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Demography of the Caucasus

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DEMOGRAPHY OF THE CAUCASUS

Edward C. Holland and Jennifer S. Wistrand

Introduction

Demographic processes in the Caucasus region reflect broader dynamics in the politics and economics of the Soviet and post-Soviet space. A series of wars in both the North and South Caucasus has resulted in internal displacement and the out-migration of both skilled and unskilled labour. The planned economy of the communist period impelled migration and resettlement from the top down; the deportation of nationalities by the Soviet Union prior to and during the Second World War exemplifies this practice of state-led demographic engineering (McGarry 1998). The Soviet system depressed migration rates by equalising standards of living across locales through subsidisation and the artificial maintenance of full employment (Heleniak 2008). Since 1991, state-led practices have been replaced by more organic, market-determined pull and push factors such as political violence and associated instability (Castles and Miller 2009).

Demography and demographic change offer a platform for considering the Caucasus as an integrated region, rather than divided into north and south. Both areas have experienced out-migration by Russians, the adverse effects of internal displacement as a result of unresolved conflicts, urban growth and change accompanied by the emptying of rural areas, and short-term labour migration away from the region to other areas of more dynamic economic growth. We argue that the demographic profiles of the North and South Caucasus look remarkably similar a quarter-century after communism’s end, primarily because of the joint legacies of the Soviet state and similar experiences in terms of economics and conflict during the transition period (Holland and Derrick 2016). This chapter offers a review of demography in the region since the last Soviet census in 1989, discussing in turn the key trends in each of the four Caucasus states (Russia, Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia). We then highlight four key processes that have come to define the demographics of the Caucasus in the post-Soviet period: population changes associated with late Soviet and post-Soviet wars in Azerbaijan, Georgia, and Russia and the demographic situation in the de facto states that formed as a result of these conflicts (see Chapter 16); continued Russian out-migration from the South Caucasus and novel Russian out-migration from the North Caucasus; urbanisation and urban growth, focusing on the case study of Baku; and short-term labour...
migration. The conclusion is forward-looking in its perspective, and identifies a set of salient issues that each of the Caucasus states will have to negotiate in the coming years.

**Demographics in the North and South Caucasus: an overview**

Migration is not a new phenomenon for the inhabitants of the North and South Caucasus. What distinguishes contemporary migration is that the destinations and motivations to move are distinct from prior periods. This chapter focuses on the where and why of migration since 1991, using the 1989 Soviet census as a baseline for understanding population change in the Caucasus region since communism’s end. Each of the four Caucasus states has conducted two censuses in the post-Soviet period (Russia in 2002 and 2010; Georgia in 2002 and 2014; Azerbaijan in 1999 and 2009; Armenia in 2001 and 2011). Table 24.1 provides summary statistics for population totals from the last three censuses for the four Caucasus states. We use this information for reviewing the demographic situation in each state in turn.²

**Russian Federation**

In Russia’s North Caucasus, the 2002 census offered the first snapshot into the consequences of the economic depression, war, and social instability that accompanied the country’s first post-Soviet decade. Population trends were more stable during the subsequent decade. The national republics of Chechnya, Dagestan, Ingushetia, North Ossetia, and Karachaevo-Cherkessia all experienced population growth during the last intercensal period (2002 to 2010). Of the six republics in the region, only Kabardino-Balkaria saw a decline in population during this time. Stavropol’ krai, the non-ethnically defined territory in the North Caucasus Federal District (NCFD), also saw population growth over

**Table 24.1 Total population in the four Caucasus states and major regions**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1989 Soviet Census</th>
<th>First Post-Independence Census</th>
<th>Second Post-Independence Census</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Russian Federation</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chechnya²</td>
<td>1,084,433</td>
<td>1,103,686</td>
<td>1,268,989</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dagestan</td>
<td>1,802,188</td>
<td>2,576,531</td>
<td>2,910,249</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ingushetia</td>
<td>185,996</td>
<td>467,294</td>
<td>412,529</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kabardino-Balkaria</td>
<td>753,531</td>
<td>901,494</td>
<td>859,939</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Karachaevo-Cherkessia</td>
<td>414,970</td>
<td>439,470</td>
<td>477,859</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North Ossetia</td>
<td>632,428</td>
<td>710,275</td>
<td>712,980</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stavropol’ krai</td>
<td>2,825,349</td>
<td>2,735,139</td>
<td>2,786,281</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Armenia</td>
<td>3,304,776</td>
<td>3,213,011</td>
<td>3,018,854</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Azerbaijan</td>
<td>7,021,178</td>
<td>7,953,438</td>
<td>8,922,447</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Georgia</td>
<td>5,400,841</td>
<td>4,371,535</td>
<td>3,713,893</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

