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Eco-Migration and Vulnerability: Linkages between Human Rights Protection and Environmental Governance in Georgia

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ECO-MIGRATION AND VULNERABILITY: LINKAGES BETWEEN HUMAN RIGHTS PROTECTION AND ENVIRONMENTAL GOVERNANCE IN GEORGIA

*Tamari Bulia**

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INTRODUCTION

Nurunahar and her family were victims of environmental disaster in Bangladesh. The heavy storms that washed all of their belongings away have forced them to move from their village to the capital. Now they are forced to be residents of Dhaka slums. Income source: begging and selling the items found in the trash.¹

Ariano Blanik, a German youngster, like many of his fellow teenagers loves extreme sports. Wakeboarding is a favorite. However, he never imagined he would enjoy his favorite sport in the middle of his hometown. Heavy floods have placed many towns in Southeastern Germany underwater. Now, Ariano is wakeboarding on a pedestrian street.²

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1. UCANews, *Environmental Refugees – Nurnahar’s Story*, YOUTUBE (Dec. 25, 2012), <http://youtu.be/S-TI1Otq1ns> (From the UCANews 2012 short-film series, *Not Waving but Drowning*).

2. ITN News, *Water Skiing on Flood Waters in Germany*, YOUTUBE (Jun. 5, 2013), <http://youtu.be/4BIKUGTeGQw>.

Tamaz Gagadze and his family own a property in West Georgia. The house, once a perfect home for the family, is now a threat to everyone under its roof. Floods have damaged it for the most part, putting the lives of the family in danger. However, the family does not have additional resources to move or restore it.³

These stories open a wide horizon for discussing the bigger picture to which they belong. Environmental disasters affect the everyday lives of millions of the world population directly—and even more indirectly. As a response, people adjust, try to find the solutions using various resources, or simply move from their habitual place. Environmental changes are mostly stretched in time; therefore measuring the impact is a difficult task. On the other hand, rapid environmental changes, also known as disasters, have clearly visible impact on the societies.

Georgia, a country with a vulnerable economic system and conflict areas, has been facing critical difficulties since the beginning of the 1990s. With rapid and usually rebellious changes of governments, over the past ten years the Georgian Ministry of Environment and Natural Resources had over thirty ministers and deputy ministers, impeding the proper functioning of the environmental governance.⁴ Although significant formal steps have been made to address these difficulties, such as the signing of international conventions or drafting action plans and strategic documents, in practice the human-rights approach to the protection of the environment and eco-friendly strategies are being disregarded.⁵ The problems are mainly linked to financial aspects, institutional and legal issues, and lack of public interest. At the national governance level, relevant commissions or departments, in most cases, are not operational and only formally established.⁶ In addition to the low public interest for environmental issues in Georgian society, there is also a visible lack of interest from the international community, including scholars and policy makers.

The following paper aims at presenting the issue of disaster-induced migration (referred to as “eco-migration” in Georgia), by reviewing the current policy trends and governance measures. This paper seeks to identify the major gaps in Georgian policy-making by

3. Salome Shikhashvili, *Eco-migrants in Quest for Help*, YOUTUBE (Jun. 15, 2013) <http://youtu.be/w-brioDJcn4> (Report on 2011 CENN student called *Eco-Migration – Challenges and Possibilities*).

4. U.N. ECON. COMM'N FOR EUR., ENVIRONMENTAL PERFORMANCE REVIEWS: GEORGIA, SECOND REVIEW, U.N. Doc. ECE/CEP/157, U.N. Sales No. E.10.II.E.9 (2010).

5. *Id.*

6. *Id.* at 6.

discussing the governance of environmentally induced migration, as well as relevant institutional and legal tools.

I. BACKGROUND OF THE ISSUES GEORGIA FACES

The legal, social, economic, and environmental contexts of the disaster-induced migration have become the discussion topics for numerous international institutions. Due to the increasing number of people affected, the topic started to appear in the national strategies of some countries as well.⁷ However, the international organizations or policy makers tend to focus on the issue at the very last stage where the only solutions are within humanitarian aid and the disaster management.⁸

Georgia is currently facing a number of socio-economic and political difficulties; the topic of disaster-induced migration or the environment is generally overlooked and underestimated. Georgian territory includes areas vulnerable to natural disasters such as landslides, droughts, and floods.⁹ Thus, the number of people affected in the past, as well as the number of people living in vulnerable areas is high. In spite of these facts the national government has not taken significant measures to protect the people affected.¹⁰ The lack of financial resources, as well as underdeveloped legal frameworks on the issue of eco-migration, result in the deficiency of assistance for those affected by natural disasters.

Georgia enjoyed one of the highest standards of living within the Soviet Union.¹¹ The breakup of the Soviet Union, however, introduced a market economy and led to a civil war and the loss of two

7. As an example, Finland and Denmark have included environmental disasters in the Alien Act as one of the factors for granting a refugee status to asylum seekers. See ALBERT KRALER ET AL., CLIMATE REFUGEES – LEGAL AND POLICY RESPONSES TO ENVIRONMENTALLY INDUCED MIGRATION (2011), available at <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/committees/de/studies/download.html?languageDocument=EN&file=60931>.

8. Elaborate pre-disaster assistance tools exist for vulnerable areas, but the clear majority of assistance tools provided by the U.N. and other international organizations are the kind utilized during and immediately following disaster events in the form of humanitarian aid or disaster management. While elaborating assistance tools available pre-disaster (for vulnerable areas), during the disasters, and post disaster periods, there is a clear majority of assistance tools provided by UN and other international organizations during the disaster itself: with humanitarian aid or disaster management.

9. *Ecomigration in Georgia*, NGO BORGHALI, <http://ecomigration.ge/index.php/2014-05-15-13-29-55> (last visited Aug. 16, 2014).

