



TORINO PROCESS 2016-17

GEORGIA

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Executive summary of the Torino Process 2016–17 Georgia report.

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1. Introduction

Georgia has been implementing vocational education and training (VET) reforms aimed at supporting the socioeconomic development and poverty reduction priorities of the country, as well as the development of human resources to meet the short-, medium- and long-term requirements of the labour market.

VET reform is being implemented within the framework of the VET Reform Strategy of Georgia (2013–20), which was developed through wide consultation with various stakeholders. During the period 2014–16, active work has been undertaken on the implementation of the strategy's objectives, namely to support the flexibility of VET and to improve its quality and effectiveness.

The Torino Process 2016–17 report for Georgia emphasises the main directions of VET reform during the period 2014–16 (following the Torino Process 2014), its successes and its challenges.

2. Main findings

Addressing the economic and labour market demands of the country

VET reform is based on the country's economic development as well as the perspectives of the labour market. Some of the main focuses of the reform are identifying skill needs, adjusting the training provision towards the required skills, reducing the mismatch between supply and demand, and supporting the employment of VET graduates.

Average annual GDP growth for the period 2013–15 was 3.6%, while trade (16.6%) and industry (16.5%) have played leading roles in the economic development of the country (Geostat, 2015). The positive results of the reforms implemented in Georgia are reflected in various international rankings; for example, Doing Business 2015 placed Georgia at 24 among 189 countries¹; high levels of human development have also been observed². However, the economic development of the country is not equally reflected in poverty alleviation. Although relative poverty indicators have improved during the period 2013–15, poverty remains one of the main challenges in Georgia. One of the reasons is that income growth has been mainly concentrated among the top 10% of income earners.

¹ www.doingbusiness.org/~media/GIAWB/Doing%20Business/Documents/Annual-Reports/English/DB15-Full-Report.pdf

² <http://hdr.undp.org/en/content/human-development-index-hdi>

Furthermore, the effect of the reforms will only be seen in the long term, and a gradual reduction in poverty is expected over the next decade.

The high level of self-employment (mainly underemployment in subsistence agriculture) and the high level of urban unemployment (21.5%) are the main socioeconomic challenges for the county. During the period 2013–15, the unemployment rate steadily decreased, reaching 12% in 2015, the lowest for 12 years. In spite of this trend, unemployment remains a substantial problem, especially among young people (the youth unemployment rate was 30.8% in 2015).

In general, VET graduates perform slightly better in the labour market than university graduates. The unemployment rate for university graduates was higher (14.4%) than that of VET graduates (11%) in 2015. Conversely, among young people (aged 15–24), the highest unemployment rate is experienced by young VET graduates (36%) and secondary education graduates (33%), compared to young university graduates (30.8%). The analysis shows that young people (and especially girls) face particular obstacles while transitioning to the labour market. This includes inflation of qualifications, lack of trust of employers towards vocational qualifications, preference for the higher levels of educational attainment, requirements for work experience that few young people can meet, and the mismatch of skills between supply and demand. In spite of the high level of unemployment, employers find it difficult to find the personnel they require.

Relevance to the requirements of the labour market

The main challenges for labour market data generation relate to the need to plan and undertake research on various labour market indicators; to institutionalise labour market components research; and to establish a labour market information system (LMIS). In 2015 the Ministry of Labour, Health and Social Affairs started work on the establishment of an LMIS. This will be a mechanism for the collection, processing, analysis and dissemination of labour market information to jobseekers, students, employers, policymakers and other stakeholders. It will be an important tool for forecasting labour market trends.

The relevance of VET to labour market requirements is considered one of the important elements in the formation of a knowledge-based economy as well as for supporting poverty reduction in the country. There is a need to move the existing supply-driven VET system towards a demand-led model in order to meet industry's needs for a skilled workforce.

In order to increase the relevance of the VET system to the labour market, a number of measures have been implemented, including carrying out systematic labour market demand surveys, preparing VET programmes based on occupational standards developed with the participation of employers, and developing modular programmes to support increased relevance as well as quality. At least 40% of each programme is devoted to practice, most of it organised within enterprises. Entrepreneurship modules have been integrated into all VET programmes. In 2016, the piloting of the work-based learning concept started. Since 2014 regular tracer studies of VET graduates have been carried out.

