

TORINO PROCESS: REVIEW OF POLICIES FOR LIFELONG LEARNING IN GEORGIA – 2024

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PREFACE

In 2022, the European Training Foundation (ETF) launched the sixth round of its Torino Process – a biennial review of vocational education and training (VET) in countries in East and South-East Europe, Central Asia and the South and East Mediterranean region. The Torino Process (TRP) describes and analyses country developments, identifies challenges in the domain of human capital development, and describes the ways in which countries mobilise their VET systems to address these challenges.¹

In this round, the focus of the Torino Process is twofold, looking at:

- The performance of education and training systems, in particular VET, with respect to the creation of good and equitable opportunities for lifelong learning (TRP Level 1); and
- The analysis of policies that influence the performance of education and training systems, with the purpose of identifying areas in need of improvement and to generate hands-on advice on the transition towards responsive lifelong learning systems (TRP Level 2).

The focus of this review is on the second level of country participation (TRP Level 2). This level facilitates a review of what countries do to influence and improve the performance of their policies and systems from a lifelong learning perspective. This means documenting and interpreting the effectiveness of policies and systemic arrangements in countries against the backdrop of a) demand for learning opportunities, and b) relevant socioeconomic and demographic developments which may influence that demand.

The review process comprised four phases:

- Preparatory phase: formal expression of interest by the country, joint identification of issues, priorities, and stakeholders by the partner country and ETF;
- Desk research phase: review of primary and secondary data and documentation produced by the country or other organisations (including the ETF);
- Field phase: during a mission to the country, mapping key informants and conducting interviews, focus groups, and discussion groups;
- Report preparation: report drafting, quality assurance, validation, and dissemination.

Following a request by national authorities in Georgia, the focus of the review conducted in Georgia is on lifelong learning and adult education in particular. The issues and recommendations in this report were discussed and finetuned during an online event on 21 October 2024. The Torino Process defines “lifelong learning” as any learning activity undertaken throughout life with the aim of improving knowledge, skills/competences and/or qualifications for personal, social and/or professional reasons. “Adult education” refers to a range of formal, non-formal, or informal learning activities, both general and vocational, undertaken by individuals aged 15 years and above after leaving initial education and training.

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¹ A full overview of the Torino Process framework can be found here: <https://bit.ly/47YGA6L>.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Georgia has adopted a set of policy reforms that have contributed to the rapid growth of its GDP over the past years. Some traditional sectors such as agriculture, tourism and construction have been revived but need improved production methods, knowledge and skills, while some new sectors such as IT are in high demand but require an investment in training for the labour force to become competitive. Older workers in particular are hindered by a lack of modern skills and knowledge, and the retraining and upskilling of these workers will be important for maintaining the competitiveness of the economy in the future.

Despite the need for improved labour force skills, government spending on education and training was relatively low. The quality of learning outcomes is below other countries and the skills of graduates are towards the lower end of the Global Competitiveness Index. While the proportion of adults with tertiary education has approached EU levels, relatively few people have followed a vocational education pathway. EU analyses suggest that Georgia would benefit if human capital and the skills available at the labour market would be better. Although most people in Georgia view adult education positively, actual participation in adult education is below the lowest levels achieved in EU countries, primarily due to limited training opportunities, particularly in rural areas, insufficient funding, lack of flexible scheduling, financial and informational barriers, and a shortage of short-term and distance-learning options.

Policy framework for adult education

Georgia has created an adequate legal framework for adult education. The law on vocational education has enabled adults to access the formal network of VET colleges and recognised the concept of non-formal education as part of the lifelong learning system; moreover, the most recent variant of the law, along with related sublegal acts,² has introduced short-term VET qualifications appropriate for adult training and retraining. The 'Unified Education Strategy 2017-2021' has led to an increase in the scale of vocational training and retraining programmes. The 'Law on Employment Support' (2020) led to the establishment of the State Employment Support Agency (SESA), which provides active labour market policies that support adult education activities. VET colleges are encouraged to provide short-term programmes for adults. Procedures have been created to support the validation of non-formal and informal learning (VNFIL),³ and legal entities, including educational institutions, may receive accreditation and validate prior learning. Specific regulations set out the processes and procedures for the recognition of prior learning (RPL), although the take-up of these opportunities has been limited.

Institutional framework for adult education

One of the main institutions for implementing formal adult education policies and delivery is the Skills Agency Georgia (hereinafter referred to simply as the Skills Agency), created in 2021 as a public-

² Decree No.131 of 15 March 2019 by the Government of Georgia 'On Approving the Rule and Conditions of Obtaining the Right to Implement a Vocational Training Programme and a Vocational Retraining Programme and on its Recognition by the State'; Order No. 71/n of 10 April 2019 of the Minister of Education, Science, Culture and Sports 'On Approving the Rule and Conditions of Enrolment into a Vocational Training Programme and a Vocational Retraining Programme'; Order No. 971850 of the Director of Educational Quality Enhancement National Centre 'On defining the Rules of Establishing Correspondence of the Learning Outcomes of the Vocational Education Standard, the Training Programmes and Retraining Programmes with the Level descriptors of the National Qualifications Framework'; Order No. 59/n of the Minister of Education, Science, Culture and Sports of Georgia 'On Defining the Rule for Developing and Approving a Vocational Training Programme and a Vocational Retraining Programme'; Decree No.67/n of the Minister of Education, Science, Culture and Sports of Georgia 'On Defining the Fees for Obtaining the Right to Implement a Vocational Training Programme and a Vocational Retraining Programme.'

³ Order No 459 of 20 September 2019 of the Government of Georgia 'On approval of the rules and conditions for obtaining the right to recognition of non-formal education and the fee for obtaining the right to recognition of non-formal education'

private partnership funded by the government and the Georgian Chamber of Commerce and Industry to promote interaction and partnership with the private sector. Its mandate is to develop national VET qualifications, strengthen the capacity of VET providers, promote inclusive approaches in VET and allocate funding to training providers. Since 2019 it has financed about 500 programmes for adults. While the providers of most adult education programmes are public and private VET colleges, the Skills Agency has assisted 20 private companies in developing non-formal programmes to support adult education and training. While the Skills Agency is responsible for building the capacity of training providers, the National Centre for Educational Quality Enhancement (NCEQE) is responsible for external quality assurance of training and retraining programmes for adults, and of providers of adult education. It authorises educational institutions and their educational programmes and grants the right to implement training and retraining programmes. It has thus far accredited 543 short-term training and retraining programmes, mostly delivered by vocational educational institutions.

Providers of adult education

Any legal entity has the right to deliver formal state-recognised short-term courses for adults, subject to approval by the NCEQE, and may receive funding from the Skills Agency. Other possible sources include SESA, private donors, providers themselves, or the individual learners. Educational institutions providing formal adult education services include state VET colleges, public-private VET colleges, private VET colleges, adult education centres, general education schools and universities. Private sector providers, both commercial companies and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) such as adult education centres, provide non-formal adult education services. Various public bodies also provide non-formal adult education opportunities to their beneficiaries.

Data on adult education in Georgia is incomplete and mostly covers training and retraining programmes registered by NCEQE. In 2022, adult education programmes at VET level were provided by 67 VET colleges and 19 higher education institutions, enrolling over 5,000 students of whom half were adults. The typical beneficiaries of short-term courses offered by state-recognised providers are job-seekers registered at www.worknet.gov.ge portal, who are funded by the State Employment Support Agency, learners on municipal skills development programmes, beneficiaries of reintegration programmes of the prison services, and others enrolled directly by VET institutions. Normally, the catchment area of VET institutions is the towns and cities in which they are established.

Adult education services are also provided by 14 Adult Education Centres (AECs) which aim to promote civic engagement and community development, and to support the social inclusion of disadvantaged people. Their adult education courses cover languages, IT, accountancy and family finance, job search skills, short professional courses, art workshops, theatre performances, and civic education. Since their establishment, AECs have provided courses for 17,000 adult learners.

In addition, some companies provide training to their workers either in their own training centres or through other training providers, including those established as public-private partnerships. NGOs that provide adult education services include the Georgian Farmers' Association, the Georgian Chamber of Commerce and Industry, and the Georgian Adult Education Network. Specialised private sector training companies also provide direct training and retraining opportunities to adults but have limited enrolment capacity, with demand for training places far outstripping supply.

Other actors in the adult education ecosystem include several state institutions. The State Employment Support Agency (SESA) finances short-term vocational training and retraining programmes for jobseekers which, as mentioned above, are delivered by authorised training providers. SESA has field offices in nine regions where it employs full-time consultants who support jobseekers with various training and retraining opportunities. The Georgian Innovation and Technology Agency (GITA), an arms-length agency of the Ministry of Economy and Sustainable Development (MoESD), runs a training programme that provides technology firms with education and skills development. In addition, it has provided training for IT specialists who may gain international IT certifications, for IT companies' own programmes, and for IT specialists under the SESA employment programme. It also provides IT and digital skills training for jobseekers. The Ministry of Agriculture's Environmental Information and Education Centre (EIEC) offers formal and non-formal training for adults in environmental protection, green skills and agricultural studies, and for primary and secondary

school teachers at the Agricultural School. Training is also provided for employees of the ministry, and for employees of municipalities, media organisations, and NGOs.

Digital courses and online adult learning opportunities expanded significantly during the pandemic, and this trend continued afterwards. As a result many organisations now offer a wide variety of online courses. Based on Decree #143⁴ components of VET and training and retraining programmes can also be offered in a distance-learning format. Career guidance systems have recently been improved, and an effort has been made to promote the value and benefits of VET among the wider community. Professional career guidance specialists operate in all public VET institutions, but in practice only reach a minority of students.

The needs and expectations for adult education

The potential beneficiaries of adult education include unemployed persons, members of vulnerable groups such as disabled persons, internally displaced persons, employees looking to retrain, professionals seeking to upgrade their skills, and inactive persons seeking to enter the labour market (e.g., women returners, single mothers, ex-convicts, ex-military personnel). For registered unemployed persons, SESA career counsellors assist jobseekers to find training courses suited to their needs. Each year SESA supports 3,000 jobseekers to take part in training or retraining programmes. Retraining can be provided by employers or by the lifelong learning centres of universities, such as the LLL Centre at the University of Tbilisi. Municipalities have also been active in meeting the training needs of their residents. For example, Tbilisi City Hall supports training for women returners to the labour market.

Workers in precarious employment can benefit from adult education to improve their skills which may lead to more stable jobs. Workers in informal economic activities or on a temporary contract may benefit from adult education to obtain more permanent employment. Persons with disabilities and internally displaced persons (IDPs) also benefit from adult education to improve or upgrade their skills. Several adult education providers offer services to these groups. For example, Tbilisi City Hall supports training for vulnerable people such as immigrants, IDPs, recipients of social protection payments and people with large families, while the target groups of the School of Public Affairs include asylum seekers and refugees.

Accessibility and availability of adult education opportunities

Formal adult education is readily accessible to most potential learners. While individual providers may set entrance requirements, mostly there are no specific requirements to enrol in training programmes, though retraining programmes might require some specific prior knowledge. To obtain authorisation, VET and other training/retraining providers are expected to meet minimum standards, which are somewhat demanding. In 2022, the available enrolment capacity for long-term VET programmes was over 15,000 places, while the capacity for providing short-term training options was more limited. This suggests that formal and state-financed adult education provision is far below actual needs, as evidenced by the large number of applications for available courses at all types of education providers at all levels. Moreover, the statistics for participation in lifelong learning activities in Georgia is below that of regional peers and of EU member states at a similar level of development. There is therefore much scope for expanding capacity and for the further development of opportunities for adult education.

Human and financial resources

Providers of adult education have a variety of human resources with specialised experience in different occupations and trades. However, most VET colleges employ all or most of their teaching staff on a contract basis, which may demotivate staff and reduce capacity for course development or for monitoring trainees over time.

⁴ Decree №143/11 of 30 August 2024 on Approving the Rules and Procedures for Implementing Components of VET Programmes in distance-learning format.

Adult education is financed from various sources including the Ministry of Education, Science and Youth (through the Skills Agency), SESA, the Tbilisi Municipality and other state institutions such as GITA, Enterprise Georgia and the Probation Agency, other relevant ministries, local governments, donors, and user fees. The provision of adult education opportunities tends to be concentrated in Tbilisi and some other larger cities, and there is limited provision in rural and less-developed municipalities and regions. Local governments are constrained by limited budgets and their legal competencies; they require increased government financial support to provide low-cost or free-of-charge training opportunities to adult learners in their communities.

Most funding is directed towards providers rather than individuals. VET courses are financed through a per-capita funding system ('voucher system') in which learners can select any course of their choice at a public institution. This is intended to drive up quality through competition between providers, though doubts have been expressed as to the effectiveness of this system. The Skills Agency provides vouchers for long-term adult education programmes, while SESA provides registered jobseekers with a state voucher that can be used to enrol in short-term courses at VET colleges. Other courses are provided on a commercial basis by private providers. In an innovative approach, some Adult Education Centres have set up social enterprises to meet their commitment to providing adult education to members of vulnerable groups.

Policy recommendations

This report identifies the key challenges facing adult education in Georgia and makes 28 recommendations for improving the delivery of adult education services and expanding the capacity of adult education provision. The recommendations cover the key areas set out in the separate sections of the report, concerning: (i) the policy and institutional framework for adult education, (ii) the providers of adult education, (iii) the needs and expectations for adult education, (iv) access and availability of adult education provision, (v) the enrolment capacity and potential for expansion of the adult education sector in terms of human resources, and (vi) the financial resources that would be required for the effective development of adult education in Georgia.

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1. Background context

1.1. Economic transition and education performance in Georgia

Georgia has made a radical transition to a liberal market economy over the last two decades. Since the Rose Revolution of 2003, the country has been through a period of intense policy reform, not least in the education sector. These reforms have targeted a realignment towards EU systems and structures, ensuring that market forces play a primary role in resource allocation. From 2004-2022, real GDP increased by an average of 5.5%, below only Ireland's 5.6% in the EU, and well above the 1.3% achieved by Germany. In 2023, real GDP grew even more rapidly, at above 10%, for the second year in a row (European Commission, 2023a).

After applying for EU membership in 2022 the European Council granted Georgia candidate status in December 2023, but de facto halted the accession process in the aftermath of the 'recent developments in Georgia, particularly in view of the adoption of the law on the transparency of foreign influence'⁵. Prior to that, Georgia signed an Association Agreement with the EU in 2016 under which Georgia and the EU committed to cooperate to promote lifelong learning at all levels of education and training.⁶ Since 2021, over 6,500 students and professionals have taken part in exchanges between the EU and Georgia in the areas of education, training, youth, and sport under ERASMUS+. In addition, 92 Georgian students have been selected for Erasmus Mundus Scholarships. Depending on political relations with the EU, Georgia is expected to contribute to various activities and working groups related to EU policy cooperation in the field of education, VET and adult learning.

