

Values and Beliefs of Young Georgian Migrants in Germany: Do These Change and How?

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This paper explores the values and beliefs of young Georgian migrants (aged 18 to 29) who emigrated from Georgia to Berlin. Based on 30 qualitative in-depth interviews, the study examines how migration experiences have influenced and potentially reshaped the values and beliefs of young Georgians. Reflecting on their lives and experiences post-migration and the differences they observed between living in Georgia and living in Germany, the participants revealed which values are important to them and which have changed following migration. Based on the inductive thematic coding of qualitative interviews using NVivo software, the study findings suggest that young Georgian migrants tend to adopt more individualistic values associated with personal independence and space, freedom, self-exploration and a deeper understanding of their identities and preferences. Empathy, tolerance towards diverse groups and openness to new opportunities and ideas also emerged as significant values. The findings raise an important question: Did young migrants already possess these individualistic values before migrating, which then flourished in a more supportive environment, or are we witnessing a transformation from a more collectivistic value system to a relatively individualistic one, as reported by the study participants?

Keywords: youth values, value change, value disclosure, young migrants, Georgian migrants

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Introduction

This paper explores the values of young Georgian migrants aged 18 to 29 who left Georgia and have been living in Berlin, Germany, for more than six months. The findings presented here are part of a larger study that aimed to explore the values and beliefs of young Georgian migrants. Based on 30 qualitative face-to-face in-depth interviews conducted with young respondents in Berlin, the study covers a number of topics, asking participants to reflect on their values in relation to family, parenting, marriage and intimate relations, friendships and interpersonal relations, professional life and work, education, leisure, spirituality, self-care and citizenship. This paper presents part of this broader study and addresses the following research questions:

RQ1. What are the values and beliefs of young Georgians who emigrated from Georgia to Berlin?

RQ2. How, if at all, does the experience of migration influence and change the values and beliefs of young Georgians?

To answer these questions, the study focuses on data from qualitative interviews in which participants discussed their lives in Berlin, what they like and dislike there, the differences they observe between living in Georgia and Germany and the changes they experience in their attitudes, values and beliefs. In addition, the paper raises the question of whether migration leads to value change or, rather, reveals previously held or suppressed values. By moving beyond the discussion on change in values or adaptation to new values, the paper develops the concept of 'value disclosure' as opposed to 'value transformation'. It suggests that moving abroad might give people the freedom to express beliefs which they had to suppress in their home country, rather than simply triggering the passive adoption of new host-country values. This distinction is important for understanding whether migration acts as a driver of value transformation or as a context that enables the expression of latent value orientations. Overall, this study contributes to broader debates on value change and individualisation among young migrants from post-socialist societies.

In order to conceptualise values, the study uses a simple definition, portraying values as 'the beliefs people have, especially about what is right and wrong and what is most important in life, that control their behaviour'¹ or, more broadly, as beliefs, norms, principles or standards of behaviour concerning what individuals consider most important in life.

The interviews were conducted during the summer of 2023, the year when the number of Georgian citizens who left Georgia was the highest (163,480) compared to previous years (100,000 or less), according to the National Statistics Office of Georgia (GeoStat). Young people aged 15–29 constituted 28 per cent of the total number of emigrants (GeoStat 2024). Given the high number of young Georgians leaving the country, there is a gap in the social sciences concerning the values, attitudes and perceptions of young Georgians living abroad. This paper contributes to filling this gap by presenting qualitative findings based on interviews with young migrants who talk about their experiences and impressions and are self-assessing the changes in their value orientations.

The paper starts with the theoretical background, followed by a detailed description of the methodology and presentation of the findings, describing the experiences and assessments of young migrants in Berlin. It concludes with a discussion in which the results are interpreted in relation to the existing literature and theoretical perspectives.

Theoretical background

The main and most recent positions and theoretical approaches in the field of value changes following migration have developed significantly in recent decades, integrating insights from sociology, psychology, anthropology and economics. These newer approaches tend to challenge classic assimilation theory (Gordon 1964), which posits that migrants gradually forget about the values and norms of their home culture and become more assimilated into the host culture. This approach, with its seven stages of assimilation (cultural/accluturation, structural, marital, identificational, attitude receptional, behaviour receptional and civic assimilation) has been criticised for being too linear and assuming that all immigrant groups follow the same path. Classic assimilation theory, which talks about the disappearance of ethnic differences and immigrants' full integration into the mainstream society, has also been criticised for ignoring racial and economic barriers, as well as migrants' links with home cultures, which often prevent their full assimilation. While traditional classic assimilation theory provides a useful historical benchmark for understanding structural integration, in the context of Georgian youth in Germany this theory can be criticised for its normative bias. It assumes a 'disappearance of ethnic differences' that rarely occurs in the modern era of hyper-connectivity. For young Georgians, migration can rarely be a 'one-way street' of forgetting; rather, it is a negotiation between old and new 'homes'.

