

CLIMATE CHANGE, ENERGY AND ENVIRONMENT

NATIONAL CONSULTATION ON CLIMATE, RIGHTS, AND DISPLACEMENT

Eco-Migration That Meets The Needs Of Climate-
Impacted Communities In Georgia

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August, 2023



The current legal status of a person displaced due to climate change is officially equated to that of a socially vulnerable and internally displaced person resulting from armed conflict. This equivalence fails to address the specific challenges faced by climate change-displaced individuals.



Georgia does not currently possess a specific legal or regulatory foundation specifically tailored to individuals displaced or resettled because of climate change-related natural disasters.



Notably, the existing social and economic challenges undermine and, in certain cases, even violate fundamental human rights; such as the right to equality, non-discrimination, property rights, labor rights, the right to freely participate in the cultural life of community, and other similar rights.



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SUMMARY

At present, Georgia has no legal definition for persons displaced specifically due to climate change. The commonly used term “eco-migrant” is an informal definition used throughout the country that encompasses various technical and legal scenarios. However, it is important to note that this term may not completely align with respective definitions provided in international legal documents.

The current legal status of a person displaced due to climate change is officially equated to that of a socially vulnerable and internally displaced person resulting from armed conflict. This equivalence fails to address the specific challenges faced by climate change-displaced individuals. Consequently, this leads to delays in the development and implementation of a comprehensive and targeted supportive policy, that primarily centers on the accommodation of such individuals, their access to household and economic resources, property legalization, as well as their psychological, social, and economic integration within settlement areas.

In 2013, despite the Georgian Public Defender’s recommendation to the government regarding the creation of a unified database for persons displaced as a result of natural disasters, the said database has not yet been created. Crucially, such a database would contribute to the transparency of information and the development and implementation of well-informed supportive policies. Additionally, it would create an appropriate information environment to improve the legal status of beneficiaries.

The circumstances and problems described pose an additional risk to the rights of such aforementioned displaced persons. Notably, the existing social and economic challenges undermine and, in certain cases, even violate fundamental human rights; such as the right to equality, non-discrimination, property rights, labor rights, the right to freely participate in the cultural life of community, and other similar rights.

Although there are further challenges, it is objectively feasible, within the Georgian context, to delineate specific social and economic prospects for those individuals facing internal displacement or migration as a result of natural disasters (referred to as the “positive aspects of migration”). Migration fundamentally constitutes an endeavor driven by survival and adaptation. Accordingly, it carries certain positive connotations, and state assistance towards these displaced individuals should be regarded as a comprehensive set of measures aimed at fostering the long-term and sustainable economic development of resettlement areas. This however entails the implementation of pertinent financial and technical aid programs.

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INTRODUCTION

This document was developed in partnership with the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung (FES), as part of the project “National consultation on climate, rights, and displacement: Eco-migration that meets the needs of climate-impacted communities in Georgia” by the Church World Service (CWS), and the Rural Communities Development Agency (RCDA).

Within the project, an analysis of the current legislative and regulatory framework, as well as relevant literature, was conducted. Furthermore, research was carried out among target groups in the field and two public meetings-discussions were organized in the municipalities of Tsalka and Khulo with local government participation, with non-governmental and private sector representatives, and with displaced persons settled in the Tsalka and Ninotsminda municipalities and potential displaced persons in the Khulo municipality. In addition to which, the chief consultant of the project attended certain key international events: the UN Climate Change Conference and a Human Rights Council meeting, held in Bonn and Geneva, respectively. Moreover, consultations were held with representatives of the Climate, Migration & Displacement Platform (CMDP), and valuable insights were gained from the results of public consultations organized by the Friedrich-EbertStiftung (FES) in various regions, such as Asia, Oceania, Africa, and Latin America.

As a result of the conducted research processes, the legal status of existing and potential eco-migrants was determined on the example of selected municipalities of Samtskhe-Javakheti, Kvemo Kartli and Mtiani Adjara (Ninotsminda, Tsalka, Khulo); The existing legal-regulatory and scientific methodological base was analyzed; The existing state policy in relation to eco-migrants was evaluated; Weaknesses and common problems of the policy were highlighted and recommendations were made to improve the state policy supporting eco-migrants.

1.1 The Current Situation

Georgia with its unique and intricate physical-geographical conditions, is a poly-climatic country. Therefore, the impact of climate change is particularly pronounced and acutely felt compared to other, larger countries.

Over the past two decades, Georgia has witnessed a noticeable increase in the frequency of natural disasters. This trend is evident across various ecosystems (including in water, soil, forests, and other environs), where a rise in climate-related incidents has been observed. For instance, occurrences of landslides, floods, avalanches, and river overflows are each becoming more frequent in Georgia.

