

Aspects of the Educational Migration to Georgia

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ABSTRACT

According to the United Nations, there were approximately 4.854 million international students registered around the world in 2016. While the mentioned figure was equal to 3.961 million in 2011 [1]. Educational migration is an increasing trend, which brings various benefits to the host countries. Georgia began attracting foreign youth representatives as soon as it started experiencing optimistic economic trends. The growing number of foreign students has had a noticeable, positive impact on the economy and thus, has become a subject of discussion in the society. The present article is dedicated to discussing general characteristics of Georgian immigration profile (such as statistics concerning immigrants) and observing details of students' migration to the mentioned state. Additionally, the work examines diverse recommendations that could increase the number of prospective international students in the country. Analyzing some aspects of the youth immigration to Georgia is a safe mean of acknowledging the realities of Georgian educational sector and finding prospects of further development. Due to the importance of the theme, the article discusses some of the relevant recent researches and statistical data that have been published by various international and local, Georgian institutions.

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Introduction

Since gaining its independence Georgia has always been a migrant "sender" country. In the beginning of the nineties the country was trying to handle chaotic internal migration. Due to Russian occupation, citizens were leaving their homes in the occupied territories of Samachablo and Abkhazia. The situation got calmer in the beginning of the 2000's, after the Rose Revolution. The country started showing positive trends in economy and reforms were made to modernize the education system. Consequentially, Georgia began attracting young foreigners from various countries.

Immigration has become a subject of active discussion for the last two years, since the number of foreigners moving to the country started to have an impact on the social and economic life of the nation. Firstly, the article reviews the aspects of general migration. Secondly, it analyzes the trends, current outcomes and possible advancements of the international students migration to Georgia. The findings are supported by studies conducted by various international organizations.

Review of the Georgian Immigration Profile

People come to Georgia from various countries, with different aspirations for staying. Some hope to become students or start a business, while others simply wish to reunite with their families. In order to suit asylum seekers' purpose of arrival and ensure low level of illegal immigration, the Georgian government has developed diverse policies and visa procedure.

As of now an immigrant can apply for short term permits for labor, education, family reunification and etc. In case one wishes to obtain a permanent residence permit than he/she must: 1) have a spouse, child or a parent who is a Georgian

citizen, 2) invest at least GEL 300,000 in Georgia and/or 3) be a stateless person [2].

The majority of laws concerning immigration policies were introduced by the government in the years of 2014 and 2015. The country's leadership has also set up a trilingual website, where interested parties may view updated information about relevant laws and constitutional rights of immigrants. The webpage also contains a separate section through which one may apply for a temporary visa.

A study conducted by Georgian National Statistics office study reveals that the number of immigrants arriving to Georgia has almost doubled since 2002 (see Figure 1 [3]). The quantity of migrants reached its crest in 2013, when 92,458 people moved to the country. However, the mentioned indicator slightly decreased in 2017.

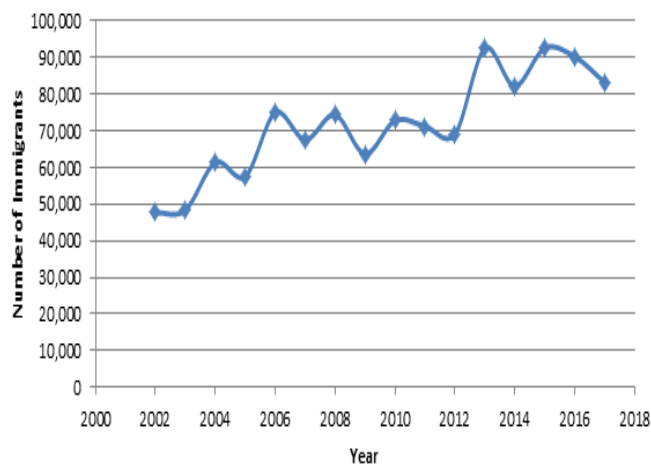


Figure 1 . Number of Immigrants, 2002-2017.

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Table 1. Residence Permits Issued, by Reason, 2012-2016

Year	Work	Education	Familyreunification	Investment ⁶³	Former Georgian Citizen	Permanent Residence permit ⁶⁴	Special Residence permit ⁶⁵	Short-term Residence permit ⁶⁶	Total
2012	5,091	876	961	-	840	4	-	-	7,772
2013	3,921	554	931	-	620	4	-	-	6,030
2014	4,666	1,130	1,136	54	2,282	676	181	-	10,125
2015	9,441	4,663	2,636	214	4,250	7,077	1,044	37	29,362
2016	9,664	2,901	1,694	95	360	1,610	587	308	17,219
Total	32,783	10,124	7,358	363	8,352	9,371	1,812	345	70,508

During the 2018-2019 academic year more male (5,511), then female (2,487) students migrated to the country[5].

It is assumed that the decline of immigrants was caused by a list published by the Ministry of Foreign affairs', that same year. The list indicates 94 countries, which's' citizens can reside on the territory of Georgia for one year (without having a special permit/ visa). The people who were forced to apply for resident visas upon their arrival, no longer needed any document to validate their stay and hence, the number of immigrants decreased.

