

# Georgia as a Country of Origin



## About This Report

*Ridgeway Information and Stop The Traffik are providing Migration Drivers Reports on asylum-related migration to Europe for the European Union Agency for Asylum (EUAA).*

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*The reference period for this report includes the months April 2022 to July 2022. Reference may however also be made to developments in earlier periods to shed light on current trends. Some referenced articles may be behind a paywall. All sources are referenced and where possible primary references are used. All information presented, except for undisputed/ obvious facts, has been cross-checked, unless stated otherwise. The information provided has been researched, evaluated and analysed with utmost care within a limited time frame. However, this document does not pretend to be exhaustive. If a certain event, person or organisation is not mentioned in the report, this does not mean that the event has not taken place or that the person or organisation does not exist.*

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*Cover photo: Thousands gather for a pro-EU rally outside the Parliament of Georgia in Tbilisi, 20 June 2022 [Photographer: EvaL Miko, Shutterstock 2022].*

*Two interviews were conducted in the research for this report. These interviews are referenced as Interview 1 and Interview 2.*

*Interviewee 1 is a team co-ordinator working to promote integral human development in the Eastern Europe and Central Asia region, including through efforts to welcome and support the integration of migrants and refugees and aid victims of human trafficking.*

*Interview 2 was conducted as a focus group with a team working to support the Georgian government in understanding and responding to migration and its challenges. Focus group participants work on a range of migration related issues in Georgia such as emergency response, migration assistance, and the prevention of human trafficking.*

## Key Developments

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Over the first four months of 2022, EU+ countries experienced a 183 % increase in the number of asylum applications received from Georgian citizens when compared to the same period of 2021.<sup>1</sup> The main countries in which Georgians have submitted asylum claims remained unchanged compared to the previous year, with France, Germany and Italy receiving almost four fifths of all Georgian applications.<sup>2</sup> Nine in every 10 applications came from first-time applicants.<sup>3</sup>

Russia's invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 has had – and is predicted to continue to have – significant economic and socio-political impacts in Georgia. Year-on-year inflation is high in Georgia, at around 13 % in June 2022.<sup>4</sup> This has been driven by significant rises in the price of food and non-alcoholic beverages.<sup>5</sup> The unemployment rate has declined somewhat since it peaked in early 2021, but remained high at 19 % in the first quarter of 2022.<sup>6</sup> Following Russia's invasion of Ukraine, Georgia has received an inflow of an estimated 24 000 Ukrainian nationals, as well as 35 000 Russian and 15 000 Belarusian nationals.<sup>7</sup> This is reported to have contributed to rent prices in the capital Tbilisi reaching an all-time high in May 2022,<sup>8</sup> further impacting the cost of living in Georgia.

The invasion of Ukraine has been a key factor influencing the increase in Georgian nationals applying for international protection in the EU+. In the first quarter of 2022, 390 Georgian nationals were granted temporary protection status in EU+ countries.<sup>9</sup> Temporary protection is a special status available only to individuals who have been displaced due to Russia's invasion of Ukraine.<sup>10</sup> Temporary protection status was therefore the most common form of international protection granted to Georgian nationals in the first quarter of 2022, outnumbering the combined total of positive decisions granting refugee status (80), humanitarian status (160) and subsidiary protection status (35).<sup>11</sup>

There is no evidence of a widespread use by Georgian nationals of migrant smuggling networks between Georgia and the EU+.<sup>12</sup>

The self-declared breakaway regions of Abkhazia and the Tskhinvali Region/South Ossetia continue to remain outside the control of the Georgian government.<sup>13</sup> However, no significant developments in the security situation in these regions has been uncovered for the reporting period of April to July 2022.

In response to Georgia's application for membership to the European Union in March 2022, the European Commission made a number of recommendations to the European Council in June 2022.<sup>14</sup> The Commission outlined priority areas to be addressed in order for Georgia to be granted candidate status

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<sup>1</sup> Eurostat, *Asylum applicants by type of applicant, citizenship, age and sex – monthly data (rounded)*, 25 July 2022, accessed 25 July 2022.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Eurostat, *Asylum applicants by type of applicant, citizenship, age and sex – monthly data (rounded)*, 25 July 2022, accessed 25 July 2022.

<sup>4</sup> Geostat, *Inflation Rate in Georgia June 2022*, 4 July 2022, accessed 27 July 2022, p. 5.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Geostat, *Labour Force Indicators (quarterly)*, n.d., accessed 25 July 2022.

<sup>7</sup> United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, *Ukraine Refugee Situation*, 20 July 2022, accessed 1 August 2022; Jam News, *'Not enemies' – how Georgia welcomes emigrants from Russia and Belarus*, 14 April 2022, accessed 27 July 2022.

<sup>8</sup> Investor.ge, *TBC Capital: Tbilisi's residential real estate market stabilizes MoM, record high rental prices remain*, July 2022, accessed 25 July 2022.

<sup>9</sup> Eurostat, *First instance decisions on applications by citizenship, age and sex – quarterly data (rounded)*, 20 July 2022, accessed 25 July 2022.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.; European Commission, *Temporary protection*, n.d., accessed 25 July 2022.

<sup>11</sup> Eurostat, *First instance decisions on applications by citizenship, age and sex – quarterly data (rounded)*, 20 July 2022, accessed 25 July 2022.

<sup>12</sup> Interview 1, 14 July 2022; Interview 2, 21 July 2022.

<sup>13</sup> Firstpost, *All you need to know about Abkhazia and South Ossetia*, 22 February 2022, accessed 13 July 2022.

<sup>14</sup> European Commission, *Opinion on the EU membership application by Georgia*, 17 June 2022, accessed 26 July 2022.



to the EU, including improvements in the areas of anti-corruption, media freedom, and the protection of the human rights of vulnerable groups.<sup>15</sup>

There are widespread claims that pro-Kremlin former Prime Minister Bidzina Ivanishvili retains significant influence over the current government of Georgia despite holding no formal position.<sup>16</sup> Mass demonstrations in June and July 2022, attracting crowds of up to 35 000 people, have called for Ivanishvili 'to relinquish the executive power' he maintains in the country.<sup>17</sup>

Despite an alleged pro-Russia influence on the government of Georgia, the population of Georgia maintains significant pro-EU sentiments and support for Georgia joining the EU is high.<sup>18</sup>

## Migration Trends

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### Nature and Scale of Migration

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In the first four months of 2022 there were 8 075 applications for asylum submitted by Georgian citizens in EU+ countries.<sup>19</sup> This represents a 183 % increase on the number of applications received in the same period of 2021, when Georgians lodged a total of 2 855 applications in the EU+.<sup>20</sup> During the first four months of 2022, the majority of Georgian applications for asylum were received by three countries: France (2 725 applications, accounting for 34 % of total Georgian applications in the EU+ during this time period), Germany (2 455, 30 %) and Italy (1 100, 14 %).<sup>21</sup> This represented a similar distribution to 2021, when France (37 % of total Georgian applications during this time period), Germany (29 %) and Italy (9 %) were the three largest receiving countries for applications by Georgian nationals.<sup>22</sup>

In the first four months of 2022, Georgian applications in Ireland increased significantly compared to the same period of 2021.<sup>23</sup> In fact, Ireland received some 420 applications during this period, accounting for 5 % of all Georgian applications and making Ireland the fourth largest receiving country for Georgian applications in the EU+.<sup>24</sup> To add some perspective, in the same period of 2021, Ireland received just 25 applications from Georgian citizens, and a total of 335 (2 % of the total) for the full year.<sup>25</sup> The reasons for the increase in Georgian applications in Ireland is currently not clear, with the Irish Times newspaper reporting in July 2022 that the Irish Refugee Council are investigating the situation.<sup>26</sup> The increase in Georgian applications has occurred alongside an overall increase in asylum applications in Ireland in 2022, with senior sources in Government reported to have suggested that the UK Government's plan to transfer asylum seekers to Rwanda for processing is likely to have had a significant impact on the increase in applications in Ireland.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> EuroNews, *Tens of Thousands gather in pro-EU, anti-government demonstrations in Georgia*, 4 July 2022, accessed 26 July 2022; DW, *Georgia pro-EU protestors force meeting with PM*, 4 July 2022, accessed 26 July 2022; Financial Times, *Georgians turn against government after being put in EU accession slow lane*, 22 June 2022, accessed 26 July 2022.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> National Democratic Institute, *Taking Georgian's pulse: Findings from February and March 2022 Surveys, and March 2022 Focus Groups*, April 2022, accessed 26 July 2022.