Given its geographic location, diverse terrain, extensive hydrographic network, and its environmental conditions, the country is susceptible to a range of both natural disasters, such as earthquakes, landslides, floods, droughts, avalanches, and human-induced (anthropogenic) disasters, like transportation and industrial accidents. Furthermore, substantial anthropogenic pressure on natural resources is creating conditions that contribute to such incidences. According to recent projections, climate change in Georgia is expected to lead to an average temperature rise of 0.9-1.9°C by 2050 and of 4.1-5.0°C by 2100 (Government of Georgia, 2021). Based on data from the National Environmental Agency, there has been a significant increase in the frequency and the magnitude of natural disasters in recent years. Between 1995 and 2020, Georgia incurred losses exceeding 1.3 billion US dollars due to such disasters; moreover, approximately 700,000 people were affected and the number of casualties reached 1,000 (თვზნაძე, 2020). The recent rise in the frequency of landslides and mudslides can be attributed to multiple factors, including heightened seismic activity, the influence of anthropogenic impacts (such as unplanned urbanization, unsustainable land use practices, construction of transportation infrastructure, deforestation), as well as global climate changes. Among

natural geologic phenomena, processes of water erosion, landslides, and flood events are the most prevalent, and their frequency is steadily increasing. Over the last few years, approximately 53,000 areas have been affected by landslide-gravity events or have been identified as prone to such events. These areas account for 25-30% of the two thousand settlements and of the transportation infrastructure in the country (თევზაძე, 2020). Notably, floods result in economic losses of up to 100 million US dollars annually. In addition to which, increases in the regularity and intensity of heatwaves, alterations in precipitation patterns, desertification leading to land degradation, rising sea levels, and other extreme events are all anticipated. These developments highlight the pressing need for immediate adaptation measures to address the impacts of climate change (თევზაძე, 2020).

Since 1980, the occurrence of natural disasters, such as recurrent landslides, floods, avalanches, and river overflows, has resulted in population displacement, particularly from mountainous and pre-mountainous settlements. In 1987, a substantial population migration took place from Zemo Svaneti to the regions of Kakheti and Kvemo Kartli. Additionally, in 1989, there was a notable migration of people from mountainous Adjara to the regions of Shida Kartli, Kakheti, and Samtskhe-Javakheti. The population migration from both regions was primarily instigated by heavy snowfall, which led to avalanches and landslides. Ultimately, these natural events resulted in the displacement of over 10,000 people. The periodic recurrence of natural disasters also compels thousands of families and individuals either to abandon their homes or to live in life-threatening conditions. Since 1980, over 3,000 settlements and approximately 400,000 individuals have been under threat from natural disaster, and as a result, these individuals need to be relocated or settlements require extensive repairs to mitigate the associated risks (ლაილი, 2012). According to an assessment conducted by the Ministry of Environmental Protection and Agriculture, providing comprehensive support to these families would require an average investment ranging between 100 and 150 million dollars annually (Green alternative, 2022). Furthermore, a significant number of families from the regions of Adjara, Zemo Svaneti, Racha-Lechkhumi, and Imereti engage in spontaneous migration without proper registration, which poses challenges for them when accessing state assistance programs, purchasing residential homes, and obtaining appropriate production resources (Green alternative, 2022).

The eco-migration program in Georgia envisages the provi-

sion of modest state assistance to individuals displaced by environmental disasters and other extreme environmental factors. However, a study conducted in 2021 by the Church World Service (CWS) and the Rural Communities Development Agency (RCDA) revealed that there are no legal provisions in place to guarantee minimum standards for eco-migrants in access to housing, land, water, sanitation, livelihood, or labor market integration (Abdusheleishvili, 2021). In essence, the existing regulatory and legal framework does not comprehensively address the needs of or challenges encountered by environmental migrants, thereby failing to ensure their access to fundamental human rights and essential services. Correspondingly, eco-migration related to climate change receives limited attention from international and national organizations, or from donors collaborating with Georgian governmental institutions and civil society organizations. Critically, the absence of comprehensive policies and adequate resources dedicated to the resettlement of eco-migrants has resulted in thousands of individuals living in precarious or uncertain conditions. Furthermore, a lack of clear and documented communication channels with the beneficiaries of government resettlement has left them uninformed about their rights, leading to speculation about the misappropriation of funds, both before and after the resettlement process. Finally, inadequate oversight during the allocation of resettlement assistance has resulted in many eco-migrants being deprived of access to land, adequate housing, and essential social services (Abdusheleishvili, 2021).

1.2 Research Goals

- (a) Determine the past experiences of eco-migrants in relation to their displacement, including assessing the positive and negative impacts of displacement on eco-migrant families and communities.
- (b) Based on the aforementioned experiences, develop recommendations for defining eco-migration programs and formulate the planned relocation policies.

1.3 Research Objectives

1. **Development of a long-term strategy and recommendations for an action program for ecological migration in Georgia.**
 - Evaluation of the current eco-migration policy.
 - Development of recommendations for improvement of the current eco-migration policy.
 - Support the development of a systematic and transparent approach to eco-migration and resettlement.

2. Raising awareness on eco-migration issues and promoting initiatives aimed at strengthening the rights of migrants:
 - Advocate for the rights of eco-migrants at the local, national, and international levels.
3. Analyzing the needs and challenges of eco-migrants in select municipalities and providing recommendations:
 - Identify opportunities for achieving equitable socio-economic transformations within migrant communities.

1.4 Expected Results of the Research

1. Raising awareness among communities, local authorities, and government institutions.
2. Analyzing the needs, issues, and challenges faced by eco-migrants in the selected municipalities.
3. Informing and engaging with local authorities and municipal and regional governments for enhancing the eco-migration policy.
4. Presenting the research findings and advocacy materials to national and international stakeholders and policymakers.

