

The Role of Migration in the Transformation of the Republic of Abkhazia Population Structure during 1989-2010

A.S. Khalilova

Institute of history, archaeology and ethnography at Dagestan Scientific Center of the Russian
Academy of Sciences, Makhachkala, M.Yaragskogo Street, 75

A.Sh. Khashba

Institute of history, archaeology and ethnography at Dagestan Scientific Center of the Russian
Academy of Sciences, Makhachkala, M.Yaragskogo Street, 75

A.D. Osmaev, Y.M. Lysenko.

Institute of history, archaeology and ethnography at Dagestan Scientific Center of the Russian
Academy of Sciences, Makhachkala, M.Yaragskogo Street, 75

Abstract

In this paper for the first time the authors examined in detail the changes in the structure of the Republic of Abkhazia population during 1989-2010, respectively. To this end the processes of emigration and immigration are analyzed concerning the ethnic groups which made up the bulk of Abkhazia population by the beginning of the study period based on field data, the information from the rural household books, statistical and civil status registration office, as well as on other sources. A brief description is provided in respect of the reasons that resulted in such a significant outflow of the republic residents. Separately, the directions of Abkhazia resident internal migration were determined. There was the attempt to substantiate the socio-political and cultural-domestic phenomena which served as a catalyst for their emergence and expansion. The examination of the close migration development prospects allowed to identify a number of socio-economic and cultural consequences of this process and the degree of its influence on the development of modern ethno-cultural landscape of the Republic of Abkhazia.

Keywords: Abkhazia, migration, ethnicity, demography, post-Soviet period, population structure.

Introduction

The turn of the XX-th and the XXI-st century was marked for the Republic of Abkhazia (further referred to as RA) by the following momentous events: the war of 1992-1993 against Georgia, the acquisition of sovereignty, the establishment of a new state, the struggle for its official diplomatic recognition - all this became the key determinants contributing to the way of the region modern political and socio-economic development. They also influenced rather actively on the position in the demographic sphere. The latter is always sensitive to the socio-economic conditions under the influence of which it demonstrates either positive or negative development trends. So, society, being inversely related to the state of demographic indicators with the positive trends of their development as a whole contributes to an optimized development of economic and social spheres, and at negative trends it may give rise to a series of problems until the crisis condition of a state and society.

Accordingly, the study of migration mobility among the residents of Abkhazia, as well as the study of changes in the age and sex structure of the republic population, its reproduction and demographic aspects of marriage and family institutions may provide a full picture of the region social development within the considered period under and show the influence of these categories on the economic and cultural aspects of society activities. Realizing that it is extremely difficult to fully cover all of these phenomena in a short article, the main focus was on the characteristics of migration processes in the RA during 1989-2010. It should be emphasized that such an analysis is carried out for the first time and it makes such results more actual for this territory within the specified time frame. This state of affairs on the issue of migration studies in Abkhazia is largely related to the fact that there is not only a complete analysis concerning the real course of society life today, but also the lack of the necessary statistical data, specific factors for the calculation of the social determination in respect of the ethno-demographic processes in RA. However, in our case, the situation was corrected by bringing in the field materials (household books data of Sukhumi, Gagra, Gudauta, Ochamchira, Tkuarchal region villages of the past and the beginning of this century [1,2,3,4]). Besides, the materials of the current population account were analyzed. The accounting was carried out by the State statistical office, the Civil Registry Office archive of RA during 1994-2009 [5], as well as the summary data of Abkhazia population accounting in 2003.

