

# NO HOPE? — SINGLE MIGRANT MOTHERS AS A PRECARIAT: AUTOETHNOGRAPHY CASE FROM BATUMI, GEORGIA

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*Abstract:* Childcare dramatically affects careers, opportunities, and happiness in migration. Single migrant mothers (solo moms) face additional difficulties (exclusion factors), which make them unhappy and overworked, lacking motivation, hope, and professional identity, and on the way to becoming a member of the precariat. The complex intersection of solo parenting combined with a migration has not been thoroughly researched yet, especially in relation to Belarusian migrants, but there are some connecting issues in the field of higher education, academic, and art careers. This autoethnographic study analyzes the experience of a single mother living with a three-year-old boy in migration in Batumi, Georgia from February 2022 to July 2023, highlights exclusion factors, and shows some examples of inclusive practices for single migrant mothers in Georgia.

*Keywords:* Autoethnography, single mother, exclusion, happiness, migration, women labour.

## Introduction

Childcare dramatically affects careers, opportunities, and happiness in migration. It takes a significant amount of a mother's time and energy, even when living in one's homeland in a family with two parents supported by other relatives. Migration creates additional social barriers



to education, healthcare, social support, and labour. Single migrant mothers (solo moms) face all these additional difficulties that lead to their exclusion from professional life (i.e., exclusion factors). This autoethnographic study analyzes my experience as a single mother living with a three-year-old boy in migration in Batumi, Georgia from February 2022 to July 2023 after social collapse in Belarus and war near the Belarusian border. I, like thousands of Belarusians, was forced to migrate by external pressure without any serious preparation.

As a method, autoethnography uses personal experience to describe and interpret cultural texts, experiences, beliefs, and practices (Adams & Herrmann 2023). This text focuses on my personal experience and the social practices I observed and personally participated in. The method has three main components. The first, *auto*, involves the author using their experiences, reflections, and theories in the manuscript (Adams & Herrmann 2023: 2). Here, the researcher becomes the research tool, incorporating their mind, body, emotions, and beliefs (Adams & Herrmann 2023: 4). For example, while I am writing, I have a child with me, and I need to divide my attention between typing, editing and communicating with him, inventing a game for him, all of which influences my research and the story I write. The second component *ethno* pushes us outside of and beyond ourselves to identify/challenge cultural expectations, beliefs and practices (not only mine, but also other solo moms I have met in migration, and our interactions with social institutions), and then, facilitate a nuanced understanding of these cultural phenomena. And the third component *graphy* – with attention to the process, quality, craft, and ethic of representation, including storytelling devices – means rules for describing experience and cultural phenomena around how to tell about it; thus, storytelling, the form of presentation, is very important. However, I choose not to include the names and pictures of my Belarusian subjects because of personal security concerns. By incorporating creative elements – such as vivid personal anecdotes, emotional reflections, and narrative structure – I make the lived experiences of single migrant mothers more relatable and accessible. This approach helps to highlight the emotional and practical complexities of migration and solo parenting, which might otherwise be lost in a more traditional academic format. The creative style invites readers to empathize with my journey and to understand the nuances of exclusion, precarity, and resilience from an insider's perspective.

This study demonstrates how both childcare and migration serve as additional barriers to professional life for single mothers. Consequently, single mothers experience unhappiness, overwork, and social isolation. They often lose motivation, hope, and a sense of professional

identity, leading to self-accusation and a transition into the precariat, characterized by insecure, unpredictable employment and income without long-term stability. The issue of the conjunction of solo parenting and migration has not been thoroughly researched yet, especially for contemporary Belarusians, but there are some connecting issues in the fields of higher education, academia, and art careers (Binuya 2016; Hauber-Özer 2019; Kurz & Davis & Browne 2021; Leyser 2014–2025). This research does not aim to present a complete picture. Instead, it highlights specific ways in which single migrant mothers can address uncertainty and precarity, such as by gradually building personal support networks in both physical and digital spaces, and by advocating for greater awareness of the unique needs of solo parents in migration. One of the ways to maintain a professional attitude is to participate in networking events. Such participation is important for career development (especially in information technology, IT) since it results in fruitful networking, social capital growth, learning about new technologies, and bringing overall positive emotions and motivation. However, single mothers often find themselves excluded from networking opportunities because of the factors mentioned above. One of the ways to address this problem is to create a more inclusive environment and/or provide additional financing to enable their participation.

This research examines inclusive practices for migrant single mothers in Georgia, also considering the economic aspects of their experiences, including transportation, accommodation, food, designated spaces, care, and activities for children.

