

8 || BUILDING TIES BETWEEN THE STATE AND THE GEORGIAN DIASPORA – THE ROLE OF EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION

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INTRODUCTION

Georgia has experienced several waves of emigration throughout its recent history linked with the dissolution of the Soviet Union, Georgia's regaining of its national independence and severe economic crises during the 1990s and later. The data of the national population census shows a 20% decrease in the general population of Georgia from 1990 to 2002. The declining trend continued according to the census of 2014 with 3.7 million people as compared to the 2002 census data with 4.3 million (GEOSTAT). The determinants of declining numbers in population size are related to demographic factors such as significantly low birth rates and remarkably increasing out-migration. The motivations and reasons for emigration are complex and are based on economic, social and political factors. The most recent migratory flows are also connected to the personal networks abroad that play an important role in one's decision to move. This conclusion even more increases the role of the diaspora in migratory flows.

Important economic reforms have taken place in Georgia throughout past couple of decades along with the increasing political stability and security that gradually transforms Georgia into an attractive destination for immigrants. However, emigration remains high with the majority of migrants looking for employment opportunities in the European Union Member States where the highest numbers of Georgian migrants are found alongside other countries of destination.

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Furthermore, since March 2017, Georgian citizens have been enjoying the right of visa free travel to the Schengen area for short stays (maximum of 90 days in a 180-day period). Based on the positive assessment of the implementation of the benchmarks of the Visa Liberalisation Action Plan (VLAP) in December 2015, the European Commission proposed to Council of the European Union to transfer Georgia to the list of countries whose nationals are exempt from the visa requirement. In addition to this amendment, the suspension mechanism – a special set of measures intended to temporarily suspend the exemption from the visa requirement for nationals of a third country – originally established by the Council Regulation (EC) 539/2001 listing the third countries whose nationals must be in possession of visas when crossing the external borders and whose nationals are exempt from this requirement was revised. Therefore, the suspension mechanism may be initiated by any EU MS if it is confronted, over a two-month period, with one or more of the following circumstances: increasing asylum applications from Georgia, a substantial increase in the refusal rate of readmission applications, the increased risk or imminent threat to the public policy or internal security of Member States and a substantial increase in the number of Georgian nationals refused entry or found to be staying in EU Member States irregularly. As a result, the need for proper communication of the rules and the procedures of visa-free travel emerged with Georgian nationals residing in Georgia and abroad.

According to the results of the latest general population census of Georgia (GEOSTAT, 2015), the top destination countries of Georgian migrants in 2015 were:

Table 1. Number of Georgian Migrants in Destination Countries by Gender, 2015

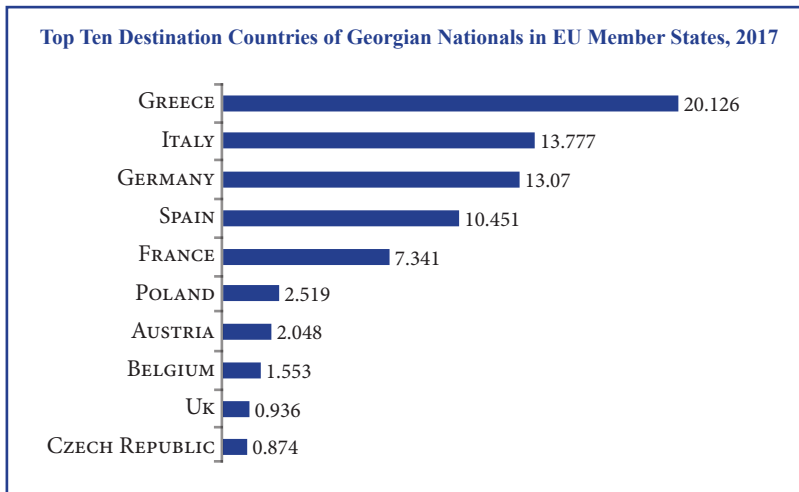
Countries of destination	Both genders	Male	Female
Russia	19,195	13, 640	5,555
Greece	14,048	2,386	11,662
Turkey	9,922	3,262	6,660
Italy	9,612	1,373	8,239
Germany	6,259	2,808	3,451

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USA	5,021	2,457	2,564
Spain	3,597	1,724	1,873
France	3,293	1,896	1,397
Ukraine	3,283	2,619	664
Azerbaijan	1,802	1,091	711
Other	11,590	6,483	5107

According to the data of Eurostat, the top ten destination countries of Georgian migrants in the European Union are:

Figure 1. All valid residents permits in Top Ten Countries of Destination (EU MS), 2017



The profiles of Georgian nationals residing abroad vary according to the context of destination countries, labour market demands, historic ties with Georgia and geographic proximity. For instance, in the cases of Greece and Italy, the labour market demand is high in the domestic sector and attracts more women migrants from Georgia who are supporting their families left behind. In general, the majority

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of people moving abroad from Georgia are women, 55% of emigrants (Migration Profile of Georgia, 2017). Germany, however, attracts more highly skilled labour migrants from Georgia and their structured educational or professional programmes act as major incentives for young Georgians to choose Germany as a destination country.

