

OVERVIEW OF THE EDUCATION SECTOR

AND IDENTIFICATION OF CHALLENGES FACED BY ETHNIC
MINORITIES AND SOCIALLY VULNERABLE GROUPS



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Within the scope of the project “Support research and public campaign aimed at accounting for needs of vulnerable groups in the Georgian educational system during the COVID-19 pandemic” financed by Open Society Foundation (OSF), the Institute for Development Freedom of Information (IDFI) has prepared an overview of current developments and challenges in the education sector of Georgia August 2022. The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the challenges facing the education sector, and with disruptions in distance learning, the Present Value (PV) of Learning Losses for the Georgian economy estimated by IDFI has reached GEL 55 bln.¹ The report aims to identify current challenges facing ethnic minorities and vulnerable groups and to propose countermeasures for stakeholders.

According to the data of the 2014 census, approximately 87% of the population of Georgia were ethnically Georgian, while the remaining 13% were other ethnic groups. Representatives of Azerbaijani and Armenian nationalities constituted 6% and 5%, respectively.

The increase in the quality of education is essential for the country’s economic development. The Constitution guarantees the possibility of education, and it is crucial that the state create equal conditions for receiving education for the population living in the country, regardless of ethnic origin or social group. This will help the country to develop qualified human capital and promote the integration of the population into the labor market.

In 2008, the action plan for the integration of vulnerable groups² for the years 2009-2014 was created with the support of the OSCE. One of the goals of the mentioned plan was to ensure access to education for ethnic minorities. In addition, in August 2015, the Action Plan for Civil Equality and Integration was approved, which includes increasing access to quality general education in the native languages of the country and ethnic minorities³.

In 2015, Georgia started the process of integrating the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) into its national policy agenda. Goal 4 refers to quality education, which means ensuring inclusive and equitable education and creating lifelong learning opportunities for everyone.

From various studies on the challenges facing ethnic minorities in the education sector, it was revealed that the language barrier is a significant challenge in Georgia, and due to high unemployment, the ethnically non-Georgian population migrates to foreign countries⁴. Other challenges are the low quality of translation of textbooks, unqualified teachers, and low effectiveness of multilingual teaching⁵.

¹ IDFI, 2021, COVID-19 and the Georgian Education Sector

² A group of people who have limited access to public aspects that are readily available to others.
<https://matsne.gov.ge/ka/document/download/3190635/0/ge/pdf>






³ <https://matsne.gov.ge/ka/document/view/2958879?publication=0>

⁴ Tolerance and Diversity Institute (TDI), 2017, Student attitudes towards minorities and the role of the media

⁵ Amirejibi, Gabunia, 2021, Minorities of Georgia: breaking down existing barriers on the way to integration

UNICEF research has found that the pandemic hit vulnerable populations the hardest, particularly vulnerable children, some of whom have had limited or no access to distance learning. Because they lack digital devices, internet connection, favorable conditions for learning at home, and parental support, they are even more at risk of falling behind⁶

To identify the challenges in the education sector and to improve the quality and transparency of public services, the project team developed the following steps to carry out the research:

-  The research team conducted a preliminary analysis of the general education sector and developed a research structure.
-  Data was gathered based on direct analysis from open sources and information requests from public institutions. The collected data was used for qualitative and quantitative research.
-  For the purposes of qualitative research, focus groups were conducted in a remote format (including with ethnic minorities).
-  The project team visited one of the regions and held an information meeting with public school teachers and representatives of the professional union of teachers.
-  The NGO "parents for education" and the "Educators and Scientists Free Trade Union of Georgia" were our partners within the scope of the project, and sociologist Giorgi Urchukhishvili assisted with qualitative research.

The Institute for Development of Freedom of Information (IDFI) plans to increase social awareness about the challenges in the sector by publishing research papers and presenting the findings to the broader public.

⁶ UNICEF, 2020, Vulnerable Children and Risks in COVID-19 times

2. MAIN FINDINGS



EDUCATION SECTOR

- **Funding for the education sector is not enough and its share in GDP is small.** Expenditure on education was increasing, on average, by 7.9% annually in a ten-year period (6.9% adjusted for inflation). However, in 2021, the share of expenditures in GDP decreased and amounted to 3.6%, which is the lowest rate in the last 10 years.
- **As the number of pupils increases, the number of schools and teachers decreases, which increases the workload of both schools and teachers.** The number of teachers amounted to 63,000 in the 2021/2022 school year, -9% less than in the 2013/2014 school year, while the number of pupils increased by 12% during the same period. There are 10 students per teacher on average.
- **In Georgia, the average age of teachers in public schools is higher than in private schools.** For public schools, the average age of a teacher is 50 years, while for private schools it is 45 years.
- **1% of pupils dropped out of school in the 2020/2021 school year.** The share of boys among drop-out pupils was 57%. Although primary and basic education is compulsory in Georgia, 40% of pupils who dropped out in 2020/2021 were below tenth grade.
- **There is social inequality in the education sector of Georgia.** In 2021, 84% of students living in rural areas returned to classrooms, while the number in urban areas was 67%. The lack of necessary equipment for distance learning and low access to the internet forced students living in villages to depend more on traditional teaching methods.
- **Vocational institutions became less attractive.** The number of students enrolled in 2021 has decreased by 47% compared to 2013. Along with the decrease in the number of enrolled students, there was also a decrease in the number of graduates. In 2021, 6,800 students graduated from vocational institutions, which is 37% lower than in 2013.
- **Demand for higher education institutions has increased.** The number of students enrolled in 2021 is approximately 160,000, a 46% increase over the 2012/2013 academic year. 64% of students were enrolled in public institutions, and the remaining 36% were in private institutions.
- **The share of students who have obtained a degree is on average 50%.** In 2021, the share of graduates in public universities is 59%, while in private universities the figure is even smaller at 45%.
- **The unemployment rate in the labor force with higher education in Georgia is still well above other countries,** including OECD members (6.1%) and EU countries (5.5%), indicating a low quality of higher education.
- **More than 35,200 children in Georgia have never used the internet and therefore had no access to distance learning.** This number is nearly 7% of children aged 5-14 as of July 2021.

ETHNIC MINORITIES AND PERSONS WITH SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS (SEN)

- **Georgia is distinguished by ethnic diversity.** According to the 2014 census, 13.2% of Georgian population are ethnic minorities, mainly representatives of Azerbaijani (6.3%), Armenian (4.5%), and Russian (0.7%) nationalities.
- **Based on the data for the 2021-2022 school year,** non-Georgian language schools account for 10% of public schools in Georgia **(207 throughout Georgia).**
- **54,325 pupils in Georgia, 9% of the total number of pupils, go to non-Georgian language schools.** 47.7% of non-Georgian pupils speak Azerbaijani, 26.5% speak Russian, and 24.5% speak Armenian.
- **The demand for special teachers has increased.** The number of pupils with special educational needs (SEN) in public schools is increasing every year. In 2021, the number of pupils with special educational needs exceeded 10,500, which is 21 times higher than in 2012.
- **Access to vocational education for ethnic minorities increased after they were given the opportunity to take vocational tests in Armenian, Russian, or Azerbaijani languages.** In 2021, 250 applicants were enrolled in vocational education institutions on the basis of non-Georgian language testing, which is 17 times higher than in 2016.
- **The number of persons with special educational needs in vocational institutions was increasing until 2016, but then this trend changed.** In 2020, the number of students with special educational needs in vocational education programs dropped to the lowest number (164 students with special educational needs), an indication of the negative impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.
- **The share of persons with special educational needs among suspended students is increasing every year.** In 2021, 37% of students admitted to vocational education programs had suspended status. 2.5% of them are students with special educational needs, which is the highest rate in the last 9 years.
- **Access to higher education for ethnic minorities has increased.** There is a "1+4" program⁷, the popularity of which is growing year by year. From 2010 to 2018, the number of ethnic minority students in Georgia's higher education institutions increased 5 times.
- **The language barrier is one of the most important challenges for the integration of ethnic minorities, and the pandemic has exacerbated it.** Before the pandemic, the number of students enrolled in the state language and integration program was growing at a slow pace, but the COVID-19 pandemic caused a sharp decrease in applicants to 2,059 (-42%, YoY).

⁷ The Program provides an opportunity of passing the general skills test in the Armenian, Azerbaijani, Abkhazian, and Ossetian languages and receiving higher education if appropriate points are accumulated.

- **Another main challenge of ethnic minorities is the lack of teachers, especially qualified ones.** In Georgia, 309 vacancies for teachers in 2018-2022 remained unfilled. As for the qualifications of teachers, by 2021 only 27% of teachers have been retrained.

THE ISSUES REPRESENTING MAJOR CHALLENGES AS REVEALED BY THE QUALITATIVE STUDY AND THE REGIONAL MEETING:

- **Poor quality of textbook translation and mismatch with the national curriculum.** Respondents emphasized that mistakes made during the translation of textbooks make the text completely incomprehensible to students.
- **There is a lack of teachers in non-Georgian language schools, especially in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM).** There is a shortage of physics and chemistry teachers in both Azerbaijani and Armenian schools, especially in rural areas. Pupils have to go to schools in the center of the municipality every day.
- **The situation in terms of state language courses for ethnic minorities has improved, but the existing programs are not sufficient.** The programs "Georgian as a second language" and "1+4" should be commended. However, Georgian language courses are less available in villages outside municipal centers.
- **Young people from ethnic minorities, even those who study Georgian, cannot find jobs in the public sector.** This is a certain form of discrimination, as the respondents note.
- **Drop-out rates for ethnic minorities remain high. The main causes are early marriage in the case of young women, and seasonal work in the case of young men.** According to the respondents, the state has not yet taken effective steps in this regard and is not conducting any information campaigns.
- **One of the important problems in both Georgian-speaking and non-Georgian-speaking schools is a large number of students in classes.** According to the respondent teachers, it is difficult to manage 30 students, especially in the post-COVID-19 period, when students are alienated from the learning environment and lack learning skills.
- **English textbooks are a significant challenge, for interviewed parents. They do not like English textbooks.** According to them, the textbooks are difficult and sometimes incomprehensible for students, especially for those whose parents do not know English and are unable to help their children.
- **Subject backwardness in schools in post-COVID-19 conditions.** Due to the reduced class time and the large number of students in the class, the students fell behind the curriculum, and in some subjects the teachers did not have time to complete the program. This gap was made up for after returning to school, which overloaded the students, causing increased psychological pressure.

- **The majority of schools are not adapted to the requirements of students with special educational needs (SEN) and students with disabilities.** The majority of respondents say that their school does not have a ramp or an adapted toilet. There is also a lack of resources in the “resource room” - the room equipped with all necessary material and technical means to meet the special educational needs of students.
- **Absence of a psychologist in schools exacerbates the problems caused by COVID-19.** In addition, the resource room should be served by a school psychologist, a special teacher, a speech therapist, and all those teachers who participate in the process of inclusive education of children with special educational needs.⁸ However, the respondents state that there is neither a psychologist nor a speech therapist at their schools.

⁸ <https://matsne.gov.ge/ka/document/view/4007539?publication=0>

3. EDUCATION SECTOR OVERVIEW



Georgia's education system consists of four pillars, which are: Early and Preschool Education, General Education, Vocational Education, and Higher Education. The right to receive education and choose its form in Georgia is guaranteed by the Constitution. Nearly 1 million children, pupils, and students are enrolled in the education sector.

Early and preschool education, including the school readiness program, is voluntary. The age of children at this level is from 0 up to 5 years. No official document will be issued after the completion of the relevant program and it is not a prerequisite for entering a school. Currently, 154,000 children visit Preschool Education Care (PEC) institutions in Georgia.

General education is regulated by the laws of Georgia "On General Education" and "On Education Quality Enhancement"; study in general educational institutions is carried out according to the National Curriculum, developed by the National Curriculum Department of the Ministry of Education and Science of Georgia. Full general education includes three levels (elementary, basic, secondary) and lasts 12 years.

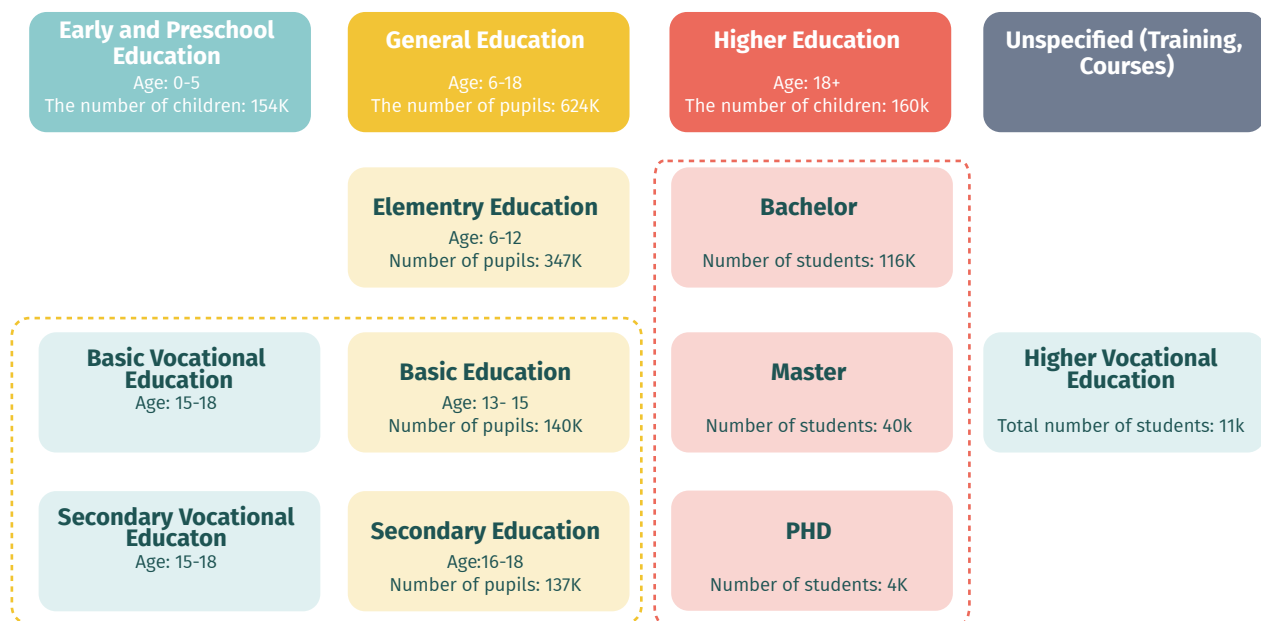
- ◆ Elementary education includes 6 years of study, which is implemented in I-VI grades (the average age of children: 6-12);
- ◆ Basic education includes 3 years (VII-IX grades, the average age of children: 13-15);
- ◆ Secondary education includes 3 years (X-XII grades, the average age of children: 16-18).

Elementary and basic education are mandatory in Georgia. A person who completes the full general education and receives the certificate (Atestati) has the right to continue learning at higher education institution. A person who completes the basic education has the right to continue studies at the secondary education level of the general education or primary level of vocational education.

Higher and vocational education is regulated by the laws of Georgia "On Higher Education", "On Vocational Education", "On Education Quality Improvement", and other sub-legal acts. Georgia has a three-cycle higher education system and is implemented on the bachelor's (includes 4 years), master's (includes 2 years), and doctoral levels (includes 3 years) of higher education.

Educational services in Georgia are provided by three types of institutions: public non-profit (state-funded and managed organizations), private commercial institutions established for profit in the private sector, and private non-profit institutions that are not established for profit (for example, schools of the Georgian Patriarchy). It should be noted that the tax system is favorable for the private sector, as education is exempt from value-added tax (VAT).

TABLE 1: THE GEORGIAN EDUCATION MARKET STRUCTURE IN 2021

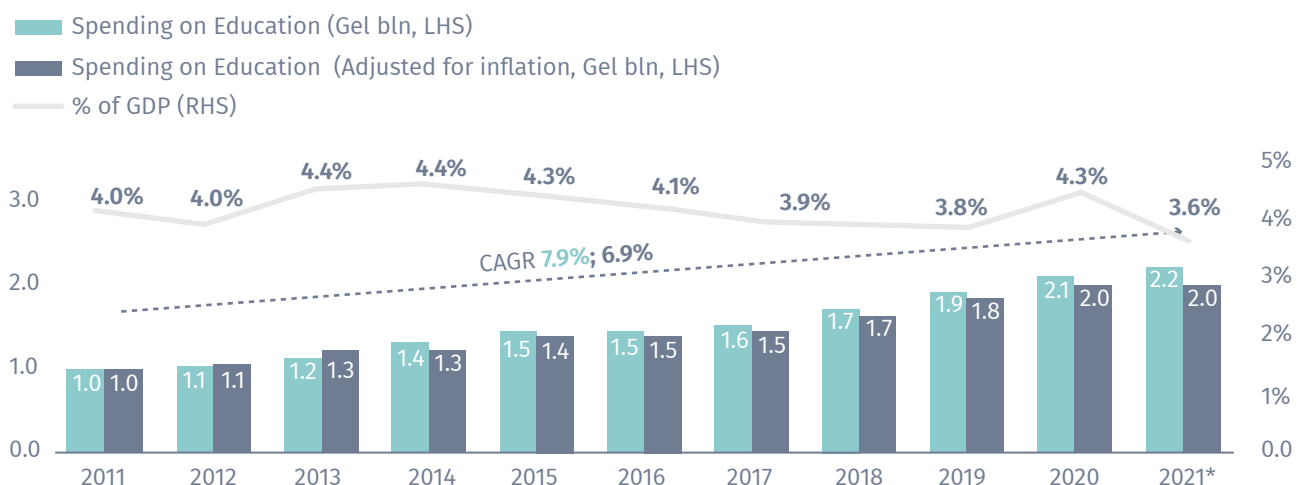


Source: GeoStat, National Center for Educational Quality Enhancement, IDFI

In recent years, numerous reforms have been carried out with the purpose of improving the education system, such as: changing institutional structure, eliminating corruption, granting autonomy to universities, and introducing European standards. However, the education system of Georgia is still facing many challenges.

Spending on education has increased at a 7.9% CAGR (6.9% when adjusted for inflation) over the last 10 years and reached GEL 2.2 billion in 2021. However, in 2021, the share of educational expenditures in GDP decreased and amounted to 3.6%, which is the lowest rate in the last 10 years.

FIG 1: EXPENDITURE ON EDUCATION (GEL, BLN) AND % SHARE IN NOMINAL GDP

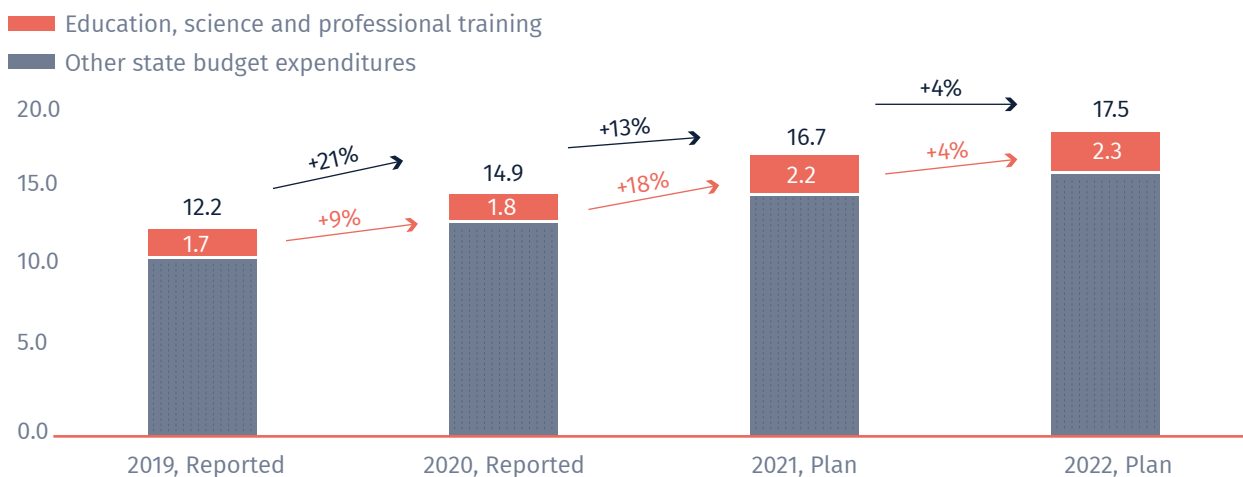


Source: GeoStat, IDFI

Note: * Accurate data will be published on 15 November 2022.

In 2021, it was planned to spend 18% more on education, science and professional training than the previous year (2.2 billion GEL), and by 2022 the expenses are planned to increase by 4%.