### My story

My personal story serves as the starting point for this study. In February 2022, just before the full-scale Russian invasion, my son and I came to Georgia. My son was three years old at the time, and a friend of mine, who was facing health problems, asked for my assistance in relocating to Batumi. It is necessary to mention that Belarusians still have a deep emotional memory of survival in wars: my grandma told me how she ran with babies under warplanes and hid in swamps for months, my mother told me about hard hunger and cold in the evacuation. Every Belarusian family has such stories — thirty percent of our population was killed in World War II. The anti-government protests felt very nerve wracking and frustrating because of deep generational trauma. Additionally, there were no tickets for direct flights. Our route was to go from Minsk, Belarus, to Dubai, UAE, to Tbilisi, Georgia, and,

finally, to Batumi, Georgia. This journey took us through frosty winter to hot summer and again to an unexpected snowstorm, followed by seven hours of nighttime driving in the Caucasus mountains.

At the time, I worked as a part-time university teacher and decided to reserve one week of travel to the “warm and peaceful South”. I thought I would come back to Minsk afterwards or continue my job online as I did during COVID, when I created a distance learning university course... And it will be OK... And maybe I will find a kindergarten for my son in Batumi and that will also be OK... But the reality was very far from my expectations. It was an extremely cold and windy night when the three of us came to Batumi into a very small, cold room on the forty-fifth floor of ORBI City with a nice view of the raging sea through the snowy fog. It took two days to warm up the room with a heater and look around. My friend begged me not to leave her alone in such a situation. We were happy enough to find the necessary support from friendly locals, who advised us on where and how to buy food and other necessities, how to solve everyday problems... I am very grateful, but still not sure if it is safe to name these people publicly.

Unexpectedly, the Belarusian Ministry of Education canceled distance learning at universities, so my employment immediately ended. And what to do? How to live, what to eat, how to survive... how to take care of my child?.. Usually, the answer is to do it by myself. Help yourself on your own. I hoped that my strong employment and educational background would give me the opportunity to continue my successful career, whether offline or online, in migration. Indeed, I have the right to introduce myself as an experienced project manager and business analyst, producer and art manager (theater, street arts festivals, sound therapy art, marketing events etc.), university teacher, and independent researcher. I am a three-time graduate of Belarusian State University, having majored in radio physics and electronics, cultural and social studies, and financial management (MBA). I held successful international internships in the UK, USA, Germany, Lithuania, and Poland. I worked on EU, USAID, UNDP international projects, as well as for NGOs, universities and business organizations. But hundreds of attempts over several months were followed only by endless applications, written tests, multilevel online interviews, the preparation and translation of additional documents (mainly at night, when my son slept); and waiting for a final answer. Sometimes I received messages, saying, “Thank you for applying, you were among the three finalists, but the hiring manager decided to choose another candidate” but other times, I heard sometimes nothing at all... Every time I asked for feedback, I never got it. Imagine, never! Not a single time! Imagine how frustrating it was!

In parallel with all this mentioned above, I had to take care of a small child: his food, health, skills, language, education, emotions, physical and mental development, his environment, clothes, friends, toys, books, documents, habits, daily routine, childhood whims, games, happiness, etc. The relocation was followed by climate and food change, new illnesses (COVID, flu, Coxsackie, tonsillitis, otitis, enterovirus, rotavirus, allergies, etc.) accompanied by extremely high temperature, very fast and dangerous dehydration, nutrition restrictions, regular visits to the hospital, doctors and pharmacies, as well as endless calls to insurance. It took a lot of time, money, and energy. I never knew in advance if I would be able to work tomorrow or not. My planning horizon became narrow – just a day or a few hours. I felt overworked, always tired, socially isolated, unsuccessful and unhappy. My motivation and hope decreased, my professional identity was nearly lost, my self-respect became self-accusation, and I found myself on the way to the precariat, asking for any available sporadic job – teaching math or English; doing sound therapy and tea ceremonies; translating tours; editing blogs; short-term consulting, etc. I met other solo moms doing similar things, babysitting, cleaning, selling things...

This very impactful and difficult experience, without any possibility of furthering my professional career, gave me an understanding of what I feel, what other mothers may feel, how to help me and them, and what I can do. I thought about other solo moms and spoke to them. I have come to understand that both childcare and migration become additional exclusion factors due to the barriers they create for single mothers, for their careers, for their professional development, and for their happiness.

From the very beginning I started to look for information. At first, I contacted all my Georgian colleagues to ask for advice or a friendly meeting. Thanks to such friendly informal communication, I have been introduced to reality and cultural differences. It became clear that a manager's position is practically impossible for me without speaking Georgian and without wider local connections. So, I paid for and took long language and culture courses twice per week and did my best to participate in local events.