Georgia has traditionally been an agricultural country, but in the years following the 1991 break-up of the Soviet Union few investments were made in the sector as agriculture was not a policy priority. This changed in 2012, when agriculture was announced as a priority sector and began to revive with government support. Due to export opportunities some agricultural subsectors are more advanced than others, including hazelnut production, beekeeping and horticulture, but other sectors remain weak. A major obstacle is the pervasive lack of skills in the sector. Farmers tend to stick to traditional methods and are often unaware of improved production technologies. Developing the skills of farmers is essential to raising agricultural productivity and incomes.

Other traditional sectors include hospitality, tourism and construction. Tourism is experiencing a decline in its labour force due to high levels of emigration of skilled workers. Overall, in the traditional sectors, workforce skills are falling behind and there is a need for retraining and upskilling adult workers.

Emerging new sectors include the IT sector and the business outsourcing sector, where new skills need to be developed for the first time. According to some local experts, Georgia is becoming a service economy based around logistics, IT services and call centres.⁷ In the field of IT there is an increasing demand for labour coupled with relatively few opportunities for adult education and training. Many employers report that the skills of new employees do not meet their expectations.⁸ The lack of a

⁵ Conclusions of European Council on 27 June 2024. Accessed 24 July on <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/policies/eastern-partnership/georgia/>

⁶ EU policy on education is guided by the Education and Training 2020 (ET 2020) Framework, and is based on the lifelong learning approach as defined in the EU's Council Resolution on Lifelong Learning, according to which lifelong learning encompasses all learning activity undertaken throughout life, with the aim of improving knowledge, skills and competences within a personal, civic, social and/or employment-related perspective (Pfanzelt et al., 2021).

⁷ Interview with Enterprise Georgia.

⁸ This statement is reported by the Georgian Chamber of Commerce and Industry which has 3,000 employer members.

skilled adult labour force is a major hurdle to attracting foreign direct investment (FDI), which is needed to ensure the transfer of technology and the implementation of new working practices.

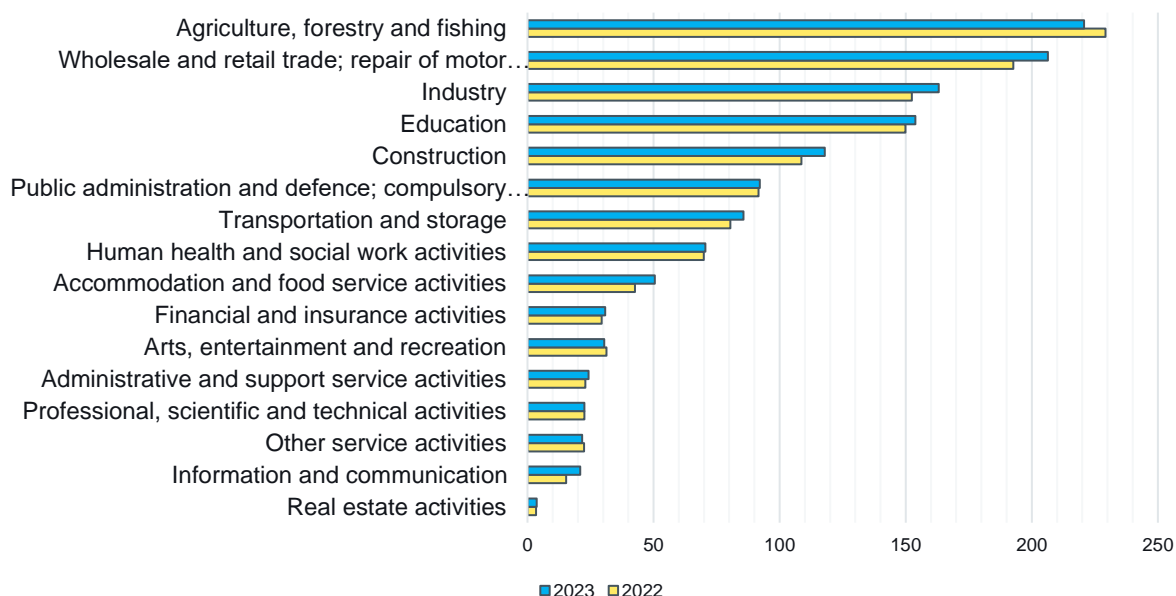
1.1.1. The labour market

A large share of employment is in low value-added sectors, while more productive sectors have failed to create sufficient high-skilled jobs (European Commission, 2023b). According to the Labour Force Survey (LFS), in 2023 the share of employment in services was 62.4%, followed by agriculture (21.1%), and industry (16.5%). Effectively, Georgia has a dual economy with a low-productivity workforce in rural areas and a higher-paid industrial- and service-sector workforce in urban areas (Posadas et al., 2018).

The structure of the labour market has been changing rapidly in recent years, and the education and training system has been unable to keep up with the resulting changes in the demand for skills (Posadas et al., 2018). As can be seen from Figure 1, between 2022 and 2023 (after the COVID pandemic) the sectors with the largest non-agricultural employment (with over 100,000 employees) have been wholesale and retail trade; repair of motor vehicles and motorcycles, education, construction, Industry, public administration and defence; compulsory social security, transportation and storage, and human health and social work activities. Of these, the demand for labour has been expanding in (i) wholesale and retail trade; repair of motor vehicles and motorcycles, (ii) construction, (iii) public administration and defence; compulsory social security, and (iv) transportation and storage.

Among the other smaller sectors, the largest increase in demand for labour has occurred in arts, entertainment and recreation and in administration and support service activities. The largest percentage increases in labour demand have taken place in information and communication activities (36.5%) (from a small base), accommodation and food service activities (18.6%), construction (8.5%), wholesale and retail trade; repair of motor vehicles and motorcycles (7.1%) and industry (7.0%), transportation and storage (6.5%) and administrative and support service activities (5.2%).⁹

Figure 1: Employment by sector of activity, 2022 & 2023 (thousands)



Source: GEOSTAT online database 'Distribution of employed persons by occupation and sex'. Note: Occupations based on NACE Rev 2.0 classification

⁹ Another relatively fast growth sector was real estate activities (8.9%), which grew from a very small base.

The labour market is also characterised by high levels of informal employment at about 27.6% of the labour force in 2023, much of which is in the agricultural sector.¹⁰ Georgia lacks a social safety net and an unemployment benefit system, so adult workers depend on earned income for their subsistence. As a result, there has been an increase in precarious work and in work for the platform economy, providing few opportunities for additional training or skills development (Diakonidze, 2020). There are large gender disparities: in 2023 the employment rate (15+) was 52% for men but only 37% for women (Geostat, 2024).¹¹ The share of young people aged 15-29 who are neither in employment nor in education or training (NEETs) was 30.7% in 2022, almost three times the EU average of 11.7%, with a large gender gap. According to the World Bank (2019), at the age of 29 half of young women fall into this category.¹²

1.1.2. The education system

Before proceeding to describe the adult education framework in Georgia, it is important first to briefly outline some key features of the formal education system. In Georgia, education is compulsory from the age of 6 to 14. Post-compulsory upper secondary education lasts three years and can be followed in different tracks including general education (ISCED level 3), an integrated model of general and vocational education (ISCED level 4)¹³, or a purely vocational education track (ISCED level 3)¹⁴ (with variable durations). In addition, students can follow post-secondary non-tertiary vocational programmes (ISCED level 4 or 5).¹⁵ The Georgian population has an average of 12.8 years of schooling.

Public spending on education was 3.6% of GDP in 2021, below the EU average of 5% and below the average for all low- and middle-income countries of 4.4%. The quality of the education system and curricula has suffered from this low level of spending (European Commission, 2022). The quality of learning outcomes as measured by the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), is below other countries in the region and well below all EU countries. Georgia was ranked 59th out of 80 countries participating in the 2022 round of PISA for the proficiency of its 15-year-old students in mathematics. The proportion of 15-year-old underachievers in reading was 66% in mathematics, 67% in reading, and 65% in science, compared to an EU average of 29.5%, 26.2%, and 24.2% respectively.¹⁶ Socioeconomic status is a strong predictor of school performance according to the PISA results.

Numerous reforms have been introduced in the education system in the last two decades. In 2005, a national curriculum was introduced, and management was devolved to school level, giving school leaders autonomy in decision-making. A major funding reform introduced a per capita funding system (officially referred to as a 'voucher' system though never issued in a physical form) that was designed to enhance parental choice of schools. This was intended to promote competition between schools, thus raising their efficiency and improving their performance (Gilauri, 2017). However, it has led to underfunding of some schools with vulnerable students, and some years later a further reform introduced formula-funding to revalue the 'vouchers' in line with needs. Per capita funding was also introduced for university and vocational education, and most recently for adult education¹⁷. The use of 'vouchers' has proved controversial, as it was observed that their use has diluted equitable access to

¹⁰ Number taken from ILOSTAT online database based on the 19th International Conference of Labour Statisticians (ICLS) standards.

¹¹ Numbers taken from ILOSTAT online database.

¹² Most young NEET women are inactive or outside the labour market, whereas most young men are unemployed. Family composition (specifically, having children) and marital status are key factors influencing NEET status. Socioeconomic status also plays a significant role, with over 60% of NEETs coming from low-income families (World Bank, 2019).

¹³ Secondary VET – integrated programmes.

¹⁴ Basic VET.

¹⁵ Secondary and tertiary VET.

¹⁶ In the OECD PISA 2022 assessment of educational performance of 15-year-olds, 'underachievement' means a score below level 2 on the test scale.

¹⁷ At higher education level they are called 'student grants' and have the same value for any field of study; in vocational and adult education they are called 'vouchers' and differ in value – they are based on actual calculations of expected costs and indexed to number of student per group.

education as better resourced schools attract more students and more funding, and less well-resourced schools in deprived areas lose students and consequently lose funding. The overall impact has been to increase educational inequality at all levels of education (Ziderman, 2017).

Graduates from general education tracks or from secondary VET programmes may progress to higher VET programmes or bachelor programmes. This option is not available to graduates from basic VET schools, who may however progress to integrated secondary vocational educational programs. In practice, most students follow the general education track and only 11% follow the vocational track at higher secondary level.

Considering the proportion of the population aged 25+ (i.e., adults) who had attained an intermediate education level in 2022, almost two fifths (38.8%) had attained upper secondary level education and one fifth (20.0%) had attained post-secondary non-tertiary level education.¹⁸ In the Georgian context it means that only one-fifth of adults have graduated from VET colleges. Public expenditure on vocational education is less than 5% of the total public expenditure on education, and formal adult VET education is funded at even lower levels (World Bank, 2022a). Among the population group aged 15-64, in 2020 one third (33.8%) had a higher education qualification.¹⁹

Despite the relatively low proportion of GDP spent on education, the proportion of employees who had completed tertiary education increased from 31.2% in 2011 to 34.6% in 2019, which was equivalent to the EU-27 average of 34.5% in the same year.²⁰ At the same time the proportion of employees with less than a basic education has fallen from 1.5% in 2011 to just 0.26% in 2019, while the share of employees with only a primary education also fell slightly from 7.0% to 6.3%, and the share with intermediate (secondary or post-secondary non-tertiary) education fell from 60.4% to 58.8% over the same period.

Georgia has made significant advances in the key commitments of the European Higher Education Area and has ratified the Lisbon Recognition Convention. The country also adopted the Bologna Declaration in 2004. A new Law on Higher Education introduced a three-tier degree system and a centralised enrolment system, enhanced university autonomy and emphasised the importance of lifelong learning. These reforms eliminated corruption in the higher education admissions process and established a merit-based system for access to higher education (Gilauri, 2017). However, critics argue that the process failed to resolve the challenges of inequality and of access for low-income households (Chitashvili, 2020). The skills of graduates in Georgia are ranked only 125th out of 141 countries in the Global Competitiveness Index. These considerations demonstrate that despite the relatively good graduation rates from post-secondary and tertiary education, the learning outcomes from the education system are relatively limited and unequally distributed.

According to the Opinion of the European Commission on Georgia's application for EU membership, Georgia needs to strengthen its human capital through education reform to ensure skills for the labour market and innovativeness, and to reinforce the capacity of the country to cope with competitive pressure in the EU (European Commission, 2022). In 2023, the European Commission concluded that '... the limited level of educational achievement, quality and labour-market relevance of education weighs on the development of Georgia's human capital and holds back its potential growth' (European Commission, 2023b). There are substantial skills gaps, in relation to digital skills, both because of an inadequate offer and the quality of the programmes (PMCG, 2023; ETF, 2020).

1.1.3. Adult education

Adult education is a key component of lifelong learning (LLL). It comprises education and training for adults with the goal of enhancing knowledge, skills, and competencies in personal, civic, social, and employment-related domains (Jarvis, 2010). This concept extends beyond traditional classroom settings, embracing flexible learning pathways that acknowledge and validate nonformal and informal

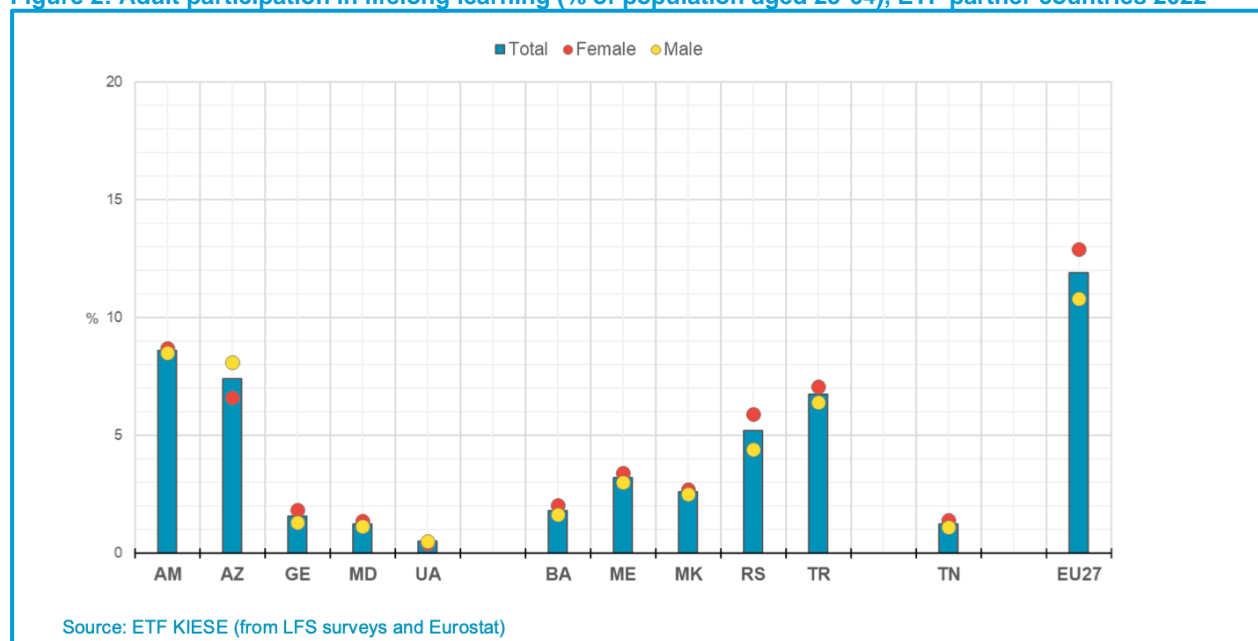
¹⁸ Data from World Bank World Development Indicators [variable code *SE.TER.CUAT.BA.ZS*].

