

**No Way Out:  
An Assessment of the Romani Community in Georgia**

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## Introduction

The Romani community is the most marginalized and disadvantaged ethnic community in Georgia. Although accurate estimates are hard to establish, the population is thought to number up to 1,500 persons, living in multiple small settlements across Georgia. Extreme poverty, unemployment, lack of education and health care, and isolation from larger society comprise several of the major problems the community as a whole is facing. The overall situation for the Roms in Georgia has significantly deteriorated since the Soviet period, leaving the population practically devoid of any means to lift themselves out of their often devastating circumstances.

This assessment aims at providing the first systematic overview of the Romani community in Georgia and includes an assessment of the Roms in Abkhazia as well. Over the course of 2007, dozens of informal group and individual interviews were conducted with members representing each of the known Romani settlements in the country.<sup>1</sup> Although a few reports have already been published on the Romani situation in Georgia, including one by the Human Rights Information and Documentation Center in Tbilisi (2003) and another by the Office of the Public Defender (2006),<sup>2</sup> a complete assessment has so far been absent. At the same time, international bodies such as the European Court for Human Rights in Strasbourg and the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance have repeatedly called for the Georgian Government to address the issue, and to provide more information on the situation of the Romani population in Georgia. This paper also intends to assist in filling this gap.<sup>3</sup>

An important note to those looking to become involved in assisting the Romani population in Georgia concerns the fatigue and mistrust of many Roms towards outsiders. Over the last ten years or so, numerous individuals representing international organizations, media institutions etc. have visited Romani settlements, asking similar questions to the ones used

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<sup>1</sup> I am grateful to Bakar Berekashvili for conducting a series of initial interviews with Roms in Tbilisi during January-March 2007 and for identifying the settlement of Roms in Leninovka village in Kakheti.

<sup>2</sup> See *“People without rights: Roms Rights in Georgia”*- Report by the Human Rights Information and Documentation Centre (HRIDC), Tbilisi 2003, available at <http://www.hridc.org>, and *“Roms in Georgia, Problems of Roms residing in Kutaisi”*, in Annual Report of Public Defender of Georgia, Tbilisi, 2006, pp. 7-10.

<sup>3</sup> See for example European Commission against Racism and Intolerance, Report on Georgia Adopted on 22 June 2001, p. 15, at: [http://www.coe.int/t/e/human\\_rights/ecri/5-archives/1-ecri%27s\\_work/5-cbc\\_second\\_reports/Georgia\\_CBC2\\_en.pdf](http://www.coe.int/t/e/human_rights/ecri/5-archives/1-ecri%27s_work/5-cbc_second_reports/Georgia_CBC2_en.pdf); and Report on Georgia, Adopted on 30 June 2006 and made Public on 13 February 2007, at: [http://www.coe.int/t/e/human\\_rights/ecri/1-ecri/2-country-by-country\\_approach/georgia/georgia\\_cbc\\_3.asp#P335\\_53935](http://www.coe.int/t/e/human_rights/ecri/1-ecri/2-country-by-country_approach/georgia/georgia_cbc_3.asp#P335_53935) (accessed on 28 January 2008).

in this assessment while promising assistance in the future. Journalists and cameramen have been present in many such settlements, often convincing Roms to cooperate in return for a promise of future aid. However, according to the information received over this assessment, no targeted projects have been initiated to help the population, and Roms feel somewhat betrayed by the regular stream of visitors who have offered little tangible aid. Consequently, a high degree of skepticism and reluctance to cooperate exists throughout several of the settlements, and any future actors would be well advised to keep in mind this sense of mistrust that has been created by previously unsuccessful attempts at community based collaboration.

### **History of Settlements in Georgia**

Due to the widespread illiteracy of the Romani population and the almost complete lack of information in literary sources, it is difficult to outline an accurate history of their settlement in Georgia. Engaging in conversations with older members of the different communities proved to be a daunting task; elderly Roms are hard to come by because of low life expectancies, and are often struggling with aging memories, making it difficult to collect comprehensive information. Thus, what follows is a broad sketch of the groups' various movements into Georgia, pieced together by what little fragments are left mostly through face-to-face interviews.