10. See *infra* pp. 10-21.

11. Chanturidze et al., *Georgia Health System Review*, 11 HEALTH SYS. IN TRANSITION, no. 8, 2009, at 1, 3-4, available at http://www.euro.who.int/__data/assets/pdf_file/0003/85530/E93714.pdf.

regions of the state, resulting in economic trouble that affected all sectors of the country.¹² Georgia's GDP fell by 68% between 1990 and 1994.¹³ The frequency of natural disasters in Georgia has also drastically increased during the past two decades.¹⁴ All of this is reflected in the large and growing number of disaster-induced displacement.¹⁵ Georgia's mountainous terrain and climate characteristics leads to a high instance of geological and hydro-meteorological disasters, often resulting in high loss and displacements.¹⁶ The situation is particularly hard in mountainous regions.¹⁷ There are several reasons, besides the sensitive geological characteristics of Georgia, which can be attributed for the recent increase of environmental disasters in Georgia:

1. High-intensity earthquakes at the end of 1980s, which continue to create landslides;
2. Climate-change-induced geological processes that act as the stimulating factors of environmental hazards; and
3. Anthropogenic influence on the environment disrupting the environmental balance.¹⁸

The natural disasters that caused the most significant changes in living places for eco-immigrants happened in Georgia in 1987, with eighty-five deaths, 2,000 houses damaged by snow, and 16,000 evacuated from risk zones; in 1989, natural disasters directly affected 5,657 families (or 24,287 people).¹⁹ From 1981 until 2007 an estimated 60,000 individuals from mountainous regions were resettled through the governmental programs.²⁰ It is interesting to note, that among the regions where eco-migrants mostly settled were mainly the regions already settled by the national minorities of Georgia; particularly the

12. *Id.*

13. *Id.*

14. GOGITIDZE ET AL., NATURAL DISASTER RISK MANAGEMENT AND ENVIRONMENTALLY INDUCED MIGRATION IN GEORGIA 6-19 (2008) (Commissioned by the OSCE: Mission to Georgia and the Green Alternative).

15. *Id.* (These displacements include people who have already been displaced as well as people living in the risk zones whose houses were officially rated as damaged, incompatible or dangerous for living).

16. See GOGITIDZE ET AL., *supra* note 14, at 6. According to the UNFCCC 2007 National Report on Georgia, of the fourteen total climate zones, eleven exist on Georgian territory.

17. *Id.*

18. *Id.*

19. See Dr. Marc Weller, *Resettlement of the people displaced due to environmental reasons: solving an existing problem or a creation of a new one? Eco-migration in Georgia 1981-2006*, EURO. CENT. MINORITY ISSUES (2007), available at http://ngoborjghali.files.wordpress.com/2014/05/ecmimonograph_6_geo.pdf.

20. *Id.*

border regions with Azerbaijan where the relocation has led to conflicts between the “newcomers” and the minorities.²¹

According to official data provided by Ministry of Internally Displaced People and Refugees of Georgia, 35,204 families are registered as affected by natural disasters, of which, 11,000 families are in need of emergency housing.²² Over the years, more than 9,000 families, approximately 40,000 people, have been resettled from Adjara.²³ The current data from the Ministry of Health and Social Welfare states that total 4,144 registered families are affected by natural disaster in Adjara Region.²⁴ Between 2004 and 2005, the damage caused by natural disasters totaled 175 million EUR.²⁵ Currently, there are about 10,701 displaced people in these villages who have been relocated by the governmental programs.²⁶

Migrants were relocated between 1981 and 1988 in Samtskhe Javakheti region, Southern Georgia, mostly populated by the Azeri, Greek, and Armenian minority families.²⁷ The reason behind this pattern of relocation is rather ambiguous: either these locations were chosen specifically for the purpose of maintaining the demographic balance in these regions or simply because of the amount of unsettled land in these areas.²⁸ There are cases when eco-migrants were settled in Georgian villages previously abandoned during the urbanization period in the 1950s and 1960s, as well as instances when new villages were created particularly for eco-migrants.²⁹ In 1989-1990 the Georgian government purchased 320 houses from Azeri families leaving Georgia because of the raising pressure from nationalist activists and organizations in order to provide eco-migrants with housing in the Bolnisi District of the Kvemo Kartli region.³⁰ There were cases of illegal sales of government houses, where the houses were constructed by

21. Justin Lyle, *Resettlement of Ecological Migrants in Georgia: Recent Developments and Trends in Policy, Implementation and Perceptions* 4-5 (Euro. Cent. for Minority Issues Working Paper No. 53, 2012), available at http://www.ecmi.de/uploads/tx_lfpubdb/Working_Paper_53_en.pdf.

22. *Id.*

23. *Id.*

24. *Id.*

25. *Id.*

26. Weller, *supra* note 19.

27. Tom Trier & Medea Turashvili, *Resettlement of Ecologically Displaced Persons: Solution of a Problem or Creation of a New? Eco-Migration in Georgia 1981-2006* 38-39 (Euro. Cent. for Minority Issues Monograph No. 6, 2007), available at http://www.ecmcaucasus.org/upload/publications/monograph_6_en.pdf.

28. *Id.*

29. *See id.*

30. *Id.*

the government for eco-migrants and ended up as a property for other people.³¹ No sanctions, however, were ever imposed.³² In most of the cases during the resettlement process, the government failed to provide the houses to the intended beneficiaries.³³

During the second wave of migration in the beginning of the 2000s, the situation was even more disorganized.³⁴ In some cases the migrants were taking the abandoned houses without permission causing tensions in the local population.³⁵ Most of the migrants were facing problems with registration as the legal owner of the house was still the Greek or Azeri family who left the district.³⁶

The research conducted by international organizations such as the European Center for Minority Issues (ECMI) and the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) about representation in Georgia, as well as a survey conducted within the relocated environmental migrants by Caucasus Environmental NGO Network, reveal the main problems relocation caused in these regions, which is still ongoing.³⁷ The CENN study report identifies problems they have faced during the resettlement process including the problems encountered during the registration process, with the “starting package” or with land and housing. The problems encountered during the registration process were mentioned by 34.5% of the interviewed eco-migrants who stated that they were not able to register in the new location. 91% of them mentioned they did not get the “starting package” granted from the governmental funds, and most of the people have mentioned that the conditions of the eco-migrants in new houses are poor, and some of the houses are partially constructed.³⁸

The government plan of creating new villages for migrants failed, as they moved in existing villages with problems in water irrigation systems and poor infrastructure. The governmental reforms on land privatization after Soviet Union created problems of land owner-

31. *Id.*

32. *Id.*

33. *See id.* at 34-37. For example, in the district of Tsalka (primarily settled by Greeks, Armenians, Azeris, and Georgians), the government bought and distributed houses to eco-migrants which belong to the Greek population who had left the region between 1980 and 2000.

34. *See* Trier & Turashvili, *supra* note 27.

35. *See id.*

36. *See id.*

37. *Comparison of the data of the survey conducted with the resettled and potentially resettled families according to the number of parameters*, NGO BORJALI (2014), available at http://ngoborjghali.files.wordpress.com/2014/05/final_report_part_iii.doc (survey conducted by NGO Borjali with support provided by CENN).

