



Sociological Dynamics of Brain Drain from Georgia: Structural Elements, Values and Policy¹

Gürcistan'dan Beyin Göçünün Sosyolojik Dinamikleri: Yapısal Unsurlar, Değerler ve Politika Üzerine

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Abstract

This study examines the reasons, motivations, and factors shaping the destination choices of highly skilled individuals migrating from Georgia to other countries, as well as their experiences during the migration process. The study group consisted of 15 women and 17 men, aged 22 to 60, residing and working in various countries such as Poland, Denmark, the USA, the UK, Lithuania, Austria, Germany, Spain, Malta, Sweden, the Netherlands, Ireland, Belgium, and the Czech Republic. Data from in-depth interviews reveal that the moral values, opinions, and lifestyles of highly skilled Georgian migrants have become misaligned with the values of the society in which they were raised. This misalignment, while not immediately apparent in determining the causes of migration, emerges over time as migrants adopt the values of their new societies. The loyalty of migrants to their homeland is limited by their closer alignment with the norms of their current societies. In this context, living in a conservative society presents a challenging experience for highly skilled migrants. These well-educated individuals with an international perspective may encounter obstacles in achieving their career goals and personal aspirations under conservative norms. In conclusion, highly skilled labor from less developed and traditional societies is more inclined to migrate.

Keywords: Brain Drain, Labor Market, Conservatism, Political Conflict, Adaptation, Georgia

Öz

Bu çalışma, Gürcistan'dan diğer ülkelere göç eden yüksek vasıflı bireylerin göç ettikleri destinasyonları seçme nedenlerini, motivasyonlarını ve bu seçimleri şekillendiren faktörleri, ayrıca göç sürecindeki deneyimlerini incelemektedir. Çalışma grubu, Polonya, Danimarka, ABD, Birleşik Krallık, Litvanya, Avusturya, Almanya, İspanya, Malta, İsveç, Hollanda, İrlanda, Belçika ve Çek Cumhuriyeti gibi çeşitli ülkelerde yaşayan ve çalışan 22 ile 60 yaşları arasında 15 kadın ve 17 erkekten oluşmaktadır. Derinlemesine mülakatlardan elde edilen veriler, yüksek vasıflı Gürcü göçmenlerin ahlaki değerlerinin, görüşlerinin ve yaşam tarzlarının, yetiştirildikleri toplumun değerleriyle uyumsuz hale geldiğini ortaya koymaktadır. Bu uyumsuzluk, göç nedenlerini belirlerken hemen görünür olmasa da, göçmenlerin yeni toplumlarının değerlerini benimsemeleriyle zaman içinde açığa çıkmaktadır. Göçmenlerin anavatanlarına olan bağlılıkları, mevcut toplumlarının normlarına daha fazla uyum sağlamaları nedeniyle sınırlıdır. Bu bağlamda, muhafazakâr bir toplumda yaşamak, yüksek vasıflı göçmenler için zorlayıcı bir deneyim sunmaktadır. Uluslararası bakış açısına sahip bu iyi eğitilmiş bireyler, muhafazakâr normlar altında kariyer hedeflerine ve kişisel arzularına ulaşmada engellerle karşılaşabilirler. Sonuç olarak, daha az gelişmiş ve geleneksel toplumlardan gelen yüksek vasıflı iş gücü, göç etmeye daha yatkındır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Beyin Göçü, Emek Piyasası, Muhafazakarlık, Politik çatışma, Uyum, Gürcistan

Introduction

Brain drain refers to the emigration of talented individuals seeking better prospects abroad. Since the 1960s, there has been a notable increase in the migration of highly educated and skilled individuals, reflecting their desires for improved opportunities, personal growth, and fair compensation (Docquier & Rapoport, 2012). This study specifically examines how brain drain impacts national development strategies, particularly in countries like Georgia, which are small, sparsely populated, and still developing. For these nations, brain drain presents both challenges and potential opportunities.

National development strategies encompass the plans and policies that countries like Georgia employ to enhance their economies, societies, and overall well-being. Brain drain, in this context, refers to the departure of highly skilled individuals from these countries to seek opportunities elsewhere. While brain drain poses obstacles by depleting countries of valuable talent, it also offers potential benefits if skilled migrants return with new expertise, insights, and connections that can advance their home country's progress (Grogger & Hanson, 2011).

In recent years, Georgia has witnessed a notable surge in emigration. According to data from the Georgian National Statistics Office, the population stood at 3,694,600 in 2024. During the same period, the number of Georgian emigrants was recorded at 245,064, marking the highest migration rate in the past two decades. This trend has been accompanied by a significant rise in remittances from abroad, surpassing 1.9 billion US dollars since 2020. Various studies underscore the significance of these remittances as a vital source of income for migrant families, contributing substantially to economic development, healthcare, and education sectors. Concurrently, there has been a notable accumulation of human capital among migrants, facilitating substantial capital growth.

The current migration patterns in countries like Georgia, characterized by their low population and developing status, pose significant concerns for the nation's future. The potential departure of Georgia's skilled workforce presents formidable challenges that could severely impact its economic potential, social cohesion, and developmental progress. This outflow of talent threatens to stifle innovation and technological advancement, potentially hampering Georgia's strides in these pivotal areas. Furthermore, the waning prospects for economic growth may undercut the country's competitiveness on the global stage. Additionally, the loss of skilled professionals could precipitate shortages in critical sectors such as education and specialized industries. The perception of brain drain and the resulting erosion of confidence might exacerbate uncertainty among local communities and undermine national reliability.

Therefore, prioritizing initiatives to retain or repatriate skilled individuals becomes imperative for Georgia to achieve its sustainable development goals. This research transcends mere academic inquiry, representing a crucial step toward ensuring the country's future development. By analyzing the factors driving brain drain in Georgia and proposing strategic solutions, this study aims to contribute to the formulation of effective policies that address this critical issue.

1. Migration and Brain Drain Trends in Georgia: An Analysis of Recent Patterns and Implications

In recent decades, Georgia has witnessed a significant rise in emigration, especially among those facing employment challenges or earning low wages. This trend, which began in the 1990s, saw a major wave of emigration between 1991 and 1995 following the collapse of the Soviet Union and the ensuing economic hardships. During this period, approximately 130,000 to 150,000 individuals left Georgia annually. Despite the detrimental effects of emigration, remittances have provided substantial economic benefits, with transfers reaching \$199.7 million in 2020, a 15.9% increase from the previous year. These remittances predominantly come from countries such as Italy, Greece, Germany, and Spain, illustrating the global dispersion of the

Georgian diaspora.