Beginning in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century with the incorporation of Georgia into the Russian Empire, small bands of traveling Romani traders began moving into the vast territory. Living off the sales and trading of small wares, goods, horses and fortunes, little information is known about any permanent settlements during this period. Most likely, Roms at this time were largely nomadic in nature, constantly on the move. A large influx of Roms into Georgia began in the 1930's as devastating famine hit large parts of Ukraine and Moldova. Roms from these regions moved in massive groups to the south, either on foot or by train, and began dispersing across Georgia from the Black Sea coast inward. Exact numbers of Roms from this wave are unknown, but early Soviet Census data records a marked increase from 70 Roms in 1926 to 727 in 1939. The advance of the German army into the southern regions of Russia during World War II also forced many Roms to flee the invasion and seek refuge in Georgia. Their numbers rose to 1,024 in 1959 according to that year's census. However, numbers from this period suffer from the same flaws as current

censuses, in that Roms most likely either hid their ethnicity or avoided the census altogether.

During the Soviet period, the nomadic lifestyle of the Romani groups came into conflict with the new set of social norms put forth by the Communist authorities. Roms were offered regular employment as unskilled or semi-skilled laborers in factories, but even with regulations passed against petty-trade, the majority still continued to work in this sphere. The biggest changes to the community as a whole came under Khrushchev, who in 1956 passed a series of measures to halt the nomadism of Roms across the Soviet Union. Over the next five years, local authorities arbitrarily stopped Roms where they encountered them, registered them, handed out documents, and also arranged for the distribution of permanent housing. Many Roms in Georgia were put to work in both agricultural *kolkhozes* (collective farms) and factories, though some continued to work as petty-traders. Children were sent to school to receive primary education, and families were incorporated into state health care facilities.

The fall of the Soviet Union and Georgia's independence drastically changed the situation of many Roms living in Georgia. First, the outbreak of virulent nationalism in the country affected many non-Georgian ethnic groups, and Roms, still afflicted by historical negative stereotypes about their cultural behavior and way of life, were sometimes specifically targeted by nationalist mobs. For example, in the Kakhetian village of Mukuzani, a vibrant Romani community existed throughout the Soviet period, where friendly relations had developed with neighboring Georgians. However, in the wake of the country's nationalist mobilization, militias swept through some of the small Romani settlement in the early 1990s, razing houses to the ground and indiscriminately seizing property. Similar cases of harassment were also experienced almost at random among several smaller settlements. Incidents of this kind, combined with the economic collapse and civil wars of the early 1990s, led many Roms to leave for Russia, sometimes linking up with relatives, in Krasnodar *krai* or elsewhere, and in search of greater economic opportunities in the north. The entire period following the fall of the USSR has been marked by significant out-migration and the deterioration of social and economic conditions for the Roms in Georgia.

## Demography and Housing Conditions<sup>4</sup>

Romani settlements today are scattered across Georgia, with no one location holding a population of more than 300 people. In Tbilisi, where the largest community can be found, approximately 250-300 people live in rented apartments and homes in the Samgori district, near the Navtlughi market. Rent per day ranges from 7-13 GEL (\$4-8), and those families who can not afford the rent find shelter in the local train station for short periods of time. Large families of eleven or twelve people usually sleep on the floors of these dwellings, though the conditions there are thought to be the best compared to other Romani settlements in Georgia. Although there is another district in Tbilisi, which local residents commonly refer to as the “Bosha district”<sup>5</sup> (Romani district), no Roms were identified there; the majority of the current population in that area is of Moldovan ethnicity. Roms are thought to have been the dominant ethnic group in the district during the Soviet period but after the fall of the USSR, most Roms have relocated to other regions of Georgia.

The small village of Leninovka, 10 km from Dedoplistskaro in Georgia’s eastern region of Kakheti, consists of around 100-120 people living in typical rural homes that they own themselves. These people mostly carry Ukrainian family names and claim to have Ukrainian roots and ties with other Romani communities with Ukrainian last names in eastern Georgia.<sup>6</sup>

Near Tbilisi, between Rustavi and the Lilo wholesale market, a substantial community of 120 Roms lives adjacent to the Gatchiani railway station in Gatchiani district of the Gardabani *rayon*. Most of the population there has Ukrainian last names as well. Living conditions there are far worse than in Samgori and Leninovka, with irregular electricity supply and water needing to be brought from a source several hundred meters away from the dwellings.

A third group of Roms with Ukrainian family names comes from two small, extremely impoverished communities in Mukuzani and Telavi in Kakheti region. No electricity or running water is available for these two communities, as they currently live only in hastily constructed shelters. The people there appear to split their time between the two settlements.

