



Actual Environmental Migrants' Families in Georgia – the State Support and Statistics

Executive Summary

Background

Over the last few decades, environmental migration has become one of the main types of human displacement globally, and its complexity has made dealing with this issue even more challenging for state governments. Unfortunately, Georgia has joined the ranks of disaster vulnerable states and while the state faces disaster-related risks and challenges, it also lacks an adequate disaster risk preparedness system on both the central and local levels. Along with this absence of a systematic approach to disaster risk reduction, there are also no valid statistics for how many environmental migrants live in Georgia, or for how many migrants have received state support. Over the years, state policy has been fragmented, with policy approaches changing in line with periodic governmental changes, resulting in a chaotic picture of environmental migration in Georgia, and meanwhile the problems of these environmental migrants have been getting more and more severe. The state must take a crucial stand and create the resilient institutional groundwork to support comprehensive disaster risk reduction, as well as express the political will to define an appropriate public policy, legislative regulations and support programs.

The present research is an attempt to collect accurate statistical data and information on state environmental migration. The official data were received from public authority agencies, but unfortunately, it seems that the data gathered from the central government, local municipalities and the reports of various organizations are radically different. The research report covers the three main issues related to the environmental migrants – 1. State statistics, 2. Legislative aspects of environmental migration and, 3. Financial support. Additionally, the research report provides information on state support and integration programs.

Public Policy and Legislative Regulation

While building the resilient disaster risk reduction public policy, holistic changes in the building of the legal framework are not taking place and the issue remains without a systemic institutional basis. Although some efforts to elaborate various legislative decrees and resolutions to solve the problem have been made, all these attempts have been spontaneous reactions to a particular disaster and have allocated financial support from the state reserve budget to people without shelter. Between 1997 and 2015, the governments of Georgia have received only nine legislative acts / decrees to deal with the problem of the environmental migrants.

Data covering the last 10 years of government policy has revealed that the state has allocated 7,320,168.00 Georgian Lari between 2004 and 2015 to respond to the needs of environmental migrants in Georgia. Additionally, 21 houses have been bought for environmental migrants with

the support of the donor community from 2011, but there is no information about which organization donated, when and where the houses were bought or how much has been allocated.

Moreover, the majority of the local self-governments express a willingness to be more actively involved in the restoration and/or rehabilitation of houses in cases of assigned funds and defined policy regulations.

In addition, the social and integration-related issues of the resettled environmental migrants is an extremely pressing problem; reports made by the public defender and other organizations emphasize that inconsistent and unsystematic resettlement causes various integration complications in the host communities and not only. The process has been slightly improved since 2013, when the state decided to allow the environmental migrant to choose the location for housing, however, even this does not ensure a smooth adaptation-integration and there is a need for defining some governmental support programs on the initial stage of the resettlement. Another step forward is the legalization of houses for environmental migrants after May, 2015 with decree #996, when the ministry anticipated the completion of the process by the end of 2016.

Actual Environmental Migrants Statistics

The lack of an environmental migrants' data management system and no ability to count the number of those migrants who left the places of resettlement and migrated to their former living areas or to other municipalities results in the absence of precise data on how many environmental migrants are living in Georgia. An analysis of various reports, including the public defenders', indicates that there are approximately 35,200 environmental migrants in Georgia. Based on the statistical data on environmental migrants requested from the Ministry of Internally Displaced Persons from the Occupied Territories, Accommodation and Refugees of Georgia, there are 2,437 families, who applied for shelter in 2014-2015. This data was generated in line with decree #779, which regulates the resettlement of eco-migrants after 2013. At the same time, the data received from the municipalities totally differs from the ministry's information. The Institute of Democracy collected data from 76 municipalities around Georgia and the number of environmental migrants, as of July 1, 2015, is 3,706. The report gives detailed data and information per region and municipalities.

The report also analyzes the data and public information about those environmental migrants who were affected on June 13, 2015 by the Tbilisi flood. Tbilisi's environmental migrants have been treated under a different regulation (#17-66), which was adopted by the Tbilisi Municipality and received a better package of benefits from the state than those migrants who are provided with shelter in accordance to decree #779 damage categories. This once more highlights the inconsistency of state environmental migration policy in Georgia.

Actual Environmental Migrants Integration

Lastly, another interesting finding of the research report has shown that there is not a consistent adaptation-integration resettlement policy in Georgia. Information received from 21 out of 76 municipalities where environmental migrants have been resettled, does not specify any activity or technical support program to environmental migrants in their municipalities. Accordingly, the research team was not able to evaluate municipalities or state authorities' activities toward the adaptation-integration of resettled environmental migrants.