



ევროკავშირი
საქართველოსთვის
The European Union for Georgia



State Commission
on Migration Issues



EMN
European Migration Network
მიგრაციის ევროპული ქსელი

GEORGIA
საქართველო

Georgia - European Union Cooperation

COMPENDIUM OF MIGRATION MILESTONES

Facts & Figures

March 2021



PUBLIC SERVICE
DEVELOPMENT AGENCY



ICMPD

International Centre for
Migration Policy Development



ENIGMMA
Putting the pieces together
to respond effectively to migration challenges

Georgia - European Union Cooperation

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Background and Acknowledgements

In 2021, Georgia marks two important anniversaries: five years since the completion (December 2015) of the Visa Liberalisation Action Plan (VLAP) and four years since Georgian citizens first enjoyed the right to visa-free travel in the EU/Schengen Area (March 2017). More importantly, this process has tied the Georgian state with the need for permanent reforms, as well as the pursuit and establishment of high standards.

Georgia has come a long way to receive and fulfil the VLAP, the beginning of a new chapter for the country, which enabled wholesale change in its migration management system. The VLAP could not be implemented without a solid basis established over the course of the past decades by the respective state agencies and their dedicated staff, assisted by generous support from international organisations (UN agencies and IOM, ICMPD), EU Member States, the US and other partner states, as well as civil society.

Through the combined efforts of this multitude of actors, a foundation for change was laid, and then built upon it with a strong structure designed to respond to the challenges we face today. Even though the VLAP is accomplished, its long-term objectives enable Georgia to effectively respond to emerging realities and tasks, as well as forge new partnerships – including that recently established with the European Migration Network. Today, taking joint efforts with old and new partners alike, the Georgian state aims to preserve the dynamics set in place by the VLAP and develop permanent mechanisms that ensure a strong nexus between migration and development.

This publication was developed with the contribution of the Member Agencies of the State Commission on Migration Issues and the State Inspector's Service of Georgia. It is designed to highlight the invaluable input of the VLAP in enhancing the migration management system of Georgia. We take this opportunity to express our sincere appreciation to all those national and international actors – organisations and individuals – who made this achievement possible.

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This publication highlights **facts and figures** only on selected VLAP benchmarks, which in addition to substantial contribution to the completion of VLAP implementation had a significant impact for the development of migration management system in Georgia, mobility, and people-to-people contacts.

The Secretariat of the State Commission on Migration Issues of Georgia and the International Centre for Migration Policy Development would like to thank the European Commission and the cooperating migration and academic institutions of the Member States of the European Union for supporting and funding the projects - “Sustaining Migration Management in Georgia” (ENIGMMA 2) and “Ensuring the Effective Coordination in Implementation of the long-term Tasks set by the EU-Georgia Visa Liberalization Action Plan”, as well as number of other projects designed to develop migration management system in Georgia.

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Table of Contents

Background and Acknowledgements	03
Abbreviations, Acronyms and Definitions	06
On behalf of the International Centre for Migration Policy Development	08
Summary	10
Introduction	11
Milestones in EU-Georgia Cooperation on Migration	13
VLAP Block 1: Document Security and Biometrics	17
VLAP Block 2: Integrated Border Management, Migration Management, Asylum	19
2.1 Improvement of Border Management	19
2.2. Migration Management - Coordination, Analysis and the Whole-of-Government Approach	23
2.3. Labour Migration	26
2.4. Readmission	28
2.5. Reintegration	29
2.6. Inland Detection of Irregular Migrants	29
2.7. Asylum Policy	30
VLAP Block 3: Public Order and Security	33
3.1. Preventing and Combating Organised Crime	33
3.2. International Cooperation	33
3.3. Personal Data Protection in the Migration Area	35
VLAP Block 4: External Relations and Fundamental Rights	37
4.1. Citizen and Minority Rights	37
4.2. Diaspora Engagement	37
4.3. Information Campaigns	38

Abbreviations, Acronyms and Definitions

AA	Association Agreement between the European Union and the European Atomic Energy Community and their Member States, of the one part and Georgia, of the other part
BCP	Border Crossing Point
BOMS	Border Operations Management System
COVID-19	Coronavirus Disease 19
EMN	European Migration Network
EaP	Eastern Partnership
EC	European Commission
EMPACT	European Multidisciplinary Platform against Criminal Threats
ENIGMMA	Enhancing Georgian Migration Management (EU-funded ICMPD project, 2013-2017)
ENIGMMA 2	Sustaining Migration Management in Georgia (EU-funded ICMPD project, 2018-2021)
ENP	European Neighbourhood Policy
Erasmus+	EU programme to support education, training, youth and sport in Europe
EU	European Union
EURAXESS	European initiative providing researchers with access to career opportunities in Europe
EUROJUST	EU Agency for Criminal Justice Cooperation
Europol	European Police Office
Frontex	European Border and Coast Guard Agency
GCG	Georgian Coast Guard
GDPR	General Data Protection Regulation
IBM	Integrated Border Management
ICAO	International Civil Aviation Organization
ICCC	International Criminal Cooperation Center
ICMPD	International Centre for Migration Policy Development
INTERPOL	International Criminal Police Organization
IOM	International Organization for Migration

JMOC	Joint Maritime Operations Center
K9	Canine
LBPS	Land Border Protection Sectors
M&D	Migration and Development
MIA	Ministry of Internal Affairs (Georgia)
MFA	Ministry of Foreign Affairs (Georgia)
MoF	Ministry of Finance (Georgia)
MoH	Ministry of Internally Displaced Persons from the Occupied Territories, Labour, Health and Social Affairs (Georgia)
MoJ	Ministry of Justice (Georgia)
MoU	Memorandum of Understanding
MoP	Mobility Partnership
MS	Migration Strategy (Georgia)
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
PCA	Partnership and Cooperation Agreement
PDP	Personal Data Protection
PSDA	Public Service Development Agency (Georgia)
RCMES	Readmission Case Management Electronic System
SCMI	State Commission on Migration Issues (Georgia)
SLTD	Stolen and Lost Travel Documents
TAC	Temporary Accommodation Center
THB	Trafficking in Human Beings
TIG	Targeted Initiative for Georgia
UMAS	Unified Migration Data Analytical System
UN	United Nations
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNODC	United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime
VLAP	Visa Liberalisation Action Plan
WoGA	Whole of Government Approach

On behalf of the International Centre for Migration Policy Development

Almost a decade has passed since the European Union (EU) launched the Visa Liberalisation Dialogue with Georgia in 2012. The intervening years have proved challenging, but also richly rewarding. Although the ultimate goal of the visa liberalisation dialogue was to achieve a visa-free regime for Georgian citizens, implementation of the Visa Liberalisation Action Plan – the roadmap of the dialogue – brought with it additional changes, reforms and developments. Therefore, this publication is intended to allow those stakeholders who were involved in implementation of the VLAP to look back and acknowledge the efforts and achievements of all governmental institutions and Georgian society on this path.

Implementation of visa-free dialogue has brought clear improvement in cooperation among the European Union, its Member States and Georgia. Various EU-funded programmes and initiatives were launched during the dialogue to support Georgian stakeholders to achieve the visa dialogue benchmarks, while generally supporting and facilitating people-to-people contacts. Starting the Visa Dialogue, and, particularly, launching the VLAP implementation in 2013 also coincided with one of the most active phases of cooperation between the International Centre for Migration Policy Development (ICMPD) and Georgian migration and border management stakeholders.

This cooperation was strengthened through implementation of various projects in order to support Georgia's migration management, with impressive achievements across the migration governance spectrum. In particular, the support provided within the framework of the two recent EU-funded projects **"Enhancing Georgia's Migration Management"** (ENIGMMA), 2013-2017,

and “**Sustaining Migration Management in Georgia**” (ENIGMMA 2), 2018-2021, played an important role in making visa liberalisation a reality. However, this would not have been possible without the continued commitment of the Georgian counterparts to the project objectives – to facilitate mobility and people-to-people contacts between the EU and Georgia, by effectively responding to migration challenges.