In contrast, segmented assimilation theory (Portes and Zhou 1993) presents a more complex model, stating that the process of integration has different paths, which could result in (1) the successful integration of migrants into the host society (so-called upward assimilation, where an immigrant integrates into the white middle class and adopts its values), (2) integration into low-income groups (so-called downward assimilation with limited economic opportunities) and (3) partially keeping the traditional values while also adapting to the values of the host culture (so-called selective acculturation). However, here the focus is mostly on second-generation immigrants and their economic assimilation, which is not directly relevant for the Georgian–German migration corridor. Many young Georgians in Germany arrive as educational migrants (students or *au pairs*) rather than as permanent settlers (Bogishvili 2025). Thus, the 'segments' they navigate are not just economic but are also defined by legal status and the 'temporariness' of their residence permits.

A more relevant framework for the given study could be transnationalism, which views migration as a two-way process whereby migrants bond with the host society but, at the same time, maintain strong ties with their home society. The authors of this theory, Schiller, Basch and Blanc-Szanton (1992: 19), argue that 'this approach will enable us to observe the migrant experience in process, analyse its origins, monitor changes within it, and see how it affects both country of origin and countries of residence'. Transnationalism claims that migrants have dual belongings and that they affiliate with the home as well as the host cultures and values, living life between two worlds. Many have economic ties with their home societies, sending remittances and influencing economic development in this manner. Others engage in the political and social lives of home cultures. For young Georgians, this is not just about economic remittances but about 'social remittances' (Levitt 1998) – the transfer of ideas, values, and social norms back to Georgia. Bogishvili's (2025) study with Georgian migrants in Germany and their family members left in Georgia shows how migration changes the values and practices of migrants in the destination country and how these changes are transferred to the country of origin to generate new cultural practices. Young Georgian migrants often live 'between two worlds', using technology to remain active in Georgian civil society and political life while navigating German social structures (Khoshtaria 2023). This 'dual belonging' makes cultural frame switching (CFS) (Hong, Morris, Chiu and Benet-

Martínez 2000) particularly relevant, as migrants adjust their behaviour and values depending on whether they are in a German or a Georgian cultural environment.

Among the psychological approaches, John W. Berry's (1997) acculturation theory remains the most operative for this study, though it requires critical updating. Berry's bidimensional acculturation framework brings forward an idea of hybrid identities, when migrants try to keep values from both their home and host cultures. This theory originally explored how migrants adjust to a new culture through different strategies that could result in integration, assimilation, separation or marginalisation, depending on how individuals and communities respond to cultural adaptation. 'Integration' balances keeping the home culture and participating in the host environment, 'assimilation' leans more towards prioritising the host culture and leaving the home culture behind, 'separation' leans more towards keeping the home culture and avoiding the host society, while 'marginalisation' rejects both cultures (Berry 1997). Berry's distinctions provide a useful way to categorise how young Georgians balance heritage and host values.

However, Berry's framework has been critiqued for presenting acculturation as a relatively fixed outcome. Expanding on this, Vladimer Lado Gamsakhurdia (2019) introduces the concept of proculturation, which emphasises that cultural adaptation is a dynamic and creative process. Rather than simply preserving or adopting cultures, migrants actively reconstruct their identities by combining and transforming elements from both contexts. This highlights that hybrid identities are continuously evolving through everyday experiences and social interactions.

Recent studies of Georgian migrants in Germany show that, for youth, integration is not a final state but a daily practice of navigation. Adaptation is influenced by demographic factors such as age and gender (Pirtskhalava 2026), where 'younger respondents often perceive migration as an opportunity and a space for personal growth' (p. 157). Other research on Georgian migrants in Germany suggests that value changes often involve a shift from collective, community-oriented norms toward more individualistic German values, including personal freedom, social justice and attitudes toward gender roles and LGBTQ+ rights (Bogishvili 2024).

Keeping these theories and studies in mind, this paper presents findings from a study in which young migrants talk about their observations and experiences, highlighting their self-perceptions on how their values changed after they migrated.

Methodology

In order to study the values and beliefs of young Georgian migrants, 30 qualitative in-depth interviews were conducted with migrants aged 18 to 29 in Berlin. Berlin was selected as the research site because it is one of the main destinations for young Georgian migrants in Germany and provides a diverse social and cultural environment. During the interviews, respondents discussed their experiences, talked about their lives in the city, what they like and value there, the differences and similarities they observe compared to Georgia and whether (and how) they feel that their views, values and beliefs have changed after spending time in Germany. In contrast to quantitative surveys, which provide brief answers, qualitative interviews generate in-depth information and reveal 'an event or development that we weren't there to see' (Weiss 1995: 9). Therefore, qualitative in-depth interviewing was the most appropriate method for gaining detailed insights into migrants' experiences, their views and whether they observe any changes in their values and beliefs.

While there are different ways to measure values – and scholars such as Milton Rokeach (1973), Geert Hofstede (1984) and Shalom Schwartz (2003) have developed sophisticated tools to capture core

values – this study partially uses a slightly modified version of the Valued Living Questionnaire (VLQ) (Wilson and Groom 2002), which asks about values related to family, parenting, marriage and intimate relations, friendships and interpersonal relations, professional life and work, education, leisure, spirituality, self-care and citizenship. While the original VLQ measures the importance of these main values and evaluates the consistency between values and actions (Wilson, Sandoz, Kitchens and Roberts 2010), this study employs a modified approach in which participants were asked to assess the importance of each value, talk about their potential change in attitudes and discuss the differences observed between Georgia and Germany in relation to these values. Respondents were also asked to summarise their observations and reflect on which of their values, attitudes and beliefs had changed after migrating.