The fluctuations in emigration trends reflect the complex economic and social conditions in Georgia. For instance, in 2019, 105,107 emigrants left the country; however, this number fell by 30% in 2020 to 74,264, likely due to the COVID-19 pandemic and related travel restrictions. By 2022, the number of emigrants rose again to 125,269, highlighting the ongoing economic uncertainty that fuels migration (Georgia Migration Commission, 2022). As of 2024, emigration surged to an all-time high of 245,064, marking a new peak. The negative migration balance of -39,207 in the same year underscores the persistent challenges Georgia faces in retaining its population (Georgia Migration Commission, 2024).

This surge correlates with growing dissatisfaction with the Georgian government's pro-Russian political stance, which has sparked fears over the country's future trajectory and undermined public confidence. Additionally, the lack of access to quality education and continued inequality in the labor market - characterized by unfair wages, poor working conditions, and minimal career development opportunities - further fuel emigration.

The ongoing exodus of Georgian citizens not only highlights immediate socio-economic issues but also raises concerns about the long-term implications for the country's workforce and economic vitality. As Georgia struggles to retain its skilled labor, it faces the risk of undermining its own development potential. Addressing these root causes - through improved educational access, labor market reforms, and a shift in political strategy - has become imperative to foster a sustainable environment that encourages citizens to remain and thrive.

The absence of comprehensive and current data on the destinations and demographics of Georgian emigrants presents a significant gap in understanding migration trends. The latest detailed study by the Georgian National Statistics Office, dating back to 2014, indicated that a substantial portion of emigrants moved to Russia and Greece. More recent data from the Migration Policy Institute in 2017 revealed that 451,000 Georgian emigrants resided in Russia, followed by 82,000 in Greece, 65,000 in Ukraine, 27,000 in the United States, and 23,000 in Germany (Georgia Migration Commission, 2021). These statistics underscore the widespread nature of Georgian emigration and the diverse destinations of its emigrants.

A critical gap in understanding recent migration trends is the absence of comprehensive data on emigrant destinations and demographics. The most detailed study by the Georgian National Statistics Office, from 2014, found that many emigrants moved to Russia and Greece. More recent data from the Migration Policy Institute in 2017 indicated that 451,000 Georgians resided in Russia, 82,000 in Greece, 65,000 in Ukraine, 27,000 in the United States, and 23,000 in Germany (Georgia Migration Commission, 2021). These figures reveal the broad geographical scope of Georgian emigration but fail to capture more recent patterns, particularly in Western Europe and North America.

The phenomenon of brain drain has been particularly pronounced since the dissolution of the Soviet Union, as many skilled professionals seek better education and employment opportunities abroad. Economic factors such as higher wages, superior working conditions, and more robust social infrastructure are key drivers of this migration. A 2017 study by the Georgian Young Lawyers Association found that 11% of emigrants held undergraduate degrees, 7% had master's degrees, and 22% had five-year higher education or vocational qualifications. However, only 2.6% of these emigrants were employed in roles that matched their qualifications, highlighting the underutilization of their skills abroad (Georgia Migration Commission, 2021).

Addressing the brain drain requires a multifaceted policy approach. First, it is imperative to enhance the conditions for skilled professionals within Georgia through targeted investments in the labor market and improvements in working conditions. Collaboration between government bodies, civil society organizations, and the private sector is critical in creating an environment conducive to professional growth. Additionally, academic exchanges, research symposiums, and public opinion research involving potential emigrants are essential for developing policies that respond to the needs of skilled labor. Establishing a centralized database to track the educational qualifications, employment sectors, and destinations of Georgian emigrants will

provide policymakers with the necessary tools to reverse the brain drain.

These measures are not only crucial for reducing emigration but also for fostering a sustainable and inclusive economic environment. By addressing the root causes of migration and offering competitive opportunities for skilled professionals, Georgia can more effectively leverage its human capital for long-term socio-economic stability.

2. Understanding Brain Drain

According to the Turkish Language Association, "Brain Drain" is defined as the migration of highly skilled professionals and scientists from their home countries to settle and work in a more developed country (Turkish Language Association, 2024). Another source defines "Brain Drain" as the movement of educated and highly qualified individuals who seek to work and live in another country outside their own (Toksöz, 2006, p. 226).

The term "Brain Drain" refers to the movement of human capital, specifically a situation where the flow of highly skilled labor occurs at an unusually fast and one-way pace. The term "Brain" represents skills, abilities, or qualifications, while "Drain" signifies that this flow is excessive or undesirable. This term was first used by the Royal Society of England in the late 1950s and early 1960s to describe the migration of scientists and technologists to the United States and Canada. Subsequently, Brain Drain has also been defined as a flow from developed countries to developing countries (Carrington & Detragiache, 1999).

According to D.W. Pearce (1981), Brain Drain refers to the migration of educated and skilled labor from less developed countries to wealthier nations. This implies that investment in human capital through education and skills is often more economically obtained in wealthier countries. Individuals with these skills migrate to countries that offer higher returns on their human capital. Such migration is often encouraged by legal and institutional factors, as many countries view skilled migrants more favorably compared to unskilled ones (Pearce, 1981).

Kwok and Leland (1982) describe Brain Drain as a term commonly used in English to explain one of the most sensitive issues of technology transfer. According to them, this term describes the departure of skilled professionals seeking more promising opportunities to work in other locations (Kwok & Leland, 1982).

Rutherford (1992) defines Brain Drain as the international migration of highly skilled professionals, such as surgeons, doctors, scientists, and engineers, from low-income countries to more advanced economies, particularly the United States. This migration is driven by the excess of trained graduates in less developed countries, salary differences, and disparities in research opportunities, which have enriched the human capital stocks of developed nations (Rutherford, 1992).

Black (1997) defines Brain Drain as a term with negative connotations describing the tendency of talented individuals to move from poorer countries to wealthier ones in search of employment. This migration can occur when wealthier countries offer higher salaries for similar skills needed in poorer countries or when employment opportunities are limited or nonexistent due to technical and economic backwardness. The encouragement of Brain Drain might result from poor countries filling high-quality positions based on family ties, political influence, and corruption, whereas wealthier countries tend to fill positions more meritocratically (Black, 1997).