During the consideration of the migration processes in Abkhazia, the basis was presented by the element which modern ethnographers name "one of the most painful ones in the modern society", and also "the main causes and factors of social changes in receiving and in sending societies" are determined [6]. In this regard, the concept of transnationality adapted to the local territorial scope was emphasized. This concept was embedded in the social networks of the Abkhaz and other emigrants supported "through the flow of those who migrate and move to a new place, and those who return to their homeland, family visits and friends in both ways, marriages between migrating people and people living at home" [7]. Besides, it was noted that the Abkhazian migrants, as well as other peoples of the Caucasus, demonstrate trans-locality when "the specificity of labor migration, in contrast to all other species, is in the temporary relocation to other settlements, often remote ones, to work for a financial reward with a necessary return to the place of a permanent residence" [8], well described by E.L. Kapustina using the example of Dagestan peoples [9].

The focusing on these phenomena on the one hand is related to the fact that such an approach makes it possible to relate the essence of migration occurring in modern Abkhazia and

influencing on the formation of its ethnic and cultural landscape, with the research of global importance, conducting on a similar subject. And on the other hand this approach allows to fill in the gap in modern Abkhazian, and specific Caucasian literature, in which migrations are not studied as a rule, and the reasons of a fixed demographic behavior of the Abkhazian society are disclosed insufficiently, the prospects for the reproduction, both indigenous and other ethnic population of the republic are not determined, which emphasizes the scientific importance of this work.

Emigration and Immigration As The Indicators Of Abkhazia Ethnic Landscape Change

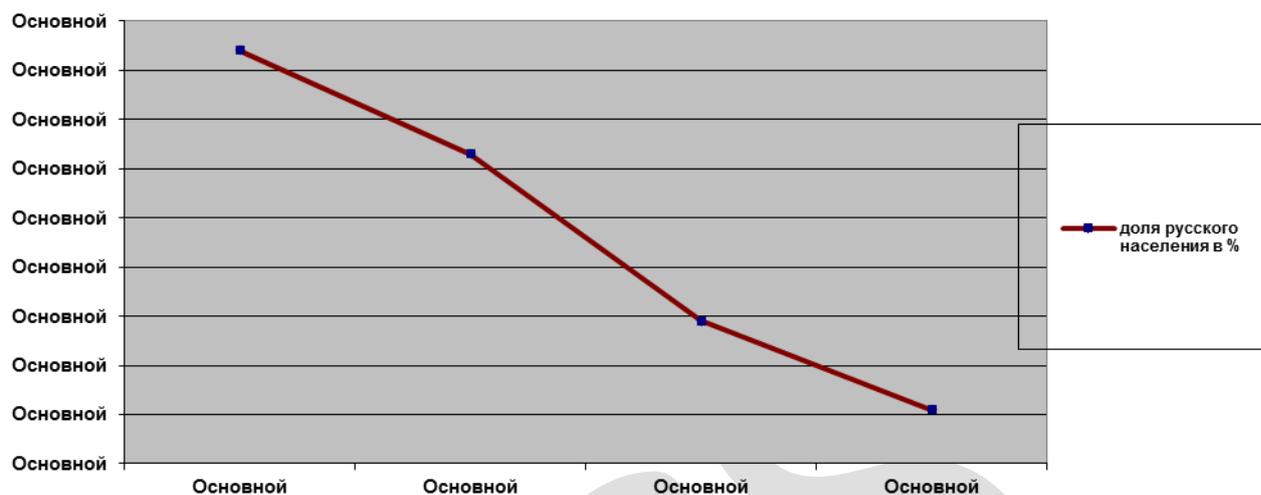
Since the period of perestroika, Abkhazia gradually accumulated the contradictions concerning the national statehood of the region under study. The escalation of the tension, exacerbated by the Soviet Union collapse, led to the outbreak of an ethnic conflict, which grew into the Georgian-Abkhazian war of 1992-1993. For the local population of the country, this war was truly crucial. It manifested itself in a broad migration caused by the deterioration of the population living standards, unemployment increase, the reduction of marriage number, birth rate decrease and mortality increase, led to a striking change in the structure of Abkhazia population [10,12].

