

*Research Article*

**THE RESULTS OF THE STUDY OF THE GEORGIAN POPULATION LIVING IN AND NEAR THE PANKISI GORGE**

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*Abstract.*

The article deals with the attitudes of the Georgian population living in and around the Pankisi Gorge towards the Kist population living in their neighborhood. It analyzes the results of a survey conducted in March and April, 2020. The article presents the views of the Georgian population on the prospects of Kist and Georgian youths, highlights their needs and the difficulties they face. The author draws a parallel between the opinions of the Georgian and Kist population. In conclusion, the article focuses on the ways for solving problems in the Pankisi Gorge.

*Key Words:* Pankisi Gorge, Georgians, Kists, policy, social integration.

**Introduction**

The issue of ethnic minorities has always been a topical question at the moment of the restoration of Georgia's independence (for example in 1918 or in 1991). There are many ethnic minorities in Georgia. They are settled in different parts of the country. One of the areas which is populated by ethnic minorities is Pankisi Gorge. It is situated in the eastern part of Georgia, in Kakheti region. The gorge is densely populated by ethnic minorities called Kists. Kists are Vainakh people who migrated from the North Caucasus and settled in the Pankisi gorge in Georgia in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Over time, Kists have adapted so well to the Georgian society that they can be considered as one of the most integrated ethnic minority in Georgia. However, there has been trend of alienation between Kists and Georgians since the 1990s. In this regard, it is very important to study the views of Georgian population living in and near the Pankisi gorge.

**Analysis of Survey Results**

A survey of the Georgian population living in and around the Pankisi Gorge was conducted in March and April, 2020. 155 respondents participated in the study. 44% of them were male and 56% were female. The target population belonged to different age groups. 47% of them were from 17 to 25 years old, 27% were between the ages of 26 and 33, 14% were between 34 and 40 years old, and 12% were over 41 years old.

The study was quantitative. The aim of the survey of the Georgian population living near the Pankisi Gorge was:

- To study their opinion on the prospects of Kist and Georgian youths;
- To analyze needs;
- To find out the difficulties they face;
- To identify ways to solve existing difficulties.

For research purposes, it was planned to conduct a survey in the above-mentioned target group. We developed a questionnaire consisting of 17 questions. It comprised open-ended and closed-ended as well as semi-open questions.

At the beginning of the survey, we introduced the target group to the rule of filling in the questionnaire and then they completed the questionnaires individually.

The analysis of the data showed that 94% of respondents completed higher education and only 6% of them have incomplete higher education.

The first question asked respondents to assess the prospects for the young man in the Pankisi Gorge. Respondents had divided opinion on the issue. For 59%, the prospects existing in the gorge are satisfactory, and for 41% - unsatisfactory. In order to explore the prospects for

young people in Pankisi, we asked an open-ended question to those who positively assessed the situation in the gorge.

These respondents believe that:

- Quite a lot of projects, which contribute to youths' development and realization from school age, are implemented in the gorge - 34%;
- There are many non-governmental organizations which focus on the development of the Pankisi Gorge. Pankisi youths are actively involved in this process - 23%;
- Private enterprises and family hotels are financed by non-governmental organizations, equestrian tourism is developed - 11%;
- There are educational centers and a gym - 11%;
- Youths have opportunity to get a perfect education, because they are supported by state and non-governmental organizations; they have a great prospect to use - 11%;
- The construction of the hydroelectric station also has a positive effect - 10%.

