

# ISSUES OF ADAPTATION OF THE POPULATION MIGRATING FROM AJARA AT THE PRESENT STAGE

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**Abstract:** Internal migration processes in Georgia have persisted for centuries and are driven by various complex factors. Studying the resettlement of the Adjarian population across different regions of Georgia and their integration-adaptation presents a significant challenge. Specific reasons, predominantly ecological disasters, propelled internal migration processes from Adjara. This study examines the causes of Adjarian population displacement, investigating the ground-level challenges migrants encountered in their interactions with local communities and national minorities. The research presents the reasons for re-migration and critically analyzes the government's role and importance in successfully managing the resettlement process.

**Key words:** Ajara; migration; adaptation; resettlement.

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The modern world is constantly changing and faces great challenges. One of the important challenges is migration, which is continuously ongoing, and the study of this issue is very relevant and important. Georgia is also a part of the global world, where migration processes take place daily. There is an outflow of population from certain regions of Georgia, both beyond the borders and inwards. In this regard, my research topic is internal migration, namely the migration of population from Adjara to Georgia, and the issues of adaptation of displaced persons.

Settlement from Adjara to other parts of Georgia has been taking place for centuries, taking a special form since the second half of the 19th century. At different stages, the reasons for displacement from Adjara stemmed from different and specific environmental conditions.

The population resettled from Adjara faced certain problems of coexistence and adaptation in a foreign environment, which were accompanied by processes of repeated migration. The study of these issues is very relevant, because despite several works, which mainly concern the period from the 19th to the 1980s, no comprehensive studies have been conducted on this topic. Accordingly, the study of this issue will help us to make the issues of life of the population migrated from Adjara known to the general public, as well as to identify and present the ethno-cultural influences of the population migrated from Adjara and the local, non-Georgian population and the trends in the development of these relations, which will be interesting for the conduct of proper migration policy and the sustainability of migration in the country. The study becomes even more important due to the scarcity of Georgian and non-Georgian language material on this issue, and our study will be an attempt to supplement this material.

**Methodology:** The aim of the study is to comprehensively analyse the processes of integration and adaptation of migrants from Adjara in contemporary Georgia. Given the specificity of the topic and the need for in-depth understanding, a qualitative and combined research design was chosen, which allows us to take into account both individual experiences and structural factors that determine the degree of adaptation of migrants.

The use of a qualitative method is because social integration, identity change, and cultural adaptation are difficult to assess only through quantitative indicators. Personal narrative, subjective percep-

tion, and historical memory are indispensable resources for explaining social change and integration processes.

The main methods used in the study were:

1. Document analysis – state and local documents related to migration, official policies, as well as studies conducted by international and local non-governmental organisations, were studied, which helped to assess the role of migration policy and legislation in the adaptation of migrants.

2. Comparative analysis – adaptation processes are examined in different geographical and ethno-cultural contexts: in traditional Georgian environments (e.g., Guria) and in ethnically diverse spaces (e.g., Kvemo Kartli, Samtskhe-Javakheti), which enriches a deeper understanding of integration processes.

The data were analysed using inductive logic, which allows general conclusions to be drawn from the empirical material.

The origin of migration flows from Adjara is mainly related to environmental disasters, although there are some movements for various economic or social reasons. Recently, the first major wave of migration from Adjara was caused by a landslide in 1989, which affected 5657 families (Putkaradze T., 2006, p. 75). For environmental reasons, the population moved to different territories, mainly to border areas. During this period, the Soviet Union was on the verge of collapse, the country was in complete chaos and corruption. Houses intended for ecomigrants were occupied by families who were not affected. Due to this injustice, many of the victims were left without a home, and this led to repeated migration. Since the 1990s, Merab Kostava Foundation and Rustaveli Society have played a major role in solving the problems of ecomigrants by providing some ecomigrants with housing (Trier T., Turashvili M., 2007, p. 27). Nevertheless, problems related to housing still exist. Which should be the centre of considerable attention from the state.

Modern Adjara is home to many potential migrants who need to live in a safe environment. As a result of separate studies, it becomes clear that the main sphere of activity of the population of Khulo is agriculture, and the population is mainly engaged in animal husbandry, farming, and various crops. However, due to the lack of sufficient financial resources, the realisation of the grown products is problematic for them. The villages of Upper Adjara suffer from landlessness (Analysis of the socio-political situation of the highland municipalities of Guria and Khulo, 2019)

Therefore, the motive of migration is big, if we add to this the danger of environmental disasters, which is especially the cause of the desertification of Khulo villages. To solve this problem and reduce the migration flow, the state has developed a law. For example, on 16 July 2015, the Parliament of Georgia approved the Law on the Development of Highland Regions. Since some villages in Adjara are considered landslide-prone zones and the population living there is potential eco-migrants, the situation is particularly dire in the villages of Vashlovani and Dekanashvili. The last study 'Ecomigrants and Potential Ecomigrants in Georgia' was conducted in 2016, as a result of which the economic situation of the people living in the villages of Khulo district is quite difficult, some live in damaged houses, some of the houses have cracks, some of the houses cannot be restored (the soil has been eroded), they have to cultivate the land in difficult conditions as the soil is depleted and they do not have safe living conditions. The population needs guarantees that they will be provided with housing elsewhere during resettlement, so that's way do not share the fate of displaced people in Tsalka (Zurabishvili T., Tavberidze G., 2016, p. 18).

