

SPLIT FAMILIES AND FAMILY MEMBERS LEFT BEHIND: MIGRATION FROM GEORGIA

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Georgians were never distinguished with high mobility. Georgian emigration is a relatively recent phenomenon that started since 1990s due to demise of the Soviet empire and dramatic changes in the country's political, economic and social life. While more has been written about economic and social status of those who left the country, less is known about family members left behind. The aim of this paper is to analyze, how household members in Georgia view emigration of a family member. What expectations and concerns do family members hold of their migrating family members? How do their families react to the socio-economic decline that many Georgian emigrants accept in exchange for economic security of their family? The paper is based on independent survey that took place in Georgia, researching migrants' adult children (2009). Migrants, as economic survivors of their families, maintain regular contacts between the places of origin and destination, emotional -- mainly through phone calls almost every day and economic by sending remittances. This split structure of their families are more compulsion rather than their choice. Using multiple methods --- questionnaires, in-depth interviews, and secondary statistical data, as well as method of analyses in SPSS program, we have examined in what ways and spheres do transnational exchanges shape and affect Georgian family life. As a result, we expect to contrast the economic benefits from emigration with the social and psychological costs associated with separation of the nuclear family members (mainly parents and children). According to questionnaires some economic effects of emigration will be studied, whereas, through interviews the emotional background of family members left behind will be revealed.

Keywords: Georgia, Feminization of migration, Gender structure, Transnational family, Remittances.

Introduction

The active emigration process that has started from the beginning of the 1990s in Georgia is a new phenomenon. Right after the switch of the country from the planned economy to the market economy, the state was facing dramatic social, political and economic changes. Thus, the Georgian exodus is the phenomenon of the last two decades and has a short term history of research analysis.

Surprisingly, many East European and Former Soviet countries began the post- Cold War era with great optimism and hopes about future independent nation states, as well as democracy

and prosperity of the new societies (Castles & Miller, 2003, p.1). Almost no one thought that the transition would be so painful, unclear, long and difficult. When suddenly, the responsibility shifted from the state to the people who had no experience of self providing and initiative, adaptation to the new reality became the key problem for any individuals. The social-economic and political changes have radically altered the ways of life, resulted in a sharp rise of women in social and economic activities (Durglishvili, 1997, p. 6). In many cases migration for the purpose of seeking long-term employment became very common.

The transition entailed the process of globalization that arose the necessity of adaptation to the global market and the global democratic values. On itself, globalization led to so called transnationalism, "behavior or institutions which simultaneously affect more than one state" (Castles & Miller, 2003, p. 1). In this context, international/transnational migration occurs as an inevitable phenomenon of globalization ("Migration in Georgia," 2008, p. 7). For many post-Cold War societies this kind of move became the only way for survival. Migration as an important part of transition on the one side, and the market opportunities on the other, spur labor migration from Post- Soviet space, mainly to the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), as well as to EU countries and the US ("Migration and remittances," 2006, p.1). Georgia of course would not be an exception.

Problem Description

Our goal is to study the modern migration processes in Georgia --- dynamics of the phenomenon, structure, existing and future trends; also, to learn what is the perception of migration as a new social event from the point of view of migrants' family members and how the process has affected them and their households. Represented research is the first part of a much bigger project, which implied to study the modern Georgian labor migration in the United States of America. The second part of the research was conducted in the USA in the framework of the Faculty Development Fellowship Program (2010) by Open Society Institute to whom we would like to express our gratitude for the support. At this point we would like to present only the part of the research which was conducted in Georgia.

Our *Target Group* were the migrants' family members left behind in Georgia; more specifically the children of the migrants who have come of age --- students --- which we considered to be the most reliable source of information because of several reasons:

- They are the actual members of the migrant families and possess most precise information;
- They can also discuss the attitude of other family members towards the migrant and migration as a phenomenon;
- Students are easily accessible for a researcher as an organized group for the interviews;
- As an age group they are the youngest adults and are very reasonable respondents;
- As the interviewer is not a stranger for them professionally (not necessarily personal acquaintance), trust and sincerity are much higher in a student - lecturer dialog then between the two of different fields.

The most interesting questions that we searched the answers to were: What is the respondents perception of migration as a new phenomenon? How has the transitional period in the country reflected on their families? What is their attitude toward the emigrated family member/members? What are their expectations and future mood?