The 30 study participants were selected using the non-probability sampling technique known as the snowball method, in which ‘the researcher collects data on the few members of the target population he or she can locate, then asks those individuals to provide the information needed to allocate other members of that population whom they happen to know’ (Babbie 2008: 205). In addition, some participants were recruited through Georgian restaurants in Berlin where they worked. During sampling, in order to avoid a homogeneous sample, efforts were made to include respondents with diverse socio-demographic characteristics.

Of the 30 participants, 9 were male and 21 female. Respondents reported having moved to Berlin between 2015 and 2022 and, at the time of the interviews, all had lived in Berlin for more than nine months. In almost all cases, the respondents were not living with their parents, who remained in Georgia. Half of the participants were single at the time of the interview, 13 reported being in a relationship and two were married. For most participants, the primary reason for migration was education. Consequently, almost all had legal residence status, with many enrolled in BA (11) or MA (6) programmes; some had already obtained a degree and/or were working (9) and others were undertaking an ‘*Ausbildung*’ (4), a German vocational training programme that combines practical work in a company with classroom instruction at a vocational school, leading to a recognised professional qualification. The average length of the interviews was 50 minutes, with the shortest being 28 and the longest 85 minutes. More-detailed demographic information about the respondents can be found in Appendix in Table A1.

It is important to note several sampling limitations. Women are over-represented in the sample, all participants are concentrated in a single city (Berlin) and the education-related migration pathways may indicate a potential class bias toward more highly educated and socio-economically advantaged young migrants. However, this does not undermine the value of the data, as qualitative research does not aim for statistical representativeness but, rather, for in-depth insights; the sample provides rich and meaningful perspectives on the experiences of this specific migrant group.

This study was conducted in accordance with recognised ethical standards. Prior to the interviews, all participants were provided with full information about the study and were asked to fully familiarise themselves with the information sheet and consent form. The information sheet contained detailed information about the purpose of the research project, its goals and funding – and about the respondent’s confidentiality and rights to withdraw without consequences. All respondents provided verbal or written consent for the interviews to be audio-recorded. All interviews were conducted by the author in Georgian. These were then transcribed and anonymised, removing any information about the respondents that could potentially identify them. The audio files were stored on a password-protected computer and were deleted once the transcriptions were finalised.

The transcripts were coded using NVivo software, which is used for qualitative data analysis. When coding the data, an inductive method was used, focusing on the information collected during fieldwork,

rather than on theoretical paradigms. This made it possible to first look at the content and, at a later stage, to draw parallels with the theories or consult the literature (Charmaz 2006). The study followed an interpretivist qualitative research approach, aiming to understand how migrants themselves interpret and make sense of their values and experiences. Coding was conducted at two levels, where first the 'level 1' codes were generated based on respondents' statements and quotes reflecting attitudes, viewpoints or assessments. At the second stage, the 'level 1' codes were grouped into broader 'level 2' codes representing overarching themes. This paper primarily analyses two 'level 2' themes which relate to, firstly, what young people like and value in Berlin and, secondly, how respondents feel that they and their values changed after their migration.

Results and findings

In order to explore which values are important for young Georgian migrants and which have changed after migration, the study examined their narratives about life in Berlin. While talking about first impressions –everyday experiences, what they like and dislike in Berlin, the differences they observe between living in Georgia and Germany, the specific experiences they have with friends, family, at educational institutions or at work – they revealed the values which are important for them and which they observe to have transformed after migrating.

Values and beliefs that are important for young Georgian migrants in Berlin

The most important aspect that young Georgian migrants love about Berlin is the sense of being free and independent. Although the initial period of migration was challenging, many participants viewed these difficulties as opportunities for personal growth and self-development. As Respondent 14 (female, 27 years old) explained, 'Independence is the biggest reward you have here. Making decisions independently and then being responsible for those decisions'. Living without parental supervision is particularly valued, even by those who had previously lived independently in Georgia, because they report never having experienced the same degree of independence and freedom which they now enjoy in Berlin. Respondent 25 (female, 22) noted that, in Tbilisi, she was never alone, as family or friends were always around. After moving to Berlin, she was 'suddenly left alone, which was very hard', yet this enabled her to start thinking about things she had never thought about before, such as 'who I was and what I wanted'. Thus, solitude becomes not only a challenge but also a space for self-reflection.

At the same time, almost everyone emphasised that, in Berlin, they can be whoever they want without being constantly observed or judged by society. As Respondent 26 (female, 25) highlighted:

I like the fact that I am free and no one controls me. No one is watching me, neighbours won't discuss what I am wearing or what time I get home. In Georgia, neighbours, relatives, everyone interferes in your life and the first thing which I liked here was that feeling of freedom and the feeling that it is my decision and I am responsible for myself... and in Georgia I was so much dependent on others, I could not even go to the bank alone...