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<sup>4</sup> Detailed information on housing conditions and locations can be found in the chart in Appendix A

<sup>5</sup> *Bosha* is the Georgian term for “Gypsy”.

<sup>6</sup> For more on the connections between communities, see the section on Community Organization.

Next, a group of some 100 Roms claiming Russian ancestry lives in the Black Sea coastal town of Kobuleti in the Autonomous Republic of Ajara. They dwell on the east side of the railroad tracks in a group of self-owned homes on three separate streets. These Roms claim that relatives migrated to Kobuleti from Krasnodar *krai* during World War II.

In Kutaisi, a group of roughly 100 Roms lives compactly in Soviet-style apartments in the Avangard district, interspersed with the local Georgian population in a collection of high rise buildings. Several additional families also live in very rundown private houses in the Avangard district, as well as in the town of Samtredia in the Imereti region. Lastly, on the west bank of the Rioni River in Kutaisi, next to the Chavchavadze bridge, a group of 50 Kurdish/Azerbaijani Roms live in erected shelters/tents with electricity but no running water.

Finally, in Sukhumi, the capital of the *de facto* separatist republic of Abkhazia, roughly 500 Roms live in private apartments and houses in a district to the north of the center of the city.

### **Employment and Economic Status**

Depending on their relative level of poverty, Roms in Georgia are engaged in several economic activities. Those living in more urban areas, such as Kobuleti, Kutaisi and Tbilisi, are able to engage in petty trade through buying cheap goods from Turkish traders and selling them on the street. Women generally do most of the trading, whereas men largely stay home to watch the children. No stands or small shops were found among any of the communities, and Roms generally frequent places of high traffic such as bazaars and transportation hubs. A daily profit of 10 GEL (\$6) can be made on average for a family, though as mentioned it is generally women who do the majority of the trading, while the men stay at home. This money is barely enough to buy food and pay the rent on apartments and houses, although in some rare cases, property has been passed down from the Soviet period. Children as well as teenage mothers usually disperse along the main avenues of urban areas to supplement the family's income with money collected from begging. Without any vocational training or substantial education, Roms have great difficulties finding employment in Georgia, where unemployment among the population as a whole is considerably high.



In the villages, the situation is quite different. Although in Leninovka, some Romani men work in farming enterprises, the majority of the male population is out of work. Irregular employment comes in the form of construction jobs. Women by and large depart for the larger towns and cities two or three days a week by means of public transport, to beg for money throughout the day along with the children. A good day would bring in five GEL (\$3) from begging per family of ten people. Both urban and village Roms reported cases of discrimination when looking for work and trying to compete with other nationalities for the same position. The situation has worsened so much in Gatchiani that Romani men have simply stopped offering their labor, no longer believing in the purposefulness of such actions.

### **Relations with Larger Society and Accusations of Discrimination**

Although open discriminatory sentiment flared up during the early 1990s as noted above, tensions died down in the following years and relations with other ethnicities have been on the whole positive according to most of the respondents interviewed. Extremely poverty-stricken Roms in various areas often attest to the support from Georgians and other neighbours, not just in giving money and food but also assisting in building houses such as in Mukazani and Telavi. Relations in the markets and bazaars between Roms and other ethnicities were generally viewed as positive by the interviewed Roms, who commented that although harassment and negative stereotyping takes place, there have been no overt incidents or conflicts with surrounding society, not including law enforcement authorities, which will be discussed below. However, this may partly be explained by a reluctance to talk about such occurrences. Interestingly, Roms living in the tent camp in Kutaisi mentioned that representatives from the local police stop by every three or four days and inquire about any possible problems or discrimination. These Kutaisi Roms stated that this practice had started after the 2003 'Rose Revolution'.

A certain degree of hostility and/or disregard for the Romani population is nonetheless visible. The traditions and way of life of Roms are thought to conflict with that of Georgian society, and negative stereotypes of the Roms as beggars, thieves, and petty criminals still persist in Georgia. The surrounding society largely views the problems that the Roms face as self-inflicted and thus unworthy of provided assistance. No targeted programs have been undertaken to help the population, with Roms commenting that any of their attempts to turn

to authorities to solve minor problems are simply ignored (according to respondents, such pleas were made in the 1990s, but the practice was discontinued after no progress was achieved). Not one of the communities visited during the field research could recall a visit by a government official interested in their plight.