In this way, we at ICMPD have celebrated the main milestones of Georgia’s visa liberalisation together with the Georgian stakeholders and indeed the general population. I also hope that VLAP implementation has made a lasting impact on improving and sustaining Georgia’s capacity in areas of migration management, such as labour migration, international protection and protection of migrants’ human rights, including personal data protection, diaspora engagement, border management, the fight against and prevention of irregular migration and trafficking in human beings.

On behalf of ICMPD, I would like to thank all ICMPD partners in Georgia as well as the ICMPD Tbilisi team for their stellar work, their dedication and unwavering commitment to making the VLAP a success. We are confident that the excellent cooperation between Georgia and its partners throughout Europe on migration and border management will only grow in the years to come.

Violeta Wagner

Regional Portfolio Manager, EECA, ICMPD

Summary

Successful implementation of the Visa Liberalisation Action Plan and the granting of visa-free travel to the EU/Schengen Area for Georgian citizens was marked by a number of institutional and legislative reforms. These developments have transformed and advanced the entire system of migration management in Georgia, bringing it into further approximation to European standards. It is the purpose of the present document to chart the trajectory that has been travelled over the past years.

While virtually the entire VLAP process and the results achieved through migration benchmarks have been documented in detail, until now most of this data could only be accessed by consulting a slew of separate, though interrelated, documents. Indeed, this was also the case in regard to the actions carried out beyond the scope of the VLAP. For this reason, the gathering and synthesising of such information into one document was in the interest of not only practitioners involved in migration management, but also students, researchers and journalists working on, or interested in, the migration field.

Thus, the present publication collects in a single space the most relevant information on almost all results achieved in the field of migration management during implementation of the Georgian Visa Liberalisation Action Plan and the period following its completion. It forms part of continuous action to maintain the course set by the VLAP. Alongside the most important milestones on the VLAP journey, Georgian progress toward gradual integration with the EU are highlighted in the compilation that follows.

So as to mimic the logic of the VLAP and classify the information on facts and figures provided by different agencies, the present publication is structured (in both its format and content) to reflect the four blocks of the VLAP. In this way, the document can better highlight the action on migration-related issues carried out in multiple directions by the various state institutions.

Introduction

Contemporary systems of migration management have been strongly affected by number of factors, which in principle, conditioned today's reality, urging those systems to undergo a transformation in order to respond to present-day challenges.

In proportion to the multidisciplinary nature of modern migration, the number of actors involved in its management are increasing, both nationally and internationally. The more complex and diverse migration processes are, the more thoughtful and coordinated action is essential. For this, the state needs a common platform, bringing together all stakeholders involved (or those from related spheres) in migration management, such as relevant government entities, international partners, civil society, the private sector, academia, local self-government bodies, human rights defenders and migrants themselves. In other words, to establish the Whole-of-Government Approach (WoGA). For the best possible action, WoGA requires a multi-functional mechanism, adjusted to contemporary demands and capable of fostering simultaneous, interconnected and highly efficient coordination among all involved actors. Such mechanism can establish concrete policy and coordinated action at national level and effectively communicate with external partners and processes. This type of systems have already been tested, or are presently emerging in various countries, while proving their capacity to better cope with challenges.

The development of WoGA based migration management system in Georgia started already in the 1990s. Shortly after the country regained its independence, the basic structures dealing with migration were gathered (in 1996) within a collegial body – a State Commission, which elaborated (by 1997) the first policy concept designed to define the process of further enhancement of the management system. Later, increasing approximation to the EU gave new, strong impetus to this process.¹ In order to improve the management and expand its efficiency, a new, but very similar, body was re-established in 2010 – the State Commission on Migration Issues (SCMI). Once again, the Commission gathered all actors operational in the field of migration, setting in motion its action based on the WoGA principle. Thus, between 1996 and 2010, sectorial agencies were established, developed and structurally expanded, making it possible to amalgamate basic thematic directions and cluster them according to existing linkages. However, to add more and necessary dynamics in the process of development the state was in need of such an important driving force as the Visa Liberalisation Action Plan.

¹ European Neighbourhood Policy (2003); Eastern Partnership Initiative and Mobility Partnership (2009); Visa Facilitation and Readmission Agreements (2010); Visa Dialogue (2012); Visa Liberalisation Action Plan (2013-2015); EU-Georgia Association Agreement (2014).

With the VLAP the entire management system, including the SCMI, underwent complex reorganisation, transforming the Commission into a body governed by shared responsibilities among its members and strong synergies between the thematic directions. Driven by such an approach, and being the part of ongoing development agenda set by the Association Agreement (AA) and the VLAP, the SCMI consecutively enforced two tailor-made Migration Strategies (2013-2015 and 2016-2020) to effectively and gradually introduce the Migration and Development (M&D) policy and adjust to it the management system.

Thus, over the past years the management mechanism has been emerging by taking into account lessons learned from the implementation of the previous Strategies and altering its work to respond to prevailing realities. Soon, the new challenges emerged as a result of major changes, shifts and transformations that took place at national, regional and global level, providing the Commission with food for thought when designing a new Strategy.

Differing from its predecessors, but following the VLAP principles, the long-term (2021-2030) vision of the new Strategy is framed entirely by, and based on, the concept of M&D, which is not viewed as an axiomatic notion by itself, but rather a broad concept that implies a coordinated, proper and pragmatic orchestration of all directions contributing to the country's development. Thus, from the perspective of the Strategy, M&D means that each thematic direction is properly articulated under a unified vision and agreed goals, while management occurs through the coordinated inter-agency cooperation oriented towards reaching these goals.

Hence, the present publication looks at one very important piece of the migration and development puzzle – implementation of the Visa Liberalisation Action Plan and its impact on migration management system. Completion of this Plan brought to Georgia not only visa-free travel to the EU/Schengen Area, but has laid another brick in the structure of its approximation to the European Union.