1.5 The Target Group

According to the latest United Nations data, the number of people displaced by natural disasters worldwide exceeds 25 million people annually (McAuliffe & Triandafylidou, 2022). Unfortunately, Georgia lacks any comprehensive and qualified data on the exact number of people displaced by natural disasters. The information available from accessible sources is limited to a general assessment by the Public Defender, which states that between 1988 and 2013 over 35,000 families, equivalent to approximately 130,000 individuals, were affected by natural disasters (საქართველოს სახალხო დამცველი, 2013). While this figure may appear relatively slight in the global context, it holds notable significance for Georgia, a country with a relatively small population. The fact that it surpasses 3.5% of the current population highlights the considerable impact of natural disasters on the affected individuals and the country as a whole. Regrettably, an accurate assessment of the precise number of resettled individuals from the aforementioned population has not been conducted thus far, moreover there is no centralized or integrated database for the relevant data.

In Georgia, natural disasters often result in internal migra-

tion; with individuals relocating to different regions within the country. As a result, the population does not typically cross country borders. It is also noteworthy that most individuals displaced by natural disasters in Georgia originate from rural settlements and resettle in other rural areas. In effect, the absolute majority of people displaced as a result of natural disasters in Georgia are self-employed individuals / farmers in the agricultural sector.

An increase in internal migration processes began in the late 1980s, primarily impacting densely populated highland areas like Zemo Svaneti and the mountainous parts of Adjara. Over the past three decades, as a result of frequent floods, landslides, and avalanches caused by climate change, tens of thousands of people have been left homeless and without means of livelihood. These individuals have predominantly resettled in the regions of Kvemo-Kartli and Samtskhe-Javakheti. However, the problems and needs of such displaced individuals have unfortunately been largely overlooked and neglected (ლაილი, 2012).

Currently, the largest flow of people displaced by natural disasters in Georgia originate from mountainous Adjara –the region that is characterized by a high population density, scarcity of land, and a high frequency of environmental disasters. The majority of whom have resettled in the municipalities of Kvemo Kartli (particularly in Tsalka) and Samtskhe-Javakheti (specifically in Ninotsminda), areas with a low population density and a relative abundance of agricultural land. With a well-planned and effective policy to support the successful social and economic integration of this population, these regions hold significant prospects for stimulating the local economy.

1.5.1 Definition of the Term Ecological Migrant

Concurrent with the increase in natural disasters in Georgia and the subsequent internal migration flows, the term “ecological migrant,” often abbreviated as “eco-migrant,” emerged during the early post-Soviet period. Since the 1990s, the term eco-migrant has been widely used in Georgia to define individuals who have been compelled to leave their homes and migrate due to the degradation of natural and climatic conditions – typically in cases where such adverse conditions have detreated livelihoods and production bases unsuitable for living or have posed significant risks to health and well-being. The term eco-migrant is commonly used in colloquial language, scientific literature, and in documentation within the non-governmental and development support sectors in Georgia. It has also been mentioned in official reports, including those by

the Public Defender. However, it is important to note that “eco-migrant” is not a legal term, and it is not officially recognized in the country’s legislative or regulatory framework. Georgian normative legislative documents contain the term “disaster victim,” which does not convey the meaning of a displaced person or of an individual who has been forcibly displaced by a natural disaster. Despite widespread use of the term “disaster victim,” it is essential to consider its legal recognition and alignment with international law. This thus entails incorporating connotations that encompass aspects of natural disasters caused by climate change, as well as forced displacement and resettlement. The term “eco-migrant” itself does not inherently convey a connotation of a natural event caused by climate change, and its usage in international law may also lead to contextual and linguistic misunderstandings, for instance in French-speaking countries, the abbreviated particle “eco” is commonly associated with economics rather than ecology. Discussions and debates regarding these terms in international law are still ongoing. Therefore, it is important to consider the terminology that has already been established and employed in international practice, such as “climate refugee,” “climate-induced migration/displacement,” “migration related to climate change” (used in the USA), and “environmental migrant” (as used by the International Organization for Migration). There are also ongoing efforts to introduce new terms that capture the complex dynamics of human mobility within the context of climate change. For example, the term “climate mobility” has emerged to encompass connotations of displacement directly caused by climate change. Similarly, it is important to acknowledge the connotative distinction between the terms “migration” and “displacement,” where migration typically refers to voluntary movement, whereas “displacement” denotes forced or involuntary movement (UN General Assembly, 2023). Taking each of these considerations into account, it seems appropriate to develop a comprehensive legal definition that captures both voluntary and forced migration and displacement, that which specifically results from natural disasters caused by climate change.

2 LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature review involved critically analyzing important documents relevant to the research – including national legislation and regulations, reports from various government agencies, relevant thematic studies, analyses, etc. As a result of the analysis, the information gathered was utilized to develop recommendations to enhance the relevant policies and to identify and engage with stakeholders.

Upon an initial literature review, it was discovered that the Public Defender of Georgia conducted substantial work in studying the legal status of eco-migrants in 2013. This work formed the basis of the Public Defender's special report on the legal status of eco-migrants, which includes specific recommendations addressed to the legislative and executive authorities of Georgia (საქართველოს სახალხო დამცველი, 2013). The information and recommendations delivered in this report have since played a vital role in conducting a comparative analysis between the situation ten years ago and at present. Based on this investigation, the main conclusion drawn is that there has been no significant improvement or progress in terms of a systematic response to the issues faced by this group of displaced persons or their administration. Unfortunately, the situation remains largely unchanged since the report was published.

