



The institutional context of the transition from education to work in Georgia

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List of abbreviations

ADB	Asian Development Bank
BA	Bachelor
CAT	Computer Adaptive Testing
EACEA	Education, Audiovisual and Culture Executive Agency
ECTS	European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System
ETF	European Training Foundation
GII	Gender Inequality Index
GCPR	Georgian Centre of Population Research (Tbilisi, Georgia)
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GEL	Georgian Lari (Georgian currency)
GEOSTAT	National Statistics Office of Georgia
GGS	Generations and Gender Survey
HEI	Higher Education Institutions
IDFI	Institute for Development of Freedom of Information
IDP	Internally Displaced People
IHS	Integrated Household Survey
ILO	International Labor Office
IOM	International Organization for Migration
MA	Master
MoES	Ministry of Education and Science
MoLHSA	Ministry of Labor, Health and Social Affairs
NCEQE	National Centre for Educational Quality Enhancement
NER	Net Enrolment Rate
PTU	Professional-Technical Schools
SSA	Social Service Agency
SPTU	Secondary Technical-Trade Schools
SSUZ	Secondary Specialized Secondary Schools
TEW-CCA	Research project “Opportunities and Barriers at the Transition from Education to Work-A Comparative Youth Study in Azerbaijan, Georgia and Tajikistan” (funded by VolkswagenStiftung)
TSA	Targeted Social Assistance
UNDP	United Nations Development Program
UNECE	United Nations Economic Commission for Europe
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund
UNICEF	United Nations Children’s Fund
USAID	US Agency for International Development
USSR	Union of Soviet Socialist Republics
VET	Vocational Education and Training
WMS	Welfare Monitoring Survey

1. Introduction

This working paper introduces the institutional context in Georgia. It is part of a series of working papers describing the institutional context of countries in the Caucasus and Central Asia. It is based on research conducted in the project “Opportunities and Barriers at the Transition from Education to Work-A Comparative Youth Study in Azerbaijan, Georgia and Tajikistan” (TEW-CCA) that was financed by the VolkswagenStiftung in the period 2015–2019; funding initiative “Between Europe and Orient”, call “Institutional change and social practice. Research on the political system, the economy and society in Central Asia and the Caucasus”. The focus is on institutional conditions that are seen as relevant for youth transition from education to work and related youth transitions such as family formation (marriage and childbirth).

Chapter 2 of this report provides an overview of the education system in Georgia. After giving a general overview on the structure of the education system (Section 2.1) conditions of preschool education are explained (Section 2.2). These institutional conditions are of great relevance for young parents as they define the opportunities of institutionalized care for young children. Section 2.3 discusses main characteristics of general education, which is composed of primary education and secondary education. Section 2.4 provides an overview on the system of vocational education in Georgia. Section 2.5 highlights the higher education system of Georgia that is characterized by a high degree of expansion.

Chapter 3 of this report offers basic information on the labor market such as figures on labor force participation and unemployment (Section 3.1) and employment (Section 3.2). Section 3.3 discusses the issue of labor migration, which is of high relevance for the Georgian society. Section 3.4 provides an overview on employment protection legislation in Georgia.

Chapter 4 of this report is devoted to the broad field of the welfare regime. Basic characteristics of labor market policies (Section 4.1), unemployment insurance (Section 4.2), social assistance for poor families (Section 4.3) and minimum wages (Section 4.4) are introduced. Section 4.5 is considering the family regimes in Georgia. The role of religion in the Georgian society is highlighted in Section 4.6. Section 4.7 addresses the topic of gender roles and, finally, chapter 4.8 gives a general overview on family policy in Georgia.

2. The Education System

The educational system in Georgia emerged from Soviet rule and at the end of the twentieth century. With the collapse of the USSR, independent Georgia inherited the Soviet education system, of which the principal features were totalitarian rule, extreme centralization, uniform ideological educational programs, a weak evaluation system, inadequate and impenetrable management of financial and human resources, limited participation by the community and absence of the private sector. Whereas the Soviet education system was characterized by strong education-occupation linkages, strong vocational orientation and exclusive tertiary education, education-occupation linkages got lost, vocational education came under pressure and vigorous tertiary education expansion and differentiation took place in post-Soviet countries (Gerber 2003; Kogan et al. 2011). Since gaining its independence, due to the collapse of Georgian economy, the education sector has also experienced a strong reduction in its budget. In recent years, Georgia has undertaken comprehensive educational reforms at all level of education, with the aim of creating a credible education system that is compatible with internationally accepted standards and concepts.

2.1. The Structure of Education System

Figure 1 provides an overview on the Georgian education system. It shows the basic structure of pre-primary, primary, secondary and post-secondary education in Georgia. Moreover, the typical pathways are highlighted via arrows.

In Georgia, there is a preschool education system that starts with nurseries for children aged 2 to 3 years. This is followed by kindergarten that host children of age 3 to 6 (or 7, depending on the birth date and rules of entering primary education). There are also nursery-kindergarten as a combined type covering the whole pre-primary education period. The Georgian pre-primary education is described in detail in Chapter 2.2.

Education is mandatory for all children aged six to 14 in Georgia. The school system is divided into primary education (six years; ages six to 12), basic education (three years; ages 12 to 15) and secondary education (three years; ages 15 to 18). A detailed description of the general secondary in Georgia is provided in Chapter 2.3.

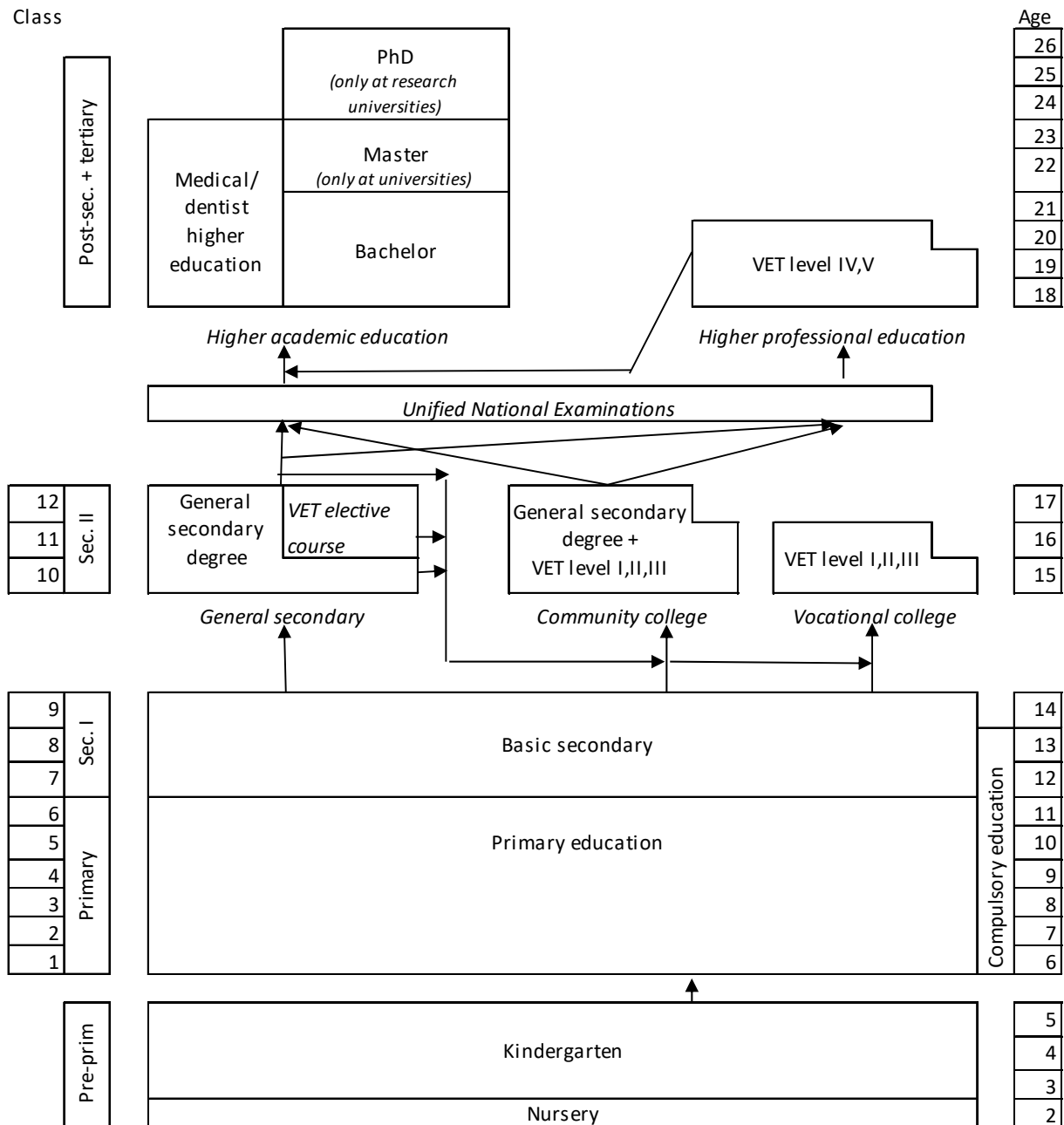
Alternatively, there exists a vocational education and training (VET) system. The reformed VET system is organized along five levels defined in accordance with learning performance. Levels I, II, and III are implemented in VET programs in vocational colleges as well as in parallel with general education and/or liberal education programs in community colleges. Students in general education can also choose VET courses as elective courses but they are not allowed to spent more than 10% of their study time on the VET elective courses. VET programs of levels I, II and III can also be provided by higher education institutions.

VET levels IV and V are part of the Georgian higher education system and they are provided by community colleges and higher education institutions. Student can only become enrolled in these courses after passing (a simplified version of) the Unified National Examinations and holding a secondary school diploma. Chapter 2.4 offers more information on the VET system in Georgia.

Passing the full version of the Unified National Examinations is one of the conditions to have access to university education next to holding a secondary school diploma. Since May 2005, when Georgia joined the Bologna process, the university education system of Georgia has been organized in a three-cycle degree system with Bachelor (BA), Master (MA) and Doctoral degrees. The only exception is medical and dentist higher education that is offered in a six-years one-cycle study program. Chapter 2.5 provides more in-depth information on the Georgian university education system.

In the following, we will overview the system of education by taking a deeper look at each level of education and its major change from the period of transition from socialism up to nowadays.

Figure 1: The education system in Georgia



Source: Own illustration.

2.2. Preschool Education

The preschool educational establishments in Soviet Georgia were divided into the following types: nurseries, nursery-kindergarten and kindergarten. The nurseries took care for children aged two years up to the age of three years. Kindergarten hosted children aged three to six or seven

depending on the respective age of school entering in different time-periods. Nursery-kindergarten was a combined type.

The preschool sector of education was always considered as the least priority in Georgia. Plenty of people considered kindergarten or nurseries as a last refuge and tried to avoid them by all means or (if they were well off) to find some private nurse or semi-legal small private kindergarten for their children. Enrolment into pre-primary sector was always very low in Georgia, especially compared to the almost universal attendance of primary secondary school (44.1% in kindergarten and 15.4% in nurseries in 1989).

During the mid-1990s transition, public investments in preschool education suffered from a strong decline. As a result, the number of preschool institutions and children enrolled almost halved during the period 1989 to 1994. From the beginning of 1990s public nurseries do not exist in Georgia anymore and children under age of three years (since age of two years) were in care in nursery-kindergarten.

