

From East to West: Evaluating the Effects of the Russian-Ukrainian Conflict and Russian Migration on the Tourism Industry in Georgia and the Path toward European Integration

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Abstract: Located at the intersection of Asia and Europe, Georgia's tourism industry encounters unique challenges amidst regional geopolitical tensions, notably the ongoing Russian-Ukrainian conflict and the subsequent Russian migration. This article employs both qualitative and quantitative research methods to explore the impacts of these political realities on Georgia's tourism sector and advocates for a strategic reorientation towards European integration as a means of promoting sustainable development. Drawing insights from qualitative interviews with key stakeholders and quantitative surveys with international tourists, the study unfolds the complex relationship between politics and tourism. Despite the predominantly negative perception of the influx of refugees, concerns about rising prices, perceived changes in service quality, and the expanding presence of Russian-owned businesses, the resilience and appeal of Georgia's tourism realm remain evident. Specifically, all respondents recommended Georgia as a tourist destination and reported feeling safe during their stay. The study also presents a comparative perspective, evaluating the potential effects of further European integration on Georgia's tourism landscape, and underscores key mitigation strategies, including policy development, diversification of tourism offerings, strategic communication, digital platform advancement and utilization, and in general, the adoption of European best

practices in sustainable tourism. These findings emphasize the need for nuanced, proactive, and inclusive policymaking and industry regulation in line with Georgia's European aspirations. This comprehensive exploration provides invaluable insights for stakeholders in the tourism sphere and contributes to the broader understanding of the intricate relationship between geopolitical realities and tourism.

Keywords: *geopolitics, Georgia's European integration, Russian migration, Russian-Ukrainian conflict, tourism strategy of Georgia*

1. Introduction

Situated at the nexus of East and West in the South Caucasus region, Georgia's famous tourism sector, characterized by the country's rich cultural heritage, diverse landscapes, and exceptional hospitality, has faced substantial challenges due to geopolitical developments. Most notably, the ongoing Russian-Ukrainian war, which has precipitated an influx of over 100,000 Russian refugees into Georgia since 2022, has instigated significant shifts within the industry. These shifts range from concerns about safety and security to alterations in tourist demographics and economic implications. Such complexities underscore the necessity for an in-depth examination of the impact of migration on Georgia's international tourism.

Despite the global COVID-19 pandemic and regional tensions, Georgia's tourism field has exhibited remarkable resilience and adaptability. This was reflected in the swift recovery in the first quarter of 2023, when tourism revenues rebounded from a severe decline in 2020, achieving 138% of the 2019 figures (Georgia Capital, 2023, p. 2). Nonetheless, the complex interplay between the Russian-Ukrainian conflict, migration dynamics, and the tourism realm necessitates comprehensive investigation.

Adopting a mixed-method approach integrating both quantitative and qualitative research methods, this study aims to explore the intricate impacts of the Russian migration on Georgia's tourism landscape. In addition, Georgia has consistently expressed an interest in deepening its ties with the European Union (EU). This aspiration for European integration has been a strategic objective of Georgian foreign policy since the Rose Revolution in 2003. The signing of the Association Agreement (AA) and the

Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area (DCFTA) with the EU in 2014 were significant steps towards this goal, signaling Georgia's commitment to aligning its policies, standards, and practices with those of the EU.

In the light of Georgia's European integration pursuits, this article also examines potential strategic shifts in focus and mitigation strategies to foster sustainable growth and development amidst these challenges. The objective of this comprehensive analysis is to inform proactive, inclusive policymaking and industry regulation, leveraging Georgia's unique tourism offerings, all while navigating the complex interrelation of geopolitical realities and migration trends.

2. Literature review

In recent years, scholarly attention on the interaction between population movements and the tourism industry has grown. This section provides an exhaustive review of relevant literature on this subject, thoroughly examining past research about the influence of population migration on various regions' tourism sectors.

The related literature highlights the complex and dynamic relationship between these two phenomena. Migration can influence tourism development in numerous ways, including the creation of new markets and demand for tourism products, the provision of labor and skills for the tourism industry, and the transfer of cultural knowledge and practices (Axelsson *et al.*, 2022; Meladze *et al.*, 2022, p. 417). Furthermore, the relationship between migration and tourism is often reciprocal, with tourism playing a role in shaping migration patterns and experiences (Janta *et al.*, 2011).

Several studies have emphasized the role of diaspora communities in promoting tourism development in their countries of origin. For instance, research on the Caribbean has underscored the important role of diaspora communities in promoting tourism development and fostering linkages between host and home countries (Lacarte *et al.*, 2023).

Other studies have highlighted the challenges associated with the relationship between migration and tourism. For instance, research conducted in Greece demonstrated how an influx of migrants and refugees could strain tourism infrastructure and resources, leading to conflicts and tensions between locals and migrants (Kotroyannos *et al.*, 2021).