Next, though the majority of Roms downplayed any events of discrimination (possibly out of fear of the consequences of passing on information), another larger trend was noticeable in all of the communities that engage in trading. In 2004, regulations were passed by the Tbilisi City Council that prohibited wandering trading on the streets.<sup>7</sup> Since that time, Roms especially in Tbilisi have experienced physical abuse, including in one case a leg having been broken by a police officer, harassment, jail time, large fines, and the seizure of goods. Some Roms even claim that such encounters occur as often as once or twice a week; such incidents have gone completely unnoticed and unreported. Several parents from the Samgori district in Tbilisi mentioned that their children are periodically taken away by authorities and placed in children's colonies, forcing parents to pay 20-30 GEL (\$12-18) to retrieve their children. Such trading activities are vital in providing subsistence to Romani families, and now men, women and children are actively evading the law in order to survive.

Roms are completely unaware of the legal rights bestowed upon them and have no recourse to respond to the arrests and judicial proceedings. In addition, the presence of Roms in political, judicial or police structures is non-existent. Roms are not represented at any level of government. During the interviews it was revealed that Romani respondents had no knowledge of any state structures, such as the Public Defender's Office, which might be able to assist them in such incidents of harassments or discrimination. Moreover, there are no community-based organizations that could provide a link to the authorities. The community structure inherent to the Roms community (see below) has not only almost completely disintegrated over the past twenty years, but appears impotent in deciding any problems that stretch beyond interactions between group members.

As written in a report prepared by the Human Rights Information and Documentation Center (HRIDC), numerous instances of *severe* police brutality, open discrimination, and

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<sup>7</sup> On January 30, 2004 the Tbilisi City Sakrebulo (City Council), with its decision N 2-6, pursuant to the Law of Georgia on Organizing Economic Activities of Local Self-Government and Local Government Bodies, abolished peddling in Tbilisi and charged the Tbilisi Mayor's Office, Tbilisi authorities and district governors to provide street vendors with the alternative work space.

illegal detentions by police officers were reported among the Romani population in 2003.<sup>8</sup> However, over the course of the dozens of interviews conducted during this assessment, the scale of such human rights violations, at least according to the Roms interviewed, was much lower. Whether this can be attributed to general improvements in law enforcement or to an increased hesitation to inform our researchers about the problems is unclear.

### **Documents and Registration**

The possession of documents by Roms largely depends on the age of the respondent. For those born during the Soviet Union, the frequency of registered documents is extremely high. However, the collapse of the USSR and the emergence of a weakened Georgian state hindered many Roms from filing out official documents of birth, deaths, pensions, etc. Added to this, Romani children are usually born at home, not in a hospital, so extra steps are needed to be taken to acquire forms and pay for the registration process. Internally displaced Roms from Abkhazia (see below) are almost completely without documents, as they were forced to flee the region during the civil war in 1992-93, leaving most possessions behind. A man interviewed who has 11 children remarked that he once went to the local registration office and was told that he needed 12 GEL (\$7) per child in order to register. That kind of money was clearly unavailable, and the head of the family had to abstain from the registration. Indeed, the impact of non-registration is significant: without proper registration, citizens of Georgia cannot receive pensions, attend health care facilities, or enroll children in school.

On the whole, however, among Roms living in urban areas there is a greater frequency of document holders. A few families in the Gatchiani district claimed to possess documents and receive state support in the form of monthly allowances. Children from these families were the only ones in the settlement to attend school. Also, in the Kutaisi tent settlement, Roms presented Azerbaijani passports, which on all accounts appeared valid. These people planned to return to Azerbaijan in the near future.

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<sup>8</sup> “*People without rights: Roms Rights in Georgia*”- Report by the Human Rights Information and Documentation Centre (HRIDC), Tbilisi 2003, available at <http://www.hridc.org>.

## **Access to Education**

Very low rates of school attendance were observed across all Romani communities. This tendency can be explained by several reasons, but first and foremost by a lack of insistence by parents on receiving an education. Several interviews solely with young people revealed that motivation to learn does exist, and some enterprising children attend regular classes. However, the vast majority of school-age children either remains at home throughout the day or takes to the streets to beg for money. A small group of children even expressed an interest in going to school but ran up against pressure and reluctance on the part of parents. Upon conversations with parents, few appeared inclined to exert any effort to find ways for children to attend classes, and seemed content or complacent with the current situation.