The research subject is the new type of a family --- the transnational family --- and a new family structure. In international literature they are called Transnational families (Knox & Martson, 2004; Ho, 2008; Huang et al., 2008; Voigt-Graf, 2008; Ho & Bedford, 2008; Bartley & Spoonley, 2008), members of which “In order to maximize the opportunities, as a predefined strategy choose to live in two or more different countries at the same time”(Ho & Bedford, 2008, p.43) and “with money transfers maintaining the welfare of the family members left in home country”(Knox & Martson, 2004, p. 111). Since the migrants of this type always maintain the connection with their families with every day phone calls and full information exchange even for the prolonged periods of time, Wolf (2002) refers to this “social exchange” as an “Emotional Transnationalism”(as cited in Huang, Yeoh & Lam, 2008, p. 7). Transnational migration is a migration flow from the migrant’s home to the preliminarily prepared destination place. In the beginning, successful migrants pave the way, establish themselves in the destination country and with so called “snow ball” (Ho, 2008, p. 152) principle expand their relations or friendship net, thus helping the potential migrants to the destination country. Some experts (Fellman, Getis, A. & Getis, J., 2007) call this social event “chain migration” (p. 85), while according to Marcus (1981) the whole net is the “transnational corporation of kin ” (as cited in Ho & Bedford, 2008, p. 43).

Our research is based on “the anamnestic method” (“The labor Migration,” 2003, p. 8), which implies conducting in depth interviews with the members of a target group (19 interviews total). We also used the 17 questions long questionnaires (99 valid from 105 totals), which were distributed among the students of Ivane Janakhishvili Tbilisi State and Akaki Tsereteli State Universities (Kutaisi).

The research intends to show the common impressionistic picture of the social event and does not aim to be representative. Though, some parallels with other global projects, some of the statistic phenomenon and resembling trends were discovered.

The interviews showed the emotional background of the phenomenon and gave us an opportunity to compare the pros and cons of migration as a social event, be it economic gain or social-psychological loss, which is caused by the split of the nuclear families that live in different states/continents. As for the analysis of the questionnaires, it gave us the general idea about the financial status of the families and their future economic strategies.

Problem History

After the 1990s the Post Soviet community entered the new, before unknown, transitional era. This transitional period is often connected with the new “transitional type of economy” or “the state economy system which is in the transition from planed economy to market economy” and is characterized by disorganization of the old social and political institutes and creation of new ones (“Transition economy,” 2010, para.1). For Georgia (as well as for the rest of the Post-Soviet states) this time period turned out to be quite dramatic, which expressed in reduction of family income, unformed market structures and active migration processes. Destruction of Soviet Union resulted in a total chaos and gave a push to different ethno-political conflicts throughout the empire. The worsening of the living standards and local wars generated migration flows as within the country also outside the state borders causing the high numbers of refugees (Gachechiladze, 1995, p.111-116).

During the Soviet Era Georgians were not distinguished with high mobility. Before the transition for almost 96,5% of ethnic Georgians who lived in the USSR, the permanent place of residence was the Georgian SSR (Gachechiladze, 1997, p. 9). However, from the beginning of

the 21st century 1 to 1.2 of 4.6 million Georgians (Meladze, 2003, p. 84) emigrated to other Post- Soviet or EU countries and to the USA. Structural changes accompany this exodus, in particular the feminization of migration, emigrants professional transformation and changes of gender roles within the family (Tokmazishvili, 2007, p. 51).

Recent years have witnessed an increasing number of single spouses migrating temporarily for work, leaving their spouses and children behind in Georgia. Women (most with higher education) migrate autonomously as caregivers or nurses, while men (mainly skilled professionals) find employment as construction workers and drivers. The main purpose of their mostly temporary migration is to send remittances. As a result of these changes the process of Georgian migration is characterized by the split of a nuclear family (again temporarily, however, neither the immigrant herself/himself, nor the spouse knows for how long), transfer depended family budget and a single-parent household (Kakulia, 2007, p. 54-57). In this case, other member(s) of the family, often grandparents, serve as parents providing their grandchildren with parents' care. By Canadian scientist Esme Fuller-Thomson (2005) such type of household is mentioned as a "skipped generation household" (p. 331).

