

**Resettlement of Ecologically Displaced Persons  
Solution of a Problem or Creation of a New?  
Eco-Migration in Georgia 1981 – 2006**

**Tom Trier & Medea Turashvili**

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**RESETTLEMENT OF ECOLOGICALLY DISPLACED PERSONS**

SOLUTION OF A PROBLEM OR CREATION OF A NEW? ECO-MIGRATION IN GEORGIAN 1981 – 2006

ECMI Monograph #6

European Centre for Minority Issues (ECMI)

Director Dr. Marc Weller

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## Introduction

A much overlooked issue of social, political and humanitarian concern in Georgia is the resettlement of so-called *ecological migrants*, or *eco-migrants*, i.e., persons who have been displaced due to natural disasters in their native villages.

Resettlement and internal migration is not a new phenomenon in Georgia. Already in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Georgians had been relocated to populate sparsely inhabited border regions. Later, with the Soviet collectivization of the 1930s-1950s, thousands of mountaineers were resettled, forcibly or voluntarily, to lowland parts of the country. In addition, the regions that had been emptied of their indigenous population during Stalin's mass deportations of the 1940s, were repopulated with Georgians from other regions. In the 1950s-1960s, in particular, much of the population of the mountain regions of Ajara had been resettled into other regions, so as to regulate the demographic balance and to avoid over population in the mountains. Since the early 1980s, the process of migration from mountainous regions has been further exacerbated by climate changes, having quite a significant impact on the livelihoods of this mountain population. Hence, over the past quarter of a century, tens of thousands of people have become homeless as a result of flooding, landslides, or avalanches.

Various governments have responded to natural calamities in these mountainous regions of Georgia, from the Soviet authorities of the 1980s, to the nationalist regime of Gamsakhurdia, afterwards including the leadership of Shevardnadze, and finally to the current Saakashvili government. All have pursued different approaches. While in the early and mid 1980s, the resettlement process was well organised, the late 1980s saw a serious increase in natural calamities in Georgia's mountain regions coinciding with the breakdown of the Soviet structures and the corruption which ensued. With the coming to power of a nationalist government under the leadership of Zviad Gamsakhurdia, resettlement policies were largely guided by a nationalist agenda to populate minority inhabited and border regions of Georgia with ethnic Georgians. Ecologically displaced persons soon found themselves as tools to advance such policies. During Shevardnadze, this issue was literally ignored, whereas after the "Rose Revolution" the Saakashvili government had taken steps to address the problems of eco-migrants, although it may seem to us today that a consistent policy for addressing such issues is still out of sight.

From 1981 until present, it can be estimated that almost 11,000 families (or around 60,000 persons from mountainous regions, largely from Ajara and Svaneti, have been resettled as part of state resettlement efforts.<sup>1</sup> In the same period, an unknown number of migrants, the majority from Ajara, have been resettled to other parts of Georgia, of their own volition, due to overpopulation and lack of land in their native regions. The regions that mainly received ecological migrants in the 1980s and early 1990s were Kakheti, Imereti, Samegrelo (Mingrelia), Shida Kartli, Guria, Samtskhe and Javakheti.<sup>2</sup> Later on, since the second part of the 1990s, Kvemo Kartli has become the main recipient region.

It is widely known that Kvemo Kartli and Samtskhe-Javakheti are regions of Georgia which are compactly populated by ethnic non-Georgian populations. Samtskhe-Javakheti is predominantly Armenian, especially the Javakheti part (Akhalkalaki and Ninotsminda *rayons*), along with small pockets of Russian Dukhobors, Greeks and indigenous Georgians. The three *rayons* of Kvemo Kartli (Marneuli, Dmanisi and Bolnisi) are dominated by an ethnic Azeri population; and, the Tsalka *rayon*, is inhabited by Georgians, Armenians and Greeks. The influx of ecological migrants in regions populated by national minorities has frequently led to tension. Unfamiliar with local social norms and with a different social and cultural background, eco-migrants have often experienced severe difficulties in integrating into the local communities. Inadequate preparation of the recipient communities has often created suspicion and mistrust against the newcomers. Consequently, poor relations between natives and newcomers have frequently developed as a result of these settlements.

The aim of this monograph is twofold. On the one hand it sets out to provide an overview of the resettlement processes and the policy – or lack of policy – that has guided the resettlement of ecological migrants. It aims at providing much needed data on the resettlement process, and at identifying the major trends in the changing policies towards resettlement. It also seeks to provide recommendations in the direction of policy enhancement regarding the management of eco-migration.

On the other hand, it seeks to discuss why tension seems to emerge as a result of the resettlement in some (but not all) of the recipient communities, especially in regions populated by national minorities,

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<sup>1</sup> The estimation is based on the following calculations: According to Putkaradze (see below), a total of 1,572-1,600 families from Ajara were resettled from 1981 to 1988. According to statistical information provided by Khulo, Shuakhevi and Keda *rayon Gamgeobas*, around 6,151 families were relocated from Ajara from 1989 to present and according to Nizharadze (see below), 2,620 families from Svaneti were resettled as part of government programs for ecological migrants since 1987. In total these numbers make up around 10,857-10,885 families.

Tamaz Putkaradze, *Acharis mosakhleobis migraciis istoriu-etnologiuri problemebi* [Historical-ethnic problems of migration of population of Ajara], Batumi: Batumi University, 2006, p. 72.

Luara Nizharadze, *Svanebis migracia da misi gansaxlebis arealebi* [Migration of Svans and Areas of their Resettlement], Tbilisi: Tbilisi University Publications, 1999, pp. 14-15.

About the data provided by *Gamgeobas* of Khulo, Shuakhevi and Keda *rayons* see Table 6.

<sup>2</sup> Samtskhe and Javakheti were separate administrative regions until 1994.

and to resolve how this tension could be avoided via enhancement of the standards for management of the resettlement process.

Very little material exists on the situation of eco-migrants in Georgia. It is an issue that is surprisingly neglected by the academic and political establishments in Georgia, as well as by the international community. Hence, apart from studies from scarce literary sources, this document is based on interviews with government officials, scholars and civil society practitioners, with interest and expertise in the subject. Special attention has been given to interviews and field studies in Svaneti and Ajara, from where the eco-migrants mostly have been displaced, as well as in the communities where the eco-migrants have settled, particularly in Samtskhe-Javakheti and Kvemo Kartli. In the first part of the monograph, government activities and programs during the Soviet era, and during the following periods of leadership of Gamsakhurdia, Shevardnadze and Saakashvili, will be reviewed. In the second part, the process of resettlement to Samtskhe-Javakheti and Kvemo Kartli will be addressed, and in the final section, the paper will discuss how tension has been generated as a result of the resettlement of ecological migrants in Kvemo Kartli and Samtskhe-Javakheti.

It seems evident that the government policies and the management of eco-resettlement throughout the past 25 years have both been fluctuating, poorly prepared, and based on *ad hoc* interventions, if not neglected altogether. This lack of policies that has characterized eco-migration since the collapse of the Soviet Union has negatively influenced the ethno-political situation in the regions of Samtskhe-Javakheti and Kvemo Kartli, thus further fuelling tension in such regions characterized by already far from harmonious relations between the authorities and the minority populations.

Georgia took a major step forward towards integration and protection of national minorities with the ratification of the Council of Europe Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities (FCNM) in December 2005. The elaboration of thoughtful policies on resettlement and internal migration in Georgia has become a great concern of the international community. Indeed, eco-migrants from Ajara and Svaneti are not persons belonging to national minorities. They are Georgians. However, belonging to populations from isolated mountain regions, being uprooted and resettled into other parts of Georgia, with completely different characteristics, and often populated by culturally different ethnically non-Georgian populations (in a period where the country as a whole is facing severe political and economic difficulties) these eco-migrants are quite vulnerable and special measures need to be taken to ensure their accommodation and integration into the recipient communities. Of equal concern

are the rights and protection of the native populations in the recipient communities, often (but not only) Armenians, Azeris and Greeks, who have frequently faced turbulence, discomfort and violation of their human rights, with the arrival of these eco-migrants into their settlements.

There are no easy solutions to the problem of ecological displacement. Government policies will have to strike a balance on the one hand to help eco-migrants to find accommodation and land where land is available, and on the other hand to ensure that such policies do take into account the concerns of the local populations when it is necessary to resettle eco-migrants in regions populated predominantly by national minorities. The elaboration of actual policies on eco-migration, including projections of settlement patterns and mechanisms for dialogue with *all* the involved stakeholders, would undoubtedly be a significant step forward to ensure broader consensus between government, eco-migrants and recipient populations, thus helping to overcome tension in the recipient regions. It is hoped that this monograph can present a modest contribution towards a broader discussion between government structures and relevant NGO and community stakeholders in order to support the elaboration of consistent policies on resettlement of these ecologically displaced populations. This would benefit the resettled population and recipient communities alike, and further the overall process of regional integration in Georgia.

## **Resettlement and government programs**

### **Resettlement until 1980**

Being a mountainous country, Georgia has witnessed migration from the mountain regions to the lowlands for centuries – voluntary or forced. Especially throughout the twentieth century, hundreds of thousands of mountaineers from regions such as Ajara, Svaneti, Upper Samegrelo (Mingrelia), Lechkumi, Racha, Upper Imereti, Khevi, Mtiuleti, Khevsureti and Tusheti settled or were settled in lowland regions – a process that accelerated with collectivization from the late 1920s and continued up until the 1950s. While most settled permanently in the lowlands, some managed to continue a pattern of seasonal migration.<sup>3</sup> Collectivization had a profound impact on rural life and the life of Georgia's mountain population. The mountain populations did not readily embrace collectivization and therefore the mountain regions were difficult to manage and control for the Soviet regime. The regime solved

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<sup>3</sup> This is the case of the Tushes who are settled compactly in three villages in the Alvani Valley of Kakheti. Many of them still move up to Tusheti during the summer period. Also some Khevsurs mostly settled in and around Tbilisi and Rustavi, maintain a pattern of seasonal migration.

their management problem by massive forced and semi-voluntary resettlement of mountain peasants to the lowlands, in the 1940s and 1950s. For example, almost the entire population of Khevsureti was resettled in the 1940s, and the region was virtually emptied except for workers needed for the collective farms, and a few industrial projects.<sup>4</sup> By 1989 the population in regions like Tusheti, Pshavi, Racha-Lechkhumi and the mountainous part of the Shida Kartli, had also been reduced to less than half the population living there in the first decades of the twentieth century.<sup>5</sup>

In the process of collectivization, the aim of the Soviet government was to initiate a new system of agricultural production by resettling the population with lack of lands, in the mountainous regions, to regions like Kvemo Kartli, outer Kakheti, Abkhazia, and the Rioni River Basin, where lands had not earlier been cultivated. As a result the above mentioned regions received migrants from mountainous regions. Meanwhile, in the 1940s whole population groups were collectively deported from Georgia, chiefly Germans (1941), Meskhetians (1944) and Pontic Greeks (1949). In total, around 170,000 people were deported from Georgia, along with millions of people in other parts of the Soviet Union. With such policies, it was not difficult for the government to find land to accommodate migrants from those regions, where the population suffered from a shortage of land. These regions included Ajara, Svaneti, Upper Imereti, Racha, Lechkhumi and Khevsureti.<sup>6</sup> According to one estimate, in the former 12 German villages in Kvemo Kartli, 2,390 new households from Racha, Lechkhumi and Upper Imereti were settled during the autumn of 1941 alone; furthermore, 5,500 new households from Imereti and Kartli were resettled in Meskheta during the second half of 1945, and in Abkhazia (from where the Greeks had been deported) more than 4,200 households from Samegrelo, Racha-Lechkhumi and Svaneti were resettled during 1946-50. The total number of resettlers to Meskheta, Kvemo Kartli and Abkhazia amounted to about 60,000 persons in the period from 1941 to 1950.<sup>7</sup> After World War II, industrialization accelerated significantly throughout the Soviet Union, including in Soviet Georgia. This led to a further increase of the migration flow (both forced and voluntary) from mountainous regions to lowlands.

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<sup>4</sup> The repressive policies of the 1940s and 1950s were somehow reverted in the late 1970s and early 1980s. The historian Ronald Grigor Suny has shown how the Socialist Government responding to demands of dissident nationalists already in the late 1970s developed a unique strategy towards the population and employed a system of public opinion polling, which to an extent impacted on government policy. One survey revealed that many forced migrants from the mountains were unhappy with their relocation, and the government thus decided to reconstruct some of the mountain villages. Ronald Grigor Suny, *The Making of the Georgian Nation* (Indiana University Press, Bloomington and Indianapolis, 1994), pp 309-310.

<sup>5</sup> For example, the mountainous parts of Java and Akhgori *rayons* of Shida Kartli were reduced by 34.7% from 1921-1989. Around 114 villages were emptied. Meanwhile, there three new villages emerged in the lowlands of these *rayons*. For further details see Table 7 in the Annex. Vakhtang Jaoshvili, *Sakartvelos Mosakhleoba* [Population of Georgia], Tbilisi: Metsniereba, 1996, pp. 229-230.

<sup>6</sup> Makvala Natmeladze, *demografiuli protsesebi saqartveloshi XX saukunis 40-ian tslebshi* [Migration processes in Georgia in the 40s of the XX century], Tbilisi: CIPPD 2002, p. 86.

<sup>7</sup> Vakhtang Jaoshvili, *saqartvelos mosakhleoba...*, pp 224-26.



## Organized Resettlement of Eco-Migrants in the 1980s

The first organized resettlement specifically in response to ecologically displacement persons took place in the early 1980s. According to government resolutions, 1,010 families from mountainous Ajara were designated to resettle to Dedoplistkharo *rayon*, Gurjaani *rayon*, and Sagarejo *rayon* (Kakheti); Khobi *rayon* (Samegrelo); Aspindza *rayon*, Adigeni *rayon* (Samtskhe-Javakheti) and Kaspi *rayon* (Shida Kartli) in 1981-83.<sup>8</sup>

These resettlement programs were well organized and properly planned. The authorities provided credits for the affected eco-migrant households of 4,500 Soviet (Russian) Roubles (hereafter RR)<sup>9</sup>, of which the migrant families were to return only 45%. Eco-migrants settled in several villages of the Aspindza and Adigeni *rayons*. Here, they were expected to build their own houses based on government credits. In addition to their overall financial support, the authorities were in charge of the transportation of building materials and equipment for the construction of the houses. Moreover, eco-migrants were given preferential treatment in terms of employment in the region of resettlement. The amount of land that was provided to an eco-migrant household was a minimum of 0.25 ha during the Soviet period, while many households received larger plots of land, often up to 1.25 ha.

In 1987, Svaneti witnessed the most disastrous winter in recent years. Several villages were affected with three to five meters of snow in January. The level of snow was so high that some 2,000 houses were damaged by avalanches, causing the death of 85 people. The *rayons* of Mestia (Upper Svaneti) and Lentekhi (Lower Svaneti) were particularly affected. Roads were closed down; communication between villages ceased; all other means of communication were damaged. 16,000 people were evacuated from the risk zone.<sup>10</sup>

Within a few days following the disaster, the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, and the Union of the Council of Ministers of the Soviet Union, issued a decree on “the aid of SSR Georgia for the liquidation of outcomes of natural disaster,” as of 12 February 1987. The resolution ordered local government and party representatives to take actions and solve the issue of housing. By that time, almost 65 million RR were allocated for assistance by the Council of Ministers of the Georgian SSR for renovation and construction of houses.

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<sup>8</sup> Tamaz Putkaradze, *Acharis mosakhleobis migraciis...*, p 72.

<sup>9</sup> The ratio of RR to USD by that time was approximately 1:1.

<sup>10</sup> The government commission identified that 409 families had lost all their property, 876 households were partially damaged, and 3,468 families were to be resettled although their houses were not destroyed. Laura Nizharadze, *Svanebis migracia da misi...*, pp 13-17.

In response to the disaster in Svaneti the government issued a number of resolutions according to which houses were to be built for the homeless population. In addition, land was designated for homesteads and farming purposes.<sup>11</sup> The government allocated about 300 million RR for the construction of houses and opened accounts for the displaced families. In addition, donations made by private individuals in Georgia and elsewhere in the Soviet Union as well as from companies and organizations, reached 74 million RR.<sup>12</sup> Following the disaster, provision was made for the construction of 5,700 houses and many significant construction works were initiated by a dozen construction companies.<sup>13</sup> Some 2,500 families from Upper and Lower Svaneti were assigned to resettle in the following *rayons*: Marneuli, Tetrtskaro, Bolnisi, Sagarejo, Gardabani, Dmanisi, Kaspi, Tskaltubo, Khoni, Ozurgeti, and Lanchkhuti *rayons*.

In April 1989, natural disaster hit Ajara. Landslides occurred in highland Ajara, specifically in the villages of Khulo, Shuakhevi, and Keda *rayons*, affecting 5,657 families (24,287 persons).<sup>14</sup> In response, the Soviet authorities started efforts to resettle the disaster-affected population to other regions of Georgia, including coastal Ajara and the regions of Guria, Shida Kartli, Kvemo Kartli, Kakheti, Imereti and Javakheti. The government initiated a resettlement program and significant state funds were allocated for the construction of new houses. In addition to the provision of houses, the program also included long-term loans for the displaced population from Ajara so as to enable them to buy their own houses. However, the disaster took place at a time when the Soviet Union was already at the verge of collapse and the process was not properly monitored. The geological assessments that took place in Ajara immediately after the disasters were characterized by significant corruption. As a result, many people who were not directly affected by the disasters, although probably generally in need of land and property, obtained permission for relocation under the resettlement program.<sup>15</sup> Perhaps this partially explains why the return migration rates for the years that followed were so high (see page 26). Many resettlers had the option to return to houses in Ajara in case they did not manage to successfully adapt to their new livelihood. Moreover, they could benefit economically from legally or illegally selling or letting their property in their villages of resettlement. The most obvious case of this took

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<sup>11</sup> Government Resolutions No 2, 3, 4 as of 1987.

<sup>12</sup> Sufficient funds allowed the government to provide significant assistance to the displaced families, who were given 4,000 RR per family or 500 RR per family member. They also were provided with furniture and kitchen utensils for free. As a further benefit, they were offered interest free loans of 4,000 RR.

<sup>13</sup> The Informational Agency of Council of Ministers, *Stikhia i liudi* [Natural Disaster and People], Tbilisi: Sabchota Sakartvelo, 1987, p. 235.

<sup>14</sup> Forty-four houses were completely destroyed and 1,152 damaged. In addition, 3,250 hectares of land became unfit for agricultural utilization. Tamaz Putkaradze, *Acharis mosakhleobis migraciis...*, p 75.

<sup>15</sup> Interview with Guram Kakhadze, Head of Department of Resettlement and Accommodation in Khulo *rayon*, 6 October 2006.

place in Tetrtskaro *rayon*, which is one of the most attractive destinations for potential eco-migrants in Ajara. The *rayon* is rich due to its productive arable and pasture lands; however, in the village of Shavsakdari, 20 houses were built for families who actually arrived in the villages but sold or abandoned the houses within two-three years. The houses were bought or occupied by the indigenous inhabitants of the village.

At the initial stage of the government program, 943 families from Ajara managed to buy houses based on governmental loans. The government program also included construction of entirely new settlements, complete with infrastructure and institutions; provision of long term, low interest loans for the displaced population, so as to enable them to build houses by themselves; and, accommodation of the displaced in houses abandoned by their original dwellers.<sup>16</sup>

The houses in the resettlement *rayons* were to be granted to the natural disaster victims for free.<sup>17</sup> Each family of eco-migrants was granted homestead land of about 0.25 ha, and farmland of 0.25 ha. Besides, eco-migrants were allowed to lease more land. The government also provided grants of RR 4,000 per family, and furniture along with first aid to the affected population. In addition, RR 4,000 in interest free loans were granted to families for the construction of stables and other smaller facilities around their houses.<sup>18</sup>

The number of rooms in new houses to be given to eco-migrants was determined according to the number of family members. At the time of the early resettlement, the government was focused on resettling people from one village (or town), to new villages, keeping them all together. For example, people from the villages Khaishi, Mestia *rayon*, were resettled in one village, Durnuki, Tetrtskharo *rayon*, which was renamed as New Khaishi. The houses built by the government were of two types: in Kvemo Kartli, houses usually had two floors with about six to ten rooms, and a balcony. In contrast, poorly designed houses were often built in Javakheti and other parts of Georgia, with rooms at different levels, linked by internal stairways. Heavily affected by the economic crisis, the Government tried to lower the costs for the construction process by contravening the existing plans of housing projects, through lessening the total living area of these houses, after their construction had already started. The costs for building a house amounted to approximately 45,000-55,000 RR. However, the quality of the

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<sup>16</sup> Tamaz Putkaradze, *Acharis mosakhleobis migraciis...*, pp 75-77.

<sup>17</sup> According to Resolution No. 14-R of the Council of Ministers of SSR Georgia as of 12 January 1988.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

houses was rather poor and today, over two decades later, the buildings are full of cracks and many are in need of thorough reconstruction.

According to the annual report of the Ministry of Resettlement and Accommodation (2006), 55 new villages were supposed to be founded in 17 *rayons* of Georgia, from the early 1980s, as part of governmental programs. In total, 5,094 houses were planned to be built, however only 3,090 were in fact constructed, out of which 2,723 are currently inhabited, and 367 still remain either empty or occupied by others. The planned construction of 280 houses was never initiated at all, whereas 1,724 houses were not ever completed.