In her research conducted in Australia, Sarah J. R. Ryu (2010) underscores the direct correlation between political stability and tourism. With political stability, countries can attract more tourists and, as a result, boost their economy. Conversely, political instability can serve as a deterrent for potential tourists, impacting the revenue and stability of the tourism industry. Ryu's study provides valuable insights into the potential effects of the ongoing Russian-Ukrainian conflict and the resultant influx of Russian refugees in Georgia on the country's tourism industry. The uncertainty and instability caused by these events may lead to negative perceptions among potential tourists, hindering the growth of the industry. However, Ryu also emphasizes the resilience of the tourism sector, suggesting that effective management and mitigation strategies can help overcome these challenges.

In a study focused on the Pacific region, Kantaro Takahashi (2019) provides a unique perspective on the interrelation between migration and tourism. Takahashi establishes that migrants can generate significant tourism demand, especially in the context of small island developing states. His findings suggest that the influx of migrants can stimulate tourism, as the migrants' friends and relatives may be more inclined to visit these destinations. In the context of Georgia, the influx of Russian refugees could potentially spur an increase in tourism demand, especially if these migrants attract their friends and relatives to visit Georgia. However, the distinct political conditions in Georgia, including regional tensions and conflicts, might affect this correlation, requiring more context-specific research to fully understand this dynamic.

The process of European integration has brought about profound changes in the tourism landscapes of many countries. With the creation of the Schengen Area, travel between countries became easier and more convenient, contributing to a significant increase in intra-European travel. Moreover, EU policies supporting the development of sustainable tourism have fostered more responsible tourism practices among Member States (Bramwell, 2004; Kadagidze & Piranashvili, 2016; Gamsakhurdia & Fetelava, 2023; Kuparadze, 2023).

On the other hand, some scholars have critiqued the effects of European integration on tourism. Hall (2005), for instance, argues that EU policies have contributed to a homogenization of European tourism destinations, leading to a loss of uniqueness and differentiation between destinations. Meanwhile, Sigala (2008) suggests that the increased competition resulting from European integration has been a double-edged sword for many

destinations, forcing them to constantly innovate and improve their offerings to stay competitive.

When considering the potential effects of Georgia's integration with the European Union on its tourism sector, it would be prudent to take into account these varied perspectives. While integration may bring about benefits, such as increased inbound tourism from other European countries and improved tourism infrastructure, it may also lead to increased competition and the potential loss of distinctiveness as a tourism destination. Moreover, the specific context of Georgia—its unique culture, history, and geopolitical location—will undoubtedly shape how these potential effects unfold (Kadagidze & Gamsakhurdia, 2022; Charaia, Lashkhi & Lashkhi, 2021; Charaia & Lashkhi, 2022; Papava & Charaia, 2021).

Overall, the literature suggests that the relationship between migration and tourism is complex and multifaceted, with both benefits and challenges associated with this relationship. Future research should aim to explore the specific mechanisms through which migration can influence tourism development and identify strategies for maximizing the potential benefits of this relationship while minimizing its negative impacts. Moreover, given Georgia's unique cultural, historical, and geopolitical context, it will be crucial to examine how these dynamics might play out in the case of its further integration with Europe.

3. Methodology

This study utilizes a mixed-methods approach, integrating both quantitative and qualitative data collection techniques. The research design and data collection tools were developed to gather information pertinent to two main aspects of the research: the impact of the Russian-Ukrainian conflict and Russian migration on Georgia's tourism industry, and the potential effects of further integration with Europe in this sector. Tourists were selected randomly at main Georgian tourist spots, while key industry stakeholders were purposefully sampled.

Quantitative data were obtained through questionnaires, capturing demographic information, migration status, and tourist activities of the participants. These questionnaires incorporated closed-ended questions to ascertain participants' attitudes and perceptions regarding the influence of

migration on tourism. Notably, this study focuses on tourists who are not residents or nationals of Russia, Ukraine, or Georgia to mitigate potential subjectivity or bias. This criterion was imposed to enhance the validity of our findings. To gather a representative sample, a sample size of approximately 385 participants was determined, considering the number of arrivals of international non-resident travelers in Georgia being 1.2 million in the first quarter of 2023 (Geostat, 2023). This sample size corresponds to a 95% confidence level and a 5% margin of error. We aimed to recruit the participants randomly to ensure an unbiased representation of the overall tourist population visiting Georgia. The resultant data was meticulously analyzed to yield valuable insights into how political dynamics and migration trends impact Georgia's international tourism.

Qualitative data was sourced from a heterogeneous cohort of 37 key stakeholders representing various roles in Georgian tourism sector. The cohort comprised individuals ranging from freelance tour guides to HR coordinators, from hotel owners to active driver guides, and from founders of the Georgian Hotel Federation to those involved in a school of tourism. The participants were given an opportunity to share nuanced insights via open-ended questions, facilitating the exchange of their unique perspectives and experiences. This diverse range of respondents enhances the richness of the collected data, enabling a multifaceted understanding of the impact of migration on tourism in Georgia.

The qualitative research questions encompassed the perceived state of tourism in Georgia amidst political realities, the impact of the Russian-Ukrainian war and the influx of Russian refugees, and the influence of political situations on tourism development, among others. The incorporation of a mixed-methods approach, leveraging both questionnaires and interviews, enabled an exhaustive exploration of the influence of migration on regional tourism. A detailed sample questionnaire and interview questions are included in the Appendix at the end of the paper.