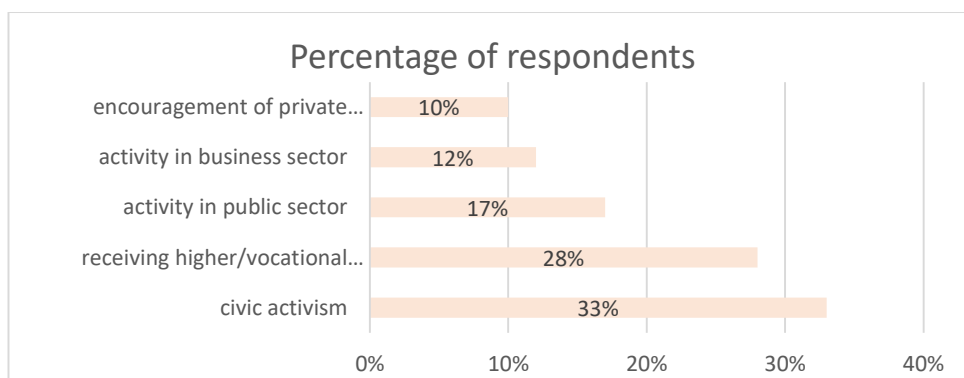
It was also interesting to study the views of those respondents who assessed the prospects for young people in Pankisi as unsatisfactory. They named a variety of reasons such as:

- Absence of jobs - 33%;
- Young people do not have the opportunity of self-realization and hence cannot earn a decent income - 17%;
- There is a tourist resource in Pankisi, but its development will be hindered by people's traditions - 17%;
- Lack of prospects in the gorge is caused by the poor quality of cultural and educational work - 17%;
- The socio-economic situation in the gorge eliminates any possible prospects for young people - 16%.

In order to determine the role of the state in addressing the existing challenges, the respondents were asked whether the challenges facing the gorge could be countered only by the state. It turned out that the majority of respondents (72%) do not think that only state should solve the problems in the gorge. A small proportion of respondents (11%) consider the state to be the only party acting against the challenges. It should be noted that 11% of respondents do not have the answer to this question, and 6% find it difficult to answer.

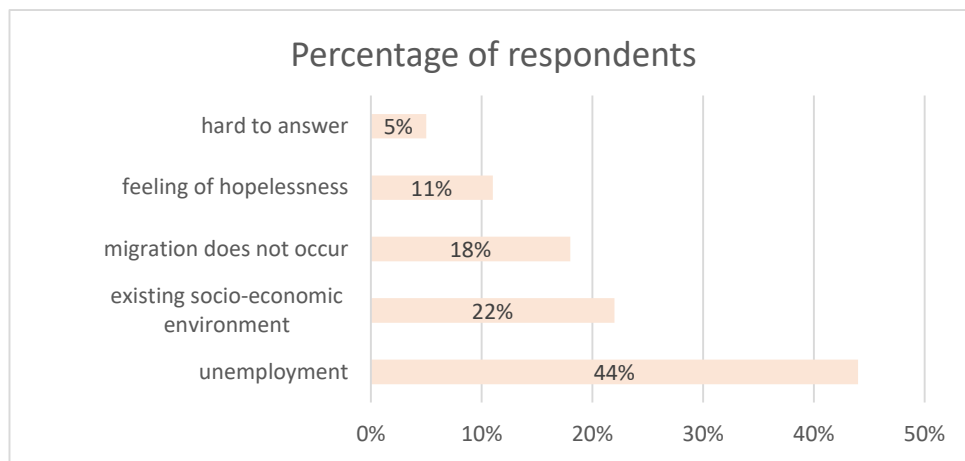
Respondents believe that in order to solve the problems in the Pankisi Gorge, it is necessary for them to be active in the civil, public and business sectors, to receive higher or vocational education. Most of them see their role in civic activism (33%) and higher / vocational education (28%). 10% of respondents consider that only state can overcome the problems. They believe that the state needs to encourage the private sector (see Table 1).

Table 1. Question: What could be your role in overcoming the problems in the Pankisi Gorge?



