

Transformation of Social Spaces: International Labor Migration from Georgia

Ia Iashvili^{1,*}, Pikria Jinjikhadze², Tinatin Gvenetadze³

¹ Direction of Human Geography, Faculty of Social and Political Sciences, Iv. Javakhishvili Tbilisi State University, Tbilisi, Georgia

² Department of Geography, Faculty of Exact and Natural Sciences, Akaki Tsereteli State University, Kutaisi, Georgia

³ Department of Sociology, Faculty of Social and Political Sciences, Iv. Javakhishvili Tbilisi State University, Tbilisi, Georgia

* Corresponding author: ia.iashvili@tsu.ge

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Abstract

The concept of space has a multifaceted meaning in geographical science, ranging from the physical location of a place to its political, socio-economic and cultural dimensions. Migration creates new social space while transforming the social, economic, political, institutional, psychological or physical environment. Our research aims to explore how international mobility transforms and restructures the social spaces of Georgian labor migrants at their immigration destination. This change has been examined across multiple dimensions: the socio-economic transformation and economic disparity, migration trends and patterns, transnational connections and social networks, household structure and gender roles, as well as cultural, linguistic, ethnic, religious and institutional affiliation. The primary objective is to determine the types of spaces that can emerge because of Georgian labor migration, considering it as a dynamic process that fundamentally shapes the nature of transformation. Our study employs qualitative research methods, utilizing semi-structured in-depth interviews conducted both in person and online. The desk research method is employed to analyze secondary data, whereas discourse analysis method has been used for interviews. The research spans the period from 2010 to 2024. The target groups are Georgian migrants residing in the USA and in some EU countries. The survey's main findings highlighted the heterogeneity of immigrant social spaces and the active participation of Georgian migrants through various activities within these spaces, namely: the space where labor activity is transformed (downgraded) professionally, the diasporic space consisting of Georgian congregations in Georgian Orthodox churches, the ethnic-religious and recreation space with the solemn celebration of national or religious holidays, the cultural-educational space with Sunday schools and Georgian cultural centers and the virtual communication space with family members left behind. The results acquired will contribute novel insights to the research on Georgian labor migration, which remains relatively limited.

Keywords: Transformation of social space, transnational family, Georgian labor immigrant women, qualitative research, USA

Introduction

The concept of space is crucial and fundamental in geographical science. Spatial thinking is a basic ability that geographers use to comprehend the arrangement of objects across terrain (Rubenstein, 2010). This concept encompasses a range of events or activities occurring within a significant geographical area, adding a spatial aspect to it. Geography began by looking at how people moving (either for a short time or permanently) affects social and economic changes, including things like language, culture, and how people adapt to new places (Fouberg et al., 2015). The concept of space has a multifaceted meaning, ranging from the physical location of a place to its political, socio-economic, and cultural dimensions. Examples of such dimensions include, for instance, the post-Soviet space, the tourist-recreational space, the emigration/immigration and diasporic space, the virtual space, etc.

However, practitioners in many professions may interpret each name differently. Consequently, each of these terms requires its own distinct explanation (Liszewski, 2006). Migration creates a new social space while potentially transforming the physical, economic, political, institutional, social, or psychological environment. Human geography, with other social sciences, surveys the formation of transformed identities in various locations, which serve as points of destination for mobile populations. Human geography examines the shifting patterns of human activities across space as well as their self-identification with particular places and regions (Domosh et al., 2013). This science studies the dynamic processes of population development across spatial and temporal dimensions, with a particular focus on migration. Mobility, which directly indicates the population's movement across areas or countries, exemplifies the relationship between human geography and migration.

From this perspective, this article discusses the problem of labour migration from Georgia and its impact on migrants' perceptions and adaptations to the immigration space. Over the past 30 years, this international move has presented significant challenges for both the migrants and their family members, greatly shaping their shifted reality.

Problem Statement, Research Goal and Objectives

The post-Cold War transformation established an entirely novel political, socio-economic, cultural, and psychological landscape. Numerous Eastern European and post-Soviet states began this era with surprising optimism and aspirations. They were establishing a new democratic state, confident in the rapid success of the nation and its society. However, neither people nor governments anticipated that the transition phase encompassing the entire post-Soviet space would be so unclear, difficult, and prolonged (Castles & Miller, 2003). To escape the current situation, individuals sought alternative paths, resulting in many discovering a new reality—the realm of emigration. The process involved adjusting to a new geographical area, establishing new socio-economic spaces, and adapting accordingly.

Our research aims to explore how international mobility transforms and restructures the social spaces of Georgian labour migrants in their immigration destinations. These changes have been examined across multiple dimensions: socio-economic transformation and economic disparity; migration trends and patterns; transnational connections and social networks; household structure and gender roles; as well as cultural, linguistic, ethnic, religious, and institutional affiliation.