⁴ The website Etno-Kavkaz breaks down the 1989 census by raion population according to current composition of the Chechen and Ingush republics, with the exception of part of Sunzhenskii raion. See: <www.etno-kavkaz.narod.ru/rnchechenia.html> (accessed 8 March 2019).
this period. Stavropol’ benefited from the out-migration of Russians from the North and South Caucasus, although by the mid-2000s most of those who were able to leave the latter area had done so. Southern and eastern Stavropol’ saw an increase in the number of Chechens, Dargins, and Nogais. The last two populations are generally concentrated in Dagestan but settled in eastern Stavropol’ for work in sheep and cattle ranching (O’Loughlin et al. 2007).

In the conditions of the Second Chechen War of 1999–2009 the results of the 2002 census in Chechnya proper should be treated with extreme caution, due to the mass displacement of the population associated with that conflict (see Chapter 13). Vendina et al. (2007) suggest an overcount rate of 27 to 30 per cent and offer an estimate of 700,000 to 750,000 for the republic’s population. The pre-census estimate issued in January 2002 placed the region’s population total at 625,000, well below the census count of 1.1 million (Heleniak 2003). Maksudov (2005) is more critical in his assessment, writing that ‘If one is to believe the last population census, the period between the years 1989 and 2002 was for the Chechens and Ingush a time of phenomenal demographic flourishing [protsvetaniia]. However, there was no miracle’.

Dagestan was the site of insurgent violence that, while resulting in a large number of casualties, never led to the widespread population displacement or the destruction of infrastructure and homes that characterised the wars in Chechnya proper. As such, its demographic profile has been more stable over the past two decades, with a growth rate of roughly 20 per cent between 2002 and 2010. This increase built on the 1989–2002 intercensal period, when the republic’s population grew by 43 per cent (Heleniak 2003). Two processes that are explored in further detail below deserve highlighting in introducing Dagestan. First, the republic has experienced rapid urbanisation in the past two decades resulting from rural-to-urban migration (Eldarov et al. 2007). The capital of Makhachkala is reportedly the fastest-growing city in the Russian Federation. Precise population measures for Makhachkala are difficult to determine, due mainly to a large and uncertain number of unregistered residents. The city’s official total in the 2010 census was 572,000, almost certainly an undercount and a number that does not include those living in the city’s suburbs. Second, Dagestan has experienced significant short-term labour migration from the rural highlands to other parts of Russia, including the oil fields of western Siberia and the cities of Moscow and St. Petersburg (Holland and Eldarov 2012).

Ingushetia, which until 1991 was part of the unified Checheno-Ingush Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic (ASSR), saw its population increase significantly during the 1990s and early 2000s due to both natural increase and internal displacement associated with the wars in Chechnya. The most salient issue for the republic is the displacement of Ingush from Prigorodnyi raion as a result of a brief but intense conflict in October–November 1992. Formerly part of the Ingush Autonomous Oblast’, the territory that is today Prigorodnyi raion was allocated to North Ossetia following the deportation of the Chechens and Ingush in 1944. Between 25,000 and 30,000 Ossetians were resettled in the area from Georgia and elsewhere in North Ossetia following the deportation and this influx continued through the late 1950s (Sokirianskaia 2004/2005; O’Loughlin et al. 2008). After being rehabilitated under Khrushchev, a number of Ingush returned to their homes in the area, although the territory itself was not returned to the Checheno-Ingush ASSR. The 1992 conflict led to the expulsion of Ingush from the raion while preserving the territorial status quo (see Chapter 15).

In addition to ongoing tensions over Prigorodnyi raion, North Ossetia has served as a destination for Ossetians who left South Ossetia after conflict there in the early 1990s, as well as in the wake of the August 2008 war between Russia and Georgia. O’Loughlin et al. (2008) report that approximately 12,000 Ossetians left Georgia around the time of the
breakup of the Soviet state, with the Georgianisation policies pursued by Zviad Gamsakhurdia and the resulting conflict in South Ossetia in 1991–92 serving as the key push factors.\(^3\)

The August 2008 Russo-Georgian War ‘dramatically changed the ethnic map’ in South Ossetia (Kolossov and O’Loughlin 2011: 634); Georgians were displaced from the region and more Ossetians left both South Ossetia and Georgia proper for Russia. The UNHCR (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees) reports that there were about 35,000 displaced persons in North Ossetia as of September 2008.