¹⁹ Data are taken from the ILOSTAT online database.

²⁰ Data for Georgia are taken from the ILOSTAT online database, and for the EU27 from Eurostat [variable code *lfsa_egaed*].

learning experiences. Adult education emphasises the importance of accessible avenues for the development, acquisition, and validation of skills, recognising the diverse learning journeys and life experiences of adults. The European Training Foundation (ETF) classifies ‘adults’ as those aged 25 and above. While emphasising access for all who need or desire adult educational opportunities, the ETF emphasises the needs of socio-economically disadvantaged learners, including those facing gender imbalances or belonging to migrant communities (ETF, 2023).

Figure 2: Adult participation in lifelong learning (% of population aged 25-64), ETF partner countries 2022



Although LLL is a policy priority for Georgia, the participation rate in adult education (i.e., the proportion of those aged 25-64 who had taken some form of education or training in the four weeks prior to the survey) was less than 2% in 2022. The overall level of adult education in Georgia is below that of regional peers and the EU (see Figure 1). Most people in Georgia regard adult education in a positive light. A survey undertaken by DVV International (2021) revealed that three fifths (60%) of respondents (aged 18-65) considered adult education to be ‘useful’. This followed an earlier study by Kitiashvili and Tasker (2016) showing that almost all surveyed adults (93%) had positive attitudes towards continuing education, and that four fifths (80%) of respondents had unmet needs for continuing education during the preceding year. Barriers such as a lack of finances and information, as well as the time required for commitment to study, exclude many adults from educational opportunities.

Adult education in Georgia refers to a variety of different forms of education and training, including:

- Training and retraining programmes awarding certificates (at NQF levels 2-5)
- Training of the 25+ age group in VET Diploma programmes (at NQF levels 3-5)
- Non-formal short-term professional training offered by higher education institutions
- Non-formal training by NGOs, government agencies, donors and private companies providing on-the-job training

Since 2019, several new vocational training and retraining programmes and qualifications for adults have been introduced in the formal education system. These enable adults to update their skills and assist their integration into the labour market. The number of certificate training and retraining programmes are increasing from only 34 new approvals in 2021, 163²¹ in 2022, and 133 in 2023. However, the number of programmes actively offered in a particular year has varied from 282 in 2022

²¹ Of which 27 were state educational institutions, 18 were private educational institutions, nine were private non-educational institutions, and three were state non-educational institutions (VET Department Report 2022).

to just 124 in 2023. According to EMIS data, 7,240 candidates enrolled in training and retraining programmes in 2023, almost 39% more than the previous year (EMIS, 2024). The number of students by adult age group (age group 24-26 and above) in public and private VET programmes was 7,151 students and 4,182 graduates in 2022²².

2. Policy and institutional framework for adult education

Georgia has adopted laws on higher education (2004),²³ general education (2005),²⁴ and vocational education (2007, 2018).²⁵ The 'Law on General Education' aimed to 'ensure the openness of and equal access to lifelong general education for all persons'. A 'Concept Paper on Vocational Education', adopted in 2005, defined the concept of adult education and was followed by the first 'Law on Vocational Education' in 2007. This law was based on the principles of lifelong learning and enabled adults to access VET colleges (Pfanzelt et al., 2021). By 2009 about half of VET students were adults aged 22 and over.

The 'Vocational Education and Training Strategy for 2013-2020' aimed to align vocational education with labour market needs. It inspired a new 'Law on Vocational Education' adopted in 2018, which recognised the concept of informal education as part of the lifelong learning system, placing it within the activities of continuing education required for the regulated professions (Pfanzelt et al., 2021). The law introduced short-term VET qualifications appropriate for adult training and retraining needs. Subsequent bylaws introduced quality assurance standards for VET institutions and programmes (Siprashvili, 2023).

The 'Unified Education Strategy 2017-2021' defined all levels of education and the main directions for the development of education. It referred to alternative ways of acquiring education and the need to take the age of learners into consideration (Pfanzelt et al., 2021). Like its predecessor, the '2022-2030 Unified National Strategy of Education and Science of Georgia' (UNSESG) has a strong focus on LLL. Its Objective 2.3.1 mentions enhancing LLL opportunities through a flexible network of innovative, diverse and inclusive vocational education institutions. The activities envisaged under this objective are to increase the scale of vocational training/retraining programmes, measured by the number of vocational training and retraining programmes provided. These activities are to be implemented under the responsibility of the Skills Agency and the Ministry of Education, Science and Youth (MoESY).

The 'Law on Social Assistance' outlines the central and local government policies concerning social services, including skills development and employment support. The laws on 'Gender Equality' and 'Persons with Disabilities' guarantee equal educational opportunities for people with disabilities, and ensure gender equality and the absence of discrimination.

The 'Law on Employment Support' (2020) defines state policy with regards to employment support and the eligibility to participate in active labour market policies (ALMPs). The '2019-2023 National Strategy for Labour and Employment Policy' (2019) as well as the draft strategy for 2024-2028 aim to support women and various vulnerable groups, including youth, persons with disabilities, ethnic minorities, internally displaced persons, eco-migrants, returning migrants, those living near administrative boundary lines, individuals under international protection, stateless persons, and single mothers. Since its establishment, the State Employment Support Agency (SESA) has funded various ALMPs for jobseekers, including vocational training and retraining programmes. In addition to training, these programmes offer career planning, counselling, basic skills programmes, and internships in

²² GEOSTAT (2023) Statistical Yearbook of Georgia.

²³ Legislative Herald of Georgia (2004), Law of Georgia On Higher Education.

²⁴ Legislative Herald of Georgia (2005), Law of Georgia on General Education.

²⁵ Legislative Herald of Georgia (2018), Law of Georgia on Vocational Education.

private companies. Data on ALMPs collected by the ETF for 2023 show that 11,018 participants benefitted from job counselling (many of these being social assistance recipients), 3,911 benefitted from a Vocational Training Programme and only 144 benefitted from internships (a form of employment incentive). Most beneficiaries were women and people over 29 years old.

2.1. New policy directions for adult education

A key aim of Georgia's policy towards adult education was expressed by Giorgi Amilakhvari, the Minister of Education, Science and Youth, during the joint session of the Committees on Education, Science, and Youth Affairs, Culture, Sports, Healthcare and Social Affairs on 5 February 2024:

*'One of the primary goals of the Georgian government is the advancement of vocational education. It is imperative that vocational education is accessible to all and meets the local as well as international demands of the labour market.'*²⁶

The Vocational Education Strategy 2024-2030 prioritises adult education, funding for which is expected to be increased.²⁷ VET colleges are being encouraged to provide more short-term programmes for adults and the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) is working with public VET colleges to increase the scale of these programmes. Other donors, including the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) and the Asian Development Bank (ADB), support the provision of short-term programmes in different sectors.

Until recently, the Government paid little attention to 'second chance' learning for adults wanting to catch up on missing basic skills such as literacy or numeracy, or to community education for active citizenship and personal development (Pfanzelt et al., 2021). The concept of adult education has mainly been limited to providing continuing vocational education and training for professional development, with a focus on supporting economic development. However, this is likely to change as Georgia has revised its regulations, procedures and tools to align with the EU's 2012 Council Recommendation on the validation of non-formal and informal learning (VNFIL) (European Commission, 2023b). Non-formal education can now be recognised, and a regulation on the recognition of non-formal education (2011) was revised in 2019.²⁸ The regulation gave non-formal education providers the right to recognise and validate prior non-formal and informal learning, setting out the processes and procedures for recognition. However, the take-up of the regulation has been limited, and only 13 providers of services for the recognition of non-formal education are registered on the NCEQE database.^{29 30}

Recognition of prior learning (RPL) is also regulated by two additional decrees: 'On the Rule for Verification of Authenticity of Educational Documents Issued in Georgia and Recognition of Education Received Abroad' (Order #98n of the Minister of Education of 2010)³¹ and 'Recognition of Learning Outcomes Achieved with Formal Education' (Order #121n of the Minister of Education of 2020).³² The NCEQE is responsible for implementing RPL and has certified 13 institutions and 50 consultants to engage with the procedures. The National Qualifications Framework (NQF) identifies 14 different sectors where RPL can be granted. However, in practice the procedure is slow and so far only 40

²⁶ <https://www.mes.gov.ge/content.php?id=13686&lang=eng>

²⁷ The Strategy was approved by the order N1225908 of MoESY on 27 September 2024.

²⁸ Order No 459 of 20 September 2019 of the Government of Georgia 'On approval of the rules and conditions for obtaining the right to recognition of non-formal education and the fee for obtaining the right to recognition of non-formal education'.

²⁹ <https://eqe.ge/ka/page/static/873/araformaluri-ganatilebis-aghiareba>

³⁰ At an online validation meeting organised by ETF and the Skills Agency in October 2024 it was noted by participants that 'the VNFIL system is too complicated and lacks transparency and some simplification is needed. At the start it was considered that the Chamber of Commerce and Industry should be in charge but there was little interest, so the education system took this on board, but more support is needed. Changes are needed, after which more private companies will be able to apply. There is a need to build bridges with the private sector.'

³¹ <https://www.matsne.gov.ge/en/document/view/1031772?publication=0>

³² <https://matsne.gov.ge/ka/document/view/5065322?publication=0>

individuals have used this service through an electronic platform supported by consultants.³³ The NCEQE aims to simplify the process of recognition and is engaging government institutions in a coordinated effort in this direction.

A regulatory framework has also been introduced to ensure the quality of dual training, and rules and criteria for work-based learning (WBL) have been developed to define the role and responsibilities of VET colleges and companies, safeguard student rights, and facilitate quality assurance procedures. In relation to this, Georgia joined the European Alliance for Apprenticeships (EAfA) in 2022.

The NQF, first introduced in 2011, was revised in 2019. Education programmes have been based on occupational standards since 2011.³⁴ Since 2019 all the VET curricula have been reformed and modularised and individualised learning plans have been introduced for VET programmes. More than 150 new VET qualifications have been developed in cooperation with the private sector.³⁵

2.2. Institutional framework for adult education policy delivery

2.2.1. Policy steering and coordination

One of the main institutions for steering and coordinating formal adult education policies and delivery is the MoES and the financing of the programs is delegated to the Skills Agency Georgia.³⁶ The Skills Agency was created in 2021 as a public-private partnership, funded by MoESY and the Georgian Chamber of Commerce and Industry (GCCCI), to promote interaction and partnership with the private sector. The GCCCI is a membership-based organisation encompassing 38 business associations in different sectors; it has 3,000 company members, most of which are SMEs based in the regions; many are connected to the agricultural sector.

The Skills Agency provides a partnership platform that brings together public, private, non-governmental and international partners to develop a skills ecosystem for both young people and adults.³⁷ Its mandate is to develop national VET qualifications, strengthen the capacity of VET providers, promote inclusive approaches in VET and allocate MoESY funding to the training/retraining providers.³⁸ Since 2019 it has allocated financing for about 500 programmes for adults.³⁹ Sector Skills Organisations are being established, and when they begin to function the Skills Agency will perform its coordinating role in conjunction with these bodies. The Skills Agency supports interested organisations to become adult training providers. It also supports private companies to engage in formal VET provision by applying to NCEQE and obtaining the right to implement short-term training/retraining programmes.

³³ Information provided by an online validation meeting organised by the ETF and the Skills Agency on 21 October 2024. At the meeting it was noted that: 'The adult population has knowledge and skills acquired through their informal environment, and a failure to recognise this risks dampening motivation and discouraging adults from entering the labour market if they have to go through the process of certifying their existing skills all over again.'

³⁴ The NQF follows the principles of the European Qualifications Framework and the Qualifications Framework for the European Higher Education Area.

³⁵ MES (2022). Vocational Education: 2022 Report on the Action Plan of the Unified National Strategy for Education and Science of Georgia. Tbilisi: Vocational Education Development Department Ministry of Education and Science of Georgia.

³⁶ The Skills Agency acquired the functions of the former Adult Education Division of the MoESY Vocational Education Development Department.

³⁷ The Skills Agency prioritises collaboration with the private sector and with education-business cooperation. In the future, the agency intends to meet private sector representatives to discuss improvements to staff training (participant comments at an online validation meeting organised by the ETF and the Skills Agency, 21 October 2024).

³⁸ Funding to Vocational Colleges is allocated by MoESY directly.

³⁹ In 2023, the Skills Agency introduced the Moodle-based Learning Management System (LMS), opening the platform for adult educators, non-formal trainers and others to design and upload digital courses and learning resources for students and the community. The free courses will be available to all from 2024, in a variety of subjects including IT, finance, entrepreneurship and technical skills.

The Skills Agency additionally supports VET institutions through a grant scheme to implement extracurricular and non-formal programmes for VET students. While the providers of most adult education programmes are public and private VET colleges, the Skills Agency has provided consultation to 20 private companies to develop non-formal programmes to support adult education and training, and it has a target to develop 15 new programmes. All such adult training and retraining programmes must be demand driven and preferably implemented on a WBL model, under which learning providers are connected to companies to assure the relevance and quality of their programmes. EMIS data analysis shows that the completion rate of the trainees on these programmes has been higher than on formal diploma programmes. This is particularly important for adults, who can acquire new skills and transition to the labour market or improve their employment status in a relatively short time.

While the Skills Agency is responsible for building the capacity of training providers, the National Centre for Educational Quality Enhancement (NCEQE) is responsible for accrediting adult education programmes and has an important role to play in implementing policies on adult education. It authorises educational institutions, provides the accreditation of their educational programmes and grants the right to implement training-retraining programmes.

All formal education providers are subject to periodic authorisation and, in case of higher education, programme accreditation too. For established programmes NCEQE creates an expert committee to check if the provider is acting in accordance with the established standards. Providers of adult education programmes should meet the relevant standards when applying for the right to issue state-recognised certificates, and not all initial applications are accepted. All decisions are published on the NCEQE website along with details of accredited providers and are available for consultation by the public.