It should be mentioned that no comprehensive theory of migration exists. During the last century scholars have only significantly modified so called "laws of migration" that were formulated by E.G. Ravenstein as early as late 19th century (Gachechiladze, 1997, p. 7) which covers 11 "laws" (Knox & Martson, 2004, p. 52; Fellman, Getis, A., Getis, J., 2007, p. 47). In our research we discuss those that refer to the Georgian reality best.

Research and Findings

The push and pull factors are the main driving forces of the process of migration (Kuby, Harner & Gober, 2004, p. 86). One of the "laws" of Ravenstein concerns the economic factor: "Economic hardship is a main push factor" (Gachechiladze, 1997, p. 7; Knox & Martson, 2004, p. 52). As for pull factors, demand for the labour force and comparatively high wages in the country of destination is essential.

In case of Georgia the push factors are unemployment, decrease of family income or even loss of that, price rising, debts and forced labour transformation (Tsuladze, 2005, p. 48; "Labour Migration," 2003, p. 15). In our research 84.8% of the respondents pointed out the economic benefits in the country of destination as the main motivation for moving. The same reason is indicated in other researches as well (Gachechiladze, 1997; Toqmazishvili, 2007; Tsuladze, 2005).

According to the project implemented by The World Bank ("Migration and remittances," 2006, p. 8) which served to study the migration process in Eastern European and Post- Soviet states, the two South Caucasian states Georgia and Armenia, were represented with high level of urban migration (Tsuladze, 2005, p. 36). Logically, the main migrants are the residents with the worst living conditions, mostly rural population. The meaning is the same of one of the Ravenstein's law: "Urban population is less involved in the migration process than rural" (Gachechiladze, 1997, p. 7). In case of Georgia and Armenia, experts consider that information about the potential places of destination was more accessible for city/town dwellers (Kakulia, 2007, p. 56). As figures show, 70% of remittances to Georgia are sent to urban areas (Migration in Georgia, 2008, p. 26; Kakulia, 2007, p. 55). Also, as families become better well off due to remittances, their members move to urban areas ("Migration and remittances," 2006, p. 8). As for Armenia, we think that its traditional high level of urbanization (67.7%) also plays a role for the existing figures.

According to our research 73.4% of Georgia’s migrants are urban residents.

In spite of various hardships since 2004 Georgia’s new government started to implement quite scaled reforms that were vital for the country. According to the National Statistics Office of Georgia the negative net migration rate (-35.2 thousand people) in 2000 dropped to -27,5 thousands (2003) and became 76.3 thousand in 2005. Than three years were followed with negative indicators again (the highest -20.7 thousands in 2007) ended with positive net migration rate in 2011 (20.2 thousands) (Migration, 2012).

The issue of the most attractive places of destination is very interesting.

According to the research of International Organization for Migration (“Migration in the Black Sea Region,” 2008, p. 74) five most active destination countries for Georgia’s citizens were:

Russia – 63%, Ukraine – 9%, Greece – 6%, Armenia – 5%, Israel – 2% other – 15%.

Our research in 2009 showed the same trends, though with certain differences:

Russia –34.3%, Greece – 22.2%, Turkey – 15.1%, USA – 6%, Italy – 6%, Ukraine – 3%, Other – 13.1%.

In these two different researches the most striking is the difference in percentage index of Georgians residing in Russia and Greece. There can be several reasons for this diversity to occur. After the war 2008 lots of Georgians returned back to homeland from Russia; also, as experts indicate (Migration in Georgia, 2008) main flows of migrants from Tbilisi and other urban centers are mainly directed to EU countries and the USA (once again because of informational access and knowledge of the language), as for the rural population, they tend to choose the Post-Soviet space more (p.12). Since in our research there is a big share of urban population (may be even biased, since there *are* only 99 questionnaires and we are not insured from inaccuracy), existing picture could be influenced by this as well.