The termination of the military conflict and the subsequent diplomatic recognition of the new state status during the entire study period allowed such phenomena as emigration and immigration to shatter the population amount of Abkhazia. Taking into account the fact that government agencies couldn't help their citizens to overcome the economic difficulties during 1990-ies, until the beginning of the new century, the residents of the country left their homeland more and more often in search of a better life. And only by the middle of the 2000-s the situation changed to the opposite one. The growth of population welfare, the revival of tourism and agriculture (the cultivation of citrus fruits and nuts), as the important sectors of the country economy gradually led to the working population immigration increase from other countries.

As already mentioned, the structure of the population of Abkhazia, which is a multinational, a multi-ethnic republic had undergone significant changes during 1989-2010 (in particular, according to the results of Union population census in 1989 the country population number amounted to 525,061 persons [13], and according to the population register of 2003 it made only 214016 people [14]). They made a particular influence on the representatives of other nations - Armenians, Russian, Mingrelians, Georgians, Greeks, etc., who formed ethnic communities here, along with the indigenous ethnic group - Abkhazians.

So, the first immigrants were the representatives of the Russian population, who responded most rapidly respond to the changes of the socio-political situation in RA. This is quite explainable as Abkhazia is very close to Russia, where this ethnic group is represented by the vast majority of the population. Note that the reduction of Russians in the structure of Abkhazian population due to emigration was observed since the early 80-ies of the XX-th century, 9 (Fig. 1).

Fig.1. Russian share in the population of the Republic of Abkhazia (in %) [11,15,16].



Основной – main / доля русского населения в % - the share of Russian population in %

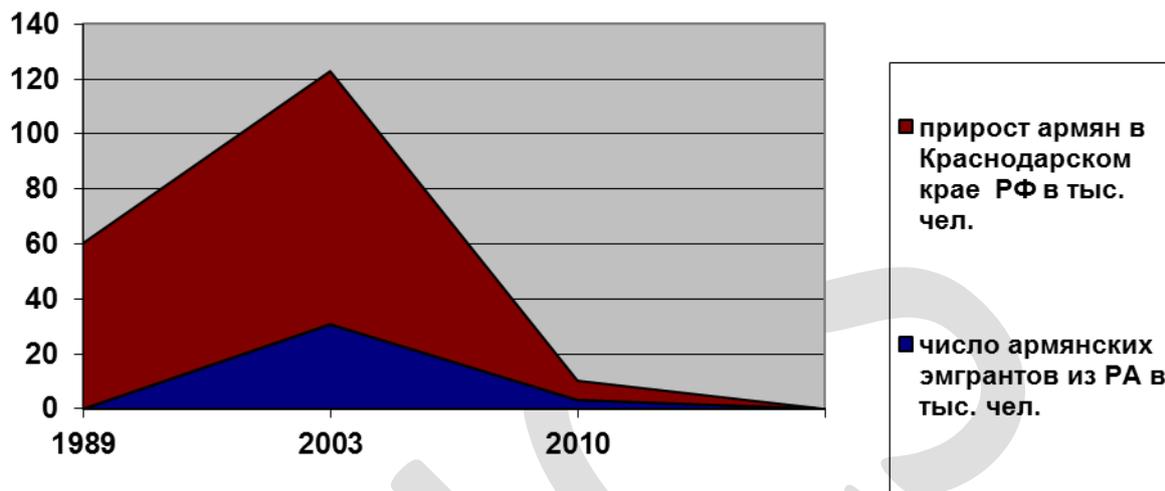
The events of 1992-1993 only strengthened this trend. By May 1993, according to the official data of the Federal Migration Service of Russia the total number of registered refugees from Abkhazia in Russian Federation amounted to 6236 people, or 2568 families [17]. Among the main causes of forced emigration of Russians is the absence of confidence in tomorrow, the instability of social and political situation in the Republic, etc. Besides, one should bear in mind that the actual number of emigrants in Russia is much higher. This is due to the large number of unregistered persons who settled with relatives, friends, and did not submit documents as the refugee from Abkhazia upon their arrival in Russia.