The NCEQE takes about two months to process an application to establish a new programme. It has thus far accredited 543 short-term training and retraining programmes. Most are delivered by vocational educational institutions, except for 76 short-term programmes delivered by non-educational providers.⁴⁰

2.2.2. Quality assurance

The Skills Agency assists adult education providers in developing their education programmes to meet NCEQE standards for training and retraining providers, and in developing their administrative documentation. It is responsible for coordinating the development of educational and occupational standards and VET programmes and their modules. It aims to support all types of adult education providers and is currently preparing a catalogue of training providers. It provides guidance to companies on how to organise and finance such training.

NCEQE is responsible for authorising providers of adult education to engage in recognition and validation of individuals' non-formal and informal prior learning. Its Qualifications Development Division is the focal point for NQF and assists the process of recognition of prior learning. Although this is not yet widely used, the legal, institutional and methodological bases for the recognition of prior learning have been created and the piloting stage has been completed. This process allows individuals to document what they have learned outside the formal education system and to use such documents to advance their careers or apply for further education and training.⁴¹ NCEQE also carries out research and analysis of the skills ecosystem and coordinates international cooperation relating to skills development.

Within NCEQE, the VET Quality Assurance Department is responsible for developing and improving standards, and special expert committees authorise and monitor VET programmes. NCEQE holds a register of experts who carry out the assessments of programme quality. The programmes are

⁴⁰ EMIS Database of Enrolments in Training and Retraining Programmes, 2024

⁴¹ State decree No. 188n on the "Establishment of the rules for the recognition of non-formal learning outcomes" sets out procedures and guidance for this process.^{si}

monitored for three years (and in future for five years), after which time the providers must reapply for authorisation. So far, no programmes have lost their licence through this process. The process is designed more with a view to helping them improve.

The NCEQE is also responsible for the management and development of the National Qualifications Framework (NQF), updated in 2019. The new NQF is expected to 'contribute to improved permeability between sub-sectors, to achieve better matching between qualifications and labour market needs, to support quality assurance of education and training, and to increase public information on qualifications' (Pfanzelt et al., 2019: 35).

NCEQE aims to integrate EU standards and procedures into their activities (e.g., using EQA indicators) and into the national quality assurance framework. Inclusion in EU exchange programmes will help mobility. Diploma supplements are a requirement of the EU regulations on the Europass CV and can be used for the recognition of Georgian qualifications abroad. ETF is involved in developing these activities through peer-learning activities and other forms of support.

Important for the quality of adult education is the relevance of the skills provided for labour market. Researching and publishing labour market information is the function of the Ministry of Economy and Sustainable Development, which conducts and publishes reports on biannual establishment skills surveys and annual labour market surveys, and is responsible for running the LMIS platform. Additionally, SESA conducts employer surveys which is the basis for selection of the sectors for their programmes pertaining to the training and retraining of jobseekers.

3. Providers of adult education

Any legal entity has the right to gain the status to deliver state-recognised short-term courses. Based on a Government Decree, any legal entity (e.g., a company or an NGO, a non-formal education centre) may implement a training programme, receive a competitive state funding and issue a state certificate. As indicated above, the right to implement a new adult education programme must be obtained from NCEQE, after which a provider must apply to the Skills Agency to receive funding for the proposed programme. Permissions are granted based on achieving the minimal requirements for such programmes, including having adequate resources for implementing a programme and meeting the administration requirements. The most problematic issues are infrastructure and safety requirements.

The providers of adult education in Georgia cover a wide and diverse spectrum. They include the following organisations:

- ❖ Educational institutions
 - State VET Colleges
 - Public-Private Colleges
 - Private VET Colleges
 - Adult Education Centres
 - General Education Institutions
 - Universities, especially their LLL centres
- ❖ Public bodies
- ❖ Private bodies
 - Private companies in-house training centres
 - Private companies as direct providers of non-formal learning

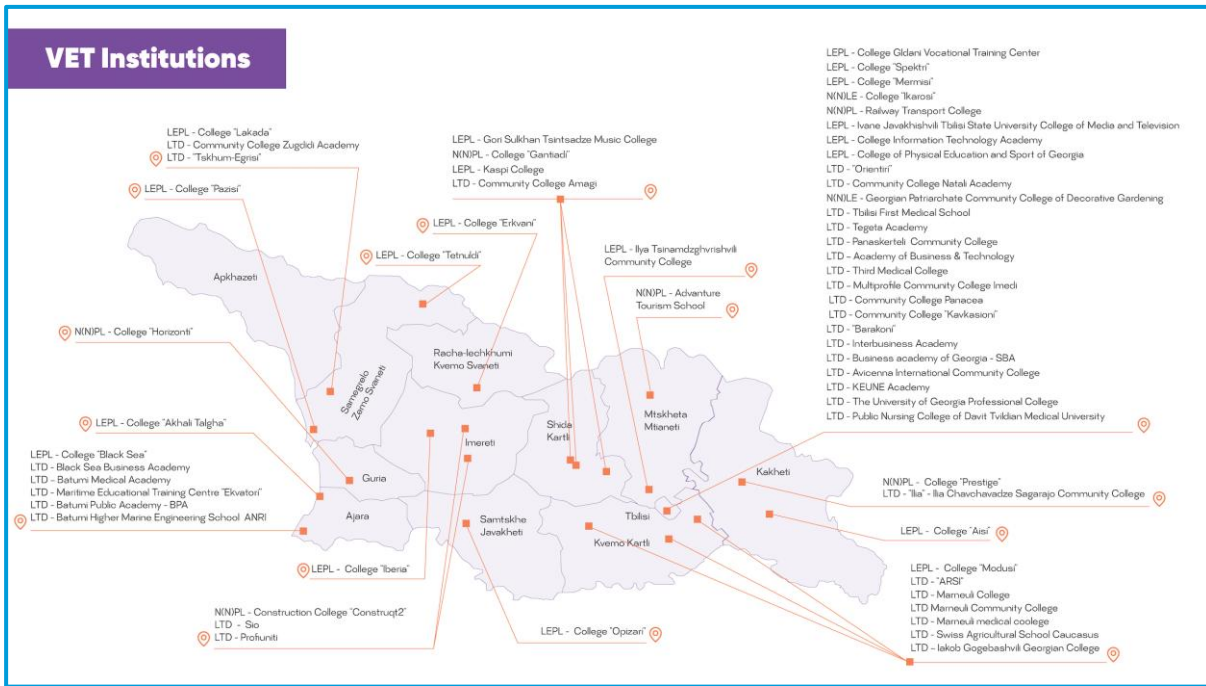
The next section describes some of these provider organisations and their structures and offers.

3.1. Educational institutions

3.1.1. VET colleges

A major group of institutions that provide adult education are the public VET colleges, which offer VET courses, including both long-term and short-term programmes to people of all age groups. In recent years, many VET colleges have been renovated and equipped with modern equipment, and new colleges and branches have been established, extending the geographical reach of the VET system. The public VET Colleges have some form of formal structured regular dialogue with the business sector (as required by Authorisation), but do not always work effectively. There are also relatively few collaborative partnerships (a notable exception is the 'Construct2' College – see below).

In 2022, VET courses ('vocational programmes') were provided by 67 VET colleges, of which 26 are public and 41 are private institutions. In addition, VET programmes were offered by 19 Higher Education Institutions, of which 15 are public and 4 are private institutions.⁴²



Source: Based on data from EMIS, 2024

In the same year, more than 5,000 of the students (44.5%) enrolled at these colleges were adults.⁴³ Adult education is also provided through retraining programmes by either vocational colleges or other providers registered by NCEQE (referred to as training/retraining programme providers). In 2023, 5837 students graduated from the training/retraining programmes (40% more than the 3,900 in 2022).⁴⁴ Colleges prefer to run long-term programmes due to the greater financial rewards involved.⁴⁵

Box 2: 'Ikarosi' College

⁴² National Statistics Office of Georgia, Statistics on Professional Education, 'Number of Educational Institutions that Conducted Admissions of Students in Vocational Education Programmes'.

⁴³ EMIS data provided in 'Adult Education Regulatory & Policy Framework Georgia'.

44 Ibid.

⁴⁵ Interviews undertaken within the current study.

The 'Ikarosi' College (<https://icarus.edu.ge>) in Tbilisi offers four long-term diploma programmes and many short-term courses, encompassing both formal and informal education. The content of the short-term courses responds to the demands from the market, and so courses may be closed, or others opened in response to need. There are also 12 retraining courses⁴⁶, mainly in tourism and services. Each programme consists of modules with their own learning outcomes. The college enrolls 1,200 short-term course students and 500 long-term course students studying in the fields of tourism and services. The college works three shifts, seven days a week. Lessons start at 9.00 am and go on until 11.30 pm. Usually, students enrol with specific intentions and goals, and are keen to study. Training is offered free of charge. Teacher salaries are determined by the number of contact hours per student. One fifth of the budget is allocated to administrative expenses. For the short-term courses, their funding comes from the Skills Agency, MIDPOLSHA, and the Tbilisi Municipality. All the modern equipment at the College has been provided by the state. The college currently has insufficient capacity, and the number of students could be increased. A renovation programme will create capacity to house 4,000 students.

Box 3: LEPL College 'Iberia' in Kutaisi

The LEPL College 'Iberia' in Kutaisi provides three-month short courses for adults in fields such as Georgian cuisine, women's clothes, hair styling, winemaking, carpentry, electronics, and marketing. These fields of study are defined in cooperation with the private sector. The college also runs 18 long-term programmes, e.g., in computing, agriculture, welding, artificial wood coverings, hair styling, clothes production, web development, electronics. This college will become one of the two 'skills hubs' in Georgia for which it will add 20 new long-term programmes. It will initiate a new course on mechatronics, even though there are not many teachers in this field. A quality assurance manager ensures the quality of the courses.

Eligibility for entry to the college depends on the selected course or programme. Entry to the programme on plant protection requires the trainee to have previous agricultural knowledge, whereas entry to the carpentry course does not require previous experience. The most important criterion is motivation, which is assessed through interviews. Students come from throughout the Imereti region, but also from other regions; for these students the college has a residential campus a kilometre away with accommodation for 55 students. Currently there are about 550 students on long-term programmes and about 250 on short-term courses. About 75% of students get a job within 12 months of graduation. The main challenge is student motivation, as some students need more incentives and greater supervision.

The college receives public funding to provide programmes intended to support trainees to find a job on completion of their course. Funding comes from the Skills Agency, MIDPOLSHA and SESA. The Asian Development Bank is funding a new building. Unlike in Tbilisi, there are relatively few businesses who are willing to cover the costs of training their employees.

Some companies have established joint training companies with MoESY as public-private partnerships. A guiding principle in Georgia's approach to adult education through VET reform is to create partnerships with the business sector (European Commission, 2023b). Examples can be found in the construction sector, the rail transport sector and the tourism sector. The idea is to directly involve the private sector in the organisation and management of a college. The graduates from these colleges can find a job in the partner company or elsewhere in Georgia.

Box 4: Construct2 VET College

Construct2 VET College in Zestaponi is an example of a public-private partnership designed to provide adult education to a specific group of learners who wish to develop skills for the construction industry. The College is a partnership between the Skills Agency and a company called BK Construction Ltd, which is the second largest construction company in Georgia. The company has worked on specific projects such as hotels, shopping malls, office buildings, residential complexes, gyms and more. The company is most interested in providing short-term courses, as the graduates from such courses can go straight into a job with the company. The College is an NGO, designed as a public-private partnership. It receives support from USAID which has provided the furniture. Short-

⁴⁶ Short-term courses offered by Ikarosi: Asian Cuisine, Organisation and Operation of a Bar, Preparation of Cakes with Biscuit Dough and Cream Cakes for Serial Production, Dish Preparation Technology, Food and Beverage Service (F&B), Technology of Preparing Culinary Products, Preparation of Bread and Pastries/Pastries with Puff Pastry, Preparation of Confectionery Mini Products, Kitchen Cleaning (Stewarding), Kitchen dishwashing, Housekeeping, French Confectionery, French Culinary, Dry Cleaning Service, Meat Processing and Meat Products Preparation Technology.

term courses are announced through a regular call put out three times per year. The College recruits 60 students annually for the 16 short-term courses. Modular programmes were introduced in 2014. The courses are attractive because a trained and qualified construction worker can earn a salary of up to 8,000 GEL. A pastoral care worker works with teachers to sort out tensions between students of different age groups. Works are underway in Akhaltsikhe Municipality to establish the 'Construct2' branch.

3.1.2. Adult Education Centres

Adult education services are provided by 14 Adult Education Centres (AECs) established through the Georgia Adult Education network (GAEN) with the support of DVV International (which is in turn mainly funded through the German aid donor GIZ). AECs aim to contribute to reducing poverty and promote civic engagement and community development, especially in localities where there is no VET College. They support the social inclusion of disadvantaged people in the regions where they have been established. For example, the Khoni Adult Education Centre (a training centre within the GAEN) is located at a village for IDPs in an old military camp. It provides courses on sewing, digital skills including programming and robotics, welding, and clothes design. Its courses are provided free of charge to adult participants from the local community.

The AECs provide non-formal community education in fields such as languages, IT, accountancy and job search skills, short professional courses and cultural education including art workshops and theatre performances, civic education and other such topics (Pfanzelt et al., 2021). Courses on family finance are very popular, teaching residents how to deal with banks and bank loans. The teachers are often brought in from the VET Colleges. Between 2006 and 2021 more than 200,000 adult learners had attending the AEC courses (Pfanzelt et al., 2021). Currently the AECs provide courses for 17,000 adult learners. The AECs would like to offer formal courses, but to do so they need a licence to meet various conditions such as having firefighting equipment and safety officers.

The AECs operate under the Law on municipalities and local government and collaborate with MoESY and the Ministry of Infrastructure and Local Development. They apply a bottom-up approach with municipalities to help them understand how they can spend money on adult education. The success of AECs depends on the personalities of the municipal leaders. Most local governments want to support adult education, but many are concerned that they may be infringing central government spending rules if they provide resources to adult education. The most secure funding for non-formal education comes from local government, which can derive immediate benefits from a better educated population or training for their employees. Many AECs have been established in municipal buildings. However, although AECs pay rent for these premises to the municipality, the latter rarely invests in improvements to the facilities.

3.1.3. Universities

Several universities and higher education institutions offer adult education programmes for personal and professional development. No statistics about the programmes have been centrally collected and made available. Data for specific institutions collected from interviews during the study is given below.