In the framework of these government programs, the eco-migrants from Svaneti and Ajara were not permitted to sell or sublet the houses they were provided with by the government, for a full 25 years. In addition, new houses could only be registered in the name of these eco-migrants if each member of the family signed out from their original houses, which had been proved to be unfit for living, according to geological or hydro-meteorological statements. This very reasonable provision, however, was not taken properly into account. During the Soviet period, as well as during Shevardnadze's leadership, eco-migrants were allowed to return to their previous houses; thus, in many cases, they would have dual registrations, and, returnees would then seek assistance once again.<sup>19</sup>

After Georgia's independence in 1991, the strained economy and turbulent political situation did not permit the state to initiate and carry out resettlement plans. Moreover, the government could not finalize the construction of houses, which had already started and which had been promised to their new owners. This obviously created serious problems for the eco-migrants. Problems that were further exacerbated by poor coordination, and an almost complete lack of information. Many migrants arrived in their new settlements only to discover that their houses had not been completed or not even begun at all. In anticipation of government action, sometimes encouraged by officials, many families remained in their new locations, for months or even years, living in temporary shelters or renting housing facilities on their own. Many eco-migrants in this situation eventually gave up all hope and returned to stay with relatives in their original villages in Ajara. As there were no planned resettlements or any government programs related to eco-migration, and because of the above problems with housing in the recipient regions throughout the 1990s, eco-migrants tended to return to their original villages in

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<sup>19</sup> Interview with Soso Kurasbediani, *Gamgebeli* of Lentekhi *rayon*, 5 June 2006.

significant numbers. The careless and ignorant attitude of the newly independent governmental structures fostered a widening sense of frustration among eco-migrants.<sup>20</sup>

### **Assistance by Non-Governmental Structures**

In the last years of the existence of the Soviet Union several organizations were formed by Georgian nationalist activists. One of these was the *Land, Accommodation and Assistance Foundation of Georgia* established on the initiative of Merab Kostava, one of the early leaders of the Georgian nationalist movement, in September 1989, by decree of the Council of Ministers of the Georgian SSR.<sup>21</sup> The Foundation was designed as a charity organization. After the death of Kostava in October 1989, the Foundation was named after its main founder: *The Merab Kostava Land, Accommodation and Assistance Foundation of Georgia*.<sup>22</sup>

According to the principles enshrined in its statutes, the *Merab Kostava Land, Accommodation and Assistance Foundation of Georgia* distributed land among the Georgian population.<sup>23</sup> The goal of the foundation was to “assist the regions of Georgia, which were suffering from poor demographic or ecological conditions, to lead the country out of demographic and economical crisis, to carry out

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<sup>20</sup> From Ajara, in total, about 4,343 families were resettled from the Khulo *rayon*, 1,696 from the Shuakhevi *rayon*, and 112 households from the Keda *rayon*, out of which 534 families returned to Khulo, 277 families to Shuakhevi and 35 households to Keda since 1989 (according to data provided by the Shuakhevi and Khulo *Gamgeobas*). The majority of the returnees left from the Samegrelo, Imereti, and Guria regions, as well as from Akhalkalaki, Gardabani and Marneuli (Kvemo Kartli). Interviews with returned migrants in Ajara and with Dr. Tamaz Putkaradze, Professor at Batumi State University and an expert on migration issues in Ajara, indicate that the reasons that eco-migrants returned from ethnically Georgian regions like Imereti, Guria and Samegrelo (Mingrelia) within 2-3 years are threefold: 1) Houses which were promised by the government in the late 1980s and early 1990s were not completed; hence, eco-migrants arriving at new regions had to live in temporary houses, hoping for the government to finalize the construction (which actually never happened, so those who did not migrate back completed the houses on their own). 2) The economy of western Georgian regions like Guria, Imereti and Samegrelo were to a large extent based on large-scale production of citrus fruits and tea. However, the fall of the Soviet Union was followed by a collapse of most kinds of industry as well as the large-scale farming on which the citrus and tea cultivation was based. As a result, not only eco-migrants, but most of the indigenous population were unemployed and impoverished. Even today, Guria and Samegrelo and partly Imereti are considered as among the poorest regions of Georgia. 3) The country was drawn into civil and ethnic war, one of the centers of which was Samegrelo bordering on Abkhazia. Thus, the unbearable political, social and economic conditions forced many eco-migrants to return to their native territories (for further details, see Table 5).

Data on return migration to Khulo in 1989-1998 and to Shuakhevi in 1987-2006 are provided by the Departments of Migration and Veterans Affairs of Khulo and Shuakhevi *rayons*. See Table 5 in the Annex for further details.

<sup>21</sup> Approved by the Minutes No. 1 of the meeting of the Assembly of Population, Accommodation and Assistance Foundation of Georgia as of 1 September 1989 and registered by Resolution no. 528 of the Council of Ministers of the Georgian SSR as of 1 November 1989.

<sup>22</sup> One of the other founders of the Kostava Foundation was Vazha Adamia, who became a member of the Supreme Council of Georgia in 1990 and was again a member of parliament in 1992-1994. Other founders were politicians and nationalist activists initially affiliated with the Round Table (the Political Block of Gamsakhurdia), who split from Gamsakhurdia by the end of August 1991.

<sup>23</sup> The main aims and tasks of the foundation were the following: a) to support the national revival of Georgia in accordance with the current legislation on the territory of the Georgian SSR; b) to create a fund for the land, which was handed over to the Foundation in unrestricted use; c) to create a housing fund by purchasing houses from state and public organizations on the territory of the Georgian SSR and the population living on the territory of the republic, and by constructing houses; d) to support regions which were problematic from a demographic point of view, and victims of natural calamities, elderly citizens who required to be taken care of, students studying in the republic and outside it, and families with many children. According to the Statute of the *Land, Accommodation and Assistance Foundation* approved on 1 September 1989.

Christian charity activities, and to take care of widows, orphans, indigent and elderly people without family support”.<sup>24</sup>

In the context of the nationalist agenda of the foundation and political life in the early 1990s, the phrase “regions problematic from a demographic point of view” refers to regions predominantly inhabited by national minorities, i.e., specifically Abkhazia, Javakheti, and Kvemo Kartli. As these regions are located along Georgia’s external borders, nationalist actors considered it of crucial importance to enhance the presence of ethnic Georgians in these areas, to refute claims from neighbouring states, such as Armenia and Azerbaijan, and to prevent secessionist tendencies in these regions.

During this period of political turmoil in Georgia, numerous political parties and organizations were founded. Often these oppositional forces were founded on the basis of strictly determined goals such as ecological problems, or preserving historical monuments, and buildings<sup>25</sup>. The burgeoning nationalist movement considered the fact that ethnic Georgians were not representing the absolute majority of the population in all parts of the country, a major obstacle for Georgia’s development. Several political parties actively addressed this issue through legal foundations, with the help of which they attracted financial resources. The political organizations exerted so much influence on the government that they easily managed to mobilize funding from it and also to impact favourably on their policies.<sup>26</sup> Indeed, the Kostava Foundation was one of the more influential of these organizations. It based its activities on donations from government agencies and voluntary private donations. In the period from 1989-1991 alone, the donations amounted to 35 million RR. The funds were utilized primarily for building or purchasing houses for families in need of shelter in different regions of Georgia.<sup>27</sup>

With the economic depression that followed the collapse of the Soviet Union, and under the influence of the nationalist and often xenophobic policies that swept Georgia in the early 1990s, many persons belonging to national minorities started to emigrate from Georgia. This emigration particularly affected the ethnic Greek communities in the Tsalka and Akhalkalaki rayons, the Russian Dukhobor community in Ninotsminda *rayon*, the Avar communities in Kvareli *rayon* of Kakheti, as well as the Armenian and Azeri communities in Samtskhe-Javakheti and Kvemo Kartli. The emigration of ethnic Armenians and

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> For example, one key issue for the nationalist movement was the safeguarding of the monastery complex of David Gareji on the border with Azerbaijan. This historical monument was endangered by ongoing military trainings at a nearby military base, as grenades were often fired at the complex. Such acts of vandalism prompted a basis for mobilization of different nationalist political parties.

<sup>26</sup> The government was encouraging the population and other organizations to donate money to such foundations and soon the entire nation of Georgia was involved in this humanitarian action.

<sup>27</sup> Interview with acting Chairman of the Kostava Foundation, Davit Kupreishvili, 11 March 2006.

Azeris in these years was considerable. At the same time, Russians, Greeks and Jews from other parts of Georgia left the country in large numbers.<sup>28</sup>

As persons belonging to national minorities were selling their property while preparing to leave the country, the Kostava Foundation would purchase houses from the emigrants at very low costs for eco-migrants or other potential settlers.<sup>29</sup> Other measures of assistance to the eco-migrants were envisaged in the program of the Foundation; however, in reality it was not able to provide assistance beyond provision of houses and homestead land, which amounted to between 0.15 and 0.25 ha. To ensure that beneficiaries settled with assistance of the Foundation, the houses would not fully become the property of the eco-migrants. The *Kostava Land, Accommodation and Assistance Foundation of Georgia* had applied two kinds of procedures for offering houses to Georgians in need. The first way was based on the purchase of houses from emigrating persons belonging to national minorities. These houses would be allocated to the Georgian population in need, including eco-migrants. New settlers were granted long-term permissions to occupy the houses, but the purchasing value of the house was to be repaid within a specific period of time negotiated between the settlers and the foundation. The second procedure included the issuance of long-term loans with very low interest rates for the purchase of specific houses. In order to avoid any kind of misconduct or misuse of the money, the Foundation opened accounts for sellers and transferred the funds directly to them. In both cases, the foundation would conclude house delivery agreements on the following condition: the houses and their homestead lands could not be sold without the written consent of the foundation. Hence, full legal ownership was not provided to new settlers.<sup>30</sup> Even after the full repayment of the loans, the foundation would have governing rights and needed to be consulted in case a family would want to sell their house.

Not all land and houses purchased by the Kostava Foundation were distributed among eco-migrants. It also assisted other groups such as poor households and families with many children. The Foundation still owns several hundreds of hectares of land in different regions of Georgia, including, for example, around 250 ha in Marneuli *rayon* of Kvemo Kartli.<sup>31</sup> In total the Kostava Foundation purchased around 800 houses, from 1989-1991, all over Georgia, including Abkhazia. Out of these 800 houses, around 300-320 houses were made available to eco-migrants.<sup>32</sup> In Samtskhe-Javakheti and specifically in

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<sup>28</sup> See Table 1 in the Annex for further details.

<sup>29</sup> Interview with acting Chairman of the Kostava Foundation, Davit Kupreishvili, 11 March 2006.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid. It should be noted that even though the legislation of that period prohibited the purchase of lands within a 21 km border zone, an exception was made for the Foundation. Many of the leading government officials were members of the Kostava Society and the Kostava Foundation.

<sup>32</sup> Interview with acting Chairman of the Kostava Foundation, Davit Kupreishvili, 15 September 2006.

Ninotsminda *rayon*, the Foundation bought 258 houses for eco-migrants and other families in need (of which 217 were in the Ninotsminda *rayon*). The Foundation provided houses for eco-migrants from Ajara in the Ninotsminda *rayon* and for eco-migrants from Svaneti in Abkhazia and Kvemo Kartli.<sup>33</sup>

**Table 1: Number and location of houses provided by the Kostava Foundation for eco-migrants and population in need<sup>34</sup>**

<b>Rayon</b>	<b>No. of houses</b>
Adigeni <i>rayon</i>	6
Akhaltsikhe <i>rayon</i>	29
Marneuli <i>rayon</i>	8
Bolnisi <i>rayon</i>	15
Mestia <i>rayon</i>	5
Tsalenjikha <i>rayon</i>	1
Oni <i>rayon</i>	1
Mtskheta <i>rayon</i>	5
Tianeti <i>rayon</i>	1
Kvareli <i>rayon</i>	8
Senaki <i>rayon</i>	1
Ninotsminda <i>rayon</i>	217
Akhalkalaki <i>rayon</i>	6

Because of the harsh climate in Ninotsminda *rayon* – Javakheti is known as Georgia’s Siberia – and the largely negative attitude of the local population towards the newcomers, eco-migrants were generally reluctant to settle there. The political situation in Javakheti was unstable in 1990-1995, while the central government had lost effective control over the region. The ethnic Georgian migrants were concerned that they would find themselves under dangerous conditions there. Thus, to encourage resettlement into this region, the Foundation sought to encourage resettlement by providing favourable conditions to those who would settle down in the villages of that region. Houses were delivered for free, without any conditions for repayment of credits; however, the new owners were not entitled to sell or let the houses for 25 years. In case they would decide to leave their houses, however, the Foundation had to approve their removal, so that the houses could be offered to other families. Despite the fact that the Foundation bought as many as 217 houses in Ninotsminda,<sup>35</sup> only 68 out of those houses were actually handed over to new owners, including eco-migrants, poor families, and families with many children.<sup>36</sup> The rest remained empty or were taken over by local Armenians.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

<sup>34</sup> Data provided by the *Kostava Land, Accommodation and Assistance Foundation of Georgia*, 25 September 2006. According to the *Gamgeoba* of Dmanisi *rayon*, additionally 575 houses were bought both by the government, the Kostava Foundation and the Rustaveli Society. Data on houses bought by the Kostava Foundation in Abkhazia is not available.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid. In Ninotsminda town 14 houses, 31 in Spasovka, 36 in Yefremovka, 20 in Orlovka, 47 in Gorelovka and 69 in Sameba.

<sup>36</sup> These were: 19 houses in Spasovka, 6 houses in Yefremovka, 4 in Orlovka, 18 in Gorelovka and 15 in Sameba.



Another private organization that assisted eco-migrants was the Rustaveli Society, established in March 1989, which worked mainly with repatriation issues in Kvemo Kartli. This organization also bought houses for eco-migrants, but unlike the Kostava Society and Foundation, the Rustaveli Society provided houses to the eco-migrants for free and without any terms and conditions. Many eco-migrants who received such property from the Rustaveli Society subsequently sold the property and left the region.<sup>37</sup>

### **Government Programs during the Shevardnadze Period**

From 1991-1993 Georgia was tormented by ethno-political conflicts and bloody civil wars. In this period eco-migrants, like other vulnerable segments of the society, were entirely ignored. These are the years with the highest degree of return migration of eco-migrants, especially from Samegrelo (Mingrelia), a region that was in the epi-center of the conflicts. This was also the time when industry, agriculture, and trade activities deteriorated, and the economy was on the verge of collapse. Under these circumstances, indeed, it was hard for eco-migrants to sustain themselves and adapt to their new surroundings. Even after the end of the civil wars in 1993, the socio-political and economical situation in the country was so miserable that the government was unable to initiate any programs for the management of eco-migration processes.

However, a land reform was initiated in January 1992, which continued until 1998. The main aim of the reform was to transfer state-owned agricultural land into private ownership. In this period most of the eco-migrants who had been resettled to different *rayons* received houses and land plots of 0.15-1.25 ha. The eco-migrants received those land plots on equal terms with other citizens. As to the lease of agricultural land, eco-migrants had the same right to lease land plots, as other villagers.<sup>38</sup> This land issue will be discussed more thoroughly in the final part of this paper.

Only in exceptional cases did the government respond to the housing needs of eco-migrants in the Shevardnadze years. In 1997, Shevardnadze issued a presidential decree according to which around USD 3 million was allocated for the purchase of empty houses in the Tsalka *rayon*. The houses were identified and priced, but only a small number of houses were actually bought, while large amounts of

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<sup>37</sup> Interview with acting Chairman of the Kostava Foundation, Davit Kupreishvili, 15 September 2006.

<sup>38</sup> See Association for Protection of Land Owners' Rights: Legal Analysis of the Rights of National Minorities and Eco-Migrants in Land Tenure Issues, 2006.

allocated funds disappeared.<sup>39</sup> Later, in 2002, the president allocated about 160,000 GEL from his Presidential Funds to purchase 22 houses in the village of Spasovka, Ninotsminda *rayon*. These houses were purchased to help migrants who had arrived in the 1990s and settled into houses of their relatives. The Ministry of Resettlement and Accommodation was in charge of the purchase. However, only 11 houses were actually bought. Presumably due to corruption, the funds allocated for the rest of the houses vanished into thin air. The affected villagers blamed the local officials for this, whereas the local officials blamed the representatives of the Ministry of Resettlement and Accommodation.

The first presidential decree after independence to address ecological migration issues was issued in 1998. The decree aimed at resolving the legal and social problems of eco-migrants, and stipulated the initiation of a system of monitoring the ecological migration processes. The monitoring in the first stage covered 17 *rayons* of Georgia, and in the second stage it included also Ninotsminda and Tsalka *rayons*.<sup>40</sup>

This monitoring aimed at investigating the conditions of houses built by the government, and identifying the number of resettlers from the mountainous parts of Georgia. The government activities and monitoring revealed that the number of families who were entitled to receive new houses from the government since 1987, to be 4,284.<sup>41</sup> However, in reality only 2,880 families had been resettled and 3,090 houses had actually been constructed. Because of the fact that many houses had never been completed, 1,155 families continued to live in their original houses in Svaneti and Ajara.<sup>42</sup> In 16 villages of the Tsalka *rayons*, three categories of migrants were identified a) eco-migrants, b) internally displaced persons, and c) persons resettled on their own initiative.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Jonathan Wheatley: Defusing Conflict of Tsalka District of Georgia: Migration, International Intervention and the Role of the State (ECMI Working Paper No.36, December 2006), p. 9.

<sup>40</sup> Decree No. 67 on "Government Program (1998-2005) for the Resolution of Legal and Social Problems of Families Suffering from Calamities Since 1987".

<sup>41</sup> Out of the 4,284 families, 2,094 families were from Svaneti, 2,145 families from Ajara and 45 families from Satchkhere *rayon* (Upper Imereti).

<sup>42</sup> Out of 2,880 families 1,790 families were from Svaneti, 1,045 from Ajara and the 45 families from Satchkhere. The monitoring also showed that out of 2,880 eco-migrant households, 266 lived in temporary shelter, since their houses had not been completed. Twenty-one out of these 266 households lived in wagons or hand-made wooden houses. The monitoring group also encountered several cases of illegal rental arrangements of houses by migrants. In addition, there were 178 houses occupied by local, non-migrant populations. It should be noted that these figures do not correspond with data provided by the Ministry of Resettlement and Accommodation in 2006 (quoted on p. 15).

<sup>43</sup> The families belonging to the "c" category were those who were provided with houses in Akhalkalaki *rayon* after the 1989 Ajara disaster; however, they had either abandoned, sold or subletted those houses and moved to Tsalka. Additionally, the monitoring noted that there were migrants from Khobi *rayon* (Dedilauri village) who had resettled to *Tsalka rayon* after natural disasters in the former location, as well as families resettled from Guria on their own initiative, in order to improve their poor economic conditions. Tamaz Putkaradze, *Acharis mosakhleobis migraciis...*, p 92.

While this monitoring program was important as a starting point for addressing the problems faced by eco-migrants, the program as such did not envisage any follow-up measures. No subsequent steps were taken to improve conditions for the displaced persons, and neither did the program address the problems of eco-migrants who had lost their houses or land during the 1990s. In short, the period between 1995 and 2002 brought nothing new to eco-migrants or to those who were in immediate need of resettling from risk zones – despite the fact that the turbulence following independence had somehow calmed and the economy had slowly begun to recover. The government had not formulated any viable strategy or a program for the resolution of eco-migration issues.

### **Resettlement after the ‘Rose Revolution’**

Only since 2004, has the new Georgian government made some efforts to address the problem of eco-migrants i.e., just after President Saakashvili had been elected and a new cabinet appointed. The first Minister of Refugees and Accommodation after the ‘Rose Revolution’, Eter Astemirova, initiated the collection of data on the conditions of the houses situated in the mountainous regions of Georgia based on geological assessments. At the same time, in 2004, the government started a program of provision of houses for eco-migrants.<sup>44</sup>

Another action taken by the government was the adoption of a government decree in June 2004, which ordained the establishment of a *Commission for Regulation of the Eco-Migration Process* in Tsalka, Akhalkalaki, and Ninotsminda *rayons*.<sup>45</sup> The decree was a response to an outbreak of violence between local Armenians and Georgian eco-migrants from Ajara in Tsalka.<sup>46</sup> The decree prescribes that there is an immediate need to regulate and confine the eco-migration processes within the legal framework, and to find new approaches to address the issue. To attain this aim, the order stipulated the establishment of a regulatory commission with the purpose of formulating suggestions of solutions for resettlement, community, and other problems, within a two-week period.

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<sup>44</sup> In the first year of this program, 160 houses were bought in Tsalka *rayon* and 10 houses in Tetrtskaro *rayon*, and in 2004 a further 53 houses were bought in Tetrtskaro *rayon*, 124 houses in Tsalka *rayon*, 2 houses in Bolnisi *rayon* and 1 house in Gardabani *rayon* in 2005. (Information provided by Ministry for Refugees and Accommodation of Georgia, in a letter to ECMI, 01/01-17/6993, 5 December 2005).

<sup>45</sup> Government decree No. 40 of 3 June 2004, about the “Establishment of a Governmental Commission for the Regulation of Ecological Migration Process from Mountainous Ajara to Tsalka, Akhalkalaki and Ninotsminda *rayons*”.