In addition, the respondents enjoy the freedom of choice which they have. Even though not everything happening in Berlin is acceptable or valuable for them, they appreciate being able to choose between what they call 'good' or 'bad'. According to them, Berlin offers a wide range of possibilities: one can choose to go to bars, clubs or 'dark rooms' but, on the other hand, one can also attend lectures, go to

the cinema, museums, exhibitions, readings and live concerts and have a 'cultural life'. Many pointed out that Berlin offers a variety of social and cultural activities and that everyone can find something they enjoy. In contrast to Tbilisi, where the number of activities and places to go is limited, Berlin is described as an epicentre of new, diverse events:

What I like is that there is always a lot going on and you can be part of many cultural and social events, so you can never get bored. From Monday to Sunday, you can plan your week so that it is very diverse, meet many interesting people. You can see new exhibitions, museums, attend events and you are at the epicentre of everything (Respondent 4, female, 27).

However, Berlin is not just a city where one has the freedom and possibility to do whatever one wants but is also a place where people can first find and then reveal themselves, their identity. Respondent 30 (male, 25) explained that only in Berlin did he realise 'what freedom really is', meaning that he could talk openly about who he is in reality and what he wants to do in life much more than in his own country.

Similarly, other respondents described Berlin as a place where one can get to know oneself better:

It's a very diverse place and you have the opportunity to express yourself... to show your interests and to get to know yourself better – with what kind of people you like to interact and what you like – and I love that about Berlin, that you always have the opportunity to do something new and, in doing something new, get to know yourself better (Respondent 14, female, 27).

Furthermore, respondents noted that, in Berlin one can change one's identity whenever and as many times as one wants – and become whoever they want – as there are fewer or no limitations. Many stated that, after moving to Berlin, they changed their self-perception and lost certain 'complexes' and 'frames' that prevented them from becoming who they really are. This is not only true for sexual or other minorities – who are oppressed in Georgia – but also for individuals who felt rather 'tied up' and 'controlled' by their surrounding society in their country of origin.

Georgian society, including family members, is described as having certain expectations about what a person should do. For example, respondents noted that there is pressure to start university immediately after school and, later, to be successful, to achieve something in life. However, some participants questioned this expectation, saying that not everyone has to be special, not everyone has to achieve something but, rather, should be free to do what makes them happy:

You have pressure from the entire society that you have to be very successful. In Tbilisi, no one, not a single family, allows their child to live a normal life and have a normal job. Everyone has to be special, everyone has to be very successful and everyone has to be 'number one'. Not everyone can do that, right? But for some reason, society puts so much pressure on you that you have to shine, you have to do this and that – but maybe I don't want to shine and maybe I want to sit by myself and quietly do what I want (Respondent 19, female, 24).

In other words, finding one's own path in life and getting to know oneself without being pressured by society is what makes young people feel happy in Berlin. Some noted that, without the pressure and expectations, they managed to grow personally and discover new passions.

Having seemingly *endless possibilities and opportunities* is another aspect which young people love and value in Berlin. Respondents mentioned that, regardless of age, a person can start things over, begin

a new study programme or hobby and that there are fewer or no limits on what one can do in life. In addition, they expressed the feeling that their efforts – whether in studying or working – are valued and appreciated.

In addition to the points stated above, when talking about the things they love about Berlin, many respondents mentioned the *multicultural environment of the city*. The idea and fact that people with different skin colours, orientations, opinions, tastes, styles of dressing and lifestyles can live together, coexist in harmony or sit together in a bar and enjoy life, gives the respondents a sense that they can be whomever they want without being criticised or rejected. Meeting people with different cultural backgrounds makes life more interesting. Respondent 9 (female, 27), spoke of enjoying the international environment:

I really like that I meet people with very different cultural backgrounds... In my class, I don't think there are any Germans but I really enjoy the international environment... I like that I find out different things after communicating with them, that they have completely different interests and that is good because, in Tbilisi, there is a closed circle, a little bubble, because the community where one is active is very small. Especially if you are interested in art, there is a bubble of 50 people whom you see at every exhibition opening – it's boring/tiring. And in Berlin, you see all kinds of people, with different interests.

Respondents noted that, in contrast to Tbilisi, which they perceive as socially homogeneous and tightly connected and where everyone knows everyone, Berlin allows them to meet new people with completely different backgrounds and experiences. Interestingly, some stated that they feel more relaxed with strangers in Berlin than with close friends in Georgia, as there is less judgement and more openness towards different opinions.

Another interesting finding from the qualitative interviews which, according to some respondents, makes life more comfortable in Berlin, concerns attitudes toward physical appearance. In Berlin, they claim to have *no pressure to 'look good' or 'fabulous'*. Participants noted that, in Georgia, much attention is paid to how a person dresses or what their hair or make-up looks like. People feel pressure to always 'stay in form' and to never go out unshaved or without looking 'tidy'. In contrast, in Berlin, people pay less attention to appearance and are often more 'natural'. In addition, according to respondents, in Georgia it is considered beautiful to be skinny and everyone is constantly encouraging each other and themselves to lose weight. Male respondents also noted that women as well as men take less care of themselves and their appearance in Europe:

In Tbilisi it was the biggest shame to have a sweat stain in the armpit and [here] they might know they have it and don't care... It has nothing to do with being unhygienic... Some girls also grow their hair [in certain places]. In Tbilisi, I would find it very weird but, here, it is OK, I mean who am I to judge? (Respondent 2, male, 29).