Box 5: Tbilisi University Lifelong Learning Centre

Tbilisi University Lifelong Learning Centre was established in 2009 as part of Georgia's involvement in the Bologna Process to develop adult education within the university system. It aims to provide different programmes for adults, enabling them to use university resources to learn new skills. They serve different groups of clients: adults, seniors, children. The courses cover computer programming, soft skills, teaching skills, among others; all according to demand. The minimum number of students needed to run a course varies from 6-10. Courses are advertised through social media since it is difficult to advertise as a state university. The university does not award credits for its LLL courses but provides completion certificates based on exam results. The Centre does not need a licence from NCEQE, as this is only required for VET colleges; private providers and universities do not need such accreditation. The university has developed its own internal system of quality assurance. The unit does not receive financial resources from the university and so its commercial programmes have become a self-financing part of the university. All the programmes are fee-based. Unfortunately, many low-income people seeking professional development cannot afford to pay the fees. There is far more demand for places on their courses than they can provide. Courses are often in demand following a change in legislation that may lead to a

requirement for new skills, e.g., in food safety standards. Although companies would then need to have an employee with a qualification to meet such standards, they are seldom willing to pay the fees for such a course.

Box 6: Akaki Tsereteli State University (Kutaisi)

Akaki Tsereteli State University was established as a Teacher Training Faculty 53 years ago. It is now the largest university for the training and retraining of teachers across the Imereti region, with about a thousand students studying for the teaching profession, covering 370 schools. The Dean selects the students on the basis of their motivation and skills. For monitoring purposes the university sends out pre-test and post-test questionnaires, which are used to measure motivation. The university runs a 'train the trainers' course for trainers of adults, with about 25 students each year. World Vision supports the training of college principals in this field. The University also provides a long-term programme in the field of precious metals and gems – a course that is interesting for professionals from banks and loan offices. The precious metal course offers two levels of certificate with a special annex.

The university runs short-term courses lasting from a few weeks to three months for training in accounting, which is in high demand. It provides short-term training and retraining for welders and crane operators for whom there is a high demand on the labour market. This is mostly retraining of existing employees. It also runs a sales management course which is financed by the companies who employ the graduates. On completion, this course offers an attendance certificate. The university creates retraining modules depending on the specific requests of the companies and develops new syllabuses according to outside requests. It has won a competition for developing a syllabus for the 'universal design' of university courses, i.e., a teaching methodology based on learning outcomes, which will be shared with other universities.

3.1.4. School of Public Affairs

This public institution was established in 2005, and since 2006 they have delivered two main sets of adult education programmes in teaching the Georgian language to non-Georgian speakers and a public administration programme for civil servants. The School cooperates with the Ministry of Internal Affairs.

Students can enrol from the age of 16 with no upper age ceiling, but they must be legally resident in the country. The School provides both online and in-person teaching. The number of enrolled students has increased to 5,200 students annually. Many students are teachers seeking to learn the Georgian language at a higher level⁴⁷ (1,600), followed by university applicants, military personnel, and civil servants from minority regions. The number of trainees is set to increase. In the 2022/2023 academic year, the School had 92 trainees and has increased the upper limit to 250 trainees during the 2023/2024 academic year. The School could also train central government personnel, but while ministries have budget allocations for retraining, they tend not to use the available resources for this purpose.

Courses are fully funded by the state in twelve training centres. In addition to core funding from the state, the School offers courses on a commercial basis. The School provides 30 different technical language courses, e.g., language for engineers. Other topics include maintenance of schools, among other things. Last year the School created a public servant integration programme in which 80 trainers are involved. Along with language teaching it is tailored for the career development of public servants. All the teaching on this programme is done in Kutaisi. The Georgian language tuition takes place both in the region and in Kutaisi. Students travel three times to Kutaisi. They receive free meals, transportation, books, and social activities in Kutaisi. There is a relatively low number of beneficiaries due to the high costs of the programme. This year they will have 30 beneficiaries in two groups. The School also provides a course in public administration, which is offered in Kutaisi, on request on location, and also in an online version. The municipalities allocate 1% of their budget for training their personnel. By government decree, any municipality can purchase their services without a bidding process. Eleven municipalities of a single district enrolled on a course on project management. The School has many experts in its database and could put on a specific course on demand on almost any

⁴⁷ According to assessments (Tabatadze, Sh., Gorgodze, n., 2015; State Strategy of Civic Equity and Integration 2021-2030), the majority of teachers at non-Georgian schools (schools with Azeri and Armenian language of instructions) need training in the state language.

administrative subject. These experts are often public servants with a wealth of experience, for whom they set out specific requirements, including five years of experience as a trainer, knowledge of a specific foreign language, a Master's degree in a specific subject, and internal connections. The School has a UNHCR programme with IDPs, and has cooperated with World Vision, UNESCO, and USAID.

Teachers must have three years' experience in teaching the language or a certificate from a teacher professional development centre in teaching the Georgian language to ethnic minorities. Faced with the problem of not having enough teachers of the Georgian language, the school created a 170-hour course on how to teach the Georgian language along with a methodology for ethnic minorities. They trained the trainers for this specific course.

3.2. Private bodies

3.2.1. Companies providing training to their own workers

Companies may provide training to their own workers either on their own premises in the form of work-based learning, off their premises in their own training centres, or send their employees to other types of training organisations as detailed above. According to a study by the Ministry of Economics and Sustainable Development, 8% of the surveyed companies provided training to their employees (Pfanzelt et al., 2021). The Georgian Chamber of Commerce and Industry (GCCI) runs a training of trainers programme, and about 80 companies have so far undergone this training to enable them to manage work-based learning programmes for their employees. This training programme has been modelled on the German approach to adult education in support of work-based learning. However, the Labour Force Survey indicates that only 0.06% of all employees received any work-based learning in the year 2000, which suggests that most of this kind of training takes place off the business premises in an educational institution.

Nevertheless, many companies report that the admission of their employees to formal educational institutions is too much of a bureaucratic process. They are therefore reluctant to send their employees to VET Colleges and prefer to set up their own training centres.⁴⁸ Examples include the 'Construct2' VET college, the company Energopro, the Natalia Academy (cosmetics), all of which have been established with official authorisation. Other companies have set up their own training centres, such as the training academy established by Sound Design Studio Ltd, which has opened a training centre to employees and non-employees alike (see Box 7).

A major challenge remains the facilitation of more partnerships between the VET colleges and the business sector. Currently, this kind of cooperation does not work effectively, partly because both employers and colleges would like to oversee and manage the educational activities.

Box 7: Sound Design Studio (Tbilisi)

An example of a company from the technology sector that provides training for its workers is Sound Design Ltd, a start-up tech company that has expanded rapidly in the film industry. It uses cutting-edge technology to provide soundtracks for films. Due to the lack of training for sound engineers, Foley artists, and soundtrack composers among other specialities, it has set up its own retraining academy to train personnel not only for its own company but for the emerging industry in Georgia as a whole. Graduates are expected to get jobs in the TV and film industry, with the advertising industry and companies that want to create video clips for their websites and so on.

3.2.2. NGOs providing adult education courses

The Georgian Adult Education Network (GAEN) was established in 2014 by DVVI in collaboration with the Adult Education Centres (see 2.5.3) to provide support to adult education providers and advocate on their behalf. It develops training materials for training sessions and workshops to support the

⁴⁸ Interview with the Georgian Chamber of Commerce and Industry.

professional development of its member organisations.⁴⁹ The Adult Education Association, established in 2009, drafted a National Strategy on Lifelong Learning; however, it was not adopted by the Government (Pfanzelt et al., 2021).

The Georgian Chamber of Commerce and Industry (GCCCI)⁵⁰ is a membership-based corporation under public law that incorporates the Chambers of Commerce and Industry of the Autonomous Republics of Adjara and Abkhazia, and regional Chambers of Commerce and Industry and the Autonomous Republics of Adjara and Abkhazia, as well as formally registered business entities and associations. According to the law, the GCCCI is required to improve professional education levels and the qualifications of business entities and organise other types of training. It currently provides at least 1,000 training places on non-formal short courses in subjects like finance, depending on the needs of the companies. The GCCCI also provides business consulting services to companies to assist them in designing short-term training and retraining programmes for their workforce.

Another important NGO in adult education services is the Georgian Farmers' Association (GFA), which provides short-term non-formal training and retraining programmes for farmers. It was founded in 2012 as a non-commercial, non-profit legal entity. Currently, it unites about 4,000 farmers across Georgia and collaborates with 16 VET colleges, both public and private. It has also managed a project to provide professional retraining to improve employment opportunities for prisoners, former prisoners, probationers, and their families, in agricultural skills for their income support and rehabilitation. These non-formal training programmes within prisons involved the construction of greenhouses. Many of the former prisoners set up their own businesses after their release from prison, producing and selling flowers, assisting in their rehabilitation. The GFA has also collaborated with UNDP and the Swiss aid agency SDA to implement a new model of professional education within various agricultural training programmes.

Box 8: Georgian Association for Education Initiatives (Rustavi)

The Association was founded in response to the closure of the local cement, chemical, and metallurgical factories in the 1990s. It provides training in project management, presentation skills, project writing, and robotics and coding. Its annual Summer School covers subjects such as CV preparation, critical thinking, literacy, presentation skills and foreign languages. Courses are held for small groups of up to ten people. Its programmes are not accredited as they deal with transferable everyday skills for which accreditation is not needed. The Association also runs a large training programme in car repairs. Many local entrepreneurs import cars from the USA and sell them in Russia or the Central Asian republics. Rustavi is a hub for that business, and local people need skills in how to take part in auctions and how to repair cars. The trainees consider this a good investment.⁵¹

3.2.3. Private companies providing adult education courses

The private sector provides training and retraining opportunities for adults. However, due to the limited enrolment capacity, the demand among adult learners for training places outstrips the supply. The pool of training providers has been extended by a government decree that authorised private enterprises and other non-formal providers on receipt of appropriate documentation.⁵² Various private companies now provide training to the public, including adults. They provide short-term training on a commercial basis. An example in the IT field of studies is the company Skillwill, which provides training through its Tbilisi and Kutaisi offices.

⁴⁹ In 2021, its website contained information on 241 learning provider organisations and 2,496 courses (Pfanzelt et al., 2021).

⁵⁰ A co-founder of the Skills Agency Georgia.

⁵¹ Interview with the Georgian Association for Education Initiatives.

⁵² Decree No. 131 on the 'procedures for obtaining the right to implement short-term vocational training/retraining courses, and the rules and conditions for acknowledgement as a training provider'. The Decree states that short-term vocational courses may be implemented by any legal body, providing they meet the quality standards (Pfanzelt et al., 2021).

Another example of a private company offering training to adults in the agricultural sector is Katalisi Ltd, which provides training in Western Georgia. It offers 13 short-term courses for trainee farmers, as well as several micro-courses (one-day courses or shorter). They have developed their own programmes to train farmers in growing vegetable products, and in developing vineyards and fruit orchards for strawberries and raspberries. The company also offers training in EU safety and health regulations as they are dealing with pesticides. The participants are mainly small farmers, some of whom are graduates of Tbilisi University who want to start their own raspberry farm. Others have VET education, or only secondary education. Most are already working on their farms, or they may be currently employed. The age range of the students is 30-55. Recruitment is achieved through word of mouth. The courses are popular, because there is no requirement for prior extensive material technical skills (raspberries can be grown even on small private plots of land), and participation is free of charge, as are the consumables (pesticides) used in the training. The government covers the costs of the training, but recently the company has also contributed to the costs themselves. Training is provided by two contractors with university degrees who have practical experience, and by trainers from local farms who also provide the pesticides used. Representatives from partner institutions from Europe have been to Georgia to support the training (e.g., a company called Delta), and student exchanges have been organised.

3.3. Public bodies

Several state institutions are active in the field of policy design and provision of adult education. The local level and national level bodies of the state include local authorities, government ministries and government agencies. They design their own programmes of activity related to adult education and sometimes contract out the provision of adult education to a variety of public and private providers (such as VET colleges or universities). In some cases they provide adult education services directly through their own institutions (such as the Environmental Education Centre of the Ministry of Agriculture – see 2.3.4.4.).

3.3.1. The Department of Labour and Employment Policy and State Employment Support Agency (SESA)

Upskilling and requalification of jobseekers is an important objective of the ‘National Strategy of Labour and Employment Policy 2019-2023’. The Department of Labour and Employment Policy under MoLDPLSHA supports this objective through the activities of the State Employment Support Agency (SESA – opened in 2020) by financing short-term vocational training and retraining programmes for jobseekers, which are delivered by authorised VET or training and retraining programme providers. SESA provides its services to jobseekers and employers under the law on employment promotion. It supports vocational training, internships, career guidance, intermediary services and public works. Unlike the Skills Agency, SESA directs its support to specific target groups – job-seekers, providing adult learning opportunities through its active labour market policies (ALMPs).⁵³ Jobseekers can be any employed or unemployed person who would like to find a new job or upgrade their professional qualifications. To be eligible for support, they should be citizens of Georgia up to the pension age (60 for women, 65 for men). SESA programmes are equally spread among youth and adult learners and cover various fields of study such as pre-school education, social care, tourism, cookery, IT programmes and others. SESA has also signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the ministry of defence for retraining demobilised soldiers.

SESA has field offices in nine regions, where it employs full-time consultants who offer employment services to jobseekers.⁵⁴ In addition, SESA staff can also provide part-time services related to the Public Works Programme (one of the ALMP measures) at the municipal level. The residents of the

⁵³ ETF (2023). *Torino Process System Monitoring Report: Georgia*, Torino: European Training Foundation.

⁵⁴ The consultants use the ‘Worknet’ online labour market management system established in 2014, which is currently being upgraded to a new system called ‘New Worknet’.

cities where the services are located benefit the most, and so, to widen its reach, SESA plans to expand the coverage of its full-time consultants to 20 more municipalities and to four districts of Tbilisi.

The SESA service model is updated annually, introducing new tasks. SESA checks the effectiveness of training to gather evidence on what works and what does not. A key finding has been that training is less likely to be effective without the motivation of the jobseekers. SESA also carries out its own employer survey, while another main source of information is the LMIS run by MoESD and labour force survey of the Georgia Statistical Office. It makes a list of the most demanded sectors, and gives this list to the VET Colleges, the Skills Agency, and NCEQE. In the future, SESA also plans to carry out a skills forecasting study. SESA has guidelines and manuals for the consultations for profiling and career guidance, which have recently been updated.

3.3.2. GITA

The Georgian Innovation and Technology Agency (GITA) is an arms-length agency of the Ministry of Economy. Its main aim is to boost the rate of small business start-ups and the innovation ecosystem of the country. It supports research on artificial intelligence, bacteriophages (as an alternative to antibiotics) and agricultural technologies. For the latter, GITA aims to increase the use of modern technologies by agricultural businesses. A training programme called 'Do It In Georgia' provides technology firms with education and skills development. A web portal is available for all training providers to upload their information. GITA makes two 'calls' per year and finances training for successful applicants. In addition, It has provided training for 1,000 IT specialists under a World Bank project, has trained 3,000 IT specialists with international IT certification from Google and Amazon, and has provided training for 120 IT companies under their own programmes and for 300 IT specialists under the SESA employment programme. It also provides IT and digital skills training to the public, including training in innovation management, IT project management and courses in different programming languages.