<sup>46</sup> In May 2004, a children’s football match in the village of Kvemo Kharaba between Ajarans from that village and Armenians from Kizilkilisa turned into a violent clash. No one was killed, but several people injured. After the clash, the Ajarans went to Tbilisi where they organized a protest demonstration. During the investigation of the incident, the Armenians and Greeks said that the Ajarans had infringed on their rights, while the Ajarans stated that Greeks and Armenians opposed the resettlement of Georgians in the region. As a result of these events, the government issued a decree on the establishment of the above-mentioned Commission. Jonathan Wheatley, ‘Defusing Conflict of Tsalka District of Georgia: Migration, International Intervention and the Role of the State’, (ECMI Working Paper No.36, December 2006), p. 9.

However, the decree was never followed by any measures or action. While the Commission had been established, it never developed into a functioning body and was soon dissolved. Obviously, the problems have persisted, both in terms of accommodating the social, economic, and legal needs of the eco-migrants, and in ensuring the peaceful co-existence between resettlers and natives.

However, some measures have been taken to identify the current and potential problems incurred by ecological disasters in the mountain regions. With the appointment of a new Minister of Refugees and Accommodation, Giorgi Kheviashvili, in May 2005, the Ministry launched a new program in March 2006, for creating an official database of those families who had suffered from natural disasters and who were in urgent need of resettlement. The ministry designed an evaluation system in order to identify the level of damage and resettle the population accordingly. The following four categories were included in the damage assessment system:

Category 1: House destroyed as a result of calamities.

Category 2: House damaged as a result of calamities, but unfit for living and not restorable either.

Category 3: Houses damaged as a result of calamities, but restorable,

Category 4: House not damaged, but lands surrounding the house destroyed and unfit for use.

According to the Head of Department of Migration, Repatriation and IDP Issues of the Ministry of Resettlement and Accommodation of Georgia at the national level, the number of households in categories 1-4 throughout the country looks as follows:

**Table 2. Damaged houses by category by regions of Georgia**

Regions	CAT 1	CAT 2	CAT3	CAT 4	TOTAL
Samtskhe-Javakheti	678	52	1,226	8	1,964
Mtskheta-Mtianeti	85	84	467	132	765
Guria	308	359	995	895	2,554
Imereti	1,203	2,629	8,506	666	13,004
Samegrelo-Zemo Svaneti	305	739	1,341	678	3,066
Racha-Lechkhumi	316	544	999	922	2,781
Kakheti	123	59	557	160	899
Shida Kartli	798	614	1,279	67	2,758
Kvemo Kartli	32	11	236	0	279
Ajara	189	469	558	2,052	3,268
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>4,037</b>	<b>5,560</b>	<b>16,164</b>	<b>5,580</b>	<b>31,341</b>

**Source:** Annual Report 2006 of the Ministry of Resettlement and Accommodation.

The number of households in categories 1-4 waiting for resettlement from mountainous Ajara and

Svaneti are indicated in the table below.

**Table 3: Damaged houses by category in mountain *rayons* of Ajara**

RAYON	CAT 1	CAT 2	CAT 3	CAT 4	TOTAL
Khulo <i>rayon</i>	48	55	97	952	1,152
Shuakhevi <i>rayon</i>	13	105	153	661	932
Keda <i>rayon</i>	10	24	45	368	310
TOTAL	71	184	295	1,981	2,531

**Source:** Department of Resettlement and Accommodation under the Ministry of Health, Labour and Social Care of Ajara.

**Table 4. Damaged houses by category in Svaneti**

RAYON	CAT 1	CAT 2	CAT 3	CAT 4	TOTAL
Mestia <i>rayon</i>	18	218	418	827	1,481
Lentekhi <i>rayon</i>	130	239	388	587	1,344
TOTAL	138	457	806	1,414	2,825

**Source:** Gamgeobas of Mestia and Lentekhi *rayons*.

Obviously, households in category 1 and 2 are most acutely in need of resettlement, being unable to live in their houses at all, or not under safe conditions. Families in category 3 and 4 are sometimes considered as potential ‘economic’ or ‘demographic’ migrants, i.e., they are largely unable to sustain themselves because of lack of cultivable land. According to the local officials of Khulo and Shuakhevi *rayons*, typically, Ajaran families have 0.25-0.75 ha of land, because of unavailability of lands in mountainous regions.<sup>47</sup> Since land usually is the only means of income for the rural population in mountainous regions, Ajarans face serious problems of economic hardship, which prompts them to look for new economic opportunities in other regions of the country.

In total, as many as 2,531 households in categories 1-4 are in need of resettlement to other parts of Georgia, in the short or midterm, from mountainous Ajara alone. In the long term, given the population growth and the lack of land, a much larger portion of the population in the three *rayons* would need to be resettled in order to establish sustainable ecological conditions in the region.

The number of potential resettlers, especially from Khulo and Shuakhevi *rayons* of Ajara, is so high that some government officials estimate a need of several millions of USD to manage the migration

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<sup>47</sup> Interviews with Nodar Katamadze and Guram Kakhadze, Heads of the Departments of Resettlement and Accommodation in the Shuakhevi and Khulo *rayons*, respectively, 6-7 October, 2006.

process successfully.<sup>48</sup> At the same time, the government purchase of houses is very slow and insufficient for the population.

Undoubtedly, the development of the above mentioned database on the current status of houses or lands damaged, or in danger of ecological damage, is an important starting point, and the Ministry for Refugees and Accommodation deserves praise for undertaking this significant effort, which also shows a genuine commitment of the government to address this problem.

In 2004-2005, the Ministry of Resettlement and Accommodation bought 264 houses in different *rayons*.<sup>49</sup> As far as purchase of houses in 2006 is concerned, the Ministry of Accommodation and Resettlement bought 216 houses for ecological migrants and Meskhetian repatriates. Of these, 156 houses were bought in the Tsalka *rayon*, 36 in the Tetrtskaro *rayon*, 17 in the Akhmeta *rayon*, and one house in the Gardabani *rayon*. Six houses were bought in the Gori *rayon* for repatriates. It should be noted that the houses, which were bought in the Tsalka *rayon*, were already occupied by migrants illegally. This was done to legalize the status of the eco-migrants, who were occupying mostly houses owned by Greeks in the Tsalka *rayon*. Purchased houses in other *rayons* were handed over to eco-migrants from the mountainous Ajara and Svaneti regions.<sup>50</sup>

Another step taken by the Ministry of Accommodation and Resettlements was the assessment of housing conditions in the Tsalka *rayon* in the summer of 2006. The Ministry established a monitoring group, which included representatives from the ministry, the local administration of Tsalka *rayon*, and representatives of the Greek communities in Tbilisi and Tsalka. Their monitoring aimed at identifying the conditions of houses, the availability of houses for sale, the possession of houses legally and illegally, etc. As a result of the monitoring, the Ministry of Accommodation and Resettlement got a clear picture of the situation in Tsalka, which, according to the ministry, will serve as a basis for the future development of ecological migration policy.

During 2007, the Ministry plans to formulate a clear ecological migration policy, as well as a proper legislative framework, regulating ecological migration and ecological migrants. The Ministry also intends to continue the purchasing of houses. However, representatives of the Ministry assume that the

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<sup>48</sup> Interview with Kakha Guchmanidze, Head of the Department of Resettlement and Accommodation, Ministry of Health, Labour and Social Care of Ajara, 9 October 2006.

<sup>49</sup> For further details see footnote 44.

<sup>50</sup> Interview with Zaza Imedashvili, Head of Department of Migration, Repatriation and IDP Issues of the Ministry of Resettlement and Accommodation of Georgia, 26 January 2007.

number of purchased houses in 2007 will be lower, compared to previous years, since the funding from the state budget for this purpose had been decreased from 1, 257, 000 GEL for 2006, to 1,000,000 GEL for 2007.<sup>51</sup> Thereby, the Ministry can only afford to buy around 175-190 houses in 2007, compared to 216 houses bought in 2006.

Up to today the situation in Svaneti and Ajara has still not improved. Mestia's *rayon* administration (*Gamgeoba*) has received 219 petitions for resettlement, out of which 34 families need to be resettled immediately.<sup>52</sup> About 600 families in Lentekhi *rayon* have the official geological approval that their houses are in dangerous condition.<sup>53</sup> Therefore, the number of potential migrants will increase gradually.

Similar to Svaneti, there are a vast number of families waiting for resettlement from Ajara. According to statistical information of the Department of Resettlement and Accommodation of Ajara, in total there are 255 families with an immediate need to be resettled from the Khulo, Shuakhevi, and Keda *rayons* (cat 1 and 2), while an additional 2,276 families are in need of government assistance because of lack of arable land (cat 3 and 4). At the same time, the ecological situation in Ajara remains precarious. The calamities have not stopped but have continued throughout the 1990s and 2000s. The most recent ones took place in autumn 2005. In August, heavy rain resulted in a landslide in the village of Dandalo in Keda *rayon*. The landslide damaged several houses and energy supply facilities; as a result, 5 families were evacuated. In November, the village of Nigazeuli in the Shuakhevi *rayon* was hit by a landslide as a result of a heavy snowfall. The central road, which connected the village with the *rayon* centre, was blocked and the villagers called for evacuation, being afraid of a new landslide. This state of affairs continuously worsens the existing socio-economic situation. It is clear that thousands of mountaineers in Ajara are in a desperate situation. The same is true for parts of the population of Svaneti.

Generally, the number of potential migrants seems to be on the rise, especially in mountainous Ajara. Apart from avalanches and floods in Ajara, the region has two other very important specificities, which need to be taken into account while discussing this migration issue. Firstly, the birth rate in the highland parts of the region (Khulo, Shuakhevi and Keda *rayons*) is significantly higher than the national average, with an average number of children per family of three to five. Secondly, Ajara is a mountainous region without sufficient arable and pasture lands. To compare, Dedoplistkharo *rayon*

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<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

<sup>52</sup> Interview with Eliso Murgvliani, representative of the Ministry for Resettlement and Accommodation in Mestia *rayon*, 4 June 2006.

<sup>53</sup> Interview with Soso Kurasbediani, *Gamgebeli* of Lentekhi *rayon*, 5 June 2006.

(2,529 km<sup>2</sup>) in eastern Kakheti is over three times bigger than the Khulo *rayon* (710 km<sup>2</sup>), whereas the population of the former (23,087 persons) is only 72% of the latter (32,288 persons).<sup>54</sup> In addition, arable lands are much more fertile in Dedoplistkharo *rayon*. These two factors contribute to the demographic imbalance of Ajara. Soviet authorities tried to regulate this disparity between the available land and the size of the population by resettling thousands of people every decade, to other regions of Georgia.<sup>55</sup> However, such measures of demographic engineering ceased with the decline of the Soviet Union. Today, therefore, mountainous Ajara is significantly overpopulated. The overabundance of people naturally leads to a lack of lands. When families divide, the scarcity of land in turn prompts new families to cultivate land further up on the mountain slopes. At the same time the forest on the mountain slopes is being cut to such an extent that nature cannot replenish herself, and the excessive amount of water channels and irrigation systems threatens the geological balance of the mountains. The demographic problem exacerbates the ecological problems and generates ecological disasters. There are hundreds of families in Ajara, who are in desperate need to relocate. Besides, thousands of families in Ajara may not be in immediate danger of ecological disaster, but have very little land. These people, a group we might term ‘demographic migrants’ are often eager to resettle to other parts of Georgia, and often appear in other parts of the country as spontaneous migrants.

A typical family in mountainous Ajara has 4-5 cows and maybe a few sheep or goats. With mostly no more than 0.25 ha family, the land is hardly sufficient for animal breeding, let alone the cultivation of crops necessary to sustain a household. Each square meter is under strict patronage by the villagers, and in some villages, the roads are so narrow that vehicles are unable to pass, and building materials have to be hand-carried from the entry point, to the village. This makes reconstruction of dwellings a time consuming and very labour intensive enterprise. Consequently, ecological and demographic migrations are the main concerns of the local population and administration, and need immediate addressing by the government.

Having discussed the general trends of the eco-migration process and state policies on the issue, the following section turns to assess the conditions that eco-migrants faced upon their arrival to these host regions. We concentrate on Samtskhe-Javakheti and Kvemo Kartli, as regions where the largest part of these eco-migrants have settled, and also on the regions predominantly inhabited by persons belonging to national minorities

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<sup>54</sup> Georgian Census 2002.

<sup>55</sup> See table 4 in the Annex for further details.



## Eco-Migrants in Minority Populated Regions of Georgia

### Resettlement in Samtskhe-Javakheti

The resettlement of eco-migrants to Samtskhe-Javakheti was particularly intensive between 1981 and 1990. The resettlement took place in several smaller waves in 1981-83, 1985, 1989, and 1990, while only a few eco-migrants have been resettled in the region since that time. The large majority of eco-migrants arrived from villages in the Khulo *rayon* of mountainous Ajara, following floods and landslides, while a small proportion came from other parts of Ajara. No eco-migrants from Svaneti were resettled in Samtskhe-Javakheti, as the direction of ecologically displaced persons from this region went westwards to Abkhazia, and south-eastwards to Kvemo Kartli.

Predominantly, the populations that arrived between 1981 and 1988 were settled in Aspindza and Adigeni *rayons*.<sup>56</sup> These regions were attractive for the migrant population for two reasons. Firstly, they are located adjacent to mountainous Ajara, though with a bad road connecting the regions. Secondly, there had been a historical experience of resettlement to the *rayon* since the 1940s, when Meskhetians were forcibly deported to Central Asia, and instead, people from other parts of Georgia were settled there (see above). The fact that the majority of the Georgian population in Samtskhe consists of recent immigrants makes the region, in the views of many migrants, more hospitable to newcomers.

The villages of Iveria, Gulsunda and Mirashkhani, in Aspindza *rayon*, were established as completely new villages for the eco-migrants. In 1944, Meskhetian Turks had been deported from Samtskhe and Javakheti and by the early 1980s, there were, if anything, only ruins of their houses left.<sup>57</sup> The government decided to re-establish the villages and to construct houses for eco-migrants. It is noteworthy that today Mirashkhani is a model village in the Aspindza *rayon*, with the best quality of lands and water. In the 1980s, eco-migrants in the Aspindza and Adigeni *rayons* were usually provided with about 0.5 ha of lands, out of which 0.15 were a homestead plot, and 0.35 arable lands.

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<sup>56</sup> In Aspindza *rayon* the villages of Oshora, Mirashkhani, Iveria, Gulsunda, Rustavi and Ota. In Adigeni *rayon* the villages of Chela, Zanavi, Sairme, Tsikhisubani and Kikineti.

<sup>57</sup> For a thorough account of the deportation of Meskhetian Turks, see: Tom Trier and Andrei Khanzhin: *The Meskhetian Turks at a Crossroads. Integration, Repatriation or Resettlement?* Hamburg: LIT, 2007.

Compared to the resettlements of 1989-90, the settlements in 1982-83 and 1985 were minor.<sup>58</sup> As a result of the April 1989 avalanches, which tormented mountainous Ajara, specifically in the villages of the Khulo, Shuakhevi, and Keda *rayons*, 5,657 families (24,287 persons) suffered ecological damage. The resettlements also encompassed other *rayons* of Samtskhe-Javakheti: Borjomi, Akhalkalaki, and Ninotsminda. These *rayons* were locations where eco-migrants had not settled previously.<sup>59</sup>

In 1989, in Akhalkalaki *rayon*, 477 families (1,693 individuals) were designated for resettlement with the help of the governmental program, however, today there are only 221 families (968 persons) in the region, out of which 15 families have bought houses by themselves, and 12 families have no houses at all.<sup>60</sup> The rest have either returned to their original settlements or left for Tsalka due to the hardships in Javakheti. Moreover, because there was no government control mechanism in place, some eco-migrants sold their houses illegally at very low prices and moved out. The village of Azmana in Akhalkalaki *rayon* is a good example of this. The village was built from the ground up for the eco-migrants. The government planned to build 70 houses, of which only 50 houses were completed. According to data provided by the *Gamgeoba* of Akhalkalaki, the initial number of eco-migrants in the village was 70 families in 1989, but by 1991 there were only 38 families left. Today there are 40 eco-migrant families (125 individuals) in the village.

In Ninotsminda *rayon*, the Kostava Foundation bought, as previously mentioned, 217 houses from the Dukhobors in pace with the out-migration of significant numbers from this community (mostly to Russia, in 1989-1991).<sup>61</sup> These houses were assigned not only to eco-migrants, but also to other Georgian families in need. In total, 215 families were prepared to resettle; however, only 159 households in fact did. Those who moved found it difficult to adjust to the new climatic, social and political conditions, and largely left the region again; except from those who settled in Spasovka, where a cohesively settled community of eco-migrants managed to stay (see below). As far as migrants settled into other villages are concerned, the newcomers there encountered three barriers which prevented them from settling permanently (in Gorelovka, Yefremovka, Orlovka, and Sameba). Firstly, the climate is harsh with temperatures dropping to minus 25 °C in winter, and roads closed by heavy snow for up to several months. Secondly, in some cases, especially migrants other than eco-migrants were not used to a rural way of life, including farming and animal rearing. Finally, in the early years after their arrival, the

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<sup>58</sup> See Table 2 in the Annex for further details.

<sup>59</sup> The villages that received eco-migrants at that time were: Okami, Azmana, Gogasheni, Apnia, Ptena, Chunchkha and Kotelia in Akhalkalaki *rayon*, Spasovka village in Ninotsminda *rayon* and Balanta in Borjomi *rayon*.

<sup>60</sup> Official data (2006) provided by the *Gamgeoba* of Akhalkalaki *rayon*.

<sup>61</sup> Tamaz Putkaradze, *Acharis mosakhleobis migraciis...*, pp 78-79; Hedvig Lohm, "Dukhobors in Georgia: A Study of the Issue of Land Ownership and Inter-Ethnic Relations in Ninotsminda *rayon*", (ECMI Working Paper No. 35, November 2006).

inter-ethnic situation was particularly tense. Therefore, Georgian settlers other than eco-migrants, who were provided houses by the Kostava Foundation, largely left those villages, and today only a few Georgian families remain there. But many eco-migrants left the Ninotsminda and Akhalkalaki *rayons* in the early years after their resettlement, for the same reasons as the non-ecological migrants.

The village of Spasovka represents an interesting case, because the resettled ethnic Georgian population largely remained there. Until 1989, the vast majority of the population in the village were Russian Dukhobors, and only four families were Armenians. Their houses were bought either by the Kostava Foundation which had been intended for only ethnic Georgians, or by *Parvana* and *Javakhk* – Armenian organizations – intended for ethnic Armenians.<sup>62</sup> The composition of the village today is as follows: out of 104 families 84 are Georgian, 16 Armenian, and 4 are Dukhobor families.<sup>63</sup> The eco-migrants who were settled in Spasovka came from the Khulo *rayon* and the first of them arrived under rather dramatic circumstances. In spring 1990, 119 families headed for Ninotsminda *rayon*, from Khulo, to settle in the houses offered by the Kostava Foundation. Meanwhile, Armenians in Javakheti held demonstrations against the resettlement of Georgians into their region, at a time when the central government had largely lost control over the region. Because of the protests in Javakheti, and concerned with the prospects for ethnic unrest, the government decided to stop the migrants, who had already arrived in Akhaltsikhe, and prevented them from proceeding to Ninotsminda. In response, the majority of the migrants returned to Khulo, while a group of some 22 families insisted on reaching their destination. Eventually, they did arrive in Spasovka and moved into their houses. Police forces were assigned to protect the settlers, and remained in Spasovka for a three full years. Since the initial settlement, additional families moved to Spasovka according to the table below.

**Table 5: Settlement of Eco-Migrants to Spasovka, 1990-2004**

Year of resettlement	Number of families/individuals	<i>Rayon</i> of origin
1990	22 families	Khulo
-	3 families	Akhaltzikhe
-	2 families	Aspindza
1991 - 1992	3 families	Khulo
1995	4 families	Khulo
1996	18 families	Khulo
1997 - 1998	1 family	Khulo

<sup>62</sup> Parvana and Javakhk were Armenian organizations set up by Javakheti Armenians, which functioned as an Armenian nationalistic response to the Georgian nationalist foundations (Kostava and Rustaveli). Lia Melikishvili, *Latent Conflicts in Polyethnic Society*. The Caucasus Institute for Peace, Democracy and Development, Tbilisi, 1998.

<sup>63</sup> Interview with Akaki Vanadze, Deputy *Gamgebeli* of Ninotsminda *rayon*, 25 September 2006.