The primary objective is to determine the types of spaces that can emerge because of migration, considering it as a dynamic process that fundamentally shapes the nature of transformation. Bringing up the topic in this manner is particularly crucial in the context of irregular female labour migration from Georgia, as the migrants' existing legal state already leads to violations of their labour rights, restricted communication and cultural interaction, and a highly subjective perception of the transformed spaces.

The paper tries to answer the following key questions: Is a migration space homogenous, or do multiple migration spaces exist? What types of spaces can be generated because of migrants' transfer as a dynamic process? What are these spaces/subspaces, and which of them embody the essence of migration as a transition? Liszewski (2006) defines space as an infinite and unrestricted expanse where all physical phenomena occur. This definition encompasses several processes. The focus of our research examines the position of migration within this context as a dynamic social phenomenon, the significance it embodies, and the role of the migrant in this process.

Methods and Materials

Our study employs qualitative research methods, utilising semi-structured, in-depth interviews conducted both in person and online. We refer to statistical methods and GIS technology for visualising quantitative data. The desk research method is used to analyse secondary data, whereas the discourse analysis method is utilised for interviews. The target groups are current Georgian immigrants of both genders residing in the USA and EU countries and returning female migrants from Europe. The selection of these target groups was influenced by the extensive network of Georgian labour migrants in both the US and EU countries, as well as the diverse migration experiences of current immigrants and returnees.

Our research encompasses the period from 2010 to 2024, when the authors initiated a pilot study including adult offspring of migrant mothers in Georgia. The research continued directly with Georgian immigrants of both genders in the USA. Female respondents are engaged as homemakers or carers, whereas males are employed as taxi or truck drivers. In 2015, under the auspices of the Fulbright

program, extensive research was conducted by the primary author to examine transnational migration in both the East Coast and Western states of the USA. In 2016, the co-authors conducted a project on transnational families in Georgia. The subsequent phase of the 2020-2022 survey encompassed Georgian migrant women residing in Europe, with whom comprehensive online interviews were conducted. In 2023 and 2024, we encountered returned migrant women who operate their small family enterprises in Georgia. The total number of respondents exceeds 70.

All respondents were over 18 years old. The IRB (Institutional Review Board) approval was issued by Rutgers University (USA). All in-depth interviews were audio-recorded while ensuring complete confidentiality. The record and the paper do not disclose the participants' names. We secured oral consent from the respondents prior to the interview, after informing them of the study's objectives.

The discussion plan for both gender groups encompassed enquiries regarding their adaptation to the new environment, initial qualifications and professional transformation in the host country, the quality of familial connections, economic advantages, and social challenges; additionally, the strategy for their repatriation was a focal point of interest.

We employed snowball sampling for recruiting the respondents. Most of them complied with our request to engage in the research with empathy and goodwill. We conducted the interviews in Georgian.

Theoretical Background

Geographers analyse the spatial distribution of individuals and activities, seeking to understand the reasons for their specific arrangements across different spaces (Rubenstein, 2010). They possess a strong interest in comprehending the characteristics of terrestrial space and the interactions between individuals and their environments within this context. Geography fundamentally examines "why and where". Another aspect related to this interest is its "significance" (Johanson et al., 2015). In the context of transnational labour migration, our article examines the importance of a specific location—the country of destination—for Georgian immigrants.

The presented survey is based on the theoretical framework developed by Liszewski (2006) and Feist et al. (2013). The first author categorises geographical spaces into three types. These types are associated with the movement of individuals or groups for purposes of recreation, leisure, and travel. The author examines the approach to spatial division and "occupation of space" in the tourism industry, highlighting the concepts of "imaginative," "access-restricted," and "real" spaces (Liszewski, 2006). Different motivations drive migration and tourism, which naturally vary in duration. However, if we acknowledge that both social phenomena involve the movement of individuals within a physical space (such as relocating to a new home or adjusting to a different environment temporarily), we can possibly extend this pattern of the spatial division concept to the realm of migration as well.

Feist's and his colleagues' idea of social space is directly linked to the concept of transnational migration. The theoretical framework of "transnationalism", established by Glick Schiller et al. (1995), was posited as an alternative to the prevalent notion of assimilation (Johansson, 2016). Immigrants are perceived not as displaced individuals but as individuals who link across international borders and reside simultaneously in more than one state (Glick-Schiller et al., 1995).

Migrants establish transnational links by their engagement in socio-economic, cultural, or political processes with their family members left behind. These connections do not diminish over time; rather, they intensify and have an institutional structure. Feist et al. (2013) observe that such relationships ultimately create transnational social spaces, characterised by organised networks spanning at least two nations. It is a robust but dynamic category that, crucially, does not align with state boundaries. Participants in such a social space include both individuals and groups (e.g., diasporas), as well as organisations (p. 14). While there is no definitive theory of transnationalism, the concept of transnational social spaces facilitates migration interactions and activities beyond international borders (p. 53). Social ties encompass not only familial and personal connections but also functional systems, including socio-cultural, economic, and political dimensions. When the social connections of migrants and less mobile individuals interlink regularly and reliably, one might refer to transnational social spaces. Feist et al. argue that "transnational lives themselves may become a strategy of survival and betterment" (p. 55). Our empirical analysis demonstrates the extent to which the structure of Georgian labour mobility aligns with the concept of transnational social spaces.