This last quote illustrates that, while some participants initially found the differences between Georgia and Berlin unusual, over time many came to accept and even appreciate the more-relaxed norms. This shift reinforces the broader theme identified throughout the interviews: the value placed on freedom, autonomy and reduced social control.

How young migrants and their values changed after migration

The things that young Georgian migrants love in Berlin are closely linked with their standards, approaches, principles, beliefs and lifestyles – in other words, with the values that have changed or become more important after migration. The qualitative analysis shows that these are the most common aspects in which respondents say they changed.

- ‘I became more independent and in control’

As already stated in the previous section, young migrants value the feeling of being independent in Berlin. Independence, in this case, mostly means being detached from family members, living independently and being able to take care of oneself. Respondent 29 (female, 28) described the ‘greatest change’ as independence, explaining that, in Georgia, ‘your mother, father, grandmother and everyone else is taking care of you and does your chores’. She claimed that having the family as a ‘shield’ is great; however, she reported encountering a lot of obstacles after moving, as her family had helped out a lot before. In Berlin she was suddenly alone and had to find her own way, which was difficult but ‘a very good experience’. She concluded that ‘there is nothing more valuable than independence and the feeling of being proud and satisfied that you did something on your own, without anyone’s help’. This proves that becoming independent is also linked with other changes which respondents see in themselves after migration, e.g., enjoying living and making decisions on their own.

Participants also reported that they ‘became more organised, learned how to manage time and started planning ahead’, in contrast to their previous life in Georgia, which they described as chaotic or organised by family members: As one participant noted: ‘I discovered that, without planning, I have chaos and big discomfort. Now that I have everything in my calendar, I am calmer and no longer worry that I will be late and make others worry. These kinds of things make me happy’ (Respondent 12, female, 26).

- ‘I started to think things over’

During the interviews, some respondents noted that migration forced them to rethink many aspects of their lives. Many described this as a process whereby they ‘zoomed-out’ and looked at their lives from a different perspective. One participant explained that she ‘started to think differently’, contrasting this with what she perceived as a tendency in Georgia to ‘go with the flow’ without analysing daily events or updating one’s opinions over time:

The worst thing is that, when people in Georgia reach a conclusion about something, about anything, they never update it. If, three years ago, I thought that this building is beautiful, it cannot be that I have the same attitude now, because I have grown in these three years and a lot has changed for me, right? But no one does this kind of update in Georgia (Respondent 19, female, 24).

For this respondent, personal growth requires continuous reflection and revision of earlier conclusions. Others similarly described realising that they had previously been living on ‘autopilot’, doing many things automatically, without putting much thought into it. One respondent stated that, in Georgia, she used to get up, go to work and return home without questioning much but, following migration, she understood that she wanted to ‘live consciously’. She began observing her feelings and asking herself

'Who am I without others? What do I really like?' (Respondent 25, female, 22). This kind of 'self-study' or 'self-exploration' is closely linked with the next aspect which changed for the migrants.

- 'I started to get to know myself better and to accept myself the way I am'

Another area of change relates to self-identification and self-knowledge. Young respondents noted that they became closer to themselves, partly because they spent more time alone. In this process, many realised that, in Georgia, society had largely defined who they were and what they liked. After migration, they began new lives as independent individuals and started to see themselves as different personalities. Respondents claimed that the opinions of others no longer have the same impact as before. Many emphasised that they became who they wanted to be and not what others expected of them: 'The others should not tell you who you are, it is you who should determine that' (Respondent 22, female, 20). This respondent also introduced an example of body image, claiming that, within a short period, her self-perception had shifted significantly in Berlin:

[In Georgia] they tell you how to be all the time... This is true even for body image. You have to lose weight. When I came back from Germany, I remember being very happy with myself, my weight and then they mentioned to me that it would be great if I lost 2, 3, 4 kilos...if they had told me the same thing one year earlier, I would have agreed. Maybe one year is not a big period of time but it made a huge difference (Respondent 22, female, 20).

Other respondents also pointed out that, in Georgia, there is this approach whereby people 'have to' do certain things a certain way, which is directed by society. These can be small things – like getting good grades at school or eating or behaving in a certain way – or bigger life decisions, like attending university right after finishing school or getting married. One of the respondents mentioned that, after moving to Germany, her German friends told her '*Du musst nichts machen*' ('You do not have to do anything'), which prompted her to reconsider what she truly wanted rather than what society expected. As she explained, she now chooses to study and develop 'consciously', not because her family demands it:

There is nothing you must do. The most important thing is to do what you like and feel good about it. This is what this city taught me... In Georgia, I was saying that I will go to Germany, do my BA, then MA and then PhD, which was stemming from societal pressure, because a BA was not enough for them. Now it is me who wants the MA consciously and not because my Mum and others told me (Respondent 20, female, 23).

In this regard, for young migrants Berlin became a place where they first started to realise – and then to accept – who they are, what they want, which interests they have, how they look, what they like and how they want to live. For at least some of the respondents, their self-perception and self-image changed noticeably. However, a few of the respondents noted that, when they return to Georgia, they temporarily become their 'old' selves again:

Every time I return to Tbilisi, I still become the same as I was before I left. I'm different when I'm here... I am much more confident and I also notice that I dress differently here and pay a lot of attention to look the way I want (Respondent 8, female, 22).