<sup>19</sup> Eurostat, *Asylum applicants by type of applicant, citizenship, age and sex – monthly data (rounded)*, 25 July 2022, accessed 25 July 2022.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> The Irish Times, *Substantial increase in number of Georgian asylum seekers arriving in Ireland*, 30 July 2022, accessed 15 August 2022.

<sup>27</sup> The Irish Times, *UK asylum seekers-to-Rwanda policy partly behind 600 % hike in applications to Ireland*, 13 June 2022, accessed 15 August 2022.

During the first four months of 2022, Georgian applications rose considerably also in Belgium (315 versus 120 in the same period in 2021), making Belgium the fifth largest receiving country for Georgian applications. Conversely, in the same time period, Greece received fewer applications by Georgian nationals. In fact, Georgian applications in Greece dropped to 120 between January and April 2022 (versus 200 in the same period of 2021), and accounted for only 1 % of all Georgian applications during this time period).<sup>28</sup>

Of the 8 075 applications lodged by Georgians in EU+ countries between January and April 2022, 7 325 came from first-time applicants.<sup>29</sup> Some 91 % of Georgian asylum applications therefore came from first-time applicants between January and April 2022, compared to 76 % for the same period in 2021 and 85 % for the full year 2021.<sup>30</sup>

In the first quarter of 2022, 80 Georgian nationals were granted refugee status in the EU+, while a further 35 were afforded subsidiary protection.<sup>31</sup> Compared to the previous quarter, this represents a 23 % increase in the number of decisions granting refugee status and a 75 % increase in decisions granting subsidiary protection.<sup>32</sup>

In the first quarter of 2022, 390 Georgian nationals were granted temporary protection status in the EU+.<sup>33</sup> Temporary protection status was therefore the most common form of international protection granted to Georgian nationals in this period, outnumbering the combined total of positive refugee status, and subsidiary protection status decisions.<sup>34</sup>

In 2001, the Council of the European Union adopted a directive which established minimum standards for providing temporary protection in the event of a mass influx of displaced persons.<sup>35</sup> On 4 March 2022, the Council determined that the situation in Ukraine met the criteria established by the 2001 directive and Member States therefore enacted legislative measures to provide support to those fleeing Ukraine through the provision of temporary protection.<sup>36</sup> This was the first time that the directive on temporary protection was activated.<sup>37</sup> The March 2022 Council Decision states that temporary protection is to be given to Ukrainian nationals residing in Ukraine who are displaced by the Russian invasion as well as to third country nationals who were legally residing in Ukraine prior to 24 February 2022 and who are unable to return in safe and durable conditions to their country or region of origin.<sup>38</sup> This includes those who were benefitting from refugee status or equivalent protection in Ukraine.<sup>39</sup> The number of Georgians with refugee status in Ukraine is low: at the end of 2021, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) stated that there were a total of 25 Georgian refugees under UNHCR mandate in Ukraine, with Ukraine therefore hosting 0.3 % of the global Georgian refugee population in 2021.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> Eurostat, *Asylum applicants by type of applicant, citizenship, age and sex – monthly data (rounded)*, 25 July 2022, accessed 25 July 2022.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> Eurostat, *First instance decisions on applications by citizenship, age and sex – quarterly data (rounded)*, 20 July 2022, accessed 25 July 2022.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

<sup>35</sup> Council of the European Union, *Council Directive 2001/55/EC of 20 July 2001 on minimum standards for giving temporary protection in the event of a mass influx of displaced persons and on measures promoting a balance of efforts between Member States in receiving such persons and bearing the consequences thereof*, 7 August 2001, accessed 25 July 2022.

<sup>36</sup> Council of the European Union, *Council Implementing Decisions (EU) 2022/382 of 4 March 2022 establishing the existence of a mass influx of displaced persons from Ukraine within the meaning of Article 5 of Directive 2001/55/EC, and having the effect of introducing temporary protection*, 4 March 2022, accessed 25 July 2022.

<sup>37</sup> European Commission, *Temporary protection*, n.d., accessed 25 July 2022.

<sup>38</sup> Council of the European Union, *Council Implementing Decisions (EU) 2022/382 of 4 March 2022 establishing the existence of a mass influx of displaced persons from Ukraine within the meaning of Article 5 of Directive 2001/55/EC, and having the effect of introducing temporary protection*, 4 March 2022, accessed 25 July 2022.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

<sup>40</sup> United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, *Refugee Data Finder*, n.d., accessed 25 July 2022.

According to UNHCR, 88 % of Georgian refugees under UNHCR mandate resided in EU+ countries in 2021, mostly in France (5 760, accounting for 59 % of Georgian refugees worldwide), Germany (711, 7 %) and Italy (623, 6 %).<sup>41</sup>

According to the UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs 2020 International Migrant Stock, there were an estimated 65 475 Georgian migrants residing in Ukraine in mid-2020.<sup>42</sup> In 2020, of the 860 000 Georgian international migrants worldwide, 52 % (450 000) resided in the Russian Federation.<sup>43</sup> There were approximately 180 000 Georgian international migrants in EU+ countries in mid-2020, with the EU+ therefore hosting an estimated 21 % of Georgian global migrants.<sup>44</sup> The EU+ countries with the highest number of Georgian migrants were Greece (85 065, accounting for 10 % of the Georgian international migrant stock), Germany (25 387, 3 %), Italy (15 813, 2 %), Cyprus (15 201, 2 %), Spain (11 824, 1 %) and France (8 673, 1 %).<sup>45</sup>

As some Georgian nationals leave Ukraine following the Russian invasion, there has also been a significant amount of Ukrainian nationals travelling to Georgia. In the period between 24 February 2022 and 26 July 2022, official statistics record 24 296 individual refugees from Ukraine in Georgia.<sup>46</sup> Georgia experienced an additional inflow of approximately 35 000 Russian and 15 000 Belarusian nationals in the month following Russia's invasion of Ukraine.<sup>47</sup> Between March 2022 and June 2022, 135 000 Russian citizens have entered Georgia, which is a 355 % increase compared to the same time period last year.<sup>48</sup>

There were an estimated 304 925 internally displaced persons (IDPs) due to conflict and violence in Georgia at the end of 2021, with a small increase of 1 400 IDPs from 2020.<sup>49</sup> In June 2021, the UN General Assembly adopted a resolution<sup>50</sup> recognising the right of return for IDPs, refugees, and their descendants 'to their homes throughout Georgia, including in the self-declared breakaway regions of Abkhazia and the Tskhinvali region/South Ossetia'.<sup>51</sup> Much of these IDPs are the result of the Russo-Georgian war of 2008.<sup>52</sup>

The vast majority of Georgian migrants travelling to the EU+ do so using regular means, as evidenced by the low number of detections of Georgian nationals illegally crossing EU borders.<sup>53</sup> Frontex reported a total of 19 detections of Georgians between January and May 2022.<sup>54</sup> The majority of these detections occurred along the Eastern Mediterranean and Western Balkan land routes into the EU.<sup>55</sup> Georgian

<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

<sup>42</sup> United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, *International Migrant Stock 2020 [Destination and origin]*, 2020, accessed 25 July 2022.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid. No data available for Croatia.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

<sup>46</sup> United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, *Ukraine Refugee Situation*, 20 July 2022, accessed 1 August 2022.