The data from EUROSTAT given in the table below indicates that more than 77,000 Georgian nationals were legally residing on the territory of the EU in 2017.

Table 3. All valid residents permits in the Top Ten Countries of Destination (EU MS), 2015-2017

All residents permits valid on December 31	2015	2016	2017	Family 2017	Labour 2017	Study 2017	Protection 2017
Total, EU	71.268	74.845	77.879	27.128	18.075	4.831	2.994
Greece	18.774	19.643	20.126	7.594	2.495	67	N/A
Italy	13.335	14.025	13.777	3.625	9.554	153	78
Germany	11.715	12.136	13.070	6.074	1.588	2.491	182
Spain	9.665	10.063	10.451	2.867	1.534	103	29
France	6.079	6.835	7.341	3.238	252	256	2.386
Poland	1.467	1.829	2.519	226	1.516	242	141
Austria	1.841	2.026	2.048	329	96	267	N/A
Belgium	1.697	1.637	1.553	530	56	33	71
United Kingdom	966	933	936	346	141	361	1
Czech Republic	858	951	874	260	147	190	21

The majority of Georgians legally residing in EU in 2017 were issued residence permits on the basis of family reasons. Germany has issued most of the residence permits on the grounds of education purposes, whereas most of the permits issued by Italy were on the grounds of employment while the majority of the permits issued

by Greece and Spain were based on family reasons. The geographical proximity and visa-free movement with Turkey supports seasonal migration schemes, especially from Adjara which is a border region with Turkey (Georgian Diaspora and Migrant Communities in Germany, Greece and Turkey, ICMPD 2015).

This paper intends to review the successful examples of Georgian diaspora engagement and provision of information to the diaspora abroad mainly based on the practices of the Government of Georgia (GoG) and the experience of EU-funded projects implemented in Georgia by ICMPD since 2013. It also argues that institutionalised and targeted information and service provision measures carried out by the state strengthen ties with the diaspora and support in building trust which in turn leads to diaspora engagement for the benefit of the home country.

MIGRATION MANAGEMENT AND DIASPORA POLICY IN GEORGIA

Over the last several years, Georgia has put significant efforts in forming its migration policy framework aiming at building a coherent migration policy at the national level. This was largely stipulated by the actions carried out to fulfil the commitments and achieve the benchmarks set out by the Visa Liberalisation Action Plan (VLAP).

The first strategic document defining migration policy in Georgia was developed in 1997 and approved by the President. It was an innovative document of its time with a mainly declaratory character. In 2010, the State Commission on Migration Issues (SCMI) and its Secretariat within the Ministry of Justice were established by the Government of Georgia. The Commission is a coordinative body of all state institutions working on migration issues and aims to develop and implement a coherent migration policy for the country while ensuring its proper management. The permanent members of the SCMI are the following state institutions: the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ministry of Internal Affairs, State Security Service, Ministry of Internally Displaced Persons from the Occupied Territories, Labour,

Health and Social Affairs; Ministry of Education, Science, Culture and Sport; Ministry of Economy and Sustainable Development, Ministry of Finance, National Statistics Office of Georgia and the Ministry of Regional Development and Infrastructure. International organisations as ICMPD, IOM, UNHCR and NGOs working on migration issues are called to the quarterly sittings of the Commission as consultative members. The main functions of the Secretariat of the State Commission include monitoring the Action Plan for the Migration Strategy and providing the Commission with relevant information, defining activities to be implemented within each thematic area of migration and submitting relevant analytical reports and informing the Commission of current projects in the field of migration, etc.. Furthermore, the Secretariat generates ideas for ‘Calls for Projects’ in the migration field and submits them to the Commission.