The dual-nationality republics of Karachaevo-Cherkessia and Kabardino-Balkaria both experienced the deportation of their Turkic groups during the course of the Second World War – the Karachais and the Balkars, respectively (Yemelianova 2005). From 1989 to 2002, populations in both regions grew as did the percentage of the population that belongs to one of the titular, Islam-practising groups (Heleniak 2006). This reflects the out-migration of Russians from the regions as well as generally higher birth rates among traditionally Muslim populations.

As noted previously, Kabardino-Balkaria is the only one of the constituent regions of the NCFD that experienced a population decline in the 2002–10 intercensal period, most likely the product of this out-migration and a possible over-count of Kabardians in the 2002 census.\(^4\)

\section*{Armenia}

Armenia was the most ethnically homogeneous of the 15 union republics (known as Soviet Socialist Republics – SSRs) constituting the Soviet Union. With the out-migration of Azerbaijanis and Russians since late communism, it has recently become more so. The key drivers in this population exodus include, inter alia, the December 1988 earthquake with its epicentre near the town of Spitak, a post-Soviet decline in living standards, and the war with Azerbaijan over Nagorny Karabakh and the resultant border closures and economic blockades (see Chapters 15 and 16). The 1989 Soviet census was significantly affected by the Armenian earthquake, which occurred approximately five weeks before the count. In turn, reported population numbers for the northwest of the republic were substantially lower than the real totals.\(^5\)

Contradicting official census figures is the out-migration of Armenians from the republic immediately following independence, driven primarily by the economic uncertainty of the post-Soviet transition. Savvidis (2009) reports that over the winter of 1991–92, 700,000 Armenians emigrated, primarily to Russia but also to Europe and the United States (see Chapter 12). Out-migration around the turn of the millennium was running at roughly 10,000 people per year. Between 1991 and 2004 the total number of emigrants approached one million and was heavily skewed towards males of working age (approximately 85 per cent of all migrants; Savvidis 2009). Migrants relied on the diaspora in Russia to carve out livelihoods. Moscow served as an important destination for Armenians from Armenia and elsewhere in the former Soviet Union. The influence of the diaspora, both in political and economic terms, is substantial. Economically, in 2014 Armenia ranked 11th globally in terms of remittances as a percentage of gross domestic product (GDP) (World Bank 2016). Belying the scope of out-migration, official census figures indicate that Armenia’s rural population increased in absolute terms between the last Soviet census (1989) and first post-Soviet census (2001) and that the population as a whole fell by only 6.8 per cent during this period (Rowland 2007).

\section*{Azerbaijan}

According to the 1989 census, the population of the Azerbaijan SSR was just over seven million, with 5.8 million self-identifying as Azerbaijani, 392,000 self-identifying as Russian, and 391,000
self-identifying as Armenian (Heleniak 2008). The first post-Soviet census, conducted a decade later, indicated that Azerbaijan’s population had risen by approximately one million persons. However, these results were contested and some authors suggest that Azerbaijan’s actual population was anywhere from one-fifth to one-third lower than the eight million total. The census was inclusive of individuals who had temporarily left the republic to seek work elsewhere, mainly in Russia and Turkey.

Azerbaijan’s internal demographic composition is diverse and reflects the ethnic and linguistic diversity of the Caucasus mountain chain. The term ‘Azeri’ refers to an ethnic group, and the Azeris are the largest such group in Azerbaijan, although large numbers of Azeris also live in Iran and Georgia. The term ‘Azerbaijani’ refers to a citizen of Azerbaijan. We use ‘Azerbaijani’ to denote all citizens of Azerbaijan, irrespective of an individual’s or a group’s ethnic affiliation – unless we are specifically discussing ethnic variations within the population of Azerbaijan, in which case we distinguish, for example, Russians from Armenians from Azerbaijanis. In such cases, ‘Azerbaijani’ includes, but is not limited to, Azeris; Avars and Udins, two of the country’s smaller ethnic groups, would also be included in the category ‘Azerbaijani’. Two of the country’s other smaller ethnic groups are the Lezgins and the Talysh. The Lezgins are concentrated in the country’s north but also reside in substantial numbers in southern Dagestan, while the Talysh live in southern Azerbaijan and north-western Iran along the Caspian Sea coast.

**Georgia**

Georgia’s censuses underscore a precipitous decline in the country’s population in the period since communism and offer the most accurate picture of the demographic issues facing the South Caucasus states. The country’s population fell nearly one-third from 1989 to 2014. Importantly, much of this decline occurred among non-ethnic Georgians. There was, however, out-migration of an estimated quarter-million Georgians during the first years after the Soviet Union’s breakup, an exodus that was primarily motivated by the poor economic conditions and conflict that occurred during this period. In total, between 1990 and 2003 approximately one million people – 20 per cent of the country’s population – left Georgia. Differently from Armenia, the gender composition of out-migrants was more balanced, approaching even numbers of men and women (Savvidis 2009). Like Armenia, however, Georgia’s economy also relies on remittances from foreign workers abroad. It ranked 21st globally in 2014 in the measure of remittances as a percentage of GDP (World Bank 2016).