Based on our desk-review of the legal and regulatory framework, it can be concluded that Georgia does not currently possess a specific legal or regulatory foundation specifically tailored to individuals displaced or resettled because of climate change-related natural disasters. The base definition of an internally displaced person is provided in the 1996 Law of Georgia “On Internally Displaced Persons - IDPs” (Article 6, paragraph 1) (საქართველოს პარლამენტი, 2014).

However, it is important to note that this definition does not explicitly encompass the concept of displacement or resettlement due to natural events.

Within the by-laws regulating the activities of executive

authorities, there are specific provisions outlining their obligations and responsibilities towards individuals displaced as a result of natural disasters. These include:

The Ministry of Internally Displaced Persons from the Occupied Territories, Labour, Health and Social Protection of Georgia – Development and coordination of state policy in the field of social protection and the resettlement of individuals affected by natural events and subject to displacement (hereinafter referred to as eco-migrants). The Ministry is required to implement executive power in the fields of social and legal protection, migration control, and the resettlement of individuals displaced due to natural events. This also accounts for the political, socio-economic, and demographic situation of the country. The Ministry is equally responsible for regulating issues concerning internally displaced persons (IDPs) and ecological migrants. Additionally, it is tasked with registering eco-migration flows resulting from emergency situations, such as natural disasters and epidemics (საქართველოს მთავრობა, 2018).

Local self-government – According to the Organic Law of Georgia “On Local Self-Government,” in force until 2014, each village head (Rtsmunebuli) was obliged to periodically submit information to the municipal and regional head (Gamgebeli/Governor) regarding the number of eco-migrants, the status of their household, and their economic conditions (Article 42, paragraph 4, sub-paragraph F of the Organic Law of Georgia On Local Self-Government). Since March 2014, following the enactment of the Self-Government Code, this Law ceased to be in effect, resulting in the corresponding functions also being lost (საქართველოს პარლამენტი, 2014).

Tax benefits – the value of those houses received free of charge in exchange for houses damaged by earthquakes and other natural disasters, whether in the same settlement or in another settlement inhabited by eco-migrants, is exempt from income tax (Tax Code of Georgia,

Article 82, paragraphs M & N) (საქართველოს პარლამენტი, 2010).

Healthcare – As part of the state program of referral services (paragraph 2), medical assistance is provided to citizens affected by natural disasters (საქართველოს მთავრობა, 2022). Similar obligations are also present in provisions from the Ministry of Health and Social Protection of the Autonomous Republic of Adjara and its structural units.

3

Research Methodology

The primary objective of the research project is to determine the legal status of eco-migrants in Georgia, to identify deficiencies in the current state-supported policies, and to propose recommendations for policy enhancement. Throughout project implementation, in pursuit of the aforementioned goals, a variety of research methodologies were employed. These include a literature analysis in the form of desk research, alongside semi-structured surveys conducted among the relevant organizations and eco-migrants themselves. Regarding the selection of respondents, a survey was administered both to previously displaced eco-migrants and to potential eco-migrants. In addition, interviews were conducted with various interested organizations, including local authorities, relevant agencies, specialized non-governmental organizations, and civil society alliances and platforms, such as local action groups (LAGs).

3.1 Research Target Group

The target group for the research included eco-migrants and local residents residing in five rural communities: Ghorjomi, Trialeti, Kavta, Gorelovka, and Spasovka, who resettled into two municipalities, Tsalka and Ninotsminda, as a result of climate change and the risk of disaster. Additionally, the research extended to the Khulo municipality, which has served as the primary relocation site for the majority of eco-migrants. By prioritizing the rights and needs of current eco-migrant communities, the study sheds light on the experiences of individuals displaced due to environmental issues, and thereby helps identify new and enhanced policies for climate-induced mobility. During the field research, active participation from women, the youth, and elders was observed during community discussions and national round table consultations.

3.1.1 Selection

The selection of the five target communities for this research project was based on several factors and

considerations. The following criteria were considered during the community selection process:

1. Climate change and displacement risks: Communities were chosen based on their vulnerability to the impacts of climate change and the presence of significant displacement risks.
2. Geographical representation: Efforts were made to ensure diverse representation across the different regions of Georgia. By selecting communities from various parts of the country, the study aimed to gain a comprehensive understanding of the ecological migration patterns and challenges nationwide.
3. Previous cases of eco-migration: Priority was given to communities that have already experienced eco-migration or resettlement due to climate change or environmental factors. This approach enabled exploration of the specific challenges and needs of these communities and their residents.
4. Cooperation and partnerships: The selection process incorporated the existing collaborations and partnerships with local authorities, government bodies, community organizations, and international and non-governmental organizations.

Based on these criteria, the research identified five communities — Ghorjomi, Trialeti, Kavta, Gorelovka, and Spasovka, within the municipalities of Tsalka, Ninotsminda, and Khulo — as suitable for the study.