4. Findings and discussion

4.1 Qualitative data analysis

The responses drawn from key stakeholders emphasize a prevailing sentiment: currently, there seems to be an inadequate response from both the government and the tourism industry in addressing the impact of migration on Georgia's tourism sector. Many stakeholders expressed concerns over the perceived neglect of the tourism sector, underscoring the urgent need for intervention. Nevertheless, amid these challenges, glimmers of hope surface with mentions of ongoing work on tourism law and government aid to assist Ukrainian refugees' resettlement throughout Georgia. Given these circumstances, it is of utmost importance to initiate immediate and effective interventions that not only address current issues but also bolster the industry's resilience against future adversities.

The majority of stakeholders observed changes in the types of tourists visiting Georgia. Several respondents mentioned a decline in "quality" tourists, attributing it to the influx of Russian refugees. They noted that individuals who were once tourists are now more permanently residing in the country. The perception was that there is a decline in high-end or "quality" tourism, with an increase in budget travel. Notably, there was a sentiment that this shift is impacting the industry's service levels and the financial dynamics of local tourism businesses. However, a small group of respondents did not perceive a significant change in the tourist demographics.

Some respondents highlighted that the hospitality and food industry sectors had seen increased profit due to rising demand and prices, particularly in areas outside the capital city. However, the impact on local residents was noted as adverse, owing to increased cost of living. The respondents also indicated that high-budget hotels had seen little change, as they are typically not suited for long-term stays, a preference among Russian migrants. The most noticeable change was observed in the real estate market, with an increase in purchases and rentals by Russian migrants. Moreover, the impact varied across different regions, with Tbilisi seeing a decrease in Russian presence while Batumi experienced an increase. Amid these changes, respondents revealed a general trend of inaction or lack of significant adaptations by local businesses, fueling a sense of uncertainty and concern for the future. However, some respondents also expressed optimism, viewing the situation as temporary and anticipating future improvements. Some perceived the situation as potentially beneficial for struggling Georgians, suggesting

a nuanced impact across different segments of society. The analysis also revealed issues related to a specific law concerning value-added tax, creating challenges particularly for local tour companies.

Responses to the questions of the interviews exploring perceptions on safety in relation to Russian migration varied significantly. Several respondents indicated that there have been no observable changes in safety conditions due to the influx of Russian migrants. Some explicitly stated they were unaware of any specific safety issues arising from this situation. A segment of respondents, however, expressed concerns that the increased presence of Russians could potentially incite conflicts, emphasizing an underlying sense of unease. This concern was linked to the idea that an individual, regardless of nationality, could trigger conflicts and cause harm, resulting in the local people bearing the consequences. Some responses reflected on the impact on the tourism sector, suggesting a possible degradation of service quality due to the influx of transient populations. One respondent even noted a sense of feeling more like a guest than a local in their own country. Despite this range of perspectives, a number of respondents remained uncertain, unsure of how to interpret the situation or the purpose of the question, or firmly believed that there have been no alterations in safety measures. Some even suggested that any changes were inconsequential since most tourist routes are in mountainous regions, where natural dangers already exist, making additional security risks negligible. It is clear that the perception of safety and changes therein due to Russian migration varies, with a spectrum ranging from no change to potential conflict, emphasizing the need for further investigation and proactive measures to ensure safety.

As for the opportunities and challenges for the local tourism sector, the responses collected reveal that long-term visitors have actively participated in the sector, setting up tourism companies, food service establishments, and utilizing their networks to provide services to fellow compatriots. However, there has been a distinct downside to this influx as well. Many respondents felt that the entry of these long-term visitors has led to market saturation, causing prices to increase significantly and negatively impacting the local population. The overall quality of the tourism sector is also reported to have suffered due to the entry of low-skilled workers, many of whom lack in-depth knowledge about Georgia's history and culture. A significant portion of the respondents also voiced concern about the long-term impact of these developments, arguing for more stringent regulations and protections for local businesses to ensure that Georgia's rich cultural heritage and the quality of its tourism sector are preserved. A minority of the respondents

did not perceive a substantial impact from the influx of Russian long-term visitors. As with any significant demographic shift, the consequences are manifold and warrant further analysis.

Additionally, the respondents reflect a strong sentiment favoring regulation and control in the tourism sector. Several participants suggested strict measures, including prohibitions on foreigners operating within the tourism industry. This sentiment seems to be driven by a desire to preserve Georgian history, culture, and language, as evidenced by calls for the necessity of Georgian language proficiency. Furthermore, there was a concern about the dominance of specific foreign markets, particularly the Russian market, which indicates a perceived need for diversification and exploration of alternative markets. This response suggests an awareness of risks associated with over-reliance on a single market, highlighting a desire for a more balanced, diverse tourism industry that could be more resilient to geopolitical shifts or market-specific downturns. However, these responses also suggest a potential for xenophobia or protectionism, which could, if left unchecked, lead to negative outcomes for the tourism industry. It underlines the need for policymakers to carefully balance the interests of preserving local culture and broadening the economic benefits of tourism.