According to general estimates of researches "thousands of Armenians, Greeks, Russians, Ukrainians, Jews, Estonians, Tatars, Turks and other ethnic group representatives" were involved in the process of forced migration from Abkhazia during this period [11]. For example, only on 15 August of 1993, more than 1,200 Greeks - residents of Sukhumi and the surrounding villages of the capital of Abkhazia were expelled to Greece from the Sukhumi seaport [11]. Therefore, if at the beginning of the 90-ies of the twentieth century the share of Greeks who emigrated from the republic, made no more than 0.1% during 10 years (from 1979 to 1989), it increased to 13282 people during the analyzed period [16] i.e. it amounted to more than 2.1% of the total population of Abkhazia. Of course, it was revealed as an obvious loss during the analysis of RA population structure.

Approximately equal emigration rates appeared among the Armenian and Georgian population of Abkhazia during 1990-2000-ies. At that the direction of these flows was diverse. If the bulk of the Georgians emigrated to Georgia, and only a small portion settled in Russia, Armenians mostly preferred to move to Russia and only a few returned to Armenia. Moreover, in most cases, they settled in the Krasnodar Territory which has common border with the RA. Therefore, when we compare data in a graphical display a parallel nature of result display between numerical indicators of Armenian and Georgian emigrants from RA and the increase of their number in this region becomes evident (Fig. 2.3 [18,19,20]).

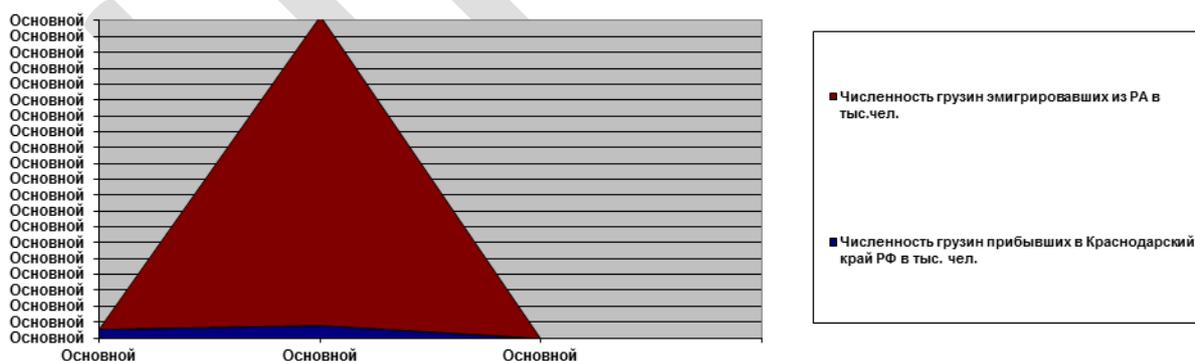
Moreover, the remigration of the Georgian population in Abkhazia during the 2000-s, was reflected in the diagram data as the zero indicators for the last period.

Figure 2. Comparative figures of Armenians emigration from RA and the growth of their numbers in the Krasnodar region of Russian Federation



прирост армян в Краснодарском крае РФ в тыс. чел. - Armenian increase in the Krasnodar region of the Russian Federation, in thousands of people. / число армянских эмигрантов из РА в тыс. чел. - number of Armenian immigrants from Armenia, in thousands of people.

Figure 2. Comparative figures of Georgians number in RA and Krasnodar Territory of Russian Federation



основной – main / численность грузин, эмигрировавших из РА в тыс. чел. - the number of Georgians who emigrated from Armenia, in thousands of people. / численность грузин, прибывших в Краснодарский край РФ в тыс. чел. - the number of Georgians who arrived in the Krasnodar region of the Russian Federation, in thousands of people.