<sup>47</sup> Jam News, *'Not enemies' – how Georgia welcomes emigrants from Russia and Belarus*, 14 April 2022, accessed 27 July 2022.

<sup>48</sup> Jam News, *More than 135,000 Russian citizens entered Georgia in June*, 28 July 2022, accessed 9 August 2022.

<sup>49</sup> Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre, *Georgia Country Profile*, 15 December 2021, accessed 27 July 2022.

<sup>50</sup> UN General Assembly, *Status of internally displaced persons and refugees from Abkhazia, Georgia, and the Tskhinvali region/South Ossetia, Georgia*, 16 June 2021, accessed 9 August 2022.

<sup>51</sup> United Nations, *General Assembly Adopts Resolution Recognizing Right of Return for Georgia's Displaced Person, Refugees, Deferring Action on Security Council Reform*, 16 June 2021, accessed 27 July 2022.

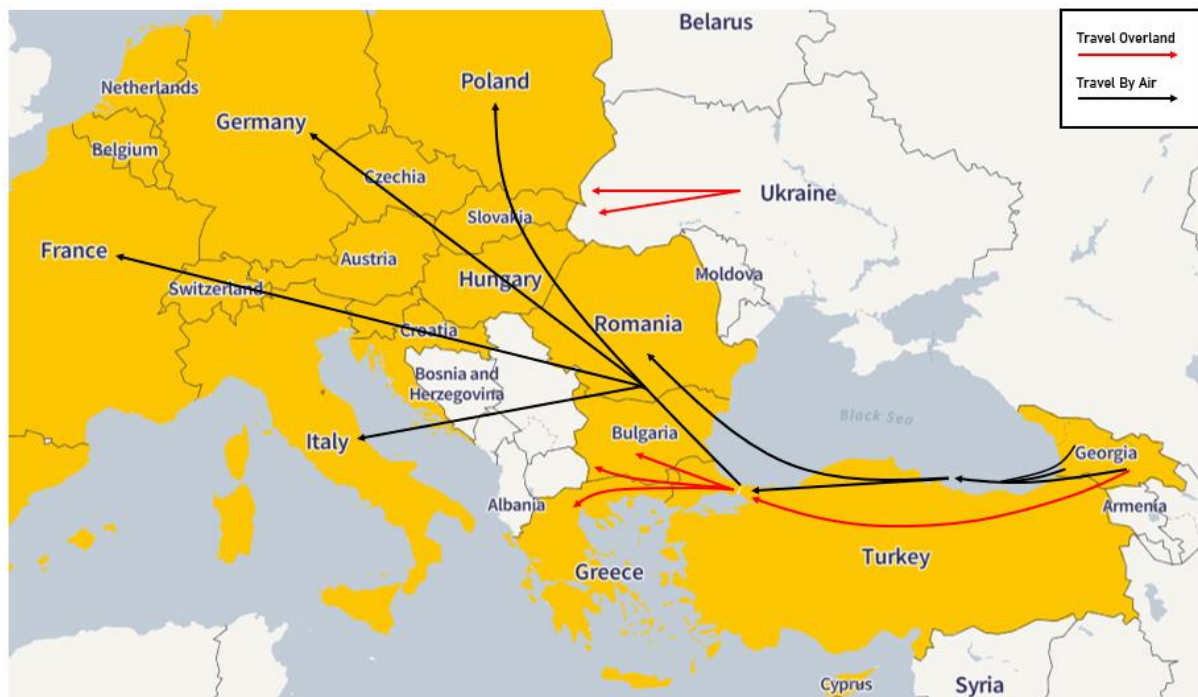
<sup>52</sup> UN General Assembly, *Status of internally displaced persons and refugees from Abkhazia, Georgia, and the Tskhinvali region/South Ossetia, Georgia*, 21 May 2021, accessed 9 August 2022; The Borgen Project, *The Problem Of Internally Displaced Persons In Georgia*, 21 July 2021, accessed 9 August 2022.

<sup>53</sup> Frontex, *Detections of illegal border-crossings statistics download (updated monthly)*, 4 July 2022, accessed 25 July 2022.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid.

citizens therefore accounted for 0.02 % of detections in the first five months of 2022, representing no change on the proportion of total detections attributed to Georgian nationals in 2021.<sup>56</sup>



**Figure 1:** Routes taken by Georgian migrants. Sources: Interview 1, Interview 2, UN, Georgian Airports, Visiting Georgia

Georgians who have migrated abroad are understood to often display aspirations of returning home rather than settling long-term in their host countries.<sup>57</sup> As noted by experts interviewed for this report, there are significant numbers of returnees to Georgia comprising a varied demographic profile, such as labour migrants who have achieved their objectives, young people who return home after finishing studies abroad, and failed asylum seekers who see no opportunity to continue their stay abroad.<sup>58</sup>

## Routes and Modes of Transport

### Regular Migration

Travelling to the EU is relatively accessible to Georgians by means of plane and bus. There are three international airports operational in Georgia: Tbilisi International Airport, Kutaisi International Airport and Batumi International Airport.<sup>59</sup> Tbilisi and Kutaisi airports service routes to several EU countries, including Austria, Belgium, Czech Republic, France, Germany, Greece, Italy, Latvia, the Netherlands, Poland, Romania and Spain.<sup>60</sup> Batumi's only direct flight to the EU is to Poland.<sup>61</sup> Experts interviewed for this report note that migrants from Georgia commonly enter destination countries in Europe by direct flights or by transiting through major airport hubs such as Istanbul and, until recently, Kyiv.<sup>62</sup>

<sup>56</sup> Ibid.

<sup>57</sup> Interview 1, 14 July 2022; Interview 2, 21 July 2022.

<sup>58</sup> Interview 2, 21 July 2022.

<sup>59</sup> United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees – Georgia, *Protection for arrivals from Ukraine*, n.d., accessed 26 July 2022.

<sup>60</sup> Tbilisi airport, *Airport Route Map*, n.d., accessed 26 July 2022; Flightradar24, *Kutaisi routes and destinations*, n.d., accessed 26 July 2022.

<sup>61</sup> Batumi airport, *Airport Route Map*, n.d., accessed 26 July 2022.

<sup>62</sup> Interview 2, 21 July 2022.

Centrally located in Tbilisi, the Ortachala bus terminal provides services to a number of international destinations; Athens and Thessaloniki in Greece are the only EU destinations.<sup>63</sup>

### *Irregular Migration*

Experts interviewed for this report stated that a small number of Georgians who struggle to maintain decent living conditions in the country use irregular means to travel to the EU and apply for asylum in EU countries, in order to improve their prospects and develop future opportunities.<sup>64</sup> As noted by experts, these persons may not necessarily have well-defined, long-term objectives and are driven by the short-term goal of improving the difficult situation they face in their home country.<sup>65</sup> Nonetheless, irregular migration from Georgia to the EU+ remains uncommon and no significant information on the routes or modes of transport that are used by Georgian migrants to irregularly enter the EU+ were identified in the research for this report.

