**Annex**

**Vocational Education Strategy 2024-2030**

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# Introduction

Vocational education can play an important role in the socio-economic development of the country and in reducing poverty. Quality vocational education contributes to the strengthening of human capital, reducing unemployment, supporting decent employment, increasing innovation and competitiveness, "green" transformation, social inclusion, the well-being of the population and, thus, the sustainable and inclusive development of the country.

Providing quality vocational education is one of the priorities of the Government of Georgia. This has been reflected in the large-scale reforms, capacity building and increased funding over the past decade. This strategy responds to Georgia's challenges such as globalization, rapid changes in technologies and labor market, demand for new skills, digital and green transformation of the country, environmental and social challenges, unemployment and poverty.

The strategy aims to promote quality vocational education for any individual, development of lifelong competencies and self-realization, which ensures the country's socio-economic development and European integration.

The main priorities of the strategy are established based on the best European practice[[1]](#footnote-1):

* **Equal access and inclusiveness**: Access to quality vocational education is a fundamental right for all individuals, regardless of their background, gender, age, socio-economic status or ability. Reducing barriers to access and participation, especially for groups with different needs, is a priority.
* **Relevance and Adaptability**: In a rapidly changing economic environment, the priority of vocational education is t to develop those competences in youngsters that are in demand both in the local and global labor market.
* **Quality improvement**: the strategy prioritizes the improvement of the quality of vocational education, compliance of educational programs with international standards, training of VET teachers and continuous professional development, modernization of equipment and infrastructure of vocational educational institutions, implementation of innovative teaching-evaluation methodologies in order to prepare competent work force and improve their further transition to work in the labor market.
* **Integration of technology and innovation**: Prioritizing the use of digital and emerging technologies, including the capabilities of artificial intelligence, to improve the delivery and effectiveness of vocational education.
* **Partnerships**: The strategy will promote synergy between educational institutions, industry stakeholders, government agencies and civil society organizations to develop a unified ecosystem based on partnerships.
* **Promoting lifelong learning and upskilling/reskilling**: The strategy will promote a culture of lifelong learning, offering individuals flexible ways to develop skills to acquire new skills and competencies throughout their careers.
* **Mobility**: supporting the mobility of persons involved in vocational education (vocational students, vocational education teachers, administrative staff and others) across Europe to promote improvement of skills and cross-cultural awareness.

The strategy is in compliance with the "Vision 2030 - Development Strategy of Georgia" and "Unified National Strategy of Education and Science of Georgia 2022-2030" approved by the government. This strategy also takes into account the achievements and challenges of the Vocational Education Reform Strategy (2013-2020) and creates the basis for the next stage of the reform. Despite the progress achieved, there remain some challenges in terms of quality, accessibility, relevance, management, autonomy and accountability of vocational education, which are to be overcome within the framework of the new strategy.

During the development of the strategy, the following documents were taken into consideration: Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) - 2030 developed by the United Nations, the Education 2030 Action Framework (UNESCO 2015), the Analysis of Global Trends by UNESCO, the Osnabrück Declaration (2020), the European Agenda for Adult Learning and the Qualification Recommendation. Association Agreement between the European Union and the European Atomic Energy Union and their member states of the one part and Georgia, of the other part (26.07.2014), ELGPN (European Lifelong Guidance Policy Network) Concept Note No. 1., No. 2., No. 3., No. 4.), the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UN, 2006), the Convention against Discrimination in Education (UN, 1960), etc.

During the development of the strategy the 2030 Agenda for the Development of Vocational Education of the European Union was taken into account, which is ambitious and multifaceted; It aims to create a sustainable, inclusive, innovative and high-quality vocational education ecosystem that can respond to the challenges of digital and green transformation. Emphasis is placed on making vocational education more attractive, accessible, inclusive and relevant to the needs of the modern labor market, so that young people and adults can develop the necessary skills throughout their lives[[2]](#footnote-2).

The strategy has been developed based on extensive consultation with stakeholders. It reflects the vision of educational institutions, employers, local and international vocational education specialists, civil society organizations, and donors regarding the development of the vocational education system. Along with the above, the strategy takes into account the best international and local practices of vocational education approaches.

It should be noted that important components of the vocational education system are supported by donor organizations. Among them are the European Union (EU), the United Nations Development Program (UNDP), the Asian Development Bank (ADB), the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), the German Society for International Cooperation (GIZ), the German Reconstruction Credit Bank (KFW), the Swiss Development Bank and Cooperation Agency (SDC), etc. With the support of the mobilization of financial resources of the state and donor organizations the possibility of gradual modernization of the vocational education system was created in accordance with international standards and recommendations.

Active participation of stakeholders, as well as close cooperation and coordination with international donor organizations is important for the successful implementation of the strategy. For the successful implementation of the strategy, it is necessary to use an evidence-based approach, to provide monitoring and evaluation mechanisms that will help to assess the progress and effectiveness of the strategy.

# 1. Situational Analysis

Georgia is a country with a higher than average income, whose average real economic growth in 2014-2023 was 5.0% (geostat, 2023). Despite the global economic challenges, Georgia maintained its growth trend, which reached 11% in 2022 and 7.5% in 2023. The improvement in Georgia's economic performance in 2023 was supported by increased investment inflows, especially in sectors such as tourism, agriculture and energy, improving the business environment and attracting foreign investment.

The population is 3.736 million (geostat, 2024). The age structure is changing and the share of young people is decreasing (from 21.8% in 2011 to 17.8% in 2018, 17.4% in 2021, 17.3% in 2022), as a result, the working-age population and the level of activities are also decreasing. A decline in youth participation leads to a decline in the future labor force, which affects economic productivity and growth.

Despite the economic development, the labor market of Georgia still has such challenges as the high level of unemployment, which has fluctuated between 16%-23% in the last 10 years and reached 16.4% in 2023 (geostat, 2024). Youth unemployment is particularly high; Around 25% of 15-24 year olds were unemployed in 2023-2024, highlighting the country's socio-economic challenges.

A significant part of Georgia's workforce works in the informal economy (27.6%, geostat, 2023) and in rural areas (32.7%), which creates challenges in terms of job security, social protection and income growth.

There is a mismatch between demand and supply of skills (ETF, 2021). This discrepancy hinders productivity and attracting investment in highly productive areas. In the IV quarter of 2022, almost half of the surveyed companies had difficulties in finding personnel due to the insufficient level of knowledge and skills of the applicants (BAG, 2023).

Gender inequality is observed in the labor market, which is a challenge in terms of inclusive economic growth. The labor force participation rate among women is 54.4% and among men 72.4% (Geostat, 2023). The hourly wage gender gap is observed in almost all sectors in favor of men. In 2022, the ratio of women's wages to men's wages was 68.3%, which is 0.3 percent lower than one of 2021 (Geostat, 2023).

Both internal and external migration of the country play an important role in the formation of the Georgian labor market. Many people with work experience seek employment opportunities abroad, and rural-urban migration increases rural unemployment (International Organization for Migration, 2023). Additionally, as of September 1, 2022, 8% (3,884) of enterprises have 17,851 foreign citizens employed, which is 2% of total employment. Compared to the corresponding period of 2021, the employment of foreign citizens increased by 78%[[3]](#footnote-3).