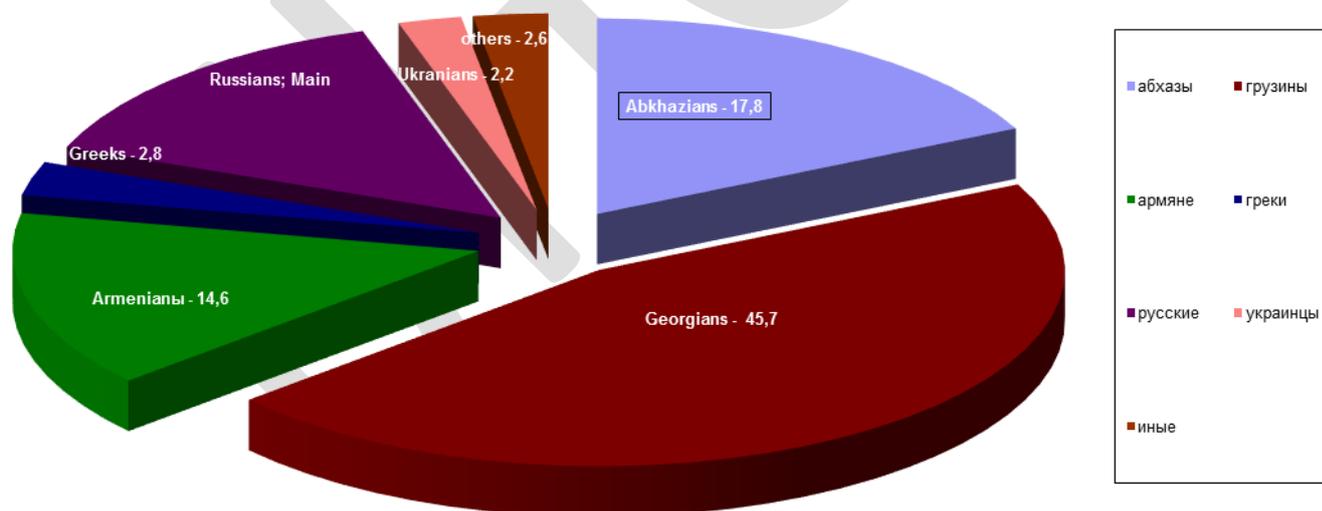
In general, the attractiveness of Russia as the region accepting the immigrants from Abkhazia has always been great also for the indigenous population of the republic. Thus, according to

reports 135 people moved from 4 villages of the Gudauta district (Kaldahuara, Huapi, Blabyrhua, Barmysh) to Russian Federation during 1986-1990 and 1997-2000 [2].

Concerning the immigration of residents from other countries into Abkhazia, this phenomenon started to spread only by the end of the 2000-s. After the official recognition of the statehood of Abkhazia in 2008 by Russian Federation this country included in the regions of the world receiving immigrants. In 2010, the Head of RA Migration Service Lieutenant-General Vladimir Arshba noted: "today mainly guest workers from the Baltic republics, Moldova, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan and Turkmenistan work in Abkhazia. Visiting various construction sites, Migration Service employees raise awareness among foreign workers, explaining to them the need for the legalization of their activities on the territory of Abkhazia" [21]. Accordingly, the role of immigrants in the structure of the Republic population was very small during the years 1989-2010, although it has the tendency of growing.

In general, the consideration of emigration flows allows us to recognize that people who moved from Abkhazia during 1989-2010 as a homogeneous population, are the representatives of the so-called "ethnic migration" in essence [22] (Fig. 4).

Figure 4. The number of the population of Abkhazia in 1989-2011 on a national basis (in %) [16]



The analysis of the dynamics concerning the number of different ethnic groups, with the share of 0.5% in the total mass of the population of Abkhazia during 1989-2011 suggests that the emigration process during the analyzed period has fundamentally changed the basic structure of the population of Abkhazia, and also made it seeking from multiethnicity to a mononationality, because during this period the share of Georgians, Armenians, Russians and other ethnic groups in the total population of the republic has decreased significantly, and the amount of Abkhazians has increased significantly, in particular from 17 to 51% [16].