Like Azerbaijan, Georgia is an ethnically and linguistically diverse state. Beyond the breakaway regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, which we consider below, the country is home to Armenian and Azerbaijani minorities in the regions of Javakheti and Kvemo Kartli, as well as Yazidis, Greeks, and Jews. The Islam-practising Georgians of the south-western region of Ajara (Adjara) are not classified as a separate demographic group in the census because they are considered ethnically Georgian.

**Key demographic processes in the Caucasus**

**Demography in the de facto states**

Population displacement associated with the post-Soviet wars in Georgia, Azerbaijan, and Russia has been significant and remains a persistent issue for each of the de facto states of Abkhazia, South Ossetia, and Nagorny Karabakh that formed as a result of these conflicts.
(see Chapter 16). Their experiences corroborate many of the processes of demographic change in Russia and the three South Caucasus states described above. The legacies of violence complement market-based forces as the key determinants of the regions’ current demographic composition.

In Abkhazia, Abkhaz were approximately 18 per cent of the population in the 1989 census, while Georgians were nearly a majority at 45.7 per cent. The region’s demography changed dramatically following the 1992–93 war. The most recent census, conducted in 2011 by the Abkhaz government, reported a total population of 240,705, a majority (50.8 per cent) of whom were Abkhaz; Georgians (including Mingrelians) and Armenians each comprised roughly 20 per cent of the population, and Russians made up just under 10 per cent (Kopeček et al. 2016). Nearly all of the Georgians – in fact, Mingrelians – reported living in Abkhazia are concentrated in Gal(i) district, at the southern edge of Abkhazia, and returned to the region on a semi-permanent basis during the mid-1990s.6

The politics of internal displacement are contentious and reflect the indeterminate status of Abkhazia and South Ossetia from the perspective of the Georgian government. Although between 40,000 and 60,000 internally displaced persons (IDPs) have partially returned to Gal(i) district, these returns are not condoned by the Georgian state. Rather, Abkhazia is not viewed as a legitimate home for IDPs so long as its status remains unresolved from the Georgian perspective (Kabachnik et al. 2010). For others displaced from Abkhazia and South Ossetia, their status as displaced persons relegates them to a liminal status within Georgia proper. In her ethnography of displacement, Dunn (2018) writes of the fine balance associated with controlling the social reintegration of IDPs – the state had to make sure that the IDPs were not integrated so much that they could not be returned to Abkhazia and South Ossetia should the territories be reintegrated into Georgia. From the Abkhaz perspective, such reintegration and further wide-scale returns are not possible (O’Loughlin et al. 2011). Cooley and Mitchell report that Abkhaz leaders openly admit that the large-scale return of Georgian IDPs to other parts of Abkhazia is impossible, since it would threaten the de facto state’s pretensions to statehood (Cooley and Mitchell 2010).

Nagorny Karabakh conducted a census in 2005. Though the results are contested, such state-building exercises are viewed as necessary to the long-term legitimacy of de facto states (Kolstø and Blakkisrud 2008). Key results reported include a decline in the absolute number of settlements – from approximately 700 to 308 – and the precipitous drop in population in Shusha (Shushi) raion, the primary home of Azerbaijanis in the region prior to the 1988–94 conflict.7 Overall population decline in the territory was reported at approximately 60 per cent and out-migration continues, particularly from rural areas of the territory. As occurred in Georgia, the displacement of Azerbaijanis to other parts of Azerbaijan has been significant and has changed the demographic composition of the state and of specific regions within it.

While Azerbaijan’s refugee and IDP populations were spread throughout the country, the greater share were concentrated in and around the country’s capital of Baku or in the areas that abut the occupied territories or Nagorny Karabakh.8 According to a 2011 World Bank report, there were 595,094 IDPs in Azerbaijan: 183,644 or 30.1 per cent were in Baku; 50,573 or 8.5 per cent were in Sumgait, an industrial city 35 km northwest of Baku; while 14,127 or 2.4 per cent were elsewhere on the Absheron peninsula on which Baku is located (World Bank 2011). Together these IDPs represented 41 per cent of the total IDP population. In 2011 the population of Baku was a little more than two million. With an IDP population of 183,644, this meant that every eleventh or twelfth person in Baku was internally displaced. Over the years, the Government of Azerbaijan has resettled a large number of IDPs. However, according to the United Nations High Commissioner for
Refugees, which has been working in Azerbaijan since 1992, as of 2019 Azerbaijan still had 1,127 refugees and 651,458 IDPs (UNHCR 2016).