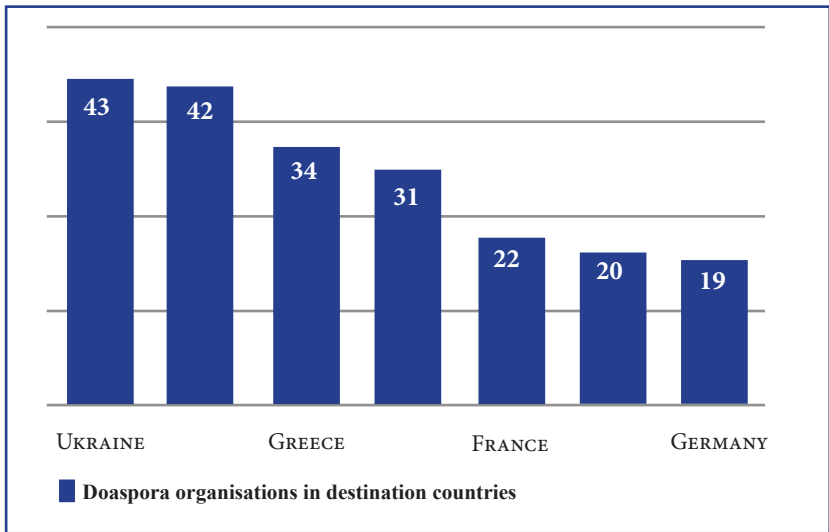
Following its establishment, the Commission took up the responsibility to develop State Migration Strategy documents and Action Plans on a regular basis. The second Migration Strategy was implemented through 2013-2015. In 2015, the government adopted the third strategic document – Migration Strategy 2016-2020 – defining the country’s migration policy that considered global and regional challenges and was based on the requirements of the EU VLAP. The 2016-2020 strategy touches upon the implementation of specific dimensions of the following migration areas: supporting legal migration, the prevention of illegal migration, international protection, foreigners’ integration and reintegration of Georgian nationals, migration and development, improving migration management, public awareness raising and deepening international cooperation.

Currently, there is no specific diaspora strategy approved in Georgia despite several attempts to do so. However, the definition of the term ‘diaspora’ is outlined by the Law of Georgia on Compatriots Residing Abroad and Diaspora Organisations (2011). According to the Law – ‘diaspora’ covers the members of all Georgian migrant communities abroad, including historical diaspora members, temporary short-term emigrants, long-term emigrants, expatriates and Georgians who are already naturalised in their countries of destination. Further, the institutional framework of diaspora issues is also in place. Considering the increasing number of Georgians residing abroad, the Government of Georgia faced the need of

strengthening ties with diaspora and migrant communities. Therefore, the Office of the State Minister on Diaspora Issues (Diaspora Office) was established already in 2008 underlining that diaspora issues were placed on top of Georgia's political agenda. This institution also coordinated the collection and analysis of information on Georgians abroad in close cooperation with the Consular Department of the MFA. Until today, the Consular Department of the MFA identifies and develops aspects of consular policy, carries out coordination, monitoring and strategic planning for consular officials abroad and provides legal technical support these officials require to fulfil their consular duties. In 2016, due to the reshuffling of the Georgian government, the Diaspora Office was abolished and its portfolio was transferred to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs where the Department of Diaspora Relations was established. Until today, this department remains the main institution responsible for maintaining and strengthening contacts with Georgians abroad and the development and implementation of the state strategy on diaspora. The profile of Georgian migrants varies around the world in its composition, characteristics and needs. These differences also influence the directions of the work of the Department of Diaspora Relations as it aims to implement individually designed initiatives and programmes for Georgian communities abroad and, in particular, the need of diaspora engagement.

In its efforts to strengthen ties with Georgian diaspora and migrant communities abroad, the Georgian government has faced the following challenges: a lack of a systematised and holistic approach with scattered programmes and initiatives, gathering and structuring data on the diaspora and the need of enhanced awareness raising. The database of the Diaspora Relations Department of the MFA counts over 300 Georgian diaspora organisations registered around the world. This estimate does not reflect the actual number of Georgian diaspora organisations and associations functioning in destination countries; however it gives the possibility to identify the most active organisations that maintain regular contact with the Ministry. As a result, an approximate picture can still be drawn on what are the major destination countries hosting the most self-organised diaspora and migrant communities. Nevertheless, a high number of diaspora groups might also indicate the fragmentation of Georgian communities in the respective countries and a lack of cooperation and consolidation.