-	1 family	Aspindza
2000 - 2001	13 families	Khulo
-	1 family	Adigeni
2002 - 2003	14 families	Khulo
-	1 person	Aspindza
-	1 family	Akhaltsikhe
2004	1 family	Khulo
-	1 person	Akhaltsikhe

**Source:** Data provided by the *Gamgeoba* of Ninotsminda *rayon*.

From early on, the housing conditions were miserable in Spasovka; three Georgian families used to live together in one house. Despite the fact that the Kostava Foundation had bought several houses in nearby villages, eco-migrants were afraid of leaving Spasovka, where Ajarans had settled together, rather than to move, alone, without each other, to different villages. As time went by, some families began to buy houses on their own from the emigrating Dukhobors, for themselves. But even today the housing problem is not entirely solved. Because some eco-migrants in the 1990s and afterwards, have arrived on their own initiative, there are still some 16 families in the village who have no houses and live either with their relatives or in old, damaged houses, abandoned by Dukhobors.<sup>64</sup> It is interesting that in some cases families sold their Spasovka houses, which they had received from the Kostava Foundation. Even though the ownership documents of the houses were kept by the Kostava Foundation, and the sale of such houses were illegal because of the 25 year clause (see above), the conditional owners informally sold their houses. The buyers of such houses were usually eco-migrants, from Ajara, who arrived in Spasovka some time afterwards, or also bought by local Armenian buyers, mostly settlers moving into the village from remote mountain villages, especially from the village of Poka.<sup>65</sup> Hence, many houses in Ninotsminda *rayon*, which were purchased by the Kostava Foundation, were either destroyed or inhabited by eco-migrants, or by local Armenians without the consent of the Foundation. Villagers from Spasovka and Gorelovka interviewed in the cause of research for this document, both Georgians and Dukhobors, said that some houses bought by the Kostava Foundation had been destroyed mostly by local Armenians, partly because they wanted to expand their lands, or could use the building materials, and partly because they wanted to prevent Georgians from settling into the region. According to Akaki Vanadze, the Deputy *Gamgebeli* (mayor) of Ninotsminda *rayon*, 70 houses were destroyed in the village of Sameba alone.<sup>66</sup>

<sup>64</sup> Interview with Akaki Vanadze, Deputy *Gamgebeli* of Ninotsminda *rayon*, 25 September 2006.

<sup>65</sup> Hedvig Lohm, "Dukhobors in Georgia: A Study of the Issue of Land Ownership and Inter-Ethnic Relations in Ninotsminda *rayon*", (ECMI Working Paper No. 35, November 2006), p. 12.

<sup>66</sup> Interview with Akaki Vanadze, Deputy *Gamgebeli* of Ninotsminda *rayon*, 25 September 2006

Official data indicate that there are 50 houses owned by the Kostava Foundation, which are occupied by local residents.<sup>67</sup> The Kostava Foundation has expressed willingness to collaborate closely with the Ministry for Refugees and Accommodation to prevent further damage to the remaining houses. However, the Foundation wisely does not consider measures to force Armenians to leave their houses, which are owned by the Foundation.<sup>68</sup> Meanwhile, those families in Spasovka who have severe housing problems, or those families who have grown well enough to separate, declare that they would like to move to nearby villages, where the Kostava Foundation houses still remain, in more or less reasonable conditions, but they are afraid of settling into a largely Armenian environment.

The housing situation for eco-migrants was even worse in Balanta, Borjomi *rayon*. According to the government program, 32 families were supposed to move to the village, where 50 houses were to be built for them. However, only 20 families moved to Balanta in 1989 from Khulo. Discovering that only six houses had been built by the time of their arrival, most of them decided to stay in self-made wooden houses, hoping that the government would eventually resume the construction of their houses. Not surprisingly, most of them left within two years of their resettlement, since these houses were never constructed, and today only one eco-migrant family remains in the village. As the head of the *Sakrebulo* (municipal council) of Balanta explained, the reasons for their departure were the harsh climate, economic hardship, and unavailability of houses.<sup>69</sup> Many of the Balanta settlers did not return to Khulo, but settled spontaneously in Kvemo Kartli.

The village of Azmana in the Akhalkalaki *rayon* is the only village in Javakheti, which is entirely populated by eco-migrants, and constitutes a small ethnic Georgian island surrounded by an Armenian majority population.<sup>70</sup> There are also villages populated partly by eco-migrants and partly by indigenous Georgians.<sup>71</sup> In the ethnic Georgian villages, the interaction with the neighbouring villages is limited. The majority of the Armenian population in Javakheti does not master the Georgian language and the Georgian migrants mostly do not know Armenian. Hence, Russian is often used as the language of inter-ethnic communication, especially among people belonging to the generations that received schooling during Soviet times, although most eco-migrants from Ajara have a poor command of Russian. Interestingly, the indigenous Georgian population usually speaks the Armenian language, unlike most eco-migrants. Unsurprisingly, the younger generation of eco-migrants have a better

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<sup>67</sup> Ten houses in Orlovka, 10 in Gorelovka, 14 in Yefremovka, 15 in Sameba and one in Ninotsminda town. Data provided by the Ninotsminda Gamgeoba.

<sup>68</sup> Interview with the acting Chairman of the Kostava Foundation, Davit Kupreishvili, 15 September 2006.

<sup>69</sup> Interview with Yuri Berdzenishvili, Head of Balanta *Sakrebulo*, 16 October 2006.

<sup>70</sup> Villages inhabited only by eco-migrants (Iveria, Gulsunda, Mirashkhani) are also found in Aspindza *rayon*.

<sup>71</sup> These villages are: Kotelia and Ptena in Akhalkalaki *rayon*; and, Oshora, Rustavi and Ota in Aspindza *rayon*.

command of Armenian than the older generation. Okami, for example, is a mixed Georgian-Armenian village, where many eco-migrants today have some command of the Armenian language.

As the population of Samtskhe-Javakheti in general is rural, the eco-migrants there are subsistence or small-scale farmers, who generate their main income from cattle or sheep breeding, and land cultivation (mostly potatoes and hay). Most families have 2-4 cows, and some households have sheep, in addition. Apart from their homestead plots of lands, most villagers have 1.25 ha of land, which they own since the land reform processes of 1992-1998. Today, for a fee of currently 15-20 GEL per hectare (depending on the territorial-administrative unit and on the quality of the land), villagers can lease additional land. However, since the Georgian government in 2005 initiated a second round of privatizations of agricultural lands, these leased land plots will gradually be privatized.<sup>72</sup> Agricultural products such as milk, meat, and potatoes are used mostly for their own consumption, and surplus production is either sold at the local market, or brought to markets further away, especially to Akhaltsikhe, Kutaisi or Tbilisi.

These socio-economic problems, so very common for most of the regions of Georgia, are naturally prevalent in Samtskhe-Javakheti, as well. The population of Samtskhe-Javakheti, regardless of ethnic belonging, has been strongly affected by the economic crises that followed the collapse of the Soviet Union. A high unemployment rate has caused seasonal migration to Russia; bad infrastructure had often made it more attractive for the local population to travel to Armenia, rather than to other parts of Georgia; the insufficient command of the Georgian language among the native Javakheti dwellers has led to the isolation of settlers of Javakheti from the rest of the community; gas, electricity, water, sewage, and road infrastructure have not been maintained since the late 1980s. Like in other parts of Georgia, a high level of corruption and organized crime marks the region. Illegal possession and storage of firearms on a large scale is another potentially very dangerous factor, in case of a deterioration of the regional stability.<sup>73</sup>

In short, in Samtskhe-Javakheti, the Ajaran eco-migrants are settled in the Aspindza *rayon* (Oshora, Iveria, Mirashkani, Rustavi, Gulsunda, Ota), the Adigeni *rayon* (Chela, Sairme, Zanavi, Kirkineti), the Akhalkalaki *rayon* (Kotelia, Ptena, Chunchka, Okami, Azmana, Apnia, Gogasheni), and the Ninotsminda *rayon* (Spasovka). In total, around 679 families have resettled to Samtskhe-Javakheti from

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<sup>72</sup> Law of Georgia "On Privatization of Agricultural Land Owned by the State" as of 8 July 2005.

<sup>73</sup> For a thorough account of the socio-economic situation in Javakheti, see Jonathan Wheatley: Obstacles Impeding Regional Integration of the Javakheti Region of Georgia, ECMI Working Paper #22, September 2004, [http://www.ecmi.de/download/working\\_paper\\_22.pdf](http://www.ecmi.de/download/working_paper_22.pdf).

mountainous Ajara as a result of government programs. However, due to the harsh climate and tense ethnic situations, several families have returned to their original settlement, or left for other destinations, within only a few years. Besides, potential migrants had been frequently selected without a proper evaluation of their needs, and without taking the existing harsh climate and agricultural conditions into consideration. Moreover, many newcomers (non eco-migrants) took advantage of the opportunity to obtain material benefits in the form of houses and property, while shortly afterwards, they left the region once again.<sup>74</sup>

However, there were resettlers who managed to stay in the region in spite of the difficulties they faced. They were largely those eco-migrants who really had no alternative place to go to, since their houses had been destroyed in Ajara. Such was the case of the eco-migrants who were settled in the village of Spasovka in the Ninotsminda *rayon*. A complimentary reason for the continued existence of the new Spasovka community was most likely the fact that the Spasovka eco-migrants were settled compactly. In comparison, return-migration from villages in the Akhalkalaki *rayon* was high. Largely, the migrants there who still had houses and land in Ajara, returned.

However, it must be noted that the Spasovka settler's situation is not desirable and does not serve as a model for inspiration for future resettlement programs. Although the migrants have remained in the Ninotsminda *rayon*, Spasovka early on became an ethnic Georgian island in an Armenian sea. There is an extremely low level of integration into the regional community, occasional tension, and hardly any interaction with the Armenian villagers.

Today, according to the *Gamgeobas* of the five *rayons* of Samtskhe-Javakheti, there are only 650 families of ecological migrants left in the region (see also Table 2).

### **Resettlement in Kvemo Kartli**

Initial resettlements in Kvemo Kartli took place in 1987, from Svaneti, and in 1989-1990 from mountainous Ajara. The Svan and Ajaran migrants were settled in all six *rayons* of Kvemo Kartli.<sup>75</sup> Several resolutions were issued by the government for regulation of land distribution and house construction in Kvemo Kartli.<sup>76</sup> In total, 584 ha of land were allocated to the eco-migrants in Bolnisi,

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<sup>74</sup> Lia Melikishvili, "Latent Conflicts in Polyethnic Society". *The Caucasus Institute for Peace, Democracy and Development*, Tbilisi, 1998,

<sup>75</sup> See table 3 in the Annex for further details.

<sup>76</sup> Resolution of Council of Ministers of SSR Georgia No 2, 3, 4, 5, 6 as of 1987.

Gardabani, Marneuli, Tetrtskharo and Dmanisi *rayons*, and 49 new villages and more than 5,700 houses were planned for construction.<sup>77</sup> However, by the end of 1993 only one third (1,992) of these houses had actually been completed.

After the 1987 avalanches, some 2,500 families from Upper and Lower Svaneti were assigned to resettle in Marneuli, Gardabani, Tetrtskaro, Bolnisi, and the Dmanisi *rayons*. However, only 1,645 families actually arrived following 1987. In the wave of resettlement after the 1989 disaster in Ajara, eco-migrants arrived especially from the mountain districts of Khulo, Shuakhevi, and Keda. Around 708 eco-migrant families were resettled in ten villages and one town in four *rayons* of the Kvemo Kartli region.<sup>78</sup> Similar to the conditions of resettlement from Svaneti, the government resolutions ordained that eco-migrants could not sell or delegate houses for 25 years.

Svans resettled into Kvemo Kartli, namely to Bolnisi town, Tetrtskharo, Marneuli, Gardabani and Dmanisi, display similar patterns. Apart from the 1,645 families from Svaneti (see above), 147 families also came from Lechkhumi, and in 1989 about 708 families from Ajara. Despite the fact that all five *rayons* are multi-ethnic, in many cases, eco-migrants were resettled into Georgian villages, especially into those which had been abandoned by the population during the urbanization that followed the process of industrialization of Soviet Georgia in the 1950s and 1960s.<sup>79</sup> In addition, several new villages were founded for ecological migrants.

Apart from constructing houses for eco-migrants in three villages of the Bolnisi *rayon*, the government bought houses in Bolnisi town from around 980 Azeri families (5,000 individuals), who were leaving for Azerbaijan in 1989-1990, many after heavy pressure from nationalist activists and organizations, and in a wake of serious deterioration of the inter-ethnic relations in Bolnisi *rayon*. Of these houses, about 320 were provided to eco-migrants from Svaneti, Ajara, and Lechkhumi.<sup>80</sup>

Interviews with local officials and inhabitants of Ajara conducted during the research revealed that Tetrtskaro *rayon* is one of the most favoured regions for actual and potential eco-migrants. The Ajaran

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<sup>77</sup> Luara Nizharadze, *Svanebis migracia da misi...*, 13-17.

<sup>78</sup> Gardabani *rayon*: the villages of Vaziani, Mukhrovani, Krtsanisi; Marneuli *rayon*: the villages of Akhali Dioknisi, Khikhani, Shulaveri, Kulari; Bolnisi *rayon*, Bolnisi town and the villages of Khatisopeli, Disveli; Tetrtskaro *rayon*, the village of Samgereti. Tsalka *rayon* will be discussed separately.

<sup>79</sup> For example, the village Tandzia in Bolnisi is an ancient village. It is the birthplace of the famous writer and government official Sulkhan Saba Orbeliani, born in the 17<sup>th</sup> century. By the time of the arrival of Svan eco-migrants only 40 Georgian families were living in the village. Today, According to local officials, the village is one of the most prosperous villages in Bolnisi *rayon*, with a flourishing well-developed agriculture and animal husbandry.

<sup>80</sup> Interview with Petre Danelia, Head of Bolnisi town *Sakrebulo*, 29 August 2006.



population, because of lack of lands in their native region, is eager to engage in land cultivation after their resettlement. Meanwhile, Tetrtskaro is a region with a vast amount of arable and productive land. In addition, animal husbandry is well developed in this region, and these types of agricultural activities are the traditional sources of income for mountain populations. Allegedly, this was the reason why the Soviet authorities decided to initiate the most extensive construction of houses, specifically in Tetrtskaro *rayon*, after the avalanches in Svaneti in 1987. Up to 918 houses were supposed to be built in eight villages, out of which only 591 houses were actually completed. Five villages were established from the ground up.<sup>81</sup> The village of Shavsakdari is an interesting case that demonstrates the failure of the government to control the migration process. Twenty houses were built in the village and a corresponding number of families were settled there. However, because of improper management of the migration process, the eco-migrants sold those houses to the indigenous population and gradually returned to Svaneti over the following three years. A local official confirmed that there were several cases of illegal sale of government houses; however, the exact number is not known, and no sanctions have been imposed.<sup>82</sup>

Dmanisi *rayon* is another interesting case in the study of ecological migration. Mainly Azeris and Georgians compose the population of the *rayon*, together with a smaller number of Armenians, Greeks, and Russian Dukhobors. In addition to 300 eco-migrant families, Dmanisi hosts IDPs from Abkhazia as well. The village of Gantiadi represents a depressing example of poor co-relations between eco-migrants and the indigenous population (in this case predominantly Georgian). It was the only village in the Dmanisi *rayon* where houses were constructed for the migrants. According to the plan, seven Svan families arrived in the village in 1991; however, all of them had to leave the village soon again as a result of a terrible accident. In 1992, a group of drunken Svan youths killed a young inhabitant (Georgian) of the village, after which time the villagers took a gruesome revenge by killing an innocent Svan migrant. In the shortest possible time, the Svan migrants of the village either abandoned their houses (which were then occupied by families belonging to the local population), or exchanged houses in order to move away from the village.

According to a local official in Dmanisi *rayon*, there were many cases where houses constructed by the government were sold to persons belonging to the indigenous population, or to IDPs, whereas the persons the houses were intended for, i.e., the eco-migrants, left the *rayon* and returned to their native

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<sup>81</sup> The villages of Khaishi, Golteti, Didgori, Marabda and Samgereti.

<sup>82</sup> Interview with the Deputy *Gamgebeli* of Tetrtskaro Enveri Gabuldani, 20 October 2006.

regions.<sup>83</sup> In 2004 the *Gamgeoba* of Dmanisi initiated a registration of houses for the local population, including ecological-migrants and IDPs. Houses are still being registered to those who presently live in them, during this registration process. There is currently a high probability that houses constructed by the government for eco-migrants will be registered in the name of someone in the non eco-migrant population.

In addition to the construction of houses, the government, together with the Rustaveli Society and the Kostava Foundation, bought 575 houses in the Dmanisi *rayon* from the ethnically non-Georgian population who emigrated from Georgia during the years of 1989-1992.<sup>84</sup> The village of Guguti in Dmanisi *rayon* can provide an example of how this process often took place. Guguti is a small village right at the Georgian-Armenian border that was established in the 1990s as a result of the planned resettlement program of the government. The village was founded with the merging of two existing Azeri villages, Mughanlo and Saatlo. Ninety-four percent of the Azeri population of Mughalo and Saatlo emigrated to Azerbaijan in 1989, and 239 houses were bought by the Rustaveli Society and the Kostava Foundation. In the early 1990s, migrants resettled to Gugurti, out of which 43 families were eco-migrants from Ajara, arriving on their own initiative. However, many of them either abandoned or sold their houses later. They were sold to people from Dmanisi town and other regions of Georgia, as summer cottages.<sup>85</sup> There is a danger that in the near future these permanent residents will leave the village, as well, due to the bad living conditions. It is obvious that, because of the poor management of the selection of migrants for resettlement, the corruption that characterized the selection process, and the lack of policies governing the resettlement process, no lasting settlements will take place.

The second phase of migration to Kvemo Kartli took place in 1997-1998, when ecological migrants, as well as non-ecological migrants, began to resettle spontaneously into the Tsalka *rayon*. Tsalka is one of the most demographically complex regions of Georgia.

Since the beginning of 19<sup>th</sup> century, this *rayon* was inhabited mainly by Greeks and Armenians, and to a lesser extent by Azeris and Georgians.<sup>86</sup> With the political instability, economic decline, and nationalist tendencies that followed the demise of the Soviet Union, Georgia's Greek population,

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<sup>83</sup> Interview with Dali Kviciani, Head of Department of Accommodation and Resettlement of Dmanisi *rayon*, 22 October 2006.

<sup>84</sup> More specifically, houses were bought in the town of Dmanisi (461 houses), in the villages of Guguti (239 houses), Lokchandra (9), Irganchai (23), Dalari (22), Salamaleiki (46), Vake (3) Kvemo Orozmani (6), Useinkendi (3) Amamlo and Kariani (1), according to the Decree No.182 of the *Gamgeoba* of Dmanisi *rayon*, 24 November 2004.

<sup>85</sup> As of late 2006, there were 142 families living in the village, out of which only 54 were permanent residents, including only 11 Ajaran migrant families. Out of 239 houses, 86 were damaged, many of which were not restorable.

<sup>86</sup> See Table 1 in the Annex for further details.

including that of Tsalka, began to leave for Greece. Between 1979 and 2002, the Greek population of Tsalka fell by 85%, from 30,811 to 4,589 persons. This process continued, and by late 2006, according to estimates of the *Gamgeoba* of the Tsalka *rayon*, there are only 1,234 Greeks left in the region.<sup>87</sup> At the same time, Tsalka witnessed a massive arrival of ecologically displaced, and various other migrants. Although migration to Tsalka has been on-going from 1998 until the present, the migration to Tsalka can be divided into two waves: the first occurred in 1997-98; the second in 2002-2003.

The first migration to Tsalka started with a 1997 presidential decree, of Shevardnadze, who allocated three million USD for the purchase of abandoned Greek houses in the villages of Gumbati, Kvemo Khareba, and Khando. During this period, only about 50 families of eco-migrants managed to settle in these houses. The government failed not only to distribute the houses properly, but also to ensure the proper registration for those who received these houses from the government.<sup>88</sup>

During the second wave of migration in 2002, Tsalka witnessed the arrival of a huge number of migrants from different regions of Georgia, of which 70% were migrants from the mountainous parts of Ajara, particularly from Khulo *rayon*. This migration took place spontaneously and was disorganized. The majority of the newcomers during the 2002-2003 influx were not ecological migrants, but economic migrants, who were attracted by the work opportunities at the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan (BTC) pipeline constructions. Sometimes, these individuals were former 'eco-migrants' who had initially but unsuccessfully settled in Ninotsminda, Akhalkalaki, Adigeni, Guria, and other *rayons* of Georgia.<sup>89</sup> The number of spontaneous migrants increased dramatically as time passed. For example, in the village of Guniakala, where in 2002 there were only 7 Svan and 2-3 Ajaran families, there are now 27 Svan and around 100 Ajaran households.<sup>90</sup>

The government did not take any action to regulate the migration. During these years, newcomers illegally occupied houses abandoned by Greeks in the villages of Tikilisa, Avralo, Guniakala, and Karakomi, as well as in Tsalka town. Very often, when Greeks left they would entrust their property to Greek neighbours or relatives (in some cases also to local Armenians). The remaining Greeks would

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<sup>87</sup> Data provided by the *Gamgeoba* of Tsalka *rayon*. Jonathan Wheatley, "Defusing Conflict of Tsalka District of Georgia: Migration, International Intervention and the Role of the State," (ECMI Working Paper No.36, December 2006), p. 9.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid.

<sup>89</sup> According to the results of the monitoring of the Ministry of Resettlement and Accommodation, by 2001, there were 371 newcomer families (1,855 individuals) in Tsalka *rayon*, out of which 204 had suffered from natural disasters, whereas another 127 families moved to Tsalka *rayon* on their own initiative, from Ninotsminda, Akhalkalaki, Adigeni, Guria and other *rayons* of Georgia. Tamaz Putkaradze, *Acharis mosakhleobis migraciis...*, 98-90.

<sup>90</sup> Interview with Ineza Kordzaia, Deputy Director of the school of village Guniakala, 15 August. 2006; According to the data provided by Tsalka *Gamgeoba*, 19 families arrived in 1997, 134 families in 1998, 98 families in 1999, 144 families in 2000, 137 families in 2001, 195 families in 2002, 331 families in 2003, and 115 families in 2004 in Tsalka *rayon*.

then rent the abandoned houses of their relatives/neighbours, informally to the new arrivals, and the Greeks would in addition tend the land property themselves, or rent it out separately.