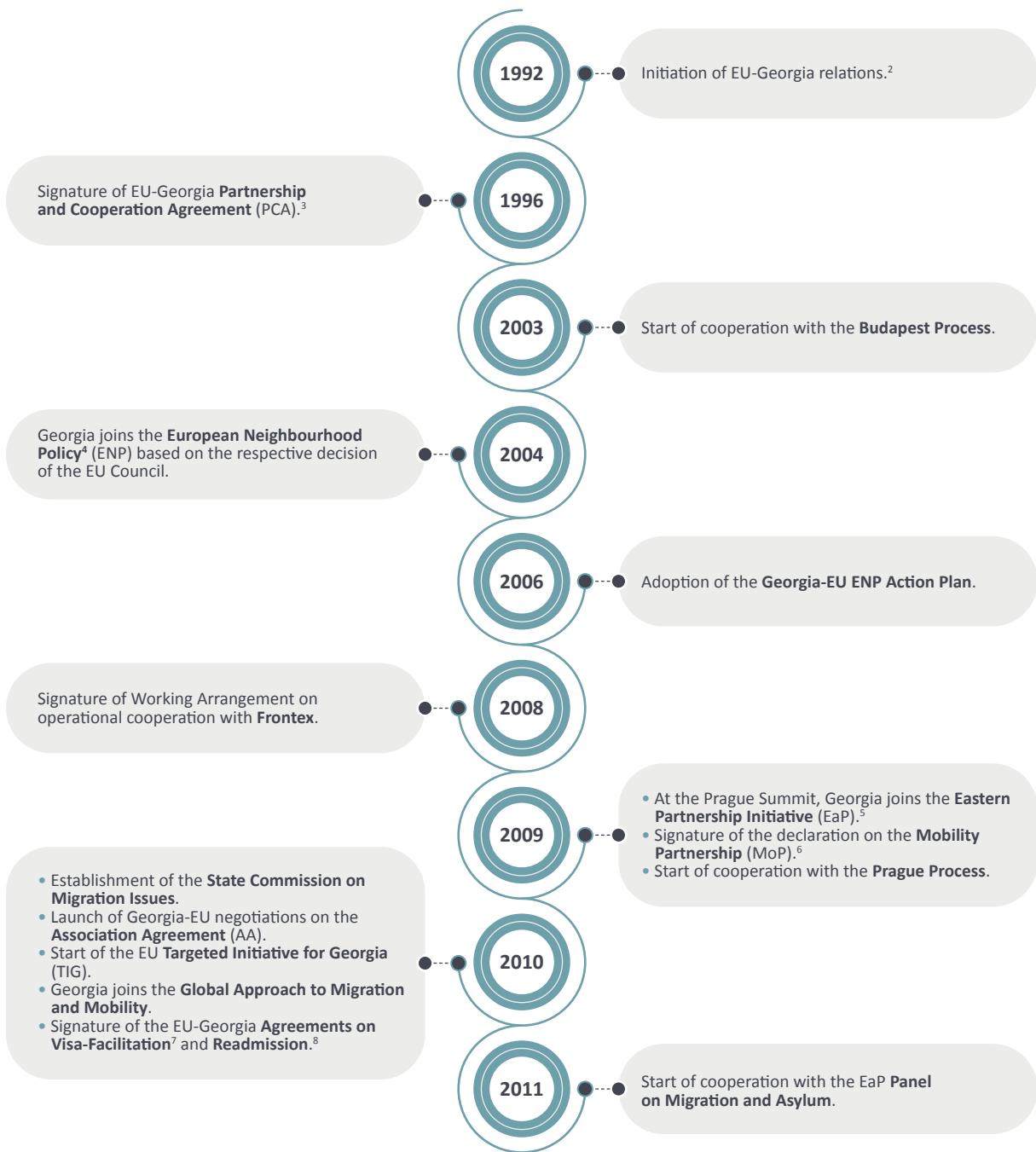
George Jashi

EU Project - “Ensuring the Effective Coordination in Implementation of the long-term Tasks set by the EU-Georgia Visa Liberalization Action Plan”.

Secretariat of the State Commission on Migration Issues, Executive Secretary



Milestones in EU-Georgia Cooperation on Migration



2 When the European Union acknowledged Georgia as an independent state.

3 Partnership and Cooperation Agreement between the European Communities and their Member States, of the one part, and Georgia of the other part, Luxembourg, 22.4.1996, i.e. the PCA, ratified in 1999.

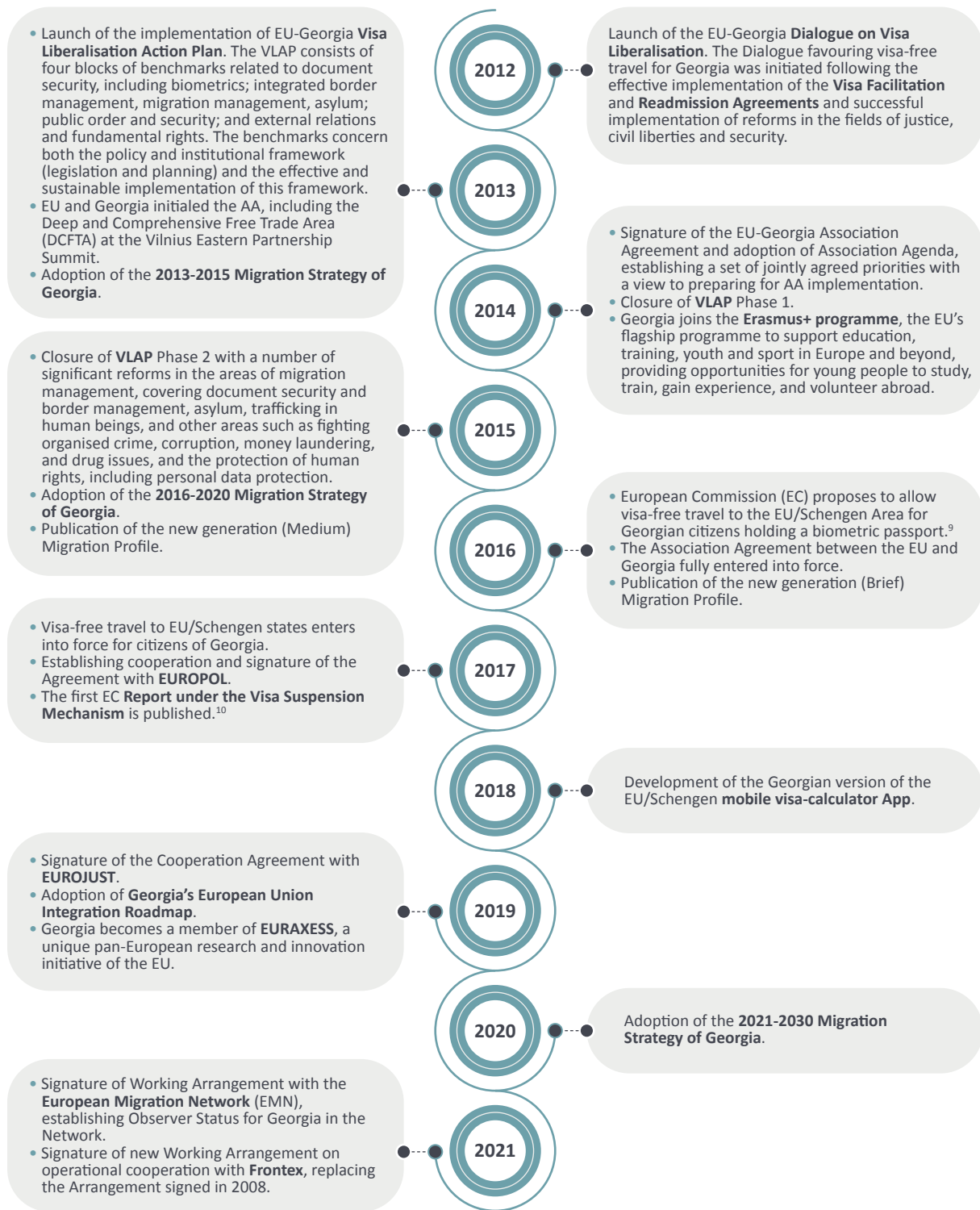
4 On June 14, 2004, the Council of Ministers of the European Union adopted a decision to engage Azerbaijan, Georgia and Armenia in the European Neighbourhood Policy. Georgia-EU relations later entered a new phase, notable for its higher intensity of cooperation and broader scope of engagement. The area covered by the ENP comprises 16 states on the southern and eastern borders of the EU.

5 Integrated border control; the Fight against corruption; Public administration reform; Improved functioning of the judicial system; Migration and Asylum; Common Security and Defence Policy; Environment and climate change; Trade and cooperation in the areas of trade regulations related to the Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area Agreement; Small and average business policy; Transportation; Agriculture and Development; Research and Innovation.

6 The EU-Georgia cooperation within the MoP framework was officially launched on 16 February 2010.

7 Agreement between the European Union and Georgia on the facilitation of the issuance of visas (enacted in 2011).

8 Agreement between the European Union and Georgia on the readmission of persons residing without authorisation (enacted in 2011).



⁹ Fourth progress Report from the Commission to the European Parliament and the Council on Georgia's implementation of the action plan on visa liberalisation, COM(2015) 684 final, p. 12. The implementation of the Action Plan has been closely monitored by the Commission through regular progress reports, transmitted to the European Parliament and the Council. In addition, progress has been monitored through regular meetings between senior ranking officials from the European Commission and the partner countries.

¹⁰ The visa suspension mechanism was first introduced as part of EU visa policy in 2013. The mechanism allows for temporary suspension of the visa exemption for a third country, for a short period of time, in case of a substantial increase in irregular migration from the partner countries. The new measures allow the EU to react quicker and in a more flexible manner when faced with increased migration or internal security risks, which may arise due to visa-free travel. The European Parliament and the European Council adopted a revised mechanism, which entered into force in 2017. Under the revised mechanism, the Commission can trigger the suspension mechanism, whereas previously only Member States could do so. European Commission reports on the visa suspension mechanism were published in 2018 and 2020.

