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**EXPECTED EMIGRATION OF STUDENTS FROM GEORGIA****Mzia SHELIA**Institute of Demography and Sociology, Iliia State University, Georgia  
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*The demographic development of Georgia is considerably determined by emigration processes. During 1989-2014, in the period between the general population censuses, Georgia's population decreased by one third. The process of depopulation can be suspended by the acceleration of the country's economic development, rationalization of management and study of migration processes and the elaboration of proper migration policy. Therefore, the study of the students' intention to emigrate is of great importance.*

*The work is based on the studies carried out by the Center for Migration Studies of Tbilisi State University and by the Institute of Demography and Sociology in 2014 and 2018. It has been established that the intention to emigrate still remains active among students. Apart from the willingness to study, the willingness to get a job tends to increase, with the share of the individuals unconditionally returning to Georgia decreasing. In particular, it has been established that if their intention to emigrate is achieved, only half of the respondents may return to their homeland that, in the long run, will further aggravate the processes of depopulation and lead to the sharp shortage of qualified workforce on Georgia's labor market. As a result, the local labor market may become saturated with low-skilled workforce coming from the countries with high population growth rates that may considerably weaken the country's economic development, upset its ethno-demographic balance and further aggravate the existing acute ethnic conflicts.*

*Therefore, as a major solution for reduction of the high emigration potential of the young people in Georgia may serve restoration of the balance between the labor and educational markets, elaboration of programs to support young specialists and provision of appropriate conditions for enhancing their creative activity. In addition, it is important to keep the youth actively informed about the actual conditions related to emigration. Here, mass media has to play a key role.*

**Keywords:** *Potential migration, Georgia, student, labor market, labor emigration*

**JEL Classification:** *F22, J61, R23*

**I. INTRODUCTION**

The emigration processes emerging after the breakdown of the Soviet Union have served as a factor that determined the demographic development of Georgia. The intensive depopulation of the country has increased the urgency of demographic security. The difficult situation formed on Georgia's labor market in the period of large-scale socio-economic transformation has dramatically enhanced the intention of workforce to get jobs on the labor markets of economically more developed countries. Those markets started to attract students as well. Their intensive emigration has led to the chronic shortage of qualified specialists in the country. The shift to a new mode of economic activity required the contribution of young individuals with modern thinking; however, it was difficult for them to establish themselves in their own country due to the decreased number of jobs and low price of workforce. Given the shrinking labor market, the students' intention to emigrate has increased and therefore, it has become more urgent to make an in-depth study of this issue.

Based on the analysis of the information obtained from special studies, this article seeks to determine the impact of hard socio-economic conditions, low income, partial employment, chronic unemployment, etc. in Georgia on the ongoing brain drain.

**II. METHODOLOGY**

The study is mainly based on two sample sociological surveys conducted under the guidance and with direct participation of the authors. In particular, the Center for Migration Studies of Ivane Javakhishvili Tbilisi State University interviewed 1236 respondents in 2014, whereas the Institute of Demography and Sociology of

Iliia State University interviewed 850 respondents in 2018. The object of the study has remained unaltered. The respondents were selected according to their gender and fields of expertise. In both surveys, a questionnaire consisting of 34-38 questions and some 300 possible answers was applied. The survey was conducted using the direct interview (survey) method by random selection and it included the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> grade students. The empirical material was processed using the statistical software SPSS. Mainly, operations of descriptive statistics were applied, including cross-tabulation with 95% confidence.

The work also applies and generalizes the materials of the 2014 general population census in Georgia and current registration materials obtained from the studies which were carried out by the scholars and international organizations working on the problems of students in Georgia.

### III. SURVEY RESULTS

Starting from the 1990s, with the collapse of the Soviet Union up to present, a very difficult situation has been predominant on Georgia's labor market. Unemployment (14%), so far, remains as the major social problem in the country, with 40% of the unemployed being individuals with a higher education. Unemployment is especially high within the young population (29% - within the 15-29 age category). According to the new methodology of the International Labor Organization, the unemployment rate is only 37%<sup>1</sup>. Major part of population is employed in agriculture and trade. Most individuals working in agriculture are self-employed, with their productive efficiency being low. The average number of their worked hours is 28, 2, whereas their average salary constitutes 64% of the average salary in the country.

The number of jobs on the primary labor market is small. The structure of training of specialists does not meet the requirements of the labor market. The demand for workforce is mainly present on the secondary market where salaries is rather low. Extreme shrinkage of the labor market generates and enhances the intention of the young people to emigrate.

Out studies have revealed that the intention of students to emigrate that started to emerge in the beginning of the post-Soviet period still remains high. 42% of respondents wish intend to emigrate for some reasons, however, as compared to the previous years, this trend tends to fall. In our opinion, this has been caused by anti-migration propaganda, increased awareness of the actual life conditions and hardships of emigrants, as well as by getting a more detailed picture of the objective situation revealed during the information campaign concerning the EU free movement.

