

## **Georgian restaurants in Saint-Petersburg: challenges of deportability**

Despite the mass deportation of Georgian citizens from Russia in 2006 and Russo-Georgian war in 2008 the extant social ties, certain competency in Russian and perceived cultural closeness still makes Russia an attractive destination for Georgian labor migrants.

The love for Georgian cuisine in Russia dates back to the Soviet era and has been recently reinforced by tourist re-exploration of Georgia by Russian holidaymakers, which resulted in fast multiplication of Georgian "ethnic" cafes and restaurants in Russian cities. Today it is not uncommon to see several Georgian cafes and restaurants on same street.

Both the small employers and the owners of network restaurants of Georgian cuisine import labor from Georgia. These invited employees cross Russian border and stay illegally. Since food service is highly regulated and inspected sphere in Russia the functioning of Georgian restaurant business is challenging.

My presentation will deal with the strategies that Georgian restaurants in Saint-Petersburg and labor migrants from Georgia who are employed by them use to adapt to deportability and with the regimes of migrants' social inclusion and exclusion. I am also interested in how the relationships between illegal migrants and "ethnic" entrepreneurs, who use their labor, are organized.

Most of my field data refer to a large network of Georgian cafes, quite well-known in St. Petersburg, which I will refer to as Marani. An additional group of materials is comprised of interviews with employees of two Georgian mini-bakeries in the suburb of the city, and of a restaurant of mixed Asian-Georgian cuisine.

In legal terms labor migration from Georgia to Russia represents a special case among post-Soviet republics. In contrast to the CIS citizens who make the majority of labor migrants to Russia Georgian migrants need employment-based immigrant visas which until recently were actually almost impossible to obtain. The visa regime with Georgia was simplified in 2015, however, as field data showed, a significant number of migrant workers from Georgia who arrived to St. Petersburg in 2016-2017 still entered Russia illegally.

Most illegal migrants from Georgia come to Russia via Belarus, with which Georgia enjoys a visa-free regime. They use bribery schemes to cross Russian-Belarusian border and both entry and exit are associated with large expenses. Georgian cafe or restaurant owners who invite new employees often bear their entry costs.

As it turned out, even large restaurant business resorts to the labor of undocumented migrants. Qualified kitchen workers - cooks and bakers who know Georgian cuisine are scarce. Marani and other cafes and bakeries often invite employees from Georgia and search for them

using their social networks. Marani's owner originates from a certain area of Western Georgia, and workers from this region represent a prominent group among the network's employees.

Non-qualified positions are filled by migrants from Central Asia (I have only encountered Uzbek migrants for the time being who comprise the second largest migrants' group after Ukrainians). As the owner of the bakery explained to me, when I asked about his Uzbek employee, "Georgians are expensive." By saying this he meant the costs and problems associated with document processing for Georgian citizens and bribes to the inspecting bodies. More and more people from Central Asia occupy highly qualified positions in Georgian cafes - they master Georgian cuisine and work as cooks and bakers.

Owners of Marani carefully regulate the ratio of documented and undocumented employees in each of their cafes. So, they try to keep a balance between illegal immigrants and those who have documents, and in the most "unprotected" cafes they place mainly or exclusively workers with documents.

At some point, apparently due to frequent inspections of the Federal Migration Service, employers began to withhold half of their employees' salaries to form a deposit, which would allow them to buy a ticket home if the employee comes under inspection. This practice was introduced after the owners of the network had to urgently buy tickets to their employees, the money for which they did not return.

Originally, while the network was small, undocumented employees seemed not to present a big problem for employers. With the development and growth of the network this situation became difficult to manage. Besides a legal possibility of issuing visas emerged. In the past six months, all new employees who come from Georgia obtain at least monthly visas and come to Russia legally. However, the old employees who entered Russia illegally, do not actually get any legalization assistance from the network.