38. *See* Trier & Turashvili, *supra* note 27.

ship.³⁹ Ownership was granted via auctions, direct sales, and special auctions, everyone who was registered in the area having the right to participate. 69% of the relocated people faced problems with the house/land ownership.⁴⁰

The problems encountered by the relocated people with the local communities include ethnic tensions and language barriers. The ethnic tensions during the Soviet Union led to problems in local communities where eco-migrants, as well as other migrants, were forced to move from their houses and were resettled by government. Often times they were placed in the regions which were densely populated by national minorities.⁴¹ The Totalitarian Communist regime was able to prevent ethnic conflicts, but since 1989 the conflict situation between different ethnicities in these areas has led to severe ethnic problems, conflicts, and civil war in South Ossetia and Abkhazia.⁴² For example, there were tensions with local Armenian minorities, who felt discriminated as they continued living in old “huts” while newcomers were provided new houses.⁴³ Language barriers between local national minorities also created problems with communication and social integration when eco-migrants were relocated.⁴⁴

II. GOVERNMENTAL ASSISTANCE AND THE APPLICABLE LEGAL AND INSTITUTIONAL RESPONSES

Assistance, for those affected by environmental hazards or at risk peoples, is one of the most important aims of the state as it is directly connected to the basic human rights of the person. However, the funds designed for this purpose have not been included in the state budget for 2010-2011.⁴⁵ In addition, the population living in the vulnerable areas are mainly the poorest part of the communities.⁴⁶ As a result, the resettled people, or eco-migrants, remain as one of the most vulnerable and the poorest segment of the Georgian community.

Currently there is no state vision and strategy to solve the related problems. The legislation does not recognize internally displaced

39. *See id.*

40. *See id.*

41. *See id.*

42. *Id.*

43. *Id.*

44. *See* Trier & Turashvili, *supra* note 27.

45. *See* Lyle, *supra* note 21.

46. Shorena Lataia, *Georgian Law Leaves Eco-migrants Without Protection*, HUMANRIGHTSHOUSE.ORG (Apr. 15, 2011), <http://humanrightshouse.org/Articles/16278.html>.

persons relocated as a result of natural disasters.⁴⁷ Trier and Turashvili's working paper on eco-migration in Georgia between 1980-2007 provides facts about and outlines the governmental role in the resettlement process from the 1980s until 2007.⁴⁸ The research identifies the timeline of these processes depending on the ruling government;⁴⁹ during the Soviet period, the resettlement programs were well organized, with the government providing 0.25 *hectares* (ha) of land, in addition to financial aid, furniture, and first aid, to the eco-migrants who were also given preferential treatment in finding jobs.⁵⁰ In 1989, the government also initiated a new program for resettlement, but as it was the time of the Soviet collapse, the program was not properly monitored or carried out and was characterized with significant corruption.⁵¹

The situation changed rapidly during the Shevardnadze⁵² presidency; the Post-Soviet crisis in the country hindered the resettlement plans, and the government could not finalize the construction of those houses, which had already started and had been promised to their new owners.⁵³ Because of ethno-political problems and civil war in Georgia, eco-migrants were practically ignored. In 1997, Shevardnadze issued a decree on eco-migrants, which allocated 3 million USD to buy houses, but due to corruption only half of that amount actually went to buying houses.⁵⁴ Following the presidential decree, in 1998, the government initiated a new system for monitoring eco-migrants' conditions. A plan was made to resettle 4,284 families, but only 2,880 families were resettled, and no subsequent steps were made to improve living conditions.⁵⁵

During the Saakashvili⁵⁶ period, the conditions of the environmentally displaced people did not improve significantly. Legally these displaced peoples remained unsupported, although promising steps in

47. *Id.*

48. *See* Trier & Turashvili, *supra* note 27.

49. *See id.*

50. *Id.* at 11.

51. *Id.* at 12.

52. Eduard Shevardnadze, the President of Georgia between 1995-2003.

53. *See* Trier & Turashvili. *supra* note 27.

54. Jonathan Wheatley, *Defusing Conflict of Tsalka District of Georgia: Migration, International Intervention and the Role of the State* 9 (Euro. Cent. Minority Issues Working Paper No. 36, 2006), available at http://www.ecmi.de/uploads/tx_lfpubdb/working_paper_36_en.pdf.

55. Decree of the Government of Georgia No. 67 on Government Program (1998-2005) for the Resolution of Legal and Social Problems of Families Suffering from Calamities Since 1987.

56. Mikheil Saakashvili, the President of Georgia between 2004-2013.

institutionalizing the issue were made. Since 2004, the new government made efforts to address the problem of environmentally displaced peoples, collecting data and starting a program to provide houses for eco-migrants.⁵⁷ In 2004, the Commission of Regulation of the Eco-Migration Process was established in response to an outbreak of violence between local Armenians and Georgian eco-migrants. However, the commission never developed into a functioning body.⁵⁸ In 2006, a new database was created for monitoring eco-migrants, by which eco-migrants were divided in four categories depending on the level of damage they had faced. The damage was classified as one of four types, and the number of individuals or families affected was identified for each category.⁵⁹ The report of National Ombudsman of Georgia in 2011 included a whole chapter on the issue, outlining the national or international approach generally and providing numbers by classification.⁶⁰ According to the report, the damaged property was divided in four categories, giving the available statistical data for each of the categories. The report showed that at that time there were twenty-nine families belonging to the Category I whose houses were destroyed as a result of a natural disaster. Category II included the houses which were not destroyed, but damaged as a result of natural disasters and cannot be repaired; thus, the house is not suitable for living. There were 166 families with such properties accounted in 2011. There were 1,274 families with a Category III, whose houses were still inhabited, but they were considerably damaged and needed urgent restoration. Category IV includes the houses that are not damaged and are suitable for living, but the surrounding area has been damaged as a result of natural disasters. There were 2,675 families living in such zones in 2011.