Typically, the local Greeks would 'sell' houses informally for USD 500-600. However, there was no documentation involved and, therefore, the 'sale' had no legal force and was not registered.<sup>91</sup> In other cases, migrants would simply move into the empty houses. In any case, the situation became highly complicated, as most of the Greeks who left their houses are still the official owners, and the newcomers cannot become registered owners of the houses without the consent of the original inhabitants. Thus, because newcomers are not registered house owners, they cannot become registered in the village and claim any rights over the privatization of the lands. There are very few lucky ones who have successfully managed to buy and legalize their houses, through government aid.<sup>92</sup>

Along with this housing issue, the difficulty of land distribution is one of the main problems for the eco-migrants. Most of the eco-migrants who arrived and had occupied Greek houses were unaware of where the land was to be found, which belonged to their particular household. Let's consider the following: there may, for example, be a village with only ten remaining Greek families left in it. These Greek families could possess (either themselves, or on behalf of their relatives or neighbours) all the former collective farm land; meanwhile, a hundred newcomer families could own none. However, the Greek families sometimes leased the land to the migrant families.<sup>93</sup> While it is an informal arrangement in which the remaining Greeks look after the land on behalf of their relatives, they have a legal right to do so. Thus, while on one hand Greeks have the legal right to utilize this land, including those which were entrusted to them by departed relatives or neighbours, on the other hand, this kind of arrangement causes discontent among Ajaran and Svan newcomers, and quite frequently leads to tensions and conflicts in the communities. For example, in the village of Guniakala, two Greek 'landowners' were the only inhabitants renting the former *kolkhoz* land from the government; they then subletted it to migrants. However, they had only paid the government partial rent for the land they controlled. There were many arguments about this inequity among the Greek and Georgian components of the village's population, which got so volatile in early 2006 that the *Gamgebeli* had to intervene in an effort to sort out the conflict. An agreement was struck between all sides, that the disputed land (i.e., the former *kolkhoz* land held by the relatives of the departed Greeks who owned it, and the excess land that the big

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<sup>91</sup> Jonathan Wheatley, "*Defusing Conflict of Tsalka...*", p 10.

<sup>92</sup> Interview with the *Gamgebeli* of Tsalka rayon, Mikheil Tskitishvili, 15 July 2006.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*

landowners were not paying rent for) was to be shared equally, and used for one year by all who needed it. A modest rent was to be paid for using the land.<sup>94</sup>

The process of migration reached its peak in 2002-2003. In 2004-2006 the process had slowed down, though it still continues today. Lately, the government has started to address the issue; in 2005, 21 eco-migrant families were resettled in the village of Olianka, Tsalka *rayon*, under a government program. Furthermore, money was allocated for making houses available for the 264 eco-migrant families already living in Tsalka rayon illegally, by registering the migrants and thus legalizing their presence.

To sum up, the initial resettlement from Svaneti and Ajara took place in 1987-1989, but in the late 1990s, as a result of more avalanches, the inhabitants of Svaneti and especially Ajara also began to resettle into Tsalka *rayon*. However, Tsalka *rayon* witnessed not only ecological but also economically motivated migration, notably in 2002-2003. Currently, there are about 2,341 Ajaran and Svan families (10,701 individuals) in Tetrtskharo, Dmanisi, Bolnisi, Marneuli, and Gardabani rayons, who have been resettled by the government programs. Besides, according to data made available by the Tsalka *Gamgeoba*, as of mid 2006, there were 1,950 Ajaran and Svan families (around 7,685 individuals) residing in Tsalka *rayon*, out of which only around 20% were eco-migrants.<sup>95</sup> In addition to this number, Tsalka *rayon* hosts 381 families from different regions of Georgia, including Samtskhe-Javakheti, Imereti, Samegrelo, Guria, etc. (predominantly Ajarans who initially settled there, as well as IDPs (245 families) from Abkhazia.<sup>96</sup>

## **Resettlement and Ethnic Tension in Minority Regions**

Following the above discussion on the flow of ecological migrants and the different government approaches to this resettlement issue, the section below casts light on the situations in the recipient communities, while also focusing on the problems of socio-economic adaptation, and the tension in the resulting relations between resettlers and the native population.

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<sup>94</sup> Interview with Ineza Kordzaia, Deputy Director of the school of Guniakala village, 15 August 2006.

<sup>95</sup> According to data provided by the Tsalka *gamgeoba*. The percentage is estimated by the *Gamgebeli* of Tsalka *rayon*, Mikheil Tskitishvili, 15 July 2006.

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*

Georgia is a multi-ethnic country and although the proportion of persons belonging to national minorities has declined significantly since the late 1980s, over 16% of the total population still belongs to national minorities, according to a 2002 census. However, the level of integration - especially among compactly settled minorities in both Samtskhe-Javakheti and Kvemo Kartli - is very low, constituting an obstacle for the full socio-political and economic inclusion of these regions, and their inhabitants. While the demographic make-up of Georgia did not pose a threat to inter-ethnic accord in the Soviet era, the ethno-political tension and economic depression that has characterized the transition years since the fall of the Soviet Union, have challenged the territorial unity of post-Soviet Georgia. While there were structural and historical reasons for the emergence of ethno-political tensions after the dissolution of the totalitarian regime, the process of state building, immediately before and after independence in 1991, had not been helped with the coming to power of a hardliner nationalist regime, under the leadership of Zviad Gamsakhurdia. The early years of independent statehood were accompanied by alienation of national minorities from the state, and a widespread sense of insecurity among the country's non-Georgian population.

This period approximately coincided with the dramatic natural disasters occurring in both Svaneti (1987) and in Ajara (1989). The resettlement of huge numbers of people was inevitable. The Soviet government decided to resettle the population to almost every region of Georgia, including Javakheti and Kvemo Kartli, which were overwhelmingly populated by national minorities. To a large extent, the totalitarian nature of the Communist regime had prevented ethnic tensions and ethnic conflicts in the region, but from 1989 on, and especially after independence in 1991, ethno-political conflict became the most critical problem in Georgia. The country was drawn into civil wars over South Ossetia (1990-92) and over Abkhazia (1992-93). Hence, the central government did not exert full control over the situation in the country as a whole, let alone in the minority-populated regions, where many eco-migrants had been resettled.

### **Tension in Samtskhe-Javakheti**

Apart from the conflicts in South Ossetia and Abkhazia, the situation in the early 1990s was especially tense in Javakheti. Here, the local Armenians refused to accept the *Gamgebelis*, the regional executive representatives appointed by President Gamsakhurdia, in 1990-1991, and launched a campaign to assert autonomy over the region. A local paramilitary organization, *Javakhk*, became the most powerful local movement articulating the demands of the local Armenians. At this time, eco-migrants from mountainous Ajara had recently settled in Akhalkalaki *rayon*, and other groups of eco-migrants were

heading for Ninotsminda. As discussed on page 27, the arrival of the Ajarans in Javakheti was met with enormous fears and suspicions. The local population was largely opposed to the government policies to resettle ethnic Georgians there. The actions of the nationalist government of Georgia were perceived as an attempt to change the demographic balance, and thus as having a clear anti-Armenian tone.<sup>97</sup> When Ajarans arrived in Javakheti, the Armenian population of Javakheti organized demonstrations against the resettlement of Georgians into the region, and in other ways sought to prevent the newcomers from settling in the region.

The Georgian population of Spasovka (Ninotsminda *rayon*) considered by and large that they had been discriminated against constantly by the local authorities, since their arrival. They argued that the land on which they had settled belonged to their ancestors and to the Georgian nation; therefore, in their view, they should enjoy all rights and freedoms as citizens of Georgia.<sup>98</sup> Contrary to this argument, Javakheti Armenians maintained that they had historically lived on the territory of Javakheti and, therefore, it belonged to them. Moreover, they complained that various Georgian governments had deliberately sought to alter the demographic situation in Samtskhe-Javakheti and to reduce the relative proportion of the Armenian population.<sup>99</sup>

It should be mentioned that in the early 1990s the *Merab Kostava Foundation*, with substantial support from both the Georgian government and the broader population, openly declared its intentions to establish a 'loyal community' (of Georgians, since Armenians were against the appointed executives of Javakheti) in minority-populated regions, and to fortify the country's frontiers with ethnic Georgian people.<sup>100</sup> Resettlement programs in the early 1990s were not designed only for ecological migrants, who were in a desperate need of new houses and lands, but also for other Georgians. Ethnic Georgian settlers came to Javakheti from Aspindza, Kharagauli, Rustavi, Kaspi, and even Tbilisi, and many of them claimed that they had patriotic motives to settle in the region. Indeed, they were also motivated by economic reasons; obtaining free houses and lands were improvements to their economic conditions.<sup>101</sup> However, what the central decision-makers failed to realize was that, while preparing for the resettlement and buying houses for the future settlers, as driven as they were by a nationalistic agenda, they failed to see that the newcomers would find it very hard to adapt to the region, partly because of

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<sup>97</sup> Rostom Sarkissian, "Javakhk: Socio-Economic Neglect or Ethnic Unrest", *Diplomacy and World Affairs*, DWA Discussion Paper no 101, 2002, at <http://departments.oxy.edu/dwa/papers/101b.pdf>.

<sup>98</sup> Interviews with dwellers of Spasovka, 24 September 2006.

<sup>99</sup> Lia Melikishvili, "Latent Conflicts in Polyethnic Society," *The Caucasus Institute for Peace, Democracy and Development*, Tbilisi, 1998.

<sup>100</sup> Interview with acting Chairman of the Kostava Foundation, Davit Kupreishvili, 15 September 2006.

<sup>101</sup> *Ibid*; Tamaz Putkaradze, *Acharis mosakhleobis migraciis...*, pp 136-137.

the harsh climate, and the isolated geographic location of Javakheti, and partly because of the settlers' uncustomary patterns of social organization. These differences of customs were interpreted as 'ethnic' divergences between the local Armenians and the arriving Georgians. All this led to severe adaptation problems and frustrations among the Georgian population, and a majority of the settlers left Javakheti again, within two to three years. As a result, the majority of the houses provided by the Kostava Foundation for Georgian migrants (217 houses), were either destroyed or used by the local population as houses and stables. This haphazard resettlement, lack of understanding from the recipient population, and their incompatible views, added to the corruption and mismanagement of the usage of the houses, causing the loss of significant amounts of money, efforts, and time.

One of the complaints put forward by the local Armenian population during the arrival of the Georgian migrants (and especially in Akhalkalaki *rayon*) was that newcomers were provided with new houses, whereas the local poor population continued to live in small huts.<sup>102</sup> Here, the local population felt that their interests were ignored and they felt discriminated against, compared to the Georgian newcomers. At the same time, the Georgian newcomers in Akhalkalaki and Ninotsminda *rayons* complained that they were ignored by their government, that their rights had not been secured properly, and that they were perceived as 'secondary citizens' by the local Armenians.<sup>103</sup> Indeed, this made their adaptation to the local conditions exceptionally difficult.

### **Tension in Kvemo Kartli**

The early resettlement into Kvemo Kartli was more organized and better planned, compared to Javakheti. This is partly explained by the fact that the first larger resettlement took place in Soviet times in 1987, while the government was in better control of its powers compared to the 1989 resettlements. Although eco-migrants were resettled compactly, and in many cases in absolutely new villages (Khikhani, Akhali Dioknisi, Disveli, Khatissopeli), there were still cases where ethnically mixed villages emerged (Shulaveri, Vaziani, Krtsanisi, Mukhrovani, Samgereti).

The situation with regard to ethnic relations was different in Kvemo Kartli as compared to Javakheti. Indeed, the adaptation process was not easy for the newcomers, but the difficulties did not necessarily derive from solely ethnic reasons. In contrast to Javakheti, the largely Azeri population of Kvemo

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<sup>102</sup> Ibid.

<sup>103</sup> Tamaz Putkaradze, "Acharis mosakhleobis migraciis...", p. 138; Lia Melikishvili, "Latent Conflicts in Polyethnic Society", *The Caucasus Institute for Peace, Democracy and Development*, Tbilisi, 1998.



Kartli did not openly declare their unwillingness to host the eco-migrants. There were very few instances, where inhabitants of Kvemo Kartli spoke out against the resettlement of eco-migrants. However, the situation worsened within a few years of the initial resettlement of eco-migrants, specifically as regards the relationship between the local Azeri population and eco-migrants from Svaneti.<sup>104</sup> The integration and local adaptation of Svan eco-migrants into the region, where the vast majority of local dwellers were ethnically and very culturally different Azeri peoples, was very difficult for both the Svans and for the Azeris.

Svans, unlike Ajarans, are often perceived as criminals by the local indigenous population in Kvemo Kartli. In order to explain this perception, it is important to keep in mind that there are more Svan eco-migrant families than Ajaran families in Kvemo Kartli, especially in Marneuli, Gardabani, Tetrtskaro, Bolnisi and Dmanisi *rayons*. Hence, Svan migrants are more visible in the region. Moreover, Svans, compared to Ajarans, were resettled largely in urban surroundings such as in the towns of Bolnisi, Dmanisi and Gardabani, which enabled them to participate actively in the socio-economic life of the *rayons*. Also, because of their settlement into urban areas, the Svans were to a much greater extent interacting with the local populations, compared to the Ajarans, who typically live consolidated in villages. As Svans in many cases were found guilty in criminal cases, they incurred the label of agents of crimes, and are therefore often perceived as perpetrators of all crimes occurring in certain *rayons* of Kvemo Kartli.

With the fall of the Soviet Union, and the ensuing chaos and absence of rule of law, the crime rate skyrocketed all over the Soviet Union. In Kvemo Kartli, where the influx of Svans approximately coincided with the demise of Soviet power, the local population perceived that the crime rate was increasing because of the arrival of the Svans. This is especially true for Marneuli, Gardabani and Dmanisi *rayons*. Robberies, thefts, burglaries and murders were increasingly disturbing the local population, and the frustration of the local population did on some occasions turn into conflicts, which were understood as ethnically based. In June 1989, for example, an argument between a Svan and an Azeri youngster turned into a massive demonstration in Marneuli town, during which Azeri activists from Marneuli, Gardabani, Bolnisi and Dmanisi, all used the occasion to raise demands for autonomy for the region. The triggering incident was in fact very trivial: the young Svan and the Azeri had an argument in the taxi line, which turned into a fistfight. Svans, living in nearby houses, noticed the fight and came running out to help their acquaintance, and the Azeri was beaten up. In response, on the very

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<sup>104</sup> As outlined above, eco-migrants in Kvemo Kartli were mostly from Svaneti, except in Tsalka *rayon*, which will be discussed separately, since in this region specific patterns of ethnic relations and tension are displayed.

same day, a group of Azeris attacked and raided apartments belonging to the Svans. The situation was diffused by police sent out from Rustavi and Tbilisi. However, on the following day, around 10,000 persons demonstrated in Marneuli and demanded the expulsion of Svans from Kvemo Kartli, autonomy for the region, replacement of all Georgian officials with Azeri ones in local power bodies, etc. Meanwhile, Azeri groups attacked police forces in Gardabani rayon, and fighting broke out between Azeris and Georgians in Bolnisi town, a result of which 14 local residents were injured. Chaos, accompanied by demonstrations, continued until the first half of July.<sup>105</sup> It must be noted, however, that these dramatic outbreaks took place at a time of general tension in Kvemo Kartli, in 1989-1990, and under the influence of aggressive nationalist agitation, both among Georgians and Azeris. However, the nationalist policies of the Georgian leadership seriously contributed to aggravate this situation, which eventually led to the emigration of thousands of ethnic Azeris from Kvemo Kartli, especially from Bolnisi town, who left Georgia for Azerbaijan, out of fears of a further deterioration of the inter-ethnic climate.

In the Shevardnadze years the inter-ethnic situation generally improved, and although relations between Svans and the native population were not exactly cordial, there were very few examples of violent confrontation, and/or mobilization, based on conflicts between the communities. However, a few times smouldering tensions did erupt into serious conflicts. One of the most recent examples flared up in 2003. The Azeri population in the village of Jandari, situated close to the village of Lemshveniera, heavily populated by Svan migrants, was suffering from constant robberies, shootings, and violence, on their way to Gardabani town. The residents of Jandari held a meeting and protested against the passive attitude of the police, however, to no avail. Later, the Azeris held two mass meetings in Gardabani town near the police office, the venue of the Prosecutor General, and the town court. The second mass meeting coincided with the trial of a Svan, who was charged with robbery. However, the court released him, as a result of which the Azeri masses' behaviour turned into outright public disorder: demonstrators began to smash the windows of the buildings, and afterwards blocked the railroad. The head of the Council of Justice met the demonstrators and promised to fire the judge responsible for the release of the Svan. After this incident, and the subsequent dismissal of the judge, the attacks against the Azeri population ceased, and matters calmed down.

Many citizens of Kvemo Kartli, both Azeris and Georgians, believe that the rights of their own particular ethnic group are violated. Many Azeris are convinced that Georgians are given priority in the

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<sup>105</sup> Gia Tasoyev *ra xdeba kvemo kartlshi* [What is happening in Kvemo Kartli] *Literaturuli Sakartvelo*. 30 June 1989. p 2; Iakob Putkaradze *dakopa daushvebelia* [Split up is impossible] *Komunisti*, 6 July 1989. p 3.

allocation of lands, in receiving positions as public officials, etc. It should be acknowledged that there are certain areas where the Azeri population is disadvantaged. Due to the fact that Azeri women mostly give birth to their babies at home, they are not able to acquire a birth certificate, and thus they cannot obtain any legal documents for their children. Consequently, there are several families and individuals who live without passports and with no registered property. They are unable to register their houses, since they do not possess the required documents. As remarked by a local official in Marneuli, “Newcomer Georgians live more legally than the indigenous Azeri population”.<sup>106</sup> Conversely, Georgian newcomers believe that they are disadvantaged compared to the Azeri population in terms of economic conditions, unemployment, and a high rate of out-migration of ethnic Georgians.<sup>107</sup>

It is noteworthy that almost all local officials of the five *rayons* of Kvemo Kartli (except Tsalka) deny that there is serious tension between the Azeri and Georgian populations, and especially that there might exist any ethnically based tension. They all acknowledge that the situation was very tense in the early period of resettlement of eco-migrants, while today, allegedly, villagers keep good relations with each other; they celebrate some holidays and festivals together, and in rare cases even inter-marriages have taken place. According to the Head of the Privatization Department of Marneuli *Gamgeoba*, Marneuli *rayon* is characterized by ethnic stability, since people of different ethnicities are dependent on and interconnected with each other in economic terms.<sup>108</sup> However, the Head of the Department of Migration and Resettlement of the Dmanisi *rayon*, mentioned that Svan eco-migrants, as well as IDPs in the Dmanisi *rayon*, are still labelled as “newly arrived” settlers, and therefore, they are clearly being differentiated from the native population.<sup>109</sup>

Before proceeding to a discussion on the situation in the Tsalka *rayon*, it would be interesting here to compare the integration processes and the development of inter-ethnic relations, after the resettlement of eco-migrants in Kvemo Kartli and Javakheti. It is obvious that full integration of ecological migrants in the predominantly minority inhabited regions has not taken place, but it can also be observed that eco-migrants in Kvemo Kartli (except in Tsalka) are in general better integrated than those in Javakheti.

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<sup>106</sup> Interview with Zaal Nadiradze, Head of the Privatization Department of Marneuli *rayon*, 14 November 2006.

<sup>107</sup> Caucasus Institute for Peace, Democracy and Development, The Union of Intercultural Cooperation in Kvemo Kartli Region "Most", The Union of Azerbaijan Women of Georgia: “*Analysis of Conflict Factors in the Region of Marneuli-Gardabani: Results of Sociological Research*,” Tbilisi 2003. Indeed, the Georgian population generally appears to be in a worse off economically than the Azeris. However, the assumption of the local Georgian population about the high level of out-migration of Georgians does not prove to be true.

<sup>108</sup> Interview with Zaal Nadiradze, Head of the Privatization Department of Marneuli *rayon*, 14 November 2006.

<sup>109</sup> Interview with Dali Kvitsiani, Head of Department of Accommodation and Resettlement of Dmanisi *rayon*, 22 October 2006.

Firstly, the Azeri population of Kvemo Kartli generally has been more receptive towards eco-migrants than the Armenian population of Javakheti, notwithstanding the grave tensions between the Azeri and Georgian communities throughout 1989-1990. In contrast, the Javakheti Armenian community at large has consistently opposed the resettlement, arguing that the resettlement efforts were deliberate actions to “Georgianize” the region, which, as we have seen, has certainly held some truth, particularly in the late 1980s/early 1990s. These arguments have been supported by mass Armenian demonstrations and their exacerbated claims for autonomy. In Kvemo Kartli, the Azeri population did not oppose the arrival of Georgian eco-migrants, as such. Generally, Azeri activists have been less radical than their Armenian counterparts in Javakheti, and have largely limited their demands to the protection of Azeri rights, and minority inclusion into the local governance structures.

Secondly, there are more mixed villages in Kvemo Kartli; thus, newcomers and the indigenous population are more exposed to inter-action, whereas the Georgian villages in Javakheti are for the most part completely isolated from other villages, with almost no communication between the Armenian and Georgian populations.