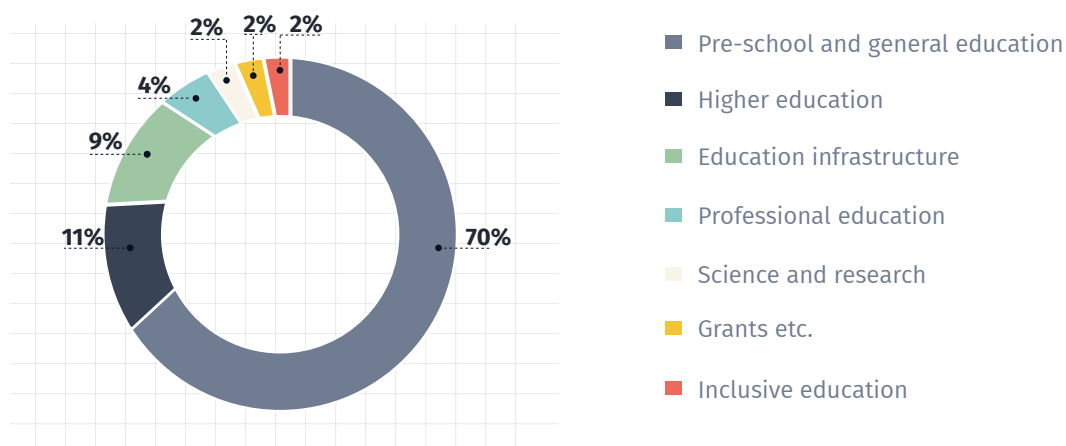
FIG 2: STATE BUDGET PAYMENTS (GEL, BLN)



Source: Ministry of Finance of Georgia, IDFI

In 2021, preschool and general education had the highest share and accounted for 70% of total government financing. This could be explained by the fact that preschool and general education are mostly state-financed, whereas costs for higher education are mainly covered by the students (except for the government-paid scholarships for certain groups of students).

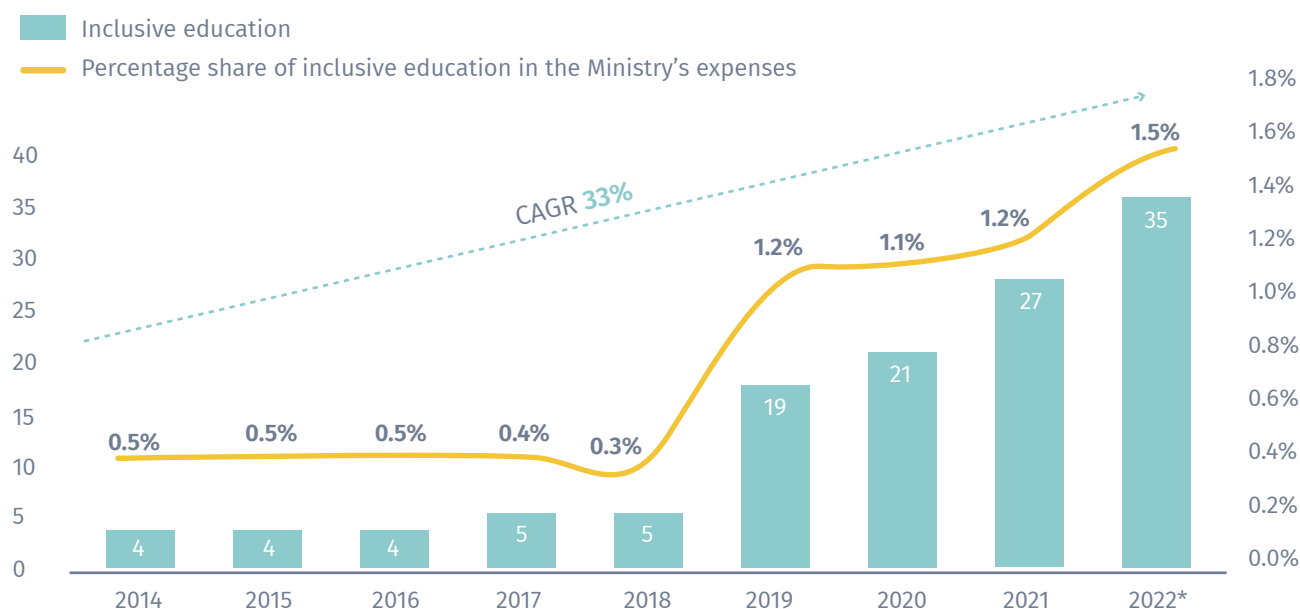
FIG 3: STRUCTURE OF STATE EDUCATION EXPENDITURES (GEL, BLN) IN 2021



Source: Ministry of Finance of Georgia, IDFI

Expenditures for inclusive education, which refers to the inclusion of people with special educational needs (SEN) in the educational process, remain small. The total expenditure on inclusive education has increased at a 33% CAGR over the last 8 years, reaching GEL 27 million in 2021, and will increase to GEL 35 million (1.5% of total expenditure) according to the 2022 plan.

FIG 4: EXPENDITURES ON INCLUSIVE EDUCATION BY YEARS (GEL, MLN)



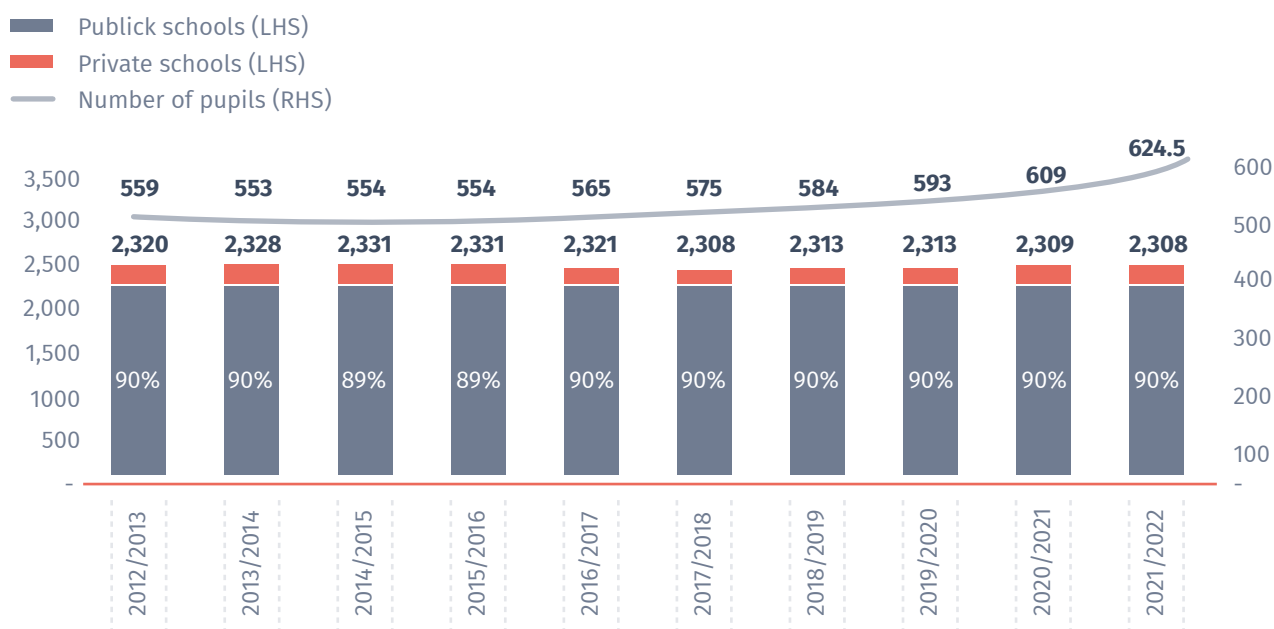
Source: Ministry of Finance of Georgia, IDFI

Note: *Planned costs

3.1 GENERAL EDUCATION

In the 2021/2022 school year, the number of pupils exceeded 624,000, +12% compared to the 2012/2013 school year. 90% of students study in public schools. The share decreased with economic growth, and private schools became more attractive prior to the 2020/2021 school year. The pandemic and related economic problems, however, have altered this trend. The increased attraction to private schools can be explained by the high quality of education, better technical support, and higher level of security.

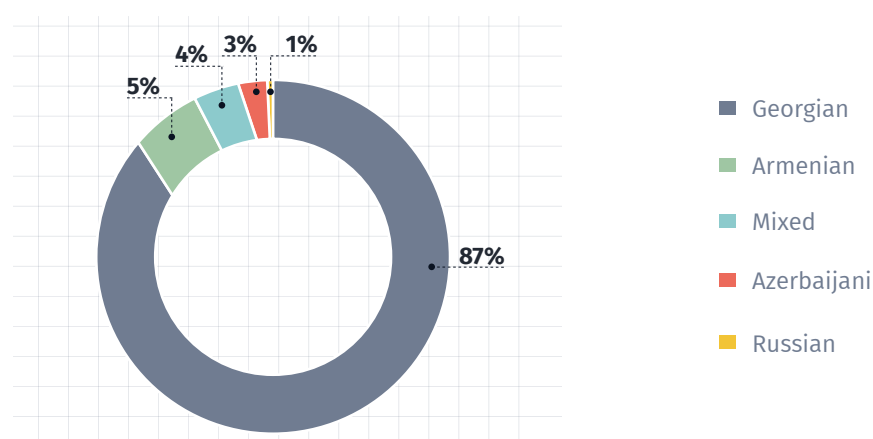
FIG 5: GENERAL EDUCATION SCHOOLS AND THE NUMBER OF PUPILS (THOUSAND)



Source: GeoStat, IDFI

While the number of students increased, the number of schools decreased. In the 2021/2022 school year, 2,308 general education schools were operating in Georgia, which is a -0.5% decrease compared to the 2012/2013 figure. In 87% of these schools, the teaching process is conducted in Georgian, 5% in Armenian, 3% in Azerbaijani, and 4% in several languages.

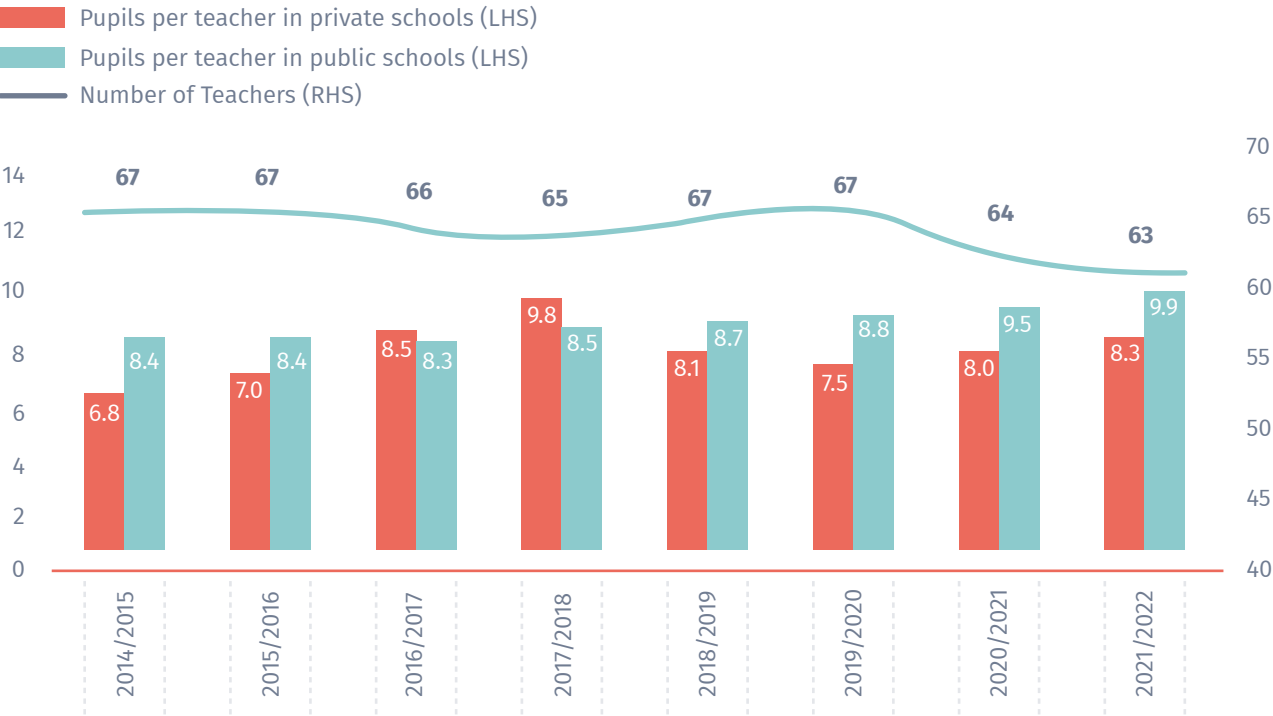
FIG 6: DISTRIBUTION OF GENERAL EDUCATION SCHOOLS ACCORDING TO THE LANGUAGE OF INSTRUCTION IN 2021-2022



Source: Ministry of Education and Science of Georgia, IDFI

While the number of pupils is increasing every year, the number of teachers is decreasing. As a result, the number of students per teacher increases. In the 2021/2022 academic year, there are 10 students per public school teacher and 8 students per private school teacher.

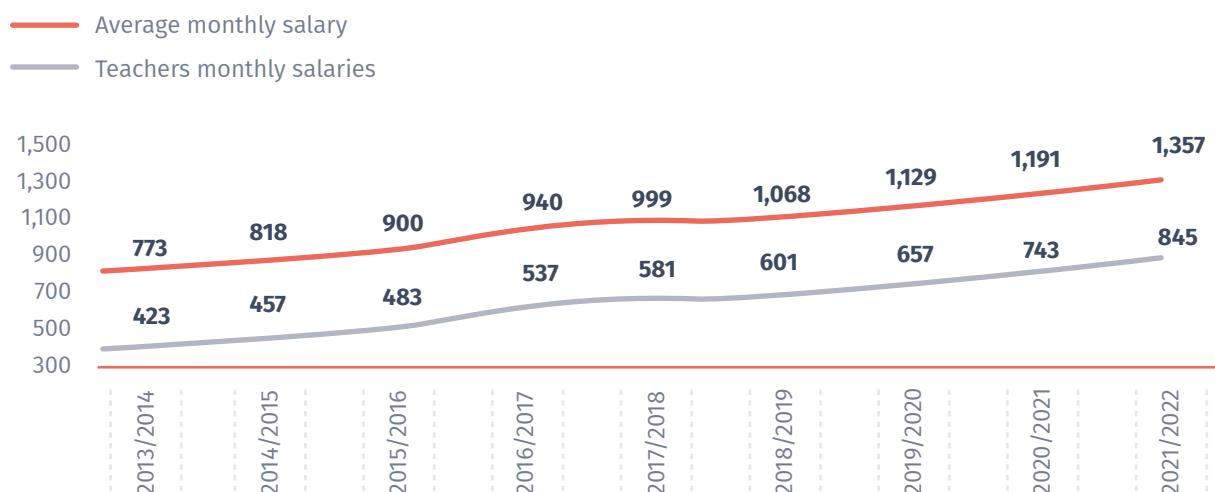
FIG 7: NUMBER OF TEACHERS (THOUSAND) AND PUPILS PER TEACHER



Source: GeoStat, IDFI

The teacher's workload is increasing. Teachers' average salary is -38% lower than the average salary in the country. The number of teachers amounted to 63,000 in the 2021/2022 school year, -9% less than in the 2013/2014 school year. However, during the same period, the number of pupils per teacher increased by 29% and 18% in private and public schools, respectively. This leads to increased teachers' workload, which makes this profession even less attractive.

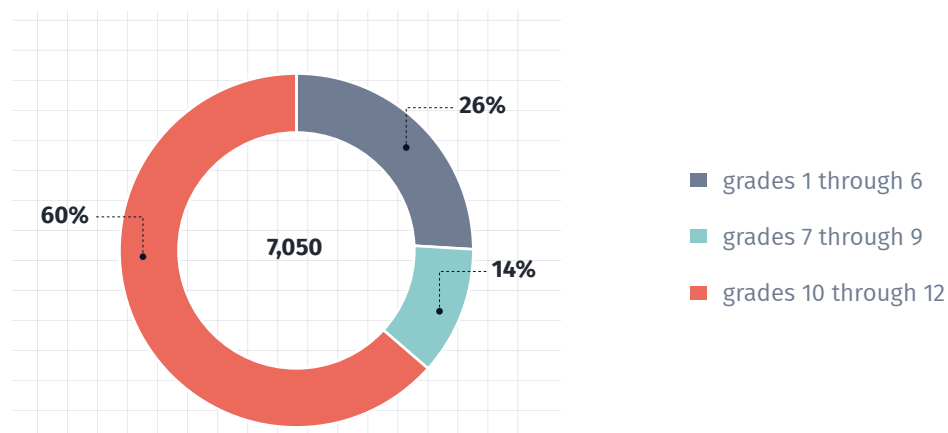
FIG 8: AVERAGE MONTHLY SALARIES (GEL)



Source: GeoStat, IDFI

The average age of teachers in public schools is 50, and in private schools - 45. This indicator shows that working in a private school is a priority for young teachers.

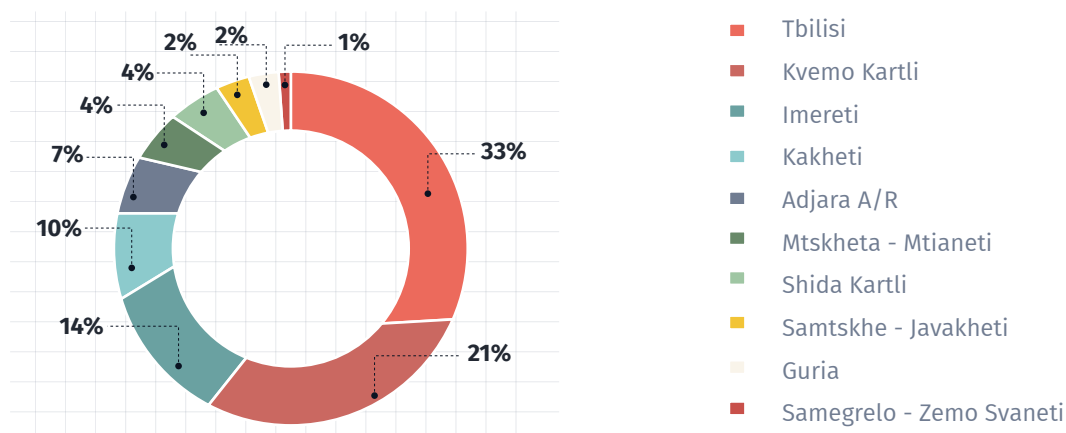
FIG 9: PUPILS WHO ABANDONED THE SCHOOL IN THE 2020/2021 SCHOOL YEAR



Source: GeoStat, IDFI

In total, nearly 1% of pupils abandoned their studies in school in the 2020/2021 school year. The share of boys among pupils who abandoned their studies accounted for 57% during this period. Despite mandatory primary and basic education in Georgia, 40% of pupils who abandoned their studies in school in 2020/2021 were below tenth grade.

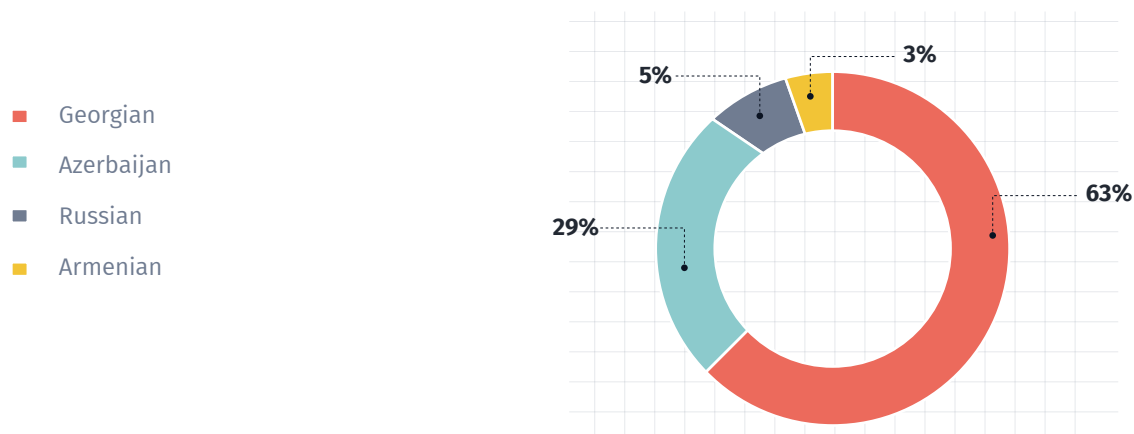
FIG 10: THE NUMBER OF PUBLIC-SCHOOL PUPILS WHO DID NOT PASS THE CLASS ACCORDING TO THE 2020-21 SCHOOL YEAR RESULTS



Source: Ministry of Education and Science of Georgia, IDFI

In the 2020/2021 school year, 534 pupils (0.1% of pupils) failed a class. 33% of them are pupils from Tbilisi schools, and 21% from Kvemo Kartli, where the majority of the population is made up of ethnic minorities. If we focus on the mentioned region, we see that 63% of the pupils attend a Georgian language school, 29% attend an Azerbaijani language school, 5% - a Russian language school, and 3% - an Armenian language school.