In the most recent period, significant efforts devoted to the improvement of accessibility of preschool education have been made in Georgia. However, a sufficient number of good quality public (free) early childcare facilities are still not available. Thus, alternative early childcare facilities' options in terms of private nannies or private nursery schools are in demand.

The most noticeable feature of the post-Soviet development of the preschool sector is the deepening social stratification of children as well as quality differences between preschool institutions. Private kindergarten have begun to appear after 1992. New private school facilities are offering the highest-quality preschool education and child care services to those parents who are able to pay. There has also been an increase in the availability of informal childcare services offered by other adults who had been squeezed out of the formal labor market.

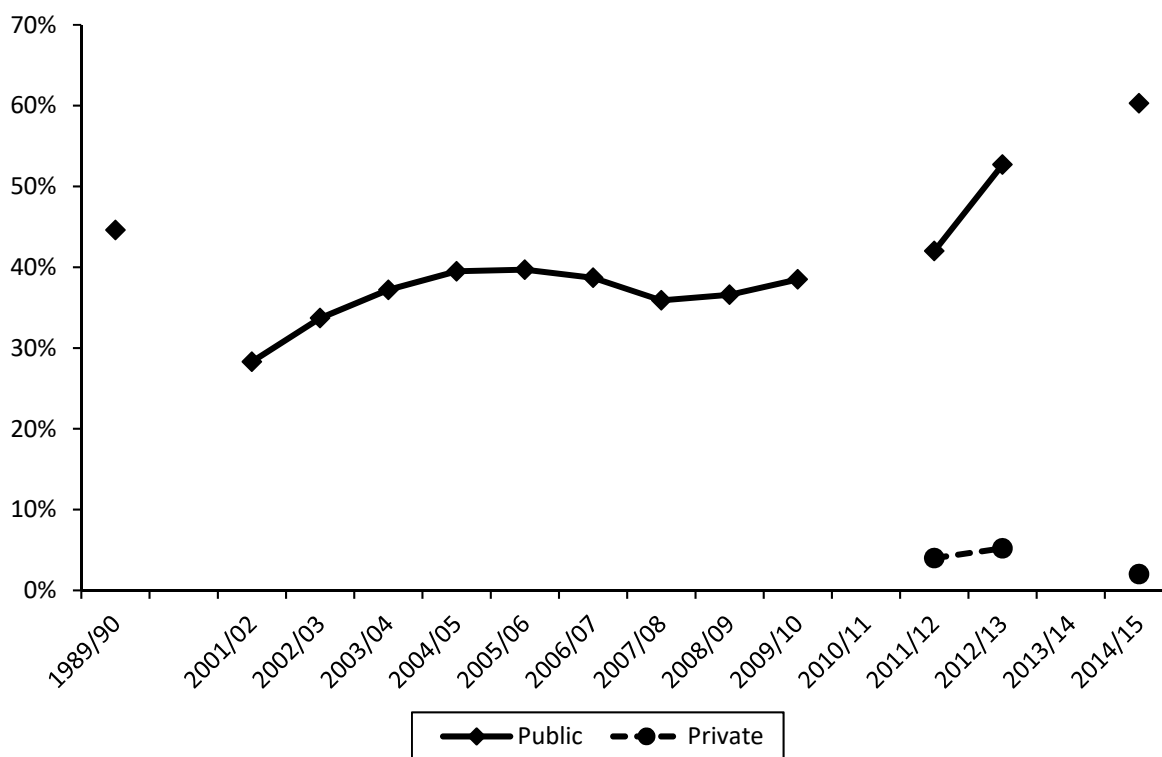
Nowadays, in Georgia, the preschool education is universal for children under the age six and is delivered in two stages: nursery school take care of children aged two to three and kindergarten take care of children aged three to six. Nursery schools and kindergarten operate within the same institution. The state is not responsible for providing every child with funding and access to preschool services. This is very different from general education, which is mandatory and fully funded by the state. The responsibilities for early childhood development in Georgia are divided between the Ministry of Education and Science (MoES), the Ministry of Labor, Health and Social Affairs (MoLHSA), and local self-governing units. The responsibility of supervising and financing the preschool education system has been delegated to local self-governing since 2005. Local municipalities are in charge of funding and operating preschool education institutions.

The preschool education system in Georgia faces problems due to lacking qualifications of preschool staff, a shortage of material and technical supply, an insufficient child-oriented learning and developmental programs and the voluntariness of using well-established pedagogical approaches and materials. In 2006, after transferring the responsibility for preschool institutions from the Ministry of Education and Science to the local municipalities, the quality and the essence of educational-nurturing process became even worse in kindergarten. There was neither any standard for child development, nor curriculum program nor any learning methodology at the local level. The role of the MoES was to create and provide the recommended methodological materials for the local municipalities, the early learning and the preschool education institutions. As for MoLHSA, it had multiple responsibilities related to children of preschool age such as providing nutrition, infrastructure and hygienic standards for KGs. Since 2013 the Preschool Education Development Division set up within the MoES has been working on the management and organization of preschool education in Georgia. In 2016, the Law on Early and Preschool Education (Ministry of Justice of Georgia 2019a) was enforced. This law determined the legislative basis for the universal access to preschool education, the operation of preschool education, the principles and mechanisms regulating the qualification of the personnel involved. In the law the system of responsible institutions across the various agencies were maintained (UNICEF 2012: 18):

- ✓ Preschool education institutions are established and financed by local self-governing units.
- ✓ The MoES develops and approves the education curricular.
- ✓ The MoLHSA approves the nutrition sanitary rules and hygienic requirements in preschool education institutions.

Figure 2 provides basic trends in the net enrolment rates in public kindergarten in Georgia. At the time of the fall of the Iron Curtain the rate of enrolment in preschool education was significantly lower in Georgia than in Russia as well as in other countries in Central or Eastern Europe. This was because of the stereotype that a child receives better care in the family, meaning that the importance of the institution in the child’s development was not properly understood. In the post-socialist transformation period public childcare in kindergarten came under financial pressure due to the political and economic transformation as well as (civil) wars (UNICEF 2012). As a consequence a significant decline in the net enrollment rate can be observed during the 1990s.

Figure 2. Net enrollment rate (NER) in kindergarten in Georgia



Source: Data from UNICEF (2012) for the years 1989/90 to 2011/12 and UNICEF (2016) for the years 2012/13 and 2014/15. Own illustration.

Remark: Data on enrollment in private kindergarten only available for the years 2011/12 onwards.

At the beginning of the new millennium the net enrolment rate increased again, however, without surpassing the pre-independence level until the year 2012/13. The small intermediate decline in the years after 2005/06 can be attributed to the 2005 reform of preschool education, which transferred the fiscal responsibility for preschool education to the municipality level, that sometimes was financially overstrained (UNICEF 2012). Over the last years, the access and quality of the preschool infrastructure improved, which is also reflected in increased attendance rates. Most recent figures from the Welfare Monitoring Survey (WMS) show that 62.3% of children aged three to five attended kindergarten during the academic year 2014/15 (UNICEF 2016). Figure 2 on enrollment rates in private kindergarten shows that almost all children in kindergarten attended a public institutions.

Subgroup-specific analyses by UNICEF (2016) based on the WMS data reveal that enrollment rates are higher in urban areas (68%) than in rural areas (55%). One reason for the lower enrollment rate in rural areas is the higher rate of absence of kindergarten or the higher rate of absence of open places in existing kindergarten in rural areas as compared to urban areas (UNICEF 2016). Enrollment rates are also higher among the rich families (70% enrollment rate among the richest fifth of households) than among poor families (52% enrollment rate among the poorest fifth of households). Subgroup-specific analyses by UNICEF (2012) based on Integrated Household Survey (IHS) data show that inequality in preschool enrollment is particularly distinguished by ethnic origin. While more than half of ethnically Georgian children were enrolled in kindergarten this applied only to 5% of Armenian children in Georgia and 15% of Azeri children in Georgia in 2011.

UNICEF (2012) determined parental attitudes as the main explanatory factor for the non-attendance of preschool education. Parents of children who do not attend a kindergarten often delay enrollment as they think that their child is too young (53% and 23% in urban and rural areas) and they prefer to grow up their offspring at home.

As mentioned before, preschool education in Georgia is completely decentralized and is financed from the budget of the local municipality. In 2011 the total preschool education expenditures were 0.31% of the Georgian gross domestic product (GDP), mainly financed by local budget (70.1%) and parental contributions (29.1%) (UNICEF 2012). Thus, parents usually contribute to preschool care. The amount spent on preschool care by parents usually varies between 0 to 35 GEL in the municipalities outside Tbilisi, whereas the maximum fee can reach up to 80 GEL in Tbilisi (UNICEF 2012). However, parental fees to public preschool education have been abolished by a policy initiative by the Parliament of Georgia in 2013 (UNESCO 2015). This policy initiative and the relatively improved infrastructure increased parents' demand to bring their children to kindergarten, which, however, induced an excess demand given the limited supply of (free places in) public kindergarten.

It should be mentioned that due to traditional family arrangements in Georgia, where half of households are complex ones with several generations coresiding, grandparents help their children with childcare duties. The limited day childcare opportunities prevent women from engaging in paid work, and also encourage young couples to live with their parents and grandparents in order to secure assistance in child care.

While there is still some controversy about the value of sending very young children to educational institutions, it is clear that nurseries are important for families where both parents work full-time and no other adult (such as a grandparent) is available in the home to look after the children.

2.3. General Education

In Georgia, school education starts at the age of six. In accordance with the Georgian Law on General Education (Ministry of Justice of Georgia 2019b), general education consists of three stages: compulsory primary (grades 1 to 6), basic secondary education (grades 7 to 9) and secondary education (grades 10 to 12). All stages are provided free of charge in public education institutions. The full transition to the 12-year general education was accomplished in autumn 2008. Before, the general education encompassed 11 years. Currently, there is no uniform national policy to maintain the students in compulsory education. However, the schools are obliged to ensure that the students and their parents do not avoid the mandatory education as well the schools control the flow of the students out of the compulsory education. Table 1 provides an overview on the number of educational institutions and students by level of education and type of institution.

Currently, there are 2313 schools with 524,000 students in general education schools in Georgia. General education schools represent legal entities of public law and commercial or non-commercial entities of private law, which carry out educational activities in accordance with the national curriculum and include at least one level of general education. Over time the number of general

education schools dropped in Georgia from 3324 in the school year 2000/01 to 2313 in the school year 2018/19. A similar decline can be observed in terms of the number of pupils that shrank from 716,000 in the school year 2000/01 to 524,000 in the school year 2018/19.

Table 1. Number of educational institutions and students by level of education and type of institution at the beginning of the respective school year, selected years

	2000/01	2003/04	2006/07	2009/10	2012/13	2015/16	2018/19
General education schools, unit	3324	3331	2539	2462	2320	2331	2313
of which:							
Public general education schools	96%	95%	90%	89%	90%	89%	90%
Private general education schools	4%	5%	10%	11%	10%	11%	10%
Number of pupils (in 1000s)	716.7	671.9	636.0	624.5	559.4	553.9	524.0
of which:							
Public general education schools	98%	97%	94%	92%	91%	90%	90%
Private general education schools	2%	3%	6%	8%	9%	10%	10%

Source: Data from Geostat (2019). Own illustration.