This relates to the Cultural Frame Switching (CFS) (Hong *et al.* 2000) concept, which describes how bicultural or multicultural individuals shift between different cultural meaning systems depending on context. In addition, the young participants reported becoming less self-critical and demanding of themselves:

I started to appreciate little things more and stopped criticising myself. In Tbilisi, there was so much negativity, so much self-critique, [questioning] how could I not achieve this or that... What I enjoy here is that I do not have to act, I am what I am in reality (Respondent 4, female, 27).

- ‘I make more time to do the things I enjoy’

In the process of self-exploration, many respondents realised the importance of cherishing life and allocating time for activities they enjoy. Some pointed out that life can consist of more than studying, working or fulfilling social obligations. One participant explained that she is calmer and has more time outside of work, which led her to start a hobby – working with clay – something she described as ‘unimaginable’ after work in Tbilisi. She emphasised [the importance of] learning to take care of herself and make time for herself ‘without a boyfriend or anyone else’, concluding that these are the things that changed for her (Respondent 12, female, 26).

Respondents also say that they stopped constantly thinking about the future and began living more in the present, enjoying every day of life. Instead of stressing about life goals and everything they ‘have to’ achieve, young migrants choose to love every moment of life, freeing up time for leisure activities:

I changed my attitude a little and started to value my personal time more. I am working but, whenever I need time for myself, I take it and that is more important... In Tbilisi, postponing work was unimaginable and I used to think that, if I rested a little, it was a bad thing to do (Respondent 7, female, 29).

Overall, findings show that young migrants began paying more attention to their personal well-being, something which is lacking in Georgia. According to participants, in Georgia people are so pressured to achieve something or to become someone important that they forget to simply live and to enjoy life. In contrast, Germany offered them more opportunities and possibilities to spend time in ways that bring personal satisfaction and harmony. Some also mentioned learning to say ‘No’ to others and to prioritise themselves:

Now I take care of myself much more because I realised that my brain and my body need to relax and forget about things. I go to clubs, have fun but, if I am tired and they ask me to go, I no longer force myself but say ‘No’ because I will not feel well the next day and ‘I’ became more important [than doing things others want] (Respondent 29, female, 28).

- ‘I became more empathetic and open-minded’

Another significant change concerns becoming more understanding of and empathetic towards others. This shift is partly linked to participants’ changed social status after migration. In their hometowns in Georgia, respondents had an established social position, family network and recognition. After migrating to Berlin, they felt like ‘no one’ in this new society, where they had to rebuild social

relationships from scratch. This experience encourages or even 'forces' young people to be more open towards new friendships and relationships. Respondents noted that, while they were still living in Georgia, they might have been holding back from interacting much with immigrants from countries such as India or African states. However, after moving to Berlin and becoming immigrants themselves, they re-evaluated these attitudes, which made them more open and tolerant towards all kinds of people.

I was not thinking much about it in Georgia but now I have the opportunity to analyse my attitude towards ethnic minorities, for example. It was not fully pleasant for me to see so many Indians in the subway but, now, after the Berlin experience, it has become a normal everyday thing... I now live outside my country and I changed, my attitude has changed. I realise that everyone can find themselves in such a situation – and that being intolerant [towards ethnic minorities/immigrants] is a sign of illiteracy and closed-mindedness (Respondent 24, male, 28).

Becoming more empathetic and open toward people who are different might also be caused by the fact that, after migration, young people interact with more heterogeneous and diverse groups, which leads to greater tolerance. Respondents noted that increased exposure to diverse people and their stories has made them more understanding and open towards new people and experiences. One respondent, for example, explained that she became more open in social relationships, more willing to meet new people and more comfortable interacting with those who are different from her. She contrasted her relatively homogeneous friendship circle in Tbilisi with her more diverse social circle in Berlin, noting that exposure to different perspectives broadened her understanding (Respondent 15, female, 22). These findings align with earlier sections, where the multicultural environment of Berlin was described as one of the main reasons why young Georgians enjoy living there.

Finally, some respondents also noted changes in their attitudes toward sexual minorities. Although many stated that they were never homophobic and that the LGBTQI+ community never bothered them, respondents reported becoming significantly more open-minded and supportive toward sexual and any other minorities after moving to Berlin. Furthermore, some respondents reported becoming more active in supporting the rights of sexual minorities and criticising homophobic attitudes in Georgia. As one participant explained, after moving to Berlin and forming friendships with LGBT individuals, she realised how normalised their public presence is there compared to Georgia. This experience made her more sensitive to the issue and more vocal in arguing that genuine normalisation requires everyday acceptance, not mere tolerance (Respondent 15, female, 22).

Overall, the findings indicate that migration operates as a context in which young people renegotiate who they are and what they value. Rather than a simple cultural replacement, the process appears to be one of re-evaluation and recalibration, where previously taken-for-granted norms are questioned and new value hierarchies emerge. Freedom, autonomy and reduced social control stand out as the central axis around which these transformations unfold.