FIG 11: PERCENTAGE DISTRIBUTION OF PUPILS IN KVEMO KARTLI ACCORDING TO THE LANGUAGE OF INSTRUCTION IN THE 2021-2022 SCHOOL YEAR

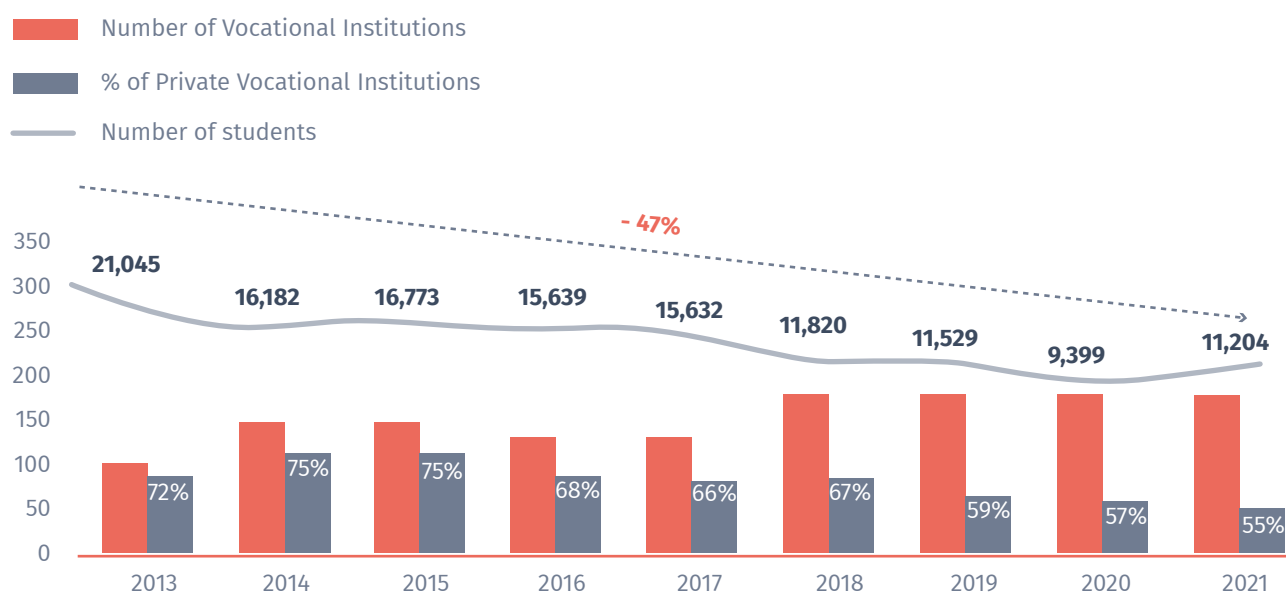


Source: Ministry of Education and Science of Georgia, IDFI

3.2 VOCATIONAL EDUCATION

The popularity of vocational institutions has sharply decreased over the last 8 years. In 2021, the number of students has halved compared to 2013 and reached 11,204.

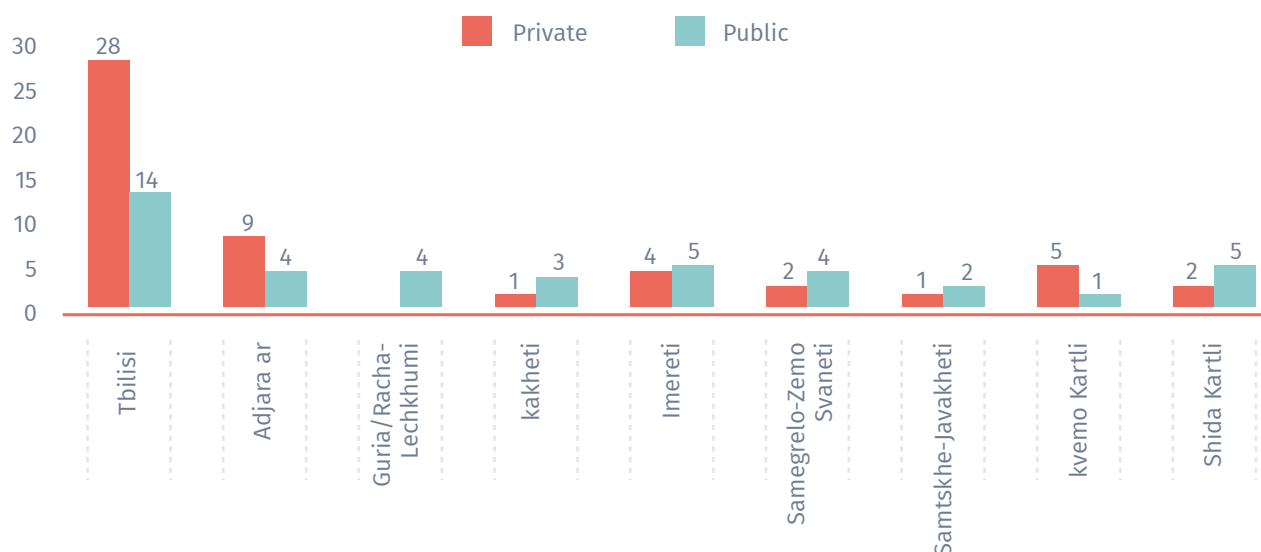
FIG 12: NUMBER OF VOCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS, THE SHARE OF PRIVATE INSTITUTIONS AND NUMBER OF ENROLLED STUDENTS (%)



Source: GeoStat, IDFI

Most vocational institutions are located in Tbilisi (45%). 14% of vocational institutions are located in Adjara. 6% and 3% of vocational institutions are located in regions characterized by the local settlement of national minorities, Kvemo Kartli and Samtskhe-Javakheti, respectively.

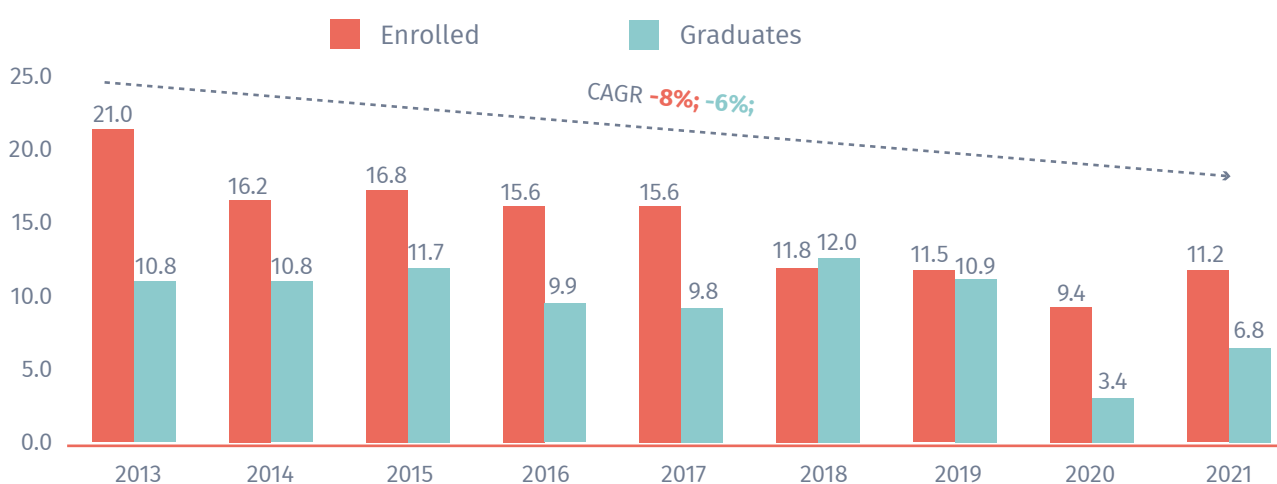
FIG 13: DISTRIBUTION OF PUBLIC AND PRIVATE VOCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS BY REGION IN 2021



Source: GeoStat, IDFI

Along with the decrease in the number of enrolled students, there is also a decreasing trend in the number of graduates. In 2021, 6,800 students graduated from vocational institutions, 37% lower than in 2014 but 98% higher than the previous year. Over the past 8 years, the number of graduating students has been declining by an average of 6% per year.

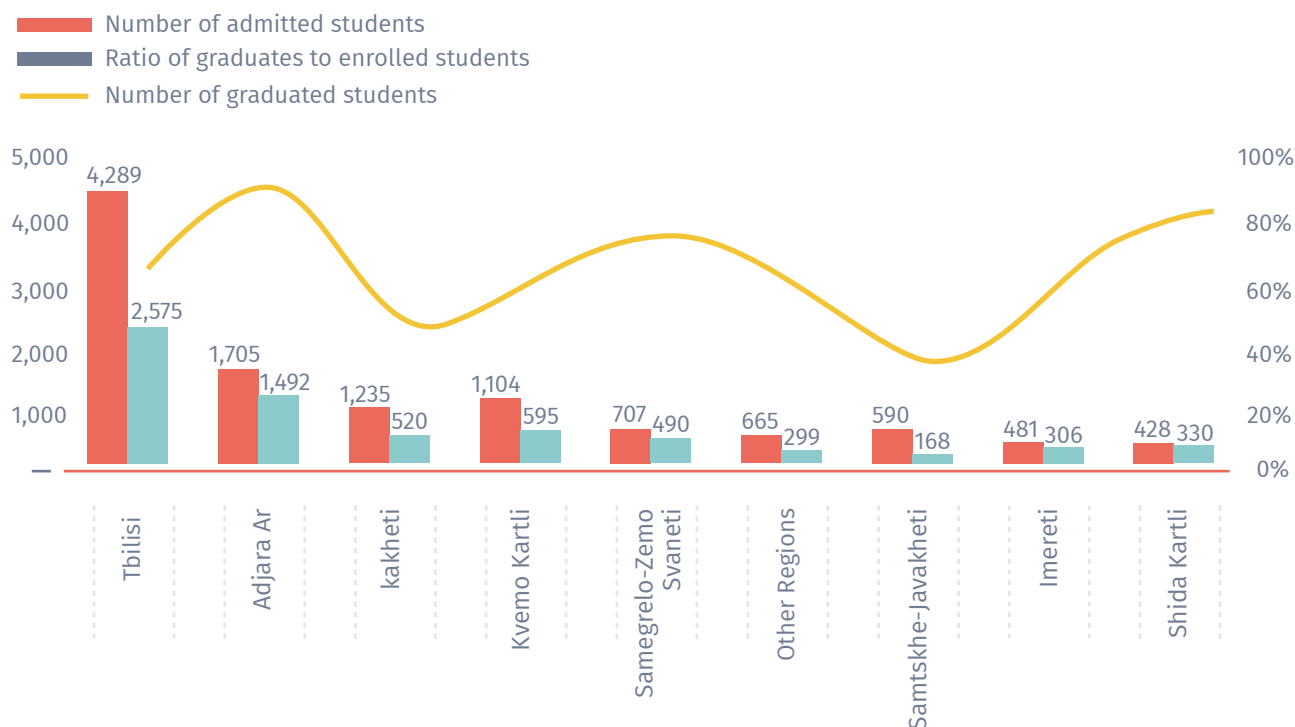
FIG 14: NUMBER OF ENROLLED AND GRADUATE STUDENTS IN VOCATIONAL EDUCATION PROGRAMS (THOUSAND)



Source: GeoStat, IDFI

In 2021, 39% of students enrolled in Tbilisi, and the ratio of graduates to enrolled students exceeds 60%. Among other regions, Adjara is leading in terms of the number of enrolled students (15%) and with the share of graduates at 88%.

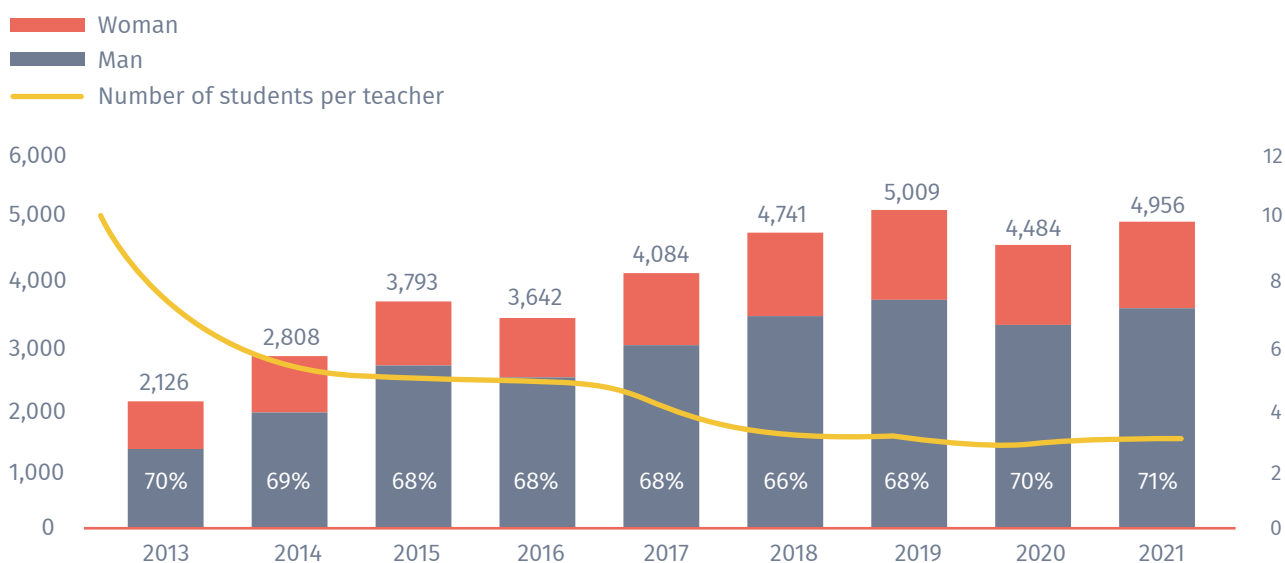
FIG 15: NUMBER OF ENROLLED AND GRADUATED STUDENTS IN VOCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS AND THEIR RATIO IN 2021, BY REGION



Source: GeoStat, IDFI

The number of teachers in vocational institutions was increasing until 2019, but during the pandemic, it decreased by 10% and reached 4,956 by 2021, which is still below the pre-pandemic level. The number of students per teacher decreases year by year, which is explained by the decrease in the popularity of vocational institutions.

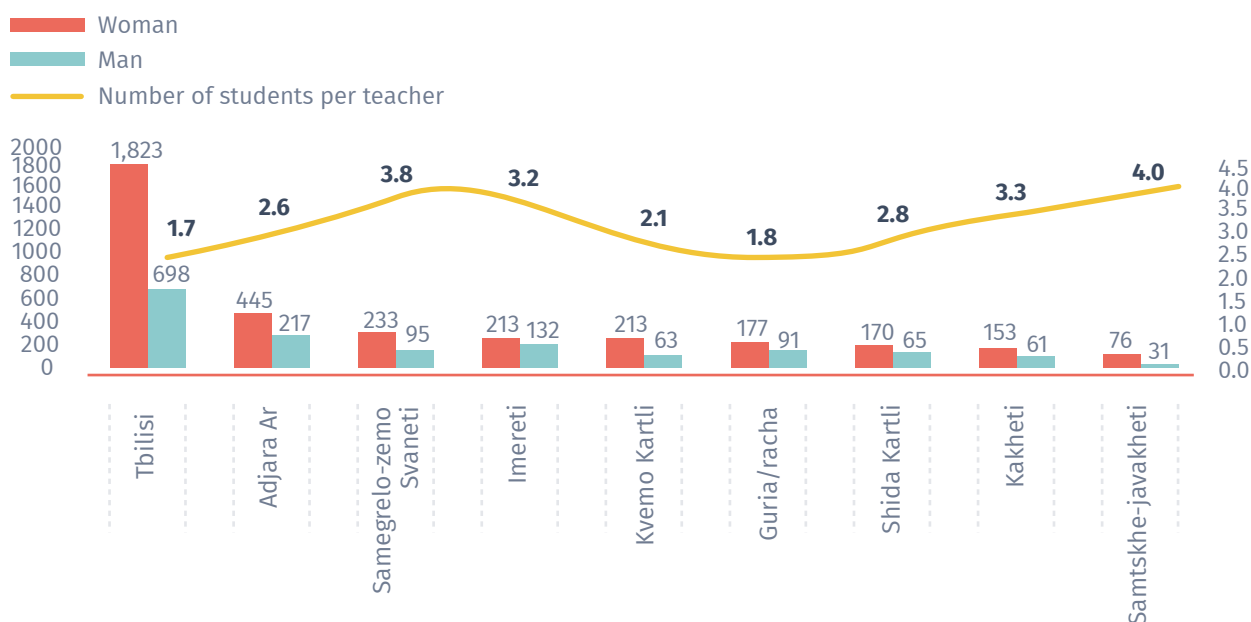
FIG 16: THE NUMBER OF TEACHERS IN VOCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS, THEIR DISTRIBUTION BY GENDER AND THE NUMBER OF STUDENTS PER TEACHER BY YEARS



Source: GeoStat, IDFI

In 2021, 51% of teachers worked in Tbilisi vocational institutions. That is why the number of students per teacher in Tbilisi is 1.7, which is lower than the national average (2.2). The highest number of students per teacher is in Samtskhe-Javakheti (4 students per teacher), which is due to an insufficient number of teachers.

FIG 17: NUMBER OF TEACHERS IN VOCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS BY GENDER AND REGION AND NUMBER OF STUDENTS PER TEACHER IN 2021



Source: GeoStat, IDFI

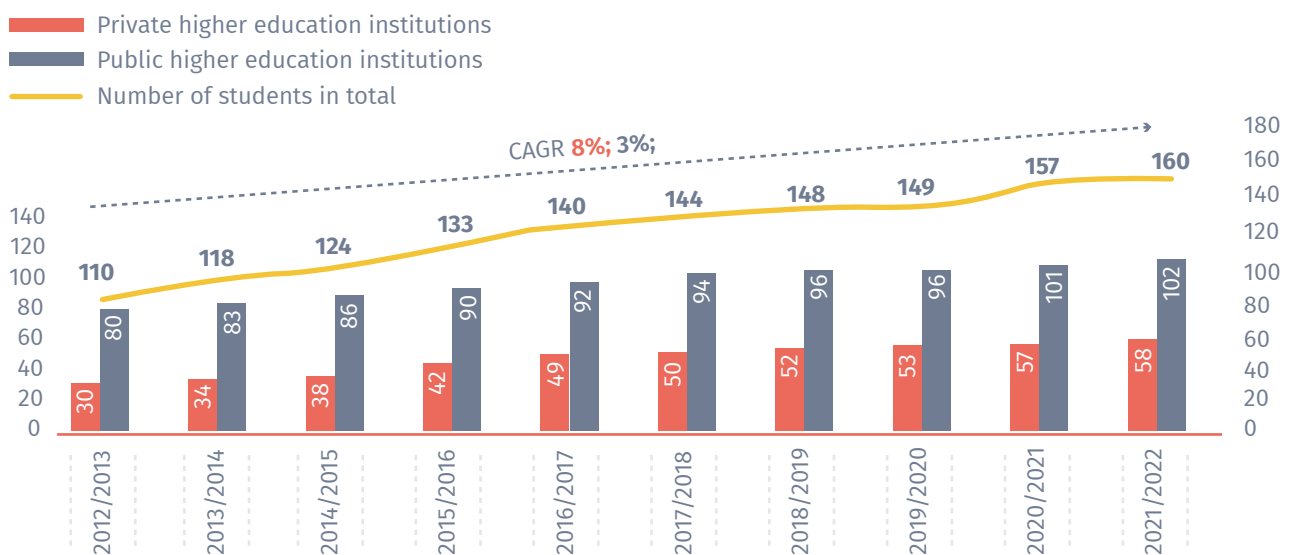
Overall, vocational programs do not fully meet the demands of the labor market. Hence, fundamental changes in the vocational education system are necessary. A higher presence of the private sector and better quality of the study programs could increase the popularity of vocational institutions and improve the situation.