Due to the high level of poverty in the community, parents can not afford to purchase the necessary school supplies, clothes, and textbooks. There have been cases where children were sent to school and attended for several years but subsequently were forced to leave after their parents could not continue paying for all the necessities. As stated above, the cost of acquiring documents for unregistered children also plays a decisive role in whether or not to send a child to school. Parents in Kobuleti also stated that gifts-in-kind were needed to enroll children in the local schools.

In addition, a significant percentage of school-age children in the Samgori district of Tbilisi attended school in the late 1990s. Due to problems with other school children, including bullying and harassment, however, Romani children were kept at home by their parents and have not returned since. Both parents and children stated that the school directors and teachers were not to blame; other school children created the problems. However, due to fear of putting their children in such a situation, almost none have returned.

Lastly, the logistical aspect of attending school presents difficulties for Romani children in some locations. The school bus which took children from the Leninovka village to the local school ten kilometers away stopped running five years ago, and now parents are reluctant to have their children walk the distance alone. The four children from the Gatchiani district who do attend school take a train ride for 20-25 minutes every day just to reach the local school, adding more to the cost of their education.

Those children who do attend school rarely finish primary and secondary school, usually dropping out after the sixth class. Cases were encountered in which children had finished all eleven classes, and one recorded account of a young Romani man enrolled in the law faculty of an institute in Rustavi. However, this was clearly an exceptional case, and the overwhelming majority of the small numbers of Roms who attend school never reach that far. Among the older generations who grew up during the Soviet period, a higher level of education was noted, usually specific to an industrial skill or agriculture, with which they were employed. These older individuals at times educated children at home, especially in the various languages of Russian, Georgian, and Romani, but the level of literacy among those home-schooled children was still extremely low. Such 'classes' were irregular at best, hastily organized, and without any resources for proper instruction.

### **Access to Health Care**

As in the situation of education and pensions, the lack of registration prevents many Roms from acquiring medical care. Facilities do exist near almost every settlement, but even for those with proper documentation, Roms can not take advantage of the health care offered again because of a lack of money. Complaints were heard about bribes needed and insufficient money for expensive medicine. Children are largely born at home and exposed to numerous health complications as well. A high death rate among infants and children and a very low life expectancy have been two very notable characteristics of many of the Roms interviewed. A Red Cross program several years ago provided some minor assistance to the community in Samgori district, but no other persons have seen any kind of interventions. Most children have never been to a doctor in their life, and thus lack all immunizations and protective treatments. Obstacles in receiving medical care was referred to as one of the major problems by Romani respondents, and in almost all communities visited, at least one instance of a severe medical necessity was witnessed, one that could not be treated due to a lack of resources and documents.

### **Language, Religion and Culture**

Roms interviewed over the course of the assessment primarily conversed in Russian, their knowledge of which was sufficient and more or less conversationally fluent. However, the very low level of literacy contributed to limited language skills. Georgian interviewers

during the assessment at times commented on the remarkable level of knowledge of Georgian among the younger generation of Roms, even among those who had never attended school. On the whole, Roms living in urban areas possessed better knowledge of Georgian and more limited Russian, while those living in the regions preferred to speak in Russian, claiming little knowledge of Georgian. All those interviewed professed to speak primarily Romani at home, although some Roms in Kutaisi spoke Kurdish as well as several other Turkic languages. Several mutually incomprehensible dialects of Romani exist within the population as a whole, and their ability to communicate with members of other settlements is largely determined by membership of the same clan (see below).

Several religions are professed among the Romani communities across Georgia. The majority of those living in and around Tbilisi is Christian Orthodox and claims to attend church somewhat regularly. Icons and other religious symbols were openly displayed in several homes. Muslim families and Evangelical converts also live in the Samgori district. Moving westward, a higher number of Muslims appears in Kutaisi and along the Black Sea coast. The Pentecostal Church has also made inroads amongst the Romani community in Kobuleti with four families converting over the past ten years.

Weddings, funerals and other celebrations are still kept in high regard in the various settlements. Those connected through clannish relations (see below) do attempt to visit relatives at such times, and whole families have made trips over the past few years to attend such gatherings. Romani music and dancing are still widely practiced and exhibited, especially among children who do not attend school. Young people still express a strong interest in studying aspects of Romani language and culture, but have little means to do so.