According to Kaya (2003), Brain Drain refers to the phenomenon where high-quality, productive, and professional labor leaves their home countries during their most productive period and does not return. This phenomenon is particularly significant for developing countries, as the well-being of a society is directly proportional to its ability to produce science and technology. High levels of Brain Drain can potentially increase a country's prosperity, as advanced education and skills gained abroad often remain underutilized if these individuals perceive limited opportunities in their home countries. Returnees may also face potential unemployment due to mismatches between local labor demands and their acquired skills (Kaya, 2009, p. 14).

Brain Drain can be categorized into internal and external migration. External migration generally refers to

the movement of highly educated, qualified, specialized, and skilled labor from developed countries to less developed or developing countries. This type of migration is often seen as a passive phenomenon impacting the economic and social development of the originating country. While Brain Drain can occur between developed and industrialized countries, it is commonly observed as a flow from less developed to more developed nations (Şimşek, 2006, p. 82).

Geographic mobility offers various options for individuals to change their living and working locations, including short-term international visits, long-term stays, and permanent relocations. This diversity shapes the experiences of highly qualified individuals while also bringing about various outcomes due to different cultural, social, and economic interactions. High-skilled individuals participating in such forms of geographic mobility may experience significant personal and societal impacts. Therefore, the geographic mobility of qualified individuals is a complex phenomenon with significant implications for both source and destination countries. A 1997 OECD report describes two main outcomes of this mobility: Brain Exchange and Brain Waste (Mahroum, 2000, p. 24).

"Brain Exchange" refers to a two-way flow of highly skilled labor between a sending and receiving country. When this flow is predominantly in one direction, terms such as "Brain Gain" or "Brain Drain" are used. Another term, "Brain Waste," describes the situation where highly skilled workers are employed in fields unrelated to their previous skills and experience, leading to a waste of their expertise (Giannoccolo, 2004, p. 4). Additionally, "Brain Circulation" refers to the phenomenon where individuals study or work abroad and then return to their home countries, utilizing the experience gained abroad to secure better employment conditions (National Interest, 2012, p. 9). Furthermore, "Brain Return" is an integral part of the Brain Drain discussion. Notably, Glaser (1978) highlights that there is a strong commitment among expatriate professionals to return to their home countries. Many individuals, despite initially planning to stay abroad for a shorter period, eventually return to their homeland (Glaser & Habers, 1978).

The migration decisions of skilled labor involve push and pull factors based on the conditions of the home country. While these factors vary across different countries, push factors are generally categorized into four main areas:

1. Financial issues and economic instability caused by inadequate salaries.
2. Insufficient emphasis on science and technology in developing countries leading to inadequate professional working conditions.
3. Employment shortages and unemployment in professions held by skilled labor.
4. Political instability, conflicts, and ethnic-based discriminatory practices in developing countries.

Developed countries attract highly skilled workers by offering favorable working conditions, career opportunities, and competitive salaries (Toksöz, 2006, p. 226).

3. Research Model

The research model defines the fundamental design and methodology of a study, outlining how the research will be conducted and which methods will be used. This concept provides a framework for planning and directing a study, incorporating methodological approaches, data collection techniques, sampling strategies, data analysis methods, and the presentation of results. Additionally, it aims to ensure the validity, reliability, and internal consistency of the research. Research models can vary based on the study's purpose, objectives, and the characteristics of the field of study, with quantitative, qualitative, or mixed methodologies being potential approaches (Punch, 2011). For this study, which aims to examine the causes of brain drain in Georgia, a qualitative method was chosen to obtain more robust and clear results.

The study focuses on Georgian high-skilled migrants who have emigrated abroad. To gain a profound understanding of the phenomenon of brain drain, qualitative research techniques were employed. Some notable advantages of qualitative research methods in this context include the ability to address variability,

examine controversial topics, and incorporate a range of methodologies and techniques. Hence, the qualitative paradigm encompasses a diverse array of approaches (Punch, 201, p. 132). Particularly in migration studies, qualitative methods are effective in conveying migrant experiences, understanding migration processes, and interpreting them (Turut & Özgür, 2018, p. 160). In this study, in-depth interviews with participants provided detailed insights into their views, experiences, emotional backgrounds, and perceptions regarding brain drain. Thus, a representative sample for evaluating brain drain was incorporated into the study.

The research employed an experimental phenomenological approach to uncover and gain detailed information about the experiences of Georgians experiencing brain drain. Phenomenology is a qualitative research method used to express and describe people's understanding, emotions, perspectives, and perceptions regarding a specific phenomenon or concept (Rose, Beeby & Parker, 1995, p. 1124). Moustakas's (1994) transcendental or psychological phenomenology emphasizes the description of participants' experiences over the researcher's interpretations. Consequently, the researcher focused on Husserl's concepts of bracketing, aiming to set aside personal biases and avoid preconceptions about participants' narratives (Creswell, 2013, p. 80). In this framework, the experiences of participants were interpreted from their perspectives.

3.1 Study Group

This study explores the brain drain phenomenon among highly skilled Georgian citizens, focusing on the factors influencing their decisions to emigrate and their migration experiences. Using purposive sampling, participants were selected based on their Georgian citizenship, possession of at least a bachelor's degree, and intention to work in mentally intensive, white-collar positions abroad. Snowball sampling expanded the participant group, and collaboration with the Georgian Migration Commission and the International Organization for Migration's Georgia branch supported participant recruitment. Digital platforms, including social media and online newspapers, further facilitated this process.

The study involved 32 participants, comprising 15 women and 17 men, aged 22 to 60, residing in countries such as Poland, Denmark, the USA, the United Kingdom, Lithuania, Austria, Germany, Spain, Malta, Sweden, the Netherlands, Ireland, Belgium, and the Czech Republic. Although gender balance and country representation were not pre-set, the researcher sought a diverse and broad sample to examine the effects of brain drain comprehensively.