As we can see in Table 1 the share of private schools has been increasing. Compared to 2000/01 the share of private schools more than doubled. The increase is even more pronounced in the share of pupils attending private school, which increased from 2% in the school year 2000/01 to 10% in the school year 2018/19. Currently, private educational institutions could be divided into three categories based on the amount of fees in Georgia. The first category is defined as expensive schools (yearly fee of 5000 to 20000 GEL), the second category comprises medium-priced schools (yearly fee of 3000 to 5000 GEL) and the third category unites low-cost schools, where monthly fees start from 100 GEL and constitute about 2000 GEL a year. The main advantage of the first category schools is that they provide various exchange programs and perspectives for continuation of studies abroad. These schools provide top-level infrastructure and comfortable education environment. All these preferences are included in the education fees. In contrast, private schools of the third category often face problems of invaluable infrastructure and inappropriate buildings. Nevertheless, classrooms with a small number of pupils and individual working with pupils make them advantageous compared to public schools (Caucasus Business Week 2016).

Both private and public general education schools are subject to authorization and accreditation, which is done by the National Center for Educational Quality Enhancement. They are also subject to the implementation of a national curriculum that is introduced by the National Curriculum and Assessment Centre (established in April 2006), together with special and corrective programs for students with disabilities and those in need of long-term treatment. However, the general education schools can also develop specialized programs or an individual curriculum within the framework of the national curriculum for the pupils with special educational needs. There are several specialized schools in Georgia, which, along with general education, provide specialized arts and sports training or prepare students for military services. These specialized schools are established as a legal entity under public law upon the recommendation of an appropriate line ministry (Law on General Education (Ministry of Justice of Georgia 2019a)).

In accordance with the 26th paragraph of the Law of Georgia on General Education (Ministry of Justice of Georgia 2019a), the regulation on teacher certification was adopted, under which a teacher at a general education school must pass exams and carry out a certification process irrespectively of her/his scientific achievements in order to get the teaching certificate. The standards of teaching are continuously improved and standardized through a process of teacher training and retraining, and a system of teacher certification that is developed by the Teacher Professional Development Centre.

The Teacher Professional Development Centre develops standards for teachers, implements teachers' professional development services and grants the right to be a teacher. Teacher certification exams are conducted by the National Examination Center that is also responsible for conducting school exit exams and unified admission tests.

2.3.1. Primary Education

Primary education used to last four years before the adoption of the Law on Education (UNESCO 2011). Since 1998 primary education is compulsory and lasts six years. At the end of the grades 4, 5, or 6, the end of the year examination can be scheduled, which is subject to the decision of the pedagogical board of a school but still needs approval by the local education department. Analyses of the Multiply Indicator Cluster Survey 2005 by UNESCO (2011) showed that the majority of six to seven year-old children were attending a primary school (94.6%). This high enrollment rate was reached by boys and girls in the same way. Inequality in enrollment is, however, visible between the ethnic groups in Georgia as for children living in households of an ethnic minority the enrollment rate in primary education is lower (86.9%). More recent data show that the net enrolment rate in primary education is even slightly higher reaching 96.9% in the school year 2013/14 (UNESCO 2015). However, a small gender divide has emerged with the net enrolment rate for boys (97.6%) slightly surpassing the net enrolment rate for girls (96.0%). The phenomenon of dropouts from primary education is almost absent in Georgia. Almost all children starting grade 1 finally reach grade 6. The few cases of dropouts from primary education are caused by poverty or psychological or health issues (UNESCO 2011).

2.3.2. Secondary Education

Secondary education used to be divided into five years of basic secondary education and two years of general secondary education before the adoption of the Law on Education (UNESCO 2011). Since 1998 basic secondary education (lower secondary education) lasts three years (grades 7, 8, and 9) followed by general secondary education (upper secondary general education) of three years duration (grades 10, 11 and 12).

Regarding the transition of the students from primary education to the next levels of general education, continuation rates are very high. Analyses of the Multiply Indicator Cluster Survey 2005 by UNESCO (2011) revealed that 99.5% of children who successfully completed the last grade of primary school successfully transitioned to the first grade of secondary school, irrespectively of their family background. Similarly, more recent data show that the continuation rate from primary to basic secondary education is 99.4% in the school year 2012/13 and boys and girls having equal transition rates (UNESCO 2015). However, when it comes to the transition from basic secondary education to general secondary education the continuation rates are lower. According to UNESCO (2015) 88.3% of pupils entered general secondary education after basic secondary education. The share is higher among boys (85.8%) than girls (84.6%)

Since 2011, the school leavers at grade 9 and 12 take exams in the format of computer adaptive testing (CAT) in various subjects. Ethnic minority pupils take exams in their own native languages. The exams are administered by National Examination Centre.

Since the late 1990s up to recent years, the unsatisfactory situation in the schools forced even those parents living in hardship to pay a sum to supplement school resources as schools are often inadequately funded. As the research conducted by Machabeli et al. (2007) showed, 40% of parents state that up to 10% of total education related expenses come as supplemental contributions. Although the contribution is described as voluntary, it is assumed to be mandatory putting pressure on parents to make contributions. However, the conditions in the schools are increasingly improving and the practices of informal payments to school are declining.

2.4. Vocational Education

During the Socialist era two types of VET schools operated (Gerber 2003):

- 1) professional-technical schools (PTU), where students attended short-term courses that qualify for manual jobs and secondary technical-trade schools (SPTU) that provided in addition a general secondary leaving certificate and,
- 2) secondary specialized secondary schools (SSUZ), where students were trained as technicians and middle grade staff of various kinds.

Both types were operated as dual-system vocational education. The VET students gained theoretical knowledge in professional centers and practical skills in enterprises (Metthews 1986: 87). Usually VET graduates were able to continue their work in the enterprise after graduation. Following the dissolution of the Soviet Union, the existing VET system came under pressure as state enterprises were closed or could not continue providing the practical training for the VET students. Since the VET schools became private, there were not sufficient efforts taken to adjust the system in order to integrate the VET into private enterprises. The situation worsened over the years. After several unsuccessful reforms of the VET system, even the professional centers, representing the theoretical part of VET, became isolated from the education system.

In 2005, the Georgian government finally initiated significant reforms to the VET system and approved the Concept of VET, which lays down the vision and approaches for VET system reforms (ETF 2015). Following this Concept of VET a new Law on Vocational Education was implemented in 2007 and revised in the following years (Ministry of Justice of Georgia 2019c). According to the amended VET Law (2010) five levels of VET were defined in accordance with learning performance:

- (1) Holders of level I qualification shall have the ability to fulfil their duties in uniform situations under supervision;
- (2) Holders of level II qualification shall have the ability to fulfil their duties with a certain level of independence;
- (3) Holders of level III qualification shall have the ability to fulfil their duties in different situations and to act adequately for solving the emerging problems;
- (4) Holders of level IV qualification shall have the ability to apply their professional knowledge for solving the problems emerging in changing circumstances, to supervise others' work and to undertake certain responsibility for assessing and improving the work accomplished;
- (5) Holders of level V qualification shall have the ability to fulfil work that requires planning and managing others' work, as well as assessing and improving the work accomplished.

A respective vocational diploma is awarded upon the completion of each VET level.

Levels I, II, and III are implemented in

- a) VET programs in vocational colleges (usually lasting one to two years) (UNESCO-UNEVOC 2015, UNESCO Institute for Statistics 2019),
- b) VET programs in parallel with general education and/or liberal education programs in community colleges (usually lasting one and a half to three years) (UNESCO Institute for Statistics 2019),
- c) VET programs as an elective subject as part of the general education curriculum (in 11th or 12th grade) (TLG 2019). Students should not spend more than 10% of their study time on the VET elective courses, i.e. the amount of VET acquired is rather limited. Such VET programs or modules can be carried out in VET centers or in secondary schools based on an official agreement between VET and general educational institutions. VET certificates acquired in this

way are recognized via transfer of credits if the student continues her/his studies in the other branches of the VET system.

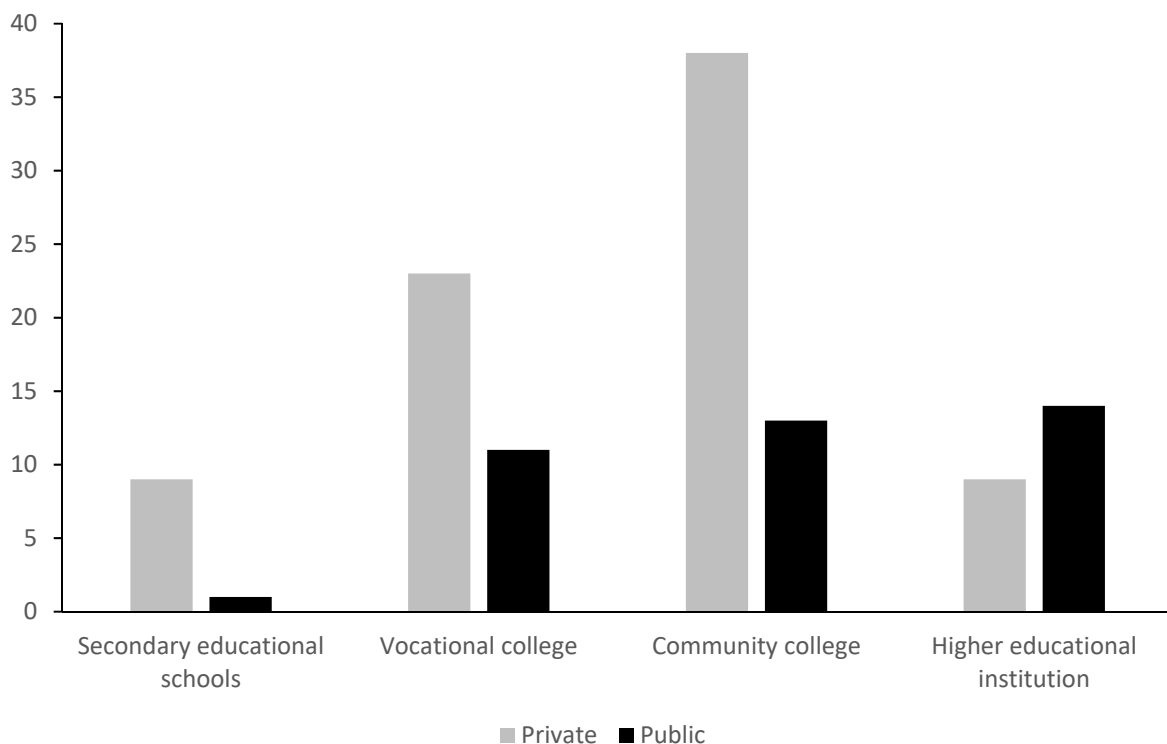
- d) VET programs provided by higher education institutions (NCEQE 2019)

Levels IV and V is implemented in

- a) VET programs at community colleges and,
- b) VET programs provided by higher education institutions (ETF 2012, NCEQE 2019).

Figure 3 shows the number of public and private educational institutions that admit the students for vocational programs. The VET system is dominated in numbers of education institutions by vocational colleges and community colleges. There are only a few secondary educational schools that offer VET programs as an elective subject as part of the general education curriculum. At levels I, II and III there are more private education institutions as VET providers in absolute numbers than public education institutions as VET providers. In contrast public institutions dominate among the higher education institutions that provide VET programs.

Figure 3. The number of private and public educational institutions that admit the students for vocational programs in 2018, by type of education institution



Source: Data from Geostat (2019). Own illustration.

Students become enrolled in professional higher education programs (VET level IV and V) through passing the Unified National Examinations. However, the requirements of the Unified National Examinations are significantly simplified as entrants have to pass only one exam – the general aptitude test. In contrast to academic programs of higher education professional higher educational programs are focused on the training of specialists with a diploma/degree, which represents the so-called short cycle of higher education.