Internal Migration In Abkhazia: Main Trends

During the study of internal migration processes in Abkhazia in 1989-2010 and the determination of its main trends in addition to the previously mentioned sources the invaluable information was obtained from the household books of rural administrations, which are updated over time. The indicators contained in them not only reflect the real picture of the country rural population structure, but also allow us to trace the main directions of village inhabitant migration.

A brief analysis of these data will allow to identify the growth of the rural population of RA urbanization within this period and, accordingly, to designate one of the main trends of internal migration among its inhabitants - from a village into a city. It should be noted that at the detailed consideration of data on the amount of RA rural population (Table 1.) a significant reduction of the rural population is evident. The postulates that the reduction of the rural population of Abkhazia is largely conditioned by the loss of workable men during the period of the armed conflict in 1992-1993 are quite common. However, the comparison of the total number of men in a number of villages with the number of men died there (Table 1.) does not give grounds for their confirmation. In this regard, there is data from local population surveys, indicating that the departure of young people from the villages began much earlier, but the dead are still buried at family cemeteries. And this data look noteworthy.

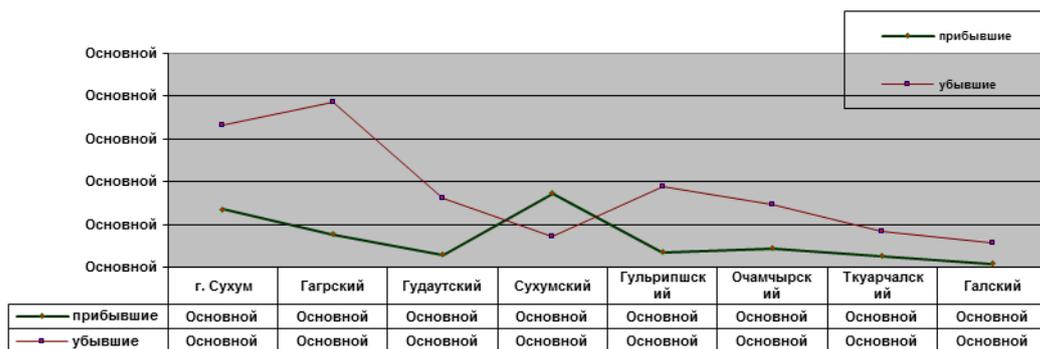
Table 1. Dynamics of the population in the villages of Abkhazia

Village	Population amount [23]				Male population amount [2,24]	
	1979	1990	2003	2005	Total number of men	Dead
Dzhgerda	1100	1000	900	800	279	42
Chlou	2300	2400	1500	Prs.	789	61
Duripsh	2400	2100	1600	Prs.	648	62
Lykhny	7200	Prs.	5400	5500	170	21

Perhaps this fact justifies the paradoxical nature of the data on the ratio of urban and rural population of RA when at similar rates of their numbers the rule is higher birth rates among the rural population than the urban one. As a whole, the total number of village inhabitants reduces in accordance with a sharply declining proportion of young and middle-aged people, whereas their proportions are increased significantly in urban areas due to migrants.

It should be noted that the role of village population migration from a village into a city acquired a greater importance during the study period and manifested in a number of consequences: on the one hand, it softened demographic, and for some areas and the age and gender imbalance in the cities, and on the other hand - it sharply increased it in the countryside. Of course, the intensity of the migratory movement of the rural population in different regions of Abkhazia was an excellent one (Fig. 5).

Figure 5. Number of arrived and departed in separate regions of Abkhazia during 1996 [25].