Conclusions and discussion

This study examines how young Georgian migrants in Berlin negotiate their values and beliefs after migration. While the existing literature on migration often focuses on the economic (Borjas 1995), health (Davies, Basten and Frattini 2009), criminal or illegal activities (Hall and Greenman 2015) or migrants' adaptation to the new environment (Sam and Berry 2010), less attention has been paid to the transformation of values and identities following migration (Berry, Phinney, Sam and Vedder 2006;

Hong *et al.* 2000; Phinney, Horenczyk, Liebkind and Vedder 2001). There is also relatively little focus specifically on migrants' values and beliefs (Williams, Thornton and Young-DeMarco 2013), especially regarding the adaptation and integration processes of Georgian migrants in the West (Pirtskhalava 2017; Pirtskhalava and Badashvili 2022; Zurabishvili 2023). Only a few recent studies have examined Georgian migrants in Germany and their values (Bogishvili 2025; Pirtskhalava 2026). While hardly any studies specifically focus on young Georgian migrants, this study addresses an important gap in understanding how migration shapes the values of youth from relatively collectivistic societies by examining young people aged 18 to 29 who emigrated from Georgia to Berlin and have lived there for six months or longer. In so doing, it contributes to broader debates on migration, youth transitions and value change by demonstrating how migration functions as a space for active value negotiation, identity reconstruction and the development of hybrid cultural orientations, thus supporting theoretical perspectives that view migration as an active and agentic process rather than a passive adjustment.

The findings show that participants prioritise individualistic values such as independence, a sense of freedom, freedom of choice and having both personal and physical space to act as they desire without feeling observed or judged by society. The continuous possibilities and opportunities that Berlin offers give young people a chance to discover themselves, to explore who they are and what they value and, most importantly, to accept themselves without pretending to be someone else. Without external pressure to achieve socially prescribed standards of success or perfection, which participants described as common in Georgia, they reported freeing themselves from internal constraints, reducing self-pressure and developing greater self-acceptance. These findings are consistent with other recent studies on Georgian migrants in Germany. Bogishvili (2024), for example, shows that migration enabled young migrants to free themselves from social constraints and strengthened their sense of autonomy and confidence. Similarly, Pirtskhalava describes migration as a 'journey or space for freedom and self-development' (2026: 147) for younger migrants. This confirms broader arguments in the migration and youth transition literature that migration can function as a pathway to individualisation and self-realisation, particularly for young people from more collectivistic contexts.

The experiences gained in Germany are often perceived as a form of liberation from traditional social norms and expectations, which weaken or fade as young migrants become more independent. As study participants gained autonomy and engaged in self-reflection, they learned to make more time for activities they enjoy and began paying greater attention to their psychological well-being and prioritising themselves. They started to feel that they actually *can* achieve something, as they feel more appreciated in Berlin, in contrast to Georgia, where their efforts were not valued properly. This suggests that migration not only exposes young people to new values but also creates social conditions that enable the expression and legitimisation of previously constrained identities.

These findings suggest that individualistic values, as opposed to collectivistic ones, became more important for young Georgian migrants after migration. At the same time, however, relationships with family members and friends, as well as certain cultural traditions from Georgia, still remain an important part of their lives. This pattern is consistent with Berry's (1997) acculturation theory, particularly the integration strategy, in which migrants maintain aspects of their home culture while adopting elements of the host culture. At the same time, these processes illustrate Gamsakhurdia's (2019) concept of proaculturation, in which migrants actively reconstruct hybrid identities, creatively combining values from both home and host contexts rather than simply assimilating into the host society.

These individual-level changes can also be understood within *transnational frameworks* (Schiller, Basch and Blanc-Szanton 1992). Young Georgian migrants maintain connections with their home country, both socially and politically (Khoshtaria 2023). Digital communication allows them to engage

in political, cultural and civil life in Georgia, while simultaneously navigating German social structures, reflecting forms of dual belonging rather than cultural replacement. This supports transnational perspectives by demonstrating that value change does not require detachment from the home country but can occur alongside continued emotional and social embeddedness.

From the perspective of Schwartz's (2012) theory of basic human values, the values emphasised by participants of the study presented in this paper correspond to 'self-direction' (independent thought and action-choosing, creating, exploring), 'stimulation' (excitement, novelty and challenge in life), 'hedonism' (pleasure and sensuous gratification for oneself) and 'achievement' (personal success through demonstrating competence according to social standards). All of the values of young Georgian migrants are under Schwartz's higher-order value orientations of 'openness to change' and 'self-enhancement', which oppose the 'self-transcendence' and 'conservation' value orientations that are somewhat collectivistic, conservative or traditional and still prevalent in Georgia (Khoshtaria 2017). Similarly, if we analyse the results from Hofstede's (2011) 'individualism/collectivism' dimension, we can again assume that young Georgian migrants carry somewhat individualistic values and rarely link to collectivistic ones. However, this study adds a critical nuance to these classical frameworks: for Georgian youth, 'individualism' is not an abandonment of the home culture but a liberation of the self within a transnational framework. While family relationships remain emotionally central, their meaning and expectations are renegotiated.