Although the 2007 VET law separated VET from general education to provide a rapid pathway to employment, the reformed VET system contains barriers at key points of the lifelong learning process. This concerns the transition from VET level III to VET level IV as well as from VET level V to the first cycle of higher education. The barriers refer to the problem that credits accumulated in VET are not portable when transitioning to the next education level leading to “dead-ends” in the VET system (ETF 2015).

Specifically, the first barrier emerges for the transition from VET level III to VET level IV. Students who graduate from basic secondary education can acquire VET levels I, II, and III. The prerequisite for program admission within the VET levels I, II and III is defined by professional standards, being it the need of completion of basic secondary education or the previous VET level I or II. However, the students from VET level III cannot not enter the next VET levels IV and V without the certificate of general secondary education. This is because higher professional programs (since 2010 referred to as level IV and V of professional education) are defined as part of the higher education system as they have been introduced as a short cycle within Bachelor (BA) studies for students who are interested in acquiring practical skills. In the New Law on VET (Ministry of Justice of Georgia 2019c) the equivalence of VET level III with a certificate of general secondary education is planned (ETF 2017a).

The second barrier emerges in the transition from VET level V to the first cycle of higher education (BA programs). Upon completion of VET level V students receive a qualification as a certified specialist. Although these programs correspond to 120 to 180 ECTS credits, these credits cannot be recognized for first cycle of higher education (BA programs) when students want to continue their higher education.

Various government bodies and key stakeholders are involved in the design of the Georgian VET system (ETF 2015). The MoES outlines and manages sector policies, strategies and programs in line with broad national policies. Through its agencies the MoES administers the regulatory framework, implements sector programs, coordinates VET programs, and monitors the educational process in VET colleges. Regarding the institutional organization of the VET system, a VET institution can be either a legal entity under the public law or a commercial or non-commercial (non-profit) legal entity under the private law. Following the 2010 Law on Educational Quality Enhancement, VET institutions must undergo a process of authorization, in which the compliance with minimum requirements of education programs as well as human and material resources is checked and approved for five years.

According to the recent report of ETF (2017b) 120 education institutions run 1440 vocational education programs based on 252 occupational standards. Although around 70 of these institutions are private VET providers, the number of students in public VET institutions outnumbers the number of students in private VET institutions. The private accredited VET providers do not currently receive government funding, even though they are, in some cases, the only providers of VET in certain fields, such as nursing and medical care (ETF 2017b). The acceptance rate at private VET institutions is almost 100%, while there is more competition in public VET institutions. One of the reasons for this might be the funding policy. Since 2013 students undergo a unified VET admission test for level I, II and III in public VET institutions (ETF 2017b). Tuition fees are fully covered for all students who successfully pass unified VET admission test. In contrast, private VET institutions are not involved in the unified VET admission

Despite the reforms of the Georgian VET system shortcomings are still diagnosed. For example, the EFT (2014) highlights that there is a lack of comparability of VET credentials and, thus, the skills and capabilities of VET graduates because of variations in teaching quality and facilities across VET institutions and VET programs. ETF (2018) emphasizes the challenges of the Georgian VET system with respect to the alignment to labor market needs. Shortcomings are also reflected in the prevailing negative attitudes towards the VET education (UNDP 2015, ETF 2018). VET is still considered a second-rate alternative to higher education, which is often a dead-end and perceived as qualifying students for low-status, manual and poorly paid jobs. This is also visible in the fact that much more students attain higher education as compared to VET.

2.5. Higher Education

During Socialist time Georgia followed the centralized Soviet system where studies and degrees were organized in the following way. The Specialist was the most common academic qualification under the Soviet higher education system. It required four to six years of study depending on the field of study. The Kandidat Nauk conducted at research institutes under the Academy of Science and the Doktor Nauk were the highest academic degrees in the Soviet system taking a study duration of five to 15 years.

Since gaining independence in 1991, the Georgian government deregulated the process of establishing higher education institutions (HEI), which resulted in a dramatic surge in the number of tertiary institutions (Chankseliani 2013). Particularly, private higher education providers got established across the country. Privatization was accompanied by marketization, as public HEIs started to offer tuition-based study places.

The Soviet system admission based on entrance exam at each university impeded transparency access. It indirectly encouraged corruption and produced non-transparent, elitist outcomes. For university entrance examination, private tutoring became very popular. Teachers began to offer private tutoring as a source of second income in order to subsidize their income as their salaries were below the average wage level in Georgia. In 2005 a comprehensive reform of the university entrance system was implemented targeting at the fight against corruption and the widespread use of private tutoring. Although the reform turned out to be very effective in reducing corruption at entry exams in higher education, the phenomenon of private tutoring at the end of general secondary education remains at high levels (Jokić 2013).

Since May 2005, when Georgia joined the Bologna process, a number of Bologna-related changes occurred in the higher education system of Georgia. Specifically, a three-cycle degree system with Bachelor (BA) (usually lasting four years), Master (MA) (usually lasting two years) and Doctoral degrees (lasting at least three years) was introduced in the form of modular programs. All students below doctoral level are enrolled in the two-cycle BA–MA degree system (except for certain specific specializations such as medicine and dentist higher education that are organized in a six-years one-cycle study program). Bachelor program cannot comprise less than 240 European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS) credits whereas Master programs comprise 120 ECTS and doctoral programs (doktorantura) 180 ECTS (EACEA 2017). Tools for recognition of degrees such as diploma supplement and ECTS were established as well.

There are three types of higher education institutions in Georgia (EACEA 2017, NCEQE 2019):

- research universities offering the full three-cycle system with BA, MA and PhD,
- teaching universities offering just BA and MA programs and not having a strong research function,
- colleges offering higher professional programs and BA programs.

Next to the colleges universities can also offer professional programs as part of a short cycle within BA studies (Poisson and Hallak 2017) (see also section 2.4). Other important components of the higher education reform process were the introduction of Unified National Admission Exams based on the principles of transparency and meritocracy next to the establishment of a system of quality assurance, evaluation and accreditation. The Unified National Admission Exams Entry are composed of three compulsory and one elective component. Compulsory subjects are Georgian language and literature, general aptitude test (GAT), and a foreign language, whereas electives are math, sciences, history, or literature (Chankseliani 2013). Scores in all examinations are scaled and form the final result that is the only determinant of access to public and private higher education institutions in Georgia. It also serves as the basis for awarding public tuition grants (Chankseliani 2013).

The National Centre for Educational Quality Enhancement (NCEQE) is responsible for the authorization and accreditation processes of HEI. It operates in compliance with the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (EACEA 2017). Authorization is granted for five years for both, public and private universities. The Georgian state only recognizes higher education degrees that were issued by authorized HEI.

Table 2 provides an overview of the number of HEI and the number of enrolled students. Over time the number of public HEI decreased from 26 in the academic year 2000/01 to 19 in the academic year 2018/19. The decline has been much more pronounced for private HEI that declined from 145 in the academic year 2000/01 to 44 in the academic year 2018/19. Although the number of private HEI has always been larger than the number of public HEI the number of students has always been larger in private HEI. However, the proportions have changed over time. While at the beginning of the 2000s there were three to four times more students in public HEI than in private HEI the ratio declined to about two in recent years.

Table 2: Higher education institutions and enrolment, 2000/01–2018/19

	2000/01	2003/04	2006/07	2009/10	2012/13	2015/16	2018/19
<i>Public HEI</i>							
Number of HEI	26	26	18	21	19	20	19
Number of students	105822	123866	110846	74056	80009	90452	95923
<i>Private HEI</i>							
Number of HEI	145	150	148	108	38	54	44
Number of students	33138	29388	29961	28654	29524	42492	51791

Source: Data from Geostat (2019). Own illustration.

Both students at public and private HEI can obtain tuition grants to cover the tuition fees. The only difference lies in the tuition rate (Chankseliani 2013). Over time the system of grant allocation has been changing. Before 2005, the high education programs were either fully financed by the state if the students receive the adequate score at the entrance exams or fully financed by the students themselves if they receive the score below what is needed for State funding. The score was defined by the level of the competition each year and the number of the places for each program. In 2005, the government provided full funding (100%) based on the results of the applicant in the three compulsory exams (Georgian language and literature, foreign languages, ability test). In 2006, the tuition grant was given only based on the ability test and four grant shares were distinguished (100%, 70%, 50%, and 30%). In 2010 the tuition grant was given based on exam results in the three compulsory and the one elective exam component. In 2013 all the programs were given equal chances and the 30% grant version was abolished (100%, 70% and 50% are left).

Table 3 provides an overview on time trends in the share of students who received different kinds of state grant (distinguishing the level of coverage: 100%, 70%, 50% and 30%) through participating in the Unified National Exam. The overall share varied between 16 and 31% in the period 2005 to 2014.

Table 3. Students who received state grant through participating in the Unified National Exam, 2005–2014, by grant amount and year, in %

	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014
100%	14	3	3	4	4	3	3	3	2	3
70%	0	6	3	6	5	4	4	4	4	4
50%	6	5	9	7	6	6	6	10	10	12
30%	0	12	9	14	12	10	11	10	0	0
Overall	20	26	24	31	27	23	24	27	16	19

Source: Data from IDFI (2019). Own illustration.

There are also categories of students in need eligible for special needs-based grants. This applies, for example, to students from mountainous areas and ecological migrant zones, IDP students from Abkhazia and South Ossetia, students impacted by Russian aggression in August 2008, graduates from minority schools, students of the KIA and MIA military families, decedents of deported minority groups as well as orphans and students from large families four and more siblings. As for funding based on social needs, according to the Law on Higher Education (Ministry of Education and Science of Georgia 2019), between 6–10% of all scholarships are allocated for this purpose. It should be noted that the number of students in each of these categories is defined, and according to the regulations, in the case of heavy competition in any of these categories, the funding is still allocated on a meritocratic basis.

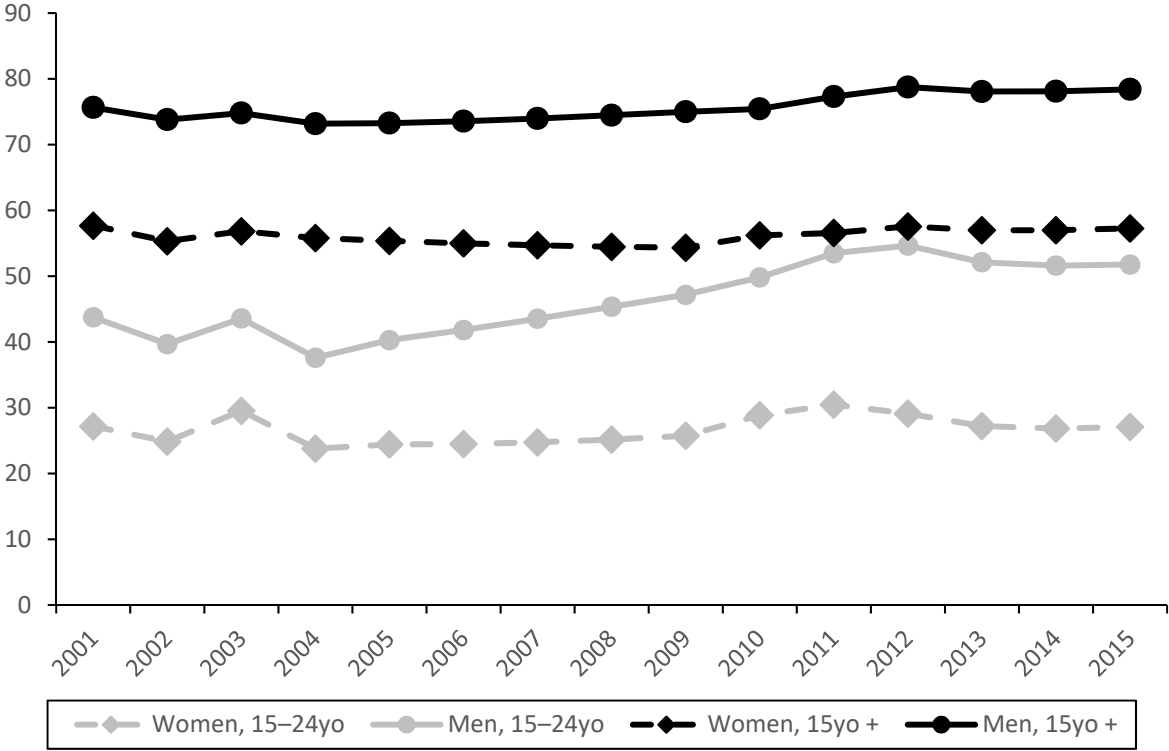
The requirements for final examination in each study program are defined by the HEI and vary according to the program. For regulated professions such as medicine, including veterinary, medicine, law and education students have to pass a State Certification Test for practicing in addition to obtaining a respective academic degree (EACEA 2017).

