

New Wave of Georgian Immigrants –
The Road from Georgia to Mexico, Part 1.

Respondent
Anonymous
Sandro

Interviewer
Nini Sikharulidze

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Introduction
Anonymous "Sandro" talks to us about his immigration story in 2022 to the United States of America. He tells us about his experiences entering the US from Mexico.

Background

Nini Sikharulidze: Sandro, how does the story of your immigration to the USA begin?
Sandro: I was born in Tbilisi, in September 1983. My immigration to the USA starts in November 2022. However, I have been an immigrant since 2019. Before moving to the USA, I lived in Poland. My decision to leave Georgia was caused by lack of opportunities. Due to the difficult financial and economic situation, I had to make this decision. Initially, Poland had a relatively better financial and economic situation. However, as a result of the Russian-Ukrainian war, a large number of Ukrainian refugees entered Poland, and the situation there also got worse. After that, I knew that there was no more promising country on Earth than the USA, and therefore I made a decision to come here.

Crossing the U.S.-Mexico Border

Nini Sikharulidze: Can you tell us about crossing the U.S.-Mexico border?
Sandro: I came to the U.S. through the Georgia-Greece-Netherlands-Mexico route. This lasted for about 10 days. I had to stop in Mexico for 4 days in search of information that would allow me to cross into the U.S. easily without breaking the law. It is very difficult for a Georgian citizen to enter Mexico. However, I had a Mexican visa and that gave me some advantage..

Nini Sikharulidze: Did you have an invitation to Mexico for your visa application?
Sandro: To justify the case that I was going to Mexico for work purposes, I started correspondence with Georgian winemakers. I introduced myself as a winemaker who was interested in the Mexican wine market. I received an invitation from Mexican winemakers and purchased a wine tour. This proved to be a foolproof method.

Nini Sikharulidze: What challenges did you have to overcome when physically crossing the border?
Sandro: There are many ways to enter the U.S. from Mexico: crawling under the wall, crossing by car… Those who come from Mexico by bypassing the wall or by some form of transit have to spend time in the detention center – sometimes for a week, sometimes for a month, sometimes for six months, who knows. That is already a very difficult case. I didn't have to go through this process, which saved me a lot of psychological stress. I have heard that immigrants are kept in very bad and inhumane conditions in detention centers. Immigrants of any nationality are treated horribly. In prison, 30–40 people live in 10-person cells. In addition, they have no information about what they are facing or what to expect. All this time, they are locked up, neglected, hungry, frozen and stressed. I am sure that after all this, a person needs a long time to recover his strength, get back on his feet and start the work for which he emigrated in the first place. I haven't experienced it, but I've heard many stories.

Nini Sikharulidze: How did you cross the border then?
Sandro: I chose another method to cross the border. I filed a request for political asylum and filled out an official application with the help of a certain organization that sends data to the U.S. immigration offices. However, this organization that I paid $2,500 for this service seemed very untrustworthy. I had no choice, I had to take a risk. I found this organization with the help of one of my friends. In the morning, cars picked us up, took us to the Mexican-American border, and then we crossed to the U.S. territory on foot.

Nini Sikharulidze: Could you tell us more about the organization that assisted you in crossing?
Sandro: The application made by this organization contains information about the citizen and the date when the citizen will cross the border. The immigration service meets you at the border, takes your fingerprints, checks the official documents and with the so-called parole (provisional release), form I-94, lets you into American territory. This means that you have not crossed the border illegally and the immigration service gives you a certain period to start legalizing your documents. I spent 9 hours at the immigration service office. First, I came to San Diego, where they assigned us to COVID-19 hotels. Then, a friend helped me buy a ticket to New York and I flew to New York. At that time, my status was as a political asylum seeker. New York is still an immigrant city, and it was a perfect choice for me as well.

Settling in the U.S.

Nini Sikharulidze: After arriving in New York, what was the most difficult thing for you as a new immigrant?
Sandro: For me, the most important and initial challenge that came with immigrating to the U.S. was being separated from my family. All my family members are in Georgia. The early period was especially difficult for me, since I had higher expectations. This country was not what I imagined it to be. The lifestyle, work, and rhythm of life didn't meet my expectations. The daily rhythm turned out to be very difficult for me. The day starts at 6 in the morning, so that the work day can begin at 9 AM. There are positive differences too – there is a sense of opportunity in such everyday life that motivates me to do more and achieve more.

Nini Sikharulidze: What factors informed your decision to stay in the U.S.?
Sandro: Despite these challenges, it was my sense of purpose and hope for the future that pushed me to stay. My goal is to live legally in the U.S., to have the right to work and to be able to return to Georgia. As of today, I have sent a request for political asylum, and I am currently in the waiting process. As you know, political immigration has its own intricacies. In my case, the persecution of me by Russian criminal gangs started in Poland. I had to leave the country to save my life and escape from this Russian criminal gang. The USA was my only solution.

Preservation of the Georgian Culture and Future Plans

Nini Sikharulidze: Do you have contact with your family or other Georgians in the U.S.?
Sandro: I am in touch with my family in Georgia daily. We try to pay as much attention to one another as possible. There are other Georgians in the USA and I have contact with them too, although not with many. Here, too, I try to communicate with friends, attend church services, in order to maintain the Georgian way of life, which is very important to me. Despite the danger of coming through Mexico, I still believe my decision to emigrate was correct. It is very difficult to move and do business in those criminal cities. There is a lot of disorder and quite a lot of criminality. Therefore, those who have to stay in Mexico for some time as an immigrant, have to deal with a lot of psychological stress.

Nini Sikharulidze: What are your future plans?
Sandro: My future plans motivate me. After my documents are in order, I want to give my children the opportunity to continue their education in the USA. However, in the future, I still want to continue living in Georgia. Motherland is motherland. No other country can occupy this place in the heart of a Georgian.

Nini Sikharulidze: Do you have any advice for immigrants who are now making this difficult journey from Mexico to America?
Sandro: For people who are preparing to take this important path, I would advise them to be sure that they have people to help them settle in the U.S. Otherwise, it's not worth the risk for another 2 years. Due to the war between Russia and Ukraine, it is very difficult to find a job. Salaries have declined by about 30% compared to the previous year. It is good if you have a Georgian relative, friend, someone you know who will guide you during this period and put you on the right path. In a foreign country, a Georgian still stands by another Georgian in a different way. This brings me great happiness.