



SDG LENS

Monitoring Sustainable Development
in Eastern Europe & South Caucasus



SPOTLIGHT REPORT ON THE IMPLEMENTATION OF SDG 4:

QUALITY EDUCATION IN GEORGIA

4 QUALITY
EDUCATION



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COUNTRY BACKGROUND

According to the 2022 SDG Index Georgia ranks 51 out of 163 and score 73,4, which is slightly higher than the regional average of 71,6. Along with sustainable economic growth, Georgia is characterized by a population aging trend, which significantly impacts various sectors and areas, including family productivity and economic growth, health and social protection, education, and employment.

According to the 2014 population census, the population of Georgia is 3.728 million (51.8% women and 48.02% men), where 32% lives in the capital city. Although the average age of the population is 39.9 years for women and 35 years for men, it is expected that the population share over 65 years of age will increase from 15.3% to 18.9% by 2030. In the last two decades, life expectancy has been steadily increasing; in 2019, it was 69.8 years for men and 78.4 years for women. The overall birth rate decreased from 2.3 to 2.0 between 2014 and 2019; the mortality rate varied from 13.6 to 12.5 per 1,000 people¹.

According to the World Bank 2019 data, Georgia belongs to a group of countries with high average incomes, with a gross domestic product per capita of 4,274.6 US dollars. The population below the absolute limit decreased by 17.8 percentage points from 2010 to 2019 and reached 19.5%; in 2020, it was recorded at 21.3%. In addition, in the background of economic growth, the social inequality index (Gini ratio) in Georgia is characterized by a tendency to decrease, and according to the data of the National Statistics Service 2020, it was 0.37% of the total income, while the unemployment rate reached 18.5%².

INTRODUCTION

Georgia, along with UN member states, is pursuing the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) and targets by 2030 and streamlining the country's policies toward the shared vision of the future. 17 SDGs and 93 targets as national priorities, baseline, and target values of 200 indicators have been adopted.

The SDG targets have been consistently and consciously included in the state policy agenda for the primary national objectives, reflecting the political priority given to the SDGs, which is counted as a noticeable improvement alongside developing the SDG tracking system. Noteworthy, the education sector was among the few to integrate the SDG targets into the policy and budgetary documents in 2022.

Georgia has achieved near-universal participation in primary and lower secondary education; however, despite an upward trend, the enrolment rate is lower at the upper secondary level, with large variations by school location³.

¹ Chitanava and Ruijin, 2017

² Geostat, 2022

³ UNESCO Institute of Statistics, 2020

Despite significant progress, all levels of education are faced with quality challenges manifested in low learning outcomes (Georgia performs worse than all EECCA⁴ countries in reading, math, and science and is behind most of the OECD countries) and difficulties for learners to progress in the education ladder.

This report is focused on implementing SDG 4 in Georgia and covers the period since the second voluntary report was published in 2020. Specifically, we analyzed overall progress towards the SDG agenda in education, alongside both voluntary reports and the current policies in general education, and prioritized to analyze **Target 4.C1, which stands for: By 2030, substantially increase the supply of qualified teachers, including through international cooperation for teacher training in Georgia.** This decision is also framed by the post-pandemic contest, which put teachers on the frontlines and affected thousands of students' learning and development goals⁵.

The report is built on the statistics and available secondary data provided by the Ministry of Education and Science of Georgia (MoES) and its respective agencies. Simultaneously, analyses are conducted based on the shadow reports and research and policy papers that were produced by local and international organizations. The following chapters describe the main highlights and challenges regarding the target. The last chapter is dedicated to providing recommendations for civil society organizations and government bodies.

ANALYZING THE KEY ACHIEVEMENTS TOWARDS THE TARGET

Teacher quality is the key prerequisite to achieving any of the SDG 4 targets. Therefore, teacher retention and deployment practices have significant effects on issues of equity and quality. The Government and the Ministry of Education and Science of Georgia took responsibility for working out a long-term strategic plan for developing the general education system as a part of the Unified Strategy for 2022–2030⁶ and ensuring equal access to quality education for all. In this regard, access to quality teachers has proven to be a breakthrough towards improving the quality of learning and students' learning outcomes.

This chapter is wrapping up key achievements toward reaching the target. The localized indicator for the abovementioned targets is defined as a "percentage of teachers in pre-primary education and public schools at primary, lower secondary, and upper secondary levels who have relevant qualifications and/or have received at least the minimum organized teacher training (i.e., pedagogical training) (4.c.1)." From the perspective of completion of the target, this particular one was counted as achieved by 2018 although based on the available data, by 2019 the number of teachers slightly decreased to 92% (this was mainly caused by including the statistics of the pre-primary and early education institution personnel).