3.2 Data Collection

Data for the research project was collected using a variety of methods to ensure a comprehensive understanding of eco-migration within the target communities. The following primary data collection methods were employed:

3.2.1 Interviews with Eco-Migrants

Primary data was collected using a qualitative research

Municipality	Community	Respondent			Age		
		Women	Men	Total	18-34	35-64	65+
Ninotsminda	Spasovka	8	12	20	3	13	4
	Gorelovka	11	9	20	7	10	3
Tsalka	Trialeti	6	14	20	5	11	4
	Kavta	8	12	20	4	14	2
Khulo	Ghorjomi	7	13	20	6	10	4
Total		40	60	100	25	58	17

method, namely semi-structured interviews. Information was gathered from the target population, including eco-migrants and potential eco-migrants, together with stakeholder agencies as well as local, regional, and national authorities, international and local non-governmental organizations, and community-based organizations. The interviews were conducted by a research team that was hired for this purpose. The team utilized a pre-developed questionnaire, prepared by the project team in advance. Experienced interviewers thereafter conducted semi-structured face-to-face interviews with the target audience at the research sites.

These semi-structured interviews were conducted throughout five communities located within the Tsalka, Ninotsminda, and Khulo municipalities (Kavta, Trialeti, Gorelovka, Spasovka, Ghorjomi). In each community, twenty individuals were interviewed as part of the research, resulting in a total of 100 semi-structured interviews. These respondents were selected using a combination of snowball sampling and purposive sampling, thus ensuring maximum engagement of the target groups.

Furthermore, the research process included establishing communication, conducting consultations, and actively engaging with various project stakeholders. Close cooperation with the relevant government bodies was also ensured throughout the process.

3.2.2 Interviews with stakeholders

Alongside the interviews with eco-migrant families, face-

to-face interviews were equally completed with key stakeholders as part of the research, including the Internally Displaced Persons, Eco-migrants and Livelihood Agency; Ninotsminda, Khulo, and Tsalka Municipality City Halls; Batumi State University; non-governmental organizations (Caucasus Environmental NGO Network (CENN), United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), International Organization for Migration (IOM), International Centre for Migration Policy Development (ICMPD), Green Regions, Georgian Ecological Farmers Association(SEMA)); public organizations; and local action groups. These interviews yielded valuable information regarding policies, programs, and initiatives pertaining to climate-induced displacement in each municipality. As part of the research, a total of 15 face-to-face interviews were conducted with stakeholders at various levels.

3.2.3 Discussions at the National Level

To gather further comprehensive information, in-depth discussions were organized with target groups at the national level. These discussions were guided by a specially developed agenda, which was established during the initial stage of the research.

During the project, two discussions were conducted at the national level, specifically in the Tsalka and Khulo municipalities. Each discussion involved the participation of 25 individuals, selected through targeted sampling. The participants included representatives from various stakeholder groups, such as eco-migrants, local authorities,

government bodies, community organizations, and international and local non-governmental organizations. The discussions were achieved over two stages. The first discussion took place during the primary stage of the project and focused on identifying the access needs of eco-migrants and determining the priority areas for action. The second dialogue was thereafter held to review and discuss the draft policy paper.

3.3 Data Analysis

The data collected underwent a thorough analysis to extract valuable insights and draw meaningful conclusions. The analysis encompassed the following steps:

1. Transcription: The interviews and discussions were transcribed to convert recorded information into a written format.
2. Data coding: The interviews were transcribed and coded to identify key topics and patterns. The coding process involved categorizing responses and assigning labels to specific concepts or ideas expressed by the participants.
3. Data reduction: The coded data underwent a process of condensation and organization to extract the essential findings and insights. This involved summarizing and synthesizing the information.
4. Topic identification: By conducting a systematic review of the coded data, recurring topics and patterns were identified. This process included organizing the data into relevant categories and subcategories to extract any significant findings.
5. Data interpretation: The coded data and the topics identified underwent analysis and interpretation to uncover certain key meanings, relationships, and implications regarding significant trends, challenges, and opportunities related to eco-migration. This process involved synthesizing the findings and establishing connections between different data points.

3.4 Data Validity

To ensure the validity and reliability of the research, various steps were implemented:

1. Triangulation: Data sources, including interviews with eco-migrant families and stakeholders, were utilized to validate the findings. The close alignment of information from various sources enhanced the study's reliability and robustness.
2. Review: The research findings and analysis underwent

a thorough review by a panel of experts and researchers who possess extensive knowledge within the field of eco-migration. Their involvement served as additional validation and helped mitigate potential biases or limitations within the study.

3. Data verification: Key informants, such as eco-migrant families and stakeholders, were provided with an opportunity to review the findings and to validate their accuracy and interpretation. This process contributed to ensuring the authenticity of the data.
4. Anonymity and ethical considerations: Strict adherence to ethical norms was maintained throughout the research process. Participants' anonymity was ensured, and their informed consent was obtained prior to conducting interviews. Confidentiality of the collected data was also protected, and all ethical standards were upheld.