прибывшие - arrived / убывшие - departed / основной - main / г. Сухум - the city of Sukhum / Гагрский - Gagra / Гудаутский - Gudauta / Сухумский - Sukhumi / Гульрипшский - Gulripsh / Очамчырский - Ochamchira / Ткуарчалский - Tkuarchal / Галский - Gali

According to the data of 1996 the proportion of residents who came to the regions of Abkhazia was basically about 20% of those who left. The essential difference is only in the capital of the country, where the figure was twice as high. This largely emphasizes the migration attractiveness of Sukhumi for population as a possible source of income. At that, the migrants from villages settled not only in the capital but also in its suburbs, which allowed to save transport costs during the process of moving to work. Another attractive region of Abkhazia was Gagra region. However, he, in contrast to the capital and Sukhumi district and it was perceived by migrants more and more as a major center of resort and tourist area.

At the determination of migration intensity from the village to the city by gender during 1990-2001 one may state with certainty that men were involved in this process mostly. The women of Abkhazia being not very well emancipated, also took part in migrations on the territory of AR, but to a lesser extent (Tab. 2).

Table 2. Dynamics of rural resident RA migration in 1990-2002 (number of persons) [1,2,4]

village	men	women
Blabyrhua	47	56
Kaldahuara	76	68
Barmysh	63	66
Huap	33	13
1-st Bedia	12	24
Gumista village	161	94
total	392	321

Of course, the depopulation from the villages was uneven. Most often, people left the mountain areas, the most remote from regional centers and cities. At the same time, the closer a settlement was to a city (or at least to a good highway), the less were the migration losses. The importance of this factor was stated by the ethnographer O. Maan, who wrote, "that 60 families left Lashkendar village of Abzhui Abkhazia, which held 100 households during the previous century due to lack of living conditions. For the same reason, after the Georgian-Abkhazian war of 1992-1993 almost 90% of Arasadzyh village families resettled in coastal areas, mainly in Uarcha, Dranda, villages, partly in Gulripsh urban-type settlement), and in the cities, especially in Sukhum. As for the residents of Kyndyg village, they moved not in the regions of the republic, but into the lower part of the village, where they occupied the houses abandoned by their Georgian neighbors" [26]. This passage illustrates the desire of the residents of Abkhazia to improve the conditions of their life in many ways if it's possible.

It is remarkable that the sharpest increase in the rural population migration from a number of districts of Abkhazia was observed at the end of 90-ies of the XX-th century. Thus, in 1997 - 2000 2445 people departed from Ochamchira region in search of a better life. At that time the number of arrivals was only 615 people [26].

Of course, with the move to the city the psychology of the rural population did not change automatically. And the feeling of trans-locality appeared here characteristic for all the mountaineers of the Caucasus. Its main manifestation was the creation of strong social networks, pulling the city and the village together. More mobile villagers, familiar through certain channels (mass media, the combination of work in a city and staying in a village, the relations with urban relatives, etc.) with the peculiarities of life in a city, take the new arrivals under their wing, encouraging their speedy adaptation. In principle, the traditional ethnographic peculiarities of the inhabitants of Abkhazia to this day, largely hinder their long separation from the usual ethno-social environment. Since the indigenous people - Abkhazians and other ethnic groups living in the country moving in a city continued (revealing vivid examples of trans-locality) to maintain close contact with a village, where they received a significant support in product (agricultural products), and financial (from the sales of agricultural products) form.

So, the villagers had their own opinion on the leading reasons of people departure from village differing from the opinion of citizens (especially young people). The older generation considered it as a direct threat to the existence of their village and the preservation of people cultural traditions in it. The representatives of the young and middle generation often considered their departure as an opportunity to financial success in life, and leisure issue solution. Also, "the causes of the migration mobility determine the socio-economic, cultural and psychological nature of the work, the desire to extend the study, the lack of opportunities for more interesting leisure activities, the dissatisfaction with housing and living conditions, and a number of other" [27]. However, full integration of newcomers to the city living conditions, their perception of urban attitudes required some time still.