As for other values related to empathy and tolerance which, according to the study participants, also become more important after migration, these could instead be linked to their exposure to Berlin's multicultural environment. As other studies also confirm, out-group contact or interactions with individuals who are different or represent other groups, can promote intergroup understanding (Pettigrew and Tropp 2006). The intergroup contact theory (Allport 1954), suggesting that bringing people from different groups together can help to break down stereotypes and foster more positive attitudes, provided that the contact occurs under specific conditions, is confirmed by current findings as well, as the young participants claim to become more empathetic, tolerant and open towards different groups, including sexual minorities – which are heavily condemned in Georgia (CRRG-Georgia 2024). This suggests that migration can facilitate not only personal individualisation but also broader value shifts toward inclusivity and diversity.

The study findings demonstrate how new social environments can encourage inclusive values, particularly toward marginalised groups such as sexual minorities, the shift in attitudes towards whom is also evident in Bogishvili's (2025) study, in which she demonstrates cases where attitudes towards sexual minorities changed and became more tolerant after migration.

Even though we cannot generalise the results of a qualitative study, the findings presented in this paper raise the question as to whether we are witnessing value transformations from somewhat collectivistic to relatively individualistic dimensions – as observed and stated by the study participants – or whether the young migrants already carried those individualistic values before they migrated and they just flourished in an environment where they were more acknowledged by society. In other words, the study raises important questions for future research about whether the observed value changes are truly transformations induced by migration or whether they represent pre-existing orientations that flourish in supportive Western contexts. In case of value transformation, the study finding could be discussed in the framework of acculturation or even transnationalism theories, demonstrating how young people adjust to the new culture, while keeping some values of the home society. Alternatively, if we assume that these somewhat individualistic values of young Georgian migrants are not necessarily gained but are, instead, 'revealed' and 'flourished' with migration, the findings could suggest that young

people, who always carried more individualistic values, tend to migrate more to Western societies, where their value orientations are being supported. In the latter case, instead of 'value transformation', we can talk about 'value disclosure', when migration provides an environment in which migrants' existing value orientations are validated and reinforced.

Ultimately, this research goes beyond simply discussing value change. It introduces the new concept of 'value disclosure', arguing that migration could provide an environment for pre-existing, constrained values to flourish rather than simply triggering the passive adoption of new host-country norms. Therefore, while, in some cases, values can shift or change with migration, in others the hidden values can simply be disclosed.

Building on this distinction, whether a person experiences 'change' or 'disclosure' depends on their specific circumstances. It can be argued/assumed that value disclosure is the most likely when a migrant already felt disconnected from the mindset of his or her home country and suddenly gains freedom in a tolerant, anonymous city like Berlin. In these cases, the new environment does not create the person's values; it just provides the freedom to express them. Value transformation, on the other hand, is more likely when migrants become deeply involved in their new society and form meaningful relationships with locals over time. When migrants actively engage with different worldviews, this exposure does not just reveal hidden traits – it actively reshapes their core beliefs, particularly regarding tolerance and inclusivity.

Whether newly acquired or newly expressed, the findings demonstrate that migration creates conditions for identity reconstruction, value renegotiation and psychological development. In this sense, migration functions not only as geographic mobility but also as a developmental space in which young people actively shape their identities and values.

Note

1. <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/values>.

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No conflict of interest was reported by the author.

AI use disclosure

During the preparation of this work, I used Google Gemini to translate specific quotes from Georgian into English and to improve the overall language and readability of the paper. After using this tool, I thoroughly reviewed and edited the text to ensure accuracy. I take full responsibility for the final content, arguments, and findings presented in this publication.

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Appendix

Table A1. Socio-demographic characteristics of study participants

Respondent #	Gender	Age	Relationship status	Education	Lives in Berlin since	Interview length (minutes)
1	Female	27	In a relationship	MA degree	2015	61
2	Male	29	In a relationship	MA student	2021	47
3	Female	19	In a relationship	BA student	2021	45
4	Female	27	Married	BA degree	2021	52
5	Female	26	Single	BA degree	2022	63
6	Male	27	In a relationship	MA student	2020	43
7	Female	29	In a relationship	MA degree	2020	37
8	Female	22	Single	BA student	2020	51
9	Female	27	Married	MA student	2022	55
10	Female	23	Single	MA student	2019	64
11	Male	25	Single	MA student	2021	49
12	Female	26	In a relationship	BA degree	2022	60
13	Male	22	In a relationship	BA student	2019	50
14	Female	27	In a relationship	BA degree	2017	85
15	Female	22	In a relationship	BA student	2021	48
16	Female	19	Single	BA student	2022	41
17	Female	20	Single	BA student	2021	40
18	Male	27	Single	MA student	2022	43
19	Female	24	Single	BA student	2022	54
20	Female	23	Single	BA degree	2017	49
21	Male	25	In a relationship	BA degree	2019	46
22	Female	20	Single	BA student	2021	46
23	Male	22	Single	BA student	2020	32
24	Male	28	Single	<i>Ausbildung</i>	2022	80
25	Female	22	In a relationship	BA student	2021	51
26	Female	25	Single	<i>Ausbildung</i>	2017	60
27	Female	22	Single	<i>Ausbildung</i>	2022	47
28	Female	20	In a relationship	BA student	2021	28
29	Female	28	Single	Working	2021	44
30	Male	25	In a relationship	<i>Ausbildung</i>	2022	62

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