⁴ Eastern Europe, Caucasus and Central Asia

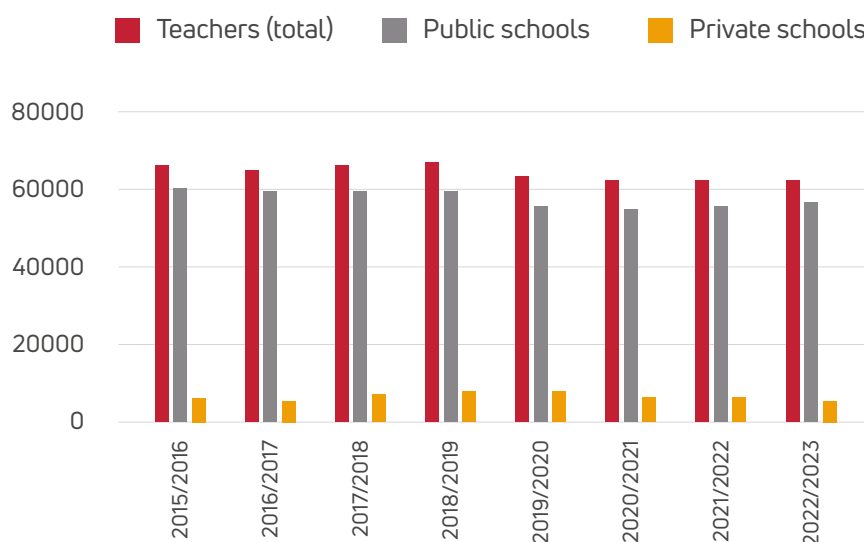
⁵ Kadagidze, 2021

⁶ National Education and Science Strategy of Georgia 2022-2032

In addition to that, the Teacher Professional Development and Career Enhancement Scheme has been abolished with the purpose of enhancing the teacher-oriented supporting and evaluation mechanisms and promoting professional development at the school level. That decision was also key to initiating the school authorization process.

Initially, regarding the policy dimension, the development of the teaching staff and the professionalization of teachers received a new impetus in 2019. One of the policy priorities was to support the teacher staff turnover. For this purpose, senior practitioner teachers (age 65+) were offered quite the career for the compensation. A total of 6,000 teachers opted for early pensions, and 2000 new teachers were recruited. The popularization of the teaching profession was also incentivized by the gradual increase in salary. There was an average 20% increase in the remuneration of the school directors, administration-technical personnel, including school doctors, and specialists supporting inclusive education between 2016 and 2022.

Teachers (total), Public schools and Private schools (2015-2023)

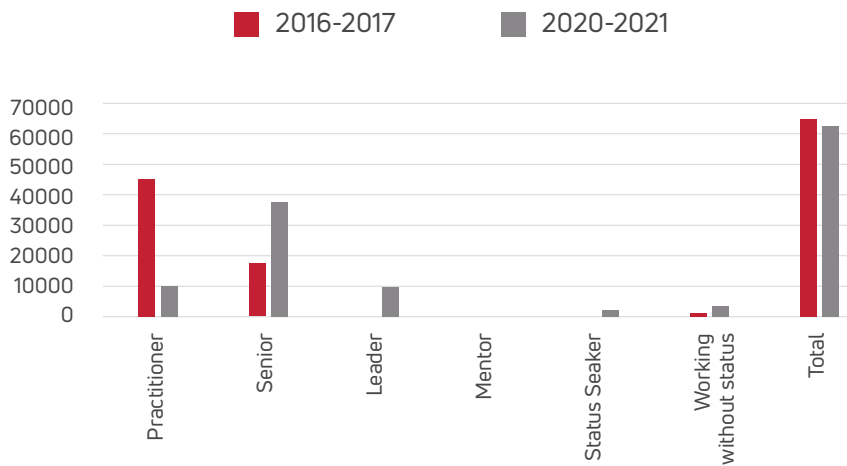


Source: Ministry of Education and Science, 2023

Overall, up to 62,000 teachers are employed in public and private institutions, and they are distributed to the teacher professional development ladder based on the certification and teacher professional development and career enhancement scheme. Teachers moving from one status to another have been used as an indirect indicator of improving teacher quality; therefore, additional certification training and examinations have been organized since 2019.

