

Highland Settlement Status Determination (Case Study of Shida Kartli-Khashuri Municipality, Georgia)

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Villages, towns, and cities with the status of highland settlements are located in all regions of Georgia. They differ according to geographical location, vulnerability to natural disasters, complexity of agricultural and economic activities, population decline and density, share of national minorities in the municipality and other characteristics. Highland areas are practically depopulated, the number of areas where the population is still there, is decreasing sharply. Locals leave their homes due to difficult living conditions, economic situation, unorganized infrastructure or other problems. According to the decree of the Government of Georgia, the status of highland settlements has been granted to 37 villages of Khashuri Municipality. The actual separation from the administrative center of the municipality is determined by the coefficient of peripherality, which is high. The issue of the villages in the municipality needs to be studied thoroughly considering the current situation (OECD, 2016). According to the request, there is a problem of meeting two criteria. While determining the status of the highland settlement of Khashuri municipality, the parameters of several villages on the critical border, as well as the deplorable social and economic situation in the border villages, should be taken into account.

Keywords: highland settlements, status, demographic, agricultural, peripherality criteria

Introduction

The highland settlements of Georgia are significantly different from each other and from the residential areas of the lowland both in terms of natural, economic, and agricultural resources, as well as social conditions and ethno-cultural features. According to the Law of Georgia “On the Development of Highland Regions”, a citizen of Georgia registered in a highland settlement, who actually lives in such an area for a total of nine months or more during each calendar year, is granted the status of a person permanently living in a highland settlement. In order to ensure the well-being of the people living in the mountainous regions, raising the standard of living, promoting employment, and improving the social and economic situation, the legislation defines such benefits for them as: a supplement to the state pension, a supplement to the social package, financial assistance in case of having a child, a salary supplement for teachers, coaches, doctors, and nurses, co-financing of consumed

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electricity, exemption from income tax for employees and entrepreneurial individuals, and exemption from property tax for landowners in the territory of the highland settlement. Individuals permanently living in the highland settlement and enterprises of the highland settlement receive benefits (Djibouti, 2020).

Methodology for Determination of Settlements With Highland Status

According to the resolution of the Government of Georgia, the status of a high-mountainous settlement is granted to the settlement located below 1,500 meters above sea level, which meets the criteria stipulated by the law. The criteria for assigning the status of high mountain settlement to the settlements located below 1,500 meters above sea level, which are not included in the historical-geographic areas provided by the law, are the following: *Demographic criterion*—based on the fact that one of the goals of the law is to keep the population in the mountains, it became necessary to identify the settlements where migration processes are acute (Georgia, 2020). The settlement, which is located at 800-1,500 meters and the population does not exceed 10, automatically receives the status of a high mountain settlement without any criteria. In other cases, the demographic criterion consists of two sub-criteria: (1) During the 2002 and 2014 censuses, the population in the settlement decreased by more than 25%; (2) The average age of the population is over 40 years. *Agricultural criterion*—this criterion identifies the settlements where the relief complicates agricultural activities for population. The settlements where more than half of the total agricultural or arable land belonging to registered citizens cannot be cultivated with the standard agricultural equipment used in bar conditions were evaluated and identified by the Ministry of Agriculture of Georgia. *Criterion of peripherality*—refers to the detection of peripheral settlements. Based on the fact that the population has access to more or less appropriate infrastructure and services in the municipal centers, their distance from the center indicates a relatively low quality of the living environment. To estimate the distance of the settlement from the municipal center, two indicators are calculated: $S=0.01S_1+0.02S_2+0.03S_3+0.04S_4$. where S_1 is the length of international roads between the settlement and the municipal center, S_2 is the national road, S_3 is the road of local importance with asphalt/concrete pavement, S_4 is the section of the dirt road. The length of said sections for each settlement is multiplied by the corresponding difficulty factor and added up. S is called “the difficulty coefficient of the access road from the settlement to the municipal center”, which is due to the condition of the road. $K = h \frac{10+h}{10-h}$, where h is the absolute height expressed in kilometers, and as a result, the coefficient K is obtained, which shows the difficulty of the access road from the settlement to the municipal center, which is caused by the highlands of the settlement. The peripherality of the settlement is determined by the sum of these two coefficients ($S+K$), if this sum exceeds the average indicator of the municipality, the settlement is peripheral (HRC, 2022). In order for a settlement located at 1,000 meters above sea level to be granted the status of a highland settlement, at least one of the three criteria presented above must be met, and if the settlement is located at an altitude of 800 to 1,000 meters, then two criteria must be met to receive the status. Villages, towns, and cities with the status of highland settlements are located in all regions of Georgia, which differ according to geographical location, vulnerability to natural disasters, complexity of agricultural activities, economic activity, population decline, population density, share of national minorities in the municipality, and other characteristics. The list of these regions includes Khashuri Municipality of Shida Kartli, where 52,603 people live, the average density is 90 pax per 1 sq.m., the share of the 14-year-old population is 18.5%, the share of the working-age population is 66.3%, 65+ age group is 1.1%, Accommodation zone is 600-1,000 m from the level of the sea. There is a problem of depopulation in the highland