The president conducts and manages the internal and external policies of Georgia. Due to Article 73 of the National Constitution,⁶¹ the President of Georgia, within the limits of his competence, is authorized to provide for citizens' security interests in the cases of war or mass disorder, territorial integrity of the country, a military coup or an armed insurrection, eco-disasters, epidemics, natural disasters, large accidents, epizootics, or other cases in which the public authorities normally exercise the restricted powers.⁶² He is authorized to declare a

57. See Trier & Turashvili, *supra* note 27.

58. *Id.*

59. *Id.*

60. STATE REPORT OF GEORGIAN OMBUDSMAN 282-83 (2011), available at <http://ombudsman.ge/uploads/other/0/85.pdf>.

61. SAKARTVELOS K'ONSTITUTSIA [CONSTITUTION], 1991, art. 73 (Rep. of Geor.).

62. See *id.*

state of emergency throughout the country or on any part of it and submit it not later than forty-eight hours to the parliament for approval.⁶³ Therefore, the president has a power to assist the affected people during the disaster events. In 2004-1010, the Presidential Fund was aimed at assisting in financing the issues that were not usually getting funded by the state budget; directly among them, assistance of eco-migrants.⁶⁴

The Parliament, being the highest representative body exercising the legislative power, is authorized to control and examine the work of the governmental agencies and the president as well. Among the fifteen parliamentary commissions, one is the Committee of Environment and Natural Resources, which is responsible for the disaster management and the risk assessment.⁶⁵ However, the committee exists only formally and in practice is not operational.⁶⁶

The executive branch of the Georgian government consists of the Ministerial cabinet with the Prime Minister, Ministries, state departments, and agencies.⁶⁷ Among other duties, the executive government is responsible for the activities aimed at the protection of environment and the natural resources of Georgia and in carrying out the politics of ecological security of the citizens; it organizes the rational use of the national resources.⁶⁸

As the Georgian legislature does not recognize eco-migrants as internally displaced peoples (IDPs) or refugees, the Ministry of Refugees and the Internally Displaced People holds no authority over the issue; the body mainly responsible for environmental, and related, policies, including eco-migrants, is the Ministry of Environment and the Natural Resources of Georgia (MOE).⁶⁹ The number of existing normative acts in Georgia gives the MOE the authority to act and decide within the area of environmental displacement.⁷⁰ For example, the law

63. CENN, *CITIZEN'S GUIDE: HOW TO PARTICIPATE IN GOVERNANCE 77-80* (2013). (CENN distributed this guide to local stakeholders, Georgian NGOs and community workers. This work was funded by European Commission.) (on file with author) [hereinafter *CITIZEN'S GUIDE*].

64. *Id.*

65. *Id.*

66. See *ENVIRONMENTAL PERFORMANCE REVIEWS: GEORGIA, SECOND REVIEW*, *supra* note 4.

67. *Id.*

68. *CITIZEN'S GUIDE*, *supra* note 63, at 80-83.

69. See generally *MINISTRY OF ENV'T & NATURAL RES. PROT. OF GEOR.*, http://moe.gov.ge/index.php?lang_id=ENG (last visited July 30, 2014) (illustrating how the MOE takes an eco-centric approach rather than an anthropocentric approach).

70. Decree of the Government of Georgia No. 132 on the Ministry of Environment and Natural Resources of Georgia (2011).

on Sea, Reservoirs, Rivers and the Coastlines (1997) obliges the ministry to conduct the activities for avoiding the environmental hazards and damages (caused by floods and sea-level rise).⁷¹ The law on Environmental Impact Permit and the law on Environmental Expertise underline that the ministry is responsible to analyze the anthropogenic influences on the environment and vice versa.⁷² According to Article 14 of the law on protecting the population and the territory from natural and technological hazards, the ministry is responsible to establish the special units for managing and monitoring the situation during the emergencies⁷³.

Other governmental institutions able to take specific actions within the topic of environmental disaster and related migration are the National Environmental Agency (NEA) and the Ministry of Internal Affairs (MIA). NEA is responsible for research and analysis of current situations and the possible scenarios, while MIA is involved in maintaining the public order and the security during the environmental disasters. The ministry includes the Department of Emergency Management. Another governmental actor involved in the disaster management is the Ministry of Regional Development and Infrastructure; among the duties of the ministry is the participation in the activities aimed at eradication of the results of the environmental disasters. In 2012 the ministry allocated 9,500,000 GEL to support the individuals or the companies whose properties and business have been damaged due to environmental disaster (flooding) in Eastern Georgia, resulting in damage to agriculture.⁷⁴

There is a basic element of environmental law in the Georgian legal system, including: the Law on Protection of the Environment,⁷⁵ the Law on Water Resources,⁷⁶ and the Decree of the President of Georgia on the National Plan during the State of Emergencies.⁷⁷ For this purpose the State Regulation on the functions of the Ministries of Refugee and Accommodation⁷⁸ is not relevant as the legal system does

71. See GOGITIDZE ET AL., *supra* note 14, at 42.

72. *See id.*

73. *See id.*

74. CITIZEN'S GUIDE, *supra* 63, at 80-83.

75. The Law on Protection of the Environment of Georgia (1996), available at <http://www.parliament.ge/ge/law/1583/4414>.

76. The Law on Water Resources of Georgia (1997), available at <http://www.parliament.ge/ge/law/1632/4463>.

77. Decree of the Government of Georgia No. 415 of the President of Georgia on the National Plan During the State of Emergencies (2008) [hereinafter Decree No. 415].

78. Georgian State Regulation No. 43 on the Functions of the Ministries of Refugee and Accommodation Regulation (2004) [hereinafter State Regulation No. 43].

not recognize the eco-migrants as IDPs. The Decree of the President on the National Plan during the State of Emergencies underlines the roles of different state (on local, regional, and national levels) and non-governmental agencies during the emergency situations.⁷⁹ The Law of Protection of the Environment,⁸⁰ which is the main legal core on the issues related to environment, mentions the term ecological disaster but provides no definition.⁸¹ The law outlines the regulation norms of eco-disaster but does not mention the disaster risk assessment norms. Article 7 of the law states the citizen is obligated to inform the relevant state institutions in case of eco- or technological disaster, but gives no definition of “eco-disaster” itself.⁸² The law can be considered discriminatory with nature as one-way obligations can be noticed: the citizens and business owners are obligated to have the action plans in case of eco-disasters and technological disasters (in this case, the man-made disasters are meant) but it does not oblige the state itself.⁸³ The Law on Water Resources⁸⁴ mentions the ecological disasters caused by water or the disasters resulting in affecting the water resources.⁸⁵ Here as well, the definition of ecological disaster is missing, as well as the clearly stated indicators. Article 10 outlines the priority of the state during the ecological disasters related to water resources, and states that the State is obligated to conduct restoration works if the objects of national significance are damaged; however, it fails to indicate the particular agencies responsible for this or mention affected population.