The main causes for the discrepancy in population counts in the Russian censuses in Chechnya were casualties from the two wars and resultant internally displaced persons. The Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC) estimated in 2008 that 600,000 persons had been forced from Chechnya at some point since the breakup of the Soviet Union. By 2008, about a tenth – 57,000 – had returned to Chechnya proper (Walicki 2008). Others had settled throughout Russia in Moscow and St. Petersburg and proximate and regionally important cities such as Rostov-on-Don. More recent data suggests that many of those displaced have either settled in their place of resettlement, returned to Chechnya, or emigrated abroad. The most recent estimate, from 31 December 2017, puts Russia’s internally displaced population at 19,000. The return of IDPs, along with a high rate of natural increase in the republic, suggests that the population of Chechnya is today higher than a decade ago. However, population statistics for the republic remain unreliable and more recent statistics suggest that the birth rate has fallen significantly from its peak in 2009 (Fuller 2016). Moreover, Chechnya has experienced renewed out-migration as asylum seekers have left the republic – due mainly to the repressive policies of the Kadyrov regime – for sanctuary in Europe.

**Russian out-migration**

Another important trend is the nationalisation of constituent populations in each of the four states. The reasons for these population changes vary from country to country. In Armenia and Azerbaijan, as discussed previously, the repatriation of co-ethnics from other Caucasus states has resulted in an increase in the total percentage of the titular nationality. This process has been accompanied by ongoing Russian out-migration from the South Caucasus. In Georgia, nationalisation as a process reflects internal displacement as previously discussed along with the out-migration of non-Georgians from the country since 1991. Table 24.2 presents census data from the Soviet and post-Soviet censuses for the four Caucasus states noting the composition of Russians at each interval.

According to the 1989 all-Soviet census, 25 million Russians lived in the non-Slavic SSRs. Many of these Russians left the newly independent states during and immediately following the breakup of the USSR. In the South Caucasus, however, the Russian populations had begun to depart from the region much earlier. In the Armenian and Georgian SSRs, “Russians declined in absolute numbers between 1959 and 1979. This decline is probably due almost entirely to out-migration of Russians, not to changes in mortality and fertility or to assimilation of Russians by the local nationalities” (Silver 1983: 376). Between 1979 and 1988, 33 per cent of the Russian population in the Armenia SSR, 25 per cent of the Russian population in the Azerbaijan SSR, and 15 per cent of the Russian population in the Georgia SSR emigrated (Korobkov 2008), more often than not to the Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic (RSFSR). The process of out-migration since 1991 is readily apparent in the North Caucasus. In each of the seven national republics, the percentage of Russians has declined since 1989 – precipitously so in Chechnya and Ingushetia.

A distinct process that has changed the citizenship composition of the South Caucasus, if not their ethnic makeup, has been the extension of Russian citizenship to non-Russian residents of the de facto states. Linked in part to Russian revanchism, this practice – termed passportisation – created territorial claims by Russia as patron state to the de facto territories (Artman 2013). The state-led campaign to extend citizenship rights to individuals living in the de facto states – whose own issued passports have little relevance because of their lack of international recognition – harkens
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Table 24.2 Ethnic Russian population in the four Caucasus states and major regions (percentage of total population)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Region</th>
<th>1989 Soviet Census</th>
<th>First Post-Independence Census</th>
<th>Second Post-Independence Census</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Russian Federation</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chechnya</td>
<td>269,130 (24.8)</td>
<td>40,645 (3.7)</td>
<td>24,382 (1.9)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dagestan</td>
<td>165,940 (9.2)</td>
<td>120,875 (4.8)</td>
<td>104,020 (3.6)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ingushetia</td>
<td>24,641 (13.2)</td>
<td>5,559 (1.2)</td>
<td>3,215 (0.8)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kabardino-Balkaria</td>
<td>240,750 (31.9)</td>
<td>226,620 (25.1)</td>
<td>193,155 (22.5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Karachaevo-Cherkessia</td>
<td>175,931 (42.4)</td>
<td>147,878 (33.6)</td>
<td>150,025 (31.4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North Ossetia</td>
<td>189,159 (29.9)</td>
<td>164,734 (24.1)</td>
<td>147,090 (20.6)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stavropol’ krai</td>
<td>2,199,999 (77.9)</td>
<td>2,231,759 (81.6)</td>
<td>2,232,153 (80.1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Armenia</td>
<td>51,555 (1.6)</td>
<td>14,660 (0.5)</td>
<td>11,911 (0.4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Azerbaijan</td>
<td>392,304 (5.6)</td>
<td>141,687 (1.8)</td>
<td>119,307 (1.4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Georgia</td>
<td>341,172 (6.3)</td>
<td>67,671 (1.5)</td>
<td>26,586 (0.7)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

back to the top-down demographic engineering of the Soviet era. Though not inclusive of citizenship, Georgia responded by making travel to the country visa-free solely for residents of Russia’s North Caucasus from 2010 to 2014 (Synovitz 2010).