However, challenges remain regarding relevance: employers have less trust in vocational qualifications than in higher educational attainment levels, which is also reflected in employment indicators. The VET system is facing the challenge of quickly and effectively meeting the needs of the labour market. It is also important to strengthen the professional orientation, consulting and information system in order to provide reliable and relevant information on the needs of the labour market, career development, etc. Promoting entrepreneurship and self-employment is very important.

Addressing the demographic and social demands of the country

Population dynamics are an important factor influencing the country's economy. According to the 2014 census, the population has decreased by 600,000 over the past 12 years (Geostat, 2016); this can be explained by human capital flight. The urban population has increased, while the youth population has decreased as a proportion of the population, from 16.3% in 2009 to 12.6% in 2016 (Geostat, 2016). Such changes in the population, together with migration trends, affect the deficiency of the workforce and the availability of skills, which requires an appropriate response from the VET side.

Data for 2013–16 show improved access to VET, including for vulnerable groups such as people with disabilities and those with special educational needs. VET funding almost tripled during the period 2013–15 as more of the sector's needs are now covered, and investment has been allocated to improve access. During this period, work has been undertaken to increase the geographical coverage of VET institutions by establishing new colleges and branches, rehabilitating college buildings, organising infrastructure based on the principles of inclusive education, and adapting and developing learning materials for people with disabilities or special educational needs. The introduction of inclusive VET has started. National minorities living in the country can take tests in their native language. Alternative procedures exist for people with disabilities and special educational needs. The European Training Foundation is supporting initiatives to address the issue of NEETs (young people not in employment, education or training). During 2015, steps were taken to develop and improve career guidance and professional orientation, which help students make informed career decisions.

However, there are still barriers to access. These can be institutional (for example, geographical issues relating to the location of institutions, the lack of information and professional orientation, the lack of customised entry testing procedures for vulnerable groups), dispositional (negative attitudes towards vocational education) and situational (tuition fees for private colleges, as voucher funding covers only public VET institutions). In addition, the VET system is very small and has limited capacity, and the concentration of funds on public rather than private VET provision limits access for vulnerable groups. In the future, the reduction of existing barriers should be prioritised.

Studies show that the attitudes of the population and stakeholders towards vocational education are becoming positive (a trend that is also reflected in the increased enrolment of young people in VET schools), although this is a slow process (UNDP, 2015). The main challenge is not a lack of positive attitudes towards VET, but the fact that VET is considered a second-rate alternative to higher or general education. Today VET is still affected by the stigma and negative attitudes from Soviet times. VET is perceived as qualifying students for low-status, manual and poorly paid jobs. In addition, students and stakeholders are hindered by 'dead-ends', which create barriers for graduates wishing to progress to the upper levels of education. This issue has been addressed in the New Law on VET, but it has not yet been approved and still needs to be put in force. The law allows the vertical mobility of VET students to higher levels of VET (levels 3–5) as well as to higher education; it also emphasises the equivalence of certificates of VET graduates with a basic education background and certificates of secondary education graduates.

Stakeholders often do not have enough information about the VET system and its reforms. It is important to use diverse mechanisms to increase the attractiveness of VET, including public awareness campaigns, promoting cases of successful VET graduates, formulating effective career guidance system, and improved transition to work of the VET system.

Internal efficiency of the VET system

This section summarises the main mechanisms for ensuring a match between demand and supply, the progress that has been made and the challenges that remain.

Numerous activities have been implemented over the past few years to increase the quality and relevance of VET. During the period 2013–16, significant steps were taken to update the National Qualifications Framework, and to analyse and pilot the VET Quality Assurance Framework. Activities have related to both internal and external quality assurance mechanisms. Modular programmes have been introduced, and teacher training has been organised within schools and enterprises. The infrastructure has been improved, along with the quality of teaching and assessment. Preparations have been made to pilot the system of validation of non-formal and informal learning (MCA-G, 2016), which is essential for the further development of quality as well as relevance.