3. Labor Market System

3.1. Labor Force Participation and Unemployment

The Georgian labor market has undergone major changes during the last 25 years of economic changes and reorganization, registering both periods of growth and severe declines. Figure 4 shows trends in labor force participation rates in Georgia in the new millennium for different age and gender groups. For both age groups (15 to 24yo and above 15yo) female’s labor force participation rate was below male’s labor force participation rate over the period from 2001 to 2015. Hence, women participate less in the labor market than men in Georgia. In a comparison of the population of men and women aged 15 and above in 2015, 78.4% of men are economically active in contrast to only 57.3% of women. This gender gap of 21 percentage point remained rather stable during the observation period 2001 to 2015.

Figure 4. Labor force participation rate, by gender and age group, in %



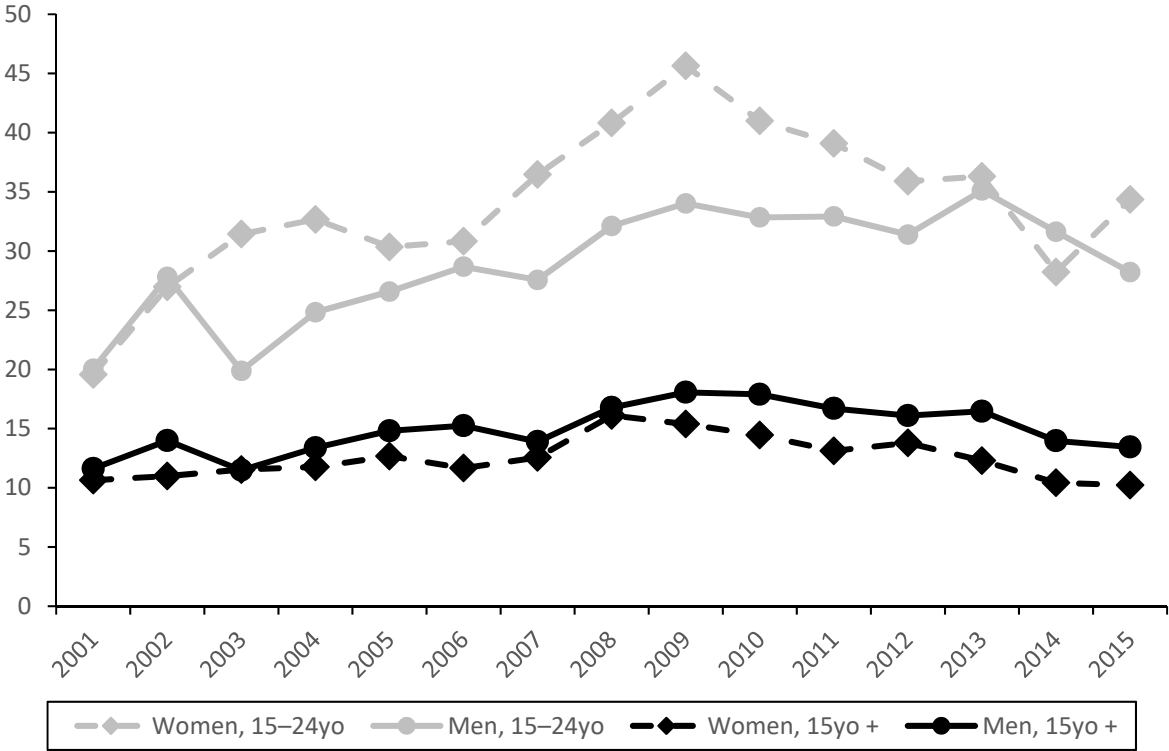
Source: Data from World Bank (2019). Own illustration.

As we can see from the picture above, labor force participation rates are lower among youths aged 15 to 24 compare to rates of the overall population aged 15 or above. In 2015 the labor force participation rate of young men reached 51.8% and just 27.1% among young women. The lower youth labor force participation rate can be explained in more details below, but partly might be explained by the enrolment of youths in education. While female youth labor force participation remained rather stable over time, there was an increase of the male youth labor force participation.

Figure 5 shows general trends in unemployment rates in the period 2001 to 2015 based on modeled ILO estimates. In general it can be seen that in all years the youth unemployment rates surpasses the unemployment rate of the general population. Unemployment has been persistently high for independent Georgia, reaching its peak in 2009 due to the 2008 August war and the world financial crisis. Afterwards the unemployment rate started to decline. While among youth women have a

higher unemployment rate than men, men have higher unemployment rates than women in the general population.

Figure 5. Unemployment rate, modeled ILO estimates, by gender and age group, in %

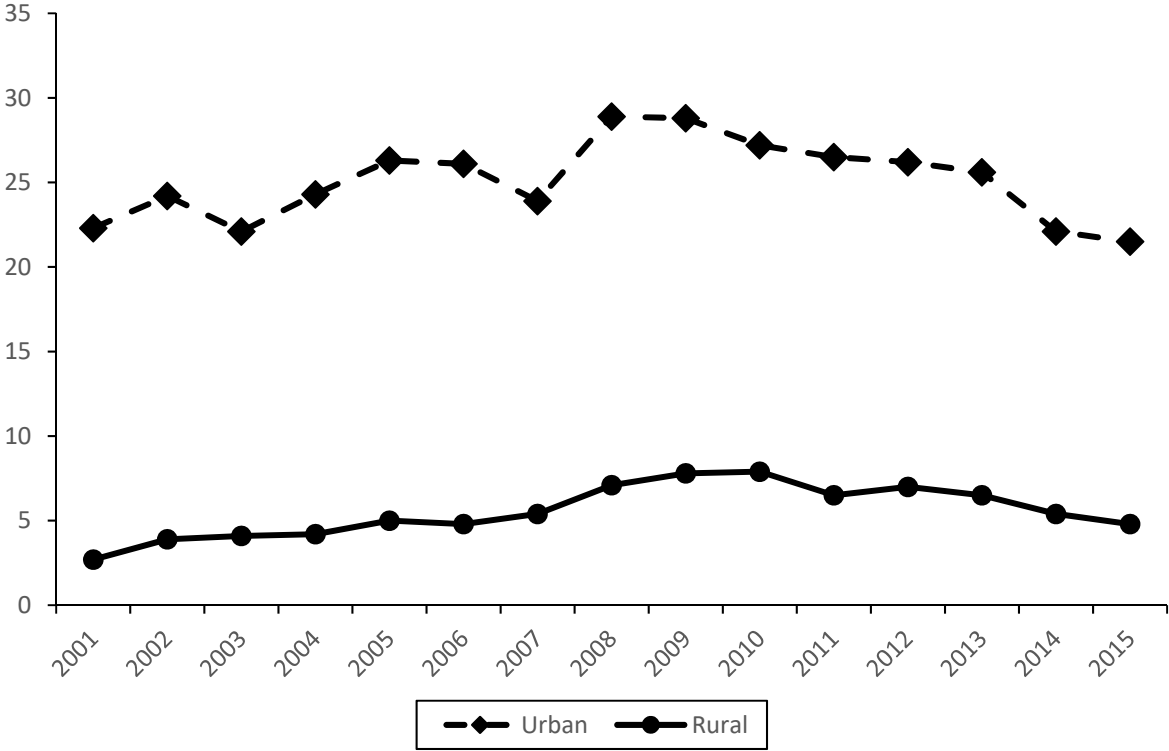


Source: Data from World Bank (2019). Own illustration.

Figure 6 shows the official unemployment rates in rural and urban areas for the population aged 15 and older in Georgia in the period 2001 to 2015. For urban areas the rate is 3–4 times higher than the figures for rural areas. For example, in 2015 the rate was 21.1% in urban areas but only 5.0% in rural areas. Unemployment levels are also very different across regions: in 2014, Tbilisi had the highest unemployment rate: 22.5%; Adjara has the second highest, with 15.8% (Geostat 2019).

However, there exists a commonly held opinion that unemployment is much higher than the official figures and that there is the additional problem of underemployment. The matter is that official figures on the number of persons employed are artificially increased by including the total number of employees persons who are working in households free of charge as helping family members. For example, in 2003, this category of family helpers was estimated to represent 29.2% of the total number of employed (USAID and IOM 2010). Another definition problem in official unemployment statistics is that in the official statistics all able-bodied members of a household that possesses at least 0.5 ha plot of land are not counted as unemployed. Thus, the true unemployment rate is probably even higher as suggested by the official statistics figures as many persons in Georgia engage in agricultural work for subsistence purposes.

Figure 6. Unemployment rate of persons aged 15 and older in rural and urban areas, national statistics, in %



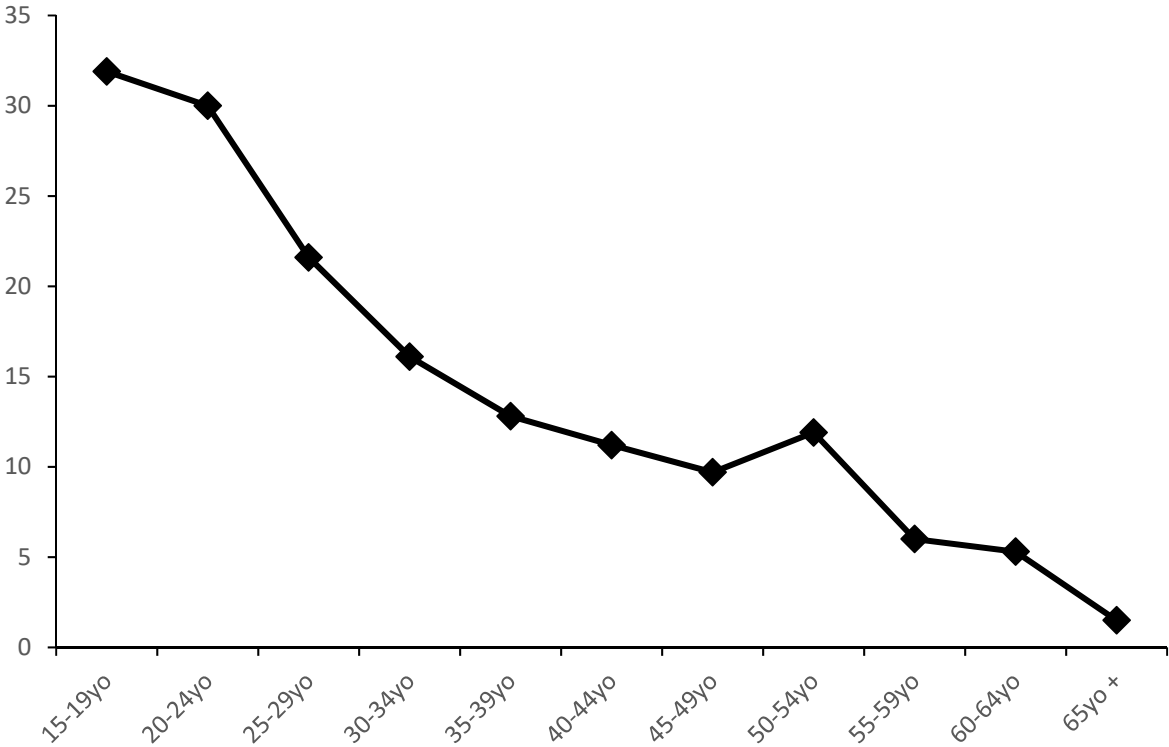
Source: Data from Geostat (2019). Own illustration.