**Urban change and urban growth: the case of Baku**

With a population of 1.8 million, Baku, the capital of the Azerbaijan SSR, was the fifth-largest city in the Soviet Union at the time of its breakup. Baku was a multi-ethnic, cosmopolitan city (Grant 2010). It was also socially stratified:

Baku … contains strong social divisions: the population consists of unskilled and semi-skilled labourers and their families who have recently settled there from the villages; a traditional industrial working-class population which is one of the oldest in the Caucasus because of the development of the oil industry since the nineteenth century; and, finally, an educated urban elite.

(Dragadze 1995: 160)

Within a couple of years of achieving independence from the Soviet Union, however, Baku began to change. The 1989 Soviet census reflects the processes of Russian out-migration discussed previously. Russians composed 16.5 per cent of Baku’s population, other ethnic groups (such as Armenians) 17.5 per cent, and Azerbaijanis 66 per cent (Korobkov 2008). These percentages fell further in the following decade, however. According to Azerbaijan’s 1999 census, there were only 142,000 individuals who self-identified as Russian and 121,000 individuals who self-identified as Armenian remaining in the country (Heleniak 2008).11

The events of the late 1980s and early 1990s have had a lasting impact on Baku’s ethnic and social composition. While the Russian population’s departure from the Azerbaijan SSR was more or less gradual, the Armenian population’s departure was immediate and followed the Sumgait attacks in early 1988. This exodus was further accelerated by the conflict over Nagorny Karabakh. With the war’s end, Baku stopped receiving large
numbers of refugees and IDPs, the vast majority of whom – in the case of the IDPs – arrived with few possessions and little means of supporting themselves. However, the concomitant collapse of the Soviet Union and the conflict over Nagorny Karabakh devastated Azerbaijan’s economy. In turn, increasing numbers of Azerbaijanis from rural areas not directly affected by the conflict started to migrate to the capital. According to a 2012 European Commission report:

> Destroyed infrastructure, closed plants, and [the] low level of incomes forced people to migrate from rural to urban areas in pursuit of better employment opportunities. The main direction of socio-economic migration within Azerbaijan was the flow of people from regions to the capital, Baku, where the most migrants could find temporary employment. (Allahveranov et al. 2012: 7)

Some of these individuals had been working in the agricultural sector until the government decided to privatise it (Kaneff and Yalçın-Heckmann 2003), effectively eliminating employment for many who had little education and few skills to pursue other kinds of work locally.

Beginning in the late 1990s, Baku started to experience an oil boom. In 1994, a 30-year, multi-billion-dollar deal was signed between a number of international oil companies (the so-called Contract of the Century). The Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan (BTC) pipeline, owned by a conglomeration of international companies, began delivering oil from the Caspian Sea to a Mediterranean seaport in 2006 (see Chapter 23). The construction and maintenance of the BTC pipeline has resulted in an influx of both high-skilled and low-skilled foreign-born workers, reproducing the social stratification of the Soviet period. Reliable data is difficult to obtain, but there could be 20,000 to 30,000 individuals from countries such as the United Kingdom, Turkey, Iran, Pakistan, and the Philippines working in Baku (Rumyantsev 2014). Some Azerbaijanis have had very optimistic expectations of the oil boom while others have been more wary. For example, while many Azerbaijanis have welcomed the various job opportunities the foreign oil companies offer, they resent the fact that locals are either offered less pay for doing the same jobs as their Western counterparts or are only offered lower skilled and lower paying jobs – a reality reminiscent of the Soviet period (Wistrand 2011; Brinegar 2017).

**Short-term labour migration**

Short-term migration does not generally involve assuming the citizenship of the country to which an individual has migrated, though short-term migration may lead to more permanent forms of migration over time. Such movement can be voluntary – for example, for educational or professional opportunities – or forced. Short-term migration may also be regular or irregular. While irregular migration has always existed, it has been on the rise for the last quarter century. Düvell (2011: 80) attributes this increase to: 1) a demand on the part of Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) countries for ‘flexible, low-skilled, and low-paid workers, notably in the service sector’; and 2) an ‘asylum crisis’ that was spurred at least in part by the breakup of the Soviet Union and its Eastern Bloc.