3.5 Research Limitations

It is important to draw attention to the constraints and restrictions of the project, namely:

1. Sample size: One potential limitation of the study is the relatively limited number of respondents in the sample. Despite efforts to include a diverse and non-homogeneous group of participants, those selected may not fully capture the diversity and complexity of eco-migration in Georgia as a whole. Since the study focused on five target communities, it is important to exercise caution when generalizing the findings to those subjects not covered within the research.
2. Interpretation of data by participants: The reliance on data provided by respondents introduces a further potential limitation, as it is susceptible to bias and inaccuracies due to participants' subjective interpretation and potential misremembering of detail. Moreover, their responses may have been influenced by their personal experiences, perceptions, and motivations.
3. Limitation of time and resources: The research was conducted within a specific timeframe and with limited resources, which poses a potential constraint. As a result, the depth of data collection and analysis may be affected, and certain aspects of eco-migration may not have been fully explored or examined in detail.
4. Subjectivity: The process of interpreting data and identifying discussion topics relied on subjective judgment. Despite efforts to minimize bias, it is important to acknowledge that individual perspectives and interpreta-

tions may still have influenced the analysis.

5. Type of data: The research predominantly relies on qualitative data gathered through in-depth interviews, which may present limitations in terms of analysis and quantification.

3.6 Ethical Standards and Anonymity

Ethical considerations were observed throughout the research process. The respondents were given an information sheet beforehand, outlining the purpose, procedures, and their voluntary participation, to which they provided verbal consent. Pseudonyms are used to ensure anonymity, thereby protecting the confidentiality of all respondents. By providing advance notice, the participants were also able to provide open and honest answers without fear of disclosing their personal information.

4

Key results of the research – policy problems and challenges

The research conducted within the project revealed that eco-migrants residing in rural areas constitute a significant proportion of the country's population. Moreover, the settlement areas for the majority of these individuals have substantial economic potential. In regions like Samtskhe Javakheti and Kvemo Kartli, the population density remains relatively low, while the concentration of productive resources, particularly land, is quite high. Facilitating an increase in food and agricultural production in these regions would undoubtedly lead to rising incomes for the displaced population, alongside enhancements in their living conditions and a substantial overall contribution to national food security. This, in turn, could lessen the country's reliance on food imports. Samtskhe-Javakheti and Kvemo Kartli possess the potential for achieving these objectives, including an appropriate production base and human resources, as represented by eco-migrants. However, granting this population access to production resources and capital remains a challenge. Regarding their legal status, ecological migrants' circumstances require improvement, particularly in terms of social and economic rights. This inadequacy is most prominently observed in their limited social and economic integration within their local society.

Based on both the desk review and field research, the study identified the following obstacles that impede the development and implementation of essential supportive policies aimed at enhancing the legal status of eco-migrants:

1. The absence of a unified and systematic approach to ensuring the social and economic status of eco-migrants – As of the present date, the legal term “ecological migrant” and its corresponding legal definition have not been incorporated into Georgian legislation. Consequently, there is no official status for individuals who have been displaced due to natural events or disasters. This situation further contributes to delays in the development and implementation of a well-structured and comprehensive policy to

support eco-migrants. The failure to adhere to a legal framework that includes an official definition and recognition of eco-migrant status causes significant setbacks in the process of identifying affected individuals. This moreover leads to delays in the formulation and execution of a definitive policy aimed at supporting such migrants. Establishing an official status for eco-migrants would therefore play a significant role in developing a consistent national standard and formulating the relevant supportive policies. In a recent face-to-face interview, an eco-migrant from the village of Spasovka stated the following:

We should be granted migrant status. It has been discussed for a long time. As far as I know, if we are granted this status, we won't ask for luxurious mansions. It will simply be ours, and with this status, we will enjoy certain privileges. We have left behind our ancestral land, our cemeteries. We miss them, and we carry a certain pain. We are also in a state of uncertainty here, as the house and land plot are not truly ours. From what I understand, more attention should be paid to migrants (Eco-migrant respondent from Spasovka village in Ninotsminda municipality).

2. Limited access to production resources, their unplanned and unfair distribution, and inequality – The field research was specifically carried out in the regions of Javakheti and Kvemo Kartli, focusing on the resource base and the potential of these particular areas (Ninotsminda and Tsalka municipalities). Surveys conducted among eco-migrants from Upper Adjara who settled in Ninotsminda and Tsalka clearly indicate that the agricultural areas listed within municipal records and designated by the state remain untended and undeveloped. Furthermore, eco-migrants are not afforded the chance to engage in economic activities within these areas. According to one employee in the Ninotsminda municipal administration, the situation is as follows:

The auctioning of land should be halted, and these

individuals should be given the opportunity to lease land for cultivation and feeding their animals. They are primarily engaged in animal husbandry, and I have heard numerous cases where they rent land to store their goods. Wintering is also necessary, and some have a total of 60-100 animals, which incurs separate expenses. Furthermore, milk collection centers should be established. Although cooperatives have been attempted in the past, they did not succeed. It is challenging to fix these issues locally. The central government should intervene, and a comprehensive plan should be devised regarding the activities these individuals will be allowed to undertake (Respondent, employee of the Ninotsminda municipal administration (Gamgeoba)).

During the resettlement process, each eco-migrant household was allocated two hectares of land; however, official ownership of the land has not yet been transferred to them. The allocated area is relatively small and only allows for basic self-sufficiency rather than enabling eco-migrants to engage in larger-scale economic activities. Notably, an eco-migrant from the village of Gorelovka highlighted the following concern:

In case we are cattle breeders, what can we achieve with a mere two hectares of land? We are left with no choice but to rent additional space. Each year, we are granted different plots, shifting from one location to another. Our livelihood primarily depends on our cattle. While they [local farmers] have access to potato fields, we struggle to find sufficient land. They possess and cultivate the land (Eco-migrant respondent from Gorelovka village in Ninotsminda municipality).