Table 1.
Distribution of High-Skilled Georgian Migrants by Country of Residence

Country of Residence	Number of Participants	Country of Residence	Number of Participants
Netherlands	6	Denmark	1
Poland	6	Sweden	1
United Kingdom	4	Malta	1
Germany	3	Ireland	1
USA	3	Belgium	1
Spain	2	Czech Republic	1
Austria	1	Lithuania	1

Data collection was conducted through semi-structured interviews held via Zoom between August and

September 2023. Zoom was selected for its suitability and accessibility, accommodating geographical differences and time constraints. Of the 32 participants, 22 opted for video interviews, while 10 preferred audio-only. The flexibility of Zoom allowed participants to choose whether to turn on their cameras, fostering a comfortable communication environment. The researcher found that video interviews encouraged more intimate interaction, enhancing the quality of the data.

Participants were motivated by their interest in the research and their willingness to contribute. Many expressed eagerness to receive the final version of the study. The interviews were productive, with participants providing fluent and clear responses. Data collection concluded when saturation was reached, with strong collaboration and engagement from participants throughout the research process.

3.2 Data Collection

A semi-structured interview form was selected for data collection to provide both structure and flexibility, allowing participants to respond freely while addressing key research topics. This method enabled the researcher to gather specific data while encouraging participants to share personal experiences, contributing to a more in-depth exploration of brain drain. The interview form consisted of six sections and 63 questions, carefully designed to cover diverse aspects of the study.

The first section collected demographic data, offering insights into participants' personal characteristics and living conditions. The second section explored participants' identities, migration processes, and reasons for migration. The third section focused on participants' educational backgrounds and professional experiences prior to migration, examining how these factors influenced their decisions. The fourth section investigated the decision-making process, reasons for choosing a destination, and pre-migration preparations. The fifth section detailed migration experiences, adaptation, job search, working conditions, and social integration. The final section explored the impact of brain drain on Georgian citizens and the participants' reflections on their experiences.

Interviews, conducted in Georgian and translated into Turkish for analysis, lasted between 45 minutes and 1 hour 57 minutes. No participants expressed dissatisfaction with the length, and many found the experience therapeutic, as it allowed them to articulate challenges they faced. The variation in interview duration appeared related to individual personalities, with women generally providing longer, more emotional responses, while men tended to offer shorter, more concise answers. Participants were informed of their right to withdraw, and confidentiality was strictly maintained throughout the process. This method enhanced the overall quality of the research by capturing rich, detailed data while ensuring participant comfort and ethical standards.

3.3 Data Analysis

Initially, the researcher maintained field notes to systematically record observational data during interviews. This approach helped document participants' responses and relate them to the study's core concepts and theoretical framework, aiming to prevent data loss and ensure organized documentation of the research process.

Audio recordings from the interviews were transcribed into written texts using Microsoft Word, with significant portions translated from Georgian to Turkish. The transcription process preserved participants' statements accurately and facilitated further analysis. The written texts were then categorized into separate files based on the interview questions.

In the fieldwork phase, data from semi-structured in-depth interviews were first coded and categorized, followed by analysis. Data collection was directly managed by the researcher, who also handled the data

analysis. The analysis involved defining overarching themes and sub-themes to allow for a systematic examination of the data and better understanding of patterns. This step was followed by further analysis and interpretation of the findings. This method contributed to a deeper and more comprehensive examination of the research data.

4. Analysis of Migration Trends Among Highly Skilled Georgian Professionals

The analysis of migration trends among highly skilled Georgian professionals reveals a complex interplay of economic, educational, and personal factors influencing their decision to relocate abroad. This section synthesizes the demographic and occupational data collected from 32 participants to understand the motivations and implications of their migration experiences.

4.1 Demographic Overview

The participants' demographic characteristics illustrate a diverse group primarily consisting of young adults in their prime career-building years. With ages ranging from 22 to 60, the majority are concentrated between 22 and 36 years old. This age group represents a period when professionals are often establishing or advancing their careers, which significantly influences their migration decisions.

Table 2.

Distribution of High-Skilled Georgian Migrants by Age

Age	Number of Participants	Age	Number of Participants	Age	Number of Participants
22	2	29	2	35	7
23	2	30	1	36	1
24	2	31	1	60	1
26	3	32	1		
27	3	33	2		
28	2	34	1		

Gender distribution shows a slightly higher number of male participants (17) compared to female participants (15). Marital status further impacts migration decisions, with 22 participants being single and 10 married. Among the married participants, the presence of foreign spouses or partners significantly contributes to the decision to stay in the host countries.

Table 3.

Distribution of High-Skilled Georgian Migrants by Gender

Gender	Number of Participants
Female	15
Male	17

Table 4.

Distribution of High-Skilled Georgian Migrants by Marital Status

Marital Status	Number of Participantrs
Single	22
Married	10

Geographically, participants hail from various parts of Georgia, with a significant concentration from Tbilisi, highlighting the centralization of higher education and job opportunities in the capital.

4.2. Analysis of Factors Affecting the Decision to Migrate from Georgia

Migration decisions among highly skilled Georgian expatriates are influenced by a multitude of factors. These range from pursuing educational opportunities and marriage to seeking better job prospects. In this section, a detailed analysis will categorize these migration drivers into three primary factors: education, marriage, and job opportunities. Despite individual variations, a common consensus among the 32 participants underscores several fundamental reasons behind their migration decisions:

- Pursuit of improved living conditions,
- Desire for a fair salary,
- Achievement of work-life balance,
- Instability of the economic and political environment in Georgia.

This section aims to offer a comprehensive evaluation of these primary reasons, with a focus on three key categories:

4.2.1 Marriage

Marriage is considered one of the most influential and significant factors affecting an individual's life, future, and goals. Upon marriage, individuals often align their plans, objectives, and aspirations with the dynamics of their partnership. This effect is particularly pronounced for those with families, as their considerations extend beyond their personal future to include the well-being of their spouse and children. Consequently, personal goals may be secondary to family-related priorities.

Conversely, single highly skilled individuals typically seek better opportunities abroad, making the decision to return to their home country easier compared to their married counterparts, for whom returning may be more complex and long-term.

The research indicates that the presence of a spouse or partner is a crucial determinant in the decision to remain in the host country for Georgian expatriates. For example, participant K1 and K9, who married foreign nationals, noted that their partners' citizenship significantly impacted their future plans.

Participant K1's decision to remain in Poland, originally motivated by an Erasmus+ volunteer project, was ultimately influenced by marrying a Polish national, shifting his plan from returning to Georgia. Similarly, Participant K10's relocation to Lithuania was driven by his Lithuanian spouse's preferences, illustrating how marital ties can dictate migration patterns.