## **Profile of Migrants Targeting the EU+**

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In the first quarter of 2022, 42 % of EU+ asylum applications from Georgian nationals were submitted by female applicants.<sup>66</sup> This represents an increase in the proportion of female applications in comparison to 2021, during which time 39 % of Georgian applications for EU+ asylum were submitted by female applicants.<sup>67</sup> The age profile of Georgian asylum applicants in the first quarter of 2022 has remained the same as in 2021, with 22 % of applicants under the age of 18; 35 % of applicants between the ages of 18 and 24; 41 % of applicants between the ages of 25 and 34; and 1 % of applicants over the age of 35.<sup>68</sup>

In 2021, Georgian children had a higher rejection rate for international protection in the EU than any other nationality.<sup>69</sup> Some 96 % of child asylum applications in EU countries were rejected, while 2 % received subsidiary protection status, 1 % received protection under the Geneva Convention and 1 % received humanitarian protection status.<sup>70</sup> As of 26 July 2022, none of the Georgian children granted temporary protection status in EU+ countries have been classified as unaccompanied minors.<sup>71</sup> One possible explanation for this is that Georgia is classified as a 'Safe Country of Origin'.<sup>72</sup>

Experts interviewed for this report stated that the characteristics of Georgians migrating abroad typically differ by region of origin, with individuals from the south-western regions of Adjara (Achara) and Guria commonly involved in labour migration to Turkey, while those migrating from urban areas such as Tbilisi, Rustavi and Kutaisi generally display more varied and complex migration patterns, often focusing on EU countries for employment, study and asylum-related purposes.<sup>73</sup>

One interviewee for this report stated that they believe skilled professionals to be one of the main groups to have left Georgia in recent years, with their decision making influenced by the deterioration of rights and freedoms in the country.<sup>74</sup>

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<sup>63</sup> Visiting Georgia, *International Buses*, n.d., accessed 26 July 2022.

<sup>64</sup> Interview 2, 21 July 2022.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid.

<sup>66</sup> Eurostat, *Asylum applicants by type of applicant, citizenship, age and sex – monthly data (rounded)*, 25 July 2022, accessed 26 July 2022.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid.

<sup>69</sup> United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, United Nations Children's Fund, International Organization for Migration, *Refugee and Migrant Children in Europe – Accompanied, Unaccompanied and Separated. Overview of Trends January to December 2021*, 21 July 2022, accessed 26 July 2022, p. 5.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid.

<sup>71</sup> Eurostat, *First instance decisions granting temporary protection to unaccompanied minors by citizenship, age and sex – monthly data (rounded)*, 26 July 2022, accessed 26 July 2022.

<sup>72</sup> EUAA, *Safe country of origin' concept in EU+ Countries: Situation Update*, 9 June 2021, accessed 9 August 2022.

<sup>73</sup> Interview 2, 21 July 2022.

<sup>74</sup> Interview 1, 14 July 2022.



## Push Factors

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### Political and Security Situation

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No significant conflict or political violence has taken place in Georgia this year. The self-declared breakaway regions of Abkhazia and the Tskhinvali region/South Ossetia continue to remain outside the control of the Georgian government, as they have been since the early 1990s.<sup>75</sup> In March 2022, shortly after Russia's invasion of Ukraine, an anonymous online video of armed men was posted in which they advocated for the violent recapture of Abkhazia and the Tskhinvali region/South Ossetia.<sup>76</sup> The video has been dismissed by some as an intentional provocation.<sup>77</sup> Russia still has an estimated 8 000 troops in the regions.<sup>78</sup> The video remains significant, however, as it demonstrates the nature of potential misinformation likely to be employed within the country following Russia's invasion of Ukraine.<sup>79</sup> Georgia continues to be committed to seeking peaceful resolutions to the occupations.<sup>80</sup>

The newly elected de facto president of the Tskhinvali region/South Ossetia, Alan Gagloev, announced on 31 May that the referendum planned by his predecessor for 17 July to join Russia was postponed.<sup>81</sup>

Domestically, Georgia has been politically challenged. The Georgian Dream political party won the October 2020 elections which were, however, staunchly contested by opposition parties, leading to months of political paralysis.<sup>82</sup> A deal mediated by the EU in April 2021 between the Georgian Dream and opposition parties appeared promising, though the ruling Georgian Dream pulled out in July 2021.<sup>83</sup>

Mass demonstrations took place in Georgia in June and July 2022, including a gathering of an estimated 120 000 people on 20 June to express support for the country's EU ambitions.<sup>84</sup> An estimated 35 000 demonstrators gathered outside the parliament on 3 July to call for the government to resign due to its failure to obtain EU candidate status.<sup>85</sup> Protestors have called for former Prime Minister and founder of the ruling Georgian Dream party, Bidzina Ivanishvili, to relinquish the executive power he maintains in the country.<sup>86</sup> Ivanishvili is understood to be the richest man in Georgia and is widely believed to maintain control over the government despite having no official political position.<sup>87</sup> As of June 2022, at least four cabinet members were close associates of Ivanishvili, including Prime Minister Irakli Garibashvili.<sup>88</sup> The Shame Movement, a pro-democracy civil society group, has mobilised, been present, or helped organise these protests.<sup>89</sup>

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<sup>75</sup> Firstpost, *All you need to know about Abkhazia and South Ossetia*, 22 February 2022, accessed 13 July 2022.

<sup>76</sup> Radio Liberty, *In Georgia, Calls Emerge To Retake South Ossetia, Abkhazia*, 10 March 2022, accessed 13 July 2022.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid.

<sup>79</sup> Chatham House, *Georgia must bolster resilience to information warfare*, 14 March 2022, accessed 9 August 2022.

<sup>80</sup> Eurasianet, *Calls for Georgia to open a "second front" against Russia fall flat*, 10 May 2022, accessed 9 August 2022.

<sup>81</sup> DW, *South Ossetia shelves plan for referendum to join Russia*, 31 May 2022, accessed 13 July 2022.

<sup>82</sup> Eurasianet, *U.S., Europe start to play hardball with Georgia*, 19 April 2021, accessed 13 July 2022.

<sup>83</sup> Eurasianet, *Georgian ruling party walks out on critical political agreement*, 28 July 2021, accessed 13 July 2022.

<sup>84</sup> The Economist, *Why is Georgia struggling to join the EU?*, 6 July 2022, accessed 26 July 2022.

<sup>85</sup> EuroNews, *Tens of Thousands gather in pro-EU, anti-government demonstrations in Georgia*, 4 July 2022, accessed 26 July 2022; DW, *Georgia pro-EU protestors force meeting with PM*, 4 July 2022, accessed 26 July 2022; Financial Times, *Georgians turn against government after being put in EU accession slow lane*, 22 June 2022, accessed 26 July 2022.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid.

<sup>88</sup> European Parliament, *Motion for a resolution on violations of media freedom and safety of journalists in Georgia*, 7 June 2022, accessed 26 July 2022.

<sup>89</sup> Radio Liberty, *Protesters In Tbilisi Decry Georgian Government's Inadequate Support For Ukraine*, 1 March 2022, accessed 13 July 2022; DW, *Tens of thousands rally to defend Georgia's European future*, 21 June 2022, accessed 13 July 2022; Radio Liberty, *Georgia's Shame Movement Is Getting Protesters Out On The Streets. But Is It Enough To Trouble The Government?*, 1 July 2022, accessed 13 July 2022.

The European Parliament expressed concern over Ivanishvili's personal and business links to the Kremlin in June 2022 and the subsequent impact that this has had on the Georgian government's stance on Russia following the invasion of Ukraine.<sup>90</sup> The European Parliament therefore called on the Council of Europe to consider imposing personal sanctions on former Prime Minister Ivanishvili, citing his influence on the decision not to implement sanctions against Russia and to continue an ambiguous relationship with the country as well as his alleged role in the deterioration of media freedom in Georgia.<sup>91</sup>

## Human Rights

In 2022, Georgia was given a score of 58 out of 100 and classified as 'partly free' by Freedom House.<sup>92</sup> The country was also ranked 89 out of 180 countries and territories in the Reporters sans Frontières (RSF) 2022 World Press Freedom Index.<sup>93</sup> This represents a significant decline from 2021, when Georgia was ranked 60 out of 180.<sup>94</sup> A 2021 report by the United States Department of State highlighted that within Georgia, there were credible reports of 'serious problems with the independence of the judiciary along with arbitrary or selective detentions, investigations, and prosecutions widely considered to be politically motivated; unlawful interference with privacy; violence and threats of violence against journalists; limited respect for freedom of peaceful assembly and association; and crimes involving violence or threats targeting lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, and intersex persons and activists.'<sup>95</sup>