Thirdly, Georgians are more represented in local governmental structures in Kvemo Kartli than in Javakheti, which on the positive side, allows for better accommodation of the needs of eco-migrants, while on the negative side, it partially excludes the ethnic Azeri population from political participation and inclusion. In the local *Sakrebulo*s and *Gamgeobas* of Marneuli, Gardabani, Bolnisi, Dmanisi, and Tetrtskaro *rayons*, the Georgian population, including newcomers, is well represented. One of our informants mentioned that in Kvemo Kartli, many Svans have reached high positions.<sup>110</sup> It was also noted that in the late 1980s (during the wave of nationalist mobilization) several prominent Azeris in Kvemo Kartli were removed from their posts (e.g. that of *kolkhoz* chairman) and replaced by newly-arrived Svans.<sup>111</sup> In contrast, the representation of eco-migrants in local governance of Javakheti’s two *rayons*, Ninotsminda and Akhalkalaki, is low.

The above factors make it more difficult for eco-migrants to integrate into local society in Javakheti than in Kvemo Kartli. Eco-migrants in Javakheti often see themselves as ‘true patriots,’ “defenders of Georgian’s right to stay on Georgian territories,” on ‘their’ lands. They often feel that Armenians wish to evict them from Javakheti, declare autonomy and secede to Armenia. Many also feel discriminated against in Javakheti. In Kvemo Kartli one can less frequently witness such nationalist perceptions

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<sup>110</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>111</sup> Interviews by Jonathan Wheatley, July 2006.

(except in Tsalka *rayon*). Clearly, the different experiences of resettlement and adaptation have affected the migrants' perceptions of their own position vis-à-vis their new neighbours.

As far as Tsalka *rayon* is concerned, the socio-psychological adaptation of migrants into the region was even more difficult than in Javakheti. Taking into account the process of resettlement, it is clear that the vast majority of migrants settled down in the *rayon* illegally. They largely occupied empty houses, which belonged to out-migrating Greeks. As mentioned above, the majority of those migrants were not eco-migrants, but rather people who were seeking to improve their economic conditions, attracted by the employment opportunities at the Baku-Tbilisi-Çeyhan pipeline construction project. Since the massive spontaneous resettlement of migrants in 2002-2003, the crime rate has increased significantly. The 2005 Public Defender's report reveals eight cases of serious crimes in only the first three months of 2005. According to this report, the criminals were migrants from Svaneti or Ajara, who committed atrocities, mostly against Greek dwellers.<sup>112</sup> In some cases, local Armenians claimed that they had tried to defend their Greek neighbours and relatives, who were assaulted by the Georgian criminals, as a result of which larger confrontations broke out. A characteristic example of such a case is a criminal act which took place on March 2005, in Avralo village: Burglars (supposedly Georgians) broke into the house of an elderly Greek couple, beat them up and stole around 850 USD. That same afternoon, Armenians from the nearby village of Kizilkilisa, and armed with wooden bats, entered the village of Avralo, where they beat up around ten Georgian villagers, whom they had randomly encountered in the streets. They also broke into the local school and raided it. This event, and the way it had escalated, revealed that the relations among the local population were very tense in some parts of the *rayon*, and needed to be immediately addressed.

There were several other violent incidents taking place in Tsalka *rayon*. However, there seems to be consensus among the population in Tsalka that since a police force has been deployed in the region, in March 2005,<sup>113</sup> the rule of law has come into force, resulting in a serious decline of criminal activity in the region. This has also impacted positively on tensions between the communities, but problems regarding houses and lands still remain a potential source of tension.<sup>114</sup>

To demonstrate how tension in the region could impact on the stability of the country, and on how sensitive this issue may become for the government, a recent event of 9 March 2006 should be

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<sup>112</sup> Report of the Public Defender of Georgia presented to the parliament, 23 December 2005.

<sup>113</sup> Moreover later, in July 2006, the Greek government donated 16 police patrol cars to the Tsalka *rayon* police.

<sup>114</sup> Land and housing issues will be discussed in the following section regarding the socio-economic integration.

mentioned. A quarrel between drunken Svans and a group of Armenians ended up in the murder of a 23-year-old Armenian, Gevork Gevorkyan. Even though the suspects were promptly arrested and an investigation had been initiated, which later led to long-term sentences of the murderers, local Armenians gathered in front of the police station in Tsalka town and demanded the lynching of the suspected perpetrators. As the mass event escalated, the protestors broke into the *Gamgeoba* building, where they broke windows and damaged inventory. This tense situation in Tsalka spilled over into neighbouring Javakheti, where on 12 March in Akhalkalaki, the Armenian organizations *United Javakhk* and *Virk* held a rally. Eventually, an Armenian crowd stormed the local branch of the Tbilisi State University, protesting against the number of ethnic Georgians studying there, as well as into the local court building. Finally, the angry mob targeted the office of the Georgian Bishop of the region, accusing the Church of hiding weapons there. Law enforcers and the bishop's administration agreed to allow some of the protesters inside; once they confirmed that no weapons had been hidden there, the crowd dispersed.<sup>115</sup>

Indeed, the demonstrations in Javakheti had an effect on how Georgian society perceives the situation in minority regions. Georgian media outlets contributed to exacerbating negative perceptions towards the Armenians in Javakheti, in articles with headlines such as: “Samtskhe-Javakheti Separatists Want War with Georgians” or “Slow Bomb - Separatist Demands in Javakheti”.<sup>116</sup> This attitude in the media clearly serves as an impeding factor to the breaking down of stereotypes and towards efforts of regional integration, and there are numerous examples of how such media portrays national minorities negatively, in general. Partly as a result of this negative media attention to national minorities, in particular towards the Armenians in Javakheti, Georgian mainstream society is to a certain extent, unreceptive to problems of ethnic minorities in the nation. In contrast, many ethnic Georgians consider the Georgian population as the most heavily discriminated against and oppressed, in the minority-populated regions.

## **Socio Economic Adaptation and Inter-Ethnic Tension**

Naturally, socio-economic factors do play a significant role in the process of adaptation and integration of the eco-migrants into their new settlements. Despite the fact that part of the state controlled resettlement of ecological migrants took place well before independence, a Pandora’s Box of problems

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<sup>115</sup> The Messenger, 16 March 2006, Issue no 50; *Akhali Taoba*, 17 March 2006, issue no 74.

<sup>116</sup> *Akhali Taoba* 19-25 March 2006, issue 76; *Kviris Palitra* 20-26 March 2006, issue 12.

began to emerge in the regions where eco-migrants had resettled, especially in Javakheti, as the Soviet Era came to an end. The collapse of the state-run economy led to competition between the native population and the eco-migrants, over scarce resources, and this further increased tensions between the hosts and newcomers.

Armenians and Dukhobors in Javakheti, and Azeris along with Armenians and Greeks in Kvemo Kartli, traditionally were engaged in agriculture, animal husbandry, and small-scale trade, as well as industry, in the late Soviet period. As eco-migrants arrived in these regions, they not only had to adapt to a new ethnic and cultural environment, they also had to find their place in a different socio-economic setting. The main problems faced by these eco-migrants, in terms of socio-economic issues, were (and are) related to housing, land, and language complexities. These difficult issues are dealt with separately, below.

### **Housing Issues**

Even during the earliest stages of their resettlement, many eco-migrant families in Javakheti and Kvemo Kartli were suffering from the poor conditions of their houses. As already mentioned, the government did not complete its ambitious plans of creating new villages for eco-migrants, and as a result, many arriving eco-migrants found themselves in partially constructed houses, and some were not offered any housing at all. Those who had the resources to do so finished the houses by themselves, while others built simple wooden houses as temporary shelters, hoping that the government would eventually offer assistance in completing their houses.

As discussed earlier, newly built houses were offered to the eco-migrants under the condition that they would not for the first 25 years become legal owners of their dwellings. However, this regulation was ignored in many cases. Eco-migrants, unable to adapt to their new surroundings, sold the houses illegally, or simply gave them up and moved away. As a result, issues of personal registration, legal ownership, and user rights, have become chaotic. Thousands of people now live in houses which they do not officially own, nor even have the legal right to utilize.

Recently, the regional administration of Kvemo Kartli has begun a house registration exercise, and as part of these efforts, eco-migrants are supposed to receive legal documents for the house they occupy. This process has started in Dmanisi, Tetritskaro, Marneuli and Gardabani *rayons*. As far as Javakheti is concerned, many eco-migrants are registered; however, not all of them possess house ownership

documents. For example, in Spasovka (Ninotsminda *rayon*) ownership documents of those houses which were provided by the Kostava Foundation still remain in the possession of the Foundation. While this is in accordance with the conditions of the Kostava Foundation (the 25-year rule), other eco-migrants who have resettled in Spasovka on their own initiative, do not possess their houses formally, since they have acquired them by informal arrangements with previous owners, mainly Dukhobors. There are also cases where persons living in a house provided by the Kostava Foundation have sold their premises, informally, to newly arrived eco-migrants, and resettled to Tsalka themselves.

As discussed on pages 9-12, the government plans of the late 1980s were to establish villages for eco-migrants, with complete facilities, including infrastructure, schools, kindergartens, hospitals, cultural centres, etc. However, with the breakdown of the economy following the disintegration of the Soviet Union, the government could not fulfil this aim. Therefore, another serious problem that eco-migrants face today, in some villages, is a lack of irrigation and potable water supply systems.<sup>117</sup> This is particularly a problem in eco-migration villages built in the 1980s in Marneuli, Gardabani, and Akhalkalaki *rayons*. This problem makes it very difficult for the eco-migrants to engage in productive agricultural activities; thus, the only possible way to make a living is by animal husbandry.

Where eco-migrants live in 'old', i.e., already existing villages, there are potable water supplies and irrigation systems. However, in such villages, eco-migrants often face the problem of limited access to arable land, which often results in tension and conflicts with the native villagers. Such tension is often understood as ethnic tension and has occurred both in Kvemo Kartli and in Javakheti. However, the question of land is especially acute in the former region, which has experienced more recent waves of in-migration, of the ecologically displaced and other migrants.

## **Land Issues**

In the Soviet period, arable land belonged to *kolkhozes* and *sovkhozes* (state farms) and were state property. Rural dwellers owned only their homestead lands. The process of privatization of agricultural lands started with reforms, after independence, and brought about many disputes and conflict over ownership. Undoubtedly, land ownership is the main issue that fuels tension between eco-migrants and native populations. Land privatization in Georgia can be divided in two phases: from 1992 to 1998, and, since 2005. The 1992-1998 land reform regulated that agricultural land, from 0.15 to 1.25 ha (and

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<sup>117</sup> This is the case of Akhali Dioknisi, Khikani and Shulaveri in Marneuli *rayon*, Lemshveniera, Krtsanisi and Mukrovani in Gardabani *rayon*, Kotelia, Okami and Ptena in Akhalkalaki *rayon*.



up to 3.0 ha in mountainous parts of the country), could be handed over for private usage. The remaining available lands were retained in state ownership and distributed only for use.<sup>118</sup> Therefore, the 1992-1998 land reform was not an actual privatization. It was only with the 2005 land reform that privatization of all available agricultural lands in Georgia took place in accordance with the Law of Georgia, “On Privatization of State-Owned Agricultural Lands”. Today, there are lots of lands in Samtskhe-Javakheti and Kvemo Kartli that are about to be privatised.

According to the 2005 law, the privatization of agricultural lands took place through direct sale, special auctions and open auctions. Persons already leasing state owned land were given priority for buying land through direct sale. Land, which had not been leased, was subject to special auction. The right to participate in this auction was granted to the inhabitants of the specific village, town and community registered in the “house books,” maintained by the *Sakrebulo*s (rayon municipal councils), or registered locally on the basis of an ID card, to which the land was attached. Land, which had not been leased out or had been leased out previously, was subject to open auction, and in such cases the right to participate in auctions was granted to any citizen of Georgia or any legal entity in the country.

This legislation did not stipulate any limitations for the lease of state owned agricultural lands. After the beginning of the second privatization process in 2005, eco-migrants and other farmers who had leased agricultural lands were fully entitled to privatize the leased agricultural land plots, according to the principles defined by the legislation.<sup>119</sup> Similarly, eco-migrants had the full rights to participate in direct sales and special auctions. However, as mentioned above, they had to be registered in the “house books” of the *Sakrebulo*s, in order to qualify for these rights.<sup>120</sup>

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<sup>118</sup> According to the Resolution of the Cabinet of Ministers of Georgia #48 as of 18 January 1992, the term ‘use’ means either ‘lease’, ‘rent’, or ‘hereditary building right’. At the same time, the legislation stipulated that land reform could not be conducted within a 21 km zone along the external borders of Georgia, which implied that, given the location of Samtskhe-Javakheti and Kvemo Kartli along the borders with Armenia, Azerbaijan and Turkey, the population in parts of these regions could not receive the usual 0.15-1.25 ha of lands. The reason was the aim of defining of state borderline of the country. However, the rule was not exercised all over the country. Limitations applied to Kvemo Kartli and Samtskhe-Javakheti and also along a three km zone on the Black Sea Coast area. Indeed, those who were affected most by this policy were Azeris in Kvemo Kartli and Armenians in Samtskhe-Javakheti as well as all others living in these regions. Nevertheless, a major difference can be observed between Samtskhe-Javakheti, on the one hand, and Kvemo Kartli, on the other. In Samtskhe-Javakheti, people got land in the border zone despite the decree because the local government structures largely were composed of ethnic Armenians, who took extracurricular measures to protect their own interests and provide ethnic Armenians with land illegally. Land was thus shared relatively fairly in Samtskhe-Javakheti. In contrast, in Kvemo Kartli, the *Gamgebelis* of the rayons and the village *Gamgebelis* (but especially the former) often began leasing land to private individuals and companies. Thus, in the period 1993-96, most of the 21 km strip of land in Kvemo Kartli was already leased to the relatives and associates of the *rayon Gamgebelis*. Most of these individuals were ethnic Georgians, although sometimes the (largely Azeris and Georgians) village *Gamgebelis* also profited by striking deals with the rayon authorities. Later, from 1994, the 21 km restriction was abolished and the population of Kvemo Kartli and Samtskhe-Javakheti received agricultural land of 0.15-1.25 ha under reform regardless of ethnic background. Interview with Jaba Ebanoidze, Director of the “Association for the Protection of Land Owners’ Rights”, 27 November 2006.

<sup>119</sup> Law of Georgia “On Privatization of State-Owned Agricultural Lands” as of 8 July 2005.

<sup>120</sup> It should also be mentioned that the basis for registration in a “house book” is ownership of a house or land in the corresponding settlement. There are cases where eco-migrants are not registered in “house books” and, therefore, they have no right to participate in special auctions.

Here it should be noted that although the legislation stipulated that every individual had equal rights of access to available land, many eco-migrants complained that land was unevenly distributed. Villagers of Spasovka, for example, emphasized that there were farmers in Ninotsminda *rayon* who owned about 500-800 ha of lands, while Ajaran farmers possessed no more than 2-5 ha. A similar situation prevailed in some parts of the Akhalkalaki *rayon*. Often, ethnic affiliation was linked to possession of lands. Many claimed that they were deliberately denied access to more land because they were Georgian in an Armenian community.<sup>121</sup> This kind of claim did not contribute to enhance good neighbourly relations.

During the 1990s, the privatization and land distribution processes were typically controlled by the local authorities. Often the powers of local officials were misappropriated. In addition, the local population suffered from a lack of knowledge of their own rights, and of their financial capability to privatize land or acquire land for leasing. Hence, a significant amount of land plot was concentrated in the hands of local officials, or based on kinship relations, or bribery, resulting in a discriminatory division of lands, disfavours the marginal and vulnerable segments of the population. Moreover, vast parts of the lease contracts were not properly prepared, and this today has created impediments in the second privatisation process.<sup>122</sup> Eco-migrants often feel isolated and forgotten by the government, who resettled them there, and left them without any assistance to support their integration process into the region.

Interestingly, while eco-migrants often feel discriminated against in their access to land, many persons belonging to the Azeri population in Kvemo Kartli think that there are cases during the distribution process where preference is given to ethnic Georgians, especially Svans. For example, the head of the *sovkhos* of the village of Kapanakhchi (himself Svan), was accused by the local Azeri population of distributing all available lands to his relatives in 2003, which caused serious tension between the Azeri and Georgian (Svan) populations.<sup>123</sup> A sense of discontent among Azeris, however, has often not been pronounced publicly. Largely, the Azeri population does not often make public statements about

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<sup>121</sup> Interviews with villagers in Spasovka, 24 September 2006.

<sup>122</sup> The law determines that possession of lease contracts empower citizens to privatize the land they have leased through direct sale. In case their lease contracts are not adequate, citizens will have to participate in special auctions.

<sup>123</sup> "Analysis of Conflict Factors in the Region of Marneuli-Gardabani: Results of Sociological Research," Caucasus Institute for Peace, Democracy and Development; the Union of Intercultural Cooperation in Kvemo Kartli Region "Most", and The Union of Azerbaijan Women of Georgia, 2003.

infringements of their rights. However, there have been cases where local farmers have demonstrated in Marneuli town, as happened twice in 2004.<sup>124</sup>

Tsalka *rayon* represents an outstanding example when it comes to land issues. Also, in Tsalka *rayon*, one of the main problems between newcomers and the indigenous population is the shortage of land. As already mentioned, the proportion of eco-migrants compared to other groups of newcomers in Tsalka *rayon* is very low. Although eco-migrants, unlike many other newcomers (spontaneous migrants) are usually settled legally into the region, eco-migrants and other new arrivals still have a problem in common: none of them have received land, except for their 0.2 ha homestead land. In traditionally Greek villages, migrants sometimes rent land from Greek families, who control almost all of a village's lands and houses, which belong to their emigrated relatives. Legally, Greeks have the right to let these lands. However, the obvious material inequality is a thorn in the flesh of the Georgian newcomers. Often they state that as Georgians in "their country", "on their own land" they are "treated as guests".<sup>125</sup> Feelings of this character exacerbate the tense situation, migrants becoming more assertive in their demands. Furthermore, land, which is rented by a migrant from a Greek owner, cannot be privatized.

According to a local official, a governmental decree of 1999 stipulated the allocation of 0.5-1.5 ha of former collective land to each family in Tsalka, regardless of ethnicity. However, most Ajarans were not entitled to that land because they did not own houses officially, even if they had "bought" them. Moreover, the majority of Ajaran migrants have arrived since 1999. As a result, a large number of eco-migrants and other internal migrants do not formally own land in Tsalka *rayon*.<sup>126</sup>

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<sup>124</sup> Another noteworthy event took place on 3 December 2004 in Marneuli *rayon*. Around 300 local Azeri inhabitants of the village Kutliari attacked the Georgian owner of a horse farm and his bodyguards; this owner leases out the absolute majority of the village lands, so that the Azeri locals were demanding the re-distribution of 320 ha of land. As a result of the attack, an old Azeri woman was killed and several people were injured. The situation was so grave that representatives of the Azerbaijani government and diplomats participated in the negotiations for resolving the issue. The ambassador of Azerbaijan to Georgia wrote a petition to the President of Georgia encouraging him to allocate an appropriate amount of land for the Azeri population of Marneuli. The incident was followed by another open letter to the President of Georgia by a group of Azerbaijani non-governmental organizations, expressing their concern over the violation of human rights of Azeri communities in Georgia in regard to land privatization. The event clearly shows that the land issue is one of the key issues for the local population, whether ethnic Georgian or not. Since land is the only means of income for the rural population, they fight not merely for a plot but for a source of living. It can be said that the conflict has an economic rather than ethnic basis. Nevertheless, this tension has an ethnic dimension and there is a clear risk that land disputes, if they escalate, can develop into open ethnic conflict in mixed communities.

Marika Liparteliani, "Attack on Kulari Stud Farm Ended with Casualties", *Resonansi*, 6 December 2004, Issue 333. *Civil Georgia*, "Azeri NGOs Concerned over Azerbaijanis Rights in Georgia", 9 December 2004,

available at: [http://www.civil.ge/eng/article\\_ngo.php?id=8542](http://www.civil.ge/eng/article_ngo.php?id=8542).

<sup>125</sup> Interviews in Tsalka *rayon*, 25-26 July 2006.

<sup>126</sup> Interview with Mikheil Tskitishvili, *Gamgebeli* of Tsalka *rayon*, 25 July 2006.

However, as soon as the second round of land privatization starts in Tsalka (based on the 2005 law), those migrants who have arrived on their own initiative since 2000 will encounter serious problems. Houses are often paid in several instalments, and in several villages the eco-migrants have not yet paid the full sum for their houses bought from the indigenous population (Greeks or Armenians). Until the full amount has been paid, the property legally remains in the ownership of the seller, who is the person registered in the house register. Consequently, the buyers (the migrants) are not registered in those houses, and thus have no right to participate in the special auction for land privatization. Although they can still hope to participate in the open auction, in most cases their chances of acquiring the desired, local land are minimal. Although the majority of spontaneous newcomers are not eco-migrants, the proportion of eco-migrants arriving on their own initiative is not insignificant. For example, in Tetrtskaro their number is around 220.<sup>127</sup> If these issues are not addressed, they may become another source of tension and conflict.