The presence of a foreign spouse or partner often leads to a reassessment of one's migration trajectory, with many participants expressing reluctance to return to Georgia due to their partners' nationalities. For instance:

- Participant K2, who initially intended to return to Georgia, changed his plans after establishing a relationship with a Hong Kong national living in Denmark.

- Participant K22 and K26 also highlighted how their relationships with foreign partners have solidified their decision to remain in their current countries.

In essence, the presence of a foreign partner or spouse often outweighs ties to family, community, or home country, leading expatriates to prioritize their personal circumstances over returning to their country of origin.

4.2.2 Education

Access to quality education is a significant factor influencing the decision to migrate from Georgia. Many highly skilled Georgians initially left their country to pursue advanced education in Europe. While some planned to return to Georgia after completing their studies, many experienced a shift in their intentions after acclimating to the living conditions and educational standards abroad.

Participants frequently noted that the education systems in their host countries offered higher standards compared to those in Georgia. For instance:

- Participant K10 compared the rigorous and practical approach of education in London to the more theoretical and less interactive system in Georgia.
- Participant K24 described a transition from a less practical education system in Georgia to highly specialized and rigorous academic environments in Edinburgh and London, emphasizing the disparity in educational quality.
- Participant K11 highlighted the practical training and resources available at Vienna University of Technology compared to the theoretical focus of Tbilisi Technical University.

A recurrent issue among participants was the inability to translate theoretical knowledge into practical application, a common criticism of the Georgian education system. The lack of practical training and internship opportunities was seen as a significant drawback, affecting employability and career development.

In summary, the decision to migrate for educational purposes often results in a reassessment of one's return plans due to the superior quality of education and career opportunities available abroad.

4.2.3 Job Opportunities

Job opportunities represent a critical motivator for migration. Initially, the urge to move abroad might stem from educational or marital reasons; however, the desire to secure a high-quality job becomes a central factor in the decision to remain in a foreign country.

Participants expressed that finding a suitable position aligned with their skills and qualifications was a primary factor in their decision to stay abroad. Job dissatisfaction, inadequate salaries, and poor working conditions in Georgia were cited as reasons for seeking better opportunities elsewhere.

- Participant K3 and K25 described their pursuit of international job opportunities as a significant driver behind their migration decisions. The desire to work in global companies and gain international experience was a key motivator.
- Political instability and dissatisfaction with economic conditions in Georgia further influenced their decisions. For instance, Participant K32 cited political shifts towards Russia and the resulting instability as factors that drove him to seek a more stable environment.

- Additionally, societal issues such as gender-based salary disparities were highlighted by Participant K13, who noted the difficulties faced by women in Georgia, which further influenced their decision to relocate.

In conclusion, the combination of better job prospects, superior working conditions, and a more stable environment often outweighs the connection to one's home country, leading highly skilled Georgians to opt for permanent residence in their host countries.

5. Labor Market Challenges and Migration Decisions of Skilled Georgian Migrants

Georgia's economic development process can be analyzed through the lens of neoclassical economic theory, which posits that migration is primarily driven by differences in labor returns. The fundamental model articulated in the works of Hicks (1932), Lewis (1954), and Harris and Todaro (1970) emphasizes that migration results from actual wage differentials across markets or countries (Bozkaya et al., 2022, p. 179).

In the context of Georgia, factors such as living conditions, work environment, wage levels, and workplace relationships have prompted the migration of skilled labor to welfare states. Georgia's low wage levels have created a conducive environment for the emigration of skilled labor. While this contributes to the skilled labor force in welfare states, it simultaneously weakens Georgia economically and in terms of labor force. As inequality increases, Georgia becomes poorer, while welfare states grow wealthier. From the perspective of the core-periphery approach, migration is seen not as a mechanism for modernization and development but as a process where labor resources from migrant-sending countries are utilized for the benefit of developed countries, adversely affecting the socio-economic development of developing countries. According to Wallerstein's theoretical approach, these processes are closely tied to the phenomenon of colonialism.

Migration perpetuates unequal development and the exploitation of resources from poor countries, further enriching the wealthy (Güllüpinar, 2012, p. 67). However, there is a positive aspect to this for Georgia. Skilled labor migrants can financially support their families back home or invest in Georgia, thus contributing economically. For instance, among the 32 participants interviewed in this study, most have accumulated savings after leaving Georgia and acquired property in Georgia. This indicates that migration can be viewed not only in terms of its negative impacts but also as a reflection of resource transfer between countries. Nonetheless, the positive effects of brain drain, such as financial remittances, technology transfer, investments, or trade, may not provide sufficient returns, leading to adverse economic and social impacts in Georgia. When the positive effects of migration do not create a balancing effect, the result can be seen as a brain drain problem, highlighting potential issues arising from the inability to effectively utilize resources and knowledge within the country.

The high-skilled Georgian migrants participating in the study evaluated the challenges in the Georgian labor market as follows:

" There are many issues in Georgia's job market, such as protectionism, favoritism, low wages, and poor working conditions. Despite working overtime, no extra pay is provided, and employers often have a "take it or leave it" attitude." (K2, In-depth Interview, 2023)

" Unfair wages are a major issue in Georgia. There is no system to protect workers' rights like in Sweden. There's also a significant gap in salaries between senior and junior managers, which I believe is unfair." (Participant K24, In-depth Interview, 2023)

" It's not hard to find a job in my field in Georgia, but salaries are very low. My current company values employees by promoting healthy living and offering benefits. I don't think similar practices exist or will exist soon in Georgia." (Participant K28, In-depth Interview, 2023)

"The main issues in Georgia's job sector are low wages, disorder, mandatory overtime, lack of work-life balance, and challenges in career development." (Participant K31, In-depth Interview, 2023)

The decision of high-skilled Georgian migrants to migrate, after evaluating the challenges in Georgia's labor market, can be understood by focusing on the micro theory of neoclassical economics. According to the neoclassical economic perspective, the decision to migrate is closely related to an individual's preferences and financial situation. Individuals may decide to migrate to shape their future and improve their economic status. This concept is based on the micro theory of neoclassical economics articulated by Sjaastad, Borjas, and Todaro.