The existing legal basis is rather weak due to several reasons, primarily the existing laws containing the terms—such as “environmental disaster,” “ecological disaster,” “environmental hazard”—but not including the differences between them or the definitions of any of them, therefore creating ambiguity around the concepts.

The functions of related institutions and their obligations are unclear: in some cases not indicated for the specific agency at all; in other cases, the duties are overlapping. For example, the task of controlling the data and monitoring on disasters is included in the functions of several institutions: National Agency of Environment, Sector, Regional and Inspection Divisions of the Ministry of Environment, Regional Divisions, and the office of the State Minister on Regional

79. *Id.*

80. *See* Law on Protection of Environment of Georgia, *supra* note 75.

81. *Id.*

82. *See* Law on Protection of Environment of Georgia, *supra* note 75, at art. 7(D).

83. *Id.*

84. *See* Law on Water Resources of Georgia, *supra* note 76.

85. *Id.*

Management Issues.⁸⁶ Furthermore, there is no clear distinction between the functions of state government and the local municipal governments.

The entire related legal basis is in regards to the disaster management within the rapid environmental disasters; there is no mention of slow-onset environmental disaster, such as deforestation. The legal system (as well as the institutional responses) is oriented on the disasters during the disaster itself; there is a lack of norms and regulations before or after the disaster, as well as a lack of a human rights dimension. The laws contain the elements on environmental disasters, stating the responsible agencies for managing the disaster assessment and the emergency situation. However, several questions arise. What is the environmental disaster? What is the specific terminology and its definitions? What are the indicators of the environmental disaster/hazard? What is the difference between environmental accident, hazard, and disaster, and how can the differentiations be drawn? In addition to failing to answer the above-mentioned questions, the laws do not mention the eco-migrants, or groups displaced due to environment related reasons.

Besides the loopholes in the legal system, there is a lack of information, research, and data, as well as the interest of international organizations and scholars. So far, no UNHCR, UNFCCC, or IOM related projects have been implemented regarding environmentally induced migration in Georgia. Among the very few international organizations involved in the topic has been OSCE mission in Georgia.⁸⁷ OSCE mission in Georgia and the NGO Green Alternative have published a study on Disaster Risk Management and the Environmentally Induced Migration in Georgia.⁸⁸ The study outlined the importance of the subject, emphasizing that due to the geographical position climate characteristics of Georgia, the environmental disasters such as landslides and flooding are frequent but underestimated.⁸⁹ Besides the study of OSCE, the research by ECMI Caucasus gives the comprehensive understanding of the issue from the historical perspective of eco-migrant displacement. ECMI identifies the major problems of the displaced people and notes “the government of Georgia tried to balance the demographic situation of minority settled regions by settling the eco-migrants inhabited by Armenian, Azeri, Greek, and other minority

86. See CITIZEN'S GUIDE, *supra* note 63; see also Decree No. 415, *supra* note 77.

87. See GOGITIDZE ET AL., *supra* note 14.

88. *Id.*

89. *Id.*

groups.”⁹⁰ Because it has a strong and active civil society network, Georgia is the leading country in the Caucasus Environmental Network (CENN)⁹¹ where the local NGOs with cooperation of NGOs from Azerbaijan and Armenia are working on the issue by conducting surveys and field work and raising awareness among the population and governmental agencies.⁹² The major achievement of the civil society in terms of the environmentally induced migration was the NGO Borjgali establishing the temporary mandate of Eco-Ombudsman.⁹³ The project was implemented in cooperation with the Public Defender’s Office of Georgia.⁹⁴

The Public Defender’s Office published an annual report in 2010 where a whole chapter was devoted to the issue of migration as a result of natural disasters and the affected persons.⁹⁵ The report outlined the specific legal regulation problems and the gaps in practice and provided specific recommendations for their resolution. Several reasons led to the inclusion of the topic in the report, such as an increased number of the disaster-affected families and an increase in complaints of the public towards the Public Defender within the topic.⁹⁶ As a result, the Public Defender’s Office has revealed a lot of problems in this area, later referred to in the report.⁹⁷ The NGO Borjgali applied to the Public Defender’s office with the project of establishing “Eco-Ombudsman.”⁹⁸ Eco-Ombudsman would be the part of the Public Defender’s Office responsible for monitoring the situation of eco-migrants, the people affected or displaced by the environmental issues. Due to the lack of resources and low priority of the issue, the Eco-Ombudsman office ran for six months between September 2012 and March 2013.⁹⁹ The project was fully funded by East-West Manage-

90. See Trier & Turashvili, *supra* note 27.

91. See generally CENN, <http://cenn.ge/> (last visited on July 30, 2014).

92. *Id.*

93. ECO-OMBUDSMAN REPORT BY NGO BORJALI (2013), available at <http://ngoborjghali.files.wordpress.com/2014/05/e18394e18399e1839de1839de1839be18391e183a3e18393e183a1e1839be18394e1839ce18398e183a1e18390e1839ce18392e18390e183a0e18398e183a8e18398.pdf> [hereinafter ECO-OMBUDSMAN REPORT].

94. *Id.*

95. ANNUAL REPORT OF PUBLIC DEFENDER OF GEORGIA: THE SITUATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS AND FREEDOMS OF GEORGIA (2010), available at <http://www.ombudsman.ge/uploads/other/1/1351.pdf>.

96. *Id.*

97. *Id.*

98. See ECO-OMBUDSMAN REPORT, *supra* note 93.

99. *Id.*

ment Institute (EWMI) Georgia representation.¹⁰⁰ The responsibilities included monitoring the human rights protection issues regarding the environmentally displaced people on the basis of received complaints and appeals from the citizens. On the basis of the received applications from the citizens, it examined the needs of the affected people, revealing the specific facts of violation of human rights and submitting the report to the Public Defender, who presented the issue to the relevant public institution. Eco-Ombudsman also contributed to raising awareness on the issue in public. As part of his/her duties, the ombudsman prepared the annual report and conducted consultations of the affected population: legal consultations as well as consultations regarding the procedures of financial reimbursement from the state.¹⁰¹ The five main achievements/activities of the office were outlined in the final report of Eco-Ombudsman, including: an information campaign, consultations with affected population and government officials, and implementing particular projects initiated by the office.¹⁰²

The information campaign was aimed at raising awareness and included the meetings and presentations with NGO workers, student groups, conducting presentations at the training events for youth, and interviews with the public television. The campaign also included raising awareness among the international society by meeting with international NGO representatives. Consultations included the direct interaction between the affected and vulnerable population and the Eco-Ombudsman via correspondence or meetings and field trips to observe the current situations of resettled populations and the vulnerable groups. Consultations with the governmental agencies involved meetings with government officials, aimed to discuss the current situation, examine the possible solutions for improving it, and mobilize resources together. The office also organized the Forum on Eco-Migration on February 5-6, 2013. The attendees of the forum were the government officials, NGO workers, and representatives of international organizations. The main aim of the forum was to discuss the current situation in regards the environmentally induced migration in Georgia and other countries, to analyze the systemic gaps, and to discuss the possible solutions¹⁰³.