**Table 1. Selected indicators 2020-2023**

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Indicators**  | **2020** | **2021** | **2022** | **2023** |
| GDP in current prices, billion USD dollars  | 49.8 | 60.7 | 72.9 | 80.2 |
| GDP, actual growth (%) | -6.2  | 10.6 | 11.0 | 7.5 |
| Level of activity (% 15+) | 51.4 | 51.5 | 52.3 | 53.0 |
| Level of employment (% 15+) | 41.0 | 41.8 | 43.5 | 45.5 |
| Level of unemployment (% 15+) | 18.5 | 20.6 | 17.3 | 16.4 |
| Level of employment of new graduates (20-34 წ)  | 49.4 | 49,1 | 48.2 | 54.8 |
| Level of unemployment of young people (% 15-24) | 31.2 | 33.4 | 30.6 | 26.7 |

 *Source: geostat 2021, 2022, 2023*

The Association Agreement between Georgia and the European Union (2014) constitutes the basis for long-term political and economic cooperation and bringing the reform process closer to EU standards, including the area of education. The government of Georgia started the process of nationalization of sustainable development goals in 2015. Ensuring access to vocational education is important for achieving United Nations Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 4 (quality education), 5 (gender equality) and 8 (decent work and economic growth).

Georgia's efforts are also in line with the UN Youth 2030 Strategy and the Education 2030 Framework for Action, which emphasize developing youth skills for decent employment and entrepreneurship.

## 1.1. Management and financing of vocational education

The Ministry of Education, Science and Youth is responsible for the development of the state policy of vocational education. The Law of Georgia on Vocational Education (2018) envisages strengthening the role of both the private sector and local self-government in the management of vocational education. Vocational education development policy involves the management of vocational education with the active involvement of the private sector, which will contribute to the introduction of vocational programs demanded in the labor market, support of innovative teaching, improvement of competition and creation of better employment opportunities.

On April 28, 2021, as a result of the cooperation between the government of Georgia and the private sector, the Ministry of Education and Science of Georgia and the Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Georgia jointly established a new model for the management of vocational education and the development of the skills ecosystem – N(N)LE Skills Agency. Within the framework of the policy of the Ministry of Education, Science and Youth of Georgia, the Agency coordinates various initiatives, for which it closely cooperates with the Ministry's agencies, sectoral Ministries, vocational educational institutions, international organizations and other interested parties in order to improve the quality, attractiveness and relevance of education.

In addition to the N(N)LE Skills Agency, the agencies of the Ministry of Education, Science and Youth of Georgia play an important role in the process of implementing vocational education policy - the National Center for the Educational Quality Enhancement (NCEQE), the Education Management Information System (EMIS), the Educational and Scientific a Infrastructure Development Agency (ESIDA) and institutions implementing vocational educational programs.

The involvement of the private sector in vocational education is carried out at the level of the system, sectoral and educational institutions.

System-level partnerships involve wider collaboration between government agencies, vocational education institutions and industry representatives to shape vocational education policies and strategic directions (OECD, 2019). In the context of cooperation at the system level, it is important to note that in 2021, a non-entrepreneurial (non-commercial) legal entity the Skills Agency was jointly established by the Georgian Chamber of Commerce and Industry and the Ministry of Education and Science of Georgia. The highest management body of the Skills Agency is the supervisory board which is staffed according to the principle of public-private partnership, with representatives of business associations and state organizations in the country (decision makers). The Board determines the policy of the agency and performs the most important functions for the effective operation of the organization.

In the context of cooperation at the sector level, it is important to mention partnerships in the process of developing and implementing specific sectoral policies with business associations, sectoral associations, sectoral skills organizations and others. Sectoral Skills Organization (SSO) is a sector-level organization that unites the main associations/clusters in the economic sector.

A regulatory framework for work-based learning was launched in 2022 detailing the role and functions of sectoral skills organizations. Currently, there are challenges related to sectoral skills organizations, such as the skepticism of large businesses towards sectoral organizations, while the participation of large business is very important for vocational education. As the largest employers in the labor market, they have the opportunity to play an important role in the development of human capital.

Partnerships at the level of vocational educational institutions include involvement in the development and implementation of educational programs in the direction of work-based learning. In addition, partner business organizations are often represented in the supervisory boards of institutions. The new initiative of the Ministry of Education, Science and Youth of Georgia, which envisages the introduction of participatory management models of vocational educational institutions, will significantly support the partnership at the level of vocational educational institutions.

Vocational education governance developed through strategic reforms and international cooperation; The involvement of the private sector has helped to improve the quality and relevance of vocational education. Companies make a significant contribution to the development and implementation of educational programs, including short-term vocational training and retraining programs, which increase the relevance of programs to the demands of the private sector and the needs of the labor market (ETF, 2019).

In this process, it is important to ensure the long-term sustainability of the partnership, to successfully implement policy initiatives based on the partnership, and to strengthen capacity, monitoring and evaluation mechanisms.

In addition to partnerships, the management of vocational education institutions varies per institutions, although management often lacks flexibility and innovation; Directors often try to use modern management approaches, but lack of resources and experience make this process difficult.

The system of continuous professional development of vocational teachers is not developed at the level of institutions; Professional development opportunities for vocational education teachers and instructors are not systematized and standardized, which puts teachers and instructors with different qualifications in unequal conditions.

Along with the increase in the scope of the vocational education reform, the vocational education budget is also growing, which was increased by 22% in 2017-2020. In 2023, the total budget for vocational education amounted to 115.7 million GEL, and for 2024, 133.5 million GEL is allocated.

**Table 2. Funding of vocational education (million GEL)**

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | 2020 | 2021 | 2022 | 2023 |
| Funding of vocational education (total public expenses) | 64.4 | 66.2 | 92.6 | 115.7 |

*Source: Ministry of Education, Science and Youth of Georgia*

At present, multifaceted information is available in the vocational education management information system, however, there is a need to improve the analytical processing of information and its use in the policy planning process.

## 1.2. Access to and participation in vocational education

Accessibility and participation in vocational education has been increasing in recent years, driven by the strengthening of the inclusive system and the expansion of opportunities for all citizens, regardless of their background or personal challenges. An inclusive approach to vocational education is in line with international standards and recommendations including UNESCO, which supports comprehensive strategies to make vocational education accessible to all (UNESCO, 2018).

The "Concept of Inclusive Vocational Education" was developed, which represents a strategic vision in the direction of creating the necessary political and legislative framework and implementing best practices to achieve inclusivity in the vocational and adult education system. The concept aims to ensure access to vocational education for all people with additional needs and vulnerable groups.

### 1.2.1. Network of vocational educational institutions

Participation in vocational education is influenced, among other factors, by the availability of the geographic network of vocational education and its capacity at the regional or municipal level.

As of 2023, 76 educational institutions had the right to implement vocational educational programs. Out of these institutions, 26 were state vocational educational institutions, 36 were private, 12 were higher educational institutions, and 2 were general educational institutions.

Vocational education is becoming available in new locations. In 2023, this opportunity was created at the Lanchkhuti training base of N(N)LE College "Horizonti", with the support of the Ministry, work is underway for the authorization process in Khashuri and Tskaltubo colleges, the rehabilitation of the training base of the Samtskhe-Javakheti State University was completed in Akhalkalaki.

In Tbilisi, with the support of the German government, the development of "Center of Excellence" for transport/logistics and construction is in progress.

Student dormitory is available in 7 educational institutions.

Vocational education programs are available in all ten regions and 36 municipalities (including Tbilisi). In 2023, 73 institutions implementing vocational educational programs announced admission to modular programs, out of which 60 were vocational educational institutions, 11 were higher educational institutions, and 2 were general educational institutions. In addition, 73 institutions announced admission to vocational training and vocational retraining programs, out of which 44 were vocational educational institutions, 9 - higher educational institutions, 1 - general educational institutions, and 22 - non-educational legal entities.

As of 2023, more than 500 vocational training and vocational retraining programs were available to anyone.

In 2020, the introduction of integrated vocational educational programs began, which implies the integration of the learning results of the secondary level of general education into vocational educational programs. Integrated programs are available in almost all regions of Georgia. As of 2023, 91 integrated programs were implemented in the vocational education system.

There are career counseling services in all vocational educational institutions, however, it should be taken into account that updated information about the labor market and educational opportunities that would help interested persons to make an informed decision is less available to them; the technologies in the process of collecting and disseminating career information. Diverse student services need to be developed.