3.3 HIGHER EDUCATION

Demand for higher education institutions has increased. The average number of students per higher education institution was 2,500 in the 2021/2022 academic year, +30% higher compared to the 2012/2013 academic year. The number of students enrolled in 2021 is approximately 160,000, a 46% increase over 2012/2013. 64% of students were enrolled in public schools, and the remaining 36% were enrolled in private schools.

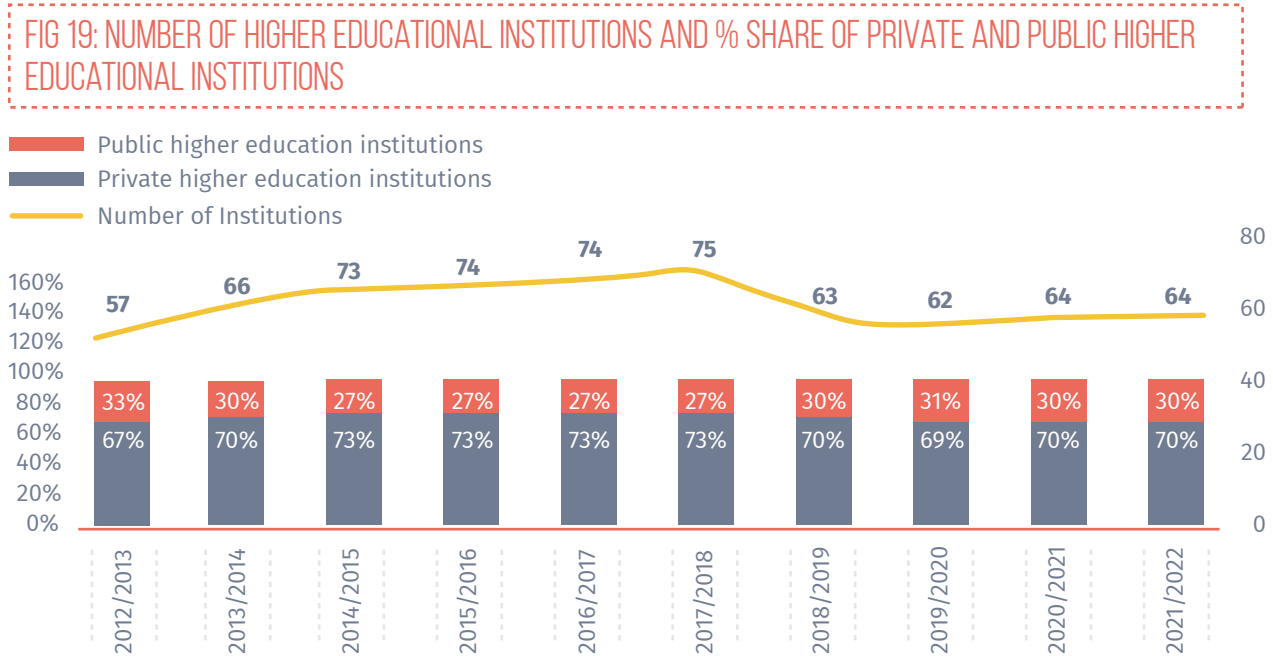
The popularity of private higher education institutions is increasing. The number of students in private universities increased to 58,105 in 2021, a +97% increase compared to 2012. During the same period, the increase in the number of students enrolled in public schools was only +27%. Public higher institutions can accept more students because of the material and technical base. In the 2021/2022 academic year, the ratio of students per state institution was on average 5,350, which is 4 times higher compared to private institutions.

FIG 18: NUMBER OF ENROLLED STUDENTS IN PUBLIC AND PRIVATE HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS (THOUSANDS), 2013-2022



Source: GeoStat, IDFI

The number of universities has been increasing since 2012 and reached 75 in the 2017/2018 academic year, but decreased thereafter to 64 higher education institutions in the 2020/2021 academic year. 70% of them come from private higher education institutions. Over the past ten years, the number of private schools has been growing by an average of 2% per year, indicating that opening private universities is becoming attractive for the business sector.



Source: GeoStat, IDFI

Graduation rate in private higher education institutions is lower compared to state institutions. The average graduation rate per admitted student⁹ in a public higher education institution was 69% in the 2012-2021 years, +16% higher compared to the private education institutions in the same period.

Higher education institutions could be overcrowded, and compulsory military service could be the reason for the low graduation rate. Students are exempt from military services during their study semester, which increases the rate of failures on exams as a means to extend the study semester and incentivizes youth (under the age of 27) to pursue PhD degrees earlier.

⁹ We have calculated average graduation rate per student, considering number of admitted students and 4 year study period.

FIG 20: NUMBER OF ADMITTED AND GRADUATED STUDENTS IN PUBLIC HIGHER EDUCATION PROGRAMS (THOUSANDS) AND SHARE OF GRADUATES

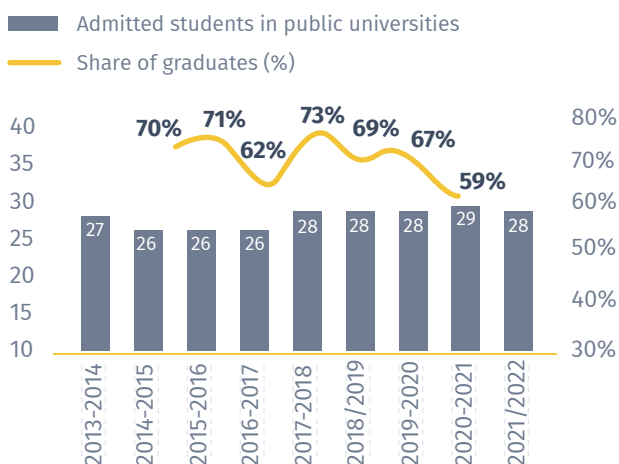
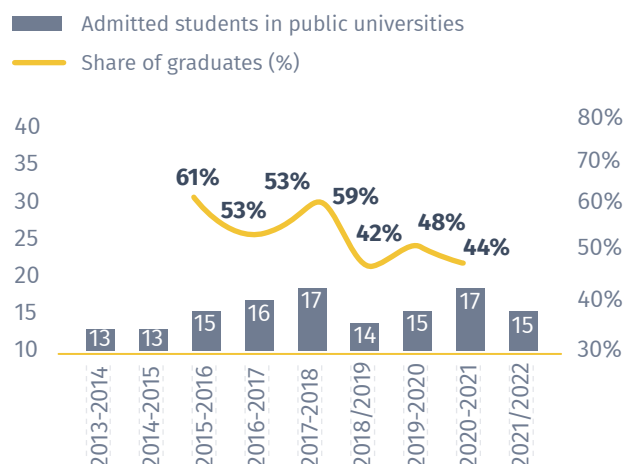


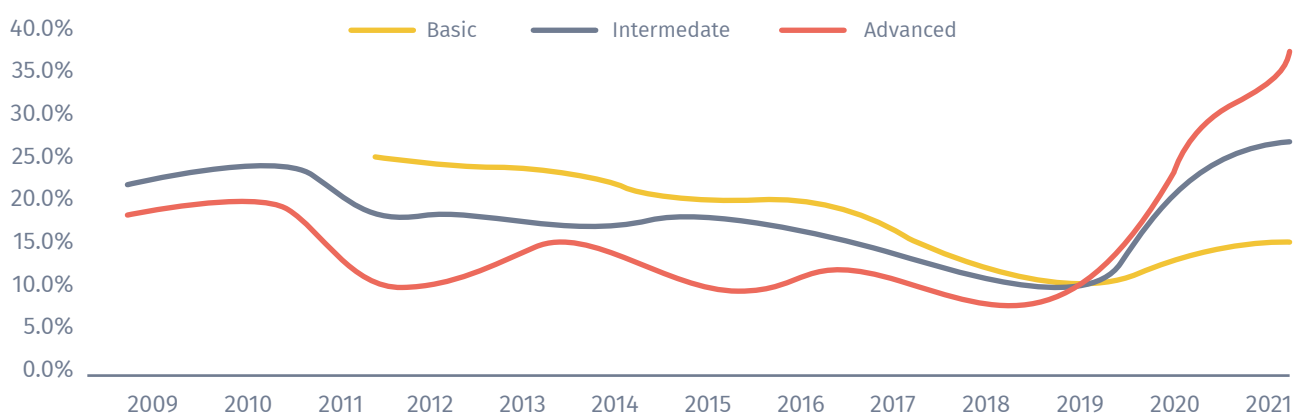
FIG 21: NUMBER OF ADMITTED AND GRADUATED STUDENTS IN PRIVATE HIGHER EDUCATION PROGRAMS (THOUSANDS) AND SHARE OF GRADUATES



Source: GeoStat, IDFI

Before the pandemic, the unemployment rate in the labor force among those with a basic, secondary, and higher education degrees was decreasing sharply in Georgia. However, COVID-19 has caused a sharp increase in unemployment. The unemployment rate among people with basic and secondary education reached its maximum in 2021 and amounted to 34% and 26%, respectively.

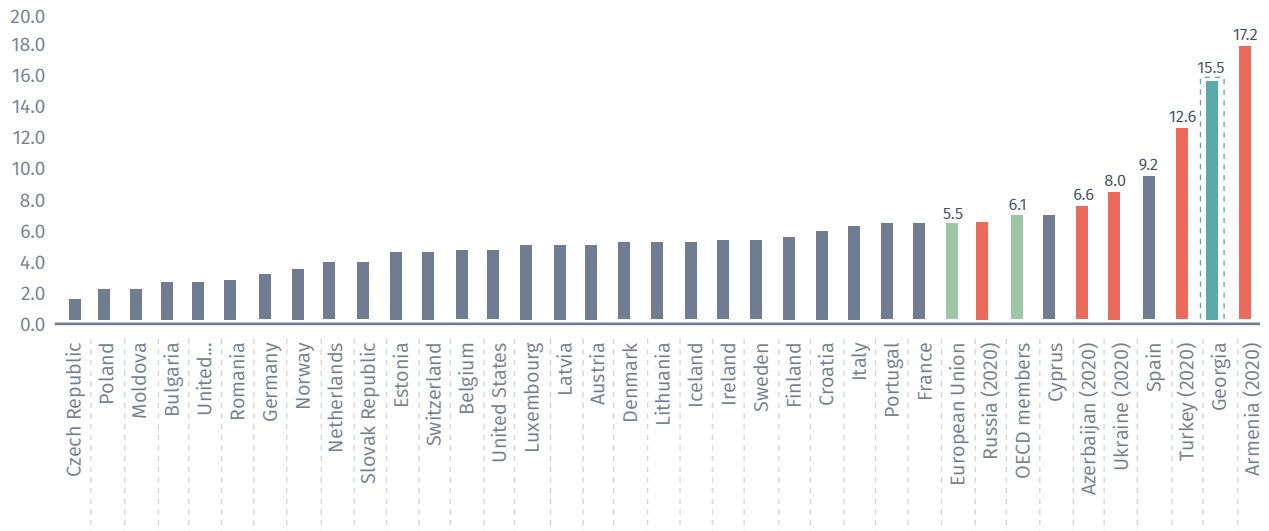
FIG 22: THE UNEMPLOYMENT RATE IN DIFFERENT GROUPS BY EDUCATION LEVEL IN GEORGIA



Source: WB, IDFI

By 2021, the unemployment rate in Georgia among the workforce with higher education was 15.5%, which is 9.4 p.p. less than in 2011. Despite the decreasing trend, the unemployment rate in the labor force with higher education in Georgia is still well above other countries, including OECD members (6.1%) and EU countries (5.5%), indicating a low quality of higher education.

FIG 23: UNEMPLOYMENT RATE IN THE WORKFORCE WITH HIGHER EDUCATION IN GEORGIA AND OTHER COUNTRIES 2021



Source: WB, IDFI

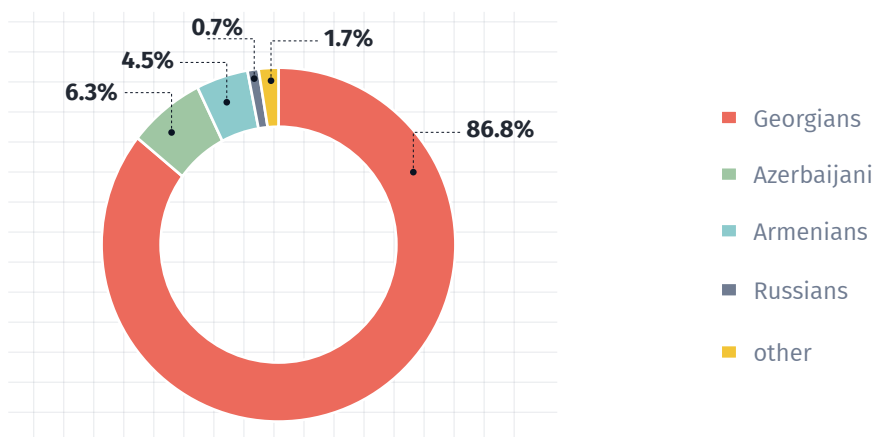
Overall, while the demand for higher educational institutions is high, a university degree often does not imply a high chance of employment in a high-paying position and high-quality education. Graduates often do not practice their profession at all. The higher education system supplies the economy with a number of graduates who are often unable to meet the demands of the modern job market, which is reflected in the high rate of unemployment.

4. EDUCATION FOR ETHNIC MINORITIES



Access to quality education and knowledge of the state language are important conditions that determine the involvement of ethnic minorities in all spheres of public life. According to Geostat's 2014 population census, 13.2% of Georgia's population are ethnic minorities. Representatives of Azerbaijani and Armenian nationalities constituted 6% and 5%, respectively.

FIG 24: ETHNIC ANALYSIS OF THE POPULATION OF GEORGIA

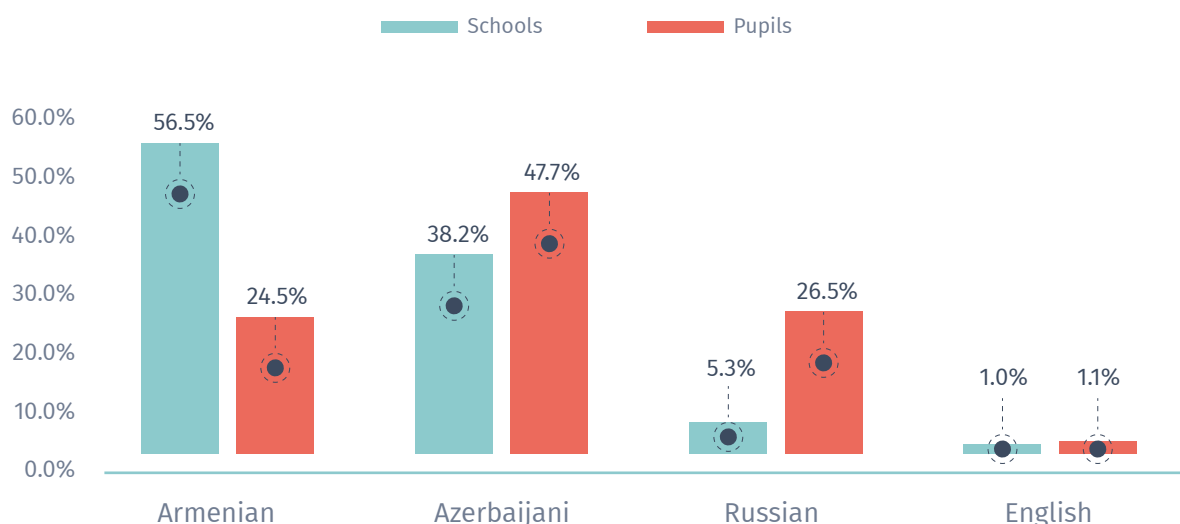


Source: GeoStat, IDFI

In Georgia, it is possible to receive general education in Armenian-language, Azerbaijani-language and Russian-language schools and sectors in addition to Georgian-language schools. Based on the data for the 2021-2022 school year, non-Georgian language schools account for 10% of public schools in Georgia (207 throughout Georgia). There are 117 Armenian-language, 79 Azerbaijani-language, and 11 Russian-language schools operating in Georgia — 57%, 38% and 5% of non-Georgian language schools, respectively.

In the same year, the number of non-Georgian language school pupils was 54,325, which was 9% of the total number of pupils. The majority of pupils, representing ethnic minorities (47.7%) speak Azerbaijani, 26.5% speak Russian, and 24.5% speak Armenian.

FIG 25: DISTRIBUTION OF NON-GEORGIAN LANGUAGE SCHOOLS AND PUPILS BY THE LANGUAGE OF STUDY 2021

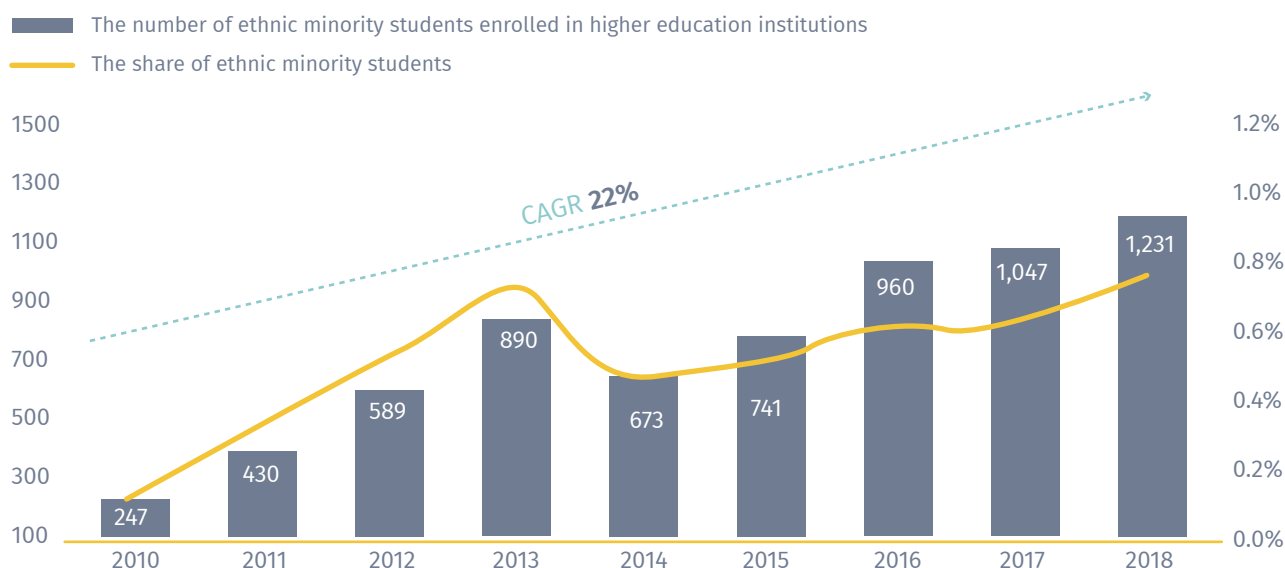


Source: EMIS, IDFI

As for higher education, since 2010, representatives of ethnic minorities have had an opportunity to get higher education in Georgia in a simplified manner. The simplified system, the so-called "1+4" program, provides the possibility of passing the general skills exam in the Armenian, Azerbaijani, Abkhazian, and Ossetian languages and receiving higher education if appropriate points are accumulated. Entrants undergo a preparation course in the Georgian language for 1 year, and after accumulating 60 credits, they continue their studies at the faculty of their choice.

Between 2010 and 2018, the number of students from ethnic minorities in Georgia's higher education institutions increased 5 times, which is the merit of this program. The number of non-Georgian speaking students enrolled in higher education institutions grew by a 22% CAGR over the last 9 years. Moreover, the "1+4" program also allows non-Georgian speakers to undergo internships in various public services, although there is no statistical data on the employment of these persons. Thus, it is necessary to calculate the employment rate to properly assess the success or failure of the program.