The particular projects initiated by the office included the project on “Social Houses” on the local government of Autonomy Republic of Adjara and eco-migrants. The project ideally included the recon-

100. *Id.*

101. *Id.*

102. *Id.* at 1-14.

103. *Id.*

struction of an old hospital building into the housing appropriate for living and allocation of first and second-class environmentally displaced people in the region. The project was funded with 9 million GEL (4.3 million EUR) by Autonomy Republic of Adjara Government. After the office of Eco-Ombudsman was terminated, the information and monitoring of the project was closed to the public.¹⁰⁴

The office of Eco-Ombudsman has revealed the major problems and need to develop the state strategy, to fill the legal or data gaps. Due to the financial issues and the limited mandate, as well as time, the outstanding results have not been achieved.¹⁰⁵

III. PARTICULAR CASES

The following particular cases found in the local media illustrate the common problems that environmental migrants are facing in Georgia:

- Case 1: Distribution of 95 million GEL after the flooding in July 2012

The flooding in the Kakheti region,¹⁰⁶ on July 19, 2012, resulted in the damages to 28,500 families.¹⁰⁷ The costs included the damages of the housing and the agriculture. The Ministry of Infrastructure allocated 95 million GEL (42 million EUR) to support the affected population.¹⁰⁸ The ministry announced on January 18, 2013, that the affected families and the small business owners would get reimbursed starting from January 21, 2013, according to the damages they had suffered.¹⁰⁹ However, the ministry was accused of corruption and the uneven distribution of reimbursements after the media was attracted by the case of Archil Aladashvili and Nino Rostomashvili,¹¹⁰ farmers from Telavi, Kakheti Region. Mr. Aladashvili has stated that although the damages for his family included the damaged 0.17 ha of vineyard,

104. ECO-OMBUDSMAN REPORT, *supra* note 93.

105. *Id.*

106. The Kakheti region is located on the Eastern part of Georgia and is the main source and the center of agriculture in the country.

107. Press Release, Ministry of Reg'l Dev. & Infrastructure, 95 Million GEL Will be Distributed to the Victims of the Disasters in Kakheti (Jan. 18, 2013), *available at* <http://www.mrdi.gov.ge/ge/news/press/52a35341e4b073169dbbb6c0> [hereinafter Ministry of Reg'l Dev. & Infrastructure Press Release].

108. *Id.*

109. *Id.*

110. Ira Ninidze, *Bank Kartu Compensated the Aladashvili Family with 12 GEL*, PRESSA.GE (Jan.25, 2013), <http://www.presa.ge/new/?m=society&AID=20453>.

0.20 ha of vegetable gardens, and 0.40 ha of fruit gardens the amount of compensation he received was 12 GEL (6 EUR).¹¹¹ Mr. Aladashvili presented the official bank receipt as well as documented proof of the damages. Mrs. Rostomashvili, on the other hand, did not make it to the list of compensation receivers although her housing was damaged as well as her vegetable garden.¹¹² The cases were not further investigated.

- Case 2: The disregard of the damage categorization

In 2008, the houses in the area most vulnerable for environmental disasters were given the categorization.¹¹³ However, the categorization did not result in specific action from the state. The people with houses with the highest categories, that needed urgent reconstruction or were not repairable, were not displaced or compensated.¹¹⁴ On September 21, 2008, the local media and the population were shocked by the event that occurred in Adjara. The landslide buried the house with six family members, among them three children.¹¹⁵ The house was included in Category I, meaning that it was destroyed and unsuitable for living anymore.

The situation in the Southeastern Georgia indicates the failure of the government in the relocation of the eco-migrants: the relocated families were ethnic Georgians, from Adjara, while the inhabitants of the villages in Samtskhe-Javakheti were the minority families from Armenia, Azerbaijan, or Greece, resulting in tense relationships in ethnically diverse villages.¹¹⁶ The new government of Georgia was characterized by high nationalist values and, the ethnic minorities of the country have claimed, eagerness to change the demographic balance of the regions settled by them.¹¹⁷ The tense situation has caused conflicts and demonstrations a number of times. On March 9, 2006, an

111. Rusatvi 2 Daily News, *Courier 2013 01 24*, YouTube (Jan. 25, 2013), <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qoYjk0BCWYA>.

112. Press Release, Kakheta Info. Cent., Compensation of Victim of Natural Disaster in the Form of 12 GEL (Jan. 24, 2013) available at <http://www.ick.ge/rubrics/society/13468-12-video.html?fontstyle=f-larger> [hereinafter Kakheta Info. Cent. Press Release].

113. Rezo Getiashvili, *Challenges and Opportunities in the Context of Environmental Protection, Human Rights, and Migration* (2010).

114. See Lyle, *supra* note 21 (noting that the last relocations by governmental programs took place at the beginning of the 1990s).

115. Elene Khachapuridze, *Eco-migration – Challenge for Georgia*, NETGAZETI.GE (Jan. 19, 2012), <http://netgazeti.ge/GE/89/Life/7827/>.

116. See Trier & Turashvili, *supra* note 27.

117. See *id.* at 39 (citing Rostom Sarkissian, *Javakhet: Socio-Economic Neglect or Ethnic Unrest*, Diplomacy & World Affairs, DWA Discussion Paper no. 101, 2002).

argument between the Svan group¹¹⁸ and local Armenians resulted in the death of a twenty-three year old Armenian, Gevork Georkyan.¹¹⁹ The incident caused the widespread demonstrations of Armenian minorities and conflicts, not only in the region, but throughout the whole country.¹²⁰ ECMI argues that these events are one of the causes of creation of the negative image and perception on minority groups in Samtskhen-Javakheti region by Georgians, due to the widespread negative fueling of the issue from the media.¹²¹

CONCLUSIONS

The reviewed cases of Georgia identify the existing applicable measures to tackle disaster-induced migration and display the need of development of the legal framework. The existing measures, as well as the policy-making gaps, will be summarized below, followed by the conclusions and the recommendations.