### 1.2.2. Enrollment, dropout, and completion rates in vocational education

In 2018-2019, the dynamics of those registered for vocational education programs was decreasing, however, public interest in vocational education has increased significantly in recent years, which is evidenced by the growing number of persons registered for vocational education programs: in 2023, the number of places announced for vocational education programs increased and reached 17,700, which is 15% more, compared to the previous year.

**Table 3. Number of announced places and registered persons for vocational education 2020-2023**

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | 2020 | 2021 | 2022 | 2023 |
| Number of announced places | 9056 | 13 871 | 17 183 | 17 700  |
| Number of registered persons | 14 324 | 18 784 | 24 449 | 27 891 |

*Source: LEPL Education Management Information System*

As of the end of 2023, 22,567 people were enrolled in both qualification and vocational training and vocational retraining programs, which is more than 50% more than the base rate of 2021 (15,000 people). Out of the mentioned 22,567 persons, within the framework of the announced admission, 15,523 persons were enrolled in vocational educational programs, and 7,158 persons were enrolled in training/retraining programs.

According to statistics, the number of women predominates in private vocational educational institutions, and in public ones - men, probably due to the specifics of the programs and gender stereotypes in choosing a profession. Horizontal gender segregation is still evident in vocational education; Women predominate in fields such as education, the arts, health care, and business administration, while men outnumber women in STEM fields[[4]](#footnote-4).

According to the data by Education Management Information System, in 2023, the share of female vocational students among persons with the status of vocational students almost equals the percentage share of men.

**Table 3. Vocational education enrollment per calendar year**

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Institution  | Gender  | 2020 | 2021 | 2022 | 2023 |
| Private  | Man  | 1653 | 1270 | 1938 | 2214 |
| Private | Woman  |  2477 | 2770 | 3004 | 3687 |
| Public  | Man |  3200 | 4498 | 5596 | 5859 |
| Public  | Woman  | 2277 | 2883 | 3640 | 3763 |
| **Total**  | **9607** | **11421** | **14178** | **15523** |

Source: LEPL Education Management Information System (unified data for public and private vocational institutions, 2020-2023).

In 2023, 554 places were announced for dual programs (additionally 62 places for persons with disabilities), 1805 applicants were registered. A total of 463 vocational students were enrolled in dual programs within the framework of 2023 admission to vocational educational programs.

1010 places were announced for integrated programs (additionally 116 places for persons with disabilities) and the number of registered persons was 2370, and 783 vocational students were enrolled.

214 vocational training and retraining programs were financed with the support of the Ministry. In 2023, 7158 people were enrolled in vocational training and vocational retraining programs.

Various mechanisms are used in the process of enrolling applicants; Vocational educational institutions, along with partner organizations, including employers, organize student selection process by themselves.

The level of successful completion of the vocational educational program increased to 70% by 2019[[5]](#footnote-5). However, in 2023, 7,741 students completed vocational education, which was 51.3% of the enrolled students; out of these, 4,030 were men, and fewer - 3,711 were women. It is to be noted that 51% of enrolled men and 52% of women successfully completed vocational education (Ministry of Education, Science and Youth, 2023).

There are notable regional differences in both vocational education enrollment and completion rates. Despite the efforts made in recent years, regional inequality remains a challenge. Participation and completion rates are higher in Tbilisi than in rural areas.

It should be noted that representatives of ethnic minorities at the level of vocational education benefit from a flexible approach to selection, by undertaking selection procedure in Russian, Armenian or Azerbaijani languages. In addition, they have the opportunity, if necessary, to take the Georgian language module before starting the teaching of vocational modules, and after that they can master the desired profession. In 2023, 289 people were enrolled in vocational educational institutions based on selection procedures for ethnic minorities. In recent years, significant work has been done at the level of vocational education in the area of inclusive development, which means the focusing of vocational education policies, services and programs to groups with various additional needs.

In 2023, 271 persons with disabilities were enrolled in vocational education. In total, 939 people receive vocational education. In vocational educational institutions, the rate of inclusion of persons with disabilities and special educational needs is increased by 24%.

Vocational education for adults is attractive in Georgia, as evidenced by the growing demand; Between 2020 and 2022, enrollment in vocational training and retraining programs was increased by 159%, yet demand greatly outstrips supply; Challenges are related to the availability of vocational education and the provision of lifelong learning opportunities for adults, both in the context of formal and non-formal education.

Vocational training and vocational retraining programs prepared with the involvement of the employer play an important role in raising the competences of human capital. These programs allow employees to acquire new skills and knowledge, which increases their professional competences and positively affects both their personal and career development, as well as economic and social well-being, which ultimately positively affects the economic development of the country. Rates of status termination and abandonment in the system are high; 39.7% in 2019 and 28% in 2020, 36.6% in 2021. In 2023, 12,394 students were expected to complete their studies, out of them 1,481 (11.9%) students suspended their status, and 2,730 students (22%) terminated status.

Dropout rate research shows that vocational students make an uninformed decision when dropping out. The decision about dropping out is made in about 5-4 months. A sharp trend of "downward dropout" was observed, which means that vocational students completely left the education system and did not continue their studies anywhere. More than half of them were female; The lower the socio-economic status of the family, the sooner the vocational students left the institutions[[6]](#footnote-6).

Dropout of vocational students is less related to negative attitude towards studies and vocational education. These are more related to various barriers - inflexible schedule of the program, unfavorable location of the institution, employment, financial problems related to travel, housing and marriage-divorce, marital status, having children, etc. Vocational students themselves have less influence over most of these barriers and cannot overcome them on their own without appropriate support.

To sum up, the rates of places, applicants and enrollments in vocational education have been increasing in recent years, which is a positive and significant trend, although this trend is less reflected in the number of graduates. It should be noted that there are challenges related to the accessibility and inclusiveness of vocational education; Among them are geographical, financial and informational barriers, lack of educational networking opportunities, especially in the regions.

The high rates of status termination and dropout is a challenge, which ultimately reduces the total number of graduates and thus hinders the training of qualified personnel in the country. This challenge requires a more inclusive, vocational student-centered approach, developing appropriate mechanisms, offering intensive career counseling or other student services where individual needs are taken into account. It is important to make educational programs and study schedules flexible, to improve teaching-assessment methods, to identify vocational students at the risk of dropping out at an early stage and to offer them appropriate services, etc.

## 1.3. Vocational education as an attractive educational choice for young people

The low attractiveness of vocational education is influenced by sociocultural perceptions and attitudes that give priority to academic education, assert the low status of vocational education, stereotypes, including gender, etc. In this hierarchy, academic education is still highly prioritized over vocational education.

According to the public opinion survey in 2022, 79% of respondents have heard about vocational education.

According to ACT's 2022 Public Opinion Survey on Vocational Education, about four in ten respondents would choose vocational education (37%). For four out of ten respondents, vocational education is important for starting a professional/working life (43%), it can be obtained in a vocational education institution (42%) and it involves mostly practical training (38%). Vocational education is perceived as a not so insignificant mechanism for the country's economy. Four out of ten respondents believe that vocational education strengthens the country's economy (41%) and that it plays an important role in reducing the unemployment rate in the country (40%). According to the results of the qualitative research, over the years, attitudes towards vocational education change and positive attitudes increase, however, it is still considered less prestigious by the general public (compared to higher education).

In order to raise awareness about vocational education, the Ministry of Education, Science and Youth of Georgia, in partnership with international organizations, implements many activities, such as exhibitions, image promotion content on social media, open days, skills week and etc. It is being promoted as a decent employment opportunity, as evidenced by many successful cases.

The image and attractiveness of vocational education has improved significantly, especially among young people who are interested in rapid employment and career development.