### **Community Organization and Social Relations**

Caste structures and hierarchical leadership structures that have characterized Romani communities for centuries have largely disappeared amongst the population in Georgia. In almost every small settlement, the use of a 'baron,' or elected leader of the community responsible for adjudicating internal conflicts, has declined, largely because no successors were named when older generations of these leaders passed away. Each family claims to govern its own affairs and mutual aid is only offered to members of one's own extended family, not to the extremely needy in general. The collapse of these social structures, which by many accounts were very active and useful during the Soviet period, has resulted in a

very fragmented community that has no mechanisms for combating the series of problems that its members continue to face. People claiming to be barons were found both in Samgori district and the village of Leninovka in Kakheti. In the former location, the wife of the deceased baron stated that she took over his responsibilities after his death, but it was unclear how much say she has in the community. In Leninovka, baron elections are supposed to be held next year and one man is picked to win them. However, other respondents in the village displayed a lack of trust in his leadership and spoke of an informal hierarchy that unevenly distributed jobs and products among the community.

As with other Romani communities, very young marriage ages and high birth rates cause many problems in feeding, housing, and raising large numbers of children. Teenage mothers appeared almost incapable of watching their children, and some of the behavior witnessed on the part of young children was very alarming. As most members of the older generations have either died or moved to Russia after the collapse of the USSR, Romani settlements are by and large comprised of very young parents with an average of five children per couple. Mixed marriages with Georgians are very rare, but do occur, with Georgian women mainly becoming part of the Romani community (the reverse was not seen).

A 'clan system' is the best way to describe relations between different settlements, but not 'clan' in the sense normally associated with the Caucasus. Instead, the term when used in this context refers only to the origins of the different Romani populations of Georgia. This is especially the case with regards to the times and patterns of resettlement of different groups, and not familial relations that govern economic and social relations within a distinct community. The clans currently present in Georgia are mainly delineated by the country of their origin, such as Ukraine, Russia, Moldova, Central Asia or Azerbaijan. Therefore, although the umbrella term 'Rom' encompasses a similar set of characteristics among all the respondents, the individual settlements only maintain relations with other communities that share their own Romani dialect, culture, religion, etc. Therefore, a settlement in Kutaisi has little or no contacts with that of Gatchiani due to different origins and linguistic dialects, but might keep close contact with the community in Samgori due to parallel histories.

## **The Georgian-Abkhaz War and Romani Displaced Persons**

As documented by several first-hand interviews with Roms who used to live in Abkhazia at the time of the collapse of the USSR, the treatment of the community there was deplorable during the conflict. Reports of widespread discrimination, death threats, robberies, and other violence plagued the Roms living there, causing immense physical and psychological damage. Some Roms even claimed to be the main target of discrimination by Abkhazians. Most Roms fled northward at the time of the war, settling in Krasnodar *krai* in Russia. However, a stream of displaced persons made their way to Kutaisi where they dispersed among the existing settlements in Georgia, with individuals linking up with relatives.

Scattered Romani IDP families from Abkhazia can be found among the settlements across Georgia, especially in the Samgori district of Tbilisi, where numbers may be up to 150-200 people. These people are entirely without any sort of documentation or registration, and completely unaware of the programs run by the Georgian government to assist displaced persons from the war. Smaller numbers of Romani IDPs are found additionally in other settlements in Georgia.

Many Roms returned to Abkhazia in 2002 after having fled the 1992-93 conflict northward into Rostov *oblast*, Samara and Krasnodar *krai* in Russia. At first, approximately 200 resettled in a northern district of Sukhumi, occupying their former houses and apartments, abandoned over the course of the war. Over the past five years, an estimated 300 more Roms have enlarged the community, stating that harassment in Russia prompted their decision to return. All in all, these Roms expressed the lowest level of discontent with their current situation, and the wages and conditions described differed remarkably from the more impoverished Roms living in Georgia proper. Most had both Russian and Abkhaz citizenship, were completely registered with the authorities, and received medical care when available. As in other communities, very few of the children attend local schools, but they do not in general wander the streets begging for money, as the money earned from trading at the local market precludes this humiliating task.