Following Korobkov (2008), political stabilisation from the communist transition began to take hold by the mid-to-late 1990s, with the end of wars in Nagorny Karabakh, Chechnya, and the Central Asian state of Tajikistan. From this point forward:
various types of temporary labour, and undocumented [irregular] migration grew in importance. These changes were based on political stabilisation in many post-Soviet states, moderation of governmental policies toward minorities, exhaustion of the reserves of mobile population, including ethnic Russians and Russian-speakers, and the inhospitable social and political atmosphere for migrants in many migrant-receiving countries (including Russia and – following the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks – the West). This latter factor led to the rapid growth of undocumented [irregular] migration.

(Korobkov 2008: 77)

In the Caucasus, the distinction between regular and irregular migrants is an important one because of changing citizenship regimes across the post-Soviet space. Many Azerbaijani migrants lack proper paperwork when travelling to Russia for a variety of reasons. Moreover, hostility towards migrants from the North and South Caucasus has traditionally been high in European Russia. Polling from the Levada Center, Russia’s most reputable public opinion firm, found that in the mid-2000s levels of antipathy among the general public were highest towards Chechens (above 50 per cent), with other immigrants from the North and South Caucasus following close behind (Gudkov 2006). Despite these issues, Russia has served as a key destination for international migrants from elsewhere in the former Soviet Union. In 2017, Russia hosted 11.7 million immigrants, making it the fourth most popular destination globally (behind the USA, Saudi Arabia, and Germany).

According to the World Bank’s Migration and Remittances Factbook 2016, 13.7 per cent of Azerbaijan’s population is composed of emigrants and Russia is their top destination (World Bank 2016). Certain parts of Azerbaijan – particularly the rural areas – experience a higher rate of migration than others. In the early 2000s, 24 per cent of the households surveyed in ex-urban areas claimed to have at least one family member working outside of the country (Kanef and Yalçın-Heckmann 2003).

Much of the short-term labour migration that has taken place between the Caucasus and greater Russia in recent years is similar to prior migration regimes (during the Soviet or even imperial periods) in work type, destination, and network. During the 1950s and 1960s, the majority of the Azerbaijanis migrating to Russia were students and oil workers (Yunusov, 2003). By the mid-1980s, however, the number of Azerbaijanis migrating to Russia to sell fruit, vegetables and flowers had surpassed those migrating there to pursue higher education and professional vocations. Seasonal agriculture-related migration continues to be a predominant form of short-term labour migration today (Wistrand 2017).

The breakup of the Soviet Union somewhat disrupted the flow of Azerbaijanis and their goods to and from Russia and motivated those who were able to continue to move between the two republics during that time to diversify their business interests. Yunusov (2003: 73) writes: ‘During that period the activities of the Azerbaijani migrants changed. Together with the traditional sales of produce and flowers, they soon took the lead in managing eating places: shashlyk (skewered grilled cubes of meat) houses, restaurants, cafes, and later casinos’. By the late 1990s, the majority of the Azerbaijanis migrating to Russia were again engaged primarily in selling produce and to a lesser extent flowers. For example, at that time, there were estimated to be around two million Azerbaijani migrants in Russia, 800,000 living and working in Moscow, and 650,000 of those working mainly in the markets or the service sector. The Azerbaijani migrants not in Moscow were scattered across the country from St. Petersburg to Vladivostok to Noril’sk in Russia’s far north (on the last, see Parente et al. 2012), generally in the company of fellow Azerbaijani migrants from the same part of
Azerbaijan, underscoring the importance of regionalism. For example, Talysh migrants to Russia often travel and work together – upwards of 25 per cent of the Talysh males in southern Azerbaijan who were under the age of 35 were working in Russia as of 2005 (Clifton et al. 2005). Short-term migration from Armenia to Russia is also commonplace, with 84 per cent of migrants in Bellak et al.’s (2014) sample working in construction. Changes in Russia’s visa regime towards Georgia curtailed this migration flow, as did the August 2008 war between the two countries; other destinations, including Greece and Turkey, have emerged as increasingly important destinations for Georgian migrants since the year 2000 (Hofmann 2015).

Regional and ethnic affinities also play an important role in short-term labour migration between Dagestan and the rest of Russia. Nogais from the northern part of Dagestan engage in short-term labour migration to the Urals, working in the company of fellow Nogais from their part of the republic (Holland and Eldarov 2012). A key driver of short-term labour migration is Dagestan’s rapid population growth, which has produced a youth bulge that is stressing the republic’s economy particularly in the rural highlands. As a result, an estimated 14 per cent of the working-age population in the republic’s rural areas have turned to short-term labour migration (Holland and Eldarov 2012). This practice harkens back to the late imperial period, where individuals from rural areas travelled to nearby towns and cities for temporary work (White 2007). Following Holland and Eldarov (2012: 379–80), ‘Today … rural areas are the primary sources for temporary workers, while the routes taken by these workers – towards areas of economic growth and development – parallel historical destinations in type (high growth, integrated into the market economy, etc.) if not location.’