Along with this, since 2017, the Ministry has been implementing the Vocational Skills Development Program for schoolchildren (Work Skills Development Program), which allows schoolchildren to try professions in practice that are interesting to them.

In 2022, on the initiative of 23 vocational educational institutions, orientation courses for the development of vocational skills were implemented in more than 400 public schools of Georgia, where up to 7,000 8th and 9th grade students received vocational training in more than 30 professional fields. As of 2023, 141 orientation courses were implemented in 122 public schools and 1982 students (8th and 9th grades) were involved, while 68 certification courses were implemented in 41 public schools and 1335 students were involved (10th, 11th and 12th grades).

"Professional Orientation, Counseling and Career Guidance Strategy in Formal Education 2024-2028" has been prepared, the purpose of which is to ensure access to quality and continuous services of career guidance and management in the field of education for all young people and adults.

Work continued in the area of bringing the vocational education system closer to the European educational space. From 2022, the Erasmus+ program was launched at the level of vocational education and the regulatory framework for the implementation of joint and exchange programs came into force.

In summary, the reform of vocational education, modernization activities (revising educational programs, improvement of infrastructure), support of international organizations and donors contributed to the attractiveness and image improvement of vocational education; However, for some young people, their families and employers, vocational education is still perceived as secondary education compared to academic education. More advocacy and awareness-raising activities are needed to highlight the value of vocational education in society. It should be taken into account that the image and attractiveness of vocational education is a complex issue and it is affected by the quality and relevance of vocational education, employment opportunities, and the results of public-private partnerships.

## 1.4. Quality of vocational education

Quality assurance framework and mechanisms have been established in the field of vocational education. The external mechanism of quality assurance is authorization, which falls within the competence of the National Center for Educational Quality Enhancement (NCEQE), and the internal mechanism is the self-assessment of vocational educational institutions, which is submitted by the institutions annually. Successful implementation of the NQF contributes to the standardization of qualifications. In 2020, new standards for the authorization of vocational educational institutions were approved, which is focused on quality assurance, capacity building and increasing autonomy of vocational educational institutions.

The process of integrating EQAVET (European Quality Network of Vocational Education) indicators into the authorization standards of vocational educational institutions is on-going.

Along with the development of the quality assurance system, the mechanisms for the development of qualifications were renewed, which ensures the strengthening of the role of the private sector in the process of development of qualifications. This will contribute to the improvement of the quality of qualifications and their compatibility with the requirements of the labor market.

Training and continuous professional development of vocational education teachers is one of the important aspects to ensure the quality of vocational education, which is one of the challenges. The total number of vocational education teachers, including invited teachers, is about 4000. Within the framework of the World Bank project "Raising the qualifications of teachers in vocational education" (2021) in Georgia, the "Flexible system model of a vocational education teacher's commencement of work, professional development and career advancement" and the working documents of the professional standard of a vocational education teacher have been developed. With the support of the Asian Development Bank (ADB), revision of these documents is underway. Moreover, teacher training and retraining programs were prepared, on the basis of which the skills agency carries out specialized trainings for teachers. In order to promote the cooperation of vocational education teachers, networks of teachers were created in different sectors. Establishing an internal system of institutions for the professional development of teachers is a priority. In addition, special emphasis is placed on the training of vocational education teachers in accordance with international standards.

A challenge in the teaching process is the lack of teaching resources in the Georgian language. Due to the fact that most of the teachers of vocational education have little knowledge of foreign languages, it is a challenge to familiarize them with modern foreign materials and/or involve teachers in international exchange programs.

According to a World Bank report, 90% of vocational education institutions in Georgia have some technology-integrated, enhanced learning methods in their curriculum (World Bank, 2023). In order to further promote the use of technology at the vocational education level, the concept of digital transformation of vocational educational institutions has been prepared, an electronic platform for vocational education - lms.geoskills.ge has been developed, on which self-directed courses, online courses about interactive educational content design and creating learning resources through artificial intelligence, have been published. Professional development programs for vocational education teachers increasingly include digital literacy and technology components, but following modern trends, broader and more intensive trainings are needed.

There are successful examples of innovative practices in the field of vocational education, but these are limited to individual institutions and thus, have less impact on system-wide improvement.

In terms of transition to green competences, readiness is observed in the system, a concept has also been prepared, although work is still underway on effective ways of integrating green competences.

### 1.4.1. Link between levels of education

The Law of Georgia on Vocational Education focuses on connecting the level of vocational education with other levels of formal education. Since 2020, integrated vocational education programs have been introduced into the system, which created an important basis for connecting general and vocational education levels. Nevertheless, the compatibility of vocational education programs and the transfer of credits to connect with the higher education level still remain a challenge.

Moreover, it should be taken into account that there is less practice in terms of the recognition of non-formal education, which is an important mechanism in terms of promoting lifelong learning. Currently, 11 institutions have the right to recognize non-formal education in 11 fields of study. However, it is important to scale up in this direction and raise public awareness of the opportunities to recognize non-formal education.

Despite the interventions implemented in the area of quality improvement in the vocational education system, the quality of vocational education is still facing certain challenges. This includes continuous professional development of vocational education teachers, elimination of regional disparities, quality assurance of teaching-evaluation and awarding of qualifications, integration of innovations in vocational education, partnership with the private sector in the area of work-based learning, compliance of vocational education with labor market requirements and deepening of international cooperation.

## 1.5. Compliance of vocational education with labor market requirements

During the evaluation of the implementation of the Georgian Vocational Education Development Strategy (2013-2020), the effectiveness of the steps taken in the area of the development of vocational education and its compatibility with the labor market was determined, which is related to the creation of solid legislative, methodological and institutional foundations.

According to the survey of graduates conducted in 2022, the employment rate of 2020 graduates is 60%, and the employment rate of 2021 graduates is 74%, the share of self-employed people is 20%, and the employment rate by profession is 49% (Ministry of Education, Ministry of Science and Youth of Georgia, 2023). However, according to a survey conducted in 2023, 40% of respondents in the 2022 cohort indicated that they are currently working in a profession, and 12% are self-employed in their profession, and the overall graduate employment rate is 81%. Moreover, surveys conducted among employers in the main sectors indicate that 80% of them are satisfied with the skills and competencies of graduates of vocational educational institutions (Georgia Employers' Association, 2024). However, some employers are more skeptical about the readiness of graduates of vocational educational institutions for the workforce.

Despite the progress achieved, there is an imbalance between the skills of graduates and the demands of the labor market; This discrepancy leads to a delay in the transition of vocational education graduates to the labor market and a lack of experienced, qualified personnel in certain industries. Rapid technological progress is also exacerbating the discrepancy. Continued collaboration between vocational education institutions, government agencies and private sector stakeholders is essential to address these challenges and sustain the positive trend.

 There are various mechanisms to ensure the compatibility of vocational education with the labor market, such as:

* Requirement of the authorization standard to take into account the requirements of the labor market;
* Analysis of existing studies of the labor market by vocational educational institutions;
* Preparation of vocational educational programs based on competences in accordance with the requirements of the labor market;
* Validation of educational programs with employers;
* Organization of practice with employers in the training process;
* Participation of employers in awarding qualifications;
* Research of graduates and consideration of results.

The above-mentioned mechanisms exist, but it is important to strengthen them and, if necessary, expand them. Improved cooperation between the labor market and the education sector contributes to the development of vocational students' skills and competences in line with employer requirements, however, it is noteworthy that this is less reflected in better employability (ETF, 2023).

### 1.5.1. Youth transition from education to the labor market and support in employment

The current state of the labor market in Georgia confirms the difficult transition of young people from education to employment, which contributes to unemployment or hinders their self-realization. According to a study conducted in 2016 by the Ministry of Internally Displaced Persons, Labor, Health and Social Protection of Georgia, about 40% of young people start their first job 6 months after graduation. The transition period lasts on average 1-2 years.