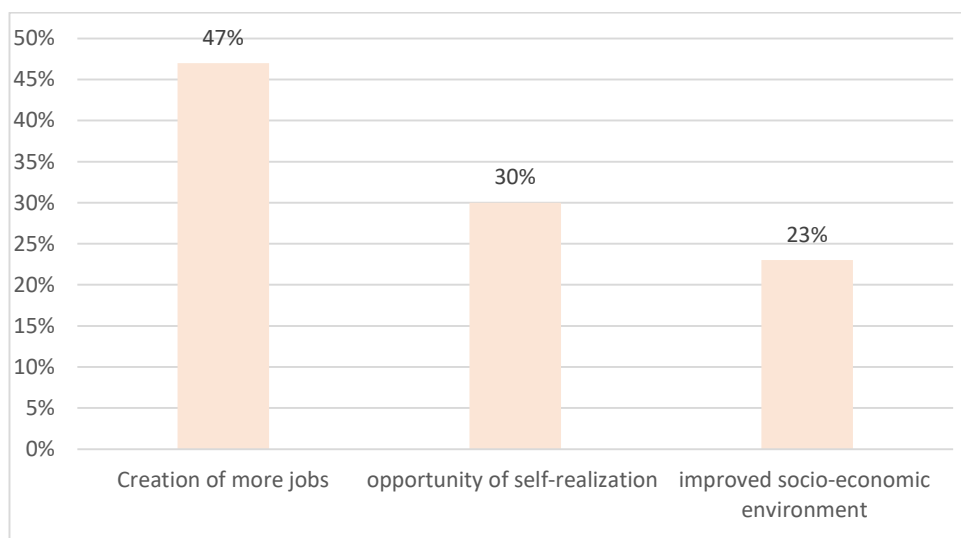
It is also interesting to determine the reasons for the migration of young people from the Pankisi Gorge. The majority of respondents cite unemployment as the main reason for migration. Other reasons, such as the existing socio-economic environment and the feeling of hopelessness, were also mentioned. 5% find it difficult to answer this question. Besides noteworthy is the fact that 18% of respondents think that migration does not occur (see Table 2).

Table 2. Question: What do you think causes the migration of young people from the Pankisi Gorge?



The majority of respondents believe that the emergence of more jobs and the opportunity of self-realization will stop the migration of young people from the Pankisi Gorge. 23% of respondents believe that improved socio-economic environment will also play an important role in this regard (see Table 3).

Table 3. Question: What may stop the migration of young people from the Pankisi Gorge?



The vast majority of respondents - 88% confirm the need for higher or vocational education. In their view, education is necessary for a sense of more perspective. 17% of respondents also consider that receiving higher/vocational education is partially necessary for the feeling of perspective.

67% of the target group believe that they cannot succeed with only school education. A small percentage of respondents (5%) have the opposite opinion on this issue, while 23% believe that school education is partially sufficient to gain success.

Respondents expressed their opinion about what is necessary for young people from Pankisi to get higher or professional education. According to their responses, it is essential:

- to have motivation and desire to get education - 16%
- to have teachers who will demonstrate the need of education and make the Pankisi population interested in it from an early age - 16%
- to create jobs - 12%
- to provide information and raise awareness - 12%
- to have better financial and socio-economic situation - 6%
- to have opportunity to master profession on the spot - 6%
- the new generation to be given more freedom by the older generation - 6%
- family views to be changed; young people should have chance to get the education they want - 5%
- to have better conditions in the gorge - 5%

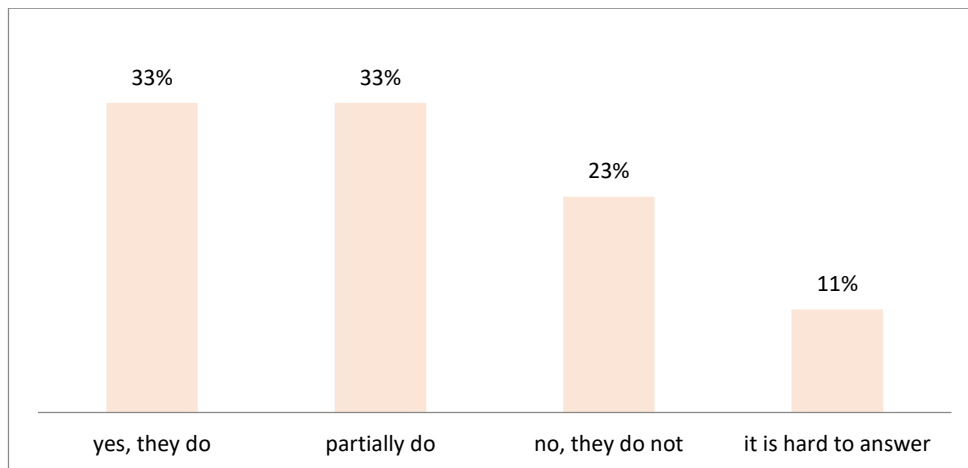
16% of respondents found it difficult to answer this question.