A case highlighted in the study can be summarized based on the statements of several participants:

"I recognized a structural problem in Georgia, and since I can't solve it, leaving was the best option for my future." (Participant K24, In-depth Interview, 2023)

"I could earn the same salary in Georgia as I do in Poland, but the work here is genuinely interesting. I can develop, advance my career, learn new things, and pursue a better future." (Participant K3, In-depth Interview, 2023)

These statements indicate that individuals aim to shape their future and that economic issues are significant factors influencing their decision to migrate. According to the micro theory of neoclassical economics by Sjaastad, Borjas, and Todaro, individuals make cost-benefit calculations when deciding to migrate. High-skilled individuals may migrate to places where they can achieve better economic opportunities and earnings. These migration decisions can be seen as strategies for individuals to invest in their human capital (Abadan-Unat, 2006, p. 23). Thus, individuals may decide to migrate to maximize their potential and strengthen their future.

In conclusion, the labor market challenges in Georgia lead individuals to make migration decisions in line with their desire to shape their future and improve their economic situation. The responses of skilled Georgian migrants regarding the work environment and conditions in Georgia, when evaluated from a nationalist model perspective, emphasize that it is not enough to merely train skilled labor; it is also critical to retain and effectively utilize these skilled individuals within the country. However, the lack of appropriate conditions and the presence of other attractive centers indicate that skilled labor tends to seek better opportunities for their future.

Therefore, the tendency of skilled labor to leave Georgia instead of staying reflects not only individual preferences but also the structural issues in the labor market. This situation shows that skilled labor, in an environment where it is not effectively evaluated and utilized, is motivated to seek better opportunities.

6. Navigating Conservative Norms: The Challenges of Highly Skilled Georgian Migrants in Pursuit of Personal and Professional Ambitions

Society is a structure defined by rules and norms that regulate individuals' behaviors. Individuals bear the responsibility to adapt to this social order. From Emile Durkheim's perspective, just as our bodies are nourished by external food, our mental organization is also nourished by thoughts, feelings, and experiences derived from society (Durkheim, 2004, p. 76). This metaphor illustrates how an individual's mental processes are shaped by societal interactions.

In Georgia, the widespread adoption of conservative thought serves as a determinant of the society's core moral values, deeply influencing various structures within the country. This brings about the necessity for individuals to conform to these moral values and the pressure to integrate into societal norms. In line with

Emile Durkheim's explanation, moral values fulfill the need to be part of a group and contribute to the formation of an individual's identity (Durkheim, 2004). However, this effort to conform to norms brings challenges for individuals living in a conservative society. For instance, highly skilled individuals may find their career goals and personal ambitions constrained by these norms. In Georgia, conservative societies often emphasize marriage and family formation, leading to the perception of a woman in her thirties being unmarried as a societal failure. Individuals under such circumstances may struggle to achieve their unique goals due to societal expectations.

Living under conservative norms, individuals often feel compelled to live according to societal expectations rather than their own desires, leading to adverse effects such as the restriction of personal freedoms and the fear of exclusion. This situation fosters a constant concern about others' opinions and the need to account for their actions, thereby limiting individual freedoms. Under conservative social dynamics, fighting for one's own path and goals often becomes complex due to the necessity of conforming to societal norms. In this context, the decision to move away from one's homeland may be influenced by the value changes within the migrated community. Changing the moral values of a society is a complex process that occurs within an intricate network of interactions and requires the integration of effective strategies across political, economic, social, and educational fields. In other words, altering a society's moral values is a long-term and challenging process. Thus, migration and living in a desired society can be a solution.

Based on the in-depth interviews conducted for this research, it is evident that the moral values, views, and lifestyles of highly skilled Georgian migrants have become misaligned with the values of the society they grew up in. Initially, this misalignment might not have been a prominent factor determining the reasons for migration. However, over time, as they adopted the values of the societies they lived in, their sense of meaning and attachment to their homeland (Georgia) became restricted to a limited perspective involving only family and friends residing there. For skilled migrants, living within a conservative society often presents a challenging experience. These well-educated individuals, who possess foreign language skills and an international outlook, may encounter obstacles in achieving their career goals and personal ambitions under conservative norms. As a result, highly skilled labor from less developed and traditionally inclined countries, such as Georgia, tends to be more inclined to migrate.

7. The Impact of Georgian-Russian Political Tensions on Skilled Migration

For those who are not Georgian citizens or do not live in Georgia, understanding the political tensions between Georgia and Russia can be quite challenging. To grasp how the decision to emigrate from Georgia may be influenced by this situation, a brief historical overview is necessary. This section aims to provide an objective evaluation based on historical events and the perspectives of individuals involved in the research.

The political tension between Georgia and Russia has deep historical roots and reflects a complex series of relationships. This tension, which began before the Soviet era, became particularly pronounced in 1921 when Soviet Russia annexed Georgia. The years under Soviet rule were marked by Georgia's struggles for independence and efforts to preserve its cultural identity.

Following the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991, Georgia regained its independence but faced internal ethnic tensions and separatist movements. One significant event during this period was the Abkhazian War, which took place between 1992 and 1993, resulting in conflict between Georgia and the Abkhazia region. Russia intervened in the conflict by supporting Abkhazia's declaration of independence and providing military aid. This intervention escalated the conflict and led to Abkhazia's de facto independence, although it remains unrecognized internationally. Russia's influence in the region increased, becoming a central element of the tension between Georgia and Russia.

The 2008 Russia-Georgian War began with Georgia's attempt to intervene in the separatist movement in

South Ossetia, leading to a Russian invasion of Georgia. Russia's extensive military operations affected civilian areas, including settlements near Tbilisi. An international mediation resulted in a ceasefire on August 12, 2008. However, as a consequence of the war, Georgia lost control over Abkhazia and South Ossetia. While Russia recognized the independence of these regions, many other countries did not, exacerbating Georgia's territorial integrity issues and increasing tension in Georgian-Russian relations. Following these conflicts, Georgia's efforts to integrate with NATO and the EU accelerated its alignment with the West but negatively impacted its relations with Russia. Georgia's strategic location and potential influence on regional balance reflect a complex interplay of historical, ethnic, and strategic factors.

Georgia's efforts towards Western integration have promoted democratization and economic reforms. However, Russia's regional influence, particularly its sensitivity to Georgia's Western relations, has caused tension. The political tension between Georgia and Russia involves deep-rooted issues and the complex interaction of ethnic and strategic factors.