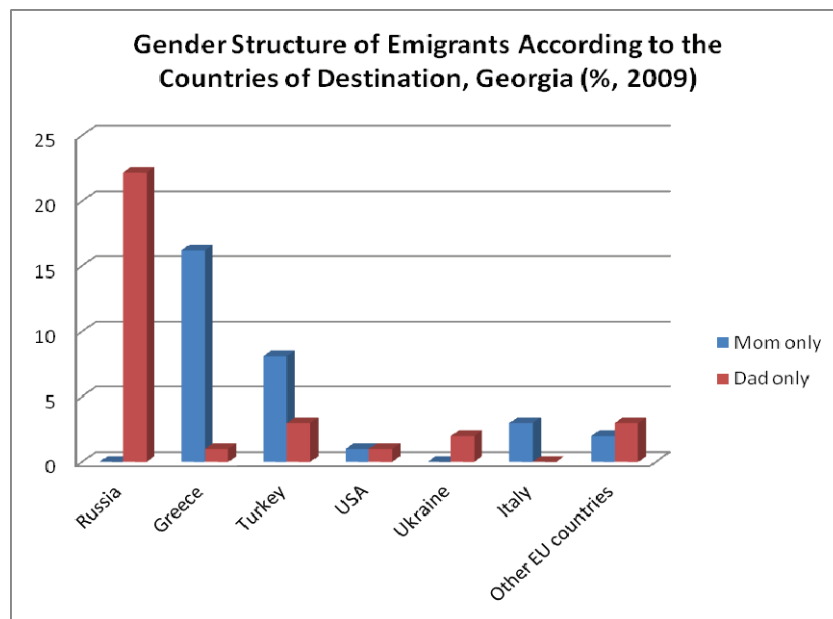


Chart 1.

Our research displayed the gender structure of migration by countries (chart 1).

It was revealed that Russia and Ukraine are male-dominant destination countries, while women choose Greece and Italy mostly; the gender share of Georgian emigrants is almost equal

in case of the USA, though women exceed men in Turkey, while male migration is higher in EU states. Almost the same but more exact data one can find in the research on Georgian labour migrants by International Organization for Migration (“Labour Migration,” 2003), where the share of women among the Georgian labor migrants in Russia is only 14.8% , percentage of women is little higher than men in the USA --- 54.7% and 45.3% relatively, while the share of women migrants in Greece is 70.1% (p. 41). We consider, that due to knowledge of the language and earlier existed business relations from the Soviet period, most Georgian males found Russia and Ukraine as one of the most favorite places of destination, while women who could not speak the host country’s native language (Greek, Italian, English) but those countries offered some market opportunities, could only realise themselves as unskilled labour force engaged in domestic jobs mainly as caregivers or baby sitters. In other words, nevertheless, that Georgian emigration is characterized with a high share of college educated migrants (44%) (“The Labour Migration,” 2003, p. 44), Soviet professional skills turned out more suitable for the Post- Soviet market and were not sold in Europe and the United States. Some emigrants learned the language of the recipient country later, but less of them possessed new professional skills. In the beginning of the 2000s only 17.5% managed to realise their own professional experience (“The Labour Migration,” 2003, p. 44). Situation has not changed much onwards. In the survey conducted by Danish Refugee Council (DRC) (“Labour market,” 2012) in two Georgian industrial cities Rustavi and Kutaisi, 52.9% of returned migrants indicated that they have not acquired any new professional skills during their stay in the country of emigration (p.107).

According to Ravenstein’s theory, ”For migrations within a native country females participation is more characteristic, while international migrants are mostly young males” (Gachechiladze, 1995; Fellman, J., Getis, A. & Getis, J. 2007). Today many experts speak about the feminization of international flows. Since 1990s the gender structure of all immigrants in the US changes in favor of women – 55% (Rubenstein, 2010, p. 54) and 57.1% in Eastern Europe (“Migration in Georgia”, 2008, p, 29).

Feminization of migration implies women’s actual engagement in the working process and not simply having a dependent status as a family member (“Migration in Georgia,” 2008, p. 29). According to the population census of 2002 in Georgia women comprised 62.2% of all migrants in the country (internal migration) and 41.3% of all emigrants (outmigration). Herewith, on every 100 Georgian male citizen out of the country, come 67 women (Toqmazishvili, 2007, p. 51). The international statistics of 2005 counts somewhat different figures. In the survey of 12 East European and Post-Soviet countries (“Migration in the Black Sea Region,” 2008), Georgia is distinguished with the lowest rate of female migrants -- 37.8%, while this figure is the highest for Armenia -- 58.9% (p.29). However, according to the statistical surveys in Armenia this data is no less than 67.4% (“Population,” 2008, p. 45-46; 48).