## **Migration Patterns**

Over the course of 2007, roughly half of the Roms interviewed in the various settlements claimed to have engaged in some sort of internal migration within Georgia. A normal practice would be to send one parent, usually the mother, and several children west during the summer to capitalize on the large number of tourists visiting the Black Sea Coast. The Romani settlement in Kobuleti for example sees its numbers double from May to September, with relatives from Tbilisi joining the already cramped residents in sleeping on the floor. These movements can best be described as semi-nomadic, with some sustained migration during the tourist season. Relatively stable populations are found in each of the settlements during the winter.

In terms of outward migration, many Roms in western Georgia, through a long history of nomadism prior to arriving in Georgia, claim to have roots as well as contacts in countries as far as Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan. One male even claimed to be born in Tashkent and several individual respondents traced long histories of movement through Central Asia, Russia, and the rest of the Caucasus. As stated above, the Roms living in Kutaisi presented Azerbaijani passports and said they were planning to move there in the coming years. As for the rest of the settlements, a majority of the respondents expressed a desire to move to Krasnodar *krai* in Russia, if they had the finances to do so. A large Romani community lives there, and many Roms in Georgia are eager to rejoin their relatives who moved there in the past decade. However, another group of Roms professed a love for the land of their birth and gave no inclination of a desire to leave.

## **Conclusions and Recommendations**

The Romani community in Georgia suffers from a multitude of problems, including extreme poverty, unemployment, lack of access to education and health care, and isolation from larger Georgian society. Although cases of discrimination have notably declined in the past five years, especially in relation to the police and government authorities, new laws passed that ban street trading have resulted in numerous instances of harassment and ill-treatment of Roms throughout Georgia. Without any knowledge of their basic rights or ability to address injustices within the political or judicial processes, Roms in Georgia are

left without any recourse to improve the devastating conditions in which they live. The Georgian Government has yet to act with any political urgency to address the current situation, although overall improvements and reforms to the police force and judicial system were noted by Romani respondents as having a positive effect on their lives. Still, the attitude of the majority population towards the Romani community in Georgia is one of scorn and disregard, as the surrounding society sees the problems of the Roms as self-inflicted and thus unworthy of state-sponsored social assistance. Consequently, for the most part, the community remains almost entirely marginalized and in desperate need of assistance, but with practically no one to turn to outside their own communities.

Furthermore, not being registered with state authorities, Roms are deprived of the benefits that the Georgian state offers to its citizens – from internally displaced persons assistance for persons displaced from the Georgian-Abkhaz conflict, to pensions for elderly people and free education for Romani children. Genuine access to education and health care not only depends on registering all Romani individuals, but also on reaching isolated, poverty-stricken, and altogether forgotten Romani communities who either have no knowledge of existing facilities or are presented with significant obstacles to receive adequate care and instruction. In the end, the high occurrence of both Romani adults and children wandering the streets in urban areas must be addressed, as the continuance of this attribute helps to confirm negative stereotypes listed above among Georgian society about the role Roms can play within the country.

## Appendix A

	Samgori District Tbilisi	Gatchiani District Gardabani <i>rayon</i>	Leninovka Dedoplistskaro <i>rayon</i>	River Bank Kutaisi	Avangard District Kutaisi	Kobuleti Ajara	Mukuzani/Telavi Kakheti	Sukhumi Abkhazia
Number of People	250-300	120	100	50	120	100	40	500
Housing Type	Rented Houses and Apartments	Owned Houses	Owned Houses	Temporary Shelters and Tents	Owned Apartments and Houses	Owned Houses	Tents	Owned Apartments and Houses
Electricity	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes
Running Water	Yes	No, source 200m away	No, source in village	No, source 100m away	Yes	Yes	No, source nearby	Yes
Type of Employment	Trading and Begging	Begging	Agriculture and Begging	Begging	Trading and Begging	Trading	Begging	Trading
Percentage of People with Documents	20-30%	30%	95%	80% (Azerbaijani Citizens)	50%	100%	0%	90% (Russian citizens)
Percentage of Children Attending School	5%	10%	5%	0%	15%	10%	0%	15%
Religion	Orthodox, Muslim, Evangelical	Orthodox	Orthodox	Muslim	Muslim and Orthodox	Muslim, Evangelical	Orthodox	Muslim and Orthodox
Clan / Origins	Ukrainian and Russian	Ukrainian	Ukrainian	Central Asian, Kurdish	Ukrainian and Russian	Russian	Ukrainian	Ukrainian and Russian
Number of IDPs from Abkhazia	150-200 people	None	One family	None	Two families	None	None	None