According to the respondents, in order to improve the social and political environment in the Pankisi Gorge, the civil sector should:

- hold frequent meetings with the population and provide them with more information on various issues;
- conduct trainings and suggest people ways to solve problems;
- carry out various activities in the gorge, where Georgian children will also be involved.
- develop business and agriculture, create enterprises. Pankisi has the potential to develop both tourism and agriculture, which will develop the social environment.
- implement projects that will help increase the civic self-awareness of Pankisi residents and improve the political environment;
- encourage the breaking of stereotypes associated with the Pankisi Gorge and reassure the rest of the community that Pankisi is completely safe.

Some of the respondents found it difficult to answer this question. In addition, it was argued that the socio-political environment in the gorge would not improve until the views and attitudes of the entire Pankisi population changed.

Table 4. Question: In your opinion, do traditional factors affect the personal and professional development of the Kist population?



Most respondents believe that it is absolutely possible to solve a number of issues with the help of the business sector. None of the respondents rejected the idea.

The study also focused on the issue of discrimination. 80% of respondents believe that ethnic and religious discrimination against Kists does not occur. 17% find it difficult to answer the question, while 11% confirm the existence of discrimination. The respondents who testify to discrimination against Pankisi Kists note that they personally do not have a negative attitude towards them, although many do.

Majority of respondents believe that religious factors have some effect on their personal and professional development. 23% deny the influence of religion on this issue, while 11% find

it difficult to answer the question. It should also be noted that those who affirm the existence of influence only consider it in a negative light.

Most of the respondents believe that traditional factors to some extent affect the personal and professional development of the Kist population. 23% deny any influence of this factor, while 11% have no answer to this question (see Table 4). All respondents who confirm the influence of traditions negatively evaluate it.

Most of the respondents believe that receiving higher or vocational education will more or less increase their employment opportunities in the gorge. However, 39% do not see a link between employment and education.

Receiving vocational education turned out to be one of the most important issue of other meetings as well (Me and the State - Access to Vocational Education in Pankisi, 2019).

#### *Conclusion*

Thus, the analysis of the survey results revealed that the Georgian population living in or near Pankisi Gorge have interesting views about the Kist population living in their neighbourhood. It is also important to compare their views with those of the Kist population. For example, the Kist population of the Pankisi Gorge believes that state or non-governmental organizations are insufficiently trying to solve the social problems in the gorge (Authorities have Suspended Infrastructure Projects in Pankisi - the Elder, 2019). On the contrary, Georgians believe that a lot is done to improve the social conditions of the Kist population. The results of the survey showed that the Georgian population links youths' outflow from the gorge to unemployment. Pankisi Kists share the same opinion.

Therefore, it is necessary to conduct research on the development potential of the gorge and encourage those sectors that will create jobs in the area.

Since there are various views on the construction of hydroelectric stations and Kists' opinions also differ from each other (Iordanishvili: Because of Threats the Issue of Building a Hydroelectric Station in Pankisi Has to be Decided by the State, 2018), it is important to make some investments in adventure tourism and eco-tourism in the gorge. The strengthening of the tourism sector in the area will create more social ties among the population living in or near Pankisi and will significantly improve the overall social environment. Jobs will be created and youths' outflow from the gorge will be reduced. Investors' interests in Pankisi and pragmatic steps will significantly reduce criminal cases and stabilize the political situation.

The policy of social integration of the population living in or near the gorge must be implemented by the central or local governments. Otherwise, the pace of alienation of the population is going very fast and will significantly harm the interests of the state.

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