settlements. In 2015, 25 villages of Khashuri Municipality were granted the status of high-mountainous settlements, in 2016, eight villages were added, and in 2017, four more villages were added. At present, 37 villages have the status. Among them: from 800 to 1,000 m—34 villages, from 1,000 to-1,500 m up—three villages (Alexandrestrskaro, Didi Tkhilnara, Patara Tkhilnara). There are six villages with seasonal residents (Kashveti, Ghandzilib, Didi Tikhilnara, Patara Tikhilnara, Didi Khavleti, Aleksandrestrskaro). Two villages do not have the status of high mountains: Zemo Brolosani and Kvemo Brolosani (Kvemo Brolosani: 39 households, 125 inhabitants; Zemo Brolosani: 29 households), Chorchana: 16 households, 48 inhabitants; Kobi: one household, two inhabitants. The population in 37 highland villages of Khashuri municipality amounts 2,440 pax (working population-62: 85%, 0-under 14 years old: 0-21 in villages, 65+ age: 37%-60%). The municipality is multi-soil (1,200-1,600 m above sea level), the following branches of agriculture are developed in the municipality: agriculture, viticulture, cattle breeding. Main agricultural crops are as follows: wheat, corn, beans, barley, oats, grapes. Animal husbandry is developed: mainly cattle breeding, pig breeding. Chorchana and Kobi villages are located in Khashuri municipality adjacent to the occupation line.

The villages' arable plots were found near the border, and the populated areas were found on the territory controlled by Georgia. In addition to the security problems caused by the occupation, the local population faces severe socio-economic difficulties in the villages adjacent to the occupation line.

There is only one family living in the village of Kobi. Household and infrastructure problems are one of the main factors that contribute to the migration of the population from the village adjacent to the occupation line. Actual cut-off from the administrative center of the municipality shall be determined by the peripheral (Government of Georgia, 2015). This coefficient is high, which, in most cases, is due to the difficulty of the road. The population of small settlements of the municipality economically and in terms of access to services depends on nearby urban centers and resorts, even if they were not part of the same the municipality. The cases of villages in the municipality need to be studied taking account of the current situation. Compliance with the criteria of these villages with the requirements is presented in the table where settlements located at an altitude of 800-1,500 meters above sea level are clearly visible, where the number of inhabitants is less than 10 and they have not been granted the status of a high mountainous settlement, the feasibility of assigning which should be determined without taking account of the criteria. According to the table data the villages listed above should meet the two criteria according to the demand, although the existing data only hinder the well-being of the population of these villages (Ministry of Agriculture of Georgia, 2015).

Table 1

Criteria Compliance of the Villages With the Requirements

Villages	Height above sea level	S+K=average 1.29 (>1.29)	2002	2014	Demography		Agriculture
			Population description	Population description	Population decline (>25%)	Average age (>40%)	Unable to plow with standard techniques (>50%)
Qindzati	800	1.38	374	304	19	39.2	0.0
Monasteri	870	1.42	217	195	10	36.7	42.8
Tagveti	800	1.04	103	56	46	48.4	19.5
Zemo brolosani	960	1.80	126	97	23	36.9	0.0
Kvemo brolosani	900	1.61	157	118	24.84	39.3	0.0

Conclusion

When determining the status of the mountainous settlement of Khashuri Municipality, the parameters of the above mentioned villages should also be taken into account and in order to remedy the deplorable social economic situation in the borderline villages, it is necessary for local self-government and central authorities to work more coordinatedly, have close ties with the local population, and actively communicate with them. Considering the dangers posed by the creeping occupation, the situation of the population in these villages should be especially prioritized.

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