We could assume that the above-mentioned effort resulted in a significantly decreased number of the lowest-status teachers (practitioners). Regarding continuous professional development, Georgian teachers are engaged in mandatory training modules produced and administered by the MoES or TPDC, although it was only in recent years (2022) that it became available for non-Georgian language teachers to pass exams in their first language. These are exams that enable teachers to reach higher status.

Teacher distribution by status



Authors own calculation, based on the multiple, 2023

ANALYZING THE KEY CHALLENGES AND CONSTRAINTS TO REACH THE TARGET

It is estimated that 24.4 million teachers will be needed to achieve universal primary education by 2030⁷. The situation is exacerbated by high teacher attrition rates, which in some countries are surpassing recruitment rates⁸. It should be emphasized that despite some positive impact on the turnover of the teaching staff in Georgia, teacher quality, supply, and deployment issues are evident⁹. In this chapter, we will discuss the three main challenges that need to be tackled to make the target achievable by 2030.

Quality teacher supply and deployment. To begin with, the target indicator for the objective is the following - *The percentage of teachers in pre-primary education and public schools at the primary, lower secondary, and upper secondary levels who have relevant qualifications and/or have received at least the minimum organized teacher training (i.e., pedagogical training) lacks relevance and could no longer serve as the only indicator for quality teacher supply and deployment.* As shown above, the target is reached by 92%, while staffing in public education institutions is insufficient or poorly distributed¹⁰. There is a shortage of qualified teachers, especially in remote areas, as well as in non-Georgian schools. Particularly in STEM subjects. The shortage of teachers leads to the practice of combining the teaching of different subjects by teachers or deploying less qualified candidates. Non-Georgian language teachers, who made up 10% of the whole teacher cohort, have the highest level of teachers with only a full general education and, in some cases, a vocational education certificate, while the majority of Georgian-speaking schoolteachers possess at least an undergraduate degree.

⁷ UIS-UNESCO, 2016

⁸ UIS-UNESCO, 2016

⁹ OECD 2019; World Bank 2022

¹⁰ World Bank, 2022

Lack of long-term, evidence-based planning: Full General education (primary, basic, and secondary) is the biggest sub-sector of the education system, which underwent important systemic reforms over the last two decades, although teacher-related policies still lack evidence-based and long-term planning. The long-term plan of recruiting and deploying teachers has not yet been developed, even though the issue of filling vacant places was immediate after the retirement of 10% of the whole teacher cohort and the median age of the Georgian teacher cohort is relatively high. From 2016–2017 to the 2022–2023 academic years, the age of teachers has increased significantly. Accordingly, the number and specific share of teachers under 40 years of age have been drastically reduced. If in the 2016–2017 academic year the number of teachers under 40 was 15,277, by the last academic year their number was only 11,616. The subjects of the natural sciences are characterized by a high proportion of teachers over 60 years of age (physics 38%, chemistry 33%, biology 28.4%, as well as mathematics 29%)¹¹.

The only full-scale analysis that could support and guide this kind of policy decision and its implementation was carried out in 2008 by the Teacher Professional Development Center. Teacher demand trends were analyzed based on the newly developed formulas, and some scenarios were projected. It was projected that by 2018, approximately 20,000 new teachers would need to be trained and deployed. A teacher surplus was expected in certain subjects (e.g., Georgian language and literature, foreign language, and history). However, despite the excess of teachers in these subjects, we may have a different picture from the regional view, and the vacancy of teachers in some educational disciplines may not be filled.

Lastly and importantly, the regulatory framework for the teaching profession, along with the relevant state indicators to track and assess the teachers' professionalization, has not yet been revised, which lessens the efficiency of the teacher training and preparation programs. Generally speaking, initial teacher preparation currently lacks a graduate student standard as a reference point¹², programs are not up to date, and they do not meet the needs of the school communities as well as the teacher candidates¹³. By the same token, Georgian teachers are not eager to participate in non-mandatory PD programs, and about 1/3 of them are not involved at all, either in the teacher's professional development scheme or in additional activities apart from the scheme¹⁴. Among the conditions hindering participation in professional development activities, the most common is the absence of conditions encouraging participation in such activities. In particular, almost 36% of the interviewed teachers believe that this is the reason that hinders their participation in professional development activities¹⁵.

According to the state audit report, in 2019, 17,390 (29%) teachers reported that they did not get any training during the last 3 years. Teacher participation in professional development is a bigger issue in the non-Georgian communities¹⁶. The number of untrained teachers is the highest in Kvemo Kartli, which makes us predict that the majority of undertrained teachers could be Azerbaijani teachers.