Additionally, eco-migrants highlight the ownership of vast agricultural land by certain individuals in the Javakheti region. These landowners are unable to personally make use of the land, instead it is leased to eco-migrants under unfavorable terms. This practice not only fosters the emergence of practices similar to feudal land ownership but also violates the social and economic rights of the migrants.

If someone else possesses the land, I don't question why they have it. But when there are those with thousands, 1500 hectares, and others like me with only 2 hectares, shouldn't I be entitled to a piece of land as well? Or am I expected to become their servant? We are not being brought here to be treated as slaves, right?! (Eco-migrant respondent from Gorelovka village in Ninotsminda municipality).

3. The lack of effective communication and information

flow from local authorities and insufficient communication with national and regional authorities – According to the majority of respondents, there is a lack of meaningful communication from both the central government and local governments, with the exception of periods related to pre-election campaigns and associated public events. Eco-migrants are not provided with any information regarding different economic opportunities, grant funding from international donors, or government programs aimed at supporting development by the responsible agencies. They can only gain access to such information through their own proactive engagement.

It is crucial for them to have access to climate information. Additionally, they need to know about the characteristics of the land, the availability of education for their children, the proximity of the village to other essential facilities, such as first aid and medical services. It is also vital to assign a representative within the local administration who will be responsible for eco-migrants, acting as a liaison between them and state institutions (Representative from CENN, a non-governmental organization).

Moreover, the lack of adequate communication contributes to the marginalization of eco-migrants and poses obstacles to integration into their local society.

The process of adaptation, receiving news, and assimilating a vast amount of information can be challenging. It becomes even more difficult when eco-migrants face issues with essential resources such as drinking water, sewage, and heating. Their lives undergo a complete transformation (Representative from Green Regions, a non-governmental organization).

4. Challenges in the transfer of allocated land for residential and agricultural purposes into official ownership

We were informed during a meeting in Khulo that if we relocated there, we would receive two hectares of private land, while 5-10 hectares would be leased to us, and farmers would provide us with one cow each. However, upon our arrival, these promises were revoked. We have not received anything except for the two hectares of land. Some houses were given to us, while others were not. During the legalization process, we were informed that if we leave within five years, we should return the key and hand it back to them. After five years, the house would be registered under our name. My niece has already registered ownership of the house, but the contract states that she cannot

sell it or use it as collateral (Eco-migrant respondent from Gorelovka village in Ninotsminda municipality).

This situation thus hampers the economic sustainability of eco-migrants, hinders their integration into local society, and infringes upon their fundamental human rights to property and the attainment of an adequate standard of living.

5. Political nihilism – Within the surveys, the eco-migrant population revealed a notable and significant trend of nihilistic attitudes towards the government. This standpoint stems from the perception that the government inadequately prioritizes the well-being of eco-migrants, thereby resulting in a neglect of their problems and of needs to a certain extent.

We receive more support and attention from non-governmental organizations here, offering assistance in various ways. However, I have never had any personal encounters with government officials in this area (Eco-migrant respondent from Gorelovka village in Ninotsminda municipality).

During the surveys and informal conversations, the population suggested that social and economic assistance is unavailable and deliberately delayed in favor of certain local interest groups. Similar trends can be observed regarding eco-migrants' access to production resources, for which even legal mechanisms (such as land auctions) are sometimes employed.

6. Unplanned and unsystematic coverage of relocation expenses for eco-migrants – From the 1990s to the present day, several waves of relocation for eco-migrant have been observed in Georgia. During this time, the government's role in ensuring relocation processes has varied significantly; mainly due to the uncertainty of governmental obligations and the absence of a legalized systematic approach. One respondent thus mentioned the need to redesign approaches within the existing program:

It is necessary to reassess the allocation of points to the beneficiaries. Currently, a higher score is awarded to families meeting certain criteria - such as having seven or more members, having three or more family members under 18 years old, having pensioners or disabled persons, or being recipients of allowances. This scoring system may result in one of two houses in the same yard, both at risk of danger, being included in the program based on this score, while the other house may be excluded (Respondent from Khulo municipality).

For instance, during the early 1990s relocation, the government provided full coverage for all major relocation expenses, including the provision of land and transportation. However, a similar level of support was not extended during the early 2000s. Although the government promised to reimburse all associated costs, these assurances were not completely fulfilled. As a result, eco-migrants were left to bear the expenses themselves, leading many to incur significant financial debt.

7. Issues of adaptation to climate change – It was evident during the public consultations that eco-migrants are noticing a one-month extension of the agricultural season due to warming. Alongside this warming, eco-migrants have also observed a decrease in annual precipitation. Consequently, the need to introduce agricultural crops adapted to these changes was emphasized. For instance, the importance of buckwheat production was highlighted as it would offer the possibility for import substitution, climate resilience, and potentially remove the need for expensive irrigation systems due to reduced rainfall. Buckwheat cultivation would additionally provide an adaptable and profitable alternative crop. Regardless of crop choice, there is still also an urgent need to develop a network of irrigation systems in areas affected by climate change-induced displacement. This is particularly crucial in light of global warming and decreased annual rainfall. Such infrastructure would therefore contribute to increased crop yields, improved livelihoods, and economic stability for the population.