VLAP Block 1:

Document Security and Biometrics

During the period 2013-2019, a new set of regulations concerning identity documents and civil acts was drafted and brought into effect, aimed at ensuring the introduction and dissemination of **high-tech, reliable identity documents** – electronic identity documents and biometric passports – **that are protected against fraud and forging, and are in line with the European standards.**

At present, 3,067,888 individuals have an **electronic ID document**, while 1,520,622 individuals have a **biometric passport**.

The process of establishing and enhancing the information security system was launched in 2013 and is still ongoing, aimed at ensuring the issuance of reliable identity certification documents.

Starting from 2014, **old-type passports are being actively replaced by biometric passports**; from 28 July 2014, this option has also been available abroad, through Georgia's consular posts.

The Personal Data Protection Policy was developed and a personal data protection officer appointed at the Public Service Development Agency (PSDA) under the Georgian Ministry of Justice (MoJ). In 2014, **a Secured Personal Data Processing and Transfer System was developed** within the PSDA. This system ensures data processing pursuant to the Law of Georgia on Personal Data Protection.

In 2014 and 2018-2019, **legislative amendments were initiated (including on making the procedures of name and last name change more stringent)** which focused on preventing abuse of visa-free movement and minimising the risk of activating the suspension mechanisms as much as possible.

The process of **digitising all civil acts** is underway. The main goal of this digitisation is the refinement of databases for the issuance of reliable identification documents. Each year, up to 1.3 million pages of documents are digitised. From 2014 to date, 6,806,728 records have been digitised for entry into the respective databases. This process is set to be completed by the end of 2024, involving the digitisation of a total of over 10 million acts.

Since 2014, the **Stolen and Lost Travel Documents (SLTD) database** of the General Secretariat of International Criminal Police Organisation (INTERPOL) has been integrated into all border checkpoints in Georgia.

From 2016 onward, Georgia shifted to third generation biometric passports. The introduction of biometric passports produced in compliance with international standards (including those of the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO)) has considerably boosted the reliability of identification documents issued by Georgia and has directly affected the (acquisition of the) right to visa-free movement in the EU/Schengen Area by Georgia.

In 2019, the PSDA, the National Central Bureau of Interpol under the MIA of Georgia and the General Secretariat of INTERPOL signed an **agreement that granted the PSDA direct access to the INTERPOL SLTD database**. As per the agreement, INTERPOL is provided online with the information about passports of Georgian citizens, travel documents of permanent residents in Georgia, and travel documents of refugee or humanitarian status holders.

VLAP Block 2:

Integrated Border Management, Migration Management, Asylum

2.1 Improvement of Border Management

National IBM Strategy and Action Plan

With the purpose of establishing an effective border management system, and strengthening peace and stability in Georgia, a national Integrated Border Management strategy was adopted. The IBM Strategy encompasses all aspects of border management, including risk analysis, border surveillance, cooperation on local and international level on various issues of border management, etc.

Development of infrastructure and technical capabilities

Modern, operational Border Crossing Points

Georgia has **modern, operational Border Crossing Points (BCPs), upgraded and adapted** to control different flows, and the management model is fully aligned with the EU best practices.

All BCPs are **fully equipped with both lines of inspection, in accordance with the European standards**. In order to ensure efficient/smooth coordination and exchange of information between all BCPs, the Main Division for Border Management and Coordination was established in 2018, contributing to the effectiveness and centralisation of border management.

Aiming at successful continuation of visa-free regime, **legislative amendments to the Law of Georgia on 'Rules for Georgian citizens on Leaving and Entering Georgia'** were introduced, enabling Georgian officials to examine documents and conditions envisaged by the visa-free travel already at Georgian borders. If a citizen of Georgia does not comply with the requirements of the Law, he/she could be refused exit from the country.

Improved infrastructure and command, control and communication capacities at the Border Sectors

Within the framework of the modernisation process, **during the period 2012-2020, 23 Land Border Protection Sectors (LBPS) were constructed.** In addition, nine LBPSs were equipped with modern border surveillance systems. The primary objective of the MIA is to cover all high-risk border sectors, while the Ministry continues its consistent work towards applying those technologies in all relevant border sectors.

In 2016, a canine (K9) division was created within the Georgian Border Police. The K9 division has become a new tool for detecting and apprehending persons attempting illegal crossing of the state border.

Georgian air assets are actively involved in the border surveillance operations. They perform multiple duties related to border security and conducting search and rescue and aerial fire-fighting operations over the whole land territory and maritime space of Georgia.

Strengthened monitoring and (video and photograph) surveillance capabilities at 'green' and 'blue' borders

In order to establish and develop electronic and **video surveillance capacity** for 'green' borders, a Border Operations Management System (BOMS) was elaborated that includes video surveillance, communication and tactical positioning (border patrols) and software and databases. BOMS covers all aspects of managing the state border of Georgia.

The **acquisition of two Island-class patrol boats** is one of Georgia's important recent achievements in this regard. New patrol vessels have significantly enhanced the operational capabilities of the Georgian Coast Guard (GCG), with a focus placed on providing security beyond Georgian territorial waters and the capacity to participate in international naval exercises. Separate from this development, during the period 2012-2020, the logistical capabilities of the GCG have been improved – and a new naval base built in Batumi.

Creation of Joint Maritime Operations Center

In 2013, the Joint Maritime Operations Center (JMOC) was established. The concept behind the JMOC is based on the interagency approach for preventing, revealing and eliminating all kinds of illegal activities, maritime incidents and violation of the maritime space regime of Georgia that pose a threat to the national security. All relevant ministries and legal entities involved in maritime operations are represented within the JMOC.

The Centre produces daily briefs and disseminates these to the relevant agencies, while analysing data and producing specific reports as requested. The JMOC also actively cooperates with the NATO Shipping Centre on 'white shipping' in the Black Sea.

Strengthened inter-agency and international cooperation

Inter-agency cooperation

In the area of interagency cooperation, it is very important to bring operations of police and customs authorities closer to the principles of IBM. In pursuit of this aim, different activities were implemented to ensure smooth communication and coordination at both the operational and policy levels.

- Since 2012, the **Container Control Programme** – a joint initiative from the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) and the World Customs Organization – has been implemented in Georgia. A Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) was signed between the Georgia Revenue Service, the Ministry of Internal Affairs and UNODC on the establishment of Joint Port Control Units in Poti and Tbilisi and the Air Cargo Control Unit. The main task of the Joint Units is to prevent trafficking in drugs and other illicit goods.
- In 2013-2017, with the support of the US Department of State, Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs, a K9 project was implemented. Within the framework of the project, a **MoU between the Revenue Service and the MIA** was signed. Based on the MoU, a Drug Task Force was established at Tbilisi, Batumi and Kutaisi International Airports, aiming at detecting illegal movement of drugs, and psychotropic substances and precursors.

International cooperation with partner countries and organisations

- Closer international cooperation in the field of border management with neighbouring and partner countries is proven to be an effective tool to tackle irregular migration and cross-border crime. Georgia has concluded **bilateral cooperation agreements** on border issues with 11 partner countries.
- Georgia has further intensified its **cooperation with NATO**. In 2014, Georgia deployed a liaison officer to NATO Allied Maritime Command (MARCOM), whose engagement fosters information exchange between MARCOM and Georgia. Additionally, a new tactical memorandum with MARCOM was signed in 2020.

In order to further enhance interoperability with NATO and contribute to Operation Sea Guardian, **the MIA declared two GCG Visit, Board, Search and Seizure teams** to the Operational Capabilities Concept Evaluation and Feedback (OCCE&F) Programme. Both teams successfully completed three phases of NATO evaluation (SEL1, NEL1, SEL2). Besides this development, in 2019, the MIA offered two Island-class patrol boats to the NATO Pool of Forces, with the final aim of obtaining NATO Response Force status.