In 2017 the top "sender" countries, whose citizens immigrated to Georgia, included: Russia, Turkey, Ukraine, Armenia, Azerbaijan, China and USA.

In 2016, a total number of 17,219 residence permits were issued. According to the data, educational residence permits have been the most demanded out of all visas (see Table 1 [4]).

International Students in Georgia: Facts and Benefits

Over the last years Georgia has become a micro hub for education. The country has an established culture of attaining tertiary education and has conducted several reforms. However, according to various international organizations Georgian education system lacks quality and does not convey practical working abilities to its' students [6]. Yet, the increase in the number of foreign youth has been considerable. The biggest factors effecting foreign students' decision to migrate are: safety, cost of tuition and recognition of Georgian educational credentials.

While observing student immigration data, the effect of former Soviet relations is apparent, as the majority of the students arrive from Azerbaijan and some, from Russia. Young people from India, Iraq, Nigeria, Turkey and/ or other countries also chose Georgia as their destination, mostly to study medicine [7].

Historically, most of the universities provided courses exclusively in Georgian language. However, after international students started arriving, a growing number of alma maters developed bilingual and/or English study programs. In accordance to the information provided by the Georgian Ministry of Education and Science, the number of foreign language educational programs has increased from 88 (year 2012) to 205 (year 2016). The Georgian universities have started to take part in Erasmus Mundus and Tempus projects. Thus, the young foreigners have had a positive effect on the internationalization and the development of the local education sector.

In order to make the moving process easier for the young adults, the government of Georgia has launched a website "Study in Georgia"(http://www.studyingeorgia.ge).The purpose of the page is to provide general information concerning the education and exchange programs offered by some of the universities.

Georgia benefits from student immigration not only education wise, but economically too. According to calculations, international students spend more than GEL 195

million, in 2016. Most of the expenditures were spent on tuition and living fees (such as rent and food) (see Table 2[7]).

Table 2. Breakdown of Expenditures of International Students in Georgia, 2016.

Type of Expenditure	Expenditure (GEL)	Share of Total Expenditure
Tuition	75,928,318	38.88%
Rent	45,017,544	23.05%
Groceries and food	23,584,199	12.08%
Transportation	10,114,029	5.18%
Utilities	8,769,560	4.49%
Clothing, shoes, accessories	7,497,323	3.84%
Eating and drinking out	7,482,191	3.83%
Entertainment	3,409,920	1.75%
Books	3,381,639	1.73%
Cell phone communication	2,439,394	1.25%
Car purchase	3,500,008	1.79%
Other durable goods	2,273,243	1.16%
Travel/Tourism	842,892	0.43%
Childcare	1,063,218	0.54%
Total annual personal expenditure	195,303,478	100%

Recommendations

As evident from the data above, short term international student migration creates encouraging opportunities for the expansion of the Georgian economy and educational sector. Hence, further steps must be taken for the enlargement of the mentioned migration trend.

Professionals working in the Georgian education field all together agree that western influence, national university accreditation processes, faculty and/or students returning from abroad, are sources of development [8].

According to a number of studies some of the top reasons why international students chose to continue their studies elsewhere include: the English language; higher education's system's reputation and educational quality [9; 10].

English is the language of global economy and modern society. Countries all over the world are increasing number of courses taught English, in order to gain competitive advantage[11]. Despite the fact that various Georgian universities have set up English courses, it would be beneficial for the Georgian universities to internationalize their overall education strategy and/ or courses. In order to heighten the reputation of Georgian education system, the universities need to actively engage in the development of exchange programs, research partnerships and/or connections with foreign universities. It would also valuable for the professors to take part in exchange courses and attend international workshops. The exchange of information among professionals and faculty mobility will ensure that up to date teaching techniques are delivered to the students and that the lecturers increase their expertise.

Apart from focusing on the succession of the education quality, the universities have to develop housing programs. Most of the students arriving to Tbilisi have to search for rental flats by themselves. If the alma maters had any campuses/ dormitories, the process of moving to Georgia would be much easier for international students.

It will also be advantageous, to set targets of attracting international students from specific educational markets. Modern students can be perceived as educated consumers; they know exactly what their demands are and search for the "supply" on the web. Internet and social media make it possible to reach wider, more global audiences. Thus, a successful digital marketing strategy must be executed for the Georgian education sector. Since young people living abroad may not be able to physically visit Georgia, it is important to provide them with easily accessible information, until they decide where to study.

The website 'Study in Georgia' may be a strategic instrument for branding Georgia as an international education hub. The website needs to be replenished and redesigned. Information concerning the majority of universities in the country, admission criteria, procedures and international student stories could be added to the webpage. The visually appealing, informative website and digital advertisements could interest prospective students and improve enrollment as a result.

Conclusion

Finally, it can be concluded that migration to Georgia is an increasing trend. Thanks, to the growing number of international students the country has a chance to become a prominent education centre of the region, attracting young talent from all over the world.

Foreign students positively contribute to development of the economy and education sector of the country. Hence, it is natural for the government of Georgia to have a goal of expanding the number of educational migrants. However, before the objective is reached the leadership of the country and the representatives of teaching organizations must work at the aspects of quality and internationalization of education.

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