Results

During the Soviet era, Georgians were characterised by limited mobility. As per the 1979 census, 96.5% of this ethnic group's population resided permanently in their homeland, a figure that remained

largely stable in the 1989 census, reflecting only a 1.5% decline (Gachechiladze, 1997). Presently, among Georgia's overall population of 3.7 million, over 800,000 individuals have emigrated, with 51% being women and 49% men (Migration Strategy, 2020, 8). The tendency to leave the country is growing, and Georgia maintains a negative net migration rate (Geostat, 2025; Geostat: Emigration from Georgia, 2024; IDFI, 2024) with the exceptions of two years, when 23,000 Georgian nationals returned from abroad due to the consequences of the Covid-19 pandemic in 2020 and then in 2022, the following inflow of Slavic asylum seekers resulting from the Russo-Ukrainian War¹ (Migration Profile: Georgia, 2023, 2) (Table 1 and Fig. 1).

Table 1. Georgia's Population Net Migration (number and rate) Source: Geostat, 2025.

Years	Net Migration	Per thousand, ‰
2013	-2,606	-0.7
2014	-6,543	-1.8
2015	-3,408	-0.9
2016	-8,060	-2.2
2017	-2,212	-0.6
2018	-10,783	-2.9
2019	-8,243	-2.2
2020	15,732	4.2
2021	-25,966	-7.0
2022	54,509	14.7
2023	-39,207	-10.6

In addition to the spatial change, Georgian labour emigration is characterised by structural (professional) transformation of migrants, temporary separation of nuclear family members for an undefined duration, reliance on remittances from emigrants, and the prevalence of single-parent households. Frequently, another or older family member(s) assume the parental position (Iashvili et al., 2014). Fuller-Thomson (2005) refers to this particular family structure as a "skipped generation household" (p. 331). Our research focuses on two distinct spaces—the host state and the country of origin where the migrants' transnational household engages in their simultaneous activities. Transnational migration from Georgia should be considered as a phenomenon that extends outside the context of its borders. Since the early 1990s, labour migration between affluent and developing nations to sustain families has become a persistent issue. Ho & Bedford (2008) define transnational migration as a familial strategy for risk mitigation. In developing countries, during crises, family members decide to engage one of their members in migration to enhance or stabilise income levels. Transnational migrants possess multiple residences in geographically distinct locations, thereby sustaining enduring economic and emotional connections to their household (p. 43). Consequently, our nation, as a component of the aforementioned realm, is not an exception. However, although the presence of Georgians abroad as labour migrants is temporary, on the one hand, the irregular status of most of them and, on the other hand, the less attractive environment for the continuation of labour activities in the homeland make the prospect of migrants' return completely uncertain (Migration profile, 2023).

As mentioned above, Liszewski identifies three categories of space, the first of which is the „imaginative“ space. It is constructed by the potential migrant's cognition based on previously observed, read, communicated, or other information. The readiness of the human intellect is influenced by specific motivations, which are essentially the push and pull factors that drive migration. One of our respondents remarks that

What you anticipate beforehand is always euphoria... Regardless of the accuracy of the information provided, you remain convinced that your circumstances would improve in that

¹ Despite the absolute number of emigrants in 2022 (125 269 individuals) surpassing that of the previous year (99 974 individuals) in 2021, the influx of population due to the war between Russia and Ukraine resulted in a positive migration balance in Georgia (Geostat, 2025).

location; however, when confronted with reality, one realises that the aspirations brought forth collapse, yet retreat is no longer an option. **Male, in his late 40s. Monroe (NY), USA, 2010.**

Several respondents indicated that they believed they possessed comprehensive knowledge of their immigrant family member; however, those did not align with reality:

*My year-long stay in Cyprus with my mom for work has significantly transformed me. I wish you understood how I previously wasted her remittances; I didn't have regrets and was unaware at the time... Currently, my father and I consistently endeavour to avoid wasting cash irrationally. **Female in her early 20s. Tbilisi, Georgia, 2010.***