Figure 2. Number of Georgian Diaspora Organisations, Sunday Schools and Creative Groups Abroad, (Main Destination Countries) MFA, 2016



As seen in the figure above, the greatest number of Georgian diaspora groups are registered in Ukraine (43) and Russia (42) with Greece (34) being the third country with the largest number of registered diaspora groups. Next are Turkey, France, the USA and Germany followed up by Israel, Belgium, Estonia, Spain, Italy, the Netherlands, Sweden and Switzerland, each counting from five to ten Georgian diaspora groups. As a rule, these are community or religion-based organisations run on a voluntary basis aiming at preserving Georgian culture, language, religion and identity among members of Georgian migrant communities abroad and in some cases – promoting these values among hosting communities. This directly corresponds with the main activities of the Department of Diaspora Relations under the Ministry of Foreign Affairs; in particular, promoting Georgian culture and preserving the identity of compatriots living abroad, strengthening their contacts with the homeland and developing cooperation including in the area of the popularisation of Georgian culture, history and traditions.

NEXUS BETWEEN DIASPORA ENGAGEMENT AND COMMUNICATION

Although some states and policymakers see the emigration of their nationals as a loss and are alarmed about the phenomenon of brain-drain, they are starting to realise that an engaged diaspora is actually an asset and can even counterweight the out-flow of highly skilled migrants. In 2017, remittances comprised 8% of Georgia's GDP and are in general exceeding foreign direct investments (National Bank of Georgia, 2017). However, it is crucial to activate not only the economic aspect of diaspora engagement but social as well, focusing on professional aspects and the transfer of knowledge and skills. Moreover, the economic engagement of the diaspora broadly depends on its trust in the government and the achievement of trustful relations is often possible through exchange and communication.

The mandate of the Department of Diaspora Relations of the MFA entitles promoting Georgian culture and language abroad and strengthening Georgian identity and the feeling of belonging among diaspora and migrant communities. As a result, the daily work of the Department is based on liaison with representatives of Georgian diaspora organisations and active diaspora members, hearing out their concerns and addressing the organisational needs of diaspora organisations talking into account their limited capacities (financial and human) as the majority of organisations are working on a voluntary basis. The support of the Georgian state to the diaspora organisation is often limited to delivering books to Sunday Schools, purchasing Georgian national costumes and instruments for dance ensembles and choirs, organising annual diaspora networking events in Georgia and so on. The main channels of communication which the Department of Diaspora Relations uses to reach Georgians abroad are social networks, emails and direct contact with Georgian diaspora organisations such as during official visits, NGOs in Georgia and abroad, as well as private channels. Other forms of assistance include consultations provided by telephone, email or in person. In general, the Department of Diaspora Relations is in daily contact with diaspora organisations and supports them in organising various cultural and networking events such as the Diaspora Professional Forum (2015) and the Diaspora Economic Forum (2016). However, it should be noted that these contacts and the provision of assistance have mainly been done on an ad hoc basis. In addition, the needs of

diaspora organisations, which differ from country to country and from organisation to organisation, have not been fully analysed. As already mentioned, one major goal of the Department of Diaspora Relations is to consolidate Georgians abroad including through a Global Diaspora Network to provide more comprehensive and regularly updated data on Georgian communities, weekend schools and diaspora organisations, and events and activities planned by Georgians abroad. In order to complement these activities, the ICMPD *inter alia* has focused on support to further structure the activities of the Department of Diaspora Relations since 2013 (or other responsible institutions before the reform). In this way, a regular gathering of data and developing a structured approach has seen positive results.

Some of the successful examples and best practices of diaspora engagement are outlined in this paper and have been taken up and implemented by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs independently and in cooperation with the ICMPD in Georgia within the following EU-funded projects: Enhancing the Role of Georgian Emigrants at Home (ERGEM, 2013-2014), Enhancing Georgia's Migration Management (ENIGMMA, 2014-2017) and Sustaining Migration Management in Georgia (ENIGMMA 2, 2017-2020). This paper also follows the approach that was taken by the ICMPD in cooperation with responsible Georgian state institutions by following these methods while working with the diaspora:

- Data gathering and structuring
- Direct communication and mobile counselling
- Diaspora as an awareness raising agent
- Engagement of high profile diaspora members
- Improvement of inter-institutional cooperation within Georgia

Data Gathering and Structuring

As previously indicated, the data on the number of Georgian diaspora organisations and members abroad and activities of diaspora organisations was rather scattered.