So far, most of the labor emigrants who have left Georgia are illegal. Their life conditions are difficult, whereas the income is gained as a result of hard labor which has contributed to the formation of negative disposition of students towards illegal migration. In particular, two thirds of the students responded negatively to the question „If you fail to obtain legal employment abroad, are you willing to work illegally?“ A sharply negative attitude towards illegal migration has been demonstrated particularly by the students of the faculties of Law, Economics, Business and Medicine of Ivane Javakishvili Tbilisi State University which is due to the fact that, for instance, the students of the Faculty of Medicine are aware that medical doctors are in high demand on the international labor market, whereas students of the Faculties of Law and Economy follow study courses of migration and therefore, have a good understanding of the problems relating to migration. Obviously, it is not sufficient. It becomes increasingly necessary to raise the awareness of the young people with respect to the grave consequences of illegal emigration. More active coverage of this issue by mass media would bring appropriate results.

Through the study it was found that currently, there are two underlying causes for the students` intention to emigrate: Obtaining quality education and employment abroad. It has been found that 26, 8% of potential migrant students intend to study, 57,6% - to study and get a job, while the rest- only to work abroad. It seems that study serves as a kind of excuse for obtaining employment abroad.

The question that follows is: **„Why the intention to emigrate relating to employment has increased among students as compared to their intention to study?“**

Previous studies on the topic of migration indicate that unemployment and hard economic conditions were the major reasons for the intention of the young people to emigrate (Tukhashvili M, Shelia M, 2012; Chelidze N, 2006). The latest studies have demonstrated that the lack of prospects for getting appropriate jobs in one's own country has come to the foreground. Therefore, due to the existence of the category of the „poor employed“, high intention to emigrate is maintained among the students. They do not intend to realize their potential on the secondary labor market. They are well aware that if they get similar jobs on the European market, their salaries will be 4 or 5 times higher. Hard and harmful working conditions prevail on Georgia's labor market, with highly overtime work almost in all fields. In fact, the duration of work time is more than the one provided for by law. The overtime per week is only two hours in health care sector on the average, whereas it is more than 10 hours in the construction sector. Given such overtime labor, the remuneration of professionals is rather small. The average salary of a young specialist is lower than the average salary in the country.

<sup>1</sup> New methodology established from 2017 considers excluding self-employed individuals from the employed population.

Therefore, according to the latest study, the number of the student respondents aiming to work abroad in order to earn money, has increased 3, 5 times. Thus, it is hard labor conditions and small salary, not unemployment and extremely hard economic conditions within the family that trigger the intention to emigrate prevailing in Georgia in the last period.

Here comes the question: **„Is there any opportunity for the achievement of the existing intention to emigrate and subsequently, for returning home for those emigrants? “**

The respondents start making arrangements for the accomplishment of their intention to emigrate, first of all, by studying and improving a foreign language. The analysis shows that the number of students studying a foreign language is rapidly growing. Although, we must note as well that one third of them fails to do it and the intention to emigrate remains only a wish. Taking into consideration all the circumstances, we can assess that in fact, only every third respondent is making arrangement for the achievement of their intention to emigrate. Predominantly, those are the students whose average academic progress is high (on the average, higher than good). Obviously, the outflow of this category of population considerably reduces Georgia's labor potential and increases the deficit of qualified specialists in a number of fields.