A. *Summary of identified relevant governance measures and gaps*

To demonstrate and analyze the applicable measures on various stages of environmental disaster, the applicable governance measures are summarized in a timeline: 1) Measures/Tools applicable Pre-Disaster; 2) Measures/Tools applicable for Disaster mitigation; and 3) Measures/Tools applicable Post-Disaster.¹²²

On the PRE-Disaster stage, the Ministry on Environment and Natural Resources is the single identified role-player from the government. The ministry is responsible for developing strategies for protection of the environment and natural resources, analyzing and assessing the risks, and evaluating and monitoring the current state.¹²³ The ministry is operating using three main legal tools: Law on Protection of the Environment of Georgia, Law on Sea, Reservoirs, Rivers and Coastlines, and Law on Environmental Impact Permit.

118. Note: Svanetians were resettled from the Svaneti Region after the earthquakes in 1989 and 1991.

119. Koba Liklikadze, *Georgia: Tsalka District Again Wracked By Ethnic Violence*, RADIO FREE EUROPE/RADIO LIBERTY (March 17, 2006), <http://www.rferl.org/content/article/1066805.html>.

120. *Id.*

121. See Trier & Turashvili, *supra* note 27, at 46-47.

122. *Id.*

123. Decree No. 93 Georgian Government on Reorganizations and Structure of on the Ministry of Environment and Natural Resources of Georgia (2013), available at https://matsne.gov.ge/components/com_ldmssearch/files/downloadFile.php?pdf&v=1&id=1909622&ge.

The situation is rather different regarding the applicable measures for assistance during disaster management. In terms of financial assistance, emergency funds are allocated in Presidential funds and funds for other ministries.¹²⁴ They can be directed towards disaster assistance upon demand.¹²⁵ The Ministry of Natural Recourses and Environment is an institution directly applicable during the disaster events; however, the clear focus is on environmental aspects only, not considering human dimension. In terms of applicable legal tools, there is a clear focus on environmental protection only. In addition, responsibilities for the environment usually fall upon people and property owners, not upon governmental agencies, creating significant challenges to the protection of human rights in the cases such as eco-migrants.

The case study reveals a significant lack of legal or institutional responses at the Post-Disaster stage.¹²⁶ The only identified agencies relevant to this stage are the Parliamentary Commission on Environment and the initiative of the Parliament on categorization of the damaged properties.¹²⁷ However, the particular cases reveal major loopholes in the categorization, such as disregard of the categories or the committee responsible for its four years of dysfunction.¹²⁸

In order to draw proper conclusions, after naming the existing measures, it is important to identify the existing gaps, issues, and problems that need to be properly tackled. The particular cases and the legal/institutional basis discussed in the paper reveal a number of sensitive issues in terms of governance of disaster-induced migration. From the literature review, we can set the most cutting-edge issues on all three levels, or *indicators*.¹²⁹ The *indicators* will show the level of preparedness towards the discussed matter. Considering the importance of the economic aspect and that eco-migrants are one of the poorest parts of the Georgian society, the *allocation of funds* is the first *indicator*. Considering the identified issues regarding the legal framework and the relevant institutions, the *Legal and Institutional indicators* are given particular importance. And last but not least, the

124. See State Regulation No. 43, *supra* note 78; see also Ministry of Reg'l Dev. & Infrastructure Press Release, *supra* note 107.

125. See Ministry of Reg'l Dev. & Infrastructure Press Release, *supra* note 107.

126. See *id.*

127. See ENVIRONMENTAL PERFORMANCE REVIEWS: GEORGIA, SECOND REVIEW, *supra* note 4.

128. *Id.*

129. See *id.*

research gap, due to the noticeable absence of data, is one of the *indicators*.

The discussion of the particular cases in Georgia demonstrates the serious problem in terms of financial support and allocation of funds.¹³⁰ The annual budget of Georgia included the funds for assisting the population during the environmental disasters, and although the amount was significantly small, it did give first-hand support for the basic needs. However, the budget does not include funds for this purpose beginning in 2010.¹³¹ The emergency funding for disaster management comes from the Presidential Fund and an occasional contribution from the Ministry of Infrastructure. However, the previously discussed cases have revealed that the funds do not always reach the beneficiaries.¹³²

The legal protection issue on the international level appears especially vague in Georgian cases, as well as in international law. International actors and academics have not agreed upon whether the displaced population should be considered refugees or IDPs.¹³³ Specific legal status is granted *only* if the migration is forced and internal (*only* in certain states). The legal protection of displaced people is vague in Georgian cases as well. The issue is not recognized by the national legislature. The legal instruments focusing on the environmental disaster aspect do not give clear definitions or distinctions between various terms. More importantly, in the quite limited basis of environmental law, there is lack of referral to human rights and the important intersection of environment and human rights protection, and the state “avoids the responsibilities.”¹³⁴

The relevant institutions on the international level show certain trends: the institutional responses focus on basic human rights, either regarding *only* political refugees or *only* purely environmental issues. On the international level and Georgian cases, the jurisdiction is usually fragmented. The responsibilities overlap, and most institutions only focus on research, environmental protection, or humanitarian aid. Less governmental institutions consider the links between human rights and environment or eco-migration in their mis-

130. See Kakheti Info. Cent. Press Release, *supra* note 112.

131. See Trier & Turashvili, *supra* note 27.

132. See Kakheti Info. Cent. Press Release, *supra* note 112.

133. Roger Zetter, *The Role of Legal and Normative Frameworks for the Protection of Environmentally Displaced People*, in *MIGRATION AND CLIMATE CHANGE: ASSESSING THE EVIDENCE* 385, 385 (Frank Laczko & Christine Aghazarm eds., 2009).

134. Aleko Tskitishvili, *Georgian State Avoids Responsibilities Toward Eco-Migrants*, HUMANRIGHTSHOUSE.ORG (July 11, 2012), <http://humanrightshouse.org/Articles/18335.html>.

sion. In Georgia, there is no visible distinction between the responsibilities of the local and national governments in terms of disaster management. Institutional assistance by the relevant institutions is only during the disaster, and there is a visible lack of international actors conducting work on the subject within Georgia.