This, subsequently, led to the situation that communication with the diaspora used to be rather sporadic and mainly implemented on ad hoc basis. In general, the reliable data on emigration is scarce in many countries and Georgia is not an exception. Often, national censuses do not provide exact data on out-migration. In 2014, the National Office of Statistics of Georgia carried out a census that included a set of comprehensive questions related to emigration and immigration. This was the first precedent when migration issues were included in the national census. Consular registration is organised on a voluntary basis and, therefore, does not cover all citizens residing abroad. In such cases, information on diaspora and migrant communities should be gathered from supplementary sources and analysed by the central diaspora authority. Such sources could be the data from destination countries (national census, data from registers on residence permits and long-term visas, statistical and operational data on irregular migration, etc.) or various studies and research carried out by international organisations, civil society organisations or research institutes. An analysis of diaspora activities may provide valuable information on the diaspora's social profile, skills, interests, needs, challenges and potential to engage in home-country development. While the migration topic is frequently addressed by many researchers and policy-makers, the potential impacts of migration on the development of Georgia have not yet been fully explored or supported by the state authorities at the political or at the technical level.

The study carried out in the framework of the EU-funded ERGEM (Enhancing the Role of Georgian Emigrants at Home) project implemented by the ICMPD and the Danish Refugee Council in 2013-2014 intended to at least partially fill this knowledge gap by examining the (potential) contributions of the Georgian diaspora in several countries selected for project implementation. The study assesses the situation and needs of Georgian migrants in their countries of residence and analyses the willingness and possibilities for migrants to contribute to Georgia's development. The study concludes with recommendations on how the ties between Georgian institutions and the Georgian diaspora can be strengthened.

As a result, the Georgian institutions realised the need of enhanced knowledge of Georgian diaspora communities in order to better engage them and to develop evidence-based policies. Following the development of the case study on the

Georgian diaspora in Germany, Greece and Turkey (Georgian Diaspora and Migrant Communities in Germany, Greece and Turkey, ICMPD 2014), the Georgian institutions responsible for diaspora relations could draw a clear profile of Georgians in three destination countries. Thus, systematic data collection on Georgian diaspora abroad, analysing their needs and mapping their locations, professions and interests was proven to be an efficient instrument supporting communication with the diaspora. In the following year, the Office of the State Minister for the Diaspora and, later, the Department of Diaspora Relations under the MFA, followed the same pattern of studying the Georgian diaspora in other countries.

Furthermore, with the support of the above mentioned EU-funded ERGEM project, the Department of Diaspora Relations built a database that unites Georgian diaspora organisations registered abroad, active diaspora members and networks of diaspora professionals according to the fields of expertise, weekend schools with the number of teachers and students and religious entities in destination countries. This way, the collected data is being catalogued properly and the institutional memory is preserved for the next generations of state officials to come.

Direct Communication and Mobile Counselling

When working with the diaspora, one of the commonly identified challenges is usually related to the lack of information about the country of origin, the change of legal and institutional frameworks, business development opportunities and the investment climate, etc., in addition, to feeling far from home and having a lack of trust in the governmental institutions in the country of origin. Evidence of successful measures to strengthen relations between the government and diaspora communities and to build trust is scarce. It has also been widely acknowledged that there is no uniform approach as the needs and the qualitative and quantitative structure of diasporas vary from country to country. Indeed, different governments have applied a number of practices. The unanimity exists regarding the notion that protecting and supporting migrants and diaspora members is an important precondition for building and maintaining relations and promoting their contributions to development processes at home.

For states that have limited consular coverage due to a lack of financial and/or human resources, it is mostly difficult to meet the needs of migrants and diaspora members through the provision of consular protection and services only. Hence, the establishment of so-called ‘mobile counselling units’ composed of state officials and the organisation of a mobile counselling programme in main countries of destination may be seen as a valuable means to overcome the above mentioned challenges (Guide on Organising Mobile Counselling for Migrants and Diaspora Members, ICMPD 2014). This practice in Georgia was first identified by the EU-funded ERGEM project implemented by the ICMPD. The project’s counterparts developed the Guide describing this practice which includes step-by-step instructions on how to build and implement counselling events in destination countries and can be replicated worldwide.

Mobile counselling can be the right tool to address the challenges related to the scarce state resources and limited consular coverage and to better serve migrants and diaspora members abroad. Consequently, a mobile counselling unit composed of government officials from relevant institutions can be created, trained and deployed for a limited duration in a main destination country of migrants and diaspora members. The mobile counselling unit should thus be able to provide migrants and diaspora members with advice regarding a wide range of issues covering, *inter alia*, legal status, visa-free travel and identity document issues, the portability of social security benefits, property rights and return possibilities as well as business and investment opportunities in the country of origin. The main objective is to provide migrants and diaspora representatives with relevant, timely and high-quality information that is specifically tailored to their needs. The mobile counselling programme complements already existing consular services offered by the government representations abroad and should bring state institutions abroad and at home working on diaspora issues closer together. The organisation of counselling events is also related to minimal expenditures when organised in partnership with consular offices abroad that can provide with a meeting venue for free of charge. According to the feedback received directly from migrants and diaspora representatives following the three information events (mobile counselling) carried out on the ground in the three destination countries of Georgian migrants in 2014 (Germany, Greece, Turkey) within the above mentioned ERGEM project, the