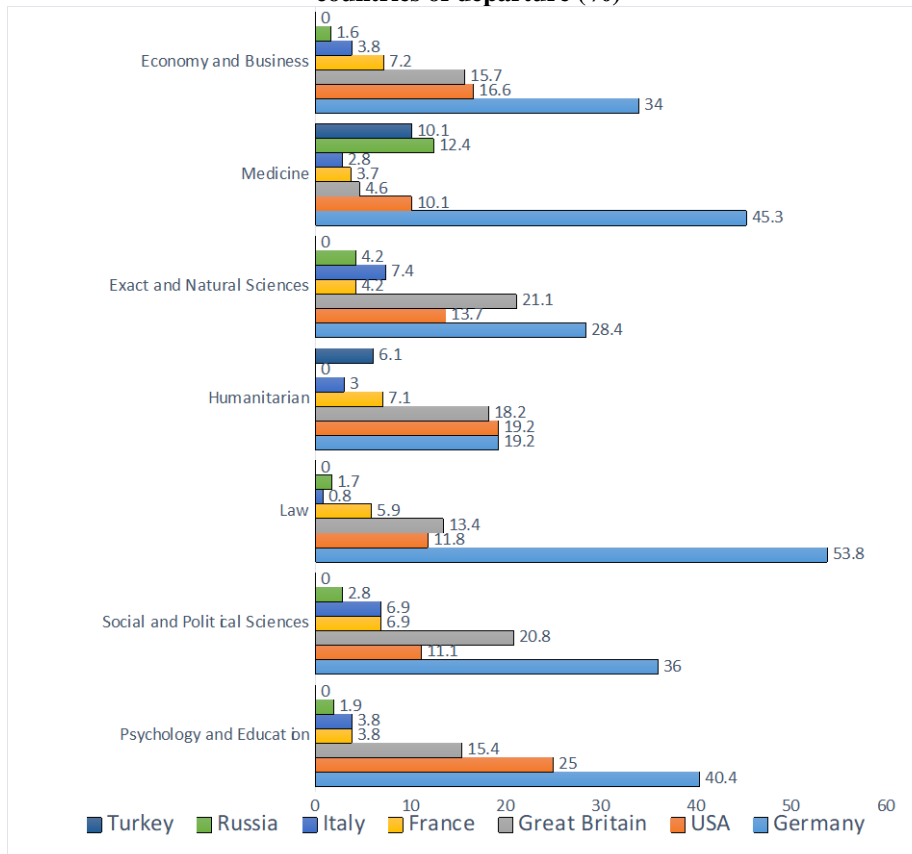
The survey has demonstrated that only half of the respondents intending to go abroad consider returning home. Only 3% of the respondents have expressly decided to stay abroad, while the rest think that they will be able to return home and establish themselves in their country after getting prestigious, well paid jobs which are relevant to their profession. Striking a balance between the education sector and labor market is hard to achieve in the nearest future. In order to prevent the outflow of promising young professionals from the country, it is necessary to promote, to the extent possible, the increase of their economic activity. In this regard, the students' prior consistency of aim with respect to their future participation in certain particular projects is of much interest. The activity of students tends to increase in this direction and becomes more specific. In particular, if, during the 2014 survey, 54% of respondents answered negatively to the question: „Have you pondered any specific project you wish to become employed in in the future? “, only 31% of the respondents answered negatively during the 2018 survey. The priorities have been substantially altered. For instance, if, during the 2014 study, most of the projects the students intended to implement were related to the production, during the subsequent survey, the projects related to education (21%), tourism (20%) and services sector (16,1%) came to the foreground. With this respect, we must note with regret that this intellectually advanced category of population almost is not interested in sciences. This decreased trend to follow various fields of science in the country with century-old scientific traditions has been a disastrous outcome of the state policy related to the development of science. Therefore, it requires the enhanced public attention.

According to the studies on migration, the share of the Western and Central European countries within emigration flows has been gradually rising in the last decade, whereas the intensity of emigration to Russia and Turkey tends to fall (Tukhashvili M., et al, 2018). Out latest studies also confirm that trend. For 69% of the respondents, Germany (37,2%) and Great Britain (11%) remain as their preferred direction of emigration.

Among the countries preferred by the students for emigration, Italy (5,4%) has been underlined. Moreover, a different preference can be observed according to various faculties. For instance, the top three countries the law specialists prefer to emigrate to include Germany (53,8%), Great Britain (13,4%) and the United States (11,8%); future doctors prefer emigrating to Germany (45%), Russia (12,4%), the United States (10,2%) and Turkey (10,1%). For students of humanitarian faculties, the range of countries they prefer to emigrate to, according to their fields of expertise, is rather large (Diagram 1). The intention to go to the above countries has mainly been conditioned by the high living standards prevailing there. The well-formed links and the existing exchange programs with high education institutions of those countries are of no less importance. Here again, we can observe the difference between the students of individual faculties with respect to their preference. For instance, the students of faculties of exact and natural sciences consider it important to easily find jobs (Diagram 2). There is a high demand for professionals of that field in many countries. If the students' intention is achieved, the current deficit of qualified specialists of that field in Georgia will become even sharper.