RSF noted in the 2022 index that efforts undertaken to improve press freedom have been undermined by official interference and that physical assaults on journalists increased significantly in 2021.<sup>96</sup> Notably, 50 media workers were brutally assaulted by radical groups who were taking part in homophobic counter-demonstrations during Georgia's Pride march in July 2021.<sup>97</sup> One person was killed and several more were injured.<sup>98</sup> The incident was condemned by the Prime Minister; however, 'none of its organisers were brought to justice.'<sup>99</sup>

Under Georgian law, political parties are not permitted to own media outlets, although owners 'often have close ties to political leaders'.<sup>100</sup> Media criticism of authorities is reportedly responded to 'with censorship, raids and intimidation'.<sup>101</sup> On 7 June 2022, the European Parliament published a resolution on violations of media freedom and the safety of journalists in Georgia, stating that the Parliament had serious concerns about the 'aggressive rhetoric and discriminatory treatment towards the media representatives by members of the Georgian government and of the ruling party', and noting that there is an ongoing 'divisive rhetoric' from the Georgian Dream party that 'weakens Georgia's resilience'.<sup>102</sup> The *Strengthening Media freedom, Internet governance and Personal data protection in Georgia* project, run by the Council of Europe, held a meeting to discuss freedom of expression and professional regulation of the media in July 2022.<sup>103</sup>

<sup>90</sup> Ibid.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid.

<sup>92</sup> Freedom House, *Georgia*, 2022, accessed 10 August 2022.

<sup>93</sup> Reporters Without Borders, *Georgia*, 3 May 2022, accessed 26 July 2022.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid.

<sup>95</sup> US Department of State, *Georgia 2021 Human Rights Report*, 2021, accessed 10 August 2022.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid., European Parliament, *Motion for a resolution on violations of media freedom and safety of journalists in Georgia*, 7 June 2022, accessed 26 July 2022.

<sup>98</sup> European Parliament, *Motion for a resolution on violations of media freedom and safety of journalists in Georgia*, 7 June 2022, accessed 26 July 2022.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid.

<sup>100</sup> Reporters Without Borders, *Georgia*, 3 May 2022, accessed 26 July 2022.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid.

<sup>102</sup> European Parliament, *European Parliament resolution of 9 June 2022 on violations of media freedom and the safety of journalists in Georgia (2022/2702(RSP))*, 9 June 2022, accessed 9 August 2022; European Parliament, *Motion for a resolution on violations of media freedom and safety of journalists in Georgia*, 7 June 2022, accessed 26 July 2022.

<sup>103</sup> Georgia Today, *Georgia's Progress this Week on Fulfilling the EU's 12-Point Recommendations*, 21 July 2022, accessed 25 July 2022.

Human rights concerns are also reflected in the June 2022 recommendations by the European Commission to the European Council concerning the Georgian application for EU membership, outlining the political and economic criteria to be addressed in order for Georgia to be granted candidate status to the EU.<sup>104</sup> Among others, the European Commission recommended for Georgia to increase efforts ‘to guarantee a free, professional, pluralistic and independent media environment’ and to make immediate efforts ‘to strengthen the protection of human rights of vulnerable groups’.<sup>105</sup> Georgia has been given until the end of 2022 to implement the recommended reforms.<sup>106</sup>

Human Rights Center, a Georgian non-governmental organisation working for the protection and promotion of human rights in Georgia, reported in May 2022 that they were monitoring 21 criminal cases in the general courts of Georgia that are alleged to be politically motivated.<sup>107</sup> The imprisonment of pro-opposition media owner Nika Gvaramia represents a high profile example of the government’s alleged suppression of free speech and political expression.<sup>108</sup> On 16 May 2022 Gvaramia was sentenced to three and a half years in prison for abusing his position as owner and director of pro-opposition news channel Mtavari TV.<sup>109</sup> The sentencing has been described by human rights organisation Amnesty International and a number of other non-governmental organisations as a politically motivated act designed to suppress dissenting views and government criticism.<sup>110</sup> Gvaramia had previously worked as a lawyer for former President Mikhail Saakashvili.<sup>111</sup>

The former President Saakashvili left Georgia after his second presidential term concluded in 2012, however was sentenced in absentia to six years in prison for alleged abuse of power during his presidency in June 2018.<sup>112</sup> Saakashvili’s supporters claim that the charges against him are politically motivated.<sup>113</sup> Saakashvili returned to Georgia in October 2021 to urge Georgians to vote in the upcoming elections and was subsequently arrested.<sup>114</sup> Between October 2021 and March 2022, Saakashvili has spent 70 days on hunger strike, with doctors warning in May 2022 that the former president was in danger of dying if he did not receive proper medical care.<sup>115</sup> The European Court of Human Rights subsequently ruled in November 2021 that Georgia must ensure Saakashvili’s safety and provide him with appropriate medical care.<sup>116</sup>

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<sup>104</sup> European Commission, *Opinion on the EU membership application by Georgia*, 17 June 2022, accessed 26 July 2022.

<sup>105</sup> Ibid.

<sup>106</sup> Ibid., VOA News, *Georgians Hold Mass Rally for EU, Urge Government to Quit*, 3 July 2022, accessed 26 July 2022.

<sup>107</sup> Human Rights Center, *Human Rights Center monitors 21 cases with Alleged Political Motives*, 25 May 2022, accessed 26 July 2022.

<sup>108</sup> European Parliament, *Motion for a resolution on violations of media freedom and safety of journalists in Georgia*, 7 June 2022, accessed 26 July 2022; Amnesty, *Georgia: Sentencing of pro-opposition media owner Nika Gvaramia a political motivated silencing of dissenting voice*, 17 May 2022, accessed 26 July 2022.

<sup>109</sup> Amnesty, *Georgia: Sentencing of pro-opposition media owner Nika Gvaramia a political motivated silencing of dissenting voice*, 17 May 2022, accessed 26 July 2022.

<sup>110</sup> Ibid; Human Rights Center, *Statement of Non-Governmental Organizations Regarding the Arrest of Nika Gvaramia*, 18 May 2022, accessed 26 July 2022.

<sup>111</sup> Amnesty, *Georgia: Sentencing of pro-opposition media owner Nika Gvaramia a political motivated silencing of dissenting voice*, 17 May 2022, accessed 26 July 2022.

<sup>112</sup> Reuters, *Georgian ex-president sentenced in absentia for abuse of power*, 28 June 2018, accessed 26 July 2022.

<sup>113</sup> Ibid.

<sup>114</sup> Politico, *Former Georgian President Mikheil Saakashvili arrested on eve of election*, 1 October 2021, accessed 26 July 2022; Independent, *Jailed Georgian ex-president faces court*, 29 November 2021, accessed 26 July 2022.

<sup>115</sup> EuroNews, *Mikheil Saakashvili: Ex-Georgian President in danger of death, warn doctors*, 17 May 2022, accessed 26 July 2022.

<sup>116</sup> Al Jazeera, *Georgia’s jailed ex-leader Saakashvili ends 50-day hunger strike*, 20 November 2021, accessed 26 July 2022.