FIG 26: THE NUMBER OF ETHNIC MINORITY STUDENTS ENROLLED IN HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS BY YEARS

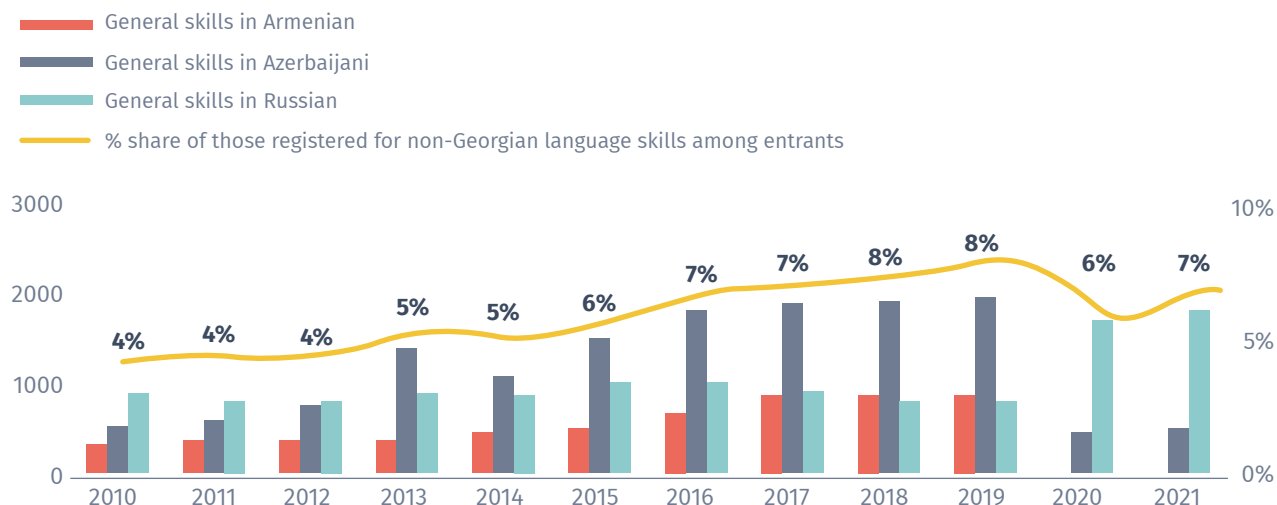


Source: The State Ministry for Reconciliation and Civic Equality, IDFI

If we look at the data from the Unified National Examinations, we see that out of 38,415 registered entrants, 2,665 registered for the non-Georgian language general skills exam in 2021, which is 7% of the entrants, +3 p.p. more than in 2010.

In 2010, 253 entrants registered for the Armenian-language general skills test, accounting for 18% of ethnic minority entrants. This figure increased to 21% in 2021 (565 entrants). As for the Azerbaijani-language general skills test, 335 entrants were registered in 2010, only 24% of ethnic minority entrants, which increased to 78% in 2021 (2,076 entrants). In the same period, the number of people wishing to pass the general skills test in Russian decreased from 58% to 1% (from 610 to 17 applicants).

FIG 27: THE NUMBER OF ENTRANTS REGISTERED FOR NON-GEORGIAN LANGUAGE SKILLS AND THEIR SHARE AMONG ALL ENTRANTS BY YEAR



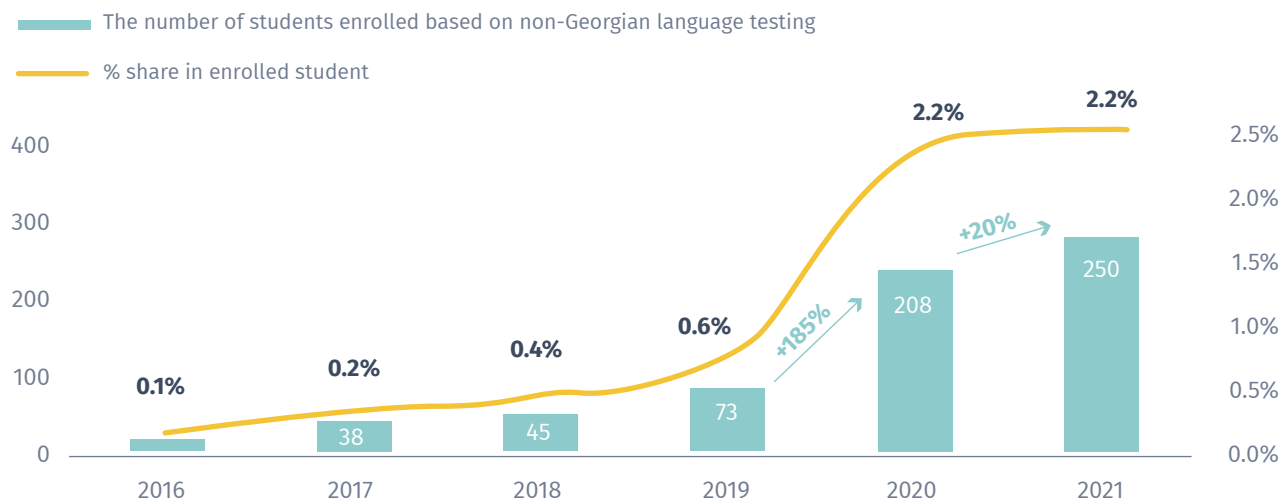
Source: EMIS, IDFI

As for vocational education, to disseminate information about the availability and application process for professional educational programs, the representatives of the department of vocational education development, as well as individual colleges, held an information session. In order to improve access to vocational education for representatives of ethnic minorities, existing colleges were renovated and equipped. As a result, people in different regions are given the opportunity to receive vocational education.

Furthermore, since 2016, representatives of ethnic minorities have had an opportunity to pass the test in Armenian, Russian, or Azerbaijani languages, enroll in vocational education institutions with state funding, and take a Georgian language course simultaneously.

Since then, the number of applicants who take the non-Georgian language test has been increasing every year. In 2021, 250 applicants were enrolled in vocational education institutions based on non-Georgian language testing, which is 17 times higher than in 2016.

FIG 28: THE NUMBER OF STUDENTS ENROLLED IN VOCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS BASED ON NON-GEORGIAN LANGUAGE TESTING BY YEARS

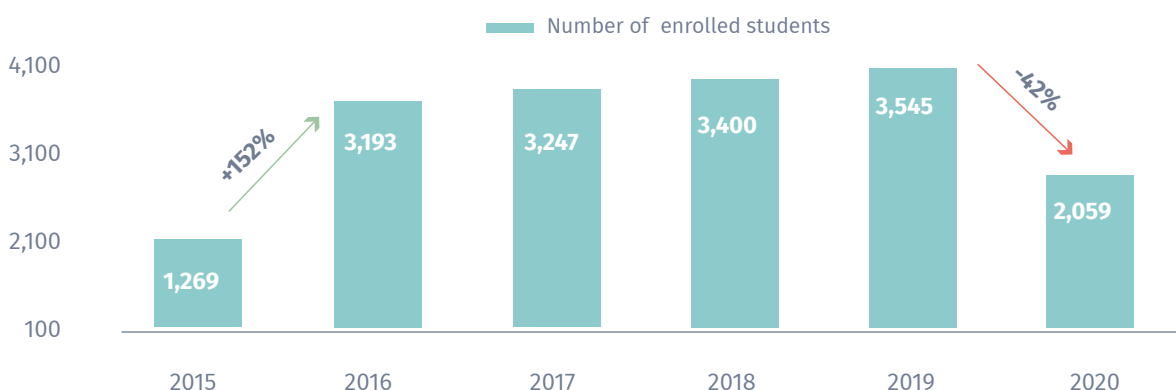


Source: Ministry of Education and Science of Georgia, IDFI

There are various courses for ethnic minorities to learn the Georgian language. For example, "Zurab Zhvania School of State Administration" implements various programs through 13 training centers and 171 mobile groups to teach Georgian. In response to the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic, these groups continued their activities through distance learning. During 2015-2020, about 16,000 students completed the course.

The pandemic has exacerbated the problems facing ethnic minorities. Before the pandemic, the number of students enrolled in the state language and integration program was growing at a slow pace. However, the COVID-19 pandemic caused a sharp decline in the number of applicants, to 2,059 (-42%, YoY).

FIG 29: THE NUMBER OF STUDENTS ENROLLED IN THE STATE LANGUAGE AND INTEGRATION PROGRAM BY YEAR

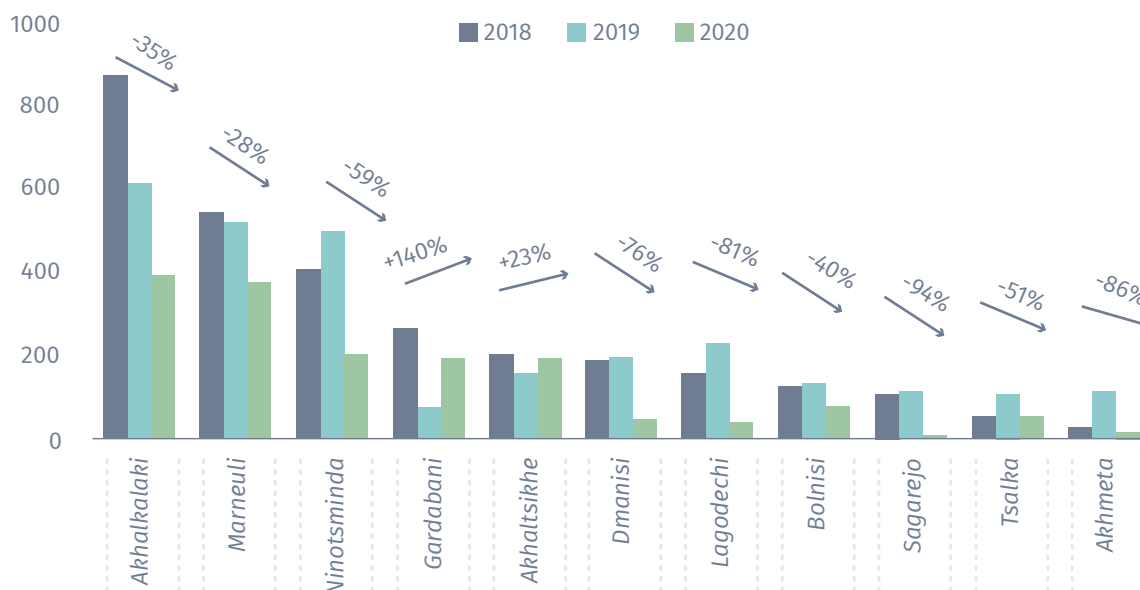


Source: The State Ministry for Reconciliation and Civic Equality, IDFI

The highest interest in learning the Georgian language is in the municipalities of Akhalkalaki, Marneuli, and Ninotsminda, while the lowest interest was in Akhmeta and Tsalka.

The negative impact of the COVID-19 pandemic should also be noted. In 2020, the number of students enrolled in the state language and integration program had sharply declined in all municipalities except Akhaltsikhe and Gardabani, as compared to 2019.

FIG 30: THE NUMBER OF STUDENTS ENROLLED IN DIFFERENT MUNICIPALITIES IN THE STATE LANGUAGE AND INTEGRATION PROGRAM

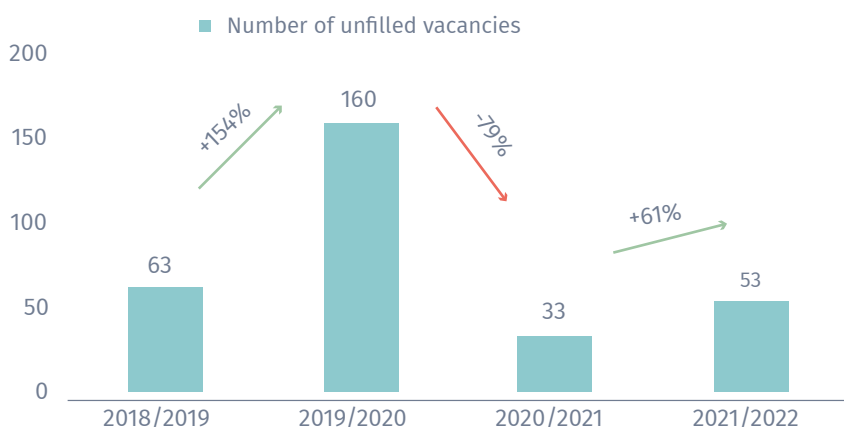


Source: The State Ministry for Reconciliation and Civic Equality, IDFI

Despite the aforementioned Georgian language learning programs, the low level of social integration of ethnic minorities remains a challenge. Moreover, the opportunity to receive quality education remains a challenge due to the language barrier. This is also caused by the low-quality translation of textbooks.

Another challenge for ethnic minorities is the insufficient number of teachers. 309 vacancies for teachers remained unfilled in 2018-2022 across the country. This challenge became particularly acute at the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, when 160 advertised vacancies could not be filled.

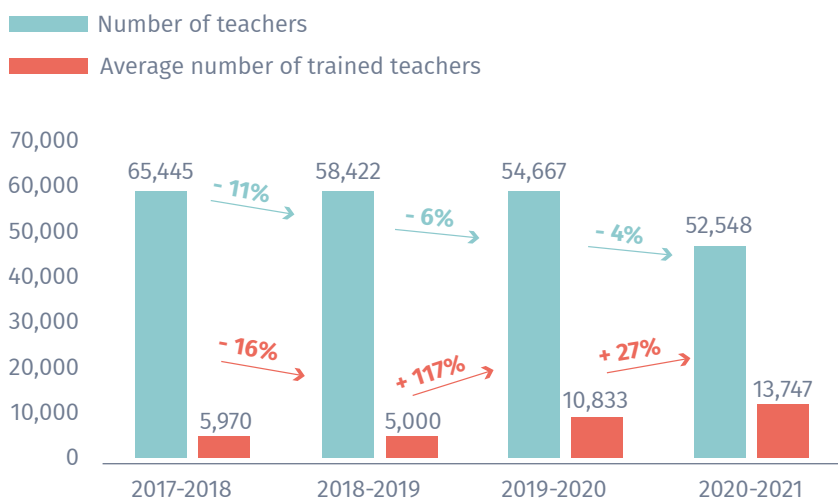
FIG 31: NUMBER OF UNFILLED VACANCIES BY YEAR



Source: State Audit Office, IDFI

Another challenge for ethnic minorities is the qualifications of teachers. The number of teachers trained in information technologies throughout Georgia is increasing every year. Still, by 2021, only 27% of teachers were trained, which is a rather low rate and indicates the severity of this problem.

FIG 32: AVERAGE NUMBER OF TEACHERS TRAINED IN INFORMATION TECHNOLOGIES BY YEARS



Source: State Audit Office, IDFI

The COVID-19 pandemic has further exacerbated the problems faced by ethnic minorities. Their interest in learning the Georgian language has decreased due to economic or social problems, which further hinders the process of their integration into the society. The pandemic has also made the lack of teachers more noticeable.

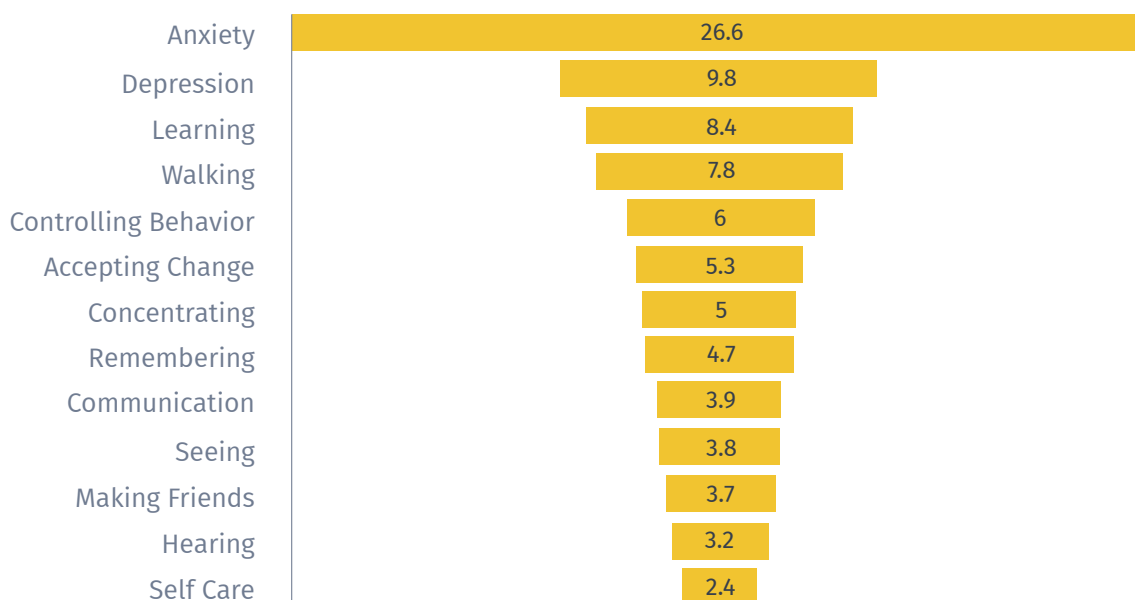
5. EDUCATION FOR PERSONS WITH SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS

A student with special educational needs (hereinafter referred to as SEN) may be a student with a physical disability, intellectual disability, sensory disability (hearing and/or vision), speech disability, behavioral and emotional disability, need for long-term hospitalization, or difficulties in learning caused by social factors, due to which they cannot cope with the requirements of the national curriculum.¹⁰ A SEN student is one who has difficulty in learning compared to his peers and for whom it is necessary to adapt the national curriculum and draw up an individual curriculum.

According to the 2015-2020 Action Plan of the State Strategy for Civic Equality and Integration, quality education should be available for representatives of ethnic minorities and persons with disabilities at all levels of education.

According to a study by UNICEF and GeoStat, most SEN children (36,400 children) suffer from anxiety and depression. 8,400 children have learning difficulties, which is 1.5% of children aged 5-17.

FIG 33: CHILDREN AGED 5-17 WITH FUNCTIONING DIFFICULTIES IN DIFFERENT LIFE DOMAINS (THOUSAND)

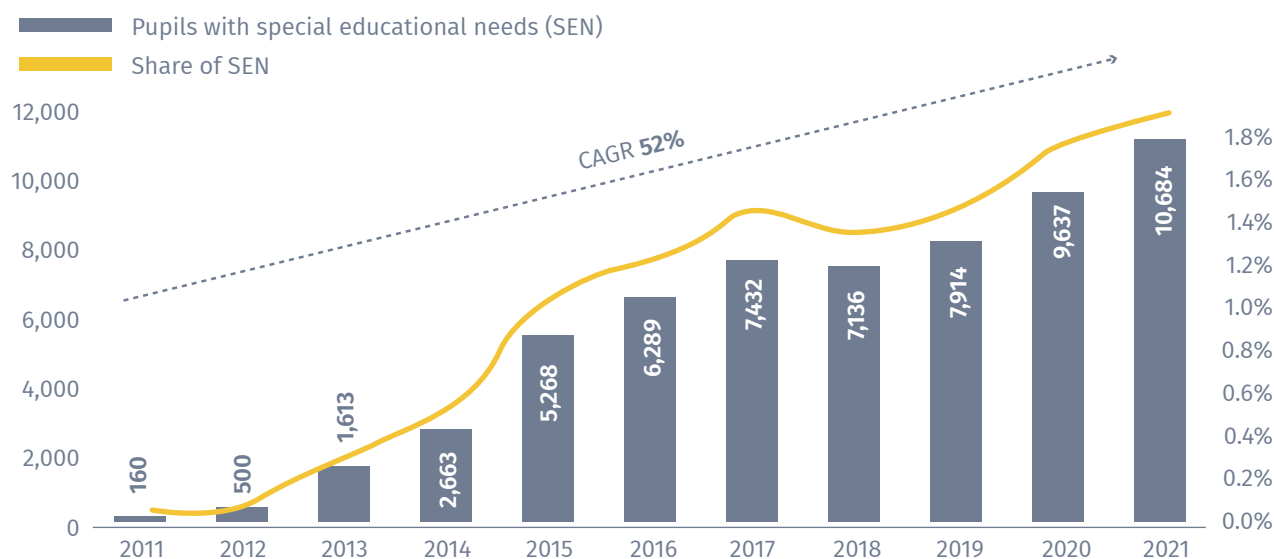


Source: UNICEF, GeoStat, IDFI

The number of pupils with SEN in public schools is increasing every year. In 2021, the number of pupils with SEN exceeded 10,500, which is 21 times higher than in 2012. This increases demand for special teachers to provide equal quality education to all pupils.