The other side of this phenomenon is the penetration of urban relations in a village, namely the change of the rural population lifestyle, its gradual approach to urban standards. All this led to the changes in the organization of agricultural production; it increased the proportion of villagers engaged in non-agricultural labor, changed their value orientations, etc. And if at the beginning of the study period the city life was not prestigious for the bulk of the rural population, and "life in a city was perceived by many as a necessary, short-term one for a

living and a better provision of a family who continued to live in the countryside often" [28,29], then by its completion the focus largely changed into the opposite one.

Another major trend in internal migration flows of RA citizens was the labor pendulum (seasonal) migration during 1989-2010. After the collapse of the Soviet Union it has acquired the form of population successful survival strategy for small and medium-sized depressed towns and urban-type settlements. A significant part of the population in such towns not only survived economically, but also formed a segment of a dynamic population, quickly adapting to the changing conditions [30].

Let's emphasize that the very fact of the labor pendulum migration presence commuting is also widely adopted in other republics of the Caucasus. So, in Dagestan this is the phenomenon with a long history (formerly known as seasonal work). "However, if in the last century it was one of the ways to keep the poor population of the region from the final impoverishment, now seasonal workers are often the representatives of the wealthy residents among mountain villages. Labor pendulum migration allow to improve a social status, and most importantly, to get material wealth, many times greater than income, which is available in a native village for such services. Perhaps this fact can be called a decisive one for a seasonal migrant during this period when he chooses his destination for a departure" [31].

It is very important to reveal 2 types of labor migration for the Republic of Abkhazia in this trend. So one of them is presented by strictly seasonal departures in order to improve the "economic" situation, which was especially unstable during the first half of the 1990-s. In this regard, let's note that the available field information allows to talk about the number of seasonal workers increase. For example, in 2000 the village Huap of Gudauta region was left by 31 people during seasonal work, and by 2006 their number has increased by 1.2 times and the number of people who went for seasonal work from the village Kaldahuara doubled [2].

Another type of pendulum migration is the daily departure of residents from villages to the city work. Thus, according to our data, 100 people from 4 villages arrived to the city in 2000-s [3.4], which makes 0.05% of the total population of Abkhazia. The peculiarity of this type of migration is the fact that the composition of village population located in the zone of city influence, either expands or remains stable. Thus, for example, Lykhny village is located in the immediate vicinity of the town of Gudauta, which significantly impeded the outflow of population from rural areas. This is due to the fact that the villagers can get to work in the city on foot or go by bus. Among these villages one can attribute the residents of Gumyst village in Sukhumi region, who were working mainly in Sukhumi due to the convenient geographical location of the village (in 1997-2005 more than 200 villagers went to the capital [1]).

Conclusions

Summarizing, we should say that migration played a very important role in the change of national, age, gender and other demographic indicators, forming the structure of the population of the Republic of Abkhazia population during 1989-2010. And if among the main causes of emigration one should highlight the military events of 1992-1993, the internal migrations were characterized by the search for more comfortable living conditions, better than in rural areas, the information capacity of RA cities, the attempt to find the best opportunities for a profession selection and the realization of the intellectual potential, the desire to improve one's financial condition, also via touristic servicing (renting of apartments for tourists, the work in the field of the resort servicing, small business) and so on. Another

factor stimulating to move to another location is the disadvantages of transportation system. (A relatively high cost of transport, the inconvenience of vehicle schedules [32] between the villages and cities of the republic.

Summary

Of course, such a short coverage of the migration processes in Abkhazia cannot fully show the whole picture of happening things and to reflect all the features of migrations in the country. But, at the same time the reflection of the major trends in the issue of internal and external movements of the RA population provides a unique foundation for further study of these processes in Abkhazia as a whole, and can also help the RA authorities, employees of ministries and departments in the development of plans to overcome the negative effects of the studied phenomena.

Conflict Of Interest

The authors suggest that the presented data do not contain any conflict of interest

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