Taking these statistical limitations of considering family helpers and subsistence agricultural work as employment categories into account, the differences in official unemployment rates between urban and rural areas might be explained by the dynamically poor labor market in Georgia with a large incidence of typically low-productivity agricultural employment, mainly of a subsistence nature, which represents the majority of the self-employed in rural areas. According to the statistical data methodology at least one member of rural household, usually owner of agricultural land, is considered as being self-employed and some other household members as helping family members. This structure of the employed population in Georgia, which has a disproportionately large self-employed component, reflects a rural–urban division by unemployment rates as well.

This is a phenomenon that serves more explanation in Georgian context where a system of unemployment registration does not exist. The Labor Force Survey, which is a base for official statistics on employment and unemployment in Georgia, defines an unemployed person as someone aged 15 or above, who was not employed (even for one hour) seven days prior to the interview process, who was looking for a job for the last four weeks and who was ready to start working within the next two weeks (Geostat 2019). Looking at this definition it becomes clear that due to the traditional structure of Georgian economy with a large agricultural sector mainly for subsistence purposes particularly among the older generation, chances to be identified as unemployed are higher for younger household members that usually are less likely to be engaged in agricultural work.

Figure 7 shows the unemployment rate differentiated by age groups. As in most other countries the typical negative relationship between age and unemployment rate is visible with the highest unemployment rate among the young generation.

Figure 7. Unemployment rate by age group, national statistics, in %



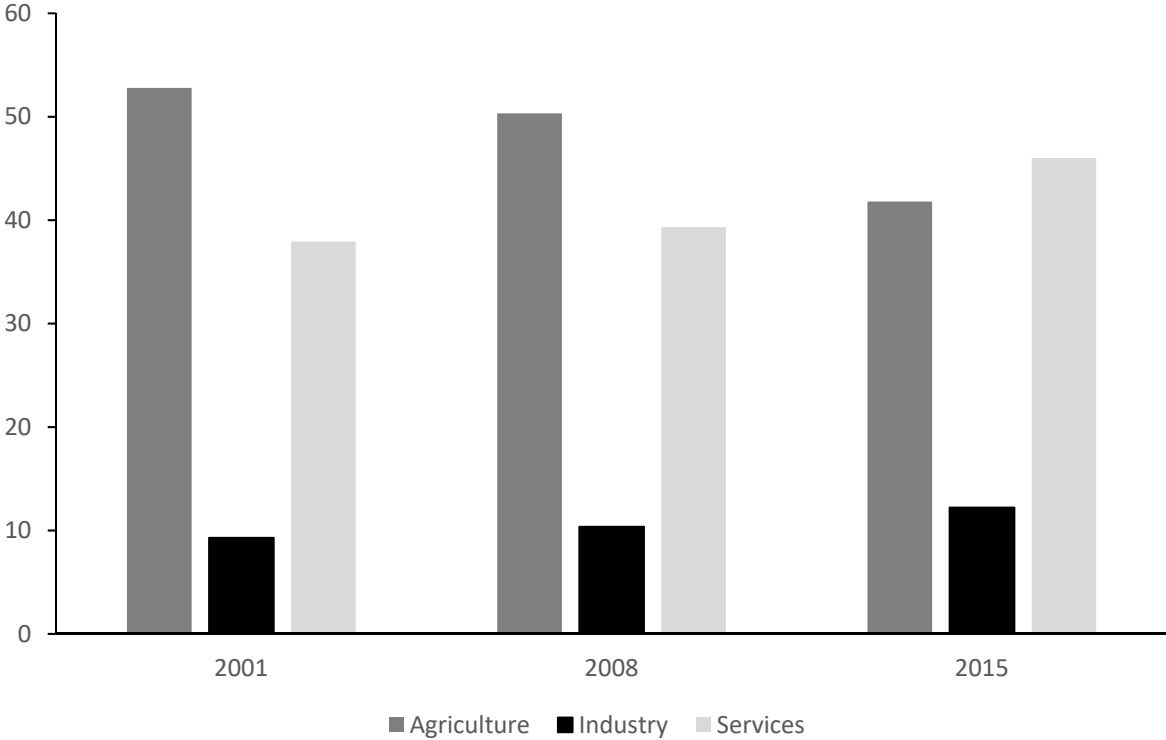
Source: Data from Geostat (2019). Own illustration.

3.2. Employment

According to Geostat (2019), of those being in employment in Georgia, 59.9% were reported as self-employed and 40.1% were employed in 2014. Among these employed people there are only 14.4% employees in public sector, and 25.3% are employed in a private sector. In general, the Georgian labor market is marked by one outstanding feature, the predominance of self-employed workers among the working population. Self-employed workers are largely concentrated in agriculture, whereas the productivity levels in the sector are quite low. This feature is consistent over time and it reflects the resilience of the informal economy and informal employment.

Figure 8 shows the distribution of employment by economic sector in Georgia. The employment structure in Georgia is dominated by agriculture. The structural changes of the 1990s forced large groups of people to migrate back to rural areas, and engage in agriculture again in order to satisfy subsistence needs. Nowadays, still more than half of employed people work in agriculture. Agriculture provides employment of last resort for those who cannot find jobs elsewhere, and eventually work as subsistence farmers. Although a large part of workforce is working in the agricultural sector, it contributes only a small share to Georgia’s GDP, which shows that most work is of low-productivity in the agricultural sector in Georgia. Agriculture is dominated by small farms. These farms are generally owned and managed by men. According to official statistics, men head 70% of farms and women make up 30% of farmers/farm owners (Geostat 2013: 98). The data also suggest that women farmers are less likely to be running farms for commercial purposes.

Figure 8. Distribution of employment by economic sector, 2001, 2008 and 2015 (% of total employment)



Source: Data from World Bank (2019). Own illustration.

Services and industry play significant roles in driving growth in Georgia. ETF (2015) identified trade followed by manufacturing, public administration, transport and construction as key economic sectors next to the large agricultural sector.

In the Georgian economy the informal economy plays an important role. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, when employment fell rapidly in formal sectors, people managed to survive by engaging in a multitude of informal economic activities. For example, they engaged in street trading, subsistence agriculture, or unofficial taxi services. The largest increase in informal employment took place in rural areas, where the population could rely on more abundant natural resources and agricultural activity.

3.3. Labor Migration

More than one million people or 25% of the Georgian population lives abroad (World Bank, 2011). The massive out-migration is a new phenomenon for Georgia. The recent emigration flows from Georgia are mainly directed to labor migration and they are temporary.

The current emigration pattern can be largely characterized as temporary labor migration which involves about 6% to 10% of the total population (ETF and BCG-Research 2013). According to a nationally representative survey on migration between 7% and 8% of the Georgian population has experienced some kind of migration, i.e., either they are absent migrants or they have migrated and returned (ETF and BCG-Research 2013).

Surveys on returnees show that only a minor number of Georgian migrants return to homeland after succeeding the goal of staying abroad. Most of them returned to Georgia due to specific private reasons such as family problems in Georgia (Badurashvili 2005).

Two thirds of Georgian who live abroad are living in CIS countries. According to World Bank (2011) most migrants live in Russia (over 60%), followed by Armenia and Ukraine (7.2% and 6.8% respectively) as well as Greece, Israel and USA (with shares ranging between 2.4% and 4%).

A specific feature of Georgian emigration is the fact that it is largely undocumented and irregular. Accordingly, labor emigrants usually rely on unofficial and often illegal means that can be rather costly. Most migrants are unable to obtain official work permits and mainly work in the informal economy (Badurashvili 2005, People's Harmonious Development Society and TASO Foundation 2010).

Regarding the return orientation of migrants, available studies provide some indications that returnees experience difficulties in finding a job similar to the one they had before their departure in Georgia or finding any job at all in the new destination country (ETF and BCG-Research 2013).

Previous research suggests that unemployment in Georgia remains one of the main reasons for emigration (Badurashvili 2005). A specific feature of Georgian emigration is the fact that it is largely undocumented and irregular. Accordingly, labor emigrants usually rely on unofficial and often illegal means that can be rather costly. Most migrants are unable to obtain official work permits and mainly work in the informal economy (Badurashvili 2005, People's Harmonious Development Society and TASO Foundation 2010).

3.4. Employment Protection Legislation

After the collapse of the Soviet Union employment relationships in Georgia were still regulated by the Soviet Labor code of 1973. The Labor Code was reformed in 1997 but key socialist elements persisted and stood at odd with the principles of the new market economy (Shvelidze 2012). After the Rose Revolution in 2003 various liberal reforms were adopted in Georgia, which had a progressive impact for the business environment and the flexibility of labor markets. For example, the labor code adopted in 2006 was considered to be among the most liberal in the world. It radically increased labor market flexibility and the power of employers in industrial relations. However, as a result, no opportunities have been provided for social dialogue, neither at the national nor at the firm level. It placed the employer in an advantageous position and, in a number of cases, grossly infringed on the rights of employees.

For example, the revised Labor Code of 2006 gave employer the legal right to terminate an employment relationship with an employee without giving justification and explanation. Restrictions on temporary contracts and overtime work were removed. Complicated and generous severance pay procedures were simplified into one procedure and the severance payment was restricted to one month, which is very low in international standards (European Commission 2011).

There is no minimum wage legislation. Individual and collective contracts are now treated similarly, and collective bargaining is allowed by any group comprising two or more individuals (rather than only by formally established trade unions) (European Commission 2011).

Corrections to the radical liberal Labor Code of 2006 were implemented in 2013. A more balanced approach has been taken making the Georgian Labor Code more in line with international standards and strengthening previously almost non-existing workers' rights. The changes in the labor code have been as follow:

- the ban of oral contracts,
- introduction of some limitations on the use of fixed-term contracts, e.g. after two yearly contracts the third one must be of indefinite duration,
- prolongation of paid leaves and maternity leaves,

- a better regulation of collective bargaining and protection against anti-unions activities and strikes, and,
- antidiscrimination protection of employees, also during the pre-contractual relations.

In addition, it establishes a mediation role for the government in case of collective labor disputes. Nevertheless, as stated by Bagnardi (2015), despite efforts to have a more friendly approach towards the labor movement and trade unions a proper social dialogue has also not yet developed under the new Labor Code.