One expert interviewed for this report cited the pro-Russia policies of the current government and the current human right situation in Georgia as notable push factors for Georgians who choose to leave the country.<sup>117</sup>

## Economic Situation

In an economic update published in April 2022, the World Bank predicted that Georgia's economy, which is closely linked with Russia's, will be negatively impacted by Russia's invasion of Ukraine through the impact that the war will have on trade, remittances, foreign direct investment, commodity prices and logistics.<sup>118</sup>

In June 2022 the annual inflation rate amounted to 13 %, a slight decrease from the peak annual inflation rate of 14 % witnessed in December 2021 and January 2022.<sup>119</sup> The high annual inflation rate was primarily influenced by an increase in the cost of food and non-alcoholic beverages.<sup>120</sup> The year-on-year increase in this group was 22 % in June 2022, with significant annual increases in bread and cereals (+ 35 %), vegetables (+ 33 %), fruit (+ 32 %), mineral waters, soft drinks and juices (+ 24 %), milk, cheese and eggs (+ 20 %), coffee, tea and cocoa (+ 18 %), fish (+ 18 %), sugar, jam, honey, chocolate and confectionary (+ 16 %), oils and fats (+ 15 %) and meat (+ 11 %).<sup>121</sup> Other groups also experienced significant year-on-year increases, including transport (+ 19 %) and housing, water, electricity, gas and other fuels (+ 13 %).<sup>122</sup> The National Bank of Georgia increased the monetary policy rate from 10.5 % to 11.0 % in March 2022 and has retained a monetary policy rate of 11.0 % as of 22 June 2022.<sup>123</sup>

The National Statistics Office of Georgia, Geostat, reported that in June 2022 the subsistence minimum – the minimum level of income needed to ensure basic needs are met – was 226 GEL per month.<sup>124</sup> This is equivalent to approximately 74 EUR.<sup>125</sup> The subsistence minimum increased by 13 % over the first six months of 2022 and by 19 % in the year preceding June 2022.<sup>126</sup>

Following Russia's invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, there has been a significant inflow of people from Ukraine, Belarus and Russia to Tbilisi.<sup>127</sup> This had an impact on housing demand and rental prices. In March 2022, the average rental price in Tbilisi increased by 20 % compared to the previous month, with a further monthly increase of 22 % in April 2022.<sup>128</sup> By May, the monthly increase rate had slowed, however rental prices remained at an all-time high with a 101 % year-on-year increase compared to May 2021.<sup>129</sup>

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<sup>117</sup> Interview 1, 14 July 2022.

<sup>118</sup> World Bank, *Georgia Macro Poverty Outlook*, April 2022, accessed 26 July 2022.

<sup>119</sup> Geostat, *Inflation Rate in Georgia June 2022*, 4 July 2022, accessed 27 July 2022, p. 5.

<sup>120</sup> Ibid., p. 4.

<sup>121</sup> Ibid., p. 4.

<sup>122</sup> Ibid., p. 4.

<sup>123</sup> National Bank of Georgia, *საქართველოს ეროვნული ბანკი მონეტარული პოლიტიკის განაკვეთს 0.5 პროცენტული პუნქტით 11.0 პროცენტამდე ზრდის* [The National Bank of Georgia increases the monetary policy rate by 0.5 percentage points to 11.0 percent], 30 March 2022, accessed 27 July 2022; National Bank of Georgia, *საქართველოს ეროვნული ბანკი მონეტარული პოლიტიკის განაკვეთს უცვლელად 11.0 პროცენტზე ტოვებს* [The National Bank of Georgia leaves the monetary policy rate unchanged at 11.0 percent], 22 June 2022, accessed 27 July 2022.

<sup>124</sup> Geostat, *Subsistence Minimum*, July 2022, accessed 25 July 2022.

<sup>125</sup> European Commission, *Exchange rate (InforEuro)*, n.d., accessed 29 July 2022. Calculated using the June 2022 GEL/EUR exchange rate of 0.326.

<sup>126</sup> Geostat, *Subsistence Minimum* July 2022, accessed 25 July 2022.

<sup>127</sup> United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, *Ukraine Refugee Situation*, 20 July 2022, accessed 26 July 2022; Jam News, *'Not enemies' – how Georgia welcomes emigrants from Russia and Belarus*, 14 April 2022, accessed 27 July 2022; Investor.ge, *TBC Capital: Tbilisi's residential real estate market stabilizes MoM, record high rental prices remain*, July 2022, accessed 25 July 2022.

<sup>128</sup> Investor.ge, *TBC Capital: Tbilisi's residential real estate market stabilizes MoM, record high rental prices remain*, July 2022, accessed 25 July 2022.

<sup>129</sup> Ibid.





The Georgian Lari (GEL) has strengthened against the US Dollar and the Euro since its depreciation in late February and early March 2022.<sup>130</sup> As of 27 July, official data from the National Bank of Georgia places the USD/GEL exchange rate at approximately 2.79, compared to a period average of 3.11 for the first quarter of 2022.<sup>131</sup> As of 27 July 2022, the EUR/GEL exchange rate was 2.83 according to the National Bank of Georgia, compared to a period average of 3.49 for the first quarter of 2022.<sup>132</sup>

It is common for Georgian migrants, notably labour migrants, to maintain strong connections with Georgia and to send remittances to sustain their families back home.<sup>133</sup> Remittance inflows to Georgia have increased significantly in the second quarter of 2022.<sup>134</sup> According to data published by the National Bank of Georgia, remittance inflows reached EUR 1.18 billion in the second quarter of 2022, peaking in May with a monthly inflow of nearly EUR 483 million.<sup>135</sup> This represented a 169 % increase compared to May 2021.<sup>136</sup> Incoming remittances decreased somewhat in June 2022 to EUR 417 million, however remained well above previous levels: the monthly average inflow for the year 2021 was EUR 191 million.<sup>137</sup> Some 54 % of incoming remittances came from Russia in June 2022 and increases in remittances from Russia were the primary driver of the sharp increase in inflows to Georgia in the second quarter of 2022.<sup>138</sup> Remittances from Russia increased by 393 % month-on-month in April 2022, from EUR 26 million to EUR 129 million, with a further 136 % increase to EUR 306 million in May 2022.<sup>139</sup> Remittances from Russia decreased somewhat to EUR 225 million in June 2022, however remained well above previous levels.<sup>140</sup> Money transfers from Russia accounted for 13 % of total remittance inflows to Georgia in the first quarter of 2022 and 55 % in the second quarter of 2022.<sup>141</sup> In June 2022, 20 % of remittances into Georgia came from EU countries, notably Italy (EUR 35 million, accounting for 8 % of total remittance inflows), Greece (EUR 18 million, 4 %) and Germany (EUR 14 million, 3 %).<sup>142</sup> Data published by the National Bank of Georgia records only money transfers from abroad through official channels and does not contain estimates of other informal or in-kind payments.<sup>143</sup> While the reason for the increase in remittances from Russia is not known, it is therefore possible that such increases are impacted by changes in the way that people send money as well as potential increases in the overall amount sent.

Foreign direct investment in Georgia amounted to EUR 555 million in the first quarter of 2022, representing a 78 % increase in comparison to the same period of 2021.<sup>144</sup>

In the first quarter of 2022, the unemployment rate in Georgia was 19 %, with a total of 289 600 persons registered as unemployed.<sup>145</sup> The unemployment rate has been decreasing over the previous year, since a high of 22 % was reached in the first and second quarter of 2021.<sup>146</sup> Unemployment is significantly

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<sup>130</sup> National Bank of Georgia, *Official exchange rate of Lari against foreign currencies*, 27 July 2022, accessed 27 July 2022.

<sup>131</sup> Ibid.; Geostat, *Official Lari Exchange Rates to US Dollar and Euro*, 2022, accessed 27 July 2022.

<sup>132</sup> Ibid.

<sup>133</sup> Interview 2, 21 July 2022.

<sup>134</sup> National Bank of Georgia, *Money Transfers*, n.d., accessed 26 July 2022. USD to EUR conversion calculated using May 2022 average conversion rate as published by: European Commission, Exchange Rate (InforEuro), accessed 15 August 2022.

<sup>135</sup> Ibid.

<sup>136</sup> Ibid.

<sup>137</sup> Ibid.

<sup>138</sup> Ibid.

<sup>139</sup> Ibid.

<sup>140</sup> Ibid.

<sup>141</sup> Ibid.

<sup>142</sup> Ibid.

<sup>143</sup> Ibid.

<sup>144</sup> Civil Georgia, *Q1'22 FDI USD 568.2, Up by 78 %*, 10 June 2022, accessed 27 July 2022.

<sup>145</sup> Geostat, *Labour Force Indicators (quarterly)*, n.d., accessed 25 July 2022.