GITA has strong links with universities, with which they aim to create up to three 'catapult networks'.⁵⁵ Through the programme 'Start-up Georgia' GITA aims to establish four 'innovation accelerators', one of which has already been established. In these accelerators they will offer a one-year training and support programme for 160 start-ups to enable them to operate on the national and international markets. Furthermore, GITA supports innovative enterprises and start-ups through its own venture capital fund and supports innovative start-ups through a grant programme, with grants that provide short training courses lasting one or two weeks. GITA has also initiated a special tax regime for start-up companies who receive a 10-year tax holiday absolving them of the requirement to pay the 15% profit tax and the 20% income tax. Through a separate programme GITA provides a 30% subsidy to companies who invest in R&D.

3.3.3. Ministry of Agriculture: Environmental Education Centre

The Ministry of Agriculture's Environmental Education Centre offers formal and non-formal training courses for adults in environmental protection, green skills and agricultural studies. It offers training for primary and secondary school teachers at the Agricultural School. Green- and agro-scholarships are provided for VET, Bachelor and Master students. Training is provided for employees of the ministry, for employees of municipalities, media organisations and NGOs. Short-term training and retraining programmes are provided in cooperation with the Skills Agency. Teachers attend courses according to their professional development programme.

Courses are planned in accordance with national policy priorities. Courses on environmental topics and on waste management last from a few hours up to three months. They provide training in the use of modern technologies in the field of agriculture and in the field of veterinary sciences. Some courses

⁵⁵ Catapults are organisations created to accelerate the application of research, and further develop new technologies so they can be scaled up and put into practice. They provide businesses with access to their expertise and facilities, enabling them to test, demonstrate and improve their ideas. Catapults work with small, medium and large businesses in collaboration with universities and research centres to support them to improve their business performance.

are delivered by VET Colleges and universities that have agricultural and environmental programmes. The Centre offers three short-term training courses itself. An environmental manager's course is provided free of charge as is a forest management course. Most courses take place in municipal government offices or in the regional offices of different agencies, or in municipal premises provided free of charge.

The Centre has about 7,000 trainees, about half of whom are adults (including schoolteachers and farmers). Training on climate-related issues is provided to school teachers through a 20-hour training course. These courses are held online in the evening. The Centre provides training for kindergarten teachers on site. Farmers receive theoretical and practical training on a face-to-face basis or through online webinars. Many farmer trainees are potato or strawberries farmers.

The Environmental Education Centre deploys teams of trained trainers. For the school programme there are 12 trainers; for the pre-school programme they have four trainers. Sometimes they hire teachers if there is a need, or they use staff members from the education unit. They also have programmes for VET colleges.

3.3.4. Ministry of Economy and Sustainable Development: Enterprise Georgia

Enterprise Georgia (EG) is responsible for promoting SME development and export business, and runs the 'Invest in Georgia' programme to attract foreign investment to the country. Enterprise Georgia provides co-financing and collateral guarantees for loans to SMEs. In 2019, EG employed 55 people; this has now risen to 120 and it is expanding with additional regional offices. The main obstacle to the development of small businesses is access to finance and technical knowledge on how to run a business. Enterprise Georgia has established three regional centres which are set up as 'growth hubs'; these perform a diagnosis of the key issues that companies are facing, with the aim of making them more competitive.

An export promotion programme provides individual consultancy support for companies. Enterprise Georgia makes an individual assessment of companies on their export readiness. It provides a matchmaking services abroad and organises a trade exhibition abroad, for example to the USA. It has set up a platform (TradewithGeorgia.com) on which 900 companies are registered. Typical export products include fruit and beverages, apparel and fashion, and new emerging sectors are toys, pet food, and packaging. Announcements are sent out via the platform about training programme calls. EG provides grants for online and offline training in packaging improvement on a course with 10 different modules. There are 25 participants per call and 100 people per year become certified export managers. The training costs US\$90 per person as a commitment fee and leads to a certificate as an export counsellor. The training is provided by universities.

'Invest in Georgia' targets emerging new sectors such as the IT sector, business outsourcing sector, traditional sectors of hospitality and tourism, logistics, and new sectors such as domestic appliance manufacturing.

The shortage of skilled labour is the main obstacle to attracting FDI. If there were a more highly skilled workforce, multinational corporations (MNCs) would hire all those that were available. About 5,000 jobs have already been created in business process outsourcing using the German language. More German-speaking outsourcing officers are needed, but the country cannot provide them because of a lack of training capacity in that subject. There is a large skills gap in relation to IT specialists and a need for additional training in this field. About 150 international IT companies are based in Georgia, many of which have begun to train their own staff.

3.3.5. Local authorities

Local authorities have the possibility to offer programmes to their residents. However, not many of them fund training and retraining programmes. In a survey conducted by Skills Agency in 2022, only

Batumi and Khelvachauri municipality indicated⁵⁶ that they funded training and retraining programmes or provided co-funding for any sort of vocational education. Also, very few municipalities provided transportation and accommodation support to students.

Box 1: Tbilisi City Hall

Tbilisi City Hall has a training programme 'Learn and Get Employed' (www.dasakmdi.ge). This programme offers vocational training and retraining for residents through short-term courses on specialities in high demand on the labour market. The programme, which has been running for three years so far, also provides employment with the cooperation of the private sector. These courses are free for residents, take place at leading public and private VET colleges and are designed by the colleges. The municipality also has good connections with private training providers who can deliver non-formal courses that are not necessarily approved by NCEQE.

The main criteria for selecting beneficiaries are being a citizen of Georgia, being resident in Tbilisi, and being at least 18 years old. The courses last from 3 to 7 months and include both theoretical and practical training, which can be conducted online or on-site. For those who prefer online courses but need a space to attend online lectures, the City Hall provides free workspaces in newly rehabilitated multi-functional libraries for the duration of the training programme.

Within the framework of this programme, training or retraining is offered in 60 specialities, including fields such as construction, engineering, food technology, tourism, services, information technology, design, transport, finance, healthcare, and veterinary fields. More than 1,000 residents are currently enrolled on these courses. As a result of the project, up to 10,000 citizens registered in Tbilisi, aged 18 and above, have been retrained through the programme. More than 70% of them are currently employed. From spring 2023 to date, 3,617 citizens have attended these courses, of whom 2,044 are women and 1,573 are men.⁵⁷ Priority groups include socially vulnerable groups i.e., social assistance recipients, mothers, special needs regarding physical disabilities. Most trainees are young people aged from 14-29 years old, while others are mainly under 45 years of age.

The advantage of the programme is reported to be its flexibility, its focus on the practical aspect of the profession, and its diversity. However, the main factor that determines the success of the programme is active communication with employers, the business sector and consideration of the demand on the job market. Funding is the main constraint on expanding the programme. Demand for graduates of IT courses is very high, as is the demand for construction workers.

In the future there are plans to increase the variety of courses and the volume of funding. A large-scale research project is underway to assess the attitudes of former beneficiaries towards the courses and to understand the general population's preferences for this type of training. This research will enable the Town Hall to improve the quality of the courses in the future.

3.3.6. Other public bodies

The Academy of the Ministry of Finance (MoF) offers training to the public in finance, management, and law. It also offers adult education opportunities in presentation skills, emotional intelligence, gender equality, and IT skills. It has provided training to female entrepreneurs in financial literacy in partnership with UN Women (Pfanzelt et al., 2021). The Training Centre of the Ministry of Justice provides training to its own staff and to staff from local municipalities for their professional development. The National Centre for Teacher Professional Development provides continuing professional development for teachers at general education level. Training courses for inmates in prisons and for those released on probation are carried out by LEPL Vocational Training and Retraining Centre for Convicts (Ministry of Justice), but they are mostly non-formal trainings, arranged in cooperation with VET institutions.

A growing group of providers now offer online courses, whose importance expanded significantly during the pandemic and has continued to grow since. According to official information, however, as of November 2024 there was only one provider with an official licence to implement training and

⁵⁶ The survey was administered in an online format and Skills Agency personnel followed up by phone to ensure timely submission of completed forms. However, participation rate in the survey was only slightly more than 50%. Tbilisi Municipality did not participate.

⁵⁷ Correspondence with Tbilisi Municipality, Culture, education, sports and youth affairs Municipal Service. Letter to Skills Agency # 19-01242043196 of 22.07.2024.

retraining programmes in distance learning form, , as foreseen by the MoESY Order №143/N of 2024. Distance learning can to some extent solve the problem of accessibility, and remote learning can help the rural population to access learning opportunities, although not all skills can be gained through this mode. International experience with distance learning provides a useful pointer for the development of this form of adult learning in Georgia.

International providers like Khan Academy, Udemy, EdX, and Coursera are becoming increasingly accessible to and used by older learners through their online informal education opportunities. Khan Academy, which offers a large variety of free content translated into the Georgian language, had more than 1.4 million views over 2019-20 (Bochorishvili, 2020). DVV International provides online training for trainers at its Adult Education Centres, as well as online training for employees of the MoESY VET department and adult education division, and for NCEQE on approaches to distance learning (Pfanzelt et al., 2021: 41).

3.4. Providers of career guidance for adults

Career guidance systems have recently been improved and an effort has been made to promote the value and benefits of VET among the wider community. Professional career guidance specialists operate in all public VET institutions. In addition, a 2024-2030 Strategy of Professional Orientation, Consultation and career guidance in Formal Education has been approved recently by MoESY Decree No. 139/n of 27 August 2024. The strategy should ensure the implementation of an inclusive career guidance policy in formal education, supporting equal opportunities for adults to fully realise their potential in life. Nevertheless, it has been observed that, in practice, career guidance services provided by VET Colleges only reach a minority, with most students having little awareness of the services provided or the benefits they could derive from such services (Siprashvili, 2023). According to the GCCI, in practice there is no real structure for career guidance.⁵⁸ While the colleges provide this service to meet the authorisation standards, services are not sufficiently tailored to adult learners. It would be desirable to have a structural approach to providing career guidance for all adults who need it. The municipalities do not provide career guidance; they provide some transportation to the training centres, but not much else.

Jobseekers have access to career guidance services via SESA through its employment support programmes. The guidance services include registration in the jobseekers database, information on career opportunities, competency assessments, career counselling and guidance, training and retraining, and career education, as well as vacancy analysis and recruitment services for employers. As regards the labour market information system feeding career guidance services, the World Bank (2022b) recommends that analysis of real-time vacancy data posted in private online job portals should be part of the SESA's methodology to identify and forecast skills in demand. SESA's e-portal for employment services ('Worknet') currently engages mainly with public sector bodies but should also include the private sector to ensure that jobseekers have accurate and timely information for decision-making.

4. The needs and expectations for adult education

This section identifies the requirements and expectations of the potential beneficiaries of adult education and the challenges they face. The first point to note is that there is a wide diversity of potential beneficiaries of adult education which include, among others, unemployed persons, members of vulnerable groups in the community such as disabled persons, internally displaced persons (IDPs), employees looking to retrain, professionals seeking to upgrade their skills, and inactive persons seeking to enter the labour market (such as women returners, single mothers, ex-

⁵⁸ Interview with the Georgian Chamber of Commerce and Industry.

convicts, and ex-military personnel). We evaluate how effectively the needs of the aforementioned groups of people are being met by the current adult education system.

4.1. Meeting the needs and expectations of adult learners

4.1.1. The needs of unemployed persons

There are currently 260,000 registered unemployed people (down from 354,000 in 2017)⁵⁹ and SESA provides 16,000 career counselling consultations annually for them.⁶⁰ Jobseekers have little incentive to contact SESA because there is no unemployment benefit system in Georgia although many unemployed people receive social security benefits. While this reduces the number of unemployed people registering at SESA, it also means that there may be large numbers of potential jobseekers who fail to register. SESA engages in outreach activities to these people and offers group consultations during visits to villages. According to SESA,⁶¹ by the end of 2023 there were 207,542 people employed on public works programmes who continue to receive social assistance for four years and who could potentially benefit from retraining programmes.

- Meeting the needs of unemployed persons

The career counsellors who work with SESA aim to guide jobseekers towards training that is best suited to their experience, education and abilities rather than the most popular training (sometimes requested by jobseekers). Consultants profile job seekers by checking their education, work experience, skills and abilities, and future plans. They then classify jobseekers into three subgroups: A, B, & C categories.

Jobseekers in the 'A' category are those who are ready for the labour market. They are invited to job fairs and offered any suitable job that has been notified to SESA. The jobseekers receive a career guidance consultation and together with their career guidance counsellor they decide which training programme to attend. Each year 3,000 jobseekers are financed to take part in training or retraining programmes. SESA's goal is for 3,900 persons to take part in retraining. As an example, the local Gori branch of SESA focuses on retraining in its cooperation with VET colleges. However, over the last three years it only provided one retraining programme in one VET college. On that course, out of 35 trainees, only 15 acquired the new skills they needed to get a job. Others simply wanted a certificate as validation for skills they already had to find a job at a later stage. During interviews, it was observed that VET colleges often lack interest in submitting applications for such programmes due to the level of bureaucracy required, and they do not appreciate the fact that SESA selects the trainees. Furthermore, in Kutaisi, the local branch of SESA told us that they manage to provide training opportunities for jobseekers from the Kutaisi municipality but not for those from outlying municipalities within the region. This is another major challenge and is mainly due to a lack of sufficient staff across the SESA branches.

For the 'B' and 'C' categories, SESA offers career guidance services, a personal action plan, and refers them to the ALMP measures. These include short-term training and retraining courses at VET colleges, as well as an internship programme. Under the internship programme an employer can hire up to three interns whose costs are paid for by SESA for between two and six months. Interns are paid a relatively low remuneration of just 200 GEL per month below the subsistence minimum for 2023 (Geostat ⁶²). At the end of the internship the employer must hire at least one of the interns for six months under a regular employment contract. The SESA also offers training to jobseekers in these categories to develop their core competences in fields such as social skills, languages (including

⁵⁹ National Statistics Office of Georgia online data.

⁶⁰ Interview with SESA, Tbilisi, June 2024.

⁶¹ <https://bm.ge/news/2023-tslis-bolostvis-saarsebo-shemtseobis-mimghebta-raodenoba-shemtsirda-ramdeni-sotsdautsveli-ighebda-shemtseobas>

⁶² <https://www.geostat.ge/en/modules/categories/791/subsistence-minimum>

English, German⁶³, French), and IT. SESA also provides training in the development of entrepreneurial skills. However, the Kutaisi branch of SESA told us that, in practice, they do not have enough staff to offer the training in entrepreneurship.