implementation of similar events is a successful practice. On the one hand, the state institution representatives get the opportunity of an in-depth outlook on the existing needs of the diaspora representatives and, on the other hand, diaspora members and migrant communities receive reliable information first-hand and have the guarantee that their concerns and needs will be further discussed by government officials and hopefully addressed in practice. This is the main benefit of organising mobile counselling that carries more added value as opposed to the information provided online on the web-pages of involved state institutions.

Diaspora as an Awareness Raising Agent

Once the trust with diaspora organisations is built and their information services are improved, diaspora organisations maybe engaged in the important task of contributing to awareness raising among diaspora members and new-comers to the country. For example, in the case of Georgia, a significant milestone was achieved in Georgia-EU relations in March 2017 when citizens of Georgia were granted visa-free travel to the Schengen zone. Georgian nationals holding biometric passports are exempt from tourist visas while travelling to the Schengen area for 90 days within a 180-day period. The fact was met positively in Georgian society; however, it has raised many questions among Georgians abroad related to their status, citizenship, work permits and more.

The Georgian Government has efficiently implemented all benchmarks of the Visa Liberalisation Action Plan (VLAP). A significant part of the VLAP was related to the organisation and implementation of public awareness measures aimed at informing the Georgian population and Georgian nationals living abroad about the rules and requirements of the visa-free regime. Moreover, in December 2017, the European Commission published its first report under the Visa Suspension document in addition to the Commission Staff Working document. Among other issues, the report concludes that ‘overall the visa liberalisation benchmarks continue to be fulfilled’ with several recommendations for further enhancement of the related areas. One of the recommendations of the report is to “continue campaigns on the rules of the visa free travel.” The main responsibility for VLAP implementation

was successfully overtaken by the Georgian Government; however, EU support was also provided through specifically designed and carried out projects. Thus, the Georgian Government launched a massive information campaign targeted at the awareness raising of Georgian nationals at home and abroad on the rules and procedures of the visa-free movement. The necessity of the information campaigns was even more urgent and important due to the fact of the rising numbers of asylum applications from Georgia to EU Member States after the establishment of the visa-free regime. As an increase of asylum applications may trigger the visa suspension mechanism, the government needed to intensify information provision services and look for new, innovative communication methods and strategies. A remarkable rise in asylum applications of Georgian citizens to the Schengen area was recorded in the first several months following the adoption of the visa-free movement as well as at the end of 2018. According to the statistics published by the European Asylum Support Office (EASO), the total number of applications filed by Georgian citizens in 2017 increased by 35% as compared to 2016.

As a result of consultations with international organisations and with the support of the EU-funded ENIGMMA 2 (Sustaining Migration Management in Georgia) project that runs from 2017 to 2020 and is implemented in Georgia by the ICMPD, the Government of Georgia launched an extensive information campaign covering the regions of Georgia. Following the attested successful practice of mobile counselling, the ENIGMMA 2 project supported the deployment of expert groups to the regions of Georgia for face-to-face meetings with the general population, academia and civil society representatives. The expert groups consisted of representatives of relevant state institutions, mainly the MFA and independent experts working on migration issues and visa policy.

Overall, the following awareness raising measures were taken:

- **Information meetings** – 58 meetings were organised in nine regions of Georgia;
- Tailored **trainings** – were conducted for the representatives of major travel agencies and airline companies;

- Country-wide **media campaign** was launched including the development of video-clips and various visualisations on the rules of visa-free travel. Information on the rules and procedures of visa-free were broadcast on major national TV and radio channels;
- Printed **information material** – leaflets and brochures were developed and distributed throughout the information meetings in the regions of Georgia. The material was handed over to the Public Services Development Agency that has also distributed a leaflet on the rules of visa-free travel through its community centres. The leaflet was handed out to every citizen who received a new biometric passport and it was further disseminated at every airport in Georgia;
- **Schengen/EU Application** – the mobile application helps citizens of Georgia to monitor the days spent in the Schengen/EU zone and calculate the remaining days. It is important that citizens calculate 90 days within a 180-day period accurately in order not to accidentally violate the visa-free regime. The application is simple and enables citizens to save the history of travelling in the EU/Schengen zone, calculate the remaining days and share visual information about a specific travel or travel history via social networks, etc. The application can be downloaded free of charge.