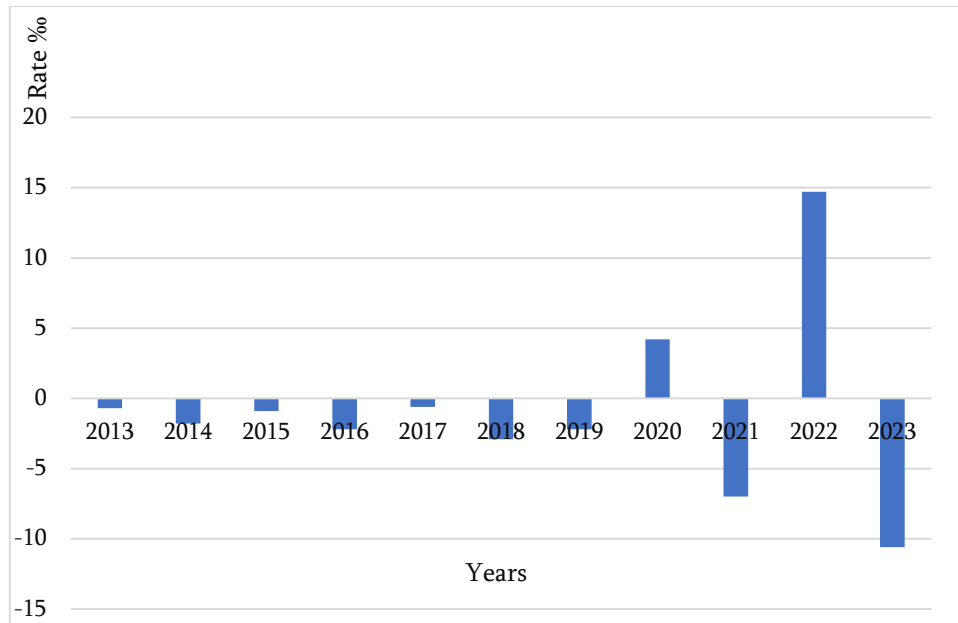


Figure 1. Georgia's Population Net Migration Rate (%)

Liszewski (2006, p. 9) identifies two subspaces inside the imaginary realm: virtual and perceived. The first is a comparatively recent term that denotes “artificial reality”. The significance of the virtual space notion has been shaped by the information and communication technology established over the past two decades and the worldwide Internet network.

Georgian transnational migrants establish a distinct virtual environment with family members remaining in their homeland, facilitated through social networks. It is not unusual for some migrant mothers to participate in assignment preparation via social networks. According to one of our return research participants:

*In Greece, there exists a designated period of afternoon inactivity, during which everyone rests. I have been assisting my children's education via the Internet for that couple of hours. Without this opportunity, I would not have remained there for three years. **Female in her mid-40s. Kutaisi, Georgia, 2022.***

The second is the perceived subspace, denoting the impression formed by prior observations and experiences. In other words, it assesses the impact of the actual circumstances as perceived by the individual. The experiences of each migrant serve as both personal assets and valuable information for prospective migrants, aiding them in constructing an imagined reality. Our abovementioned respondent, with previous experience as a carer in Greece, mentioned her repeat leaving:

*I am aware that I am heading into exploitative labour and humiliation again, but my family still requires it for survival. **Female in her early 40s. Kutaisi, Georgia, 2019.***

Fortunately, this woman is one of those rare exceptions who successfully attained the minimum objective and rejoined her family after three years:

*My children required my presence now as much as they needed me to depart at that time. I am pleased to have accomplished it. **Female in her mid-40s. Kutaisi, Georgia, 2022.***

Adaptation to the immigration environment is defined by criteria such as the migrant's view of current events (positive/negative, optimistic/pessimistic), self-esteem, health perception, and problem-solving abilities (Durglishvili, 1997).

Georgian migrants residing in America exhibit a markedly favourable disposition towards the current order in the country. The rule of law is frequently acknowledged as a source of significant comfort:

The rule of law is paramount; I wish I had witnessed this in my country. The officer issued me a ticket for violating traffic regulations. In such instances, I refrain from engaging in disputes with them; they do not impede me in any kind. Most significantly, I am aware that both I and the American guy are equal under the law. Male in his early 50s. New York, NY, USA. 2015.

What contributes to my comfort in this environment? I am more mobilised and organised than ever before. I possess self-respect, maintain employment, and exhibit calmness. Health issues? Indeed, there exists a similar situation, although I would encounter the same and additional issues in Georgia. Female in her early 60s. New York (NY), USA, 2015.

Georgian migrants returning from Europe describe their time there as "planned and safe", with the vast majority believing they learnt essential skills for organised employment (Badurashvili, 2012). The perceived immigration space for return migrants is associated with the development of skills such as rapid problem-solving, independent decision-making, effective time management, and a responsible work ethic. They also report increased energy, determination, and punctuality (Tukhashvili, 2012).

The aforementioned sorts of space and their interaction are virtually limitless, as migration is a process of global magnitude involving millions of participants, but not in all cases. The emigration space may not be uniformly available to all individuals, and at times, it may prove to be "access restricted" (Liszewski, 2016), which can be categorised into sub-spaces constrained by natural, political, economic, and socio-cultural reasons (p. 16). A parallel can be established with the migration context. The aforementioned variables, in certain instances, restrict the entry of migrants into the emigration domain.