- **Cooperation with the European Border and Coast Guard Agency (Frontex)** was launched in 2008, after the signature of the Working Arrangement. Since that time, cooperation areas between the parties have further enhanced and have entailed: participation in Joint Operations (JO) and Collecting Return Operations, staff exchange, cooperation in the field of risk analysis and exchange of information (EaP-RAN; Pulsar Data Exchange). Working Arrangement also envisages enhanced cooperation between the training institutions involved in the Frontex Academies Network and participation in capacity building activities.

In 2021, a renewed working arrangement on operational cooperation was signed with the EU agency. Under the revised arrangement, the sides reaffirmed their commitment to work together in addressing irregular migration and fighting cross-border crime, on implementation of technical assistance projects, and exchange of information and best practices in the area of border management and return.

Since 2019, four Georgian police officers on a monthly rotating basis have been deployed to EU member state airports within the framework of Frontex Joint Operations. Deployment of Georgian officers is considered a significant assistance in preventing the unauthorised entry of Georgian citizens into the EU/Schengen Area. The activities undertaken by the police officers complement the border check tasks undertaken at EU borders.

Development of border risk analysis system in compliance with the EU and FRONTEX best practices

In parallel to enhancing technical capacities of the border operations, efforts are being made to improve the Border Risk Analysis System at the MIA, in line with EU best practices. In order to gain a cohesive picture of the risks (including border checks, border surveillance, migration), relevant activities have been implemented since 2015. A unified risk analysis methodology manual has been developed (the document was elaborated based on Frontex CIRAM methodology). The manual will form the basis for creating a risk analysis product within the Ministry.

2.2 Migration Management - Coordination, Analysis and the Whole-of-Government Approach

During the period **2013-2015**, the **action mechanism and priorities** of the **SCMI**,¹¹ a principal platform for migration management established in 2010, was updated and significantly developed, enabling Georgia to move to the most advanced European migration management standards from 2016 onward.

Also, a collegial management body, the SCMI gathered all important actors operational in the field and devised action based on the WoGA. The Commission became a common platform that made it possible to unify the interlinked basic thematic directions within the various sectoral agencies involved in migration management. In so doing, it conditioned the thematic and structural expansion and development of these agencies, while clustering them within the Commission, in accordance with linkages based on principles of shared responsibilities.

In this way, Georgia has made significant progress in developing migration management mechanisms based on the WoGA, resulting in the **production of a cohesive policy at national level**. SCMI activities to determine a unified state policy on migration and improve migration management served as the bedrock for building a unified and centralised strategic management system for this field in Georgia, another important contribution to Georgia's integration with the EU.¹² Interested in the implementation of reforms in the field of migration, the EU has been supporting the development of the Commission from the very beginning.

Cooperation with the EU resulted in the creation of a sound basis for the unified structure that underpins the national system of migration management. The first (**initial**) stage in this process saw the Commission launched, the 2013-2015 Migration Strategy adopted, and important links and entities of the management chain established. Building on these results during the second (**setup**) stage, the government elaborated and activated complex multi-sectoral mechanisms in accordance with the 2016-2020 MS that outlined the nature and implementation instruments of these mechanisms.¹³ The third (**development and continuous modernisation**) stage, which is due to be implemented in the years to come, is of particular importance to continuing Georgia's advancement in this area.

11 Ordinance of the Government of Georgia, No. 314, **On Establishing State Commission on Migration Issues and Approving its Statute**, Tbilisi, 13.10.2010, http://migration.commission.ge/files/scmi_ordinance_eng__as_of_10.08.2018_.pdf

12 European Parliament (2020), 2020 Report on the Implementation of the EU Association Agreement with Georgia, 2019/2200(INI), Committee on Foreign Affairs. https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/A-9-2020-0136_EN.html.

13 The Strategy was **inter-alia** prepared with the assistance of ICMPD within the first EU-funded ENIGMMA project.

During the period 2013 and 2015, Georgia's 2013-2015 and 2016-2020 Migration Strategies were approved. The main pillars of the strategies were supporting legal migration; combating irregular migration; return and reintegration of Georgian migrants; support for the Georgian diaspora; awareness raising; migration and development; international protection, integration, etc.

In 2014, the new Organic Law on Georgian Citizenship came into effect. This piece of legislation simplified the determination of Georgian citizenship and introduced new regulations for acquiring Georgian citizenship via naturalisation. The new Law was brought into full compliance with the UN 1961 Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness. As a result of the amendments to the Law in 2018, Georgian citizenship can be retained in the case that the citizenship of another country is acquired. Consequent to the amendments, Georgian citizenship can also be restored to those former Georgian citizens who lost Georgian citizenship due to their acquisition of a different citizenship.

Moreover, a set of new tests have been introduced, which should be passed by any person interested in being granted Georgian citizenship and which examine the applicant's knowledge of Georgian language, Georgia history, and basic principles of law. The tests are publicly available for all interested individuals.

In 2014, the Law on the Legal Status of Aliens and Stateless Persons entered into force, which established new regulations for the entry and stay of foreigners in Georgia, and introduced new visa and residence permit categories. This enabled improvement in the process of issuing visas and residence permits and establishing the purpose of foreigners' stay in Georgia. Furthermore, to ensure continuous improvement and refinement of relevant procedures applied by agencies working on visa and residence issues, international best practices are studied by relevant institutions on a regular basis. The introduction of an electronic visa issuance service and the option of submitting applications for residence or citizenship remotely are two further prominent examples of recent developments in this regard.

In 2014, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs launched the Consular Case Management Electronic System "Geoconsul" (www.geoconsul.gov.ge). The Geoconsul system emerged as a genuine breakthrough, since it became a portal for complete information on consular service, making it possible to gauge in one purview the entire spectrum of those consular services available.

In 2015, Georgia launched the E-Visa Portal, which allows foreign citizens to obtain a short-term visa (purpose of visit – tourism, business, culture, sport, etc.) for Georgia without having to visit a Georgian embassy or consulate. The e-visa grants the same right to enter the territory of Georgia as the ordinary sticker visa placed in the passport.

In 2015, an advanced Migration Profile, one of the tools for migration data analysis, was developed, and in 2016-2019 this product was maximally improved and indeed came to serve as a model document for other countries.

Along with numerous EU-supported specialised academic researches, seminars and conferences, four important issues are to be pointed out. In 2014, the SCMI published the very first Georgian adapted version of the International Organization for Migration (IOM) **Glossary on Migration**, which played an important role in establishing the common terminological basis for all national institutions involved in migration management. In that same year, the SCMI concluded a MoU with **Tbilisi State University** on establishing and developing cooperation on research and internships in the field of migration. In 2017, the SCMI Secretariat and ICMPD finalised a joint initiative begun in 2013 and published the first Georgian interdisciplinary **Textbook on Migration**, designed both for high educational institutions and practitioners in the field. In 2020, the SCMI Secretariat and the Legislative Herald (official gazette) under the MoJ, in cooperation with the EMN and ICMPD and through the assistance of the State Language Department of Georgia, started translating the EMN's newest 7.0 version of the **Glossary on Asylum and Migration**. This revised text will replace the existing glossary (from 2014) and present to practitioners an updated and much larger collection of terminology agreed and used by EU Member States.

In 2019, the Unified Migration Data Analytical System (UMAS) was launched in real-time mode. The UMAS is an innovative IT solution to the long-standing challenge of migration data gaps. The UMAS links migration-related administrative data collected by different state agencies involved in migration management using 'big data' technology and advanced analytical software. The System was created in 2014-2016 to enable analysts to uncover hidden patterns, correlations, and other insights invisible to traditional business intelligence solutions and summary statistics. The UMAS employs a combination of new technologies widely used today in the field of 'big data', but which represent a novelty for the public sector.