In spite of the implementation of numerous measures to reduce the imbalance between supply and demand, the quality of VET still needs improvement. Studies from 2015 (UNDP, 2016) once again reveal the need for the further development of skills of graduates and the quality assurance of professional qualifications. The revised Quality Assurance Framework will be an additional mechanism for ensuring the high quality of vocational qualifications (MCA-G, 2016). In addition, the implementation of quality assurance mechanisms needs continuous effort and time.

It is important to continue working towards the finalisation and implementation of the Quality Assurance Framework and quality assurance mechanisms; to encourage the regular involvement of employers in the process of developing educational programmes, and in their implementation, monitoring and assessment; to introduce work-based learning in partnership with the private sector; to develop continuing professional development of teachers in VET institutions and in enterprises; to prepare and adapt educational resources; and to ensure the provision of material-technical facilities.

At the same time, it is necessary to share and disseminate best practices between VET institutions and enterprises, and to strengthen communication between teachers and professionals working on programme development. Since 2015 Georgia has been a full member of WorldSkills International.

VET governance and policy practices

VET governance in Georgia is centralised. The weakness of the regional level is a challenge in terms of the vertical level of governance. Social partners lack influence on VET policy-making decisions around sector-specific skills. During the period 2013–16 one of the priorities was the development of social partnerships at the macro (National VET Council), meso (sectoral committees) and micro (board of trustees) levels, such as balancing or updating existing membership structures (National VET Council, sectoral committees), and capacity-building activities (information meetings and seminars for the members of the National VET Council and advisory boards).

In spite of these activities, social partnership still requires improvement. This applies to the systemic and regular involvement of social partners in the process of developing and implementing policies, the delivery process (teaching and assessment), monitoring and providing qualifications. It is important to strengthen the capacities of social partners and for them to take responsibility for issues such as the provision of career guidance, the introduction of work-based learning, and the improvement of the image of VET.

Based on research carried out within the Torino Process 2016–17, it is essential to strengthen the capacities of the existing national social partnership platform (National VET Council) along with its thematic working groups and the secretariat to ensure effective functioning. Social partnership needs to develop at sectoral level in order to support the closing of the gap between the provision of skills

and the labour market. At the micro level, it is important to support partnership between employers and VET institutions.

Formulation of evidence-based policy

The reform recognises the importance of information provision for producing evidence-based policy and its monitoring process. The VET system monitoring database, created in 2013–14 with the purpose of providing information, is regularly fine-tuned and updated. In 2015, an electronic matrix model for the management of the VET Strategy Implementation Action Plan was introduced. It is important to further develop the VET reform monitoring and evaluation process.

3. Recommendations for action

This section brings together future short-term (1–2 years) priorities that are formulated based on the existing challenges.

1. Supporting private sector engagement in VET; developing social partnership at all levels:
 - supporting the effective functioning of the National VET Council (including thematic working groups and the secretariat);
 - reforming sectoral councils from a long-term perspective: expanding functions, capacity development;
 - supporting private sector engagement and partnership at micro level (including work-based learning);
 - developing public–private partnerships.
2. Increasing the quality and relevance of VET:
 - developing and implementing the updated Quality Assurance Framework; improving the quality of VET qualifications in accordance with the National Qualifications Framework;
 - supporting the implementation of modular VET educational programmes: continuing professional development of VET teachers in both VET schools and enterprises, including teachers from private colleges; developing relevant materials;
 - supporting informed decision-making processes and student employability through information, career guidance and career development.
3. Increasing access to and attractiveness of VET:
 - eliminating barriers ('dead-ends'): improving mobility to higher levels of VET as well as to higher education;
 - supporting the development of a unified VET network, including public and private VET providers: reviewing the existing financing model, providing training for teachers, etc.;
 - establishing a system for the validation of non-formal and informal learning;
 - improving the status and image of VET: supporting the formulation of a positive attitude towards VET on the part of students and stakeholders; increasing the awareness of students and stakeholders of VET opportunities and reforms.

MORE INFO

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www.torinoprocess.eu

Torino Process blog: blog.torinoprocess.eu

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