We suppose that the reason for comparatively low rate of Georgian female migrants in the research is caused by the high number of irregular female migrants. They simply were not counted in the research. Even though that there are a lot of Armenian irregular migrants as well, because of better services of registration in Armenian Diaspora organizations these data might be more accessible for the international statistics.

One of the main benefits from emigration is remittances. According to investigation of European Bank of Reconstruction and Development (EBRD) the GDP of Georgia in 2007 equaled 10.22million USD, while remittances comprised 866.156 thousands USD, or 8.47% of total GDP (National Bank of Georgia, 2007 as cited in “Assessment,” 2009, p. 5) and more than 1 billion in 2008 (“Assessment,” 2009, p. 3). In 2011 remittances amounted to almost \$1.3billion that comprised 8.8% of Georgia’s total GDP (Melkadze, 2012, para.3). Such a high

share of remittances is typical for developing communities and often exceeds foreign direct investment in the country.

We studied the structure of use of remittances in Georgia. It was revealed that 54.5% of sent money is for children’s education, 20.2% for food, 17.1% is to purchase medication and 3% for saving; 4% of money family members use for various purposes (chart 2).

As it was already pointed out, feminization of migration means women’s active involvement in the working process. The research of gender structure of goals achieved by Georgian migrants and their family members with help of remittances did not show any significant differences in this regard: 5.1% of our respondents started their businesses with help of remittances sent by women only and the other 6% received the money for small enterprise from only men. Emigrant mothers financially supported purchasing of a new car for 3.1% of poll members and emigrant fathers have done the same also for 3% of our respondents. With remittances from women 15% of the research participants could renovate or purchase a new living space; 16% of our researched families were provided with the same acquisition from male emigrants. 10% of our

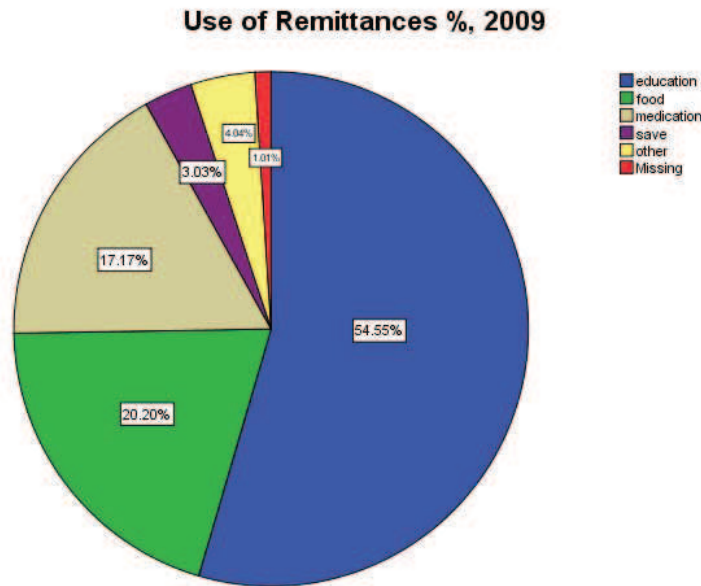


Chart 2.

poll members with emigrant moms and 11% with emigrant dads have not acquired anything significant yet (chart 3).

Nine percent to fifteen percent of Georgia’s population receives financial support from abroad (“Migration in Georgia,” 2008, p. 26). From total amount of remittances that were transferred in the country in 2008 (1.002bln.USD), 63.3% was from Russia, 7% from Ukraine, 6.4% from the US, 4.7% from Greece, 3.7% from Italy, 2.2% from Turkey, and 2% from Spain (“Assessment,” 2009, p. 21). These trends have been changed recently with steadily declining share of remittances from Russia to 52% (Melkadze, 2012) and increased transfer amounts from Greece (\$47.2million in 2008 and \$60.7mill. in 2010), Germany (\$7.2mill. in 2008 up to \$14.6mill. in 2010), the USA, Spain, Israel and Italy (“Labour market,” 2012, p. 101). Surprisingly, global financial crisis almost did not reflect on amount of money transferred to Georgia.

Ravenstein indicates that “Most migrants are adults; families are less likely to make international moves” (Fellman, Getis, A. & Getis, J., 2007).