In terms of land privatization, there are a number of additional problems. Firstly, the new land privatisation law does not include the land formerly utilized by the Greeks, which is formally still owned by Greeks who have left the country. This is often high-quality soil. Therefore, the new coming migrant population does not have access to those lands. Secondly, the land privatisation law envisages the selling of not-privatised land, by special auctions, and only those officially registered as residents of the village or *Sakrebulo*, can participate. These newcomers, therefore, have no rights at all. For this reason the *Gamgebeli* of the Tsalka *rayon*, Mikheil Tskitishvili, has temporarily frozen the implementation of the privatisation law in the *rayon*. He is currently trying to persuade the central government to give equal rights to newcomers, for participation in auctions, or to solve the existing problem by other means.<sup>128</sup> However, this problem has yet to be addressed by central government actors.

Meanwhile, the Armenian population in Tsalka *rayon* also complains of discrimination. They state that Georgians are given priority in obtaining positions in the local administration. As a consequence, local Armenians argue, it is often easier for newcomers to solve their legal and administrative problems, compared to the Armenians and Greeks. This complaint is also related to unemployment. An especially painful topic for the local Armenians is the Baku-Tbilisi-Çeyhan pipeline project which was the main

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<sup>127</sup> Interview with the Deputy *Gamgebeli* of Tetrtskaro, Enveri Gabuldani, 20 October 2006.

<sup>128</sup> Interview with Mikheil Tskitishvili, *Gamgebeli* of Tsalka *rayon*, 15 July 2006.

source of employment in the Tsalka rayon from 2002-2005. However, as it turned out, the proportion of Armenians hired as local labourers was much lower than the number of Georgians. Meanwhile, Georgian employees on the project were typically new arrivals from Ajara and Svaneti, including eco-migrants. Armenian residents of Kizilkilisa, a village located less than two km from the pipeline, claimed that only five persons from their village were employed on the pipeline.<sup>129</sup> This state of affairs caused immense discontent among the Armenian population, and undoubtedly plays a serious role in the state of inter-ethnic relations in the region.

As far as land issues in Javakheti are concerned, the situation is no better, if not even worse. This is especially true in the village of Spasovka, where tensions over land at a certain point almost turned into violent conflict. During the initial year of resettlement (1990), eco-migrants submitted a petition to the local village authority (ethnic Armenian) to allocate around 1,000 ha of land for rent, an arrangement that could take place within the legal framework. However, the demand was rejected by local authorities. As a result, the Georgian migrants decided to assert their rights and demonstrated in front of the village school, as a protest to the existing conditions. As tension escalated between eco-migrants and the local village authorities, around 500 Armenian inhabitants of other villages arrived in Spasovka. Confronted with this threat, the Ajarans appealed to the Ninotsminda *rayon* authorities for help. During that time, Georgian para-military groups, associated with the *Kostava Society*, were stationed in Ninotsminda town. When the militia forces arrived in Spasovka, the situation was extremely intense. As an Ajaran leader stated, “they were afraid that the Armenians would attack them”. The militia group negotiated with both sides and managed to prevent an angry conflict. Eventually, the land was allocated for Georgian migrants.<sup>130</sup>

Later, another incident again caused tension. In 1995, Spasovka villagers were deprived of their hay fields. The issue of land user rights was unclear and the local officials decided to terminate the Spasovka villagers’ access to use the land. Unsurprisingly, this caused serious discontent among the Georgian population. Generally, the villagers in Spasovka complain that village lands are given to Armenian residents of other villages, while Spasovka residents suffer from a shortage of lands. By 1996, the eco-migrants in Spasovka were able to rent about four ha per household. Despite the fact that eco-migrants paid 80 GEL for each contract to lease land, they did not receive formal contracts, which

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<sup>129</sup> BP’s policy during the construction period was to hire local residents with priority given to those living within two km of the pipeline or within five km of installations above the ground.

<sup>130</sup> Interview with Jemal Vanadze, dweller of Spasovka, 24 September 2006.

could prove their rental of the land.<sup>131</sup> Today, approaching privatization, the lack of formal documentation means those who want to privatize the land may not be able to do so, as they may fail to provide sufficient proof of their lease arrangement.

However, it should be noted that these problems are widespread, also in exclusively Armenian villages, where certain groups, often relatives of officials, are given privileged access to land. In the case of the Spasovka villagers, the disputes tend to take on an ethnic dimension.<sup>132</sup> Today there is a shortage of land in Spasovka, which prompts eco-migrants to move to Tsalka region as their families grow larger. At the same time, Armenian farmers from other villages are renting the lands – attached to Spasovka. This fact causes huge discontent among the Georgian villagers.

### **Language Issues**

Yet another major question and a very important factor for the eco-migrants' integration and adaptation process, is the language issue. As a local official of Tsalka said, in an interview: "Friends can resolve conflicts between themselves by communication, but when groups cannot communicate due to a language barrier, there is no mechanism to resolve conflicts."<sup>133</sup> This problem prevails both in Kvemo Kartli and Javakheti.

As mentioned before, Armenian or Azeri villages surround Georgian villages in Javakheti and Kvemo Kartli. The interaction between these villages is very limited. This is, of course, especially true for those Georgian villages which are inhabited exclusively by eco-migrants. A very low percentage of Ajaran eco-migrants speak Russian, and only a small proportion of persons belonging to the Armenian, Azeri or Greek populations speak Georgian. Although many persons belonging to national minorities are eager to study the Georgian language, (especially the younger generations seem to realize this will help them to integrate into the Georgian society—and enhance their career opportunities), it may take many years before a common language is spoken by all communities in the country. It seems an indisputable fact that the different ethnic communities hardly interact with each other, and do not discuss social or economic issues together. Therefore, it is difficult to solve even basic communal issues, without the involvement of the local administration (*Gamgeoba*) representatives.

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<sup>131</sup> Ibid.

<sup>132</sup> Interviews in Spasovka, 23-25 September 2006.

<sup>133</sup> Interview with Mikheil Tskitishvili, *Gamgebeli* of Tsalka *rayon*, 15 July 2006.

In short, the main concerns of the resettled and indigenous population are of a social and economic character. Simple disputes over small pieces of land can easily turn into serious conflicts, which in many cases may be interpreted as ethnic confrontations, not only by the affected populations, but also at times by the local authorities, and different interest groups. In this sense, Kvemo Kartli and Javakheti are particularly vulnerable, and there is little doubt that the conflict potential contained in the socio-economic situation poses a danger to the stability of these regions. This fact emphasises the necessity of the Georgian government to devise policies that prevent escalation of tension between the native minority populations and the newcomers. In this context, systematic measures for regulation of ecological migration are of immense importance.

## **Conclusion and Recommendations**

Uncontrolled migration processes, coinciding with the overall economic hardships and the political turmoil over the past 20 years, have left thousands of Georgian citizens in a legal limbo. These migration processes have gravely worsened inter-ethnic relations in some regions of the country.

Since the number of families suffering from calamities is so significant, in both Ajara and Svaneti, and on the grounds that over 60,000 individuals have been displaced due to ecological calamities, the issue of ecological migration deserves much more attention than it has been given so far. The development of a policy framework for migration management is much desired. The Georgian Government in 2006 developed a strategy for the integration of internally displaced persons from the civil wars in Abkhazia and South Ossetia; it is now time to pay adequate attention also to the eco-migrants. Admittedly, management of eco-migration is complicated, and resource intensive.

Some steps have been made recently. Ever since the emergence of the 'Rose Revolution', this new government has taken important steps to finalize the creation of a database on households affected, or potentially affected, by ecological damage all over the country, including Svaneti and Ajara. However, this will only be the beginning of a complex strategy towards finding a viable solution to the severe problems presented by ecological migration.

Indeed, among the numerous features of ecological migration, this document has focused on two aspects of particular concern: on the one hand, a view of the process of resettlement that takes into account the

needs of the ecologically displaced eco-migrants, in the hopes of developing a strategy for migration management that will improve their conditions; and, on the other hand, evaluating the issue of eco-migration from the perspective of the recipient regions, with a special focus on the regions of Georgia inhabited predominantly by persons belonging to national minorities.

The first issue will be dealt with in particular in the recommendations below. We believe there is a critical need to develop a legislative framework for the protection of eco-migrant's rights; and, not less importantly, a comprehensive governmental strategy for the management of ecological migration processes.

The second issue, the settlement of eco-migrants, also needs a final clarification here. It is evident from this study that eco-migration at times has created significant tensions in the recipient communities; the focus of this paper has been on Samtskhe-Javakheti and Kvemo Kartli, with their ethnic minority populations. This is not to say that problems have not also occurred in other ethnic Georgian host communities. In fact, many eco-migrants returned after having been settled in Samegrelo (Mingrelia) and also experienced tension with the host population in many other locations. However, during resettlement to minority populated regions, there is a tendency for the resettlement to be seen through an ethnic prism, and tension between natives and newcomers is often interpreted as ethnic conflict. No doubt, the lack of planning that has characterized the migration process, and the mistakes made by the Soviet authorities and by subsequent post-Soviet governments, have contributed significantly to trigger tension in the recipient communities, and many of the problems could have been avoided with better policies in place.

While there is little doubt that settlement policies have been driven partly by a nationalist agenda to enforce an ethnic Georgian presence, in border regions and minority populated regions, it should also be acknowledged that resettlement at times has been guided by the fact that housing has been more readily available in regions abandoned by various national minorities, which has been the case in Tsalka since the late 1990s.

In this context it is important to develop a balanced approach towards the settlement of internal migrants in minority populated regions. It is not the aim of this study to provide an answer to the complex question as to what extent ecological and other internal migrants should be settled into minority regions, such as Javakheti or Kvemo Kartli. However, it would be both useful and feasible to



keep in mind The Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities, and its provisions, as guiding principles to inform policies to this end. Article 16 of the Convention, which was ratified by Georgia in December 2005, stipulates that:

The Parties shall refrain from measures which alter the proportions of the population in areas inhabited by persons belonging to national minorities and are aimed at restricting the rights and freedoms flowing from the principles enshrined in the present framework Convention.

In the explanatory report to the FCNM (art. 81 and 82), it is noted that the article prohibits “only measures which are aimed at restricting the rights and freedoms flowing from the Framework Convention”. It is also noted that the prohibition is not extended to measures having the effect of restricting such rights and freedoms, since such measures may at times be justified and legitimate. One example of justified resettlements is the relocation of inhabitants of a village for building a dam. Another example could very well be the internal resettlement of citizens who are affected by ecological disaster. What is important here is that resettlement takes place in the spirit of the FCNM. In this sense, it would clearly be a violation of the FCNM if the underlying agenda, when selecting the locations for the ecological migrants, would be to change the demographic balance in a region populated by persons belonging to national minorities; while it would not be a violation, *per se*, if the underlying concern is to find appropriate dwellings for displaced populations.

As mentioned in the recommendations below, we suggest that a strategy for ecological migration is devised. Here, it would be highly important to ensure that not only representatives of eco-migrants, but also affected recipient communities, are both involved in the policy development, and also at the more practical level, when new locations for eco-migrants are assigned. A process of consultation with future host communities will be crucially important to ensure that national minorities (and also Georgian recipient communities) do not again feel antagonized because of pressure on their communities, and to avoid the creation of tension where eco-migrants are settled.

Returning now to the first perspective, that of the eco-migrants, we believe that government efforts on addressing the issue should address two areas; firstly, that the government should work towards a plan for future ecological displacement, and, formulate a comprehensive strategy of resettlement; and secondly, the direction of works should address the problems of those eco-migrants who have resettled since 1987, and who still find themselves in difficulties, mainly because of lack of formal ownership of houses and land.

## Recommendations:

### *Mid- and long term action*

- ❖ Drafting and adoption of adequate legislation on ecological migration. Legislation on ecological migration is one of the critical foundations for a successful resettlement policy and for protection of this particularly vulnerable group. Today, eco-migrants are left without any specific rights and protection because of their peculiar situation. In the framework of the current Georgian legislation, there is not a single provision to safeguard the rights and obligations of eco-migrants. The lack of a legal basis for regulating eco-migration leads to the absence of the protection of the rights of eco-migrants. To this end, the Parliament of Georgia could adopt a Law on Ecologically Displaced Persons. An alternative would be to amend existing legislation. The Law of Georgia on Internally Displaced Persons,<sup>134</sup> (last amended in June 2006), does not envisage persons displaced as a result of natural and/or human made disasters, thus contradicting the ‘Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement,’ adopted by the UN in 1998.<sup>135</sup> To protect the rights of ecologically displaced persons, the Parliament of Georgia could also adopt an amendment to the existing law on IDPs, incorporating the status, rights and responsibilities of eco-migrants in accordance with UN Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement. This would entail a redefinition of IDPs, in accordance with the UN Guiding principles as “Persons who have been forced or obliged to flee or to leave their homes or places of habitual residence in particular as a result of, or in order to avoid the effects of, armed conflict, situations of generalized violence, violations of human rights or natural or human-made disasters, and who have not crossed an internationally recognized state border”.
  
- ❖ Long-term strategy for management of ecological migration. It is recommended that an inter-ministerial body is established at the central level, consisting of high ranking officials from the Ministry of Resettlement and Accommodation, the Ministry of Finance, the Ministry of Environmental Protection and Natural Resources, the Ministry of Agriculture, and other relevant executive bodies. These governmental bodies, according to their competencies, should be able to plan and formulate a long-term strategy for resettlement, adequately. In addition, the central

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<sup>134</sup> See the law at: <http://www.unhcr.org/home/RSDLEGAL/44ab85324.pdf>

<sup>135</sup> See the full text of the Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement at [http://www.reliefweb.int/ocha\\_ol/pub/idp\\_gp/idp.html](http://www.reliefweb.int/ocha_ol/pub/idp_gp/idp.html)

government should work with several national and international organizations, as well as with donor organizations, in order to obtain financial and informational support in formulating and implementing the process of the resettlement programs. At the same time, the government should cooperate with national and international organizations for data and information sharing, as well as experience sharing, and actively involve national and international agencies (UNHCR, IOM, CoE, INGOs) in the elaboration of the strategic plan. It would be equally important to involve representatives of ecological migrant communities and representatives from recipient communities in the strategy elaboration. For the elaboration of the strategy, further studies would be necessary for the situation of ecological migrants. Moreover, potential host communities would need to be studied before the resettlement. Environmental issues, economic conditions, ethnic and demographic factors, and cultural differentiation, are the main determining forces for the adaptation process.<sup>136</sup>

The strategy should include several distinct, yet inter-related elements:

- An Emergency Response Action-plan. Central and local self-government bodies need a specific strategy on how to act when sudden natural disasters emerge. Special action plans should be formulated which will address the need of those people who will suffer from the disasters. Temporary shelter for temporary accommodation may be constructed in low lands; specific reserves of funds should be reserved for medical and humanitarian aid, etc.
- Resettlement Aid Program. An aid programme to support the ecological migrants during the first, difficult period of resettlement would help the eco migrants to become self-sustainable. Eco-migrants should be encouraged by financial support by the time of resettlement. Starting a new life in an unfamiliar location is extremely difficult for eco-migrants without the help of the government. Based on the experience of internally displaced persons in Georgia, whether ecologically or war displaced populations, it appears that even after 10, 15 or 20 years, displaced persons are poorly adapted to the place where they have settled. Displaced persons remain among the poorest segments of society.
- An Integration Program, which envisages all aspects of socio-economic, cultural, and educational integration. The program must take due note of local specificities in the host communities, and must devise a practice for systematic assessment and consultation in the process of selection of new host communities.

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<sup>136</sup> A quick and smooth adaptation process will contribute to peaceful and friendly relationships between people of different cultures, religion and ethnicity. Hence, adequate planning and analysis of the host regions can promote a successful adaptation process.

- A Facilitation Program for Eco-Migrants Resettled since 1987, i.e., a program directed towards the assistance of eco-migrants still facing problems with formal ownership of houses and access to land and landownership.

#### *Short term action*

- ECMI in collaboration with the *Independent Journalist House of Ajara* will take initiatives to organize an initial series of roundtables for relevant government and civil society stakeholders, with the aim of initiating activities to support long-term objectives.
- The Ministry for Refugees and Accommodation, possibly in collaboration with national and international NGOs, can conduct assessments of the landownership situation, especially in the Tsalka rayon. In the current situation, where large land areas are owned by emigrated Greeks, the survey should identify the current owners, as a basis for taking subsequent measures to promote the purchase of this land, and to ensure the legal redistribution among villagers currently settled into the communities.
- The government should pay more attention to ecological migration and allocate more funds for resettlement programs. Houses, which were bought by the government in 2004-2005, were bought mostly for those who already had resettled on their own initiative. While these beneficiaries undoubtedly are in need of legalizing their status, the government has failed to assist those families who are in an urgent need for relocation.

Developing a systematic approach to eco-migration and eco-migrants based on an actual governmental policy will enable the government to prevent social crises, and in the long run reduce financial expenditures, while at the same time promoting integration and development processes in the country. In the long run, such measures will contribute to enhance the government's capacity to uphold stability and security in the country.

## Annex

**Table 1. Population in selected regions of Georgia, 1979 to 2002**

Rayon	Census 1979					Census 1989					Census 2002				
	Georgians	Russians	Greeks	Armenians	Azeris	Georgians	Russians	Greeks	Armenians	Azeris	Georgians	Russians	Greeks	Armenians	Azeris
Akhalkalaki	3,067 4.40%	1,788 2.57%	70 0.10%	63,692 91.70%	142 0.20%	3,005 4.3%	1,737 2.5%	68 0.10%	63,092 91.3%	171 0.2%	3,124 5.27%	157 0.06%	51 0.08%	57,516 94.33%	3 0.00%
Ninotsminda	370 1.1%	3,830 10.46%	33 0.09%	32,231 87.99%	87 0.24%	454 1.2%	3,161 8.3%	35 0.09%	33,964 89.62%	43 0.11%	476 1.39%	963 2.75%	5 0.01%	32,857 95.78%	2 0.00%
Akhaltzikhe	21,702 43.10%	2,910 5.78%	230 0.46%	24,035 47.74%	119 0.24%	25,648 46.8%	3,426 6.2%	239 0.4%	23,469 42.8%	118 0.2%	28,473 64.72%	410 0.89%	129 0.28%	16,879 36.59%	13 0.03%
Adigeni	18,007 90.15%	424 2.13%	21 0.11%	1,263 6.32%	46 0.23%	19,491 91.6%	294 1.4%	23 0.1%	1,237 5.8%	50 0.23%	19,860 95.70%	101 0.46%	7 0.03%	698 3.36%	17 0.08%
Aspindza	9,651 77.76%	56 0.45%	14 0.11%	2,654 21.38%	14 0.11%	10,753 80.1%	45 0.3%	15 0.11%	2,565 19.1%	11 0.08%	10,671 82.02%	34 0.26%	8 0.06%	2,273 17.47%	0 0.00%
Borjomi	25,351 68.10%	1,631 4.38%	1,403 3.77%	4,699 12.62%	64 0.17%	28,057 82.0%	1,768 4.53%	1,313 3.36%	3,877 9.94%	61 0.15%	27,301 84.21%	585 18.0%	540 1.67%	3124 9.64%	24 0.27%
Bolnisi	12,032 17.52%	1,377 2.00%	2,031 2.96%	6,396 9.31%	45,914 66.84%	17,688 21.7%	1,210 1.48%	2,345 2.87%	5,545 6.8%	53,808 65.98%	19,926 26.82%	414 0.56%	438 0.59%	4,316 5.81%	49,026 65.98%
Gardabani	46,306 46.01%	6,614 6.57%	1,423 1.41%	2,093 2.08%	39,956 39.70%	52,396 45.7%	6,263 5.5%	1,522 1.3%	1,617 1.4%	48,781 42.5%	60,832 53.20%	994 0.87%	236 0.21%	1,060 0.93%	49,993 43.72%
Marneuli	6,453 6.42%	3,250 3.32%	3,791 3.77%	12,986 28.37%	72,965 72.57%	7,805 6.5%	2,930 2.43%	3,657 3.4%	12,581 10.45%	91,923 76.35%	9,503 8.04%	523 0.44%	396 0.33%	9,329 7.89%	98,245 83.10%
Tetritskaro	15,665 44.4%	2,416 6.86%	7,637 21.68%	5,044 14.32%	2,336 6.63%	16,732 45.9%	2,367 6.5%	8,413 23.1%	4,520 12.4%	2,499 6.8%	18,769 74.03%	689 2.72%	1,281 5.05%	2,632 10.38%	1,641 6.47%
Dmanisi	5,774 12.95%	691 1.55%	3,537 7.94%	2,308 5.18%	32,164 72.16%	14,590 28.1%	579 1.1%	3,174 6.1%	187 0.4%	33,107 63.9%	8,759 31.24%	156 0.56%	218 0.78%	147 0.52%	18,716 66.76%
Tsalka	1,710 3.47%	360 0.73%	30,811 62.45%	13,996 38.37%	2,231 4.52%	1,613 3.6%	320 0.7%	27,127 61.0%	12,671 28.5%	2,281 5.1%	2,510 12.02%	125 0.60%	4,589 21.97%	11,484 54.98%	1,992 9.54%
Batumi	73,126 59.80%	24,781 20.26%	2,576 2.11%	13,936 11.40%	528 0.43%	90,253 65.9%	21,112 15.14%	2,747 2.0%	13,394 9.8%	665 0.9%	104,313 85.64%	6,300 5.17%	587 0.48%	7,517 6.17%	301 0.25%
Tbilisi	656,431 62.15%	129,143 12.23%	16,179 1.53%	152,900 14.48%	12,867 1.22%	824,412 66.1%	124,867 10.0%	21,722 1.7%	150,138 12.0%	17,986 1.4%	910,712 84.19%	32,580 3.01%	3,792 0.35%	82,586 7.63%	10,942 0.01%
TOTAL IN GEORGIA	3,433,011 68.75%	371,608 7.44%	95,105 1.90%	448,000 8.97%	255,678 5.12%	3,787,393 70.1%	341,172 6.3%	100,324 1.9%	437,211 8.1%	307,556 5.7%	3,661,173 83.75%	67,671 1.55%	15,166 0.35%	248,929 5.69%	284,761 6.51%

Source: Statistical Department of Georgia according to the censuses of 1979, 1989 and 2002.