Second, I saw that there were families with small children playing at the shore nearly every day in any weather. We spoke to each other, shared contacts and experiences: how to find a better kindergarten or a job, what about documents, how to help each other... Our children played together, and mothers had a moment to breathe, think about themselves, look at the sun, sea, flowers; calm down, relax a bit, find people, and build their own support network.

Third, there still are a number of very useful social media groups and communities started by earlier relocated people. Often such communities are based on off-line activities, such as Eco-run, Tea People Batumi, Batumi Tea Party, Chorus Batumi, Cinema Club, and Morning Yoga. I would like to mention especially, the very active and useful Moms-of-Batumi Telegram/Instagram group, which organizes meetings for different childcare needs.

I looked for any communities – formal, informal, online, off-line; regular or occasional; small or big; led by locals or migrants – that could help me to undertake single-mothers childcare challenges in migration. In the end, this brought me to ABF Batumi, a part of the globally known network of Swedish educational circles. It has its own small space in Batumi. I was happy to find it quite quickly and volunteered to organize a circle for parents with 2–7-year-old children where moms can meet, help each other, educate their children, and exchange ideas, cloths, toys, things and important information about children, and spend own time with their children in community (more information below). Because of this, I can analyze more than my own experience. This step has opened a door to other support organizations considering the special needs of solo migrant parents (most often, mothers).

We eventually left Batumi because of the need to change my son's passport, which can only be done in Belarus, and we could not return to Batumi without permission to go abroad from his absent father, who never wanted to see my son, but that is another story.

### The exclusion of single migrant mothers from professional life: Outcomes

As my story shows, childcare dramatically affects careers, opportunities, and happiness in migration. It takes a significant amount of a mother's time and energy even when living in one's homeland in a big family with many relatives (Binuya 2016; Leyser 2014–2025). Single migrant mothers (solo moms) face additional difficulties that lead to their exclusion from professional life (exclusion factors)..

Both childcare and migration become additional exclusion factors from professional life due to the barriers they create for single mothers.

The barriers created by childcare are as follows:

- 1) additional time (when compared to a single person or to a large family) dedicated to a child's health, education, games, going to bed, speaking, reading, sports, etc. or example, any illness requires

time spent on contacting the insurance company in another country, waiting for an answer about the approved hospital address, going to the hospital by taxi, waiting in the hospital for documents from insurance (sometimes for hours), speaking to a doctor, going to analysis, waiting for results, waiting for the doctor's diagnosis (sometimes for hours), waiting for documents (sometimes for hours), going to the pharmacy (sometimes more than one), planning the next visit to the doctor, not sleeping, trying to give water literally by drop every half hour, etc.;

2) additional payments for the child's needs, kindergarten, babysitter, school, food, clothing, accommodation, furniture, insurance, doctor, medicines, transportation, travel, visa, child socializing, events, toys, books, etc. For example, one solo mom started her own travel agency business and had to pay a day-and-night babysitter when she worked as a tour guide, while I paid the kindergarten for additional working hours and double payments for COVID tests;

3) psychological factors, such as containing emotions, sharing feelings, support, solving problems, losing one's interests due to the focus on raising a child (the strongest one for me personally), always being with the child, always speaking to him, always taking care of and helping him, additional anxiety and fear, always crushed life-work balance, etc. For example, when I was driving, I always had to speak to my son, answer his questions, react to his words, invent and play word games or sing with him.

The barriers created by migration are as follows:

1) double and additional documents: taking care of passports, permissions, visas, power of attorney, bank account, legal status, etc. For example, we had to leave Batumi because of the expiration date of my son's passport and could not come back because of a lack of permission to cross the border; or the unpredictable practice of crossing the border once per year to make staying in Georgia legal ("VisaRun"); or the necessity of expensive power of attorney, including official translation and apostille;

2) cultural differences: language, women's social role, acceptable behavior, different climate, etc. For example, my son's long and difficult acclimatization to Batumi;

3) everyday conditions: no real property, no equipment, no experience, no support from family and old friends, etc. For example, the online interviews I did in big hotel lobbies or in hotel yards with access to public Wi-Fi with unpredictable noise around.

The barriers from childcare and from migration have a doubling effect and multiply each other, producing a kind of negative synergy. For

example, I was unable to find an offline job because I did not speak the local language, and I was unable to work online regularly because of the additional time spent on childcare and urgent situations. It seems that the digitalization of work accelerated by the COVID-19 pandemic brought more opportunities for single parents, but it also crushed work-life balance, transforming home into office. This preliminary list of barriers is incomplete and may be extended by other single migrant mothers. For sure it is a subject for future research. As a result of these barriers, single mothers become unhappy, overworked, often socially isolated, frustrated, losing motivation, hope, and professional identity, turning to self-accusation on the way to becoming a member of the precariat. This complex question has not been thoroughly researched yet, especially for Belarusians, but there are some connecting issues in the field of higher education and art careers (Binuya 2016; Hauber-Özer 2019; Kurz, Davis & Browne 2021; Leyser 2014–2025).