One of the main peculiarities of Georgian emigration is split of a nuclear family. According to our survey 30.3% of households have emigrant mothers, 32.3% have emigrant fathers and only in 3% of all families both parents have emigrated (chart 4); 34.3% of our respondents indicated that other members of their families have job abroad as migrant workers. If summarize, it is clear that 62.6% of young adults are growing up and live in single parent families that unfortunately, becomes a norm in our society. We consider, that one more “law” of migration that was suggested by Tyner (2002) “Families are both as beneficiaries to the process [migration] as well as its potential victims” is relevant to such situation (as cited in Huang, Yeoh & Lam, 2008, p. 9).

What is worth to mention is that for “compensation” of their absence most parents try to give strong financial benefits to their children. 45% of our respondents believe that the largest share of remittances is for them; other 50% consider that money sent from abroad is equally available

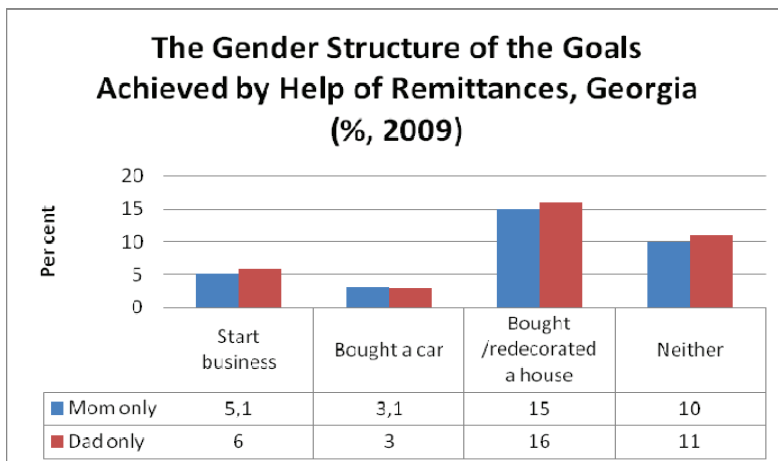


Chart 3

for all household members. Only 3% think that it is for emigrants’ spouses and for 2% of respondents it is for elderly parents (chart 5). Here are more exact figures about distribution of remittances: 25% of our respondents indicate that they consume 50% of all remittances and another 25% do more than 50%. However, half of poll participants are sure that there is not any bias in distribution of finances in their families (chart 6). We consider one more “law” of migration by Reley (1997) is very relevant to this process -- “Nevertheless many researchers see migration as a family decision or strategy, some members will benefit more than others from those decision” (as cited in Fellman, Getis, A., & Getis, J., 2007).