Migration management requires effective coordination among all relevant state agencies. The main objective of establishing **Unified Migration Risk Analysis System** (during the period 2015-2019) was to analyse data related to migration flows, identify trends, assess identified risks and respond adequately to the expected processes, develop preventive measures and recommendations and make evidence-based decisions.

To this end, an interagency working group on migration risk analysis was set up under the SCMI, comprising five state agencies. The SCMI adopted the concept for the Unified Migration Risks Analysis in 2016, and the methodology in 2020. The latest document will support proper management of the risk assessment process, which is an integral part of effective risk management.

The new **Migration Strategy for 2021-2030** was adopted in 2020. The long-term vision of the Strategy is based on the nexus between migration and development, aiming at minimising negative¹⁴ aspects of migration while increasing its positive¹⁵ effects, which in turn should foster the country development. Consequently for the Strategy, such a principle implies the development-oriented and interlinked action of all entities involved in migration policy elaboration and management.

Aimed at maintaining the integrity of the visa-free regime and preventing activation of the visa suspension mechanism, on 10 December 2019, legislative **amendments** came into force for the **Law of Georgia on Crime Prevention and the Procedure for Enforcing Non-Custodial Sentences and Probation**. These amendments introduced stricter regulations and clearer criteria, based on which a convicted person on whom a non-custodial sentence has been imposed, or whom is on probation, would be allowed to go abroad, to extend his/her term abroad and terminate the issued permit.

2.3 Labour Migration

In 2013-2016, the first pilot project on temporary labour (circular) migration was implemented, in cooperation with the German Agency for International Cooperation.

During the period 2017-2019, in close cooperation with IOM, a pilot circular migration project was implemented with Poland. As part of the project, 65 Georgian citizens were employed in Poland. Based on the experience gained as a result of the pilot project, the development and operationalisation of similar schemes with other partner countries is actively underway. The goal of such schemes is, firstly, to ensure safe and orderly job placement for Georgian migrants, by protecting their labour and social rights and ensuring return to their home country.

In 2013, the Governments of Georgia and France signed an agreement on residence and circular migration of skilled professionals. The agreement came into force on 1 February 2019. Currently, intensive consultations are underway

¹⁴ Such as emigration of high-skilled citizens and the corresponding brain drain and/or brain waste; population decline, especially in terms of the level of able-bodied workforce and reproductive age; human rights violations of individuals due to illegal status in a foreign country; serious psychosocial conditions among migrant families; irregular migration, etc.

¹⁵ Such as legal migration; reduction of poverty, business development and access to education and health care in the country of origin as a result of proper management of migrant remittances; application by returning migrants of knowledge and skills gained while abroad; the import of modern technologies, values, ideas and innovation; diaspora engagement in the development of their home country (through investment, development of trade and entrepreneurship, promotion of the country to attract tourists); harnessing the potential of immigrants, etc.

with the French party to agree on specific ways to most effectively implement the agreement.

In 2015, the Law on Labour Migration entered into effect. This Law regulates labour migration from Georgia by means of regulation of intermediary companies and informing potential emigrants. Based on the Law, the procedure requires intermediary companies to submit information about any intermediary activities performed to the Ministry of Internally Displaced Persons from the Occupied Territories, Labour, Health and Social Affairs (MoH).

The conditions for employing foreigners in Georgia are also covered by the regulation. Through Resolution N417 the government approved (on 7 August 2015) the rules on “Employment by a Local Employer of a Labour Immigrant and Performance of Paid Labour Activities by such Immigrant”. These conditions entered into force on 1 November 2015, regulating the employment of foreigners in Georgia.

To coordinate Georgian labour migration, including in respect to temporary legal employment of Georgian citizens abroad – in terms of both interagency policy and national cooperation generally, the **Labour Migration Division** was established within the MoH **in 2018**.

The State Employment Support Agency was established in 2020 to support the employment of workforce on the local labour market in Georgia and facilitate temporary legal employment of Georgian citizens abroad.

So as to facilitate development of inter-state cooperation in the field of labour migration and expansion of the opportunities of temporary legal employment abroad, several advancements have been made:

- Since 2017, dialogue has been initiated with six states and **Draft Agreements on Cooperation on Legal Temporary** (Circular) Labour Migration have been sent for consideration;
- In 2019, the Republic of Bulgaria and Georgia signed an agreement on the Regulation of Labour Migration;
- In 2020, Georgia and the Federal Republic of Germany signed an **agreement on the employment of Georgian workforce for seasonal jobs in Germany**. As part of this agreement, Georgian citizens will be able to engage in employment in Germany for up to three months. In the same year, Georgia and the State of Israel signed the **Bilateral Agreement on Temporary Employment of Georgian Citizens in certain sectors of Labour Market in Israel**.

2.4 Readmission

The **Agreement between the European Union and Georgia on the Readmission of Persons Residing without Authorisation** entered into force in 2011. The Ministry of Internal Affairs of Georgia has been tasked with ensuring effective implementation of the Agreement, a role in which it has met with much success, as confirmed by the statistics (around 97% of readmission applications have been approved). The Agreement continues to bear fruit for all parties, and Georgia has maintained a high rate of positive decisions on readmission applications.

The Agreement provides a mechanism for safe and orderly return of persons who do not, or who no longer, fulfil the conditions for entry into, or presence or residence in, the territory of Georgia or one of the Member States of the European Union. In order to support effective implementation of the Agreement, Georgia has concluded implementing protocols with 12 EU member states.

The effective implementation of the Agreement underlines Georgia's dedication and credibility in adherence to the rules of visa-free travel to the EU/Schengen Area.

Georgia has also successfully cooperated on readmission with other partner countries. To this end, **agreements of readmission have been concluded with seven partner countries.**

The technical implementation of the agreement is supported by the **Readmission Case Management Electronic System** (introduced in 2013). Currently, 19 European states cooperate in the system, which is successfully operating and is widely recognised as an effective and efficient tool for ensuring safe return of persons residing in the EU without authorisation. The introduction of the system represented an important step in Georgia-EU cooperation in this area, as it preceded the visa dialogue with the EU.

In addition to the developments outlined above, on 13 September 2018 Georgia introduced an **Electronic Travel Document** that can be used by Georgia for readmission purposes, alongside the regular printed document. This new feature was widely praised as one of the most effective elements of the Readmission Case Management Electronic System (RCMES).

2.5 Reintegration

Funded through the state budget, the **Program to Support Reintegration of Returned Migrants** has been running since 2015, which currently is fully administered by the MoH. Structural changes carried out within the Ministry through the end of 2019 resulted in the creation of the new Internally Displaced Persons, Ecomigrants and Livelihood Agency. A Reintegration and Integration Division has also been set up within the Agency, responsible for running the above-mentioned Program. Migrants who return to Georgia can receive a number of services within the Program: health care services, funding for social projects, facilitation of vocational education and temporary housing.

2.6 Inland Detection of Irregular Migrants

In 2014, the **Law of Georgia on the Legal Status of Aliens and Stateless Persons** entered into force. The Law **designated the MIA as the agency responsible for fighting irregular migration**. The Ministry has undertaken significant steps, both at the institutional and legislative levels, to establish effective mechanisms in this regard.

In 2014, a **Migration Department** was established within the MIA, which ensures identification of persons without legal grounds for residing in the country and the implementation of the according expulsion procedures. The Department is also responsible for implementation of agreements concluded by Georgia on the readmission of persons residing without authorisation. In 2018, the functions of the Migration Department were expanded to include responsibility for implementation of the right to asylum in Georgia.

Mechanisms for intra-agency, inter-agency, and international cooperation have been introduced to effectively fight illegal migration. In the intra-agency context, the Coordination Group for the Fight against Irregular Migration was established. The Group is composed of representatives from different departments of the MIA. The Group's objective is to develop unified policy for migration-related issues and improve migration management process. Working group meetings are held on a regular basis.