However, one innovative method applied during the information campaigns implementation was the engagement of Georgian diaspora organisations – which became possible due to the previous work on building communication and trust between the state and the diaspora. The EU-funded ENIGMMA 2 project has established a scheme of communication where diaspora members are seen and act as information agents. The first activity was piloted in Greece where diaspora organisations and individual diaspora members are generally very active. The heads of diaspora organisations and active diaspora members were trained on the rules and procedures of the EU-Georgia visa-free regime. Representatives of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Georgia gave a full-day workshop where specific examples of the abuse of the visa-free regime were discussed with cases on rejections of Georgian nationals from border-crossing points, the issue of no point of requesting asylum in countries where Georgia is in a safe country list, specific requirements and the needed documentation for visa-free travel, repercussions of the misuse of the visa-free regime and other details. As a follow-up,

the trained diaspora representatives organised information meetings with all interested diaspora and migrant communities with the purpose to transfer knowledge on the visa-free movement. The information on the rules and procedures were widely disseminated through social networks (e.g., Facebook) which is one of the most popular methods of communication of Georgians abroad.

As a lesson learned, diaspora members as information agents can be used in cases when important changes have taken place in the national migration legislation of the home country or local migration legislation of the hosting country. In the case of the latter, disseminating correct information is of utmost importance since in most cases the problem of fluency in the host country language persists. Further, ordinary diaspora and migrant communities members as well as new-comers often tend to trust diaspora organisations more than state institutions themselves and information provision in this way maybe more efficient.

Engagement of High-profile Diaspora

Generally, the high-profile diaspora can be defined as *“renowned women or men in a specific field who work transnationally and who have the potential to improve the reputation of the country, to drive economic growth, to act as a role model in that field and who can generally act as advocates for the country (EUROMED-Migration).*

The programme on Georgia’s High-Profile Diaspora Engagement was developed by the EU-funded ENIGMMA (Enhancing Georgia’s Migration Management) project team in 2015 and is a document outlining the framework of diaspora engagement and suggests specific actions to be implemented by the Department of Diaspora Relations of the MFA. The overall objective of the programme is to facilitate the engagement of high-profile diaspora members and migrants in Georgia’s development.

The specific programme objectives are to:

- Map, build and maintain a network of diaspora professionals in various fields of expertise;

- Develop and pilot framework activities which offer recognition of the professional achievements of high-profile diaspora members and migrants in fields such as science, sports, arts, culture, politics, business, education, etc., as well as their contributions to development in Georgia – suggested activity: Diaspora Awards;
- Strengthen ties between Georgia and Georgian youth residing abroad as a way of investing in future Georgian diaspora professionals in order to sustain their interest in Georgian life and developments taking place in Georgia.

The cornerstone of the programme is the ‘Diaspora Awards’ – an event that aims to recognise diaspora achievements and professional success abroad. The programme was built upon the experiences and successful practices of other countries such as Ireland (“Connect Ireland”), Lithuania (“Global Lithuanian Leaders”), Scotland (“Global Scot”), Portugal (“Portuguese Diaspora Council”), Israel and Australia. The programme takes into account the diversity of skills and backgrounds present in the Georgian diaspora and examines their potential contributions to Georgia’s development and positive image worldwide. Moreover, it seeks to recognise the achievements of Georgian champions abroad and in Georgia as well as their contributions to development in Georgia.

The aim of the High-Profile Diaspora Engagement Programme was twofold: to establish an annual event (Diaspora Awards) giving grounds for networking and facilitating communication among diaspora members and state officials and connecting diaspora professionals with similar interests, building a foundation for future networking and joint activities. The first Georgian Diaspora Awards took place in Tbilisi in 2017 which was a highly publicised event with involvement of high-level state officials and diaspora members from different countries. As a result, a network of diaspora professionals was created and the MFA was able to suggest further activities of network functioning in the form of policy advice, mentorship schemes for young Georgians abroad and in Georgia and joint publications and so on.

Inter-institutional Coordination

With the abolishment of the State Minister's Office for Diaspora Issues, the activities and responsibilities of the Consular Department of the MFA and the Department of Diaspora Relations became more harmonised. This has largely contributed to a prompt and structured exchange of information.