¹⁰ <http://inclusion.ge/geo/static/19>

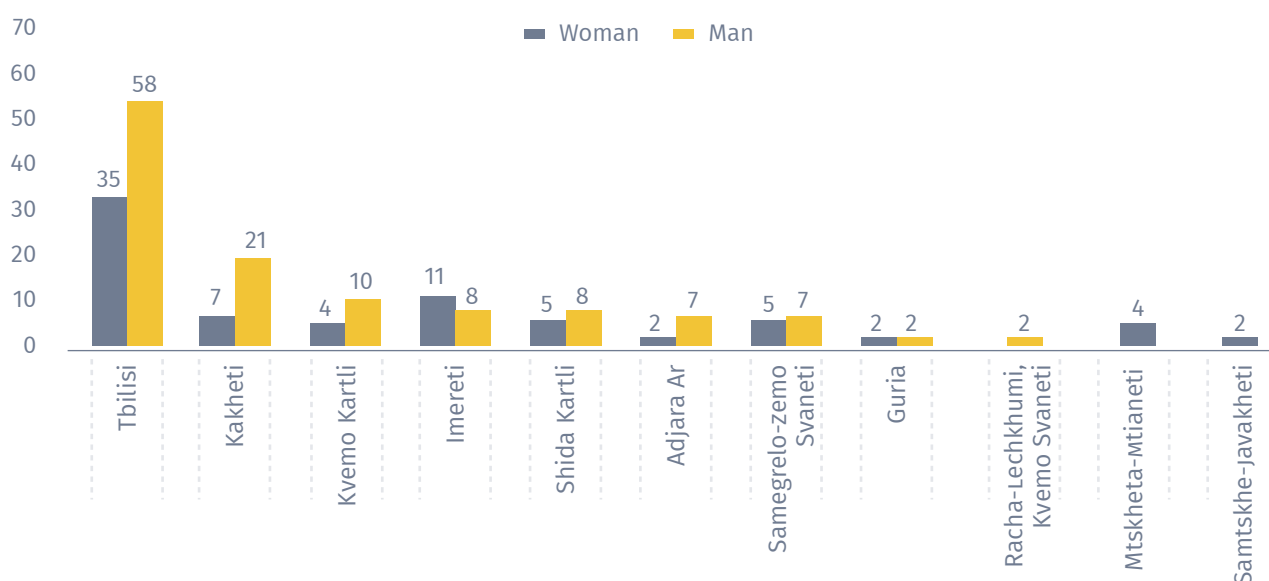
FIG 34: NUMBER OF PUPILS WITH SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS (SEN) IN PUBLIC SCHOOLS BY YEARS



Source: Ministry of Education and Science of Georgia, IDFI

Not only ethnic minorities but also persons with SEN are interested in vocational education. In 2021, 201 people with SEN were studying in vocational education institutions; 47% of them were in academic institutions located in Tbilisi, 14% in Kakheti, and 10% in Imereti, while the rest are distributed among the other regions.

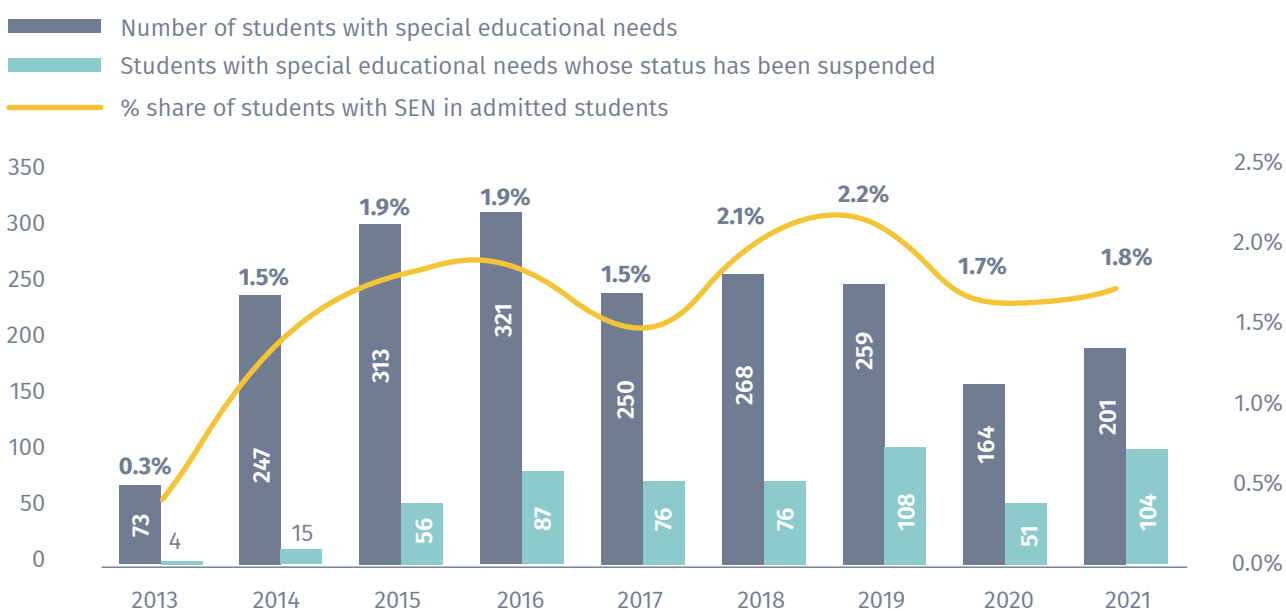
FIG 35: THE NUMBER OF PERSONS WITH SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS (SEN) ENROLLED IN VOCATIONAL EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS BY GENDER AND REGIONS, 2021



Source: Ministry of Education and Science of Georgia, IDFI

The number of persons with SEN in vocational institutions was increasing until 2016, when this trend changed. In 2020, the number of students with special educational needs in vocational educational programs dropped to its lowest (164 students with SEN), which indicates the negative impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. In the same year, the share of students with SEN among admitted students was 1.7%, which is 0.5 p.p. less than in 2019. In 2021, 201 students with SEN were admitted to vocational institutions, and 104 suspended their status, which accounted for 52% of admitted students.

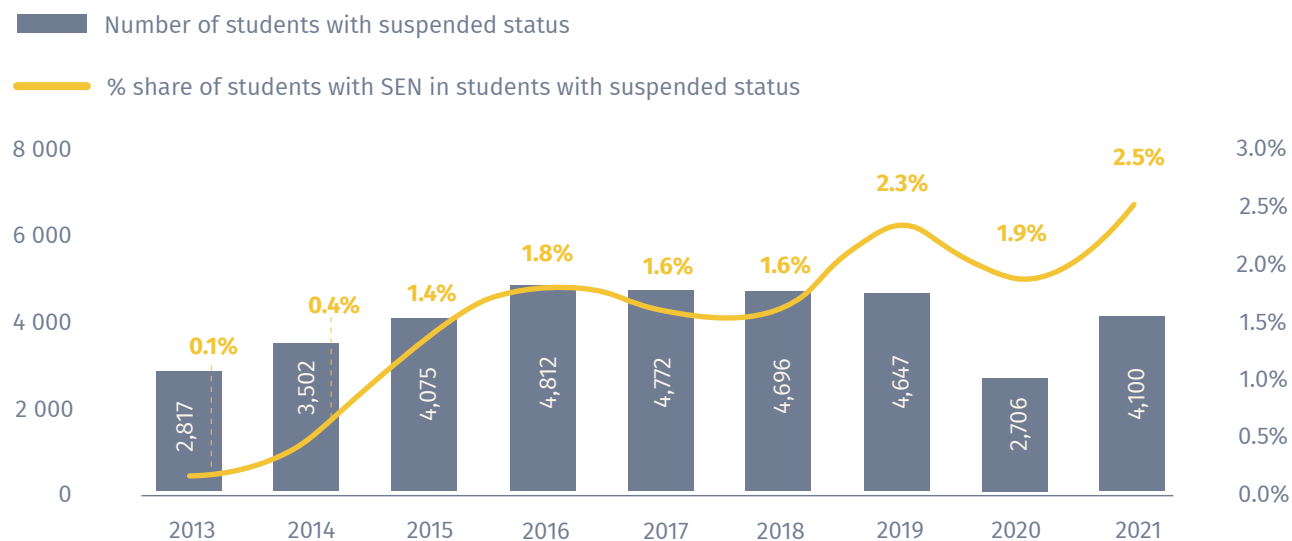
FIG 36: THE NUMBER OF PERSONS WITH SEN ADMITTED TO PROFESSIONAL EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMS, THEIR SHARE IN THE ADMITTED STUDENTS AND THE SUSPENSION OF THEIR STATUS BY YEARS



Source: Ministry of Education and Science of Georgia, IDFI

The share of students with SEN among students whose status has been suspended is increasing every year. In 2021, 37% of students admitted to vocational education programs suspended their status, which is 23 p.p. higher than the same rate in 2013. The share of students with SEN among suspended students is characterized by an upward trend and reached 2.5% by 2021, which is the highest rate in the last 9 years.

FIG 37: THE NUMBER OF STUDENTS ADMITTED TO VOCATIONAL EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMS WHOSE STATUS WAS SUSPENDED, AND THE SHARE OF STUDENTS WITH SEN IN THEM BY YEAR



Source: Ministry of Education and Science of Georgia, IDFI

6.COVID-19 AND THE POST-PANDEMIC PERIOD



The Georgian education sector faced new challenges due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The pandemic has changed the sector dramatically and resulted in the closing of schools and universities across the world. E-learning on digital platforms remained the only possibility to continue the educational process.

Considering the lack of appropriate conditions for distance learning, it was a significant challenge for the developing country to involve pupils and students in the online learning process when it was struggling with high unemployment and low savings. Problems include not having appropriate equipment (computer, laptop, tablet, mobile phone, etc.), as well as access to the internet (especially for people living in the regions).

6.1 ACCESS TO TECHNOLOGY AND THE INTERNET

The process of digitization of the world economy has begun. Developed and developing countries are increasingly using modern technologies to raise the efficiency of governance. The education sector is no exception in this regard, especially in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. Access to technology was important for the distance learning process. The pandemic revealed significant challenges in this direction, which have not been fixed yet. These challenges are:

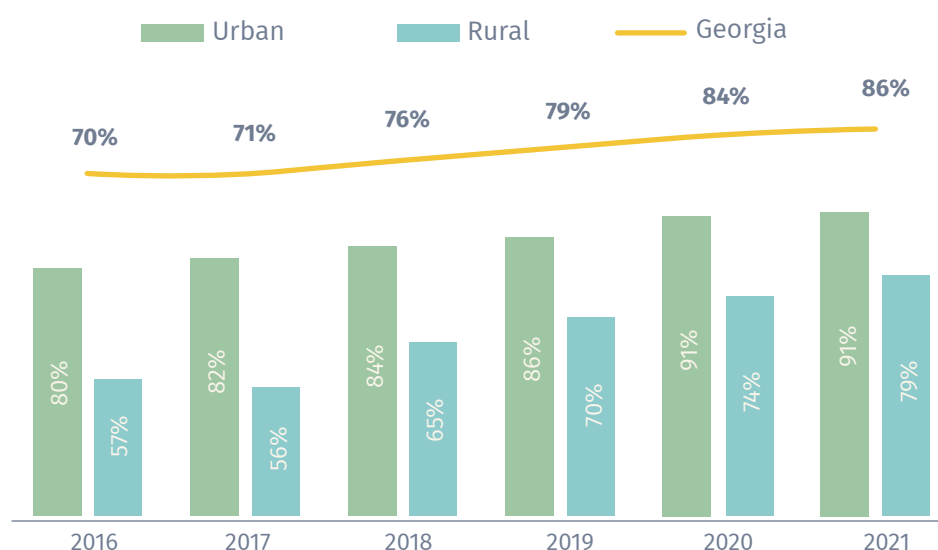
- ☐ A significant part of the population does not have access to appropriate devices for studying;
- ☐ Access to high quality internet is a problem outside the capital;
- ☐ Economic issues and inability to attend classes;

A significant part of the population does not have appropriate devices for studying

Equipping schools with computers and conducting relevant trainings remains a challenge. According to the latest data available, in 2009-2010, 94% of schools were equipped with computers (20 pupils per device). However, information about the regular updates of old devices and relevant trainings for teachers and pupils is unavailable.

Distance learning was never used in the education system of Georgia before the pandemic, and therefore the country was unprepared for this new challenge. At the beginning of the pandemic, 16% of households did not have access to the internet, and 38% did not have access to a computer. In 2021, the situation improved slightly, and these indicators were at 14% and 36%, respectively.

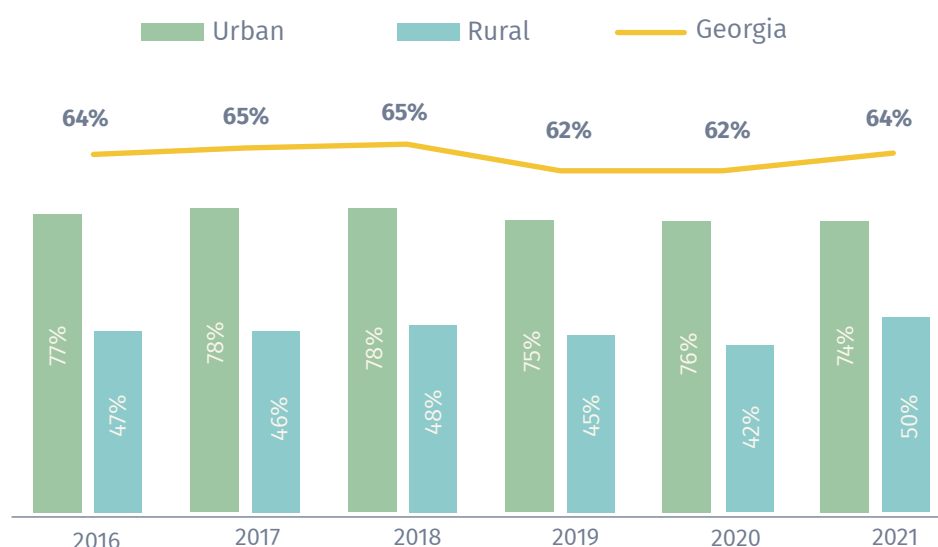
FIG 38: SHARE OF HOUSEHOLDS WITH INTERNET ACCESS (%)



Source: GeoStat, IDFI

Distance learning is more challenging in the rural areas and regions compared to the cities. The high degree of inequality is largely related to the socio-economic status of families. At the start of the pandemic, 58% of rural households did not have a computer and 26% did not have access to the internet, compared to 24% and 9% in the cities. The pandemic and online learning have forced households to adapt to new lifestyles and technological developments that have improved these indicators. By 2021, 50% of rural households do not have a computer and 21% do not have internet access.

FIG 39: SHARE OF HOUSEHOLDS WITH COMPUTER ACCESS (%)



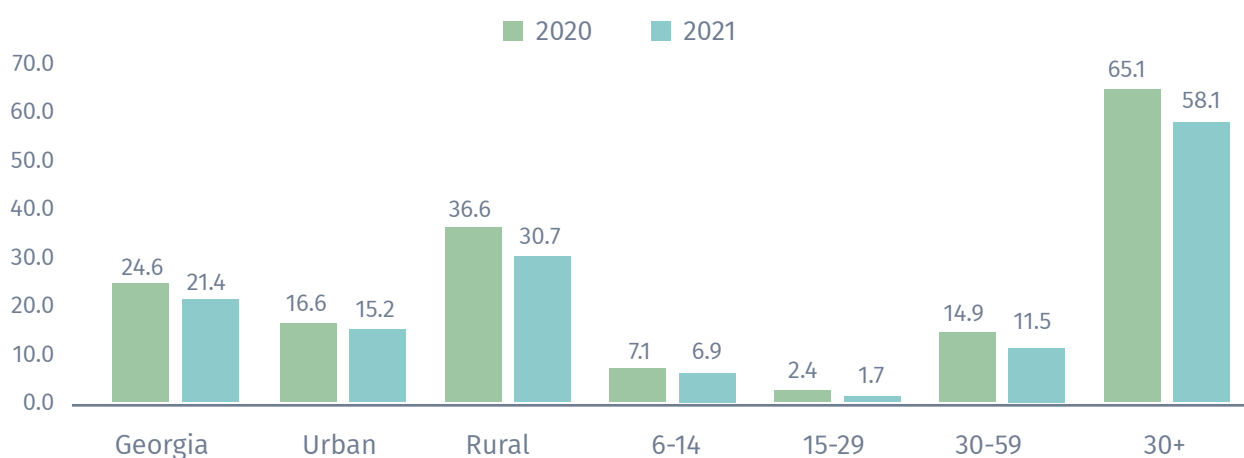
Source: GeoStat, IDFI

Access to high quality internet is a problem outside the capital

Households in Tbilisi, for the most part, have access to the internet (91%), but only 79% of the population had access to the internet in the rural areas in 2021. Additionally, the knowledge of using computers and the Internet is a challenge, especially among rural populations. 30.7% of the rural population has never used the Internet, compared to 15% of the urban population in the country.

More than 35,200 children¹¹ had never used the Internet and did not have access to distance-learning tools in Georgia - nearly 7% of the children aged 5-14 as of July 2021.

FIG 40: SHARE OF THE POPULATION (%) WHO HAVE NEVER USED THE INTERNET



Source: GeoStat, IDFI

The low quality of internet access is a significant challenge in distance learning. More than a half of optical Internet subscribers live in Tbilisi, while only one-third of Georgia's population lives in the capital, which means that high-quality internet is unevenly distributed in the country.

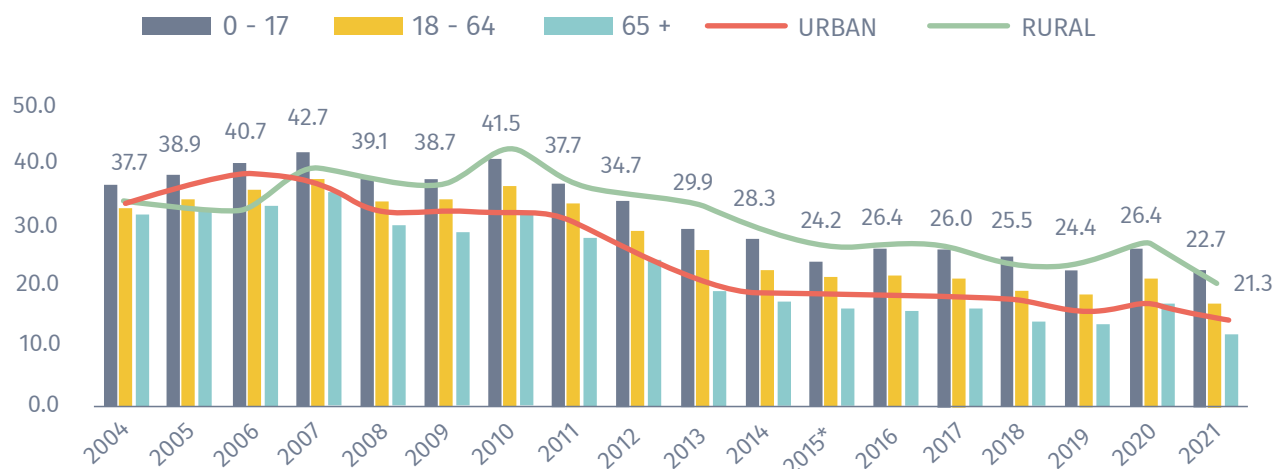
Economic issues and inability to attend classes

Children in Georgia face a higher risk of poverty than any other population group. In 2021, the share of the population under the age of 17 living below the absolute poverty line was 22.7%. Children in families living below the poverty line are particularly vulnerable to the rapid spread of the coronavirus and face higher probability of disruption in the study process.

Additionally, poverty in the regions is a bigger problem compared to urban areas. The share of the population living in rural areas below the absolute poverty line is +6 p.p. higher than that of urban areas.

¹¹According to GeoStat's census data, there were 510,500 children aged 5-14 in Georgia, as of January 2021.

FIG 41: SHARE OF THE POPULATION BELOW THE ABSOLUTE POVERTY LINE (%)



Source: GeoStat, IDFI

Note: * Base year of calculating poverty line

6.2 THE TELECOMMUNICATIONS SECTOR

The number of internet users grew by +8.7%, +5.8%, and +1.1% YoY in 2019, 2020, and 2021, respectively, and exceeded one million subscribers. The share of Magticom and Silknet of total internet subscribers was 48% and 30%, respectively, in 2021.

The Internet service market size in Georgia hit an all-time high of GEL 294 million at the end of 2021. 81% of total revenue was shared between MagtiCom and Silknet.