4.1.2. The needs of returners to the labour market

The potential labour force includes persons who are either looking for a job but not currently available to work, or who are available to work but are not actively looking for a job. In 2022 the potential labour force was 23% of the extended labour force (i.e., the labour force as conventionally defined plus the potential labour force).⁶⁴ The large potential labour force suggests a major need for adult education and retraining as some (unknown) proportion of this group may seek to return to the labour market over time.

- Meeting the needs of employees looking to retrain and professionals seeking to upgrade their skills

In 2023, almost a third of companies (31.4%) offered some sort of formal training or retraining to their employees (about the same proportion as in 2019).⁶⁵ This is a lower proportion than in some peer countries such as Estonia, where about two fifths of companies provide training opportunities to their employees, suggesting scope for a greater level of provision by companies in Georgia.

Retraining is also offered through the various provider organisations, most importantly through the universities. The LLL Centre at the University of Tbilisi offers retraining programmes for directors and nannies for kindergartens. They train about 300 teachers per year. In recent years they have trained 700-800 pre-school teachers for kindergartens in the methodology of kindergarten teaching; from 2025, the kindergartens will need to get accredited and will therefore need professionally trained personnel. The training that is provided to teachers from kindergartens is paid for by the local municipalities. The university also works with private kindergartens and charges them for the training. In addition, the government is building a new training centre outside Tbilisi to teach logistics in cooperation with the private sector.

Some training courses offered by the Ministry of Agriculture's Environmental Education Centre are provided on demand in response to farmers' needs and interests in specific issues. The Centre carries out training needs surveys to identify their clients' demand for training. Regional offices of rural development agencies and extension services also provide information about the needs of farmers, and make a needs assessment. Three parliamentary committees (education, environment, agriculture) carried out a survey on which professions need to be supported, and recommended scaling up green scholarships to increase employment possibilities in the field of agriculture. Training in beekeeping was identified as a promising line of activity and consequently about one thousand persons have been retrained in this profession.

- Meeting the needs of inactive persons seeking to return to the labour market

Local authorities support the training of members of vulnerable groups in their localities. For example, as reported above, Tbilisi City Hall supports training for women returners to the labour market who have difficulty accessing the labour market. For this group the focus is more on social integration than on employment as such.

Kutaisi municipality offers social programmes to support training for adults to help them find a new career. Kutaisi municipality finances adult training and buys the equipment needed for professional development in cooperation with UNICEF. The training has an educational component, an employment component, and a positive parenting component. Each year the municipality announces a

⁶³ Georgian citizens can work in Germany for three months in the agriculture sector.

⁶⁴ The overall inactivity rate for the age group 15-64 was 30% in 2020.

⁶⁵ World Bank World Development Indicators online database [variable code IC.FRM.TRNG.ZS].

tender for a contract to implement adult training programmes, most recently won by World Vision. Trainees are selected based on an assessment of vulnerability, and the focus is usually on families with children. Applicants are assessed on their capacity to benefit from the training and on their degree of motivation. Each case is discussed by a committee comprised of representatives of the local authority, child protection department and the training provider, based on which trainees are selected. Monitoring has shown the benefits of the programme, which is accessed more by women than by men, and a kindergarten is provided free of charge for the children of trainees over two years old. Training is often provided on a one-to-one basis. If the municipality had a larger budget, they would supply more training on this basis. It is a needs-based project and international assistance is useful for that purpose.

The Ministry of Agriculture's Environmental Training Centre offers training to convicts within the prison system and to ex-convicts undergoing probation, to support them in their rehabilitation and in finding new professions in agriculture.

4.1.3. The needs of members of vulnerable groups

More than one third (37%) of workers are engaged in informal economic activities, almost all of whom were employed in the agricultural sector.⁶⁶ Almost one in ten employees (8.2%) were on a temporary contract in 2020. These persons may wish to improve their skills base to obtain a more permanent employment contract. In a study on the socioeconomic status of vocational students carried out by the government in 2019, 12% (427,000 people) of the population were described as socially vulnerable due to their socioeconomic status (MESCS, 2020). Persons with disabilities and IDPs are also in need of developing their skills, which may vary from basic to higher levels or specialisation, and reskilling.

Ensuring inclusiveness in VET is one of the main pillars of the VET strategy. Five public VET colleges are built on the universal design principle and all public ones are adapted to the needs of persons with disabilities and special education needs. Along with infrastructural arrangements, Public VET institutions can provide special services to the above-mentioned groups (e.g. sign-language interpreter, assistants, specialists of inclusive education, transportation, etc.), and use adapted learning materials and guides; according to the Skills Agency, special training for teachers and inclusive education specialists is constantly planned and provided. The same source states that regulation for the provision of inclusive vocational education has been prepared as well and is currently under discussion with the parties involved. According to EMIS statistics, the number of enrolments of students with special needs in VET is increasing.

The LEPL College 'Iberia' in Kutaisi aims to be inclusive. It provides training to 26 special educational needs (SEN) students and five wheelchair users. The Tbilisi City Hall funds training places for 50 SEN students, their transport costs are covered, and they are assigned special teaching assistants. Specialists with sign language are provided for students with cerebral palsy and other disabilities.

The Mayor's Office of the Tbilisi City Hall also supports the adult education and training of vulnerable people such as immigrants, IDPs, social protection recipients, and people with large families. The focus is on employability. The training is provided at the Tourism College 'Ikarosi' in Tbilisi for about 400 students on non-formal short-term courses who receive a certificate issued by the City Hall at the end of the course. These courses are registered on the City Hall's 'Get a Job' website. All student transport costs are covered by the municipality. IDPs receive additional funding: a per diem remuneration and costs for equipment allocated according to time sheets.

The School of Public Affairs has several target groups, including asylum seekers and refugees (some from Ukraine) and unemployed parents, in addition to its regular clientele of clergy, civil servants, and military personnel. It also provides an outreach service with mobile teams in the rural areas and villages.

⁶⁶ ILOSTAT online data for 2022.

4.2. Employers' expectations

Labour Market and Establishment Skills surveys carried out by the Ministry of Labour, Health, and Social Affairs from 2015 to 2023 reveal that the demand for some occupations is increasing much faster than for others, with the growth in the need for professionals and technicians outstripping that for blue collar workers and labourers. According to research by the World Bank, employers primarily seek workers with cognitive and job-related skills, while demand for such skills is closely followed by socio-emotional skills such as openness and conscientiousness. Among cognitive and job-related characteristics, technical skills are key for all workers, while for white-collar workers, numeracy, literacy and problem-solving skills are most important, and for blue-collar workers key skills include literacy, being able to communicate and work with co-workers, work independently, and manage their own time (Posadas et al., 2018).

An enterprise survey carried out in 2019 by the World Bank showed that 14.9% of companies identified an inadequately educated workforce as their biggest obstacle, and 42.5% identified it as a major obstacle.⁶⁷ A more recent World Bank study argued that due to technological change based on digitalisation, developing high-level cognitive and digital skills will also be essential to help Georgians take on higher productivity jobs in the future. Yet, VET and higher education graduates often lack the skills needed in the new digitalised workplace (World Bank, 2022b). In addition, soft skills are becoming an increasingly important element of retraining programmes as workers will increasingly need good social and behavioural skills to work in interdisciplinary teams (World Bank, 2022b). The World Bank report concluded that '[the] new Skills Agency should perform an important function in this respect, defining vocational education standards in collaboration with the public and private sectors, and fostering the provision of job-relevant skills by upscaling and diversifying vocational trainings among public providers and stimulating training by private providers' (World Bank 2022b: 71). Thus, the development of adult education, including post-secondary vocational education, will be critical in providing a flexible approach to training and retraining that meets the rapidly evolving demands of employers.

5. Accessibility of adult education provision

Enrolment in Continuing Vocational Education and Training (CVET) grew by 159% between 2020 and 2022, from a low base (ETF, 2024). However, enrolment capacity is limited, with demand for CVET outstripping the supply of places. The VET reform has increased the availability of short-term training and retraining through an expansion of private sector and general education providers of adult education, but the scale of this improvement is still insufficient in relation to needs.

5.1. Eligibility conditions

The enrolment rule and procedures for formal adult education programmes are defined by Decree 71n of MoESY of 10 April 2019. Providers can have reasonable entry requirements for their programmes; however, there are usually no specific requirements to enrol in training programmes while retraining programmes might require specific prior knowledge to build on. At one public VET college that the team visited, assessment for student entry is based on confirmation, not on independent scores. All students must have at least achieved a basic education, but there is no restriction on age and about 90% of students are over the age of 18. They also enrol students with a higher education qualification who wish to change career in mid-life. In the past there was a limit on the proportion of adults permitted to enrol, set at 30% of the student body, but this restriction is no longer enforced.

⁶⁷ World Bank Enterprise Surveys [variable code IC.FRM.OBS.OBST9].

For example, the Ikarosi college receives about 10 applicants for each place. Applications are decided by an admissions commission composed of sector specialists who consider the motivation of the applicants and their existing skills and abilities based on interviews, which are considered to be more efficient than practical tests for admission. For short-term programmes, the business sector participates actively in the selection process, and competition for places is high. For example, a cookery course admitted 20 out of 200 applicants, of whom 16 found a job one month after the end of the course.

5.2. Physical accessibility

Authorisation procedures require VET and training/retraining providers to align with the requirements of accessibility, and so all colleges are expected to meet minimum standards. However, this expectation is not always fulfilled. One college in Tbilisi has steep steps leading up to the building and has no obvious disabled access. At another, physical accessibility is enabled by floor attachments for blind people, and while it has disabled access at the front door there are no lifts within the building. However, the college has special vehicles to bring students with disabilities to the college and makes an effort to adapt its programmes to the needs of single mothers.

Most training provided by the Ministry of Agriculture's Environmental Education Centre takes place in cities and towns, but in the case of kindergartens it takes place in local municipalities. In Kutaisi, for example, the Centre provides transport and accommodation for the participants. The Centre plans its training to ensure that access issues are dealt with effectively. Accommodation is provided in the case of 2- or 3-day training courses, even when training lasts only one week.

Given the limited availability of short-term training and retraining programmes, most adults tend to enrol in long-term programmes that involve in-person training. These long-term programmes typically occur during regular working hours, from 9 am to 3 pm, with occasional exceptions where training is provided in two shifts (Siprashvili, 2023). This favours non-working adult learners, particularly women with children who can benefit from day-care services for their children. In contrast, people who are in work or who have family responsibilities during the day are not well provided with opportunities for training. Many adult learners would therefore benefit from a greater availability of short-term training programmes, condensed diploma courses, and distance-learning options.

5.3. Limitations on access

A few VET Colleges offer training and retraining programmes during the weekends or evenings to accommodate the needs of working people, but in general there is a major gap in this respect. This is partly due to the scarcity of funding for short-term programmes (although state funding is available from MoESY through the Skills Agency, MIDPLHSA (through SESA), and municipalities, as well as support from donor organisations). The scarce provision of short-term training programmes pushes some adult learners to enrol on unsuitable long-term programmes, leading to high rates of absenteeism, high drop-out rates from such programmes, and a long-term trend of falling completion rates on college courses. Persons with disabilities and persons with Georgian as a second language are particularly vulnerable to these adverse trends caused by the gaps in the provision of short-term training programmes (Siprashvili, 2023).

Other challenges facing adult learners include the costs of transportation to the local college, especially in rural areas where public transport ends in the afternoon, making it difficult for learners to attend evening classes.

One study found major challenges to the introduction of individualised learning plans in VET colleges (Siprashvili, n.d.). While the law recognises the need for tailored learning plans for all students, practical challenges include the limited amount of financing available and a lack of administrative

capacity. Colleges lack both the resources and expertise to implement individualised learning plans effectively. Another study found that the motives for joining adult education programmes are mainly linked to extrinsic factors, such as professional orientation, vocational and economic benefits (Kitiashvili & Tasker, 2016). However, barriers such as lack of finances and information, as well as enough time required for commitment to study, exclude many adults from such educational opportunities.

The adult education system faces significant challenges related to accreditation and course provision, especially in non-formal learning contexts. Many providers struggle to meet accreditation standards due to inadequate training infrastructure and insufficient investments, such as the inability to address basic fire protection and safety requirements. Additionally, adult learners often lack motivation, with limited access to career guidance and orientation services that could support their educational and professional development. Currently, only jobseekers and vulnerable groups benefit from career guidance initiatives through targeted projects, leaving the broader adult population underserved.

6. Enrolment capacity and potential for expansion

In 2022, the available capacity for long-term vocational programmes was 15,747 places, while the capacity for providing short-term training options was more limited (Siprashvili, 2023). This suggests that adult education provision in Georgia is far below the potential capacity as evidenced by the large number of applications for available courses in all types of education providers and at all levels. Moreover, survey evidence (LFS) reveals the relatively low level of participation in lifelong learning activities in relation to regional peers and EU member states at a similar level of development. There is huge scope for the expansion of capacity and further development of adult education opportunities in the country.

6.1. Human and financial resources

6.1.1. Human resources

The different providers outlined above have a rich variety of human resources with specialised experience in different occupations and trades. Most funding for adult education in Georgia (apart from on-the-job training by companies) comes from the types of sources (ad hoc decisions by different government bodies, donor funding) that do not allow for stability. While funding for formal training and retraining courses is quite efficient in covering all types of programme implementation costs, including teacher salaries, most VET colleges employ all or most of their teaching staff on a contractual basis. This may lead to demotivation of teaching staff and a lack of capacity for course development or for consistent monitoring of trainees over time. Several examples provide evidence of this issue.

In the LEPL College 'Ikarosi', for example, while all teachers have attended teacher training courses, about four fifths of them are from the private sector. Most of them are graduates with several years' experience in their sector and are contracted by the college to deliver courses in their area of specialisation. The college also employs a fifth of its teachers as permanent staff, some of whom have been working at the college for many years.

The LEPL College 'Iberia' in Kutaisi has about 60 teaching staff, of whom 20 teach short-term courses. All teachers have a higher education, while teachers of short-term courses also need three years' practical experience. The teachers are hired on a contractual basis from the private sector and receive salaries according to their number of contract hours. All have expertise in the field in which they teach, but only some have a teaching qualification. The College provides those teachers with teacher training. According to our interviewee, a major challenge is that teachers do not like doing short-term courses or parts of courses. Moreover, having many teachers covering small parts of each course

means that there is no one in charge of overall assessment. While each course has its 'Head', who is responsible for the development of the programme, they are not paid for running the course but are paid on the same contractual basis as all other teachers. Although the salaries of teachers are increasing, they are still far below what can be earned in the private sector.