Mechanisms supporting the process of transition from education to the labor market (including career guidance) are not adequately developed at all levels of formal education. Overall, the youth is insufficiently informed about the requirements of the labor market. However, job search and employer negotiation skills are often lacking. Consequently, the number of young people who are outside the education, training and employment system (so-called NEET) is high. Over the past 4 years, NEET rates have been decreasing (in the 15-24 age group from 28.5% to 21.05; in the 15-29 age group from 35.1% to 26.9%). In 2023, the NEET rate for the 15-24 age group was 21.0%, and -26.9% for the age group of 29 (Geostat, 2023). The NEET rate (15-29 age group) is significantly higher among females (30.9%) than males (21.5%). Over the past three years there has been virtually no difference between male and female NEET rates for the 15-24 age group, indicating that significantly more females become NEET after 24. Although women in Georgia have a high level of education, their transition to the labor market is still problematic (UN Women, 2021).

According to the 2021 study "Youth Needs and Challenges at the Municipal and Regional Level", conducted by the Friedrich Ebert Foundation and the Youth Agency, the most crucial challenge for young people is employment in regions and municipalities.

According to the study of employment of vocational education graduates, Tbilisi has the highest rate of employment, which is about 1/3 of the employed persons. Racha-Lechkhumi-Kvemo Svaneti and Mtskheta-Mtianeti have the lowest employment rates.

International experience has shown that when there is a lack of jobs for young people, it is important to support youth entrepreneurship. There is some experience in Georgia in terms of developing entrepreneurship skills. It has been integrated into both vocational and general education curricula since 2015. Nevertheless, in order to promote the development of self-employment opportunities and to strengthen the participation of young people in the country's economy, it is important to expand the entrepreneurship education system to achieve practice-oriented learning outcomes.

In conclusion, it should be noted that vocational education management focuses on improving quality and coordination. There are certain mechanisms and frameworks in this area, however, in this process, it is important to successfully implement policy initiatives based on partnership, to strengthen capacity, monitoring and evaluation mechanisms.

The image and attractiveness of vocational education has been greatly improved, especially due to its practical value, providing vocational students with work-related skills and employability. However, it is important to continue and expand this trend.

Cooperation between employers, industry experts and educational institutions is improving, which ensures regular updating of vocational education programs and development of competences in accordance with current trends, however, efforts are needed to coordinate, improve capacity so that this progress is accumulated at the system level and/or reflected in better employability.

Despite the interventions implemented in the area of the inclusive development of the vocational education system, there are still challenges that limit the potential of vocational education.

The sustainability of vocational education reform is critical to maintaining the effectiveness of the system's progress. Therefore, continuous investments in infrastructure improvement, training of vocational education teachers, development of vocational education programs, technological progress and innovation, etc. are important. There is also a need to improve mechanisms to adapt to changing economic and technological environment.

# 2. Strategy vision, goals and objectives

# Strategy Vision:

In response to modern requirements and challenges, ensuring the possibility of receiving quality vocational education, lifelong competence development and self-realization, which ensures the country's socio-economic development and European integration.

**Strategic goals:**

* **Goal 1: Provision of flexible, diverse and inclusive vocational education services;**
* **Goal 2: Promotion of continuous development and autonomy of vocational education providers;**
* **Goal 3: Transform the skills ecosystem through shared responsibilities between the public and private sectors;**

## Goal 1. Provision of flexible, diverse and inclusive vocational education services

This goal unites services and systemic approaches, through the implementation of which vocational education in Georgia will become more flexible and offer diverse and inclusive opportunities to society. This is an important means of stimulating the society and the economy. Within the framework of this strategy, the following specific tasks are envisaged for the realization of the first goal:

* **Task 1.1 - increasing access to vocational education in the regional context;**
* **Task 1.2 - offering diverse educational programs in all fields;**
* **Task 1.3 - promoting the development of key competencies;**
* **Task 1.4 - Development of diverse and inclusive services supporting career and personal development.**

### Task 1.1. Increasing access to vocational education in the regional context

One of the challenges of access to vocational education is geographical accessibility. Although vocational education institutions are available in all regions of the country, the current strategy envisages the provision of vocational education in all municipalities. For this, further expansion of the network of vocational education providers will be carried out using the resources of public schools. Schools will continue to be strengthened in the area of introducing vocational training and retraining programs with the support of the Asian Development Bank and the European Union. It is significant that public schools are selected mostly in municipalities where vocational education is less available. This will contribute to increasing access to vocational education for the population living in rural areas, including adults.

Public schools, on the other hand, offer students integrated vocational education programs at school. Students of the mentioned graduating class will be able to master a profession at school, alongside with complete general education. Although there is already some practice of cooperation with public schools, in order to introduce vocational programs, public schools need significant support, both in the direction of training and equipping of teachers and administration staff. The said support will be implemented through the joint efforts of the Ministry, Skills Agency and donors. The initiative to introduce vocational education by public schools will contribute to increasing the availability of vocational education, improving the image of vocational education, the entry of graduating students into vocational education and the preparation of a qualified workforce in accordance with the requirements of the labor market.

### Task 1.2. Offering diverse educational programs in all areas

The strategy envisages the introduction of a new skills development policy based on the best European experience. According to the new qualification development policy, the occupational standard is a set of tasks and duties related to a specific profession. The basis for its development is the existence of a relevant sectoral map, in which the duties in the relevant sector are identified. It is emphasized that both the sectoral map and the occupational standard will be closely related to the labor market, therefore, their development will be carried out with the organized participation of the sector (sectoral skills organizations, if any, business unions, business associations, individual companies, etc.). Therefore, the main innovation involved the process and methodology of qualification development on the one hand, and the responsibilities and roles of the involved parties on the other hand. If until now the educational field was responsible for the development of qualifications and the private sector participated in this process, the development of qualifications with the new approach will be based on shared responsibilities. In the medium term, there will be a review of qualifications in all sectors of the economy, which means the renewal of existing qualifications and/or the development of new qualifications. In addition, the Ministry will support the introduction of new qualifications at the level of vocational educational institutions. In order to support the process of development of qualifications and to increase the effectiveness of the cooperation of the involved parties, the strategy envisages the creation and development of a digital platform.

The role of the private sector is also increasing in the process of implementing programs. The new regulatory framework for work-based learning supports the development of new forms of learning in real work environments by introducing learning models tailored to the specific needs of different sectors. In the skills' ecosystem, the emergence of training enterprises will be promoted, which will engage in dual training with educational institutions, which is considered the most effective form of implementation of vocational programs in the vocational education system. Training enterprises, together with vocational education institutions, also encourage the easy transition of vocational students from education to employment.

Opportunities to develop new skills and quickly adapt to labor market trends will increase in all sectors of the economy. Together with the educational programs, the scale and sectoral diversity of the vocational training/retraining programs will be increased, in the delivery of which the involvement of business entities will be facilitated. This is an important means of adult education and, at the same time, it provides an opportunity to develop skills corresponding to the current and future demands of the labor market in a short period of time. Moreover, in addition to formalized vocational training and retraining programs for adults, it is important to increase opportunities for non-formal education, as informal education, along with formal education, plays an important role in developing skills for adults. In addition, in the direction of increasing access to adult education, it is important to strengthen the links between formal and non-formal education providers through joint efforts and resource mobilization.

In order to provide a qualified workforce for the economy, together with the increase in the quality and scope of formal vocational education, the strategy envisages the introduction of the non-formal education recognition service in an even more systematic way. This includes consultations with relevant sectors, identifying needs, increasing awareness of employees/job seekers, improving the recognition process, etc. Moreover, the circle of non-formal education recognition service providers will expand, and non-educational institutions will also be able to obtain the right to recognition. In addition, it will be possible to conduct the recognition process based on the occupational standard.