The **Temporary Accommodation Center (TAC)** for persons staying in Georgia without legal grounds has been functioning under the competences of the Migration Department since 2014. The Center complies with international standards for detention of aliens, safeguarding all respective human rights. The

TAC has separate wings for men, women and families, and rooms are adapted to the needs of people with disabilities. Medical services (including 24/7 doctor consultation) and consultation with psychologists are available for those in need. Individuals are also provided with personal hygiene items, etc. Accommodated persons have access to sufficient recreational activities (television, reading, games, etc.). Access to the open air during most of the day is ensured and aliens accommodated in the TAC maintain meaningful contact with the outside world.

The Aliens Rights' Protection and Monitoring Unit of the Migration Department is responsible for monitoring the protection of the rights of those aliens placed in the TAC.

2.7 Asylum Policy

The Georgian asylum system has been enhanced in recent years, with new legislation and institutional frameworks introduced into the asylum procedure.

The Law of Georgia on International Protection entered into force in 2017, regulating the identification, referral and accommodation of asylum seekers and the conducting of the asylum procedure. Supporting by-laws have been adopted accordingly, including, inter alia, the Ministerial Orders on "Asylum Procedure" and "The Rule on identification of the request on international protection by foreigner or stateless person at the border of Georgia and exchange of information among the Migration Department of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Georgia, Patrol Police and GBB". The legislation is now aligned with the 1951 UN Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees and its 1967 Protocol.

In order to enhance the efficiency and strength of the asylum procedure, the **Country of Origin Information Unit** (in 2014) and **Quality Assurance Unit** (in 2016) were established, operating within the Division on International Protection.

Accommodation of asylum seekers is ensured at the **Asylum seekers' Reception Centre**. The two buildings of the Centre were constructed and furnished with the support of international partners, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the EU Delegation in Georgia, and US Office of Defence Cooperation under the United States European Command.

Rights and Services

- Since 2016, asylum seekers can benefit from **free legal aid** in respect to the rejection of their application for international protection;
- As with citizens of Georgia, asylum seekers and international protection holders are enrolled in the Universal State Program for the Health Care and Insurance, effective since 2013. Since 2015, asylum seekers and international protection holders also enjoy the same access to pre-school education and general education as citizens of Georgia. Special Georgian language courses for asylum seekers and international protection holders have been developed. Asylum seekers and international protection holders also have access to the vocational training and education;
- In order to ensure a fair and efficient asylum procedure, Georgia **actively cooperates** with partner international organisations such as the **UNHCR, ICMPD and IOM**.
- A targeted integration programme for persons granted international protection has been operational in Georgia since 2017. As mentioned above, the Internally Displaced Persons, Ecomigrants and Livelihood Agency was established within the MoH, in 2019. A Reintegration and Integration Division was subsequently set up within the Agency. Currently, the Division is responsible for running both the State Integration Program and the Integration Center. The Program run by the Integration Center comprises four components: Georgian language courses, socio-cultural awareness raising, civic education and consultancy services.
- Asylum applicants are provided with a **temporary identification card** by the PSDA of MoJ. Temporary identity cards have been granted to asylum seekers (and applicants for the status of statelessness) since 15 November 2014.

VLAP Block 3:

Public Order and Security

3.1 Preventing and Combating Organised Crime

Over the past years, important measures at both legislative and institutional levels have been carried out for the purposes of preventing **Trafficking in Human Beings**, protecting victims, conducting proactive investigation and effective criminal prosecution, and enhancing cooperation, under the auspices of the Inter-Agency Council on Combatting Trafficking in Human Beings. This has occurred both within and beyond the Anti-Trafficking Action Plans. As a result, taking the figures for 2012 as the baseline, the number of investigations has doubled, while the number of prosecutions has increased five-fold.

One of the most telling assessments of the Georgian anti-trafficking success story are the US State Department reports for the period 2016-2020, which highlight that Georgia fully meets the standards for combatting THB and remains in the list of Tier 1 countries, along with EU Member States.

In 2013, an interagency commission was established to monitor the implementation of the National Strategy for Combating Organised Crime and the corresponding Action Plan. The members of the commission include representatives from the MIA, the MoJ, the MoF and the Ministry of Education, and Science, Culture, Youth and Sport. Since 2013, three National Strategies have been adopted. The strategic documents focus on fighting the institution of so-called 'thieves-in-law', drug trafficking and drug trade, cybercrime and crime committed by cyber methods, etc.

3.2 International Cooperation

In 2012, in order to enhance international law-enforcement cooperation, the **International Criminal Cooperation Center (ICCC)** was created within the MIA. The Center was tasked with coordinating the activities of Georgian MIA

representatives/police attachés and liaison officers abroad. Mirroring the experience of partner countries, in 2018 the ICCG was transformed into the **International Law Enforcement Cooperation Center**, incorporating all units with competences in international operational cooperation under one umbrella.

Furthermore, in order to strengthen international law enforcement cooperation, amendments to the **Law on International Law Enforcement Cooperation** were adopted in 2018. The amendments aim at simplifying procedures of international cooperation and obtaining evidence on crimes committed by Georgian nationals abroad.

In 2017, the **Agreement on Operational and Strategic Cooperation between Georgia and the European Police Office (Europol)** was signed, through which Georgia officially became a strategic and operational partner of Europol. Cooperation with Europol allows Georgian police forces to exchange information, and participate in collection and analysis of criminal intelligence for the prevention and combating of organised crime. The Georgian Liaison Office at Europol works in close cooperation with most of the teams and analytical projects structured under the European Serious Organised Crime Center. In addition, Europol's secure communication channel (SIENA) is used for exchanging information with law enforcement agencies of EU Member States and other operational partners of Europol. In 2020, Georgia became a partner in the European Multidisciplinary Platform Against Criminal Threats, and consequently will participate in the Operation Action Plan 2021 - Facilitation of Illegal Migration.

Georgia has signed international agreements/MoUs with 33 countries on cooperation in the field of combating crime and police cooperation (including 17 EU Member States).

In 2012-2020, Georgia advanced its law enforcement cooperation with partner countries and expanded the network of police attaches. Georgia has already deployed attachés to 16 partner states (including 11 EU Member States) covering 24 states (including 19 EU/Schengen countries).

As a result of the four-year process of negotiations, a **Cooperation Agreement between Georgia and EUROJUST** was signed on 29 March 2019, coming into force on 27 July 2019. Based on the Agreement, the Georgian Liaison Prosecutor has been deployed to EUROJUST since June 2020. Cooperation with EUROJUST aims to further strengthen mutual legal assistance and cooperation between Georgia and the EU, as well as enhance the fight against serious crime, especially organised crime.

3.3 Personal Data Protection in the Migration Area

In July 2013, the personal data protection supervisory authority - **the Office of the Personal Data Protection Inspector** - was established. The Office was mandated to supervise and monitor lawfulness of data processing and implementation of data protection legislation. In order to establish independent external oversight over the covert surveillance (interception) activities carried out by law-enforcement agencies, new functions related to the supervision and prior control of such activities were attributed to the Office from 2015. In March of that year, a two-stage electronic monitoring system for covert surveillance activities was created. Through this system, the **Data Protection Authority** can exercise prior control over the lawfulness of data collection and obstruct interception unless all legal requirements have been met.

In July 2018, the data protection authority was subject to institutional changes, as the new **Law on State Inspector's Service** (SIS Law) was adopted. According to the Law, the State Inspector's Service was established and the State Inspector was recognised as a legal successor of the Personal Data Protection Inspector (Article 27). The State Inspector enjoys the same guarantees of independence as the Personal Data Protection Inspector and is accountable only to the Parliament of Georgia (Articles 7, 12).

According to the SIS Law, as of November 2019, **the mandate of the Service has been expanded** and along with the key directions of the Office outlined above (monitoring lawfulness of personal data processing; monitoring covert investigative actions and activities performed within the central databank of electronic communications identification data), the activity of the Service currently also includes investigative functions. These encompass, for instance, investigation of specific crimes committed by representatives of law-enforcement authorities, public officials (or persons of equivalent rank) against human rights or freedoms, investigation of malfeasance-related crimes committed by the use of violence or insulting the personal dignity of a victim.