In conclusion, the political tension between Georgia and Russia is a multi-layered reflection of regional balances, energy policies, and historical conflicts. This situation underscores the complexity and sensitivity of relations between the two countries, necessitating a challenging diplomatic process for resolution.

After presenting a brief history of the political tension between Georgia and Russia, this paper examines why this tension persists and how it drives skilled Georgians to emigrate. According to the assessments of skilled Georgian migrants participating in the research, the primary reason for their inclination to emigrate is the current Georgian government's 'pro-Russian' policy. These individuals criticize the country's tendency to lean towards Russia despite various historical conflicts and emphasize their reluctance to live in Georgia under such policies.

The 2023 Georgian protests are an event that almost all participants noted as negatively affecting their decision to return to Georgia. These protests occurred against the proposed "Law on Transparency of Foreign Influence," which included regulations requiring civil society organizations receiving foreign funding above a certain threshold to register as "foreign influence agents." The backdrop of this event includes Georgia's EU membership process, the impact of the Russia-Ukraine War, and the European Parliament's accusations against the Georgian government concerning press freedom. Concerns about the potential negative impact on Georgia's EU membership candidacy if such a law were adopted were also prominent. The protests resulted in the withdrawal of the bill by the parliament on March 10, 2023.

Despite the withdrawal of the law, interviewees consider the government's contemplation of such regulations and the potential acceptance of this law if the Georgian people do not oppose it as unacceptable. They express that such a situation could have serious adverse effects on the country's future. The political tension between Georgia and Russia, especially the March 2023 protest events, are cited as one of the main reasons for their decision to refrain from returning to Georgia, highlighting the uncertain future of the country.

8. The Dynamics of Georgia's Diaspora Relations: Leveraging the Potential of Skilled Migrants for National Development

This research explores the relationship between the Georgian government and the Georgian diaspora through the lens of migration network theory and transnational migration theory. Diasporas play a crucial role in contemporary migration dynamics, significantly contributing to their home countries' economic and social spheres. This study emphasizes the potential of diasporas and their contributions to national development.

A particular focus is placed on how highly skilled labor can contribute to national development through their skills and experiences. These contributions may include consultancy services, experience sharing, seeking advice, and actively participating in significant national projects. Such interactions can enhance the

integration of the diaspora into their home countries and strengthen inter-country interactions, leading to enriching cultural and economic outcomes. Based on in-depth interviews, the researcher will thoroughly evaluate Georgia's diaspora policies, their implementation processes, and the interaction dynamics with the diaspora.

Arango (2000) defines migration networks as "individual relationship networks" that connect migrants with relatives, friends, or compatriots back home, facilitating support through various means such as information transfer, financial assistance, employment opportunities, and accommodation. These networks reduce the costs and risks associated with migration, thereby increasing the expected net returns of migration (Massey et al., 1993). This concept provides a critical framework for understanding how migrants leverage social capital resources and the significant role these networks play in the migration process.

Mastery of the language and national identity of the destination country does not necessarily make the migration experience straightforward. Migrants often face bureaucratic processes, paperwork, and local legal regulations, which can be complex and uncertain for non-citizens. Here, the importance of diasporas becomes evident. Traditionally, the term diaspora referred to groups forcibly dispersed from their homeland, but it now encompasses voluntary migrations, economically motivated migrations, and communities spread through trade (Baubök et al., 2010, p. 12). Diasporas can provide local knowledge and support networks for migrants. Through connections within the diaspora, migrants can access information, manage bureaucratic processes more effectively, and better adapt to local legal regulations. Hence, diasporas can help individuals feel more at ease, comfortable, and secure in their new country. This support at the micro-level of daily experiences underscores the broader significance of diasporas for individual migrants and society at large.

The study indicates that diaspora relations are crucial for both individuals and their home countries. This research, focusing on the Georgian case, aims to understand how a developing country like Georgia manages its relationship with skilled migrants and leverages their potential for national development. The responses of skilled Georgian migrants participating in the study are presented below:

"The experiences and skills of qualified Georgian labor abroad could greatly benefit Georgia. Embassies and consulates play a crucial role in this. For instance, the Georgian Embassy in the Netherlands lacks contact with local migrants. I only know someone at the embassy; otherwise, I would have no interaction." (Participant K26, In-depth Interview, 2023)

"I wish Georgia utilized the skills of qualified migrants. Currently, Georgia does nothing in this regard. At the very least, embassies could communicate better. Some officials from Tbilisi don't even know the local language. Many qualified Georgian migrants in Spain speak Spanish; Georgia could utilize them. Without my connections at the embassy, they wouldn't even know I exist." (Participant K29, In-depth Interview, 2023)

"You can be part of the Georgian diaspora abroad and still help your homeland. Unfortunately, the Georgian government doesn't engage with skilled migrants or leverage their skills for development. For instance, the Armenian diaspora significantly contributes to Armenia's growth, which is very effective." (Participant K27, In-depth Interview, 2023)

The participants indicate that Georgia lacks any official policy regarding the Georgian diaspora. However, they perceive the diaspora as a critical, powerful, and advantageous resource for national development. If skilled labor is forced to leave their country due to inadequate conditions, the most effective approach would be to engage them by utilizing their achievements, skills, and qualifications to strengthen their ties to their homeland. According to the respondents, this approach could be applicable to skilled Georgian migrants. However, they state that no one has contacted them or made such an offer to date.

Understanding why a developing country would not leverage the qualifications of its skilled migrants, or seek their advice and expertise, is critical for national development and progress. Every country invests in educating and training its highly skilled individuals, which constitutes a form of investment. However, why would a country allow these skilled individuals to move abroad and offer their skills to another country? Understanding this fundamental issue is crucial for national development. The researcher, along with participants, has sought answers to these questions and tried to understand the underlying reasons. The responses indicate that the issue lies within the social structure.