8. Lack of transparency in information and the presence of unscrupulous action among eco-migrants – Within the analytical and recommendatory sections of the Public Defender's Special Report, the absence of a comprehensive information database is emphasized as the primary cause of unplanned and unsystematic policies towards eco-migrants (საქართველოს სახალხო დამცველი, 2013). To date, an electronic database dedicated to eco-migrants has not been created. Accordingly, the issue of the traceability of eco-migrants remains a significant problem, persisting into the present day as it was a decade ago.

We don't have a specific individual dedicated to working on eco-migration issues. Since there is no official recognition of eco-migrants, and the majority of them are socially vulnerable, we support them like everyone else. [Eco-migrants] have no status and we have no law to treat them like eco-migrants (Anonymous respondent from Ninotsminda municipal administration).

The absence of a database not only hinders the development of a well-planned policy but also creates opportunities for dishonesty among eco-migrants during the relocation process. According to the findings of a state organization survey, there have been instances where eco-migrants exploit gaps in the traceability system, resulting from the absence of an integrated database, and acquire multiple properties simultaneously in different relocation areas, all at the expense of the state.

4.1 Policy advocacy messages: Guidelines for enhancing policies that support eco-migrants

- **Official status of eco-migrants:** A legal definition of eco-migrants, clearly defining the scope of individuals to whom this legal status applies, should be established and approved through legislation.
- **Facilitating the integration of eco-migrants:** Create and authorize a legally compliant plan for the assimilation and incorporation of environmentally displaced individuals into new settlement areas, alongside a comprehensive list and approach for the relevant governmental services to be offered.
- **Ensuring ownership rights to housing and production resources:** Establish a comprehensive approach for legalizing the ownership of housing and production resources for eco-migrants, as well as facilitating the transfer of property rights for previously designated real estate.
- **Implementation of climate-smart agriculture and production infrastructure support programs:** In regions where displaced communities are relocating, the effects of global warming are evident, with extended agricultural seasons and reduced annual rainfall. These changes necessitate the introduction of adaptive and profitable crops, as well as the development of irrigation infrastructure that can address emerging challenges.
- **Ensuring information transparency:** Establish a centralized electronic database for those eco-migrants impacted by natural disasters and for internally displaced persons.

5 Primary conclusions and recommendations for the fundamental political vision

Our recommendation is that the eco-migration policy should be based upon the following fundamental vision: Social and economic support for eco-migrants in Georgia should not be a single occurrence, rather a program that promotes long-term and sustainable economic development within their settlement areas.

Definition of vision: The vast majority of eco-migrants in Georgia originate from the mountainous region of Adjara. Adjara stands out as the only mountainous area in Georgia facing an overabundant population, a high density of settlements, and an acute scarcity of production resources. Eco-migrants from mountainous Adjara predominantly resettle in the regions of Samtskhe-Javakheti and Kvemo Kartli, which experience a shortage of population (depopulation), low settlement density, and a relative abundance of production resources (particularly agricultural fields, hay fields and pastures). As such, relocation sites for eco-migrants are characterized by their low economic activity, despite having significant potential.

Consequently, the emergence of an economically dynamic and skilled population composed of eco-migrants in depopulated regions undeniably presents opportunities to boost economic activity in these areas, to revitalize the local economy, and to promote further growth. However, this progress is contingent on providing eco-migrants with adequate access to the production resources essential for achieving economies of scale.

Therefore, the state must not restrict its efforts to solely allocating sufficient land for eco-migrant housing and self-sufficiency. It should instead formulate and implement appropriate programs that guarantee access to financial resources and capital, establish a productive foundation, and introduce effective forms of production organization — such as agricultural cooperative systems. By doing so, sustainable economic growth could be fostered in eco-

migrant settlement areas, leading to improvements in the social, economic, and legal standing of those displaced due to natural disasters.

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Abbreviations

FES	Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung
CWS	Church World Service
RCDA	Rural Communities Development Agency
CMDP	Climate, Migration & Displacement Platform
LAG	Local Action Group
CENN	Caucasus Environmental NGO Network
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
IOM	International Organization for Migration
ICMPD	International Centre for Migration Policy Development
SEMA	Association of Ecological Farmers of Georgia
BSEA	Black Sea Eco Academy

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Imprint

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0179 Tbilisi | Georgia

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NATIONAL CONSULTATION ON CLIMATE, RIGHTS, AND DISPLACEMENT:

Eco-Migration That Meets The Needs Of Climate-Impacted Communities In Georgia



Within the Georgian Context, for the persons displaced as a result of climate induced natural hazards, specific social and economic prospects are emerging in the areas of their new settlement, (referred to as the “positive aspects of migration”).



The eco-migration policy should be based upon the following fundamental vision: Social and economic support for eco-migrants in Georgia should not be a single occurrence, rather a program that promotes long-term and sustainable economic development within their settlement areas.



The emergence of an economically dynamic and skilled population composed of eco-migrants in depopulated regions undeniably presents opportunities to boost economic activity in these areas, to revitalize the local economy, and to promote further growth.

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