As outlined above, over the past decade, Georgia has made significant strides in the area of personal data protection, bringing its national legislative and institutional framework further in line with best international and European practices:

- In 2006, Georgia became party to the **Council of Europe Convention for the Protection of Individuals** with regard to Automatic Processing of Personal Data (Convention 108). In March 2013, the official procedures were launched to sign and ratify the 2001 Additional Protocol to Convention 108 regarding supervisory authorities and trans-border data flows. The

Additional Protocol was ratified by the Parliament of Georgia in July 2013. Both of these instruments have been transposed into national legislation;

- Since 2012, the implementation of **comprehensive reforms to build a data protection system** in the country took place. The Law of Georgia on Personal Data Protection (**PDP Law**) was enacted in May 2012 and provides a basic legislative framework for the lawful processing of personal data by public and private institutions, including law-enforcement agencies. The Law also lays down specific regulations, such as on special category data;
- Since the adoption of the PDP Law, **Georgian data protection legislation has been amended several times, to harmonise it with the European standards**. The country continues its commitment to bring national legislative framework and practices in line with updated international data protection standards;
- Based on the recommendations of PDP Supervisory Authority, the position of **data protection officer and data protection units** were established in key state institutions working with the largest databases of personal data, including migrant personal information. To this end, in 2014, the Personal Data Protection Unit (since 2018, the Personal Data Protection **Supervision** Unit) was established within the MIA, tasked with monitoring and ensuring a high level of personal data protection within the Ministry;
- Taking into consideration recent developments in the field – entry into force of the EU’s General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) and modernisation of Convention 108, **a new draft law on personal data protection was prepared by the Data Protection Supervisory Authority of Georgia** with the support of international and local experts. This took place following several rounds of consultations with relevant stakeholders, including representatives from the private sector, and the Parliament and Government of Georgia. The draft law incorporates the major new developments introduced by GDPR and the modernised Convention 108, aiming to further enhance data protection in Georgia. The draft law was lodged with the Parliament of Georgia in May 2019 for further legislative procedures.



VLAP Block 4:

External Relations and Fundamental Rights

4.1 Citizen and Minority Rights

The **National Human Rights Strategy and Action Plan** were elaborated for the period 2018-2020.

In 2014, the **Law on Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination** was adopted, which ensures protection from inequality in any (public or private) setting. The Law describes the forms and grounds of discrimination. For instance, the concept of multiple discrimination has been introduced into the Georgian justice system for the first time. The Law vests the authority to monitor its implementation in the Public Defender's Office. Victims of inequality are given the opportunity to apply to both this office and the court in defence of their rights.

4.2 Diaspora Engagement

Based on the principles enshrined in the Mobility Partnership Initiative signed by the EU and Georgia in 2009, the importance of diaspora engagement has been reflected in Georgian migration policy since that time. This has included acknowledgement of the contribution of migrants and diaspora members to the overall development of their countries of origin. As a result, the Diaspora Relations Department under the Ministry of Foreign Affairs has implemented various activities in the area of migration and development focusing on the engagement of Georgian migrants.

These initiatives have included the **Diaspora Awards**, the cornerstone of the **High-Profile Diaspora Engagement Programme**, aimed at acknowledge global Georgians for active participation in the development of their home country. The **Diaspora Forum**, organised on an annual basis, serves as a networking opportunity for Georgian nationals from around the world, gathering

representatives from different sectors, including academia, private and public entities, business and entrepreneurship, arts and culture, etc. Attraction of young Georgian diaspora members has been enhanced through the well-known **Young Ambassadors Programme**, engaging young Georgians abroad to promote a positive image of Georgia in foreign countries.

4.3 Information campaigns

Countrywide information campaigns

Since 2013, the Government of Georgia with the support of international and non-governmental organisation (NGO) partners, including through actions funded by the EU, has been actively implementing **information campaigns on the visa-free regime with the EU**.

Prior to the entering into force of the visa-free travel regime (2015-2017), the Government of Georgia implemented **the first phase of the VLAP campaign – focused on the rights and obligations of Georgian citizens** under the future visa-free regime. In 2017, the Government of Georgia started implementation of the second phase of this campaign, with the most active phase launched in March 2017, two weeks before the visa-free regime entered into force. **The second phase entailed a comprehensive campaign covering a wide range of activities**, pursued through various channels of communication, including meetings, online media, TV/Radio, posters/banners on public transport, leaflets, etc. The campaign also entailed the creation of a special Georgian electronic application for the Schengen calculator (EU/Schengen App).

The third wave of the VLAP campaign continued provision of information to Georgian citizens on visa-free and traveller duties and rights. This outreach had as its specific target the prevention of abuse of asylum seeking procedures. This phase of the campaign launched in 2018 and emphasised the link between abuse of the visa-free regime and the suspension mechanism, including the consequences for all Georgian bona fide travellers. Concrete activities were conducted through various channels of communication, including:

- **Informational video clips** explaining the consequences of violating the visa-free travel regulations, broadcast on national and regional television channels, on radio and via social media;
- **Information sessions** held in the both capital and regions of Georgia;

- Distribution **informational leaflets on rights and duties** under the visa-free regime, including in ethnic minority languages (Abkhaz, Ossetian, Azerbaijani, Armenian and Russian);
- **Georgian embassy (in EU/Schengen, Balkan and EaP countries) information activities and active participation** in dissemination of information via various channels, including meetings with representatives of diaspora organisations and placement of information and video clips on official websites and social media accounts;
- **Statements and interviews with political leaders and government officials** published in leading central and regional newspapers and internet portals; high-level government officials – ministers, deputy ministers, ambassadors posted to Georgia, actively engaged with political talk shows and TV programmes to speak specifically on the visa-free rules and obligations.

In light of the amendments introduced by the Georgian Parliament to the **Law on the Rules and Procedures for Georgian Citizens Exiting and Entering Georgia (2021)**, the Government of Georgia launched relevant information activities in cooperation with ICMPD ENIGMMA 2 project in December 2020.

In 2015 and 2017, the SCMI produced two editions of the **Guidebook on Legal Emigration**, which became a principal information resource for migrants and other persons interested in migration-related issues. Among other topics, the Guidebook included information on legal migration to the EU and the threats of illegal migration in relation to visa-free travel to EU/Schengen states.

Since 2016 to date, as part of the targeted awareness raising campaign, **over 900,000 informational brochures highlighting the terms and regulations of visa free travel** to EU/Schengen have been distributed throughout Georgia. This has been achieved through utilising the large network of Public Service Halls and Community Centers operating under the MoJ. Furthermore, a series of face-to-face meetings were held with local populations at Community Centers across almost all rural areas of Georgia.

EU/Schengen App

In 2020, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs launched a process to upgrade the **Schengen/EU mobile application** – developed with the initial purpose of helping Georgian travelers to calculate the number of days they could remain abroad, thereby facilitating citizens' enjoyment of the benefits of the visa-free travel regime. The aim of the new process is to upgrade the application to reflect the COVID-19 epidemiological situation currently affecting global mobility. The

upgraded App will allow Georgian citizens to stay informed about country-specific travel regulations, public health and safety measures, and other useful information related to EU/Schengen Member State travel.

The efforts of the Government of Georgia in conducting all stages of the information campaigns related above were supported by various international organisations and local NGOs. Both the EU-funded ENIGMMA 1 and ENIGMMA 2 projects, implemented by ICMPD in Georgia, supported the implementation of the campaigns undertaken.

Visa liberalisation continues to trigger key reforms in the area of migration, security and justice and facilitates people-to-people contacts.

The visa-free regime also entails responsibilities.

That is why it is important to continuously fulfil the visa liberalisation requirements and ensure conditions exist for well-managed migration and security at all times.



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State Commission
on Migration Issues



PUBLIC SERVICE
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ENIGMMA
Putting the pieces together
to respond effectively to migration challenges