Part-time and flexible work's opportunities for women are still issues in Georgia that are not legally regulated in detail. The absence of alternative, flexible employment forms in Georgian legislation induces constrains for women, who try to combine the family responsibilities and opportunities for professional career. Moreover, it makes it difficult for many young mothers to timely return to the labor market after parental leave or start a job alongside with childbearing. Data by the Generation and Gender Survey (GGS) showed that employment is one of the most statistically important factor for not-realizing of their reproductive intentions by Georgian women. According to the survey results only 22.7% of the employed women in Georgia were allowed by the employers to choose a flexible time arrangement at the job, only 58% of were entitled to sick leave and just 65.6% had the paid vacation time (Badurashvili et al. 2010: 59).

4. Welfare Regime

4.1. Active Labor Market Policies

Until recently the Georgian government considered that the labor market under the conditions of a free economy does not need any management. Hence, the Georgian government almost never interfered in the relationship between employers and employees. The lack of proper public labor market institutions created significant obstacles for effective management of labor market.

At the same time, the Georgian government launched several programs aiming at the reduction of the unemployment rate. These programs mainly consisted of projects aiming at the development of small businesses, the provision of vocational training and re-training, training internships, and employment generating activities through the development of small-medium size businesses (Ambroladze 2012). However, none of the given programs were targeted at the specific problems of youths. Nevertheless, some of the programs could facilitate the process of transition from education to work through the creation of new jobs and wider employment opportunities. It should be pointed out that in Georgia there were no active labor market policy measures until recently when some measures have been implemented. According to expert meaning these measures were not able to provide tangible results due to the lack of proper evaluation and control mechanisms and a relatively small program size (Ambroladze 2012). Programs' participants were offered mainly cash benefits instead of improving their qualification levels.

The following list provides an overview of major programs that more or less aim at facilitating youth employment:

- A program was established in 2006 that aimed at the retraining of the low skilled workforce. Training took place on the job for three months and aimed at fulfilling the requirements of the employers. Trainees received a monthly scholarship of 150 GEL. The program had a budget of 24 million GEL and it was implemented by the State Agency for Social Aid and Employment. Around 50,000 beneficiaries participated in the program.
- In 2006/07 the Tbilisi Municipality implemented the Youth Employment Program. Around 5,000 students participated in this program during summer time. Participants received a monthly compensation of 200 GEL. The participants were assigned to urban services by various branches. Project monitoring revealed that as a result of the 2006 on-the-job training program, 20% of the trainees were employed by the firm that trained them. In 2007 about 10% of the trainees found a long-term employment relationship.
- On initiative of the President of Georgia, 60 million GEL were spent on an active employment policy in December 2007. Around 100,000 job seekers aged 25-60 years participated in this program. Participants received a monthly scholarship of 150 GEL. The program aimed at the retraining of job seekers in various private companies to improve their further employment chances.
- In 2009/10 the Ministry of Economic Development implemented the program Vocational Education for Employment. The goal of this program was to strengthen the role of the private sector in vocational education and training infrastructure and to meet the labor market needs in professional human resources. More than 50 vocational training-retraining centers were established throughout Georgia. It was the plan to create 50,000 working places within the framework of the program.
- In 2010 the Vulnerable Large Families Employment Program was launched in Tbilisi by the Mayor's Office in cooperation with the private sector. Around 2,000 persons participated. Private companies winning the tender announced by the Mayor's Office were obliged to employ socially vulnerable persons as well as members of larger families.

- The Tbilisi Mayor's Office launched an employment program envisaging free computer and English courses for the city's population in February 2010.

As it was already mentioned the scale of abovementioned programs was limited and outcomes in terms of actual employment were miserable. Currently, the Georgian government runs no labor market programs of any kind. Experts note a lack of proper means for monitoring of labor market in Georgia and difficulty in identifying eligible candidates.

Efforts to improve the situation with labor market management are still at the very initial stages in Georgia. There is no state employment agency. There was one created in 2006, but dissolved one year later. There are some private employment agencies, which deal mainly with organizing of labor migration abroad.

The Georgian Ministry of Internally Displaced Persons from Occupied Territories, Accommodation and Refugees implements a program on supporting the reintegration of the returned Georgian migrants, which includes retraining of migrants and funding of micro business projects activities among them. However, this program is not focused on youths. Some international organizations also have similar type of programs implementing for specific groups of population (as, IDP, women-entrepreneurs, persons with disabilities etc.), but again none of it devotes to youth problems.

The responsible agency for administering financing and implementation of employment policy in Georgia is the Ministry of Labor, Health and Social Affairs (MoLHSA), created in 1995 after the merger of three different ministries (Badurashvili 2017). However, the department implementing the employment policy at the MoLHSA was abolished in 2005 and were created again only in 2013.

Just recently some functions, particularly related to exchange of information about labor market between different Georgian agencies and managing of labor market information, have been delegated from the MoLHSA to the Georgian Ministry of Economy and Sustainable Development.

There is no public employment agency in Georgia. In order to facilitate employment a special web platform www.worknet.gov.ge has been created with information on existing vacancies for job seekers registered on this web-portal. It is necessary to register on the web-portal to receive the information about existing jobs via messages. In order to apply for jobs, persons have to go to the Social Service Agency and fill the application form. As it seems, the web-portal is not very popular among the Georgian citizens, most of people don't know about all this abovementioned procedures.

Some online platforms have been existing in Georgia for a long time (www.jobs.ge, www.hr.ge, www.hr.gov.ge) that also help job seekers to find a job, but available data show that the majority of job seekers in Georgia find a job using informal contacts. A representative survey of enterprises among whole Georgia conducted by the Georgian Ministry of Labor, Health and Social Affairs (MoLHSA) has revealed that a key source for finding staff for local employers are informal connections. Finding a job via informal connections was mentioned by 60% of the respondents during the survey (MoLHSA 2015: 26). Employers also contribute to the problems of youth unemployment because they are seeking for experienced employees. Hence, new arrivals have problems with finding of appropriate jobs in Georgia.

As many Georgians tend to look for a job using informal ways, it is not surprising that job interviews are not common in Georgia. According to a study conducted in 2014 by the Center for Social Sciences (CSS) of Tbilisi State University, only 50% of the employed respondents participated in job interviews. During job interviews often inappropriate questions on marriage and childbirth (plans) were asked, which bear the risk of discrimination against women as having or planning to establish a family can be seen as an advantage for a man and as a disadvantage for a woman (Popovaite 2015).

4.2. Unemployment Insurance

Georgia had not experienced unemployment as such till the beginning of the 1990s. An unemployed used to be a scarce individual from a marginal group, often without permanent residence or recently released from prison/detention. Unemployment became a real problem since the beginning of the 1990s. The Law on Employment of the Georgian Population of 1991 was a reaction to fast changes that were taking place in labor relations in Georgia. This law controls labor relations and state assistance to the unemployed.

This law determined the age (16 to 60 for females and 16 to 65 for males) and the definition of unemployed as a person not having a job, seeking a job it and being ready to start it. This law also officially determined two categories of unemployed: unemployed and registered unemployed. Citizens become entitled to unemployment benefit since the first day they acquire the unemployed status. An unemployed may receive a benefit no longer than 12 calendar months. Unemployment benefit is paid on the monthly basis; during the first three months it is provided by employer and during the remaining nine months by the employment agencies.

In 1998 unemployment benefit's duration was shortened to six months. Benefits are provided by the United State Employment Fund, which is financed by taxes paid by employers.

In 2001 the United State Employment Fund was dissolved and unemployment benefit were paid from the state budget in the frame of assignments to the state program "On Social Security of Unemployed and Support of Employment". By the new Law on Employment of the Georgian Population introduced in 2001, citizens became entitled to unemployment benefit since the first day they are registered by the state agencies of employment on the monthly basis during six months. Unemployment benefit is paid to those who: a) before losing of job had a continuous paid job for no less than one calendar year, b) has been officially registered by state agency of employment during the first six months after losing of job, and c) was ready to start working on corresponding job suggested by state agency of employment. Mean test did not exist for unemployed. The benefit was provided to the eligible unemployed person on the monthly basis during six months on the fixed level of 14 GEL per month until 2004 and 20 GEL since 2005.

Since May 2006 unemployment benefits are not provided anymore in Georgia. Experts mention reasons for abolishing the benefit were the lack of proper means of monitoring, difficulties in identifying eligible candidates, and high levels of corruption (Ambroladze 2012: 24). In 2006 the Law on Employment was abolished in Georgia and no new legislative act on unemployment has been adopted in Georgia since then. State and employer do not have any obligations toward unemployed anymore.

4.3. Social Assistance to Poor Families

The MoLHSA, its regional departments, and municipal services are responsible for the social protection system in Georgia. A special state institution, the so called Social Service Agency (SSA), was created in 2006 under the MoLHSA to administer social benefits, pensions, targeted social assistance and health insurance. The SSA regional and district branches have the responsibility to identify beneficiaries, delivering benefits, and monitoring distribution of benefits to beneficiaries.

Until 2006 the state provided financial assistance in terms of a family allowance of 22 GEL for households with vulnerable persons (e.g., single non-working pensioners, IDPs, war veterans, single mothers, orphans, etc.) without checking the financial conditions of a person/household. This practice has been criticized a lot because of a lack of transparency of the procedure of granting allowances and the not-targeted approach, as the relevant categories of beneficiaries were not always present in the households that were most in need of state social assistance.

In 2006 social assistance was reformed by the introduction of the Targeted Social Assistance (TSA) program. It offers state assistance to socially vulnerable families in terms of a subsistence allowance. This is the major pillar of state assistance system in the country with a high prevalence of subsistent agriculture as well as high level of poverty and high unemployment level among youths.

The TSA program in Georgia is administered through a proxy means test that employs a complex calculation to precise the welfare benefits for each household (Hakkert et al. 2015). In order to qualify for this benefit households have to apply to the local branch of the SSA and register at the database of socially vulnerable families. The SSA will then send a social agent to document the pre-specified characteristics of the household and quantify the household's welfare score using a software. The formula used for calculations considers more than 100 household welfare indicators such as the household composition, possessions, income, expenditures and geographic characteristics. In addition, the overall score also takes the subjective assessment of the household's welfare by a the SSA social agent into account. If the test score surpasses a specific threshold, the household automatically qualifies for the TSA benefits.

The TSA program in Georgia is directed towards protecting people from extreme poverty only. Before 2013, TSA benefits were composed of a core sum of 30 GEL per month per family plus 24 GEL per month per additional family member (Hakkert et al. 2015: 31). In 2013 the amount of benefits doubled to a core sum of 60 GEL per month per family plus 48 GEL per month per additional family member. Nowadays, around 10% of Georgian population is receiving TSA.

By the opinion of experts, the TSA program design needs to be improved because it may create incentives for beneficiaries to hide their revenues and to engage in the informal economy (Hakkert et al. 2015: 37). Moreover, the program is said to induce disincentives for benefit recipients near the threshold to work not to register their employment. Given the large share of informal sector employment in Georgia and the wrong incentives by the program, the problems of the TSA program prevail.

4.4. Minimum Wage

The monthly minimum wage for public sector employees is 115 GEL. The minimum wage for private sector employees has remained unchanged since the early 1990s and stands at 20 GEL per month, but is not applied in practice and is not being used for reference. According to last available data, an official subsistence income level in Georgia is set to 155 GEL for the average consumer and 310 GEL for a family of four (Geostat 2019).