The strategy envisages a significant increase in the scale of integrated vocational education programs, which, along with the development of skills related to the profession, ensure the achievement of learning outcomes of the secondary level of general education. Programs of this type, in addition to vocational educational institutions, will be offered to public high school students at the school base. As a result of this, the readiness of young people for further education and professional activities will increase significantly.

For the transition to the next level of education, mechanisms will be created that will strengthen the connection between vocational and higher education programs, which will give higher educational institutions the opportunity to ensure the recognition of learning results achieved within the framework of vocational education in the case of continuing studies at the level of higher education.

The strategy envisages the introduction of a one-year program of training in the state language for the purposes of vocational education. A one-year training program in the state language, a supporting system for its implementation will be created, and the capacities of vocational educational institutions will be strengthened in this direction.

Along with offering a variety of programs, work will be done on flexible approaches to their delivery, such as the use of distance learning elements.

Offering a diverse of educational programs and flexible approaches to their delivery will help to increase the transition rate from school to vocational education (both for those with basic education and complete general education), as well as the transition from education to employment, for both young people and adults.

### Task 1.3. Facilitating the development of key competencies

The strategy envisages the renewal of the eight key competence development policies recommended by the Council of Europe in response to the requirements and trends of the modern economy, which means a complex vision of key competence development, which reflects key competence development approaches as a cross section and/or as a separate component.

It is important to raise the civic awareness of vocational students and develop the necessary competencies for a modern citizen in order to realize themselves and act in society with responsibility and democratic values. In addition, special attention will be paid to the development of cultural awareness and expressiveness, equality, including gender equality and sustainability competencies. In addition, the development of green competences will initially take place in sectors related to the green economy. Together with entrepreneurial education, mechanisms supporting entrepreneurial ideas will be introduced, which will contribute to the successful transition of graduates into entrepreneurial activities. The strategy envisages strengthening the teaching of foreign languages ​​in order to increase the international mobility of vocational students/graduates and competitiveness at the local and international level.

In order to improve and develop digital skills (DigiComp), as well as promote technology-based learning, the strategy plans to promote technology-enriched learning. The latter includes both the development of an e-learning supporting platform and relevant resources and the development of digital skills.

The strategy emphasizes the importance of developing key competencies in different ways. Achieving the planned results within the framework of formal education will be facilitated by informal, so-called extracurricular activities. Moreover, summer camps, which will be organized directly at the territory of vocational educational institutions and will offer participants a variety of activities for increasing civic awareness, integration and development of necessary competencies, will become an important lever for key competencies.

### Task 1.4. Development of diverse and inclusive services supporting career and personal development

In order to promote the career (employment/self-employment) and personal development of vocational students and prospective students, a professional orientation, counseling and career guidance strategy will be approved at all three levels of formal education. The mentioned strategy will promote equal access of all persons to career management services, making informed decisions and realizing their opportunities in a rapidly changing social and economic environment. In addition, a new career guidance service will be developed for persons with disabilities, which will be tailored to the interests of such persons, taking into account gender characteristics, their abilities and individual needs, and will help persons with disabilities to make an informed professional choice and transition to the level of vocational education.

A career education program will be developed and implemented in a systematic and structured manner to support the transition of vocational students into the labor market. Mechanisms supporting student employment will also be developed.

The strategy emphasizes the importance of cooperation between the field of vocational education and the field of general education. Orientation programs/courses for school students will be expanded, which will help them make informed choices and gain practical experience for future career advancement. Moreover, the possibilities of informing young people about certain professions will increase with the use of technology.

The strategy's interventions will reduce the dropout rate of vocational students and improve their employability.

This strategy recognizes a broad understanding of inclusiveness, taking into account the principle of "leave no one behind " and in this context relies on both the experience gained at the national level and the best international practices, which implies the strengthening of services tailored to groups and individuals with various additional and special needs. For the purposes of the strategy, groups with additional needs are represented by: socially vulnerable persons, persons with disabilities, women (especially those living in rural areas), youth not in education/training and employment (NEET), representatives of ethnic minority communities. In this context, to ensure access to vocational education and career and personal development, the strategy focuses on enhanced support for social integration through active cooperation with stakeholders, including the private sector.

## Objective 2: Promotion of the continuous development and autonomy of vocational education providers

This goal envisages the continuous development of vocational educational institutions, so that all opportunities created at the system level are fully and qualitatively offered to the beneficiaries of vocational education. In addition, increasing the autonomy of vocational educational institutions and their competitiveness is one of the important components of the above-mentioned goal. Within the scope of this strategy, the following specific tasks are envisaged for the realization of the second goal:

**Task 2.1. - promotion of the introduction of flexible management models in vocational educational institutions;**

**Task 2.2. - continuous professional development of vocational education teachers;**

**Task 2.3. - increasing the efficiency of the educational environment;**

**Task 2.4. - Institutional support for the development of key competencies;**

**Task 2.5. - Development of inclusive services at the level of vocational educational institution.**

### Task 2.1. Promotion of the implementation of flexible management models in vocational educational institutions

The success of the new stage of the reform is largely related to the transformation of vocational educational institutions and their orientation to innovation and continuous development. In order to achieve full compliance with the authorization standards, as well as for compatibility with international standards, an increase in the degree of independence of vocational educational institutions and the development of their organizational, including entrepreneurial culture is a necessary condition.

The strategy envisages the implementation of a new model of funding vocational education, which will take into account the principle of allocation of resources based on achievements/results, which will contribute to increasing the competitiveness of institutions. The strategy also focuses on diversifying funding sources.

In order to support the economic sustainability of vocational educational institutions, the strategy focuses on supporting the implementation of economic activities of institutions. In this context, economic activity provides for the sale of products/services created in the educational process or produced within the framework of other commercial activities. This will contribute to the realization of the goals of the institutions in different directions. For this purpose, the existing regulations and legal framework will also be reviewed.

Institutional development and effective management of vocational educational institutions are of key importance for the success of the reform. In addition to the fact that within the framework of the strategy, the establishment of individual models of management and organizational development of institutions will be promoted, taking into account the economic, regional, social and other contexts in which they have to operate, an important emphasis will be placed on the qualification of Heads of institutions, which will be based on the relevant standard.

The strategy envisages the holistic development of vocational educational institutions in accordance with the country's economic/sectoral and regional priorities. To achieve this goal, it is important that the sectoral economic context is reflected in the strategic vision and plan of vocational educational institutions, as well as in their management and functioning schemes. The strategy focuses on developing human resource capacity to analyze existing research so that the college can assess both the local labor market and other factors that affect its effective functioning.

One of the powerful tools of sectoral and regional development is the so-called "skills hub" that brings together all the necessary resources to provide specific services and support activities for vocational students/prospective students as well as other regional actors (private sector, educational institutions, non-formal education providers, etc.).

Within the framework of the strategy, the establishment of skill hubs will be promoted on the basis of selected vocational educational institutions, which will contribute to the institutionalization of new services in their filed. At the same time, the skill hubs will be resource centers for field innovations, inclusive and innovative learning methods and knowledge.

The implementation of innovations and modern technologies in the educational process, together with skill hubs, will be supported by high-tech sectoral " Centers of excellence". The concept of " Centers of excellence" implies the development of such an educational institution, which is focused on creating the best practices for the development of future skills in a particular field, and achieves this through close ties with the sector, a high-tech learning environment, innovative approaches, as well as taking into account the dynamics of the field and international trends. Centers of excellence will be developed in growing sectors such as construction, logistics, tourism and wine production.