The majority of Georgian migrants choose the Atlantic coastal plain states and cities for settlement, specifically New York City, Washington D.C., New Jersey, Pennsylvania, and Maryland. Despite being situated at similar latitudes (approximately between 40° and 43°) as Georgia, the meteorological conditions in these states are significantly distinct. While the Greater Caucasus Range diminishes the influence of the cold latitudes, in North America arctic air often descends southward through the lowlands in winter, resulting in severe cold in the northeastern United States (Bradshaw et al., 2012). However, our respondents do not perceive these natural conditions as a restricted factor. As for the research participants residing in San Francisco, California, within a Mediterranean climate zone, they reported exceptionally comfortable climatic circumstances, similar to the subtropical climate of Georgia:

The temperature here ranges from 20°C to 25°C throughout the year. The climate is pleasant. There is a daily breeze ... so, you always need a light jacket to have with you; you are neither hot nor cold. The fog surrounds the vicinity of the Golden Bridge daily at noon... it is a fascinating picture that never fails to engage my attention. Hydrangeas also bloom here, evoking memories of Adjara... a female in her late 50s. San Francisco (CA), USA, 2015.

Liszewski (2006, 14) considers the visa regime as an official limiting political factor. Since 2011, Georgia has participated in the readmission and visa liberalisation agreement with the European Union, facilitating the return of its citizens residing abroad unlawfully (Visa Facilitation, 2011; Ministry of Internal Affairs, 2013; Migration Profile, 2021). However, the aforementioned agreement simplifies entry into the European Union for some groups of persons. Despite the agreement permitting only tourist visas, Georgian female migrants continue to secure temporary low-skilled employment as care providers in private residences. One of our responders, a proprietor of a family hotel in Georgia, stated:

I reside here during the summer season, and in winter I travel to Italy. All revenue generated there is reinvested in our tourism industry. It significantly benefits my family. I own this itinerary after the commencement of visa-free travel to Europe. Female in her late 60s. Gordi, Georgia, 2024.

According to the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Georgia, more than one thousand Georgian nationals have been readmitted from Europe in the last three months of 2023. Of the total 1074 individuals, 696 citizens were readmitted from Germany, while France accounted for 136 deportees.

The list proceeds with Switzerland, Greece, Poland, Spain, and Italy. Germany, currently at the forefront, has lately committed to intensifying its initiatives aimed at addressing irregular migration, resulting in anticipated increases in deportations from the EU in the future (Over a thousand Georgians, 2023).

Despite the strict visa regulations implemented by the USA, Georgian respondents perceive the American environment as the friendliest upon entry into the country. They perceive America as a welcoming nation for immigrants, characterised by minimal bureaucracy and accessible employment opportunities for irregular individuals. The local population exhibits a varied attitude towards immigrant workers, particularly those with irregular status, such as the majority of Georgians. Based on multiple studies, Ilias & Fennely (2008) note that about sixty percent of Americans perceive irregular migration as a significantly more pressing issue than legal migration. Another survey indicates that 61% of Americans favour granting legal status to temporary migrants instead of deporting them to mitigate irregular migration. Some experts argue that "Americans may typically harbour negative sentiments toward illegal immigrants yet exhibit sympathy for individuals they are personally acquainted with" (pp. 744-745).

The economic development of the immigration region considerably influences the attractiveness for migrants (pull factor). The impact of the economic variable is especially apparent in the American context, where distance is not a critical consideration for Georgian migrants and appealing economic incentives take priority. Our research revealed that more than half of our research participants residing in the USA chose America due to greater pay, while others were influenced by their network of acquaintances in the destination country. However, the opportunities for utilising the professional abilities of migrants are somewhat constrained. With few exceptions, the educational qualifications that Georgian emigrants possessed prior to their departure for foreign countries remained unrealised for European and American markets (Iashvili et al., 2016). Consequently, specialists refer to emigration from Georgia as "brain waste" rather than "brain drain" (Badurashvili, 2012). Merely 3% of repatriated migrants reported possessing qualifications obtained abroad (Tukhashvili, 2012).

The limiting social component is the lack of language proficiency, which constitutes a deficiency in social capital, hindering Georgian immigrants' adaptation to a foreign environment. I. Badurashvili (2012) notes that whereas 57% of respondents believe it is easier for an immigrant skilled in the language to secure employment, only 10% enrolled in language study courses.

We highlight an additional aspect – ethno-religious constraining space encountered by a segment of Georgian immigrants in the USA. Orthodox Jews constitute a significant portion of the population in the town of Monroe, New York. Interactions with host communities require considerable effort from newcomers. Employers rigorously safeguard and often prioritise their ethno-religious norms, which they insist on maintaining during labour relations, presenting challenges for Georgian immigrants. This is particularly applicable to women, who frequently serve as carers, housekeepers, or cleaners. We regard such a setting as a restrictive space.