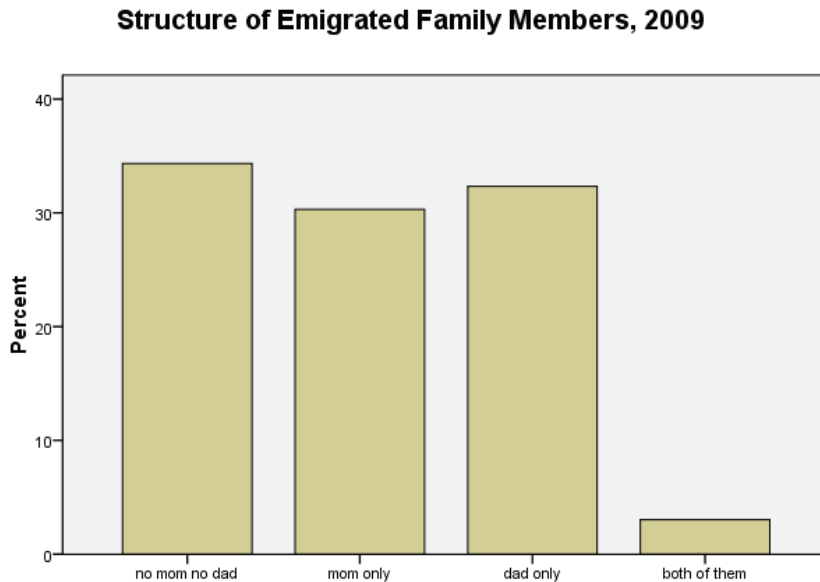


Chart 4

Conclusions and Recommendations

- Migration from Georgia is mainly economic and an employment is the main pull factor;
- Within the participants of international migration family separation level is high. According to the 2002 census and the research conducted by different international organizations, as well as according to the results of our survey, 64% of migrants from Georgia have either child (children) or a spouse left in the country;
- Remittances create a “safety net”, though most of this money is not for investments but rather as a family’s daily budget;
- Georgian migration is mainly oriented on children and family welfare.
- Even though the situation in Georgia, the population outflow wise, leaves much to ponder on the country is not yet part of any international convention regarding the labor migration, nor has it any direct agreements with any of the migrants’ destination countries. International organizations mention about the interest in the public institutions, but also indicate about the lack of the coordination between these institutions and non existence of the mutual electronic base (“Review of migration,” 2008, p. 20).
- International experience shows that economic development rapidly slows down the migration outflow. It is doubtless that this will be the crucial for Georgia as well. Though as today’s migration (as well as of the nearest future) is a severe reality and cannot be stopped spontaneously, Georgia must legalize its citizens on the international labor market. At the first step making a mutual legal agreement at least with some of the states (even for the low qualification jobs) will somewhat ease the social-physiological losses caused by the long term separation of families; also it will provide the migrant with a sufficient knowledge about his/her rights and will protect as a legal labor force.

Benefits among family members, 2009

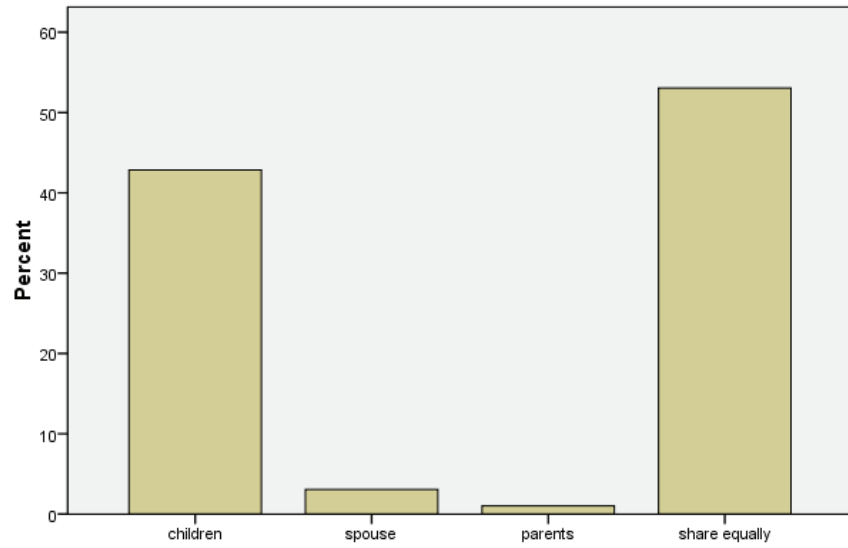


Chart 5

The share of children in consumption, 2009

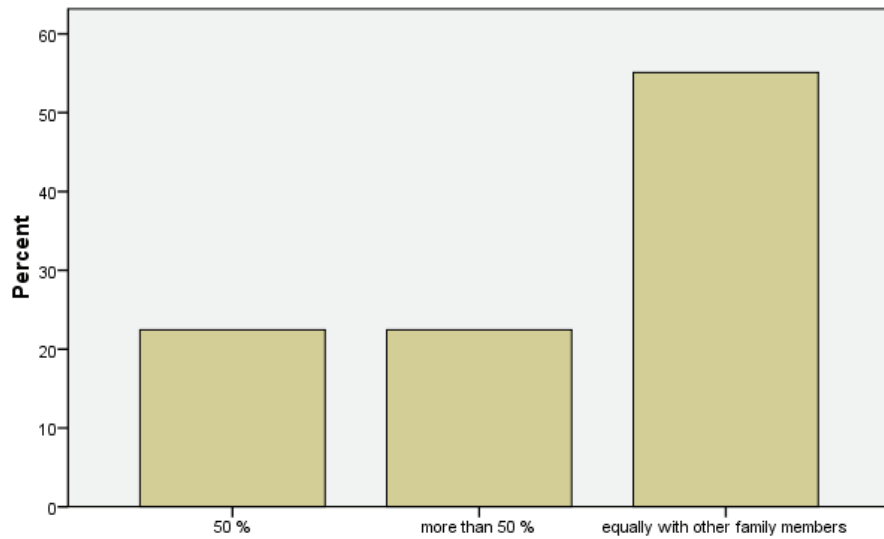


Chart 6

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