However, the gap remains in the regular coordination and structured information exchange among different state institutions. The Public Services Development Agency (PSDA) assists migrants with passport-related issues and other documentation issues and on inquiring about citizenship. In this regard, it needs to cooperate closely with the MFA on residence permits and citizenship issues since the consulates provide the same services abroad as the PSDA does in its regional units. The Department of Diaspora Relations of the MFA is also cooperating with the Ministry of Education, Science, Culture and Sport, mainly on matters of developing textbooks for weekend schools, the recognition of diplomas and more. The establishment of State Commission on Migration Issues (SCMI) and its Secretariat was a leap forward; however, the need for a systemic and structured approach is still persistent.

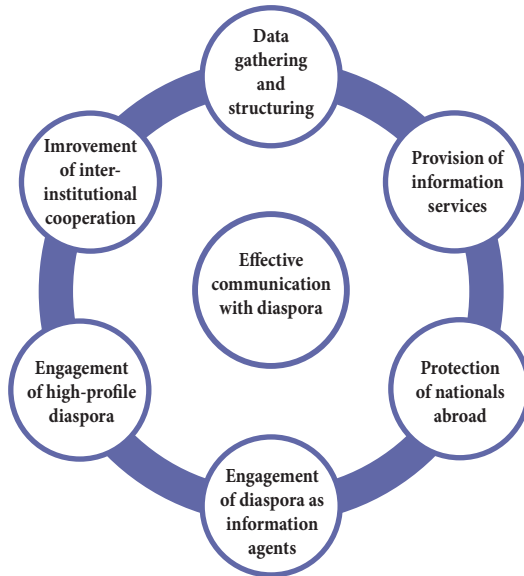
Despite the good working relations and professional contacts between all involved institutions as well as regular meetings within the framework of the State Commission on Migration Issues (SCMI), cooperation and exchange is mainly implemented on an ad hoc basis; that is, institutions approach one another when they need information in order to carry out a certain task.

CONCLUSION

In the modern world, in order to be able to fully adapt to the transnational reality, it is essential that the states develop and implement comprehensive diaspora strategies for engaging with their global citizens and networks. This paper argues that by establishing a systematised approach, gathering and analysing data, instituting

migration profiles and developing valid communication techniques, maximum progress can be achieved in attracting diaspora members for engagement in the development processes of the home country.

This paper outlines key measures and methods necessary for building trust, facilitating diaspora involvement and initiating engagement activities, projects and creation of diaspora networks leading to specific actions in the benefit of state, diaspora and home and host country societies. Therefore, effective communication with the diaspora needs to be implemented as a circle where both state and diaspora have responsibilities and both gain from this communication. For instance, if the diaspora is fully informed and the state takes care of trustful relations, the diaspora also provides correct information further to other migrants and, therefore, contributes to the achievement of the state's interests; respecting high-profile diaspora members and recognising their achievements leads to further engagement and so on.



The role of the government is to act as a facilitator rather than an implementer of activities. It has a pivotal role in giving its support, making clear to diaspora members that they are regarded as important and involving them as participants in meetings, networking events, mentorship schemes and policy making. The

administrative structure in Georgia, as well as the political situation and other factors that influence the formation of social movements including diaspora associations and migrant communities, strongly influences the ties between Georgian migrants, diaspora communities and the Georgian state. Authorities, such as the Department of Diaspora Relations of the MFA, recognise the positive role of Georgian migrants and diaspora communities abroad and aim to actively involve them. Although consular registrations continue being low, representatives of diaspora organisations are in regular contact with the consulates.

In addition to the potential of Georgian migrant and diaspora communities for the development of Georgia, their needs and challenges in terms of their human development and vulnerable situation in the destination countries are also important for consideration. Often their status, the non-existence of work permits and problems related to health insurance, put migrants and diaspora representatives in a vulnerable situation. These differences (also the differences within the diaspora communities) need to be taken into account when addressing the needs of Georgian migrant and diaspora communities and formulating effective policy measures.

It is equally important to look at the integration of migrants and diaspora communities and identify the specific situation they face in their destination country. Integration enables individuals to obtain the necessary resources to be actively engaged in the origin country and support other migrants in the residence country as was proven by activating diaspora members as information agents. Consequently, in order to support migrant and diaspora engagement in Georgia as well as promote Georgia, its language and cultural heritage, coherent and holistic policies need to be taken into account, including integration and engagement in the destination countries.

These conclusions show that there are several ways in which Georgian migrant and diaspora communities could be attracted to and engaged in the development in Georgia with the support of specific communication methods and tools as well as which aspects limit these developmental contributions. This paper also shows that a holistic approach is needed that facilitates the integration of migrants and diaspora members in the destination country and supports their engagement in the origin country as well as their promotion of Georgia, its language and culture.

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