Table 2. Money Transfers from the USA, Selected EU and Post-Soviet Countries and Israel in Georgia (Inflow, Share in Total Volume) * Money transfers until September 2024. Source: Money Transfers, 2024. National Bank of Georgia. www.nbg.gov.ge

Years	Total		USA	Greece	Italy	Germany	Russia	Kazakhstan	Israel	Other countries
	Thousand USD	Share %	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
2017	1,387,250.0	100	10.24	10.23	10.72	2.46	32.83	0.99	8.59	23.96
2018	1,579,664.9	100	10.1	10.82	12.21	2.62	28.94	1.02	9.59	24.71
2019	1,733,317.7	100	10.29	11.11	13.8	2.87	24/7	1.54	9.38	26.31
2020	1,885,981.9	100	11.58	11.62	15.78	3.93	19.3	1.04	8.31	28.42
2021	2,349,563.7	100	12.1	10.22	16.42	4.82	17.51	2.63	7.95	28.37
2022	4,372,409.0	100	7.48	5.12	9.87	3.76	47.29	3.43	4.55	18.18
2023	4,146,593.6	100	11.1	5.93	12.61	5.6	36.86	4.8	5.19	17.92
2024*	2,245,012.4		16.37	7.6	16.66	7.58	18.26	3.81	7.22	

The real emigration space is complex. It is a synthesis of geographical, socio-economic, political, religious, or ethno-cultural subspaces.

The primary incentive of Georgian migrants for establishing economic space is the financial support of family members staying in their country of origin. The main domain for immigrants is the realm of labour, which constitutes their principal activity and where they allocate the majority of their time. Figure 3 illustrates the key countries that consistently generate the most remittances. Families dependent on remittances is a characteristic aspect of Georgia's migration trend. Table 2 and figure 2 show the proportion of remittances from top countries in the overall transfers to Georgia. The high rate of money transfers in 2022 and 2023 from Russia relates to the mass arrival of its citizens due to the Russia-Ukraine war and, accordingly, the transfer of their own funds to our country. These figures only partially reflect the sums remitted by Georgian immigrants to their family members. Remittances from Italy, the USA, Israel, and Kazakhstan have risen (National Bank of Georgia, 2024). Since 2019, total money transfers from EU countries (excluding 2022 and 2023) substantially surpass those from the post-Soviet states (Table 3).

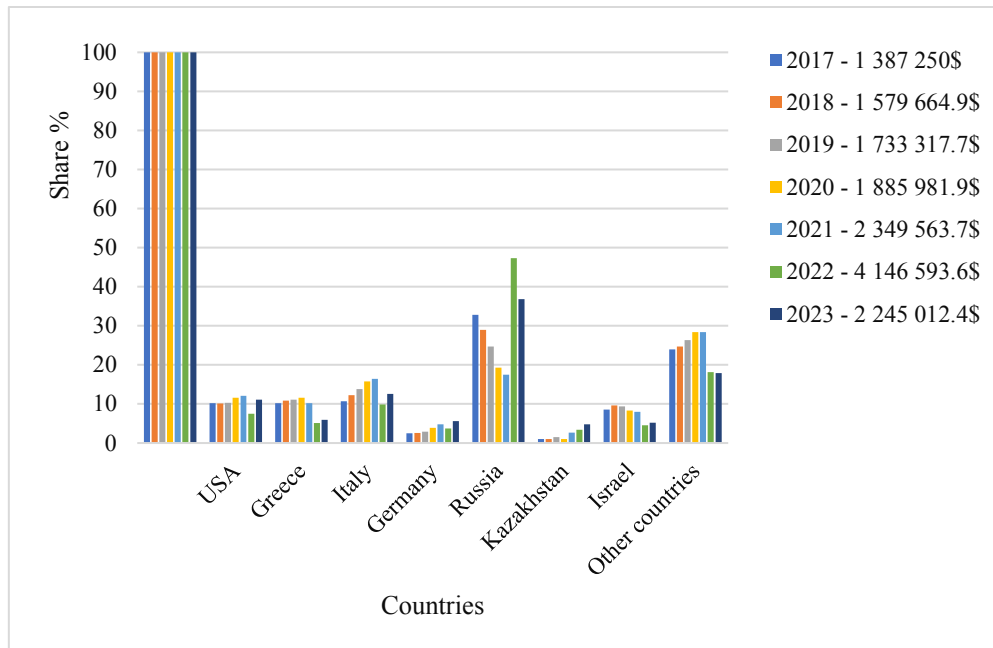


Figure 2. Money Transfers to Georgia from top remittances-sending Countries (share in total volume, %), Source: National Bank of Georgia. www.nbg.gov.ge

The emigration processes from Georgia are influenced by macro, meso, and micro factors: firstly, the global demand for low-skilled labour; secondly, migrant networks that encourage and maintain migration to specific geographical areas; and thirdly, the individual or collective decisions made by a migrant or her family members aimed at improving household welfare through enhanced earning opportunities. In numerous instances, the role of a migrant has become increasingly relevant for women, partially due to prevailing macro trends in Western nations, such as population ageing and women's active participation in the skilled labour market. The process is often referred to as the feminisation of migration (Iashvili et al., 2024).