Employment conditions for undocumented migrants in Georgian food service are almost identical. The working day exceeds the 8-hour norm and is often more than 12 hours: from 9 am to 10 pm. The salary of a good baker or cook is about 25 euros a day, the amount depends on the day's receipts. Many migrants in Georgian cafes work without days off or with only one per week, which is often not planned and given arbitrarily. One of the interviewed migrants says that for the first 7 months of his work in Russia he had only one day off. Difficulties with day offs are due to the scheduling problem - for example, in order to give the weekend to one employee, others are sent to work in new cafes in different parts of the city every day. This makes their already long and tense working day even harder. Weekends and days missed due to illness are not paid.

For many migrants it is the first time that they have come to Russia, most of them do not speak Russian well. When inviting new employees from Georgia Marani owners guarantee stable income and pre-arranged housing, which is of great importance for new coming workers and makes it easier to make a decision about migration. The employer rents an apartment not far from his cafe, where several employees live at once for three or four people in a room.

The employer may bribe the local police officer so that he would not pay attention to illegal residents of the apartment in the area he controls. Rent for illegal tenants is also more expensive than the average market price.

The illegal status of stay in Russia imposes special conditions on the life of migrant workers.

Migrants live with the feeling that at any moment they can be detained and deported, their life plans at any time may come to nothing.

The inspection of workplaces by Federal Migration Service is considered to be the most dangerous. If the police stop on the street, they usually just take all the money the migrant has with him. The police will not deport or take away the migrant's passport. The FMS's inspections may result in deportation, and Georgian migrants are aware of such cases. The inspections disrupt the work of the cafe: one day the boss asked my interviewee to take off his uniform and leave the cafe for a while, and he had to walk for hours around the streets waiting for a signal that he could return to work.

For illegal migrants time is marked in terms of its danger or safety with regard to inspections by the police or Migration service. In this respect the weekend is considered to be the most dangerous.

Due to the police inspections in the subway, illegal migrants never use it. In the morning and in the afternoon they can use municipal and commercial buses, but late in the evening, when their work day ends, they return home by taxi. It is believed that it is at night that the police arrange raids, during which they detain migrants. Taxi is the safest way to travel around the city for illegal migrants, as it delivers door to door, allowing to minimize their time spent on the street.

As the migrants say, "an experienced policeman sees by gait, by manners, he immediately figures out a person, sees who has no documents." One of my interlocutors, whose appearance is not perceived as "typically Caucasian", says that he is afraid to walk around with his Georgian colleagues and friends, because they are "black", and the police is more likely to stop him in their company. The same informant says that he never carries a passport with him, because when not having a passport during street checks he can tell the police that he is a citizen of Belarus.

Due to the difficulties associated with traveling in public places, migrants often know the city very poorly. One of my interlocutors lives in Petersburg for two years, but still has not seen the main sights of the city. His Petersburg is limited to the route to and from the café he works in.

Illegal status of Georgian migrants led to the development of specific practices of mutual assistance among them. Room-mates are worried if their neighbor is late home, warn each other if the police have been seen on the way the police is more likely.

In the absence of documents, renting accommodation becomes problematic. It is impossible to hide one's illegal status from potential landlords as they ask to show a passport, and migrants tell of cases when neighbors informed on undocumented residents to the police.

One of the ways to secure the traveling around the city that Georgian migrants resort to is getting forged Armenian passports. However, this is useless if it comes to detention, since in the police station the fraud can easily be detected.

Until recently migrant workers' employers provided them with organizational assistance in case they were detained by the police. They used to come to the police station, and give bribes. Despite the fact that the money spent on his release the migrant then had to return to the employer, this assistance was valuable for undocumented migrants. Since late 2017, employers have announced to their migrant employees that they will no longer be able to rescue them from police stations and began to encourage them to obtain visas. However, work visas are much more difficult to obtain, they are more expensive. That is why migrants usually get not work, but visitor's visas. According the conditions of the visa, migrants are required to leave the country several times a year for a period of several weeks. As a result, they risk losing their jobs. Thus, the legalization of their stay in Russia in this way has ambiguous consequences for the migrants. In general, the relatively low cost of police checks on the street make migrants question the advisability of getting visas and legalization. Many migrants live in the moment and are not inclined to make efforts to obtain documents, especially if they do not pursue a future with Russia. However today, most Georgian labor migrants are looking for a way to legalize their stay in Russia.