The Construct2 VET College has 41 staff who teach both long-term and short-term courses. The teachers for the long-term courses are employed on a contractual basis. As it is hard to find teachers, the College recruits its staff from all over Georgia. Teachers for the short-term courses are supplied by the partner company. Some of the teachers for short-term courses are college graduates. A teacher's salary is relatively low at only 20 GEL per hour gross.

6.1.2. Funding sources for adult education

Adult education, including training and retraining programmes, is financed from a variety of sources including MoESY (through the Skills Agency), MIDPLHSA (through SESA), the Municipalities and other state institutions such as GITA, Enterprise Georgia and the Probation Agency. Formal education for adults, including the public VET Colleges, is fully financed by the State through MoESY, other Ministries, SESA, and local governments, while other sources of funding are donor contributions and user fees. Non-formal providers also have diverse sources of funding; some are financed by donor organisations and others through the state budget. There are 32 Green Scholarships to support longer term studies on environmental issues. The Skills Agency runs grant schemes targeting VET students for non-formal and extracurricular activities.

Box 7: Example: Funding for a VET college

The LEPL College 'Ikarosi' in Tbilisi receives state funding from MoESY, MIDPLHSA, and Tbilisi municipality. For diploma programmes it receives voucher (per capita) funding, which is spent on teacher salaries and materials for conducting lessons. Administrative expenses are funded by the state through a subsidy. MoESY has funded upgrades of equipment, such as cooking equipment. Short-term courses each have their own budget funded by public sources to cover teachers' salaries.

While the government allows any provider to develop short-term training programmes, only those programmes developed under the priority directions defined by the order of the relevant minister can receive state funding for their implementation. In addition, SESA finances short-term training and retraining programmes for the long-term unemployed. Adult education in entrepreneurship skills is financed through the 'Invest in Georgia' programme of Enterprise Georgia, providing grants for training potential entrepreneurs who plan to start their own business. The Georgian Farmers' Association funds short-term training programme in 16 VET colleges. Companies also provide financial resources for funding adult education, including through investment in vocational colleges.

Donor finance is an important source of funding for adult education. The EU's 'Skills4jobs' programme and USAID's 'Industry-led Skills Development Programme' offer job-readiness and job-search skills to adults in the regions. These provide several million euros of financial support for adult education and training, targeting vulnerable groups including women, ethnic minorities, and rural communities. In 2021, the Asian Development Bank provided a 41.2 million euro loan to implement the 'Modern Skills for Better Employment Programme'. The project will develop skill hubs in the regions of Kakheti and Imereti, providing vocational education in 20 public schools. Non-formal education is mainly financed by the learners themselves and through various donor projects (DVV-international, USAID, UNDP, EU-financed projects) and to a lesser extent from state allocations.

Despite this variety of sources of funding, there is a great concentration of provision of adult education opportunities in Tbilisi and some other larger cities and limited provision in other places such as rural and less developed municipalities and regions. Local governments are constrained by limited budgets and legal responsibilities. There is therefore a need to ensure that local administrations have more capacity and funding to support low cost or free-of-charge training opportunities to disadvantaged communities at the local level.

6.1.3. Funding models

While there is a diversity of funding models for Adult Education, most funding is directed towards providers rather than individuals (although, when providers are financed by the state, the travel costs of the learners can be covered). Since 2019, VET courses (which include adult vocational courses) have been financed through a per-capita funding system (known as a 'voucher' system), through which learners can select any course of their choice at a public institution. MoESY (through the Skills Agency) provides funding to providers for training and retraining programmes, while SESA provides registered jobseekers with a state voucher (worth between GEL 1,000 and 1,500) which they can use to enrol on short-term courses offered by VET colleges (Pfanzelt et al., 2021). It is important to note that the 'voucher' system is not an individual voucher as such, but a per-capita funding system; it only applies to formal education. The vouchers are for a fixed sum and are not income related.⁶⁸

At least some short-term programmes are provided free of charge and funded by the Skills Agency while others are provided on a commercial basis. The Georgia Association for Educational Initiatives charges fees for courses, depending on the services provided and whether a meal is provided. They have a programme for kindergarten teachers which charges 100 GEL per person per month for two- and half-hour meetings weekly.

In an innovative approach, some Adult Education Centres within the GAEN network have set up social enterprises to meet their commitment to providing adult education to members of vulnerable groups. The surplus income (profits) from these social enterprises are reinvested in the provision of adult education courses that are provided free of charge to participants. Many of these participants are socially disadvantaged and on account of this funding model do not need to pay for their tuition, while other participants pay a relatively low course fee. Examples of such social enterprises include a café on a popular tourist route, a producer of metal doors and a motorcar diagnostic workshop near Kutaisi.

7. Conclusions and recommendations

This report has provided an overview of the adult education landscape in Georgia, focusing on the policy and institutional framework, the variety of providers of adult education, and resources available to meet the educational needs of adults. Georgia has implemented various policy reforms to promote adult education, including the recognition of informal and non-formal learning and the establishment of the State Employment Support Agency. This has also led to an increase in vocational training and retraining programmes.

MoESY (through the Skills Agency) is the main institution for steering and coordinating adult education policies and delivery. It develops national VET qualifications, strengthens the capacity of VET providers, and allocates funding to training providers. The National Centre for Educational Quality Enhancement (NCEQE) is responsible for accrediting adult education programmes.

Any legal entity can deliver state-recognised short-term courses for adults, subject to approval by NCEQE. Providers of adult education include state VET colleges, public-private VET colleges, private VET colleges, private companies, general education institutions, adult education centres, and universities.

Despite the positive perception of adult education among Georgians, actual participation rates remain relatively low compared to the EU experience. The government has made efforts to improve the adult education system and enhance the skills of the adult population, but challenges remain in terms of poor learning outcomes and limited adult education and vocational training opportunities.

7.1. Policy recommendations

⁶⁸ Interview with Georgian Association for Education Initiatives.

The policy recommendations below follow the main issues raised and the headings of the above text of the report. They follow from the analyses carried out under each heading and the challenges raised for each. They are designed to provide realistic and practical guidance on measures that could be adopted to raise the effectiveness and capacity of adult education provision in Georgia.

7.1.1. Policy and institutional framework for adult education

While a wide-ranging set of legislative acts, strategies, policy measures, governance systems and institutions are in place to deliver adult education, there are number of further measures that could be taken to strengthen the delivery of adult education services to the relevant segments of the population in order to increase participation in, and effectiveness of, adult education services.

7.1.1.a: Firstly, the scope of adult education should be broadened. This would involve including additional dimensions and forms of adult education in line with international experience, in particular with the EU orientations in the field of education and training.

7.1.1.b: Secondly, the policy framework should be developed and unified on the basis of a comprehensive national policy for adult education that sets out clear goals, standards, and guidelines.

7.1.1.c: Thirdly, governance systems should be strengthened by ensuring a greater degree of coordination between all government agencies, employers, workers' representatives and adult education providers. Such coordination of adult education governance should be ensured across different sectors and regions.

7.1.1.d: Fourthly, an effective system of monitoring, reporting, and evaluation of adult education policies needs to be developed. To achieve this, data collection should be improved, and impact analyses of adult education participation, outcomes, and needs should be carried out on a regular basis.

7.1.2. Providers of adult education

In addition to a substantial expansion of the scope of adult education and of the number of providers in different sectors, the government should give greater support to a more diverse range of providers of adult education.

7.1.2.a: Firstly, the diversity of organisations providing adult education should be expanded to include schools, libraries, and more NGOs. Existing adult education centres in underserved communities need to be supported to reduce geographical disparities and diversify their offer. Consideration should be given to an increased availability of adult education on digital platforms.

7.1.2.b: Secondly, a more diverse range of adult education programmes should be developed and promoted to cater to various sectors, not just the IT sector, although this should also be expanded to meet the growing demand for adult education services in the digital economy.

7.1.2.c: Thirdly, greater powers should be devolved to municipalities to enable them to support adult education initiatives, including the GEAN Adult Education Centres. Municipalities should be enabled to cover the rent of their premises or to offer municipal premises on a rent-free basis.

7.1.2.d: Fourthly, the process of granting the right to validate non-formal and informal learning (VNFIL) should be simplified to increase accessibility. For example, VET providers should have an automatic right to offer VNFIL in the fields in which they provide training.

7.1.2.e: Fifthly, awareness about the benefits of recognition of prior learning (RPL) should be raised, and more providers should be encouraged to offer these services.

7.1.2.f: Finally, quality standards and procedures should be streamlined to make them more suitable for adult education and less bureaucratic. Higher education institutions should be made more aware that the accreditation of their existing programmes is enough to allow them to provide short-term training and issue certificates in the same field of study, and they should be encouraged to do so with financial support if required.

7.1.3. The needs and expectations for adult education

The needs and expectations for adult learning are large and increasing, and greatly exceed the available supply. Moreover, the provision of services to meet these needs are out of balance by sector, client group and geography. Therefore, measures could be taken to better meet the population's needs for adult education, as well as the needs of employers for more skilled workers.

7.1.3.a: Firstly, essential support services such as childcare, transportation, and flexible training schedules to accommodate adult learners should be further developed. Currently, SESA lacks resources to deal with an increased demand for their services.

7.1.3.b: Secondly, personalised learning plans should be developed alongside career counselling to help adult learners navigate their educational needs and career paths. Career guidance services should be developed for all adults, not only jobseekers or students, to raise awareness and understanding of available adult education opportunities and encourage the take-up of learning opportunities. To provide effective services for jobseekers, SESA should employ more career guidance consultants.

7.1.3.c: Thirdly SESA programmes should be better tailored to the needs of the rural population and better coordinated with the VET colleges to improve the training offered and to make it more relevant to the jobseekers.

7.1.3.d: Fourthly, strategies to enhance motivation among adult learners should be developed, such as highlighting the personal and professional benefits of education. Effective engagement strategies to maintain learners' interest should be implemented, such as interactive and practical learning approaches. Adult education courses should be offered in multiple languages to cater to non-native speakers and ethnic minorities.

7.1.3.e: Finally, regular assessments to understand the specific needs of adult learners should be carried out and programmes tailored accordingly, addressing gaps in the design of training programmes.

7.1.4. Access and availability of adult education provision

Despite the large potential demand for adult education services, the availability of adult education opportunities remains limited and there are substantial problems concerning access to the services that are provided. To address this issue, several measures could be implemented.

7.1.4.a: Firstly, the focus of funding needs to better reflect the needs of learners and their learning outcomes. Funding mechanisms should provide an incentive for learners to undertake adult education, taking into consideration international experience with learning accounts, free credits, and employer tax-incentives or cashbacks, provided that adequate management capacities exist.

7.1.4.b: Secondly, access to adult education should be expanded by incentivising organisations to provide short-term training courses. Adults need incentives to take up training; for example, the availability of training in the immediate surroundings. The aim should be to provide a training offer that is available within a reasonable travel distance of potential beneficiaries. The geographical dimension should therefore be incorporated in adult education policy planning and funding.

7.1.4.c: Thirdly, the awareness and visibility of adult education programmes should be increased through targeted outreach and marketing campaigns, for which a well-organised communication of the training offer is needed (e.g. through an accessible training catalogue that includes programmes from different providers).

7.1.4.d: Finally, policies that promote equitable access to adult education across different regions and populations should be developed, including across vulnerable groups.

7.1.5. Enrolment capacity and potential for expansion – Human resources

To develop adult education, the teaching staff able to deliver education and training programmes to adult learners needs to be further developed. This will require the following measures:

7.1.5.a: Firstly, VET colleges should consider increasing the permanent staff involved in their adult education programmes and reducing the number of staff employed on a short-term basis to improve morale and the commitment to programme development and monitoring.

7.1.5.b: Secondly, specific qualifications and training programmes for adult education teachers should be developed and implemented. An adult education teacher qualification should be created. Like other teacher profiles, an occupational standard for an Adult Education Teacher should be developed. Standards for adult teacher education could be incorporated in existing Teacher Education Benchmarks.

7.1.5.c: Thirdly, the continuing training and professional development of trainers should be developed to improve the quality of training.

7.1.5.d: Finally, quality assurance experts should be better trained, and their competencies improved.

7.1.6. Enrolment capacity and potential for expansion – Financial resources

The funding policy for adult education needs improvement and its scale should be expanded. The following set of measures could be considered as ways to achieve this aim:

7.1.6.a: Firstly, the funding model should be broadened and supplemented by a universal system of learning accounts for all adults (to accompany the current system of vouchers), along with a guaranteed right to an annual skills assessment for all adults, and protected time off work for training or retraining for employees (perhaps initially in larger companies).

7.1.6.b: Secondly, additional funding sources should be secured to expand the scale and reach of adult education programmes. This could be achieved partly through co-funding mechanisms that encourage employers to participate in the funding of adult education and training (e.g., through tax breaks). Providers that offer specialised courses and programmes on a commercial basis should be supported through tax incentives and other supportive measures, such as free or subsidised business advisory services to start-ups in the field of adult education and training (to expand the number of providers).

7.1.7.c: Thirdly, the legal framework should be updated to enable tax-free reimbursement of employee training days spent off work, in order to reduce the opportunity costs for adult learners to develop their skills.

7.1.7.d: Fourthly, municipal budgets should be strengthened and allocated fairly to support adult education initiatives in all regions.

7.1.7.e: Finally, funding mechanisms should be developed that would support and incentivise the validation and recognition of skills already acquired in informal and non-formal contexts (VNFIL and RPL), including through informal employment or working abroad.

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9. Appendix

INSTITUTIONS VISITED	Type of respondent
Ministry of Education, Science, and Youth (Vocational Education Development Department)	Policymaker
Skills Agency	Public administration
Ministry of Economy: Enterprise Georgia	Policymaker – company sector
Georgian Innovation and Technology Agency	Public administration
NCEQE – National Centre for Educational Quality Enhancement	Public administration
SESA, State Employment Support Agency	Public administration PES
Regional Employment Office LEPL Kutaisi	Public administration PES
Tbilisi City Hall	Local government
Kutaisi Municipality	Local government
DVV GAEN	NGO – Donor
GFA - Georgian Farmers' Association	NGO – Business association
VET College “Construct2” & adult training centre Zestaponi - BK Construction	Provider – Public-private College
VET College “Iberia”, Kutaisi	Provider – State College
VET Tourism College “Ikarosi”, Tbilisi	Provider – State College
Institute of Public Affairs (language training for minorities)	Provider – State Institute
TSU, LLL Centre (short courses)	Provider – University LLL Centre
State University “Akaki Tsereteli”, Kutaisi (“ATSU”)	Provider – University Teacher Training
Khoni Adult Education Centre (under GAEN) (short courses)	Provider – Community College
LTD “Sound Design” (short courses)	Provider – Company
SkillWill	Provider – company