Liszewski (2006) argues that the establishment of an authentic tourist-recreational area primarily implies the "occupation" of geographical space. This is especially true in migration studies. Migrants inhabit not only the geographical territory of the host nation but also infiltrate the analogous domains of the indigenous population with their socio-cultural, religious, and psychological values. The perception of this coexistence by local people is a subject of interest for numerous study disciplines. Over the past two decades, Georgian immigrants have successfully established Georgian cultural spaces in America in the form of cultural centres such as the Dancing Crane Company (Dancing Crane, 2023), the Georgian Theatre of New York (Georgian Theatre, 2023), Pesvebi (Roots) (Pesvebi, 2023), etc., which serve as hubs for Georgian traditional arts in Brooklyn and aim at assisting young professionals in promoting Georgian culture in the United States.

Since 2005, an increasing number of Georgian Orthodox churches have been operational in America. Georgian congregations were progressively established in New York, Pennsylvania, Washington, Chicago, and Los Angeles (Georgian Orthodox Church, 2024; St Nino mission, 2024), creating

confessional-communication spaces. All these churches possess large, active, and expanding congregations. As one of our research participants recalls:

*During the Covid-19 pandemic, our parish members helped each other greatly. We are a family ... well, it was like that before, but our attitude became more cordial during this crisis. We managed to stream every week's liturgy online. Only the priest, two singers and I, one person as a parish member, remained in the church. Because people from distant states were unable to attend, we [the mobile group] delivered Easter gifts to their homes. **Female in her mid-50s, Tbilisi-New York (online), 2023.***

The Sunday schools also operate alongside these churches, teaching the second generation of Georgians born in America their native language.

Table 3. Share of Money Transfers in Total Volume in Georgia According to the Country Groups (inflow, %),
Source: National Bank of Georgia. www.nbg.gov.ge

Years	Total %	EU Countries	CIS Countries	Other Countries
2015	100	29.69	44.56	25.75
2016	100	30.55	38.02	31.43
2017	100	29.85	36.37	33.78
2018	100	33.81	33.16	33.04
2019	100	37.34	30.70	31.96
2020	100	40.48	25.18	34.34
2021	100	40.67	26.95	32.38
2022	100	24.44	58.03	17.53
2023	100	31.53	45.36	23.13
2024	100	41.86	26.48	31.66

The Georgian parish offers a recreational space as well, where all Orthodox Christian and national festivals are celebrated with formal gatherings or picnics outside the city.

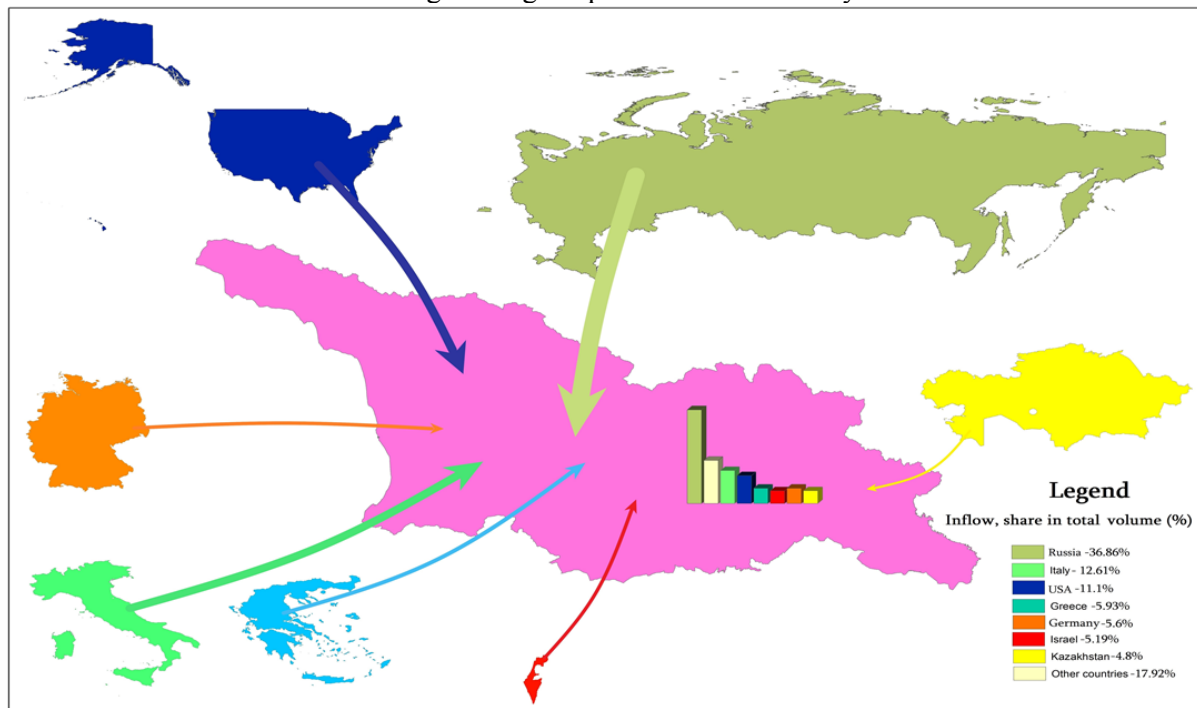


Figure 3. Map of top money transfers to Georgia in 2023 (inflow, share in total volume, %).