**Conclusion**

It will be interesting to see how the demographic profiles of the North and South Caucasus evolve over the next twenty-five years. We have made the case that the dual processes of near total economic collapse-turned-economic growth and political violence have shaped the post-Soviet migration regimes and demographic composition of each country. The possibility of further interstate conflict in the South Caucasus remains – most notably between Armenia and Azerbaijan. Both countries have invested heavily in their militaries in recent years. According to the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) Military Expenditure Database, Azerbaijan spent 3.4 per cent of its GDP on its military in 2006 rising to 4.6 per cent in 2014, while the figures for Armenia for the same years were 2.9 per cent and 4.2 per cent, respectively (Broers 2016: 6). Until recently, comparatively little fire was exchanged between the two sides. Then, between 2014 and 2016, there was a noticeable increase in military activity, culminating in a four-day war in April 2016, where Azerbaijan regained control of some small areas of territory (Broers 2016). Should fighting between Azerbaijan and Armenia renew, whether intermittently or in the form of a full-scale war, it is likely that the populations which are directly threatened by the conflict will become displaced, adding to the Caucasus region’s displaced populations.

However, with the maintenance of the post-conflict status quo in many regions it is likely that economic forces will be the key driver shaping the future of demographics in the Caucasus. Russia’s attempts to develop the economies of the North Caucasus have so far come up short (Holland 2016). On a more positive note, we think that it will be interesting to see if the Caucasus region’s diverse populations could become more cohesive because of various region-specific initiatives that serve geopolitical interests. Looking forward, could the oil and gas projects that are already taking place, or that are in the planning stages, lead
to the development of an indigenous oil and gas sector reminiscent of that which existed in Baku in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries? Or will high-skilled and low-skilled workers from Europe and South Asia continue to engage in short-term labour migration to the region, reducing the possibility of an indigenous oil and gas labour force developing? The emergence of such a labour force would be a bright spot for a set of countries whose demographic profiles have tended to paint a bleak picture of conflict, displacement and out-migration.

Notes
1 Both authors contributed equally to the writing of this chapter and author names are listed alphabetically.
2 We agree with Heleniak (2008: 37) that 'migration data from these countries should not and cannot be completely discarded but should be approached with more than the usual degree of caution'. We would argue that the same holds for census data. Given the political, economic, social and other turmoil the North and South Caucasus experienced between the late 1980s and the late 1990s, it cannot be assumed that the data that was collected during this period was either reliable or representative (see, for example, the discussion of the Armenian case below). For that reason, the information presented here is most valuable for comparison across years within country cases rather than across country cases.
3 To further complicate matters, many of these Ossetians settled in Prigorodnyi raion (see Chapter 15).
4 The Kabardian population in the republic increased by more than a third in the 1989 to 2002 intercensal period.
5 These numbers were adjusted in the mid-1990s. In Table 24.1 we report the original population totals for the republic (for adjusted totals see Rowland 2007).
6 Although many of those who returned in the mid-1990s were again displaced during a resumption of hostilities in May 1998.
7 Almost all of the settlements that disappeared were Azerbaijani (Rowland 2008).
8 Most of the refugees in Azerbaijan at this time were Azerbaijanis who had been living in the Armenian SSR, while most of the IDPs had been living in the NKAO or one of seven neighbouring regions: Lachin, Kelbajar, Agdam, Jebrayil, Fizuli, Gubadli and Zangilan. To this day, Armenia controls nearly all of the NKAO and parts of the above-mentioned regions: about 20 per cent of Fizuli; about 70 per cent of Agdam; and all of Lachin, Kelbajar, Jebrayil, Gubadli, and Zangilan (Rowland 2004).
9 Data for 2019 received via personal communication with UNHCR on 3 December 2019.
11 Because the census was not conducted in Nagorny Karabakh, this figure is an attempt by Azerbaijan to estimate the Armenian population of that region and is combined with the small number of Armenians who remained in Azerbaijan proper after the war.
12 In 1993, Azerbaijan’s real gross domestic product (GDP) shrank 23.1 per cent (Gulyiyev 2013).
13 Other terms often used interchangeably for regular and irregular migration (though distinctions exist) are documented and undocumented migration and legal and illegal migration.
14 This represented the first time since the ceasefire in 1994 that land had changed sides.

References