FIG 42: NUMBER OF INTERNET SUBSCRIBERS

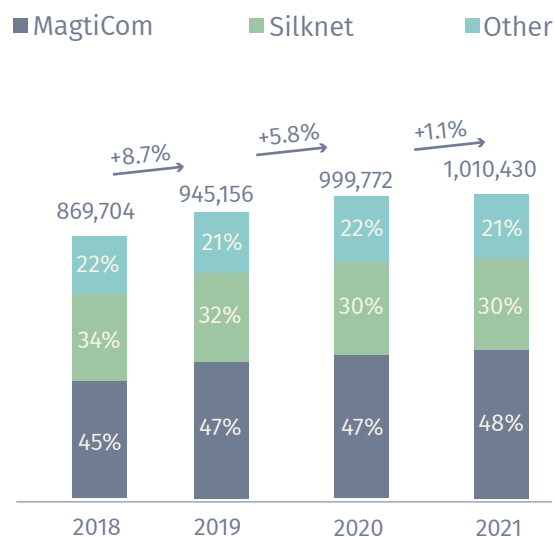
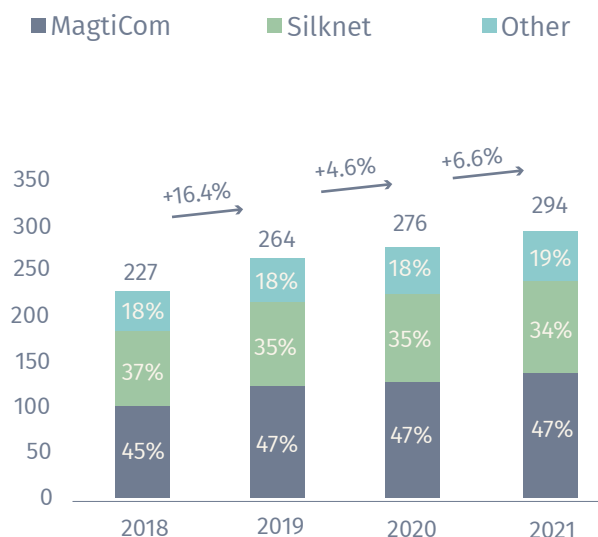


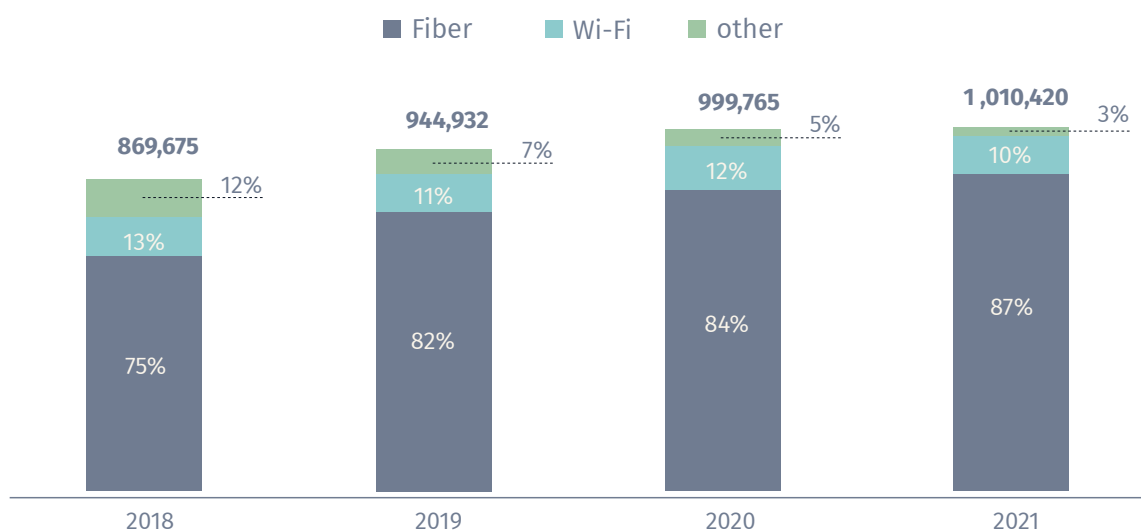
FIG 43: REVENUE FROM THE INTERNET SERVICE (GEL, MLN)



Source: ComCom, IDFI

High quality internet is still less available in the rural and mountainous areas. The most widely used internet-technology is the fiber-optic service, which was provided to almost 87% of total subscribers in 2021, +3% and +5% higher compared to 2020 and 2019 years, respectively. However, the provision of fiber-optic Internet is associated with infrastructure costs, and the population of the regions uses lower-quality technologies.

FIG 44: SHARE OF SUBSCRIBERS BY TECHNOLOGY



Source: ComCom, IDFI

Cellular internet is another alternative to broadband fiber optic internet, especially in the regions. In the last few years, the number of subscribers has increased and reached 3.7 million in 2021, which is +15% higher than in 2020. In 2020, the market is split almost equally among the 3 major telecommunications companies, each having approximately one-third of the total share. However, Magticom and Silknet dominated the market with 72% market share by 2021.

FIG 45: THE NUMBER OF CELLULAR INTERNET SUBSCRIBERS (MLN)

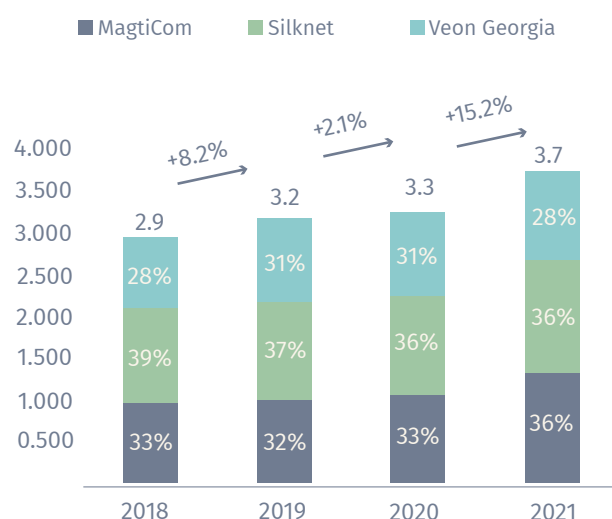
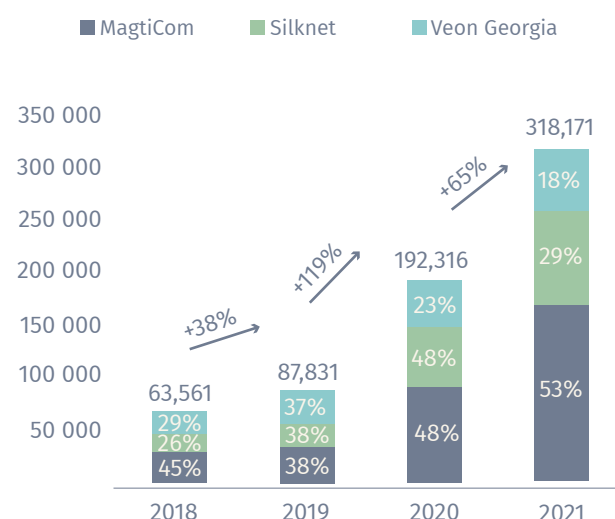


FIG 46: CELLULAR INTERNET TRAFFIC (TB)



Source: ComCom, IDFI

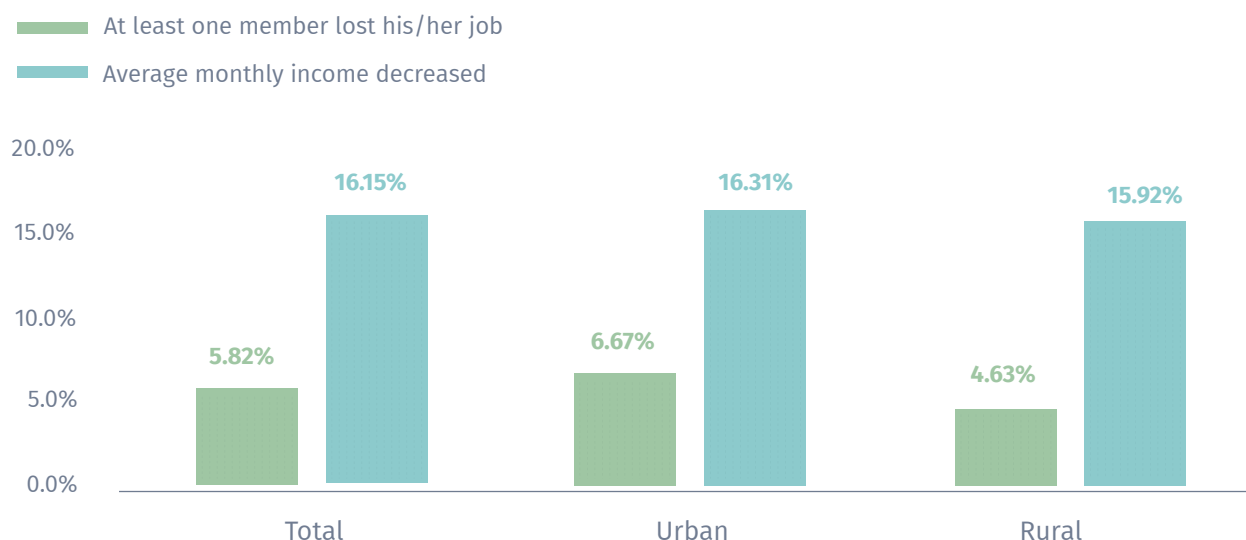
Restrictions have significantly increased usage of the internet in the country. The amount of internet used in 2021 was 3.6 times higher than in 2019. The impact of the pandemic and subsequent lockdowns becomes most apparent when looking at the changes in cellular internet traffic. Throughout 2021, cellular internet traffic exceeded 318,170 terabytes of data, which amounts to a 65% increase compared to 2020 (260% increase compared to 2019). Internet traffic increased fivefold among Magticom subscribers, quadrupled among Silknet subscribers, and almost doubled among Veon Georgia subscribers between 2019 and 2021.

6.3 THE RETURN OF PUPILS TO CLASSROOMS

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, in one-third of families, at least one member of the household lost his/her job, and 53% of households experienced a decrease in the average monthly income from March till the end of 2020¹² in Georgia. The same indicator was 35.5% by 2021.

¹² According to the survey conducted by UNICEF

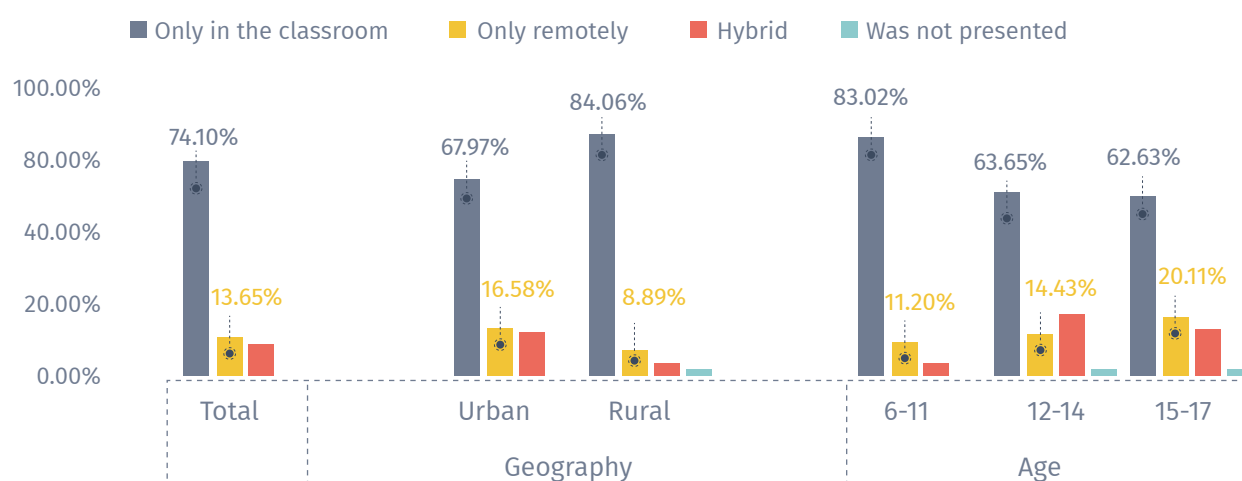
FIG 47: SHARE OF PEOPLE WHO LOST THEIR JOB OR INCOME DECREASED IN 2021



Source: UNICEF, IDFI

After the restrictions, schools reopened, and most students went back to schools. 84% of pupils living in rural areas returned to schools, versus 67% of pupils living in urban areas, by 2021. The lack of the required devices for distance learning and low access to the internet could be the reasons why people living in rural areas are more dependent on traditional ways of schooling.

FIG 48: SHARE OF PUPILS, WHO RETURNED TO SCHOOL AFTER THEIR REOPENING (%)



Source: UNICEF, GeoStat, IDFI

It seems that hybrid learning is unpopular, especially in the villages. Only 4% of pupils living in rural areas choose the hybrid learning format, while in urban areas the corresponding number has reached 15%. At the same time, 83% of elementary school pupils returned to classrooms, which is explained by the fact that online learning was the most difficult for elementary school pupils (especially for first/second-grade pupils).

Overall, statistics reveal that the pandemic has exacerbated all the problems that already existed in the education sector. This especially applies to representatives of ethnic minorities. Their interest in learning the Georgian language has decreased due to economic or social problems, which has a negative impact on their social integration.

7. FOCUS GROUP SURVEY AND REGIONAL MEETINGS



Within the framework of this research project, quantitative methods were used to collect sociological data through focus groups. It was decided to conduct focus groups in order for the research team to identify the challenges and problems that different social groups, ethnic minorities and, in general, different stakeholders (teachers, parents, and pupils) face in schools in the post-COVID-19 period.

In total, 6 focus groups with teachers and parents were held in two Georgian-speaking, two Azerbaijani-speaking, and two Armenian-speaking schools. 44 parents and 22 teachers attended the focus groups. Respondents in the groups talked about the positive aspects of returning to school after distance learning, and the challenges facing schools, teachers, and parents. Attention was focused on the problems of ethnic minorities.

7.1 QUALITATIVE RESEARCH

The goal of the qualitative study was to identify in-depth problems that might go beyond the scope of a quantitative survey. According to the objectives of the research, below is an analysis of qualitative data, the first part of which analyzes qualitative information from focus groups of teachers and parents representing ethnic minorities, and the next part analyzes the opinions of teachers and parents representing Georgian-language schools.

According to the focus groups of non-Georgian schools, the following challenges were revealed:

- ◆ Insufficient number of teachers, especially in STEM (science, technologies, engineering, and mathematics) subjects, and low qualifications. Due to this problem, pupils from the villages have to go to schools in the center of the municipality;
- ◆ Low-quality translation of textbooks and mismatch with the national curriculum;
- ◆ Language barrier; to eliminate this problem, the state needs to provide more free courses in the Georgian language;
- ◆ High rate of pupils dropping out of schools;
- ◆ Problems of employment in the public sector. There is discrimination against ethnic minorities;
- ◆ Absence of necessary conditions and infrastructure for students with disabilities in schools;
- ◆ Absence of a psychologist in schools to remove the psychological pressure that arose in the post-COVID-19 period.

According to the focus groups of Georgian-language schools, the following challenges were revealed:

- ◆ Unfinished programs in the subjects at schools post-COVID-19;
- ◆ Lack of social relations and alienation of children due to online learning;
- ◆ Problems with textbooks and lack of appropriate equipment (so-called laboratories).

● ► 7.1.1 NON-GEORGIAN LANGUAGE SCHOOLS

Lack of teachers and low competence

The research revealed that there is an insufficient number of teachers in the direction of STEM subjects in Azerbaijani and Armenian schools. According to the interviewed teachers, a particularly difficult situation can be observed in physics due to lack of teachers. According to the respondents, this problem is caused by two reasons. The first reason is a lack of knowledge of the Georgian language on the part of the teachers - they cannot thoroughly teach physics or other STEM subjects with Georgian textbooks. Another reason is the quality of the textbooks, which can make teaching the STEM subjects difficult. According to teachers, this problem existed before COVID-19, but the state has not taken effective steps in this direction.

The teachers could not identify any professional training course that would solve this problem. According to the respondents, the situation is slightly better in schools where Georgian consultants are employed as part of the state programs, such as "teach Georgian as a second language". According to them, these consultants provide training to local teachers based on the level of the Georgian language, which positively impacts their language competence.

"In our district, in Samtskhe-Javakheti, the problem is mainly related to STEM subjects, mainly geography, chemistry, physics, and there is a shortage of such subjects, and recently the searchers' program has increased, that is, mostly searchers are involved in these programs and try to pass exams to become qualified in these subjects." (Parent, Akhaltsikhe)

Parents from Marneuli say that, in addition to STEM subjects, there is a problem of teaching foreign languages, especially English, in Azerbaijani-language schools. According to them, English language teachers are not qualified enough.

According to Armenian-speaking teachers, there is a problem with raising the qualifications of primary level teachers in their schools because the exam was not in Armenian. Therefore, teachers could not pass the exams. According to the respondent, this year, for the first time, similar exams were introduced in Armenian language, which is likely to solve this problem.

Textbook problems

According to interviewed ethnic minority teachers, the problem of textbooks is one of the biggest problems with the low language competence of teachers. According to teachers from the ethnic Azerbaijani community, there is a shortage of textbooks in their schools; for example, they do not have enough books for the fourth and seventh grades. According to one of the respondents, even though the state has to distribute books to all pupils, often only 8-9 books come to one class when there are many more students in the class. The teachers noted that, although the school often turns to the resource center to solve this problem, they are always met with an indifferent attitude from the latter, and the required number of books is not provided, which then hinders the quality of the learning/teaching process. According to parents, there may be enough textbooks in the school, but they are so outdated that students struggle to learn from them. According to one of the respondents:

"The textbooks that are given to us are from the library are old books. These textbooks have been used by many children, and the pages are missing, there is no cover, and we are having trouble in this regard." (Parent, Marneuli)

Furthermore, according to ethnic Azerbaijani teachers and parents, in addition to the lack of textbooks, there is also a problem with the quality of their translation. For example, textbooks in mathematics are translated in such a way that the exercises are completely incomprehensible to the pupils. Parents think that publishing houses have a problem with qualified personnel because they could not improve the quality of mathematics textbooks for so many years. According to a respondent parent, the textbooks are written in such an incomprehensible language that both pupil and parent have difficulty in understanding the content of the homework and often need to call the teacher for additional consultation. As the mentioned respondent says:

"Now it happens that the child widens his eyes and looks at me, 'Mom, what's this? How can I understand this?', sometimes I'm in such a situation that I can't understand, and how can I explain it to her, and then we have to call the teacher separately, to explain to the child that somehow we should at least do our homework." (Parent, Marneuli)

The research showed that, although there are attempts to adapt textbooks to fit the local context, and in this regard, local teachers have also been involved in the process of translating and adapting textbooks, there are still various bureaucratic barriers due to which good textbooks have not yet reached their schools, according to the respondents. According to them, translation, approval, and recognition of textbooks take too long. According to the interviewed teachers, not only a philologist, but also a mathematics teacher should be involved in the translation of the mathematics textbook, so that the conditions of the exercises can be conveyed correctly, and finally, the textbook should be edited by a person who knows both Georgian and Azerbaijani languages at a high level.

As for the opinion of the Armenian language school teachers regarding the textbooks, they also agree that there are textbooks in the school that are useless for pupils. In this regard, foreign language textbooks, in particular English, are problematic. One of the English teachers from Akhaltsikhe says that the existing textbook for the eighth grade is incomprehensible and is difficult to use in the learning/teaching process. Armenian-speaking parents agree with Azerbaijani-speaking parents and say that mathematics and physics textbooks have problems with adequate translation and presentation of exercises.

"Those subjects that have been translated, for example, in mathematics, it is often found that mistakes are made in translation, and sometimes children find it difficult. That is, he reads the exercise instructions and the child does not understand. It is wrongly translated, that's the problem we have." (Parent, Akhaltsikhe)

One of them even remembered that physics is no longer taught in the twelfth grade, but 12th grade is still written on the textbooks. At the same time, one of the Armenian language teachers says that some textbooks are often asynchronous with the updated national curriculum, but they have to follow the national curriculum instead of the textbook, and additionally search for the material that should be covered by the national curriculum. This requires additional time and effort, which means less time can be devoted to pupils. According to them, it would be good if the textbooks are aligned with the national curriculum.

Language barrier

According to the interviewed Azerbaijani-speaking teachers, they generally like the program "Learn Georgian as a Second Language" and the language study courses within its framework; however, according to them, it is not enough for them.

Like teachers, parents also express a positive attitude towards the program "Learn Georgian as a second language". According to them, the objectives within the framework of this program and the consultants involved in it help teachers and pupils master the Georgian language. One of the parents says:

"We like the program "Learn Georgian as a second language" because children learn the language easily. Of course, they live in Georgia, and they should know not only Azerbaijani, but also Georgian as a native speaker." (Parent, Marneuli)

However, at the same time, parents say that apart from this program, their children have no other help and support from the state in terms of language learning. According to one of the respondent parents, learning Georgian is especially difficult for pupils whose parents do not know Georgian. The respondent parent think that it would be good if the state creates retraining courses for parents as well.

Respondents also have a positive attitude towards the "1+4" program, stating that the program is good, it helps young people improve their language, but unfortunately, this does not affect their employment chances. Young people of Azerbaijani origin, even those who study Georgian, cannot find jobs in the public sector.