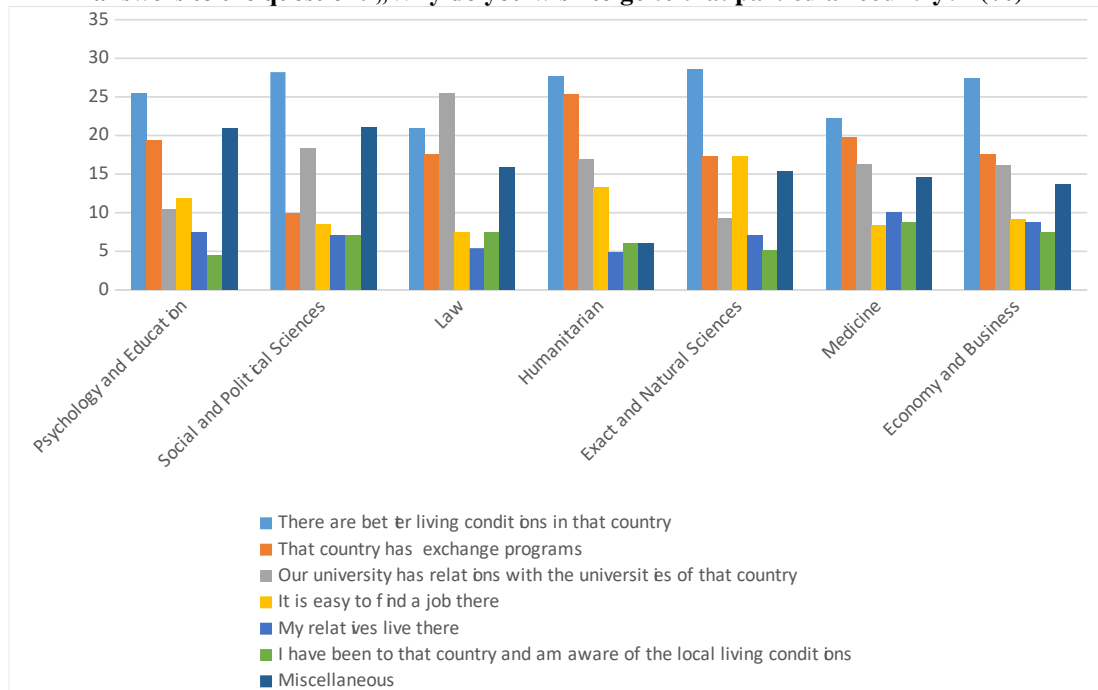
It can be clearly observed that the students' intention to emigrate exerts a considerably negative impact on their reproductive behavior. The recent survey has confirmed that the number of the students which, in the nearest future, immediately upon completion of their studies, intend to get married is very small (4,7%). Such disposition increases the average age of marriage and reduces the reproduction period that heavily affects the demographic situation in Georgia that is, anyway, very poor. Presumably, under the impact of emigration processes, the process of the country's depopulation is expected to continue.

**Diagram 1. Allocation of respondents of different faculties of Tbilisi State University according to the countries of departure (%)**



Source: Preliminary materials of survey of students of Ivane Javakshvili Tbilisi State University

**Diagram 2. Allocation of respondents of different faculties of Tbilisi State University according their answers to the question: „Why do you wish to go to that particular country?“ (%)**



Source: Preliminary materials of survey of students of Ivane Javakshvili Tbilisi State University

The question then arises: What can be the economic and social implications for the accomplishment of the students' intention to emigrate?

The young people intending to study abroad believe that they will obtain quality education” there (45%) and will have no problems with employment in their own country (34%). They, in fact, face a number of problems: due to the conjuncture of Georgia’s labor market, they sometimes succeed in finding employment. However, the existing small salaries are not relevant to their education- a fact that disappoints them. Moreover, with their skills acquired as a result of their education obtained abroad, they have difficulties in adapting to the imperfect labor market of the society in transition. The knowledge acquired from the textbooks which are based on the European and American market standards, are often irrelevant to the Georgian reality. In many cases, graduates seek to copy the experience of the developed countries. They have trouble applying creatively, in their own country, the knowledge obtained abroad. This circumstance often complicates relations with employers. Ultimately, on one hand, the limitation of use of their own knowledge and skills during work and on the other hand, the limited ability of employers to utilize qualified staff lead the young people to believe that there is no room for them on the labor market of their own country. Such situation often serves as grounds for qualified professionals to emigrate again. Consequently, the country is deprived of the capacities of its young talented generation whose representatives, sometimes, fail to realize their potential as professionals even on the labor market of the recipient country, with the high quality human capital becoming devaluated and the resulting psycho-social degradation of the generation.

#### IV. CONCLUSION

The survey has finally identified the following:

- The high intentions of students to emigrate which have been predominant since the beginning of the post-Soviet period have gradually become more targeted; however, those intentions have, so far, been unfavorable to the country with a small number of demographically shrinking population;
- The motivation for labor emigration has changed. If previously it was conditioned by the hard economic conditions within the family, currently, it is caused by a low cost of workforce on the labor market, also by the lack of jobs relevant to specialists with a higher education;
- Considerable share of students negatively assess illegal migration. The share of the respondents which, after achieving their intention to emigrate, return home unconditionally, tends to dramatically decrease. This intensifies the country’s depopulation that is further aggravated by the fact that their willingness to get married in the nearest future is very low.
- The major solution for promoting the emigration potential of the young people may be the restoration of the balance between the labor and educational markets that is highly disturbed, elaboration of programs for supporting young professionals and provision of appropriate conditions for enhancing their creative activity;
- It is necessary to keep the youth informed, on a regular basis, about the problems associated with emigration in which the mass media has to play a key role.

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