Further responses reveal a robust consensus towards strict regulation of Georgian tourism sector, emphasizing on the need for proper accreditation and qualifications for those working within the industry, such as drivers and tour guides. Some respondents advocate for measures including mandatory courses in history and culture to ensure that those involved in the tourism sector are adequately equipped to authentically represent Georgian history and culture.

Furthermore, some respondents imply the existence of a grey economy within the sector and suggest strict measures, such as hefty fines, to deter unlawful employment and promote a fair competitive environment. There is also a recurrent theme that underlines the need for greater involvement of local Georgian businesses in the tourism sector, which could be perceived as a call for the protection of domestic businesses from external competition.

There is also a recognition of the need for constant research and data collection in the tourism sector, especially concerning the activities of foreign tour companies. Such data would be crucial for effective policy formulation. Interestingly, some respondents suggested total prohibition of non-Georgian citizens working in the tourism sector, a proposal that, while protecting local

interests, may have implications for international relations and economic openness.

Overall, these responses suggest a need for balancing economic growth, cultural preservation, and regulation in Georgia's burgeoning tourism sector.

On another note, respondents also brought to light their perspectives on Georgia's ongoing European aspirations. While most acknowledged the potential benefits of aligning with European standards, some also expressed concern about losing their unique Georgian identity in the process. The discussion of European integration brought forth mixed emotions, with many hoping for a balance where Georgia can maintain its unique cultural heritage while reaping the economic and developmental advantages of European integration. Stakeholders highlighted the importance of the tourism sector in this transition and the potential role it could play in bridging the gap between East and West. However, the need for careful planning and strategy was also emphasized to ensure that the benefits of European integration are maximized while potential pitfalls are avoided.

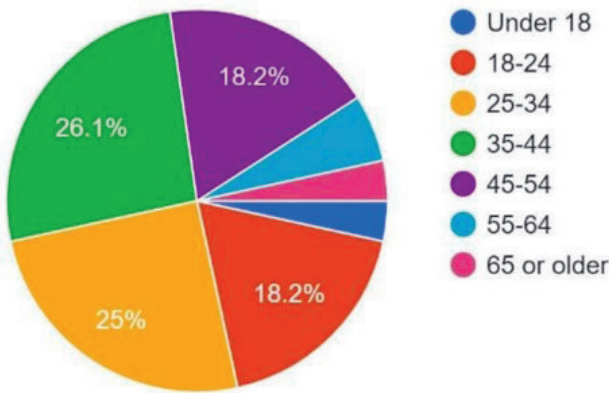
The extensive qualitative data analysis thus sheds light not only on the impact of the Russian refugee influx but also on how Georgia's strategic shift towards European integration could play out in the tourism landscape. The findings reveal the complex, multifaceted issues at hand, calling for refined, proactive, and inclusive policymaking and industry regulation.

4.2 Quantitative data analysis

The analysis of the quantitative data gathered from the survey responses provides valuable insights into the perceptions and experiences of tourists visiting Georgia. Their observations and recommendations shed light on the impact of the influx of Russian refugees on the tourism industry, as well as highlight the unique attractions that make Georgia a desirable tourist destination.

The quantitative survey gathered responses from 385 international tourists visiting Georgia. The sample comprised 53.4% males and 46.6% females, signifying a relatively balanced gender distribution. The age distribution of the respondents covered a wide range, with the majority falling within the 25–44 age group (25% in the 25–34 group and 26.1% in the 35–44 group) (see Fig. 1). A noteworthy share of respondents (18.2%) belonged to the 45–54 age group. The survey also included younger adults (18.2% from the 18–24 age group) and older adults (11.4% aged 55 or older).

Figure 1. Age distribution of respondents.



In terms of travel experience in Georgia, it was the first visit for 51.7% of the respondents, while 48.3% had visited Georgia before. Among repeat visitors, 22.7% had visited once, 11.4% twice, 7.9% three times, 2.2% five times, and 3.4% several times.

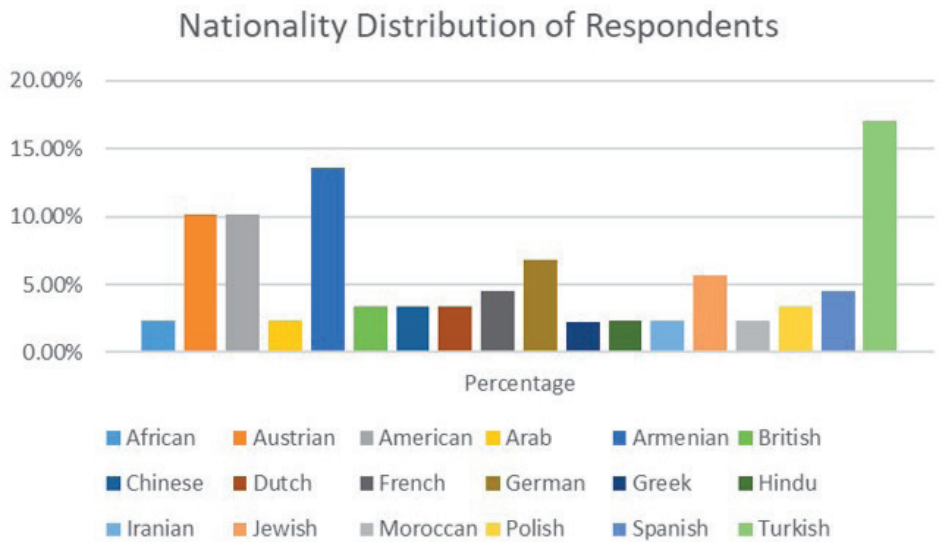
The duration of the respondents' stays in Georgia varied widely, with the majority staying for 5 days (18.4%), 7 days (16%), or 10 days (17.2%). Some tourists had longer stays, with 12.6% staying for 2 weeks, 6.9% for 3 weeks, and 2.3% for a month.