The attitude of Armenian-speaking teachers and parents regarding the "1+4" program also aligns with the opinion of Azerbaijani-speaking teachers. According to them, the "1+4" program is successful and useful for young people in terms of improving their state language skills. According to one of the Akhaltsikhe parent respondents:

"1+4 is a very good program. Many people benefit from it, almost 80% of applicants pass through this program. If we remember our time before, most of them went to Armenia to continue studying there. Now, when this program is available, everyone is trying to pass it. It is really a good program and everyone is satisfied." (Parent, Akhaltsikhe)

High rate of dropping out of schools

According to interviewed Azerbaijani school teachers, the dropout rate is still high, mainly because of early marriage for young women and seasonal work for young men. According to the respondents, the state has not yet taken any effective steps and does not conduct any information campaign about early marriage and seasonal work as an obstacle to education for young people. However, according to teachers, the problem of early marriage and school dropouts caused by seasonal jobs has started to improve a little, since local parents have already become willing to educate their children and find other, suitable means of employment.

The attitude of parents from Marneuli coincides with the opinion expressed by teachers that dropping out of school is not so common anymore due to early marriage and seasonal jobs. However, this problem is still on the agenda, and the state has not yet implemented any specific plan to eliminate it. According to one of the respondents, the mentioned problem is faced by socially vulnerable and economically low-class families:

"In order to help families, children have to miss school because they are in trouble at home. Even if they receive help from the state, they still have to work, because if the child does not study, he leaves the 9th grade and works with a craft or something." (Parent, Marneuli)

Vocational education and employment problems

Interviewed Azerbaijani-speaking teachers agree that in the last decade there has been an increase in interest in vocational education among ethnic Azerbaijani youth, which is due to increased access to such education. There is a public college "Modus" in Marneuli, which, in order to interest children, often organizes open-door days, so pupils can see the current situation in the college with their own eyes and find out which professions they can learn. However, the study revealed that there are problems with employment in the public sector for young people from the Azerbaijani community. According to them, it may be a certain form of discrimination against ethnic minorities that Azerbaijani youth are not employed in City Halls and local municipalities, police, court, prosecutor's offices, and other public services.

Marneuli's parents also agree with the mentioned opinion. According to them, regardless of education, ethnic Azerbaijani youths find it difficult to find employment, so they are forced to enter vocational education. According to one of the parent respondents:

"Young people, especially men, mostly learn crafts and work there. They may be graduating from school or higher education, but, as everywhere, in Marneuli, it is difficult to find a job. Finding a job is not that easy. A child may graduate from something, but he cannot work in his profession, and he is engaged in other things on his own. They do not work with their profession." (Parents, Marneuli).

The research showed that, additionally, young men in the Marneuli district are interested in learning IT technologies in order to be employed in the private sector. As for young women, according to the respondents, they are more often employed in banks, pharmacies, or private clinics. Employment in the public service is also unavailable for them.

Armenian-speaking teachers say that there is also a problem with the employment of people of Armenian origin in public service in their district, although this does not apply to young people who have received higher education.

"Yes, from the ethnic minority population, a lot of people work in banks, they work in the municipality, in the city hall, in various institutions, in universities, in schools. In other words, those who have graduated from the university have employment prospects." (Teacher, Akhaltsikhe)

Absence of necessary infrastructure for pupils with SEN

Both Armenian-speaking and Azerbaijani-speaking respondents agree that the main problem in their schools is the lack of an adapted learning environment for pupils with special educational needs. Respondents said that schools do not have ramps and adapted toilets. It is true that there are good teachers in this direction, so-called special teachers. There is also a resource room, although infrastructural malfunctions still create many problems, and the state has not yet taken effective steps to eliminate them. According to a respondent, one of the Armenian language teachers, Armenian language materials and resources for pupils with special educational needs are also problematic:

"I am a special teacher. Since our school is an Armenian-language school, there is a shortage of Armenian-language resources. The environment is not adapted, there are no ramps." (Teacher, Akhaltsikhe)

Absence of a psychologist in schools to alleviate psychological pressure that arose in the post-COVID-19 period.

Both Azerbaijani-speaking and Armenian-speaking school teachers and parents say that despite the difficulties of the COVID-19 and post-COVID-19 periods, schools do not have psychologists to help pupils and teachers manage the learning process. There are several challenges in schools in the post-COVID-19 era. For example, high psychological stress for pupils and teachers that is caused by staying at home and online learning during the COVID-19 period. Pupils are attached to their phones and find it very difficult to attend classes after going back to school. According to the teachers, the pupils are used to distance learning and find it difficult to attend classes offline. However, the state has not yet taken any effective steps in this direction, there have been no meetings with schools regarding how to deal with the post-COVID-19 challenges. Aside from this, there are no psychologists in the schools to help pupils overcome the difficulties they face in the process of learning offline.

● ► 7.1.2 GEORGIAN LANGUAGE SCHOOLS

Falling behind in school subjects in post-COVID-19 conditions

Parents of Georgian-language schools from Tbilisi and the regions say that the period of COVID-19 caused pupils to lag behind in subjects, which was especially evident in the post-COVID-19 period. This may be caused by the fact that, for example, in some schools in the region, teachers in physics and geography could not complete the full course and some topics remained to be explained. The second major problem that the research represented in Georgian-language schools is pupils' laziness and attachment to electronic gadgets, phones and computers.

According to the parents of the Georgian-speaking regional school, in the post-COVID-19 period, perhaps the biggest problem in schools is that pupils have fallen behind in STEM subjects and foreign languages. According to one of the parent respondents:

"For example, in geography and physics, we think that we would be further ahead and the learning level would be higher if we were in the class for the whole year. Even the child himself says that it was a little difficult for him, for example, physics would be better in class." (Parent, region)

According to parents living in Tbilisi, during the period of COVID-19, pupils need additional training in STEM and foreign language subjects in order to pass the entrance exams to universities. In these subjects, pupils in Georgian-language schools in Tbilisi may not be able to acquire the appropriate knowledge for admission to higher education institutions. According to the parents, this problem is caused by two reasons, the lack of class time and the number of pupils in the class. According to them, it is difficult to teach anything to more than 30 pupils in 45 minutes.

Lack of social relationships and alienation of children due to online learning

The lack of social interaction during online learning has caused pupils to become alienated from each other. According to parents, this problem was mostly revealed during the post-COVID-19 pandemic, when children returned to classrooms. According to one of the respondents:

"The children, the classmates themselves, became very alienated from each other because of this online learning. The lack of relationships is one of the problems now when these restrictions have been removed and we have gone to school, the children are like strangers to each other. Moreover, it is difficult for them to sit in class and listen to the teacher." (Parent, Tbilisi)

According to the parents of Georgian-language schools in Tbilisi and the regions, the school, the administration and teachers are trying to help pupils adapt to the difficulties of the post-COVID-19 period, but they do not have any written tasks in the curriculum. Teachers tried to solve the problem by conducting consultations and meetings with parents. According to them, the teachers of some subjects made an exception and additionally started meeting with the pupils who were lagging behind in some subjects. However, the state has not yet done anything else in this direction.

The problem of textbooks in Georgian schools

According to the parents of pupils in Georgian-language schools in Tbilisi and the regions, the STEM textbooks are a little unclear for the pupils, the examples given in the textbooks are confusing for them, and, at the same time, are insufficient. The teachers have to ask the pupils to find additional sources in order to better understand topics. The research showed that parents do not like English textbooks either, stating that these textbooks are a little difficult and unclear for pupils, especially for those whose parents do not know English and are unable to help their children. According to a parent of one of the Georgian language schools:

"I think that even the English textbook is not well organized for children. The children whose parents know English were able to help them to follow the lessons, and the children whose parents did not know it had difficulties. I would also include a few more examples in mathematics and physics, there are very few exercises, and the teacher sometimes has to find additional exercises." (Parent, Tbilisi)

Along with the problem of textbooks, there is a problem with laboratories. Most schools do not have modern, well-equipped physics and chemistry laboratories.

7.2 RESULTS OF THE REGIONAL MEETING

The project team went to one of the regions and held an informative meeting with public school teachers and teachers' union representatives. During the mentioned meeting, a discussion was held to identify the challenges in the education system in the post-COVID-19 period. Particular attention was paid to the problems and needs of vulnerable groups.

● ► 7.2.1 CHALLENGES IN THE EDUCATION SYSTEM IN THE POST-COVID-19 PERIOD

One of the main challenges revealed during the meeting with the teachers is the lack of motivation on the part of both the pupils and the teacher. During the discussion, it was mentioned that the reason for the pupil's lack of motivation can be dependence on gadgets, and for the teacher, the pupils' apathy. As the respondent teacher points out, this problem was there even before COVID-19, but the pandemic worsened the situation even more.

"In recent years, pupils' interest in learning has been very low. There is a lack of motivation, pupils only wonder when the lesson will be over so that they can go home and grab the tablet."

The pandemic has highlighted the need for teachers to develop technological skills. One of the respondents points out that it is necessary for every teacher to cope with the challenges presented by the specific time and requirements.

In addition, to provide better education to children, it is important that the school has technical support to use the resources available on the Internet. The meeting revealed that most schools have technical problems, the Internet is not available, projectors and computers are few in number and also outdated.

One of the main problems for schools is infrastructure problems, especially in the regions. In some educational institutions, the learning environment is completely unsuitable for the learning process. Due to a similar problem, one of the teachers notes:

"The problem is the infrastructure in the school. For example, it would be much easier for me to conduct a lesson on the Teams platform than at school because I do not have the resources."

Most teachers admit that overcrowding in classes prevents them from giving each student proper attention and leads to increased rates of student referrals. To solve this problem, according to the teachers, classes of 25-27 people should be divided into 15 people.

The next challenge that emerged is the lack of Teams management skills on the part of teachers. One of the teachers from the region says that teachers living in rural areas have found it very difficult to adapt to distance learning due to a lack of internet, technology, and digital literacy skills. At the same time, their desire to acquire these skills was very low. Some of the teachers chose to rely on the help of others instead of attending the training and studying.

"When the director of the training center offered me this kind of 6-hour Teams training module and asked me to send a list of those who are interested, I could not find a single teacher in Kutaisi. The conclusion was as follows: rather than sitting for 6 hours of training, I prefer to get by the help of my cousins."

As the meeting showed, the lack of motivation was also due to the fact that the majority of teachers have quite busy mandatory training to attend and adding another training is tiring for them.

"These chronic training are also bad, and proper management will be to attend only the training sessions you need."

When analyzing the post-COVID-19 situation, teachers point out that there are huge losses due to the decline in the quality of education. These losses especially apply to children of the first and second grades, who could not acquire the skills corresponding to the educational process along with reading and writing ability. As one of the teachers says when talking about losses:

"We returned to the school, there was a summary, and we found out that there are huge losses. Today, we have the biggest losses in terms of pupil learning, and we must try to eliminate these losses somehow."

The majority of teachers believe that in order to improve the system, the school should acquire autonomy, but this needs to be functional autonomy, which means that they can develop a plan adapted to the needs of their school. As such, excessive bureaucracy will be avoided and the school will actually be able to put the child's interests ahead of everything else.

"The school should have autonomy in the educational process. In this case, the state can give me a framework, I will work to meet the curriculum, but in what form should be decided by me."

● ► 7.2.2 CHALLENGES OF VULNERABLE GROUPS

One of the topics discussed during the meeting was the problems of pupils with special educational needs, disabilities, and ethnic minority pupils and the necessary steps for their full inclusion in the education system. The main problem identified is the parents' recognition that their child has certain needs.

"The main problem in this regard is that it is very difficult for the parent to recognize the child's condition, and if he does not have severe symptoms, the rest of the behavior becomes a nuisance, which interferes with the quality of his education."

In addition to parents' recognition, it is also important to be actively involved in the development of the child and to cooperate with the school in order to provide inclusive education to the child.

"If the child has been granted the status, parents think that they should not be active anymore, but that status obliges them to be involved as much as possible. So, cooperation is complicated between parents, teacher, and pupil. This triangle does not arise if the parents are standing to the side."

In addition, the pandemic has put vulnerable pupils in a challenging situation, as it is difficult for them to sit and listen to online classes. At the same time, it became impossible to provide them with individual assistance due to the strictness of the introduced restrictions. Assistants could not come to their home, which also brought the parent and his active involvement to the fore.

The meeting showed that there is an insufficient number of special teachers in schools. Their low wages make this profession even more unattractive. All this makes it difficult to work with persons with SEN. Together with these factors, it becomes even more difficult to work with them if the class is numerous and the teacher has to think of different activities to involve all pupils equally in the learning process.

"If there are two children in the class with different diagnoses, you should give them different activities. It is much harder if, with these two SEN pupils, you have other 26 pupils in the class. It is difficult to work with this if you have a large number of classes, and this is very big challenge for teachers. If you remove the child from the class and take him out, then there is no point, he is no longer socialized."

Another big problem for vulnerable groups is that they have no employment prospects. As it was mentioned during the meeting, after graduation, pupils with these needs cannot be employed in either public or private services and have to isolate from society. Consequently, the skills needed for socialization acquired at school are not realized.

"As for the employment of SEN pupils, it is a big challenge in Georgia. For example, last year two such pupils graduated our school, two before that, and they are unemployed, sitting at home, helping their mother."

One of the major challenges is the lack of appropriate infrastructure. Most schools in the district do not have ramps, making it impossible for people with disabilities to move without assistance. There is also a lack of resources and information.

"These resource rooms are not well-equipped. The resource room is an ordinary classroom, where there is furniture, they have special equipment, materials, they have modelling clay, pencils for each pupil, the parents bring them, or the school buys for them, their appropriate furniture."



EDUCATION SECTOR

Allocation of more financial resources to the education sector is necessary to increase the attractiveness of teaching as a profession and increase the overall quality of study.

In 2021, the resources allocated by Georgia to the education sector as a percentage of GDP are at their lowest level in the last 10 years. This leads to low pay for teachers and lack of appropriate educational infrastructure. At the same time, the teachers' workload has increased, and the teaching profession is becoming increasingly unpopular. Along with the abovementioned, there is a problem of insufficient number of teachers in areas inhabited by ethnic minorities, in mountainous villages, and in the regions in general.

Reducing the number of pupils in classes will help improve the effectiveness of the learning process, as opportunities to monitor the students will increase. It is also desirable to increase social interaction among students in the post-COVID-19 learning environment to overcome the alienation caused by online learning.

Qualitative research conducted in focus groups revealed that the excess number of students is a significant challenge for the educational process. Additionally, in the post-COVID-19 period, most students have found it very difficult to renew social relationships with their classmates, which indicates the increased need for activities that can help children return to their normal lifestyles. Special attention should be given to students with SEN who were unable to receive appropriate services to meet their needs due to COVID-19, so that they can both receive quality education and interact with their peers.

The general education system needs fundamental research-based reform, including the improvement of the criteria required for graduation, which can have a positive impact on student motivation, choice of vocational and higher education, and, consequently, on the quality of education.

The unemployment rate in Georgia's workforce with higher education is much higher than in other countries, which is due to the fact that the higher education system supplies the economy with graduates who are not ready to meet the demands of the modern labor market. Reforms in general education, such as improving graduation criteria, can change the distribution of students in vocational and higher education. This will help the country develop qualified human capital and promote the integration of the population into the labor market.

The state should develop a plan for emergencies in order to reduce the impact of unpredictable events and to ensure that the system is ready for all challenges in case a quarantine is announced again due to the pandemic.

The COVID-19 pandemic has shown us that it is necessary to have a plan for emergencies, so that the education system can function properly during unexpected changes. In the post-COVID-19 period, it is especially important to have such a plan, because in the case of a sudden increase in the positivity rate, it is possible that educational institutions will be closed again, and the state should be prepared for such cases.

Assess the specific needs of teachers in technology and various skills, so that their training is carried out according to specific directions, including in the direction of information technologies.

The study showed that teachers have to go through different trainings to receive their salary supplement, even though these trainings do not consider the needs of each of them. For the smooth delivery of general education to students, it is necessary to assess the needs of teachers and offer them necessary training accordingly. Otherwise, training is a waste of time. All teachers should have a variety of technology skills in case distance learning methods are used again.

ETHNIC MINORITIES AND VULNERABLE GROUPS

It is important to increase the number and availability of Georgian language courses to ensure that ethnic minorities can integrate with the society and receive quality education.

Qualitative research conducted in focus groups revealed that representatives of ethnic minorities living in rural areas do not know the Georgian language well and therefore cannot help their children get quality education. Thus, it is necessary for the state to provide more Georgian language courses in different locations. In addition, both teachers and parents should be attending the courses, so that each child has an equal opportunity to receive quality education.

In order to solve the problem of textbooks, it is necessary to involve not only a philologist in the translation process, but also a specialist of the subject that is being translated. In addition, in order for the textbooks to be aligned with the national curriculum, timely translation and distribution to each school are required.

There are many errors in the textbooks published in the languages of ethnic minorities, which makes the textbooks much more difficult to understand. The focus group showed us that it is necessary to quickly and qualitatively translate, approve, and recognize the textbooks, for which the involvement of specialists in various subjects and the proper functioning of resource centers are required.

For the residents of villages with insufficient teachers or no schools, the state should ensure the transportation process of students to school and from school to home.

Qualitative research conducted in focus groups revealed that there is an insufficient number of teachers in ethnic minority schools, and some villages have no schools at all. The state must ensure transportation for students from such villages so that all children have equal access to quality education.

It is necessary for the state to conduct an information campaign on early marriage as a barrier to education for young people.

Although there is a downward trend in the dropout rate for ethnic minorities, the rate is still very high, especially among the Azerbaijani community. As the respondents mentioned, effective steps are not being taken by the state in this regard, and to solve this problem, it is necessary to raise public awareness. Because of this, the government should develop a plan, conduct training, and print brochures to guarantee that every person understands the essence of this problem.

It is also necessary for the state to provide internship and employment programs in order to involve both ethnic minorities and persons with SEN in economic activities.

In order for vulnerable groups to be fully included in economic activities, it is necessary to have a variety of internship and employment programs for them in the public sector. As the regional discussion revealed, most students with SEN who graduated from school are unemployed, are distanced from society, and cannot use the skills they acquire thanks to the individual plan, special teachers, and assistants in the school. Thus, the goals of inclusive education cannot be realized if the state does not ensure the creation of equal employment opportunities for each member of society, regardless of their ethnic origin.

It is necessary to collect statistical data about the employment of the beneficiaries of the internship program within the framework of the "1+4" program.

Although the "1+4" program gives young people from ethnic minorities the opportunity to receive internships in various public services, there is no statistical data on the employment of these persons. Thus, it is necessary to calculate the employment rate to properly assess the program's success rate.

It is necessary for the state to ensure the contracture of the infrastructure for each school and adapt it according to the needs of persons with SEN and PWD. Additionally, it is essential to provide resource rooms with modern resources and equipment.

The state must ensure appropriate learning conditions for all students. In order to improve the learning environment, it is necessary to renovate schools and equip them with various technologies, especially when it comes to schools in the regions. In order for vulnerable groups to be fully included in the educational process, it is necessary to create infrastructure adapted to their needs and to fully equip resource rooms.

A psychologist and a speech therapist must be added to schools, which will help both students with SEN and any other students cope with the stress caused by COVID-19 or other circumstances.

In order to alleviate the alienation and pressure created in the post-COVID-19 period and to provide appropriate counselling for students with SEN, it is necessary to have psychologists in schools. In addition, it is desirable to have speech therapists in schools to better integrate students with SEN.

For the effectiveness of the education policy, it is essential to plan and conduct events that involve parents to a greater degree in the educational process.

The regional meeting revealed that in the teaching process, it is necessary that the triangle between parent, teacher, and student function properly. This is especially important for students with SEN, to ensure their involvement in the educational process. Parental involvement will help the school in the process of providing inclusive education.

ABBREVIATIONS



CAGR - Compound Annual Growth Rate

ComCom - Georgia's Communications Commission

EMIS - Education Management Information System

Etc. - et cetera: and other similar things

EU - European Union

GDP - Gross domestic product

GeoStat - National Statistics Office of Georgia

GoG - Government of Georgia

IDFI - Institute for Development Freedom of Information

NGO - Non-governmental organization

OECD - Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development

OSCE - Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe

OSF - Open Society Foundation

p.p. - Percentage point

PV - Present Value

PWD - People with disabilities

SDG - Sustainable Development Goals

SEN - Special educational needs

STEM - Science, technology, engineering, and mathematics

TB - Terabyte

TDI - Tolerance and Diversity Institute

UNICEF - United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund

VAT - Value-added tax

YoY - Year-over-year