<sup>146</sup> Ibid.



higher among youth in Georgia, with an annual unemployment rate of 52 % in the 15-19 age range and 41 % in the 20-24 age range in 2021.<sup>147</sup>

In a March 2022 survey of 2 024 Georgians, 81 % stated that they believe the war in Ukraine would negatively affect their family's economic well-being.<sup>148</sup> Experts interviewed for this report cited economic factors as a key driver for migration from Georgia to the EU, with Georgians seeking to improve their socio-economic conditions by seeking employment in the EU. Furthermore, many students migrate to the EU for study purposes, which enables them to enhance their professional career opportunities back in Georgia.<sup>149</sup>

## Enabling Factors

### Ease of Travel

Georgian nationals who hold biometric passports do not need a visa to enter most EU+ countries, including countries in the Schengen Zone and the non-Schengen EU+ countries of Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus and Romania.<sup>150</sup> Georgian passport holders can remain in these countries for up to 90 days in any 180-day period without a visa.<sup>151</sup> Ireland is the only EU+ country for which Georgians require a visa.<sup>152</sup>

As noted by experts interviewed for this report, Georgian nationals are generally understood to be aware of the migration and asylum policies of individual EU countries as well as of the rules for visa-free travel and the pre-departure checks that Georgian citizens must undergo when embarking on Schengen-bound flights.<sup>153</sup> Georgians reportedly make active use of dedicated private Facebook pages where they can exchange information about opportunities as well as gaps in immigration systems, changes in immigration legislation and ways to circumvent Georgia's pre-departure checks.<sup>154</sup>

Experts interviewed for this report state that document brokers, who produce fake documents such as employment certificates or documents supporting asylum claims in exchange for money, are in high demand in Georgia.<sup>155</sup> Since January 2021, the government of Georgia has implemented pre-departure checks on outbound flights to countries in the Schengen zone, which experts claim has increased the demand for official employment invitation letters issued by Polish employers.<sup>156</sup> Such letters are understood to be used by some Georgian citizens to enter the EU+ in order to move to other Schengen countries.<sup>157</sup> Despite a reported high demand on these services, the use of fraudulent documents to travel from Georgia to EU+ countries is believed to remain relatively uncommon.<sup>158</sup>

Since Georgians typically travel between Georgia and the EU+ using regular migration routes, the cost of migration is typically dependent on the cost of flights. The use of document brokers can, however, increase the total cost of migration to the EU+ significantly (by as much as 400 %).<sup>159</sup>

<sup>147</sup> Geostat, *Unemployment rate by age groups in 2021*, n.d., accessed 27 July 2022.

<sup>148</sup> National Democratic Institute, *Taking Georgian's pulse: Findings from February and March 2022 Surveys, and March 2022 Focus Groups*, April 2022, accessed 26 July 2022, p. 41.

<sup>149</sup> Interview 2, 21 July 2022.

<sup>150</sup> European Parliament and Council of the EU, *Regulation (EU) 2018/1806 the listing the third countries whose nationals must be in possession of visas when crossing the external borders and those whose nationals are exempt from that requirement*, 14 November 2018.

<sup>151</sup> Ibid.

<sup>152</sup> Department of Justice, *Immigration Service Delivery*, July 2021, accessed 26 July 2022.

<sup>153</sup> Interview 2, 21 July 2022.

<sup>154</sup> Ibid.

<sup>155</sup> Ibid.

<sup>156</sup> Ibid.

<sup>157</sup> Ibid.

<sup>158</sup> Ibid.

<sup>159</sup> Ibid.

## Situation at Borders and in Transit Countries

Georgia borders Russia to the north, Azerbaijan to the south-east, Armenia to the south and Turkey to the south-west. Borders also exist between the Russian protected breakaway states of Abkhazia in the north-west and the Tskhinvali Region/South Ossetia in the north and Georgia.

According to *Occupied*, a website that tracks events along the border of the breakaway regions, the borders of Abkhazia and the Tskhinvali Region/South Ossetia with Georgia are protected with fences, trenches and autonomous surveillance systems.<sup>160</sup> Three crossing points between the Tskhinvali Region/South Ossetia and Georgia were only open for five days in June 2022 for a religious festival, but remained closed following it.<sup>161</sup>

As of at least 4 July 2022, all of Azerbaijan's land borders are closed, which is a continuation of pandemic restrictions, and movement in and out of the country can only be done via flights.<sup>162</sup>

The only border checkpoint between Georgia and Russia is located at Kazbegi/Daraila and is open, weather permitting.<sup>163</sup>

In Georgia, there are several border crossing points with Armenia and Turkey and borders appear to be open.<sup>164</sup>

There is no evidence of significant incidences during the reporting period.

## Smuggling Networks

No evidence of the widespread use of smuggling networks was uncovered in this analysis. The lack of smuggling networks is supported by testimony from one expert interviewed for this report, who stated that there are no significant trafficking routes for Georgians migrating to Europe and trafficking of Georgians to EU countries is not common.<sup>165</sup> As noted by other experts interviewed, the widespread availability of visa-free travel for Georgians wishing to travel within Europe is likely the key factor in leading to the low demand for smuggling services.<sup>166</sup> An IOM report regarding the smuggling of non-Georgians concluded that 'Georgia does not occupy a prominent position as a country of transit or as a hub of migrant smuggling networks.'<sup>167</sup>

## Pull Factors

### Local Perceptions on What is Happening in Destination Countries

Experts interviewed for this report noted that active Georgian migrant communities in destination countries can act as an encouraging factor influencing migration decisions.<sup>168</sup> The respective communities help newcomers to navigate the job market and can share information on asylum procedures.<sup>169</sup> Migrants from Georgia are typically understood to attach high importance to informal

<sup>160</sup> *Occupied*, *Russian Military Infrastructure In South Ossetia Region*, 26 July 2019, accessed 27 July 2022; *Occupied*, *Russian Military Infrastructure In Abkhazia*, 26 July 2019, accessed 27 July 2022.

<sup>161</sup> Civil, *Tskhinvali Opens Crossing Points for Lomisoba Festival*, 15 June 2022, accessed 27 July 2022.

<sup>162</sup> JAMNews, *Closed borders: why Azerbaijani authorities refuse to reopen land communication?*, 4 July 2022, accessed 27 July 2022.

<sup>163</sup> State Commission on Migration Issues, *Georgian border checkpoints*, n.d., accessed 27 July 2022; Reuters, *Georgia temporarily closes land border with Russia due to heavy rains*, 27 June 2022, accessed 27 July 2022.

<sup>164</sup> State Commission on Migration Issues, *Georgian border checkpoints*, n.d., accessed 27 July 2022; SmartTraveller, *Georgia*, 27 July 2022, accessed 27 July 2022.

<sup>165</sup> Interview 1, 14 July 2022.

<sup>166</sup> Interview 2, 21 July 2022.

<sup>167</sup> IOM, *Smuggling of Migrants in Georgia: A Review of the Evidence Base*, 25 September 2021, accessed 10 August 2022.

<sup>168</sup> Interview 2, 21 July 2022.