4.5. Family Regimes

In Georgia, family networks and family solidarity have always been strong. According to Georgian tradition, the youngest son stays living in his parents' home and looks after them when they are old. Of course, this tradition is changing somewhat but remains strong in rural areas. In Georgia, more than half of households are complex households¹, in which parents and their adult children live together. This type of inter-generational solidarity enabled the population to survive the economic crisis and the drop in living standards of the 1990s. Households of singles account for only 6% of Georgian households because most elderly people live in families. In 2008, there were only two retirement homes in the whole of Georgia (Lefevreet al. 2009). Despite sudden social changes brought about by the new economic reality in Georgia, public opinion unequivocally supports the

¹ "Complex households" are households that comprise members other than the parent-child nucleus. These might be three-generation households, or households that include collateral relatives or members who are not blood relatives.

elderly. 98% of people think that children should take care of their parents and support them financially when parents are in need. 90% think that children should have their parents live with them when their parents can no longer look after themselves. Three-quarters declare that adult children must adjust their working lives to the needs of their parents (Badurashvili et al. 2010: 66).

Available data show that mutual support and assistance between family members and relatives is still a crucial feature of the Georgian family. The practice of intergenerational transfers is part of routine family relationships in both directions, from adult children to parents and vice versa. Even when adult children live separately from their parents, they still support each other.

Family obligations are stated by the existing legislation in Georgia as well. The Georgian Civil Code defined reciprocal duties of family members with regard to social protection, in particular the duty of spouses to give material support to each other (articles 1182-1186), the duties of parents with respect to children (article 1198 – rearing children and taking care of them, article 1212 – maintenance of children), the duties of children with respect to parents (article 1218 – maintaining parents and taking care of them, article 1220 – participation of the children in the extra expenses), siblings’ reciprocal duty of maintenance (article 1223 - maintenance), the duty of support from grandparents to grandchildren (article 1225 - maintenance), the duty of support from a grandchild to disabled grandparents (article 1224 - maintenance), the duty of support by stepparents (article 1226 - maintenance), the duty of support by a stepchild (article 1227 - maintenance), and the duty of maintenance of a child taken into permanent upbringing and maintenance (article 1228 - maintenance).

4.6. Role of Religion

According to the Constitutional Treaty (Concordat) between the Georgian state and the Georgian Orthodox Church, the state should recognize marriages performed by the Orthodox Church. In reality, according to civil law, only marriages registered in the office of the Civil Registry of Georgia are legally recognized.

Religious marriages are a common practice in Georgia. More frequently they occur now simultaneously with the civil registration than as an alternative to it. There is no official statistics on number of religious marriages in Georgia, but data from the Generations and Gender Survey (GGS) for 2006 presented below provides us with some picture on patterns of marriages in Georgia (Badurashvili et al. 2008).

Table 4. Marital status of respondents (aged 18-79) having a partner (%)

	Female	Male
<i>Have Co-Resident Partner</i>		
Only in legal marriage	67.5	62.6
In legal and religious marriage	20.3	21.0
Only in religious marriages	2.9	4.2
Not in marriage	9.3	12.2
<i>Have Non-Resident Partner</i>		
Among them are in legal marriage	63.5	35.7

Source: Generation and Gender Survey (GGS) Georgia (2006). Own calculations.

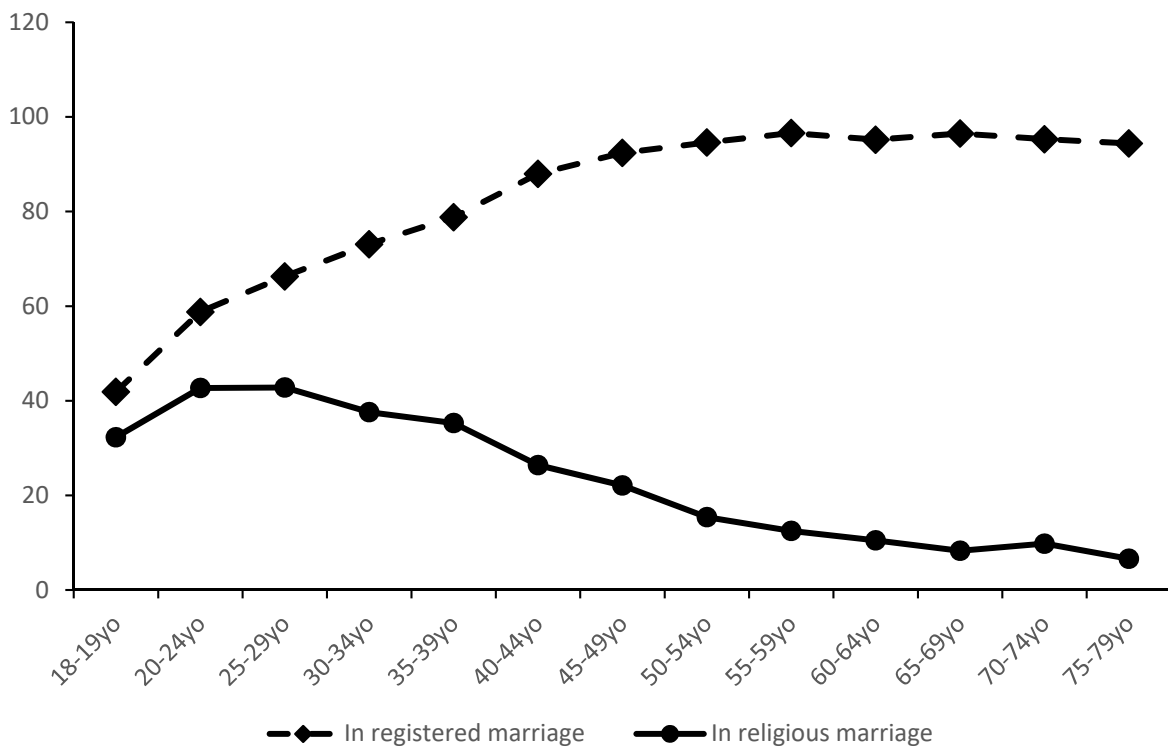
As indicated in Table 4, the main form of marriage in Georgia is a registered marriage as more than 85% of first partnerships either start as registered marriages or are convert into registered marriages later. Analyses based on the GGS Georgia 2006 revealed the tendency that some young people the

official registration of marriages in Georgia is delayed, though the registration usually takes place within a year from starting of partnership. If the consensual union is not converted into marriage within three years from its inception, its later conversion into marriage becomes unlikely (Badurashvili et al. 2008).

Today young people in Georgia often apply to the church for the religious registration of marriage, together with the legal marriage, or instead of it. It should be mentioned that these cases are not covered by official statistics because marriage statistics are based on the civil registration's records.

Figure 9 shows the increasing number of religious marriages among young generations in Georgia by GGS data. It should be mentioned that until recently this trend among young people was accompanied by a decrease in the number of registered marriages in Georgia.

Figure 9. Proportion of civil and religious marriages among respondents having partner, by age of respondents



Source: Generation and Gender Survey (GGS) Georgia (2006). Own calculations.

4.7. Gender Roles

It is often argued that women are deeply respected and valued in Georgian culture (Sumbadze 2008). This mostly concerns mothers, as women are expected to be primarily a mother and her functions are reproduction and childcare. Despite modernization and globalization the gender roles are still clearly differentiated in Georgia with women focusing on household duties even if they are employed, facing a dual burden, and women's housework is less valued than men's work outside the house (Sumbadze 2008). Men are expected to take the breadwinner role next to their wives who act as care givers.

The gender inequality is also visible in terms of the division of housework activities according to different survey results (Sumbadze 2008). Georgian women devote much more of their time than men for cooking, supporting their children doing homework, caring for children and elderly, fetching water and tending farm animals. In contrast, men focus their activities on bringing fuel for heating to the household and doing repairs of the home and agricultural subsistence work. Compared to women, men also spent more time on the main working activity in the labor market as well as leisure activities (Badurashvili et al. 2008, 2010).

In general it can be said that the Georgian society is very traditional and masculine with well-defined roles for men and women. Patriarchal traditions continued to rule on the level of family relationships (Nadaraia 2013: 6). The Georgian Orthodox Church is the most influential institution, which supports supremacy of men over women and defines women's responsibility for domestic chores and childrearing (Terterashvili 2014: 26).

Experts mention that Georgia has shown significant progress toward gender equality, especially in legal issues. However women are still strongly disadvantaged, specifically in the labor market. For example, according to data from 2013, Georgia ranked 86th among 136 countries in the World Economic Forum's Global Gender Gap Index and 81st of 148 countries in 2012 in the United Nations Gender Inequality Index (GII), which covers the three dimensions reproductive health, empowerment, and economic activity (Asian Development Bank 2014: 1).

However, as gender studies show there is still inequality between Georgian men and women in employment opportunities. Generations and Gender Survey in Georgia found that among all issues related to the process of decision making in the family there is still significant inequality between partners concerning employment. While Georgian men can unilaterally decide how much time they devote to a paid job, women more often have to take their partner's opinion concerning the job arrangements into account (Badurashvili et al. 2010: 21).

4.8. Family Policy

Georgian legislation qualifies working women for maternity leave in case of pregnancy, child birth or child adoption (European Commission 2011). Maternity leave benefits are composed of a payment as a specific share of previous salaries plus a specific state monetary assistance. Maternity leave lasts for up to 730 days since September 2013 (it was 477 days before); out of which 183 days are payable (instead of 126 days as it was before). In case of complications or delivering twins, 200 days are payable. 1000 GEL is paid to a woman on maternity leave by the state budget, whereas the rest is paid by employer. In case of adoption of a child younger than one year a child care leave for adoption is determined as 550 days; from this leave 90 days are paid. But still no assistance in terms of pregnancy is considered for unemployed women.

The current Georgian government expresses its concern on diminishing fertility levels and tries to support childbirth. In March 2014, the Georgian government issued Decree No. 262 that aimed at promoting fertility through financial incentives (Hakkert et al. 2014). The benefits of 150 GEL to 200 GEL are paid in cases of third or higher birth orders (born after June 2014) to families residing in regions without growth in birth rates during the previous two to three years.

Article 1108 of the Georgian Civil Code states that the minimum legal age for marriage is 18; however, this can be lowered by up to two years with parental consent or permission from the court. Practice shows that court grants permission in the case of exceptional circumstances, such as pregnancy.

The Georgian Civil Code defines a child as anyone under the age of 18; however, if an adolescent marries legally at 16 or 17, she or he gains full legal capacity.

According to article 140 of the Criminal Code cohabitation with a child under the age of 16 is subject to a punishment by deprivation of liberty for up to three years (Hakkert and Sumbadze 2017: 6). However, in practice in case of de facto child marriage police rarely intervene, only if somebody requests it. At present, there is a hot public discussion in Georgia on the necessity of introduction of criminal responsibility for child marriage, specifically addressing forced marriage. But it should be mentioned that public opinion on this issue is not homogeneous, not everybody supports this idea. For example, representatives of Georgian religious authorities share an agreement that of course it's better to marry after age of 18 but abstained from definitely negative assessment of early marriages, as they consider strengthening of family institution in society as a primary goal.

The existing data shows that up to 17 per cent of Georgian women marry before the age of 18. Georgia has one of the highest rates of female marriage under age 18 among European countries (UNECE 2014: 19). However, the true figure on early marriages is unknown, as those marriages involving children under 16 years old cannot be officially registered. Existing research indicates that child marriage occur more frequently among certain ethnic and religious groups; namely, religious minorities in the mountainous areas of Ajara, and ethnic minorities in the Kvemo Kartli region.

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