In addition to the above-mentioned, the Ministry will promote the introduction of participatory management models of vocational educational institutions and in this way bring business into the skills ecosystem. The initiative envisages a "public offer to private sector", within the framework of which any interested company is given the opportunity to present a vision of a public-private partnership that may be implemented in the direction of co-founding/co-investing in a vocational education provider, partially and/or fully handing over management and/or conditional use of the infrastructure. This will contribute to the development of vocational education providers in line with the field and better adaptation of vocational education to the interests of the private sector.

The above-mentioned interventions will transform vocational educational institutions into quality-oriented, innovative organizations, which in turn will contribute to providing the country and the region with a qualified workforce.

### Task 2.2. Continuous professional development of vocational education teachers

The strategy considers the issue of motivating vocational education teachers and their professional development holistically, in terms of the development of vocational educational institutions. Within the framework of the strategy, a special emphasis will be placed on supporting the professional development of vocational education teachers at the institution base and, in general, the creation of internal systems for human resources planning and development. Electronic means will be used for effective functioning of the mentioned system.

The growing trend of private sector participation in the educational process further increases the need for closer cooperation between teachers and the field. Within the sector, in order to achieve synergy between practitioners and teachers in the field and to improve the quality of teaching, it is envisaged to strengthen the sectoral networks of teachers. Networks will bring together teachers from the same field/track programs and create a platform for sharing knowledge and experience among colleagues, both locally and internationally. Networks will strengthen the role of the teacher in the vocational education institution, and will bring teachers closer to the field and strengthen business confidence in the institutions.

In addition to the above-mentioned, the increase in the role of the private sector in vocational education will significantly contribute to the entry of practicing vocational education teachers into the system.

Attention will also be focused on strengthening the capabilities of instructor-teachers and promoting their cooperation with other teachers. Moreover, the role of the Georgian Chamber of Commerce and Industry in the context of training instructors will increase significantly.

The strategy also aims to offer a vocational education teacher training program through various mechanisms, including offering specialized trainings for vocational training and vocational retraining teachers on issues of adult education methodology.

In order to develop vocational education teachers, it is important to share international practices and study visits to leading European vocational educational institutions. In order to participate in international study visits of vocational education teachers, systematic approaches will be created, which will promote study visits and practices of vocational education teachers in partner organizations of foreign countries.

In the context of sharing international practices, vocational educational institutions will actively use the possibility of visits by international experts, which will contribute to the improvement of the educational process and teaching methods.

### Task 2.3. Increasing the efficiency of the educational environment

The strategy emphasizes the importance of providing a physical learning environment in the process of providing high-quality vocational education. Through technology, the efficiency of the processes related to infrastructural development of colleges will increase. Emphasis will be placed on modernization of workshops and equipment and compliance with international standards.

The legal basis created in the context of distance learning in formal vocational education is being implemented, which will further promote the implementation of vocational programs with approaches focused on trainees and vocational students. The programs will be evaluated and those components of the program will be identified that can be effectively implemented remotely. Institutions will be supported with regard to distance learning. The use of the distance form of education is especially important in the process of implementing vocational training and vocational retraining programs, since this will contribute to further increase access to vocational education for the adult population.

Within the framework of the strategy, the importance of promoting the educational process enriched with technologies is emphasized. For this, a special electronic platform (<https://lms.geoskills.ge/>) will be strengthened, which will support the educational process based on the principle of self-directed and mixed learning. Various electronic resources will be placed on the platform. In addition, the development of electronic educational resources, including textbooks and guides, will be facilitated through the collaboration of experts and teachers in the field.

### Task 2.4. Institutional support for the development of key competencies

The strategy, together with the sectoral competences in the vocational education, focuses on the key, so-called transferable competences and various ways of their development. In addition to the learning outcomes envisaged by the program, the institutions will promote the development of key competencies through extracurricular activities, such as organizing club, team or individual activities. In this way, the process of getting to know vocational students/prospective vocational students will become more diverse and interesting, which will contribute to the development of their social and other key competencies, as well as better development of sectoral skills.

By introducing modern approaches to teaching, including through using "Shuttle" methodology, which is focused on social inclusion, increasing participants' employment/self-employment opportunities, and promoting the development of participants' entrepreneurial/vocational skills, vocational students will be given the opportunity to develop an entrepreneurial mindset, develop problem-solving and other skills, and receive support in independently developing an entrepreneurial project, from the initial idea to the presentation of a business plan.

Vocational educational institutions have an important role in helping vocational students understand and realize fundamental democratic values. Along with this, they can play a turning role in supporting the future professionals of the field, both in mastering the norms of professional ethics, as well as in understanding their role in relation to the environment, the concept of sustainability and the importance of green transformation.

The growing trend of internationalization in the field of vocational education requires more efforts in terms of training vocational students for international mobility. Accordingly, special attention will be paid to strengthening the teaching of foreign languages ​​in vocational educational institutions. In addition, the capabilities of foreign language teachers will be developed.

The strategy takes into account the digitization trend and is focused on the use of technologies, increasing the effectiveness of activities and the availability of developed services. Vocational students will be given the opportunity to thoroughly develop digital skills in the educational process or while receiving other support services, at their own base, based on the technologies offered by vocational educational institutions.

Taking into account the heterogeneous previous experience and age diversity of vocational students, as well as gender, it is important to promote their integration into the educational process and to create the possibility of individual support for all vocational students. At this stage, only people with special educational needs benefit from this service, although various studies reveal the need to expand such support.

### Task 2.5. Development of inclusive services at the level of vocational educational institution

For the successful implementation of the principle of continuous education and development, one of the most important prerequisites is the existence of a quality service of continuous career counseling. Taking into account the different expectations and experiences of people seeking or involved in vocational education, it is important to introduce differentiated approaches at the level of vocational educational institutions at all three levels of formal education in accordance with professional orientation, career guidance and career planning strategies.

Special attention will be paid to the support of career management specialists. It will facilitate the activation of their professional network and the implementation of their innovative initiatives. Various support resources will be developed with their participation.

Along with the expansion of the concept of inclusiveness in vocational education, the need for inclusive development of the educational institution itself has gained special importance. In this direction, it will also be planned to strengthen administration and vocational education teachers, including for the purpose of developing gender equality competencies. Support resources will be developed for professionals involved in inclusive development services.

It is important that vocational education institutions strengthen their work in the context of identifying the risks of dropping out, so that the risks of dropping out of those with additional needs are minimized by offering flexible approaches from the institutions.

## Goal 3: Transformation of the skills ecosystem through shared responsibilities between the public and private sectors

Within the framework of the mentioned goal, the development of an effective vocational education system through public-private partnership, strengthening of accountability among the interested parties and mobilizing resources is emphasized. The main principle that guides the process of management and development of vocational education is participation in the process of developing the country's human capital. In addition, this goal combines the issues of quality assurance, promotion, internationalization and financing of vocational education. Within the framework of this strategy, the following specific tasks are envisaged for the realization of the third goal:

* **Task 3.1. - sharing responsibility for the creation and implementation of vocational education policy between public-private sectors;**
* **Task 3.2. - development of the quality assurance system of vocational education;**
* **Task 3.3. - promotion of vocational education;**
* **Task 3.4.- promotion of internationalization of vocational education;**
* **Task 3.5. – funding of vocational education.**

### Task 3.1. Sharing of responsibility for the creation and implementation of vocational education policy between the public and private sectors

The transformation of the vocational education system into a skills ecosystem involves the creation of diverse opportunities for skills enhancement in the country through the involvement of many actors, the emergence of new roles, the distribution of responsibilities and the close cooperation of parties. In such an arrangement, special emphasis will be placed on the participation of the private sector, which can be represented in the form of sectoral skills organizations, business unions, business associations or individual companies.

To ensure participative management of the vocational education reform process, the Skills Agency created through the cooperation of the private and public sectors will contribute to the development of a flexible skills ecosystem. The main pillar of the reform is the entry into the vocational education system with shared responsibility in different organizational forms of the private sector. This will contribute to the development of qualifications, as well as the introduction of various work-based models, the improvement of the quality of teaching and the image of various professions.