The respondents represented a diverse range of nationalities (see Fig. 2), with the largest groups being Armenian (13.6%), Turkish (17%), Austrian (10.2%), and American (10.2%). Other nationalities represented in the survey were African (2.3%), Arab (2.3%), British (3.4%), Chinese (3.4%), Dutch (3.4%), French (4.5%), German (6.8%), Greek (2.2%), Hindu (2.3%), Iranian (2.3%), Jewish (5.7%), Moroccan (2.3%), Polish (3.4%), and Spanish (4.5%).

These findings provide valuable insights into the demographic profile and experiences of international tourists visiting Georgia amidst the backdrop of regional political events and influx of Russian refugees. These insights will be further analyzed and discussed in the subsequent sections of this paper.

Furthermore, the survey revealed unanimous sentiments regarding two critical aspects of Georgia as a tourist destination. Impressively, 100% of respondents stated they would recommend Georgia to others for tourism, indicating the country's strong appeal despite the geopolitical issues at play. Equally noteworthy is the fact that all respondents reported feeling safe and

Figure 2. Nationality distribution of respondents.



secure during their stay in Georgia. This illustrates the effective measures taken by the Georgian government, tourism sector and local communities to ensure tourists’ security amidst a complex political landscape and refugee influx. These findings collectively emphasize the resilience and attractiveness of Georgia’s tourism industry.

Additionally, the participants were asked a series of questions regarding their knowledge of Georgia as a tourist destination, and the influence of the Russian-Ukrainian conflict and subsequent influx of Russian refugees on their decision to visit the country.

Regarding how they heard about Georgia as a tourist destination, the majority of respondents, 43.2%, credited word of mouth, demonstrating the significance of personal recommendations in destination choice. Social media also proved influential, with 31.8% of the respondents becoming aware of Georgia as a potential tourist spot through these platforms. Other sources, such as online travel websites, played a lesser role, cited by just 10.2% of respondents.

In terms of the impact of the Russian-Ukrainian conflict and the influx of Russian refugees on the decision to visit Georgia, the majority of respondents (62.5%) stated it had no impact (Fig. 3). However, for those it did influence, the effects were varied. Of the participants, 31.8% reported that the situation made them more likely to visit, while 5.7% were deterred.

Figure 3. Impact of the Russian-Ukrainian conflict on decision to visit Georgia.

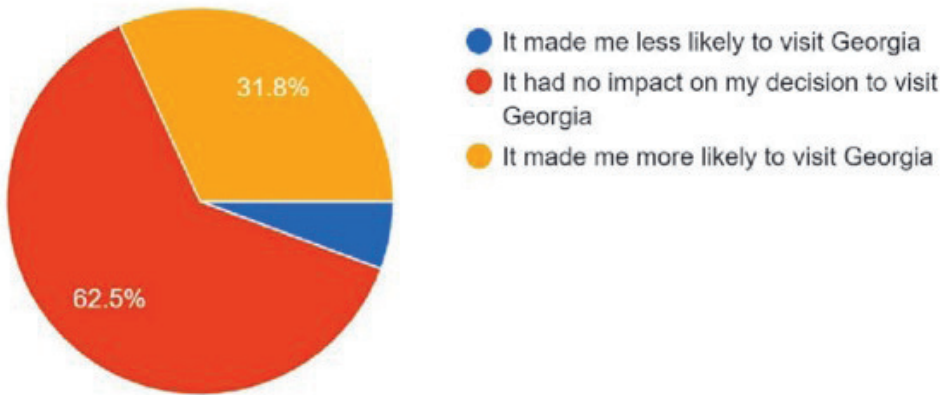
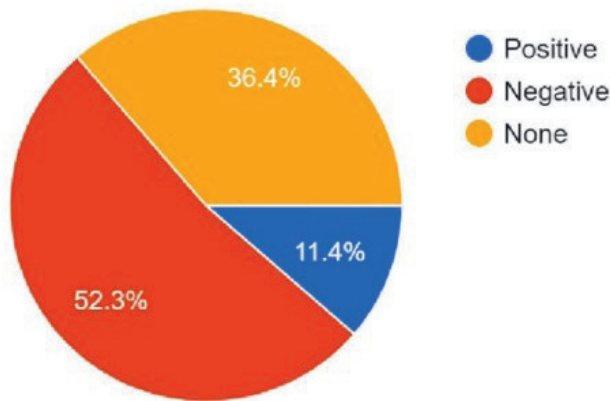


Figure 4. Perceived impact of Russian refugees on Georgia’s tourism industry.