Various socio-economic and political-cultural problems arose during the settlement stages. However, the main problem remained the problems of cultural and religious adaptation and integration, as the settlement of Adjarians sometimes took place in an environment with ethnically and religiously diverse populations. Neither the Adjarians nor the local population were adequately prepared for coexistence, which created problems of cultural and religious integration.

People displaced from Adjara had to live in culturally and religiously different environments, the majority of displaced persons were Muslims, their integration process was particularly difficult in areas inhabited

by people of other religious denominations, their integration process was easy in the community inhabited by Azerbaijanis, while in Guria, Samegrelo, Javakheti and various territories their integration was difficult, accompanied by repeated migration. Muslims in Guria, who were expelled from Adjara, also considered hanging a pig's head on a mosque in Guria a religious insult (Analysis of the socio-political situation of the municipalities of Mountainous Guria and Khulo, 2019, p. 2). There are several other examples of religious confrontation that prevented the full integration of Adjarian Muslims with local Christians.

One of the important problems in studying the integration of people expelled from Adjara is the language barrier; this problem is especially noticeable in regions where Armenian and Azerbaijani communities live, which makes it difficult to communicate between them and solve individual problems. (Trier T., Turashvili M., 2007, p. 73) One of the goals of the Action Plan of the Migration Strategy of Georgia for 2021-2030, 2025, is to pilot a new programme for learning the state language for foreigners living in Georgia with different statuses. Relevant textbooks have also been created. (Government Commission on Migration Issues, 2025)

Adjarian families living in a foreign environment have had to survive in difficult economic conditions. For example, some houses of Adjarians resettled in Lagodekhi municipality are not finished, many need repair, and they have to live in difficult housing conditions. Some of the Adjarians resettled in the Tsalka municipality have no housing and live on rent. Lagodekhi eco-migrants are in relatively good conditions, as most of them were satisfied with their housing. Despite this, they still believe that the government's promises have not been fully fulfilled (Zurabishvili T., Tavberidze G., 2016, p. 30)

Interestingly, the goal of the Adjarian population resettled to Tsalka since the 2000s, among other cases that included settling in a safe environment, was also to improve their economic situation, so the integration process of the Adjarian population of Tsalka was much more concrete, in contrast to the eco-migrants. Their socio-psychological adaptation was quite difficult; one of the reasons for resettlement from Adjara to Tsalka was the construction of the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan oil pipeline. (Trier T., Turashvili M., 2007, p. 60)

The Adjarian population, who moved to Tsalka in the hope of changing the economic situation for the better, found a difficult economic and social situation on the spot: lack of jobs, housing problems, underdeveloped infrastructure, and other reasons forced hundreds of families to leave Tsalka and return to their homeland. The fate of migrants displaced from Thilwana village and Marneuli territory was similar; many left the area due to difficult conditions. (Trier T., Turashvili M., 2007)

To study the problems of migrants living in Tsalka, in 2013, the Ministry of Refugees and Accommodation of Georgia established a working group tasked with studying the problems of migrants on the ground. During the study, they examined the places where they lived and found that most of them did not have their housing (Task Force studied the problem of eco-migrants living in Tsalka, 2013)

The same problems are faced by the displaced population from Adjara living in the village of Koreti in the Pankisi Gorge, whose problem is the legalization of their houses. They moved here in 2005 due to a landslide in Adjara. Several families have returned to Adjara, but due to difficult living and economic conditions, they make a living by raising cattle and gardening.

In 2006, a database was created to include families affected by natural disasters and expecting immediate assistance from the state. As a result, many families moved to different regions of Georgia. (Lylee J., 2012, p. 6)

It is particularly noteworthy that the Azeri population of Kvemo Kartli has proven to be much more receptive to the eco-migrants than the Armenian population living in Javakheti due to family ties, as Javakheti villages are largely isolated from other villages and communication with the Georgian and Armenian populations is reduced, unlike Kartli villages, the villages are mixed and the indigenous population is more experienced and open to new relationships, and there are many Georgians in Kvemo Kartli's ruling circles, unlike Javakheti. Added to all this is the radicalism of the Armenian population itself towards the migrants resettled from Adjara, all of which creates a barrier to the full integration of the Adjarian population (Trier T., Turashvili M., 2007, p. 59)

Since 2004, settlement from the mountains of Adjara began in the village of Gorelovka in the Javakheti region, where mainly population is ethnic Armenian. The resettled Armenian population, which welcomed them, was hostile, and there were even cases of violence. The Armenian population considers the Muslim Adjarians as 'Turks'. Adjara families were resettled in former Dukhobor homes. (Liley J., 2012, p. 16)

To integrate the population resettled from Adjara, the involvement of the state and the implementation of separate activities to address the problems of migrants are important. While it is true that the satisfaction of eco-migrants is a concern of the government, and the ways of assistance are also differentiated, it is difficult to say to what extent they can adapt socially, economically and psychologically to their new territory of residence and whether this form of migration has a positive outcome for the country and the region in the long term, given the current difficult economic conditions. The state needs to develop a programme that should include all aspects of educational, socio-economic, and cultural integration, pay attention to the specificities of the indigenous population, and introduce practices to implement the constitution. Accordingly, we consider it important to continue research in this direction.

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