"In Georgia, my field is underdeveloped, with very few sociologists and academics. Despite my 13 years of experience and education from successful universities, no one seeks my advice. They struggle to acknowledge my expertise, as it would require admitting I'm more knowledgeable than them. For instance, while teaching at a university, someone dismissed my authority, saying, 'What can this kid teach us?' This attitude contributed to my decision to stop teaching. Ultimately, there's a structural problem in Georgia; educated individuals are not consulted, and it feels like the system pushes them to leave the country." (Participant K24, In-depth Interview, 2023)

Some participants emphasize that the Georgian government's efforts to retain skilled labor in the country are insufficient. They note that, on the contrary, the government seems to encourage skilled individuals to leave. This situation is perceived as advantageous because an uneducated and unskilled population is easier to govern. Skilled labor is typically aware of their rights and unwilling to accept low-paying jobs, understanding their value and deserving fair compensation. In this context, the government may adopt a strategy to send skilled labor away, viewing it as an advantage for easier governance and avoiding issues related to favoritism.

Conclusion

This study aims to understand the migration decisions of highly skilled Georgian migrants who have left their home country for welfare states, focusing on the factors influencing their choice of destination and their migration experiences. Through qualitative research methods, particularly in-depth interviews, the study sheds light on how and why skilled labor from Georgia seeks opportunities abroad (Turut & Özgür, 2018, p. 160). The findings demonstrate that factors such as living conditions, work environments, salary levels, and workplace relationships play a significant role in driving skilled labor out of Georgia, where they are often dissatisfied with the job market.

Georgia's low salary levels are a particularly pressing issue, as they push skilled workers to seek employment in more developed countries, contributing to a brain drain. This outflow of skilled labor creates a paradox: while welfare countries benefit from the expertise of these migrants, Georgia faces economic deficiencies, workforce shortages, and widening inequalities. The interviewees expressed clear dissatisfaction with the Georgian job market, citing poor working conditions, inadequate compensation, strained relationships between supervisors and subordinates, and a lack of organizations to protect workers' rights. These structural problems in the labor market are among the primary reasons highly skilled individuals choose to leave.

This research is grounded in the microeconomic theory of neoclassical economics, which posits that migration decisions are influenced by individual preferences and financial considerations. According to this theory, migrants make rational choices to improve their future economic situation (Sjaastad, Borjas, Todaro). For Georgian skilled labor, the desire to shape a better future and secure a more stable economic outlook is central to their decision to migrate. The data from interviews support this notion, revealing that these individuals prioritize their long-term career and financial prospects when deciding to emigrate.

Additionally, the findings indicate that skilled migrants' decisions to leave Georgia are not solely based on individual preferences, but are also shaped by structural issues within the country's job market. The inability of the Georgian economy to fully utilize the potential of its skilled labor pool drives many individuals to seek better opportunities abroad. This problem is compounded by conservative social norms in Georgia, which often restrict personal freedoms and make it difficult for individuals to pursue their personal and professional goals.

Conservative societal dynamics in Georgia, as noted by many participants, are another significant factor in the decision to migrate. In Georgia, traditional norms and societal expectations can create a restrictive environment where personal freedoms are limited. Many migrants mentioned that they felt pressure to conform to social expectations rather than pursue their own desires. This feeling of restriction is particularly evident among highly skilled individuals who, due to their international outlook and education, often struggle to reconcile their personal ambitions with conservative societal values. As a result, migration becomes an attractive option for those seeking greater autonomy and freedom to achieve their goals.

Moreover, the study highlights the evolving values of high-skilled Georgian migrants, who often find their views and lifestyles diverging from those of the society they left behind. Although this divergence may not initially drive migration decisions, it becomes more apparent over time as migrants adjust to the values of their new countries. The inconsistency between the values of Georgian society and those of high-skilled migrants contributes to the latter's reluctance to return to Georgia, particularly when faced with conservative social norms.

Political factors also play a critical role in influencing the migration decisions of Georgian high-skilled labor. Many participants expressed dissatisfaction with the Georgian government's perceived "pro-Russian" stance, a policy they believe contradicts the country's historical conflicts with Russia. This dissatisfaction was particularly evident during the 2023 protests against the proposed "Foreign Influence Transparency Law." Skilled migrants saw this law as a threat to Georgia's democratic institutions and EU membership prospects. Although the law was eventually withdrawn, the idea that it could be reintroduced remains a source of concern for many. The political tension between Georgia and Russia, as well as the fear of losing democratic gains, are significant reasons why many high-skilled migrants are hesitant to return to Georgia.

Additionally, the lack of a cohesive policy towards the Georgian diaspora exacerbates this reluctance. Many participants noted that despite the diaspora's potential to contribute to the country's development, there has been little effort by the Georgian government to engage with skilled migrants abroad. This lack of outreach and recognition diminishes the prospects of these individuals returning to their homeland. Participants also pointed to the Georgian government's apparent inability or unwillingness to retain skilled labor within the country. They suggested that current policies may even encourage emigration, as an unskilled workforce is easier to govern. Skilled workers, who are more aware of their rights, are less likely to accept low-paying jobs or tolerate workplace injustices, which might present challenges to the government's control over the workforce.

Initially, the research assumed that the primary reasons for skilled labor migration from Georgia were related to economic and political instability. However, the interviews revealed that societal factors, particularly the conservative nature of Georgian society, also play a significant role in migration decisions. Despite their Georgian heritage, many migrants indicated that the social dynamics of their home country were a primary reason for not wanting to return. The traditional values that dominate Georgian society often conflict with the more progressive, internationally-oriented perspectives of highly skilled individuals.

The study also confirmed that Georgia's labor market is insufficiently developed to meet the needs of skilled workers. Poor job opportunities, low wages, and the lack of effective organizations to protect workers' rights

further drive the decision to migrate. Nepotism within the Georgian labor market was another issue frequently raised by participants, who expressed frustration over the difficulty of finding employment based on merit rather than personal connections. This lack of fair opportunities forces skilled labor to seek better conditions abroad, where their qualifications and expertise are more highly valued.

In conclusion, the findings of this study underscore the multifaceted nature of skilled labor migration from Georgia. While economic factors, such as low salaries and poor working conditions, are primary drivers of migration, societal and political factors also play an important role. The restrictive nature of Georgian society, coupled with political instability and inadequate labor market conditions, create an environment where highly skilled individuals feel compelled to leave in search of better opportunities. The study highlights the need for Georgia to address these structural issues if it hopes to retain its skilled workforce and prevent further brain drain. Engaging with the Georgian diaspora, improving job market conditions, and fostering a more inclusive, forward-thinking society are essential steps towards mitigating the negative impacts of brain drain on the country's development.

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Araştırma ve Yayın Etiği Beyanı

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