¹¹ CCIR, 2023

¹² OECD, 2019

¹³ OECD, 2019

¹⁴ TALIS, 2018; OECD, 2019; National Audit Office, 2021

¹⁵ NAEC, 2018

¹⁶ Adeishvili, and others, 2022

Another argument in favor of this prediction is that during the 2020–2021 school year, about 150 teachers and school principals of both Armenian and Azerbaijani schools participated in the training on using the basic functions of the “Microsoft Teams” application, and about 60 assistant bilingual teachers were trained. Considering that, as of 2021, a total of 5,820 teachers are employed in Azerbaijani and Armenian schools, the number of teachers and school principals trained within the named training is particularly low¹⁷. Motivation of Azerbaijani teachers to take part in the programs could be low due to the lack of bilingual programs available as well as additional supporting/incentive schemes which would motivate them to seek and pursue professional development, to improve their teaching practice, and professional status.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The spotlight report and the presented recommendations are based on joint discussions conducted with teachers, teacher professional organizations, communities, and education specialists. The presented discussions include some medium-term interventions that will lure the decision-makers to boost the progress towards the implementation of the relevant SDG target.

■ **First and foremost, teachers’ professional image and status should be improved.**

This is important for both attracting teachers and also retaining them in the profession as well as preventing frustration. The COVID-19 pandemic showed that parents appreciated teachers’ work more after schools opted for online teaching, which, according to school principals, changed the climate in many settings positively¹⁸. Suggested interventions could be: supporting the public initiatives that try to promote the teaching profession; improving communication strategies in a way to provide media with relevant information and minimize the stigmatization of teachers in the public media; and increasing the capacity of the TV School project to become the key communication platform for the teachers.

■ **Recruiting and retaining effective teachers in schools.**

It is important to develop the mechanism and evaluate the teacher supply and demand trends, as well as teacher distribution across the regions and by gender, age, and subject. Based on the analysis, relevant long- and medium-term action plans need to be developed that define the strategies to address the teacher supply issues and ensure the smooth regrouping and mobility of the teachers. Considering the increased demand for both pre-primary and primary education and the criteria for teacher selection, that requires quick preparation to enter the professional phase and more intense in-service training. In this case, risk mitigation can be handled by making a probationary period mandatory and providing more support for novice teachers.

¹⁷ Public defender office of Georgia, 2021

¹⁸ Kadagidze, 2021

Improving the quality and administration of induction programs has been identified as one of the priorities in the general education action plan for 2022–2024. It will be important to strengthen the practice in minority schools as well and, if necessary, provide additional assistance. Diverse and accredited teacher education programs: Diversifying the CPD opportunities is important to ensure the quality and accessibility of the programs. Ongoing policy and practice need to shift from centralized governance to a more decentralized model, which will create opportunities to strengthen the teacher’s professional organization and develop more accessible and tailored programs. To prevent the risk of lowering the quality of the PD programs, relevant regulatory and accreditation mechanisms need to be implemented.

■ **How could civil society organizations boost the target implementation?**

Government effort needs to be strengthened towards pursuing the smooth implementation of the targets, while the CSOs’ role undoubtedly needs to be reconsidered and strengthened. After discussing the key challenges related to the teacher policies and to this target in particular, we framed the two targeted recommendations for the CSO sector, which could support not only the implementation process of the SDG target but also empower the teacher community and education advocacy campaigns in Georgia.

■ **Joint advocacy campaign for improving teacher policies.**

The education ecosystem in Georgia has been dismembered over decades, which affects the overall policy advocacy capacity in the sector. For this reason, teacher professional organizations, associations, and policy oriented CSOs need to actively engage with each other and coordinate their work and advocacy to ensure that the most important issues get the spotlight at the policy level. Regarding the target, it would be helpful to organize the panel discussions about the target, draw the key recommendations, and state them under the name of the CSOs. This process could also be handled in the framework of the newly adopted Action Plan for implementing SDGs in Georgia. Through this process, several collaborative actions can be agreed upon, integrated, and endorsed by all the shareholders.

■ **Strengthen the watchdog practices and ensure that teachers voices are heard.**

The CSO sector could immensely contribute to the SDG implementation process and specifically the above-discussed target through developing the shadow monitoring practices and providing the analytical insights on a regular basis. This would be helpful not only for informing the education community in Georgia but also the international partners who support the education sector and specifically target teachers. Additionally, CSOs should strengthen teachers and empower them to speak up for their professional needs and be proactive in the development of policies that directly affect their work. This could be handled by supporting teacher collaboration and establishing safe and supportive platforms for them to openly discuss their challenges and mobilize themselves for advocating their goals.

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