**Table 2. Government Organized Settlements of Eco-Migrants in Samtskhe-Javakheti in 1981-1990**

Rayon of Resettlement	Village of Settlement	Rayon of Origin	Year of Resettlement	Number of houses planned for construction*	Number of houses completed*	Registered Population (in families)	Actual Population (in families)	Current Eco-Migrants**
Aspindza	Oshora	Khulo	1981	43	43	43	43	49 (261 individual)
	Rustavi	Khulo	1981	36	36	36	36	36 (175 individual)
	Iveria	Khulo	1982-	78	78	78	78	80 (335 individual)
	Gulsunda	Khulo	1982-83	14	14	14	14	14 (75 individual)
	Mirashkhani	Khulo	1982-83	32	32	32	32	60 (280 individual)
	Ota	Khulo	1980-1981	25	25	25	25	25 (153 individual)
TOTAL				254	254	254	254	1279 individuals 254 families
Adigeni	Chela	Khulo	1982	n/a	n/a	15	15	15 families
	Sairme	Khulo	1982-83	n/a	n/a	24	24	24 families
	Zanavi	Khulo	1985	n/a	n/a	15	15	15 families
	Kikineti	Khulo	1985	n/a	n/a	14	14	14 families
	Tsikhisubani	Khulo	1988	n/a	n/a	12	12	12 families
TOTAL						78	78	78 families
Akhalkalaki	Apnia	Khulo	1989	80	34	78	55	35 (145 individuals)
	Gogasheni	Khulo	1989	60	34	58	34	7 (34 individuals)
	Okami	Khulo	1989	131	101	140	70	62 (222 individuals)
	Azmanana	Khulo	1989	67	22	70	22	40 (171 individuals)
	Chunchkha	Khulo	1989	53	53	53	53	38 (209 individuals)
	Ptena	Khulo	1989	66	27	36	36	35 (127 individuals)
	Kotelia	Khulo	1989	53	42	42	37	16 (60 individuals)
TOTAL				510	313	477	307	233 families 968 individuals
Ninotsminda	Spasovka	Khulo	1990	31 bought by Kostava Foundation	19 provided to eco-migrants	32	22	84 families (336 individuals)
TOTAL				31	19	32	20	84 families (336 individuals)
Borjomi	Balanta	Khulo	1989	50	6/rest lived in wagons	32	20	1 family (6 individual)
TOTAL				50	6	32	20	1 family (6 individuals)
TOTAL IN SAMTSKHE-JAVAKHETI						873	679	650 Families

**Sources:** \* Data obtained from field trips in Aspindza, Akhalkalaki, Ninotsminda, Adigeni, Borjomi.

\*\* Numbers of the eco-migrants per village according the official registration by the *Gameobas* of Adigeni, Aspindza, Akhalkalaki, Ninotsminda and Borjomi, 2005-2006

**Table 3. Government Organized Settlements of Eco-Migrants in Kvemo Kartli, 1981-1989**

Rayon of Resettlement	Village of Settlement	Rayon of Origin	Year of Resettlement	Number of houses planned for construction	Number of houses completed	Registered Population (in families)	Actual Population (in families)	Current Population	
<b>Tetritskaro</b>	Didgori	Mestia	1987	120	32	120	31	32 (142 individuals)	
	Khaishi (Durnuki)	Mestia	1987	350	169	350	187	187 (594 individuals)	
	Chivchavi	Lentekhi	1987	101	92	101	92	89 (490 individuals)	
	Golteti	Lentekhi	1987	199	194	199	171	171 (680 individuals)	
	Marabda	Lentekhi	1987	15	15	15	15	12 (64 individuals)	
	Chkhikvta	Mestia	1987	30	0	30	2	2 (8 individuals)	
	Sahvsakdari	Mestia	1987	20	20	20	20	0	
	Samgereti	Khulo	1989	83	69	83	63	63 (284 individuals)	
	Alekseyevka	Ossetian village however, Ossetians are leaving the village and eco-migrants are buying their houses (without the assistance of the government)							
	Jigrasheni	Former Greek village. About 100-150 houses are empty							
<b>TOTAL</b>				918	591	918	561	553 families 2262 individuals	
<b>Bolnisi</b>	Tadzia	Mestia	1987	152	152	152	120	118 (478 individuals)	
	Disveli	Khulo	1989	220	80	220	80	80 (437 individuals)	
	Khatissopeli	Khulo	1989	52	20	52	20	20 (107 individuals)	
	Bolnisi town	Leckhumi, Ajara Svaneti	1989	Eco-migrants took over houses left by Azeris who left the town in 1989		147	147	147 (750 individuals).	
1989			37			37	37 (180 individuals )		
1989			135			135	135 (631 individuals)		
<b>TOTAL</b>				424	252	743	539	537 families 2583 individuals	
<b>Dmanisi</b>									
	Dmanisi town	Mestia	1987	292	292	292	251	129 (587 individuals)	
	Gantiadi	Mestia	1987	8	8	8	7	---	
<b>TOTAL</b>				300	300	300 families	258 families	129 families 587 individuals	

Rayon of Resettlement	Village of Settlement	Rayon of Origin	Year of Resettlement	Number of houses planned for construction	Number of houses completed	Registered Population (in families)	Actual Population(in families)	Current Population
Gardabani								
	Gardabani town	Lentekhi	1987	210	115	219	159	159 (591 individuals)
	Lemshveniera	Mestia	1987	350	350	350	301	301 (1383 individuals)
	Krtsanisi	Ajara	1989-90	75	-	75	57	57 (269 individuals )
	Vaziani	Ajara	1989-90	122	20	122	109	109 (424 individuals )
	Mukhrovani	Ajara	1989-90	47	-	49	36	36 (129 individuals)
TOTAL				804	485	815	662	662 families 2796 individuals
Marneuli								
	Shulaveri (Mareti)	Shuakevi	1989	143	0	143	76	76 (450 individuals)
	Khikhani	Khulo	1992-1995	240	92	240	94	94 (366 individuals)
	Tamarisi	Mestia	1987	150	150	150	120	120 (870 individuals)
	Akhali Diognisi	Khulo	1991	110	82	110	82	82 (396 individuals)
	Tserakvi	Mestia	1987	45	40	45	34	34 (146 individuals)
	Kulari (Maradisi)	Khulo		105	0	105	54	54 (245 individuals)
TOTAL				793	364	793	460	460 families 2473 individuals
TOTAL IN KVEMO KARTLI (except Tsalka rayon)				3239	1992	3569	2480	2341 families 10,701 individuals

**Sources:** Registration by the *Gamgeobas* of Tetrtskaro, Bolnisi, Marneuli, Gardabani and Dmanisi. 2006.



**Table 4. Resettlement of Population from Shuakhevi *rayon* in 1961-89 due to Demographic Regulation and Natural Calamities**

Number	Places of resettlement	Families resettled in 1961-70	Families resettled in 1971-80	Families resettled in 1980-89	Families resettled in 1961-89
1	Ajara: Kobuleti and Khelvachauri <i>rayons</i>	278	140	168	579
2	Batumi	116	70	120	306
3	Krasnodar <i>krai</i> (Russia)	-	50	70	120
4	Gardabani <i>rayon</i>	-	65	115	180
5	Ozurgeti <i>rayon</i>	178	160	112	470
6	TOTAL	572	485	598	1655

Source: Official data of Shuakhevi *Gameoba*, November 2006.

**Table 5. Return-migration to Shuakhevi, Keda and Khulo Rayons from Different Recipient Regions**

Recipient Regions	Khulo <i>rayon</i> (1989-1998)	Shuakhevi <i>rayon</i> (1989-2006)	Keda <i>rayon</i> (1989-2006)
Samegrelo (Mingrelia)	36	98	3
Guria	84	30	3
Imereti	97	68	26
Kvemo Kartli	54	30	3
Kakheti	26	9	
Shida Kartli	54		
Ajara (Batumi, Kobuleti, Khelvachauri)	36	42	
Samtskhe-Javakheti	141		
Other	6		
Total	534	277	35

Note 1: Twenty-two eco-migrants out of 277 returned migrants resettled to Batumi, Kobuleti, Ozurgeti and Tsalka, the rest 253 returned back to Shuakhevi *rayon*.

Note 2: Out Of 534 returned migrants, all of them returned back to Khulo *rayon*.

Source: Official data provided by Khulo and Shuakhevi *Gameobas*. October 2006.

**Table 6. Eco-migration from mountainous Ajara (government and non-government resettlements) 1989-2005**

Rayon of resettlement	KHULO RAYON Provided by Khulo <i>Gamgeoba</i> .2006			SHUAKHEVI RAYON Provided by Shuakhevi <i>Gamgeoba</i> .2006			KEDA RAYON Provided by Keda <i>Gamgeoba</i> .2006		
	year	# of families	TOTAL (in rayon)	Year	# of families	TOTAL (in rayon)	year	# of families	TOTAL (in rayon)
Batumi				1989	84		1989	1	
				1990	114				
				1991-92	3				
				1993	5				
				1997	2				
				1999	2				
				2000	3				
				2001	1				
				2004-05	33	244			1
Kobuleti rayon	1989	26		1989	91				
	1990	43		1990	50				
	1991	16		1991	3				
	1992	10		1992	1				
	1993	3		1993					
	1994	3		1994					
	1995	5		1995					
	1996	6		1996	1				
	1997	1		1997	2				
	1998	1	114	1998	3	151			
Khelvachauri rayon	1989	27		1989	92				
	1990	59		1990	65				
	1991	7		1991					
	1992	6		1992					
	1993	2		1993	1				
	1994	1		1994					

	1995	6		1995					
	1996	1		1996					
	1997	2		1997					
	1998	2	113	1998-2003	1-1	160			
Chokhatauri rayon	1989	105		1989	2				
	1990	17		1990	3				
	1991	6		1991					
	1992	1		1992					
	1995	1	130	1995		5			
Lanchkhuti rayon	1989	173		1989	117		1989	2	
	1990	71		1990	154		1990	-	
	1991	1		1991			1991	-	
	1992	4		1992			1992	-	
	1993	4		1993			1993	-	
	1994	2		1994			1994	-	
	1995	1		1995			1995	-	
	1996	1		1996			1996	2	
	2000	1	258	2000		271	2000	-	4
Ozurgeti rayon	1989	31		1989	51		1989	-	
	1990	88		1990	11		1990	-	
	1993	13		1991	1		1993	-	
	1995	4		-			1996	1	
	1998	2	138	-		63	1998	-	1
Bolnisi rayon	1989	51		1989	1				
	1990	42		-					
	1991	2		-					
	1992	14		-					
	1993	7		-					
	1994	1		-					
	1996	1		-					
	1997	2		-					
	1998	28		-					
	2000	3	151	-		1			
Marneuli rayon	1989-90	352		1989-90					
	1991	2		1991					
	1992	3		1992					

	1993	2		1993					
	1994	1		1994					
	1996	15		1996					
	1997	17		1997					
	1998	3		1998					
	1999	8		1999					
	2000	2		2000					
	2001	1		2001					
	2002	9		2002					
	2003	6		2003					
	2006	2	423	2006		0			
<i>Gardabani rayon</i>	1989	27		1989	87				
	1990	45		1990	65				
	1994	1		1991	2				
	1995	1		1995					
	1997	2		1997					
	1998	3		1998					
	2003	2	81	2003	1	155			
<i>Tetritskaro rayon</i>	1989-91	67			-		1989	-	
	1992-93	7			-		1990	-	
	1994-96	5			-		1992	2	
	1997-98	19			-		-	-	
	1999	4			-		-	-	
	2002-05	7	109		-		2005	6	8
<i>Rustavi</i>		1	1	-	-	0	-	-	0
<i>Tsalka rayon*</i>	1997	1		1997	-		1997	-	
	1998	87		1998	-		1998	1	
	1999	38		1999	1		1999	-	
	2000	49		2000	2		2000	5	
	2001	41		2001	2		2001	2	
	2002	100		2002	3		2002	1	
	2003	182		2003	7		2003	4	
	2004	42		2004	2		2004	13	
	2005		580	2005	9	26	2005	24	50
<i>Dmanisi rayon</i>	1989-90	2	2	1989-90	1	1	1989		
<i>Khoni rayon</i>	1989	197		1989	136				

	1990	15		1990	49				
	1991	1		1991					
	1992	1		1992					
	1993	1	215	1993		185			
Vani rayon	1989	247		1989	103		1989	33	
	1990	17		1990	28		1990		
	1992	1		1992			1992		
	1996	1		1996			1996	2	
	2000	-	266	2000	-	131	2000	2	37
Samtrediya rayon	1989	41		1989	50				
	1990	74		1990	11				
	1991	2		1991					
	1992	2		1992					
	1993	1		1993					
	1994	3		1994					
	1998	1	124	2005	3	64			
Terjola rayon	1990	1		1989	1				
	1993	0	1	1993	1	2			
Zestaponi rayon	1990	1	1	-	-	0			
Bagdadi rayon	1990	10		1990					
	1993	1	11	1993					
Tskaltubo rayon	1989-90	80	80	1990	2	2			
Abasha rayon	1989	121		1989	33				
	1990		121	1990	4	37			
Khobi rayon	1989	206		1989	62		1990		
	1990	28		1990	2		1999	3	
	1997	2	236	1997		64	2000	4	7
Zugdidi rayon	1989	3		1989	67				
		-	3	1990	5	71			
Tsalenjikha rayon		-		1989	18				
		-	0	1990	3	21			
Kvareli rayon	1989	7			-				
	1990	22	29		-	0			
Dedoplistkaro rayon	1989	40		1989	11				
	1990	9		1990	1				

	1991	2		1991	-			
	1993	1	52	1993	-	12		
Sagarejo rayon	1989	103	103					
Signagi rayon	1989	69		1989	9	9		
	1990	2						
	1994-95	3	74					
Akhmeta rayon	2004-05	24	24	2005	11	11		
Lagodekhi rayon	1989	49		1989	-			
	1990	4		1990	-			
	1991	1		1991	-			
	1994	2	56	1994	-	0		
Kareli rayon	1989	55		1989	7			
	1990	7		1990	-			
	2000	1	63	2000	-	7		
Gori rayon	1989	17	17		-	0		
Kaspi rayon	1989	2			-			
	1990	2	4		-	0		
Ninotsminda rayon	1989-1994	88			-			
	1995	2			-			
	1996	5	95		-	-		
Akhalkalaki rayon	1989	385						
	1990	59						
	1991	2						
	1992	18						
	1993	17						
	1996	36						
	1997	13						
	1999	1	531					
Adigeni rayon	1989-93	70		1989	1			
	1994	3			-			
	1995	4			-			
	1996	3			-			
	1997-98	7			-			
	2001	2	89		-	1		
Aspindza rayon	1989	36			-			
	1990	7			-			

	1995-97	5	48		-	0			
Poti		-	0	1989	2	2	1989	4	4
TOTAL			4,343			1,696			112

**Source:** *Gamgeobas* of Keda, Shuakhevi and Khulo rayon, 2006.

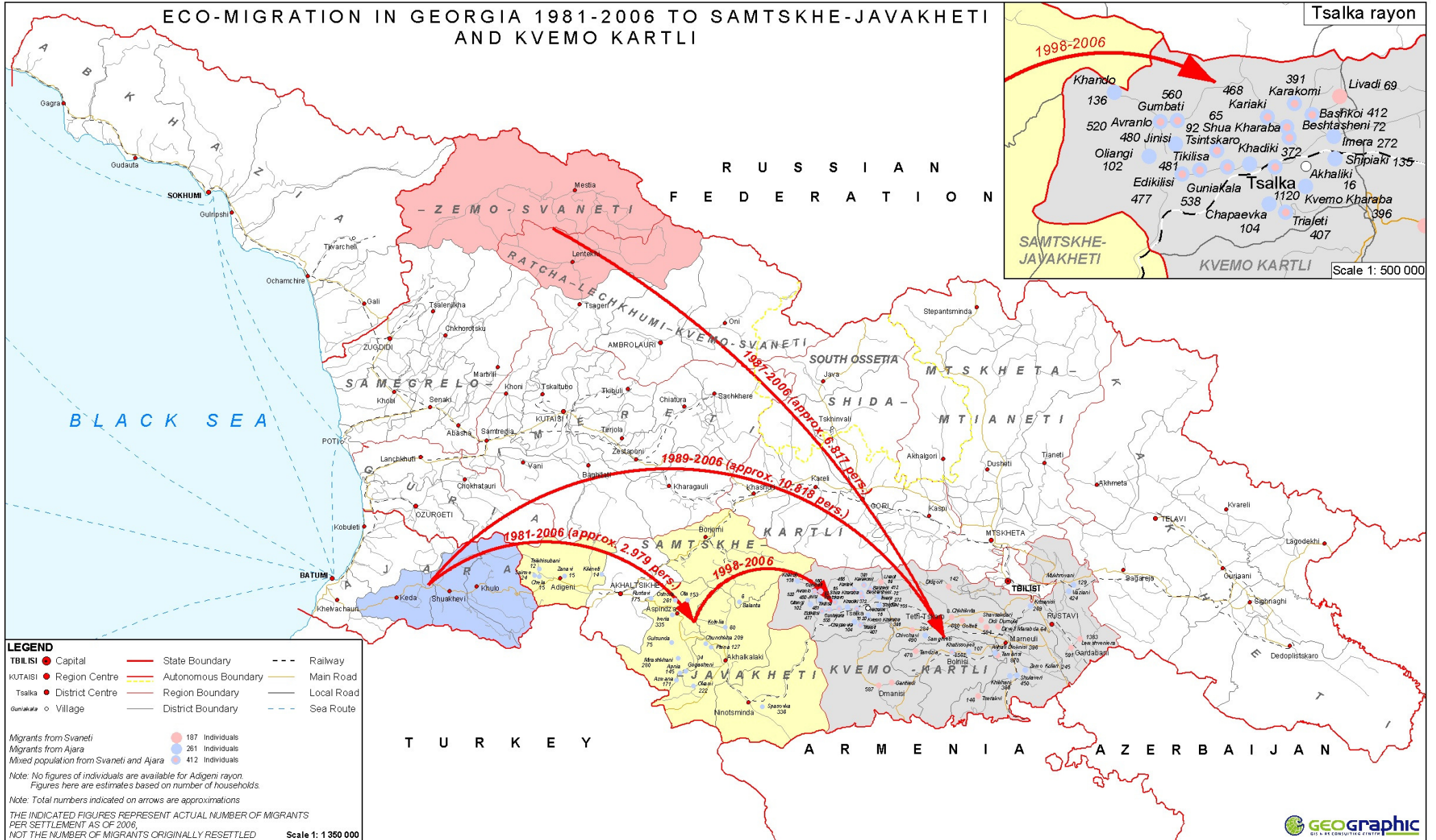
\*Data on Tsalka rayon is provided by the Tsalka *Gamgeoba*, 2006.

**Table 7. Population of mountainous regions according to 1886-2002 censuses**

Region	1886	1926	1939	1959	1979	1989	Change 1886-1989
Svaneti	-	18,823	27,128	31,000	30,400	26,120	+38.77%
Racha-Lechkhumi	-	10,1292	99,126	75,700	56,900	46,600	-54%
Tusheti	4,074	1,618	-	543	-	101	-97.5%
Khevi	8,843	8,727	-	7,976	-	6,376	-27.9%
Mtiuleti	9,282	10,483	-	8,522	-	6,822	-26.5%
Khevsureti	4,985	3,589	-	2,047	-	652	-87.8%
Pshavi	5,067	2,259	-	1,411	-	1,127	-77.7%

**Source:** Vakhtang Jaoshvili, *Sakartvelos Mosakhleoba* [Population of Georgia], Tbilisi: Metsniereba, 1996, pp. 130 and 170.

# ECO-MIGRATION IN GEORGIA 1981-2006 TO SAMTSKHE-JAVAKHETI AND KVEMO KARTLI



**LEGEND**

- Tbilisi ● Capital
- Kutaisi ● Region Centre
- Tsalka ● District Centre
- GuniaKala ○ Village
- State Boundary
- Autonomous Boundary
- Region Boundary
- District Boundary
- Railway
- Main Road
- Local Road
- Sea Route

**Migrants from Svaneti** ● 187 Individuals  
**Migrants from Ajara** ● 261 Individuals  
**Mixed population from Svaneti and Ajara** ● 412 Individuals

*Note: No figures of individuals are available for Adigeni rayon. Figures here are estimates based on number of households.*

*Note: Total numbers indicated on arrows are approximations*

THE INDICATED FIGURES REPRESENT ACTUAL NUMBER OF MIGRANTS PER SETTLEMENT AS OF 2006,  
 NOT THE NUMBER OF MIGRANTS ORIGINALLY RESETTLED

Scale 1: 1 350 000