When questioned about any observable changes in Georgia’s tourism industry due to the influx of Russian refugees, 64.8% of respondents said they had noticed changes. The perceived impact of these changes was predominantly negative, with 52.3% of participants expressing this sentiment. Only 11.4% saw the impact as positive, while 36.4% felt there was no discernible impact on the tourism industry (see Fig. 4).

This data suggests a nuanced picture of the relationship between geopolitics and tourism decision-making. Although the majority of tourists were not influenced by the Russian-Ukrainian conflict and the influx of Russian refugees, these factors did have a perceptible impact on a significant

minority. Furthermore, those who noticed changes within the Georgian tourism industry largely viewed them negatively, underscoring the potential challenges faced by the sector amid geopolitical shifts.

The main themes emerging from the analysis are as follows:

1. Changes noticed due to the influx of Russian refugees

- Most respondents noticed higher prices in the country, potentially attributable to increased demand or inflation.
- A significant proportion of respondents identified an increase in businesses run by Russian refugees, particularly within the tourism sector, leading to more competition and potentially affecting the quality of services.
- The majority of respondents noted a marked increase in the number of Russian-speaking individuals in public spaces and tourist areas.
- A significant number of respondents expressed concerns about the contamination of the Black Sea due to Nova Kakhovka dam breach in Ukraine (Lepik, 2023) and the ongoing military conflict in general, negatively impacting tourism.

2. Why they would recommend Georgia as a tourist destination

- A vast majority of respondents appreciate Georgia for its safety, relaxing environment, and the warmth and hospitality of its people.
- Respondents frequently mention the beauty and diversity of Georgia's landscapes, which include both highlands and lowlands, as well as pristine nature and popular ski resorts.
- Many respondents cited the rich cultural history and various outdoor and adventure activities available to tourists as key attractions.
- Shopping, medical tourism, and gastronomy (including wine and local cuisine) also emerged as notable aspects in drawing tourists.
- The quality and affordability of services, alongside the developed infrastructure, were viewed as attractive to tourists.

These insights provide a valuable understanding of tourists' perspectives and could be used to inform policymaking and strategies to enhance the tourism industry in Georgia. This feedback indicates areas of concern, such as rising prices and the perceived impact of increased Russian influence on the tourism sector, which could be addressed to improve the tourist experience. Furthermore, it highlights Georgia's unique selling points as a tourist destination, including its natural beauty, diverse tourism offers,

safety, and the warmth and hospitality of its people. This information could be leveraged in marketing and promotional efforts to attract more tourists to the country.

5. Discussion

The quantitative data analysis gathered from the survey offers a comprehensive understanding of the demographic characteristics, travel experiences, perceptions, and recommendations of international tourists visiting Georgia. A noteworthy aspect emerging from the analysis is the high rate of recommendations of Georgia as a tourist destination and the unanimous sentiment of safety and security, despite the influx of Russian refugees and the geopolitical tension in the region.

When examining the qualitative data from key stakeholders, it is apparent that there are concerns over the impact of migration on the tourism sector, especially with regards to the shift in the tourist demographic and market saturation due to the influx of low-skilled workers. Despite this, the perceived impact on safety and security is minimal, aligning with the perceptions of international tourists indicated in the quantitative analysis.

Interestingly, both the qualitative and quantitative data analyses reveal mixed perceptions about the impact of Russian refugees on the tourism industry. While key stakeholders argue for more stringent regulations and protection for local businesses, international tourists' feedback reveals a nuanced understanding of the situation, with most not being influenced by the Russian-Ukrainian conflict in their decision to visit Georgia. This presents an opportunity for the tourism industry and policymakers to focus on maintaining the quality of services, preserving the cultural heritage, and controlling inflation to retain Georgia's appeal as a tourist destination.

Moreover, the key attractions identified by tourists in the quantitative data, such as Georgia's natural beauty, cultural history, and the warmth and hospitality of its people, are areas that can be capitalized on in marketing and promotional efforts. At the same time, the concerns and recommendations emerging from the qualitative data, such as rising prices, increased competition, and the need for rigorous guidelines, are critical areas that need to be addressed to sustain the growth and development of Georgia's tourism sector.

It is important to note that the perceived impact of the influx of Russian refugees on the tourism industry is largely negative among stakeholders. However, international tourists mainly reported that the conflict had no impact on their decision to visit Georgia. This discrepancy could be due to the tourists' lack of direct exposure to the conflict, compared to local stakeholders who might be more attuned to changes in the industry.

In conclusion, a holistic approach that takes into account the perspectives of both key stakeholders and international tourists can yield effective strategies to bolster Georgia's tourism sector amidst the influx of Russian refugees. This involves maintaining the quality and affordability of services, preserving Georgian culture, ensuring the safety and security of tourists, and capitalizing on Georgia's unique selling points as a tourist destination.