A lack of official statistical data is evident, mainly caused by the lack of interest in environmental issues in Georgia and Georgian cases in international organizations.¹³⁵ EU, U.N., and various other agencies or international organizations are funding numerous academic and technical projects to create a good research platform and knowledge on the impacts of climate change on the environment and human rights. However, the majority of the programs and the research projects focus on the Horn of Africa or the Pacific; other small scale but vulnerable areas remain undisclosed, Georgia among them. So far, no international research project has included Georgia as a case study. Insufficient research and absence of data impede the Georgian eco-migrants from obtaining needed support. Local NGO network CENN is the only relevant non-governmental actor in terms of environmentally-induced migration in Georgia, which is producing a necessary basis for knowledge on environmental and climate-induced migration in Georgia.¹³⁶

B. Final conclusions and recommendations

Summarizing the existing measures and problems allows us to get back to the main research question of the paper and address it. The paper aims to present the case study of Georgia, as well to review the applicable governance means and the revealed gaps in order to identify what needs to be done to further develop the national strategy. As the previous parts of the paper have presented the issue and revealed the gaps, one can identify the needs for further development, later summarized in the recommendations.

Experiencing the transformation from the Soviet Union system to Western standards, Georgia undergoes constant changes in national legal and institutional reforms. Due to the rapid changes in the governmental strategies, the reforms are mostly inconsistent. However, the government has expressed the initiative to implement the Western values, with the strong motivation of becoming a strategic partner for the U.S. and EU countries.

135. The argument can be supported by a limited number of international organizations and researchers working on the issue in the case of Georgia.

136. See CENN, *supra* note 91.

One of the major aspects of Western values is the protection of human rights, which has become the topic of the working area for most NGOs in Georgia and the main task of Georgian government to consider. Whether it has been successfully developed or not, human right protection is the front line and discussion topic of both international and local public actors. Another important aspect of Western values is the protection of environment and environmentally friendly production, industry, or lifestyle. Unlike most countries in the world, North European communities have been actively involved in creating a new system for economic growth and devising strategies aimed at sustainable development, actively involving renewable energy resources and eco-friendly strategies. Awareness of carbon footprints has become a decisive aspect in Nordic countries.¹³⁷ Northern European countries have established a strong base for developing renewable energy systems, and the European Union has invested significant funds into innovative technologies and research methods aimed at ecologically sustainable development.¹³⁸ In addition to implementing innovative strategies for the protection of natural resources, the importance of a human rights approach is highly valued. The local population, as well as the wider public are fully conscious of the eco-friendly way of life and are able to actively participate to it due to the established relevant infrastructure.¹³⁹ The environment is no longer seen as an unlimited endowment from nature to humans, but is understood as an active role player in human lives and decision-making, establishing a balance between anthropocentric and eco-centric approaches.

The paper has shown that the environment and human rights are particularly interrelated, as not only humans have an impact on the environment, but vice versa; the impact of the environment on human population leads to significant changes, including forced relocation, migration, poverty, and conflicts. The paper has also outlined the importance of focusing on the issue not only during rapid changes and disasters, but also the importance of concentrating on the issue with a long-term perspective. The Disaster Management Cycle suggested by

137. Nikola Zeljkoviæ, *Nordic Countries – Global Leaders in the Green Economy*, NORDENCENTRUM.PL (Sept. 23, 2012 5:24 PM), http://www.nordencentrum.pl/publikacje/monitorn/item/22-nordic_green.

138. See *Environment-Funding Opportunities*, EUROPEAN COMM'N, http://ec.europa.eu/environment/funding/intro_en.htm (last updated Mar. 6, 2014) (showing funding opportunities provided by the European Commission for projects focusing on sustainable development); see also *Energy-Grants*, EUROPEAN COMM'N, http://ec.europa.eu/energy/grants/index_en.htm (last visited July 30, 2014) (showing grants offered by the European Commission for projects focusing on green technologies).

139. E.g., recycling, popularity of environmentally friendly devices and cars, etc.

the International Organization for Migration (IOM)¹⁴⁰ involved five steps towards sustainable development with regard to climate change/disaster management and focuses on durable solutions. The long-term durable strategies towards sustainable development are being implemented in many European countries. The Georgian case however, gives the clear insight that the topics are highly overlooked until such drastic events as landslides and floods take place.

How can Georgia learn from the best practices? What steps are necessary to protect the populations and be aware of possible risks? The answers to these questions can be recapitulated in a set of recommendations.

In terms of necessary changes on governance level, the recommended steps refer to a better organization of tasks among institutions, allocations of funds, and development of a legal basis. One of the priorities should be an appropriate distribution of the responsibilities regarding the environmental impact and the affected population among public institutions. The relevant responsible institutions—especially on pre- and post-disaster stages—are not clearly defined. Having the responsible agencies on each level (local or national) and each stage will lead to structural balance and better organizational management. Allocation of funds for the people affected by environmental issues, including those relocated or those living in the risk zones should be on the agenda of the national government. As the current annual budget of Georgia does not include such funds, the affected population receives only the voluntary funding of governmental institutions (such as shown in the case study: allocation of funds by the Ministry of Infrastructure or the Presidential Fund on occasional events). The need for a more developed legal framework on eco-migration is evident, as it would be an important starting point for further developments. In terms of governance, it is important that the government measures are aimed at not only the emergency situations, but at developing durable solutions; the actions should be applicable to the pre- and post-disaster stages. The mobilization of resources to reach successful solutions in the long run should involve focusing on the slow onset of environmental changes, as well as the rapid events. This approach will be more consistent and solid in timing and results.

As for other aspects where there is room for development, increasing the public awareness and promotion of the notion

140. INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATION FOR MIGRATION, DISASTER RISK REDUCTION AND CLIMATE CHANGE ADAPTION IN IOM'S RESPONSE TO ENVIRONMENTAL MIGRATION (2010), available at <http://www.iom.int/Template/migration-climate-change-environmental-degradation/interactive-factsheet/index.html>.

“environmentally friendly” are particularly important. Protection of the environment and usage of renewable energy resources will be assets towards sustainable development. Environmentally friendly living should be included in the strategy of the government as well as in the private sector.

The paper shows the limited data and research available on the subject. Thus, conducting the relevant research, creating the sufficient knowledge database, and distributing the proper outcomes will lead to an increase of awareness and interest from various stakeholders and actors on the local, national, or international levels.

As mentioned during the case study, the people affected by the environmental hazards remain the poorest part of the society whose rights are not protected due to the absence of relevant governance tools. Special social programs need to be implemented and supported by the governmental and the non-governmental actors empowering them.

In summary, creating a substantive legal basis, increasing awareness of the “eco-friendly concept” among the Georgian population, and developing infrastructure for environmentally friendly productions will be important assets towards the sustainable development of Georgia.