Thus, Catherine Tungol Binuya (2016) dedicated her research “to all the working professionals, all the mothers, ... foreign-born nationals, ...all the Others whose identities leave them in the marginal fringes of society” (Binuya 2016: iv). She wrote about the extremely challenging multiple roles (“intersectionality of their multiple identities” (Binuya 2016: 36)) of working mother students, who “often frustratingly find themselves falling short in one area in order to meet demands in another area” (Binuya 2016: 4). In doing so, she provided insight into factors that contribute to life-balance challenges, and recommended implementing support services.

Melissa Hauber-Özer (2019) illustrated “everyday struggles to navigate interactions through perplexing layers of access and exclusion ... to build a life in a new country” (Hauber-Özer 2019: 1), writing an autoethnography of forced migration. Ella Kurz, Deborah Davis and Jenny Browne (2021) offered a theory of women’s ‘mother-becoming’ and transformation: “birth, including the challenging and destabilizing parts, is ... also a site of women’s ‘becoming’” (Ella Kurz, Deborah Davis & Jenny Browne 2021: 135). The *M/Others Who Make* (MWM) initiative, started by Matilda Leyser (2014–2025) for “creative mothers and careers”, has become an international movement for women and non-binary people “to sustain their creative identities while also holding caring roles” offers events, a blog, space for communication, and motivation.

Like I have, all these researchers of exclusion problems faced by women looked for solutions, but still have not offered a strategy to overcome exclusion.

## How to maintain a professional attitude: Inclusive practices for single migrant mothers in Georgia

As I have mentioned in the introduction, one of the ways to maintain a professional attitude is to participate in networking events. Such participation is important for career development (especially in IT) since it results in fruitful networking, social capital growth, learning about new technologies, and bringing overall positive emotions and motivation. However, single mothers find themselves excluded from networking opportunities because of the factors listed above. One of the ways to address this problem is to create a more inclusive environment (Binuya 2016) and/or provide additional financing to enable participation. I encountered some examples of such inclusive practices for single migrant mothers in Georgia (e.g., when event budgets included transportation, accommodation, food, special space, care, and activities for children) through ABF Batumi, Interakcia Agency and Office of European Expertise and Communication (OEEC).

My way to further professional development in migration started with building connections with different people and volunteering, as described in my story. I also started a small ABF study circle which has grown into several circles for children and adults, providing new connections, opportunities, support and the possibility of influence. It is necessary to mention that usually small children are not welcomed at conferences, shows, round tables, discussions, lectures, games, business meetings, etc. because of noise, unpredictable behavior, and outrage from other participants. Special inclusive spaces for children as organized in ABF Batumi for the first common study circle gave a chance for new free activities where children may play with or near moms:

- 1) M&M's: Teach & Study by Game for children and significant adults – moms, dads, grannies, children 2–7 years old met once every one – two weeks on Tuesday evenings;
- 2) Children's club Kigurumi worked on Sunday morning and turned into a new circle with a new leader after its completion;
- 3) Club 5–7 years old met 2 times per week Monday/Wednesday;
- 4) Home economics of the XXI century met every Friday evening;
- 5) The science of happiness met once a week on Tuesday afternoons;
- 6) Mini-hikes, picnics, excursions (supported by ABF), joint holidays and outdoor walks were announced at the initiative of the participants;
- 7) Exchange of information, toys, and things.

Kigurumi, Home economics of the XXI century, and The science of happiness were organized for adults, but there was still a place for children within and around the events, so solo moms might participate in these activities. The learning circles model is very fruitful not only for education but also for socializing, self-realization and psychological support.

In ABF Batumi I met a representative of Interakcia and had a chance to speak to her personally about the difficulties faced by single migrant mothers. A number of networking events were organized in Batumi by Interakcia with the purpose of building connections between Georgian and Belarusian NGOs and activists. The events offered a space with activities for children nearby, so migrant solo moms could participate, establishing a wider local network, discussing social problems, and planning possible co-operations.

The Office of European Expertise and Communication (OEEC) continued these inclusive practices and took special care of solo moms by providing a budget for transportation, accommodation, food, special care, and activities for the children of solo moms participants. There was also a special working group organized where participants discussed the issue of migrant solo moms as a vulnerable group that requires special conditions.

I'd like to mention that all organizations and initiatives described here were started by Belarusians and quickly responded to expats' challenges. However in 2025, ABF Batumi and OEEC no longer work in Georgia, and the problems faced by single migrant mothers are still invisible for social institutions.

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