Furthermore, considering Georgia's ambitions towards European integration, the findings of this study may also have implications for the strategic direction of Georgia's tourism industry. The focus on maintaining the quality of services, preserving cultural heritage, and ensuring safety aligns with European standards, and such improvements could potentially enhance Georgia's appeal as a destination for European tourists. Also, the prospect of closer ties with Europe could open up new markets for Georgia's tourism industry, presenting an opportunity to diversify its tourist demographics and reduce its dependence on any single market. Future research could further investigate the potential impact of European integration on Georgia's tourism sector and provide insights into how the industry could adapt to leverage this opportunity.

6. Mitigation strategies and recommendations

The following recommendations focus on strategic efforts across geopolitical, socioeconomic, and environmental dimensions, fostering a more sustainable and inclusive tourism sector.

1. *Diplomatic efforts.* Continued diplomatic engagement is essential to manage political tensions in the South Caucasus region and mitigate its potential impact on the tourism industry. Georgia should seek to work collaboratively with neighboring countries and international stakeholders to address the issue of Russian refugees and the wider geopolitical challenges in the region.

2. *Promotion of diverse tourism offers.* To appeal to a broader range of tourists and dilute the potential negative impact of political realities on certain tourist segments, Georgia should continue to diversify its tourism products. The promotion of lesser-known natural and cultural attractions, the development of niche tourism segments, such as eco-tourism, wellness tourism, adventure tourism, and others, could help attract tourists with varying interests and decrease dependency on any particular tourist market. As Georgia integrates more with Europe, these offerings could be tailored to attract more European tourists.
3. *Enhancing communication strategies.* An effective communication strategy can play a crucial role in addressing tourists' concerns about safety and security amidst geopolitical tensions. This may involve transparently communicating the measures taken to ensure tourists' safety, offering updated travel advisories, and promoting positive stories about tourist experiences in Georgia. In the context of European integration, these communication strategies could also highlight Georgia's alignment with European standards of safety, service quality, and sustainability.
4. *Community involvement and sustainable tourism practices.* To protect local communities and cultural heritage, it is vital to promote sustainable tourism practices and involve communities in tourism planning and decision-making. This could help balance the economic benefits of tourism with the protection of local communities and cultural heritage. As Georgia is moving closer to European integration, the adoption of European best practices in sustainable tourism could further enhance the sustainability of its tourism sector.
5. *Strengthening national and local tourism policies.* There is a need for robust national and local tourism policies that can effectively manage the challenges posed by political realities and migration. Such policies could encompass aspects like emergency response, disaster management, protection of tourists, and support for local tourism businesses affected by geopolitical issues. As Georgia moves towards European integration, these policies could be further strengthened by aligning with European policy frameworks and standards.
6. *Leveraging European integration.* As Georgia aspires for closer ties with Europe, there are potential opportunities to attract more European tourists, open up new markets, and diversify the tourism industry. Efforts could be made to strengthen collaboration with European tour operators, participate in European tourism trade fairs, and promote Georgia as a destination in European markets. European integration

could also provide access to European funds, expertise, and training opportunities to help develop the tourism sector.

7. Limitations and future research

This research provides a comprehensive understanding of the impacts of the Russian-Ukrainian war and subsequent Russian migration on Georgia's tourism industry and evaluates the potential implications of Georgia's objectives towards European integration. Despite its valuable insights, the study does have some limitations. The research captures a snapshot of the situation within a specific time period, and given the dynamic nature of geopolitical conflicts, migration trends, and integration processes, the conditions might change. Furthermore, while the study covers a broad overview of the tourism field in Georgia, it does not look into sector-specific or regional impacts in detail.

Given these limitations, several areas warrant further exploration that could build upon this research:

1. *Long-term impacts.* Future studies could examine the long-term impacts of the Russian-Ukrainian conflict, Russian migration, and the progression of European integration on Georgia's tourism industry.
2. *Regional variation.* Future research could explore regional variations within Georgia to provide a more nuanced understanding of the impacts on different parts of the country.
3. *Sector-specific studies.* Future research could inspect deeper into sector-specific impacts, such as on the hospitality industry, travel agencies, or local businesses involved in tourism.
4. *Perception studies:* Studies focusing on the perceptions of different stakeholder groups, such as local communities or specific segments of tourists, could provide more nuanced insights.
5. *Comparative studies.* Comparative studies with other countries facing similar geopolitical situations or on the path towards European integration could provide valuable insights and lessons for Georgia.

In sum, numerous opportunities remain for further exploration to inform future policy-making and strategic planning in Georgia's tourism industry.

8. Conclusion

The research presented in this article provides a comprehensive analysis of the dynamics between geopolitical events, particularly the Russian-Ukrainian conflict and the subsequent influx of Russian refugees, and their impact on the tourism industry in Georgia. Additionally, it examines the potential implications of Georgia's goals towards European integration. This exploration utilizes a mixed-methods approach, gathering qualitative and quantitative data from international tourists and key industry stakeholders.