Source: Own work based on National Bank of Georgia. www.nbg.gov.ge

Nonetheless, Georgian immigrants often find themselves lacking in certain areas. Most often, it is a familial and educational environment for professional advancement. This deficiency primarily results

from their irregular status, limited financial resources, and, as previously noted, insufficient language skills. A minimal number of our respondents succeeded in acquiring or enhancing professional abilities. This segment comprises migrants who presently possess lawful immigrant status in the US or are US citizens. Their spaces of action are considerably more heterogeneous; unlike their undocumented compatriots, they possess the ability to visit their homeland.

The prolonged disconnection from family adversely affects both the migrant and the relatives remaining behind. The irregular status of Georgian migrants prevents collaboration with official authorities and the execution of employment contracts with employers; hence, it perpetuates the risk of significant rights violations. According to experts, Georgian female migrants work an average of 58 hours per week ([Badurashvili, 2012](#)).

According to the latest survey ([Migrant women, 2024](#)), the majority of female Georgian immigrants experience a decline in professional status in the host country. They find employment as nurses in healthcare facilities, caretakers in households, or domestic workers not involved in elder care. In case of equivalent compensation, they would choose to work in Georgia (p. 24). This last point is critical. Despite a significant enhancement in the quality of material interactions, the prolonged separation of married couples creates substantial issues in both marital dynamics and the dependency between parents and children. The division of the family is frequently perceived as a social cost among the transnational household members ([Iashvili et al., 2024](#)). Undocumented status also contributes to the presence of Georgians in the host country and the uncertainty surrounding their repatriation. Half of our respondents declared that family members anticipate her/his homecoming, while one-third contended that the family has accepted her/his absence; some others asserted that household members still require financial support from overseas.

We believe that the ambiguity regarding the issue of return, coupled with the "guaranteed" employment of migrants in the host nation and the "guaranteed" remittances to their homeland, would result in a prolonged remigration process. The greatest concern for returned migrants is the reality they encounter in their homeland upon remigration. Experts note that migrants experience culture shock when the disparity between their acquired social and cultural experiences during immigration and the realities they must adapt to in their hometown becomes evident ([Badurashvili, 2012](#); [Feminism of Migration, 2022](#); [Mataradze et al., 2024](#)). Furthermore, the current lack of adequate possibilities for socio-economic reintegration in the country of origin compels re-migrants to desire to return back to the immigration country ([Socioeconomic Stability, 2023](#)). Consequently, the formulation of a robust emigration strategy is an essential imperative for Georgia.

Conclusion

The varied and strong transnational spaces established by Georgian migrants indicate that the framework of modern Georgian labour migration aligns with Feist and his colleagues' concept of transnational social spaces. Our endeavour to generalise Liszewski's approach, from tourism to migration studies, also showed the heterogeneous structure of the immigration landscape for Georgian migrants. The immigrants indicate that their "imagined" reality diverges from the actual environment, significantly hindering their adaptation process. The "access-restricted" space stems from the irregular status of the majority of Georgian migrants, which limits their participation in educational and professional endeavours. The economic sphere serves as the primary domain for immigrants, despite the potential for professional regression. In this context, remittances from both the USA and other European nations are increasingly being sent to Georgia.

Despite numerous challenges, Georgian immigrants successfully established ethnic, cultural, and confessional spaces, including Orthodox Christian churches, Sunday schools, and Georgian cultural institutions. These areas serve as supplementary communication and leisure venues for first-generation immigrants while providing an educational environment for second-generation young Georgians.

For the majority of migrant mothers lacking a familial support system in the host nation, virtual communication is essential for maintaining emotional connections with family members, particularly with their children.

The return plan lacks clarity. In the absence of a robust migration policy by the Georgian government, which should be a guarantor for dignified repatriation, the lengthy stay of Georgian migrants in host countries would be prolonged even more, adversely impacting the already diminished gene pool of our nation.

Competing interests

The authors declare that they have no competing interests.

Authors' contribution

The first author recorded the interviews in the USA. The other two engaged in the research by conducting in-depth interviews in Georgia and online, offering valuable input. Interviews were transcribed by all participants and translated into English by the first and third authors. The visual content was produced by the second author. All authors contributed to the composition of the article, with the final edition completed by the first author.

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ORCID iD

Ia Iashvili  <https://orcid.org/0009-0009-9983-928X>

Pikria Jinjikhadze  <https://orcid.org/0009-0003-5963-0285>

Tinatin Gvenetadze  <https://orcid.org/0009-0001-4814-931X>

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