<sup>169</sup> Ibid.

sources of information about the opportunities available abroad, such as that obtained from friends, relatives and acquaintances as well as social media posts, and attach less importance to official sources of information.<sup>170</sup>

It is likely that Georgians' perception on EU destination countries are reflected in their desire to join the union. The Georgian population is understood to hold significantly pro-EU sentiments.<sup>171</sup> Article 78 of Georgia's Constitution states: 'The constitutional bodies shall take all measures within the scope of their competences to ensure the full integration of Georgia into the European Union and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization'.<sup>172</sup> Georgia presented its application for membership of the European Union on 3 March 2022.<sup>173</sup> The National Democratic Institute produces regular surveys on the attitudes of the Georgian population and found in March 2022 that 82 % of the 2 024 survey participants stated that they support the Georgian government's goal to join the EU.<sup>174</sup> Among those who expressed approval for Georgia joining the EU, the majority stated that they believe it will improve the Georgian economy, provide greater security for Georgia and strengthen democratic development in the country.<sup>175</sup> An estimated 120 000 people attended the 'Home, to Europe' rally in front of the parliament building in Tbilisi on 20 June to show their support for Georgia's aspirations of joining the EU.<sup>176</sup>

## Discouraging Factors

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### Local Prevention Initiatives

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Frontex has had a working arrangement with the Ministry of the Internal Affairs of Georgia since 2008. This was renewed in February 2021, with the two entities reaffirming their commitment to work together by implementing technical assistance projects and exchanging information and best practices in order to reduce irregular migration flows.<sup>177</sup>

The Migration Strategy of Georgia 2021-2030 contains seven main goals: the development of a migration management system built on strong institutions through improved policy planning and analysis tools, enhanced stakeholder involvement and strengthened international cooperation; the expansion and improvement of development-oriented legal migration opportunities; effective action against irregular migration and transnational organised crime and the improvement of border security; the facilitation of sustainable reintegration of returned migrants; enhanced connections with the Georgian diaspora and the creation of wider opportunities for Georgian's living abroad to better engage in the country's development; the development of an international protection system through further improvement of asylum procedures and institutional framework; and, the improvement of approaches to the integration of foreigners residing in Georgia and the elaboration of integration programs to facilitate the use of their potential for the country's development.<sup>178</sup>

In line with the goals outlined in the government's Migration Strategy, the International Organization for Migration (IOM) works in Georgia on areas including the voluntary return and reintegration of Georgian

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<sup>170</sup> Ibid.

<sup>171</sup> See, for example: National Democratic Institute, *Taking Georgian's pulse: Findings from February and March 2022 Surveys, and March 2022 Focus Groups*, April 2022, accessed 26 July 2022.

<sup>172</sup> Parliament of the Republic of Georgia, *Constitution of Georgia*, 29 June 2020, accessed 26 July 2022.

<sup>173</sup> European Commission, *Opinion on the EU membership application by Georgia*, 17 June 2022, accessed 26 July 2022.

<sup>174</sup> National Democratic Institute, *Taking Georgian's pulse: Findings from February and March 2022 Surveys, and March 2022 Focus Groups*, April 2022, accessed 26 July 2022, p. 16.

<sup>175</sup> Ibid, p. 17.

<sup>176</sup> Jam News, *"Home, to Europe" – one of Georgia's most crowded rallies in recent year*, 21 June 2022, accessed 26 July 2022; VOA News, *Georgians Hold Mass Rally for EU, Urge Government to Quit*, 3 July 2022, accessed 26 July 2022.

<sup>177</sup> Frontex, *Frontex renews working arrangement with Georgia*, 11 February 2021, accessed 25 July 2022.

<sup>178</sup> State Commission on Migration issues, *Migration Strategy of Georgia 2021-2030*, 2020, accessed 27 July 2022.



citizens and integrated border management.<sup>179</sup> IOM, the Georgian government and other partners collaborate on capacity building activities in the fields of border management, labour migration, human rights protection, diaspora engagement and integration of migration perspectives into local development planning.<sup>180</sup> The Georgian government has reportedly previously<sup>181</sup> undertaken efforts to prevent irregular migration to the EU by highlighting the fact that Georgia is typically classified as a safe country of origin and outlining the resultant implications that this has on asylum application decisions for Georgian nationals.<sup>182</sup>

## Discouraging Factors in the EU+

One expert interviewed for this report noted that for many Georgians, Eastern European countries may not be seen as the most welcoming destinations in which to seek asylum, with Georgians generally expressing a preference for Western and Northern European countries.<sup>183</sup> Such countries are generally believed to offer greater prospects of integration for Georgian asylum seekers.<sup>184</sup> Lack of integration into host countries, as well as the retention of close ties to Georgia throughout the migration experience, were cited as significant influencing factors contributing towards strong intentions among Georgian migrants to return to their country of origin.<sup>185</sup> Once in the EU, Georgian migrants may experience unexpected problems such as lower average net wages for non-EU nationals compared to announced gross wages and housing conditions or cash support for asylum seekers that do not align with pre-departure expectations.<sup>186</sup> Georgian nationals who engage in labour migration using unofficial employment mediators may face risks such as loss of financial resources, immigration-related issues upon entry in the EU and forced labour.<sup>187</sup>

The EU and Georgia have a 2011 agreement outlining the obligations of Georgia to readmit Georgian nationals in the EU who do not, or who no longer, meet the conditions required for entering or remaining in the EU.<sup>188</sup> As noted by one expert interviewed, a lack of recognition at the international level of the situations in Abkhazia and the Tskhinvali Region/South Ossetia as armed conflicts may act as a barrier for Georgian nationals affected by them who attempt to obtain protection status in Western countries.<sup>189</sup>

## Outlook and Implications

Given the significant number of positive first instance decisions issued to Georgians on the basis of temporary protection, it can be summarized that the invasion of Ukraine on 24 February has been the key contributing factor for the increase Georgians fleeing to the EU+ in 2022. While the majority of Georgian nationals residing in Ukraine who wish to seek protection in the EU+ are likely to have already left Ukraine, it should be noted that these individuals are permitted to stay for up to 90-days in the majority of EU+ countries without a visa, and so may not apply for temporary protection status immediately upon arrival.

<sup>179</sup> International Organisation for Migration, *IOM Georgia in 2021: Year in Review*, 18 December 2021, accessed 27 July 2022.

<sup>180</sup> Ibid., p. 2.

<sup>181</sup> IOM, *Smuggling of Migrants in Georgia: A Review of the Evidence Base*, 25 September 2021, accessed 10 August 2022.

<sup>182</sup> Interview 2, 21 July 2022; EUAA, *'Safe country of origin' concept in EU+ Countries: Situation Update*, 9 June 2021, accessed 9 August 2022.

<sup>183</sup> Interview 1, 14 July 2022.

<sup>184</sup> Ibid.

<sup>185</sup> Interview 1, 14 July 2022; Interview 2, 21 July 2022.

<sup>186</sup> Interview 2, 21 July 2022.

<sup>187</sup> Ibid.

<sup>188</sup> Official Journal of the European Union, *Agreement between the European Union and Georgia on the readmission of persons residing without authorisation*, 25 February 2011, accessed 15 August 2022.

<sup>189</sup> Interview 1, 14 July 2022.



In the medium-term, the impact that the war in Ukraine will have on Georgians residing within Georgia, and the resultant impact of the migration intentions of these individuals, is difficult to predict. As noted in this report, the war has had – and will likely continue to have – significant economic and socio-political implications for the country.

The European Commission has provided the Council of Georgia with a number of issues to be addressed by the end of the year in order to be granted candidate status to the EU. The socio-political climate in the country will be heavily influenced by the ability of the Georgian government to successfully enact the proposed changes. Pro-EU sentiments in Georgia are strong and are likely to remain so. A number of pro-EU and anti-government demonstrations have taken place in recent months. So far, demonstrations have remained peaceful and there are no indications to suggest that this will change.

Georgia has experienced high inflation and continued levels of high unemployment in the first half of 2022, together with significant growth in foreign direct investment and a large inflow of predominantly skilled migrants from Russia and Ukraine. Some indicators therefore suggest that the economic situation in Georgia has potential to improve in the medium term, although this will be impacted by a number of factors including the number of current Russian and Ukrainian immigrants that stay, and developments in the war in Ukraine.

Following strong economic recovery in 2021 after the initial impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, the World Bank predicts that Georgia will experience a slowdown of growth, higher levels of inflation and widening external balances due to the ongoing war in Ukraine.<sup>190</sup> In the long term, the World Bank predicts that the war may significantly impact poverty and vulnerability in Georgia due to the reduction in tourism and remittances as well as the increased cost of energy and foodstuffs.<sup>191</sup>

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<sup>190</sup> World Bank, *Georgia Macro Poverty Outlook*, April 2022, accessed 26 July 2022.

<sup>191</sup> Ibid.