The results highlight that geopolitical events and trends significantly influence Georgia's tourism landscape. The qualitative data underscores how political stability contributes to the industry's success, emphasizing the detrimental repercussions of regional conflicts and tensions. Moreover, it identifies key mitigation strategies such as diplomatic efforts, diversification of tourism offerings, enhanced communication strategies, community involvement, the strengthening of national and local tourism policies, and leveraging European integration.

The quantitative data substantiate these insights, revealing a predominantly negative perception of the impact of Russian migration on the industry. However, it simultaneously highlights the resilience and appeal of Georgia's tourism sphere, with all respondents recommending Georgia as a tourist destination and reporting a secure experience during their visit.

Interestingly, respondents recognized Georgia's cultural heritage, natural attractions, and the hospitality of its people as standout aspects. However, concerns emerged regarding increasing prices, changes in service quality, and the growing presence of Russian-owned businesses. These findings underline the necessity for vigilant management and regulation to ensure the sustainable and inclusive growth of the industry.

Additionally, the data emphasized the significant role of personal recommendations and social media in promoting Georgia as a tourist destination. In the future, leveraging digital technology could play a pivotal role in promoting Georgia's unique offerings and counteracting potential negative perceptions caused by geopolitical tensions.

In conclusion, this study features the intricacies of the interconnection between politics and tourism in Georgia. It advocates for proactive, inclusive policymaking, sustainable practices, strategic marketing, and the judicious

use of digital platforms to enhance the resilience and growth of Georgia's tourism realm amidst the changing geopolitical realities. Future research could analyze the specific impacts of geopolitical events on different aspects of the tourism industry in Georgia, as well as further explore the potential impacts of Georgia's pursuit towards European alignment on its tourism landscape. Despite current challenges, the resilience and charm of Georgia's tourism sector remain evident, suggesting a promising future if the appropriate strategies are adopted.

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Appendix

Interview questions for key stakeholders in the tourism industry in Georgia:

1. Can you tell us about your role in the tourism field in Georgia?
.....
2. How has the Russian-Ukrainian war and the influx of Russian refugees in Georgia impacted the tourism sphere in the country?
.....
3. What measures has the government and the tourism industry taken to address the impact of migration on tourism in Georgia?
.....
4. Have there been any changes in the types of tourists visiting Georgia due to the influx of Russian refugees?
.....
5. How have hotels and travel agencies in Georgia adapted to the changes in the tourism context caused by the influx of Russian refugees?
.....

6. Have there been any changes in the safety and security measures in Georgia due to the influx of Russian refugees? If so, can you describe these changes?

.....

7. What is your opinion on the impact of the influx of Russian refugees on the tourism sphere in Georgia? Do you think it has had a positive or negative impact?

.....

8. What steps can be taken to mitigate the negative impact of migration on tourism in Georgia?

.....

9. Do you have any suggestions for future research on the impact of migration on the tourism industry in Georgia?

.....

10. How can Georgia's European aspirations impact the tourism industry in Georgia?

.....

11. What measures do you think should be taken by the government or the tourism industry to leverage opportunities or mitigate challenges associated with European integration?

.....

12. How do you think Georgia's tourism offerings or strategies might need to change or adapt in response to closer European integration?

.....

Thank you for your time and insights!

Impact of Migration on International
Tourism in Georgia

Research questioner

1. 1. What is your gender?

Mark only one oval.

- ☐ Male
☐ Female
☐ Prefer not to say

2. 2. What is your age

Mark only one oval.

- ☐ Under 18
☐ 18-24
☐ 25-34
☐ 35-44
☐ 45-54
☐ 55-64
☐ 65 or older

3. 3. What is your nationality?

9. 9. Did the Russian-Ukrainian war and the influx of Russian refugees in Georgia have any impact on your decision to visit Georgia?

Mark only one oval.

- ☐ Yes
☐ No

10. 10. If yes, how did it impact your decision to visit Georgia?

Mark only one oval.

- ☐ It made me less likely to visit Georgia
☐ It had no impact on my decision to visit Georgia
☐ It made me more likely to visit Georgia

11. 11. Did you notice any changes in the tourism industry in Georgia due to the influx of Russian refugees?

Mark only one oval.

- ☐ Yes
☐ No

12. 12. If yes, what changes did you notice?

4. 4. Have you visited Georgia before?

Mark only one oval.

- ☐ Yes
☐ No

5. 5. If yes, how many times have you visited Georgia?

6. 6. How long was your stay in Georgia on this trip?

7. 7. How did you hear about Georgia as a tourist destination?

Mark only one oval.

- ☐ Online travel websites
☐ Social media
☐ Word of mouth
☐ Print media
☐ Other

8. 8. Did you feel safe and secure during your stay in Georgia?

Mark only one oval.

- ☐ Yes
☐ No

13. 13. Do you think the influx of Russian refugees has had a positive or negative impact on the tourism industry in Georgia?

Mark only one oval.

- ☐ Positive
☐ Negative
☐ None

14. 14. Would you recommend Georgia as a tourist destination to others?

15. 15. If yes, why would you recommend Georgia as a tourist destination?