One of the best international practices in the direction of organized involvement of the private sector is the existence of sectoral skills organizations, which may be considered as umbrella organizations for a specific sector.

In terms of the strategy, concurrently with the development of initiative groups of sectoral organizations, in order for the process of vocational education management to be based on shared responsibilities, the use of different forms of public-private cooperation (cooperation with business unions, business associations, individual companies, training enterprises, etc.) will continue in order to carry out the qualifications, work-based learning, teaching quality, and vocational education image improvement processes through the distribution of responsibilities with the private sector. The synergistic effect that is expected as a result of the cooperation of the private sector and vocational educational institutions is especially noteworthy. Accordingly, the strategy envisions a "public offer to private sector," which involves implementing participatory management models for vocational education institutions through public-private partnerships. This includes the possibility of transferring specific functions or areas of the institution's management to the private sector, or adopting other forms of collaboration, based on relevant proposals by the private sector. This will contribute to the better adjustment of vocational education to the interests of the private sector. As a result, the quality of the educational process will improve, the rate of employment of graduates and the demand for vocational education will increase.

The strategy also emphasizes the importance of dialogue and cooperation between various governmental and non-governmental agencies on skills-related issues.

### Task 3.2. Development of the quality assurance system of vocational education

The development of an effective and quality system in the field of vocational education through public-private partnership, accountability strengthening and resource mobilization is an important strategic goal for both the state and the private sector. In this context, an important task is the effectiveness of the network of providers of vocational education, as well as learning and other activitiescontinuous improvement of service quality. Supporting mechanisms will be offered to educational institutions to ensure full compliance with the standards of authorization of vocational educational institutions, as a mechanism for external evaluation of the quality of vocational education. The process administered by the National Center for Educational Quality Enhancement will be improved, the capabilities of human resources involved in the quality assurance process will be strengthened.

In the medium term, all educational institutions implementing vocational education programs will function in full compliance with the new standards, which, at the same time, will be in line with the "European Quality Assurance in Vocational Education and Training” (EQAVET). EQAVET indicators will be integrated into the authorization standards and the capacity of implementers will be strengthened to start implementing internal and external quality assessment with updated standards.

Special attention will be focused on the self-evaluation of vocational educational institutions and the digitization of this process. One of the main tasks is to strengthen the culture of quality development in institutions. In order to introduce a quality-oriented culture and evidence-based decision-making practices, the mechanism of cooperative visits will continue to be implemented for institutions implementing vocational education programs.

Another quality assurance mechanism will be introduced, justification of the feasibility of implementing vocational educational programs and evaluation of the implementation of already implemented programs.

In order to improve the quality of qualifications, the assessment of vocational students will be carried out, which, based on successful international practices, is the best way to build trust between the business and education sectors and develop the quality of learning. The mentioned model envisages the final assessment of vocational students at the end of their studies in the form of a qualification exam in cooperation with the sector and the educational institution. The purpose of the exam is to comprehensively evaluate the competencies of vocational students and their potential for transition to the labor market.

In order to stimulate the continuous development of vocational educational institutions, it is essential to support their innovative initiatives and development activities and ensure their financial sustainability.

### Task 3.3. Promotion of vocational education

Despite the positive trends in the change of public opinion towards vocational education, stigmatization of vocational education, gender stereotypes when choosing a profession, as well as insufficient awareness of the reform and existing services make it necessary to develop a communication strategy and plan proactive, multistakeholder and systemic interventions. A unified communication strategy will aim to inform the public about the progress of the reform, as well as to increase the attractiveness of various professions and to present opportunities for continuing education. The mentioned action plan will place a special emphasis on communication with various vulnerable and additional need groups in various ways and means, on their attraction and follow-up. All promotion activities will be carried out taking into consideration the gender mainstreaming.

The persons responsible for public relations of vocational educational institutions play a major role in the implementation of a unified communication strategy. Their professional development is one of the priority areas of this task.

To promote the field, both unified national and sectoral skills competitions will be organized, including the WorldSkills - international competition of special importance, where the winning candidates will compete in the national competition.

Focus will be on media activity, including social networks and public gathering places. A large component of the communication strategy is facilitating the transition from school and close partnership between schools and vocational education institutions. The achievement of the mentioned goal will be facilitated by increasing the scale of orientation courses in general educational institutions, which is one of the effective mechanisms of vocational education promotion.

### Task 3.4. Promotion of internationalization of vocational education

The internationalization of vocational education implies the promotion of introduction, sharing and implementation of the best practices and the latest trends at the national level through international partnerships for all actors involved in the field. The strategy focuses on increasing the effectiveness of cooperation with international donor organizations. For this purpose, the opportunity to join international organizations and European networks will continue to be used, which will contribute to increasing the awareness of the vocational education system at the international level and sharing the international experience and good practices.

Despite the important interventions made in terms of the internationalization of vocational education, the strategy places an important emphasis on the implementation of exchange and joint programs with foreign educational institutions and on increasing the scope of cooperation in this direction. Thus, the use of opportunities in the international space will be facilitated. To achieve the mentioned goal, vocational educational institutions will be strengthened and their support will be implemented in order to expand the network of international partners.

Moreover, the opportunity that has emerged for Georgia in the form of the Erasmus + program should be fully used, which will contribute to the institutional development of educational institutions, the private sector and other involved agencies, the mobility of vocational students, vocational education teachers and other personnel, and the expansion of their professional horizons, as well as language competences and raising cultural awareness. Development of the capacity of organizations in the preparation and management of international projects will be planned. Also, preparation of persons participating in mobility for participation in international projects.

In order to promote large-scale partnerships, and especially to encourage the introduction of new qualifications/programs, a regulatory framework for joint and exchange programs is implemented in practice, which will simplify cooperation with foreign colleagues and regulate the authorization process of joint programs in a different manner.

### Task 3.5. Funding of vocational education

The development of an effective system of financing vocational education is part of the strategy for the development of vocational education. The updated system of financing vocational education will be based on the principles of quality, accessibility and equality of vocational education. This will help to increase the healthy competition among the providers of vocational education. In addition, the increasing trend of the vocational education budget will be maintained, which will also be supported by the use of diversified financing methods.

# risks

A number of external and internal factors are related to the implementation of strategic goals and objectives, which may hinder the consistent process of strategy implementation and create a significant threat to the performance of specific tasks. Successful, effective and efficient implementation of the strategy depends on timely identification and reduction of internal and external risks.

The following risks may affect the implementation of the strategy:

- Both the mobilization of finances and the sustainability of financing may be under a risk, which will negatively affect both the strategy implementation process and the subsequent stages of implementation. The detection of new needs and the allocation of financial resources for their implementation may create a significant risk for the implementation of the measures provided by the strategy, dependent on state funds.

- Absence of effective coordination or misallocation of tasks and responsibilities between multiple actors and uncoordinated actions may hinder the implementation of any specific task of the strategy, which ultimately has a negative impact on the process of effective implementation of the strategy.

- Absence of an effective system of accountability and monitoring may prove to be an important hindering factor in successfully achieving the goals and objectives of the strategy. Therefore, there is a need for systematic/systemic monitoring and evaluation of the strategy implementation process and the achieved intermediate and final results.

- Although the strategy envisages improving the image of vocational education and further raising public awareness of vocational education, the lack of public interest and the low level of involvement may become a potential risk in the process of implementing the strategy. Since, at the current stage, vocational education is still considered a secondary alternative compared to higher education, there is a risk that the mentioned stereotypical attitude will still be maintained in the society.

- The implementation of the strategy may be threatened by another risk, which is related to less involvement and interest of the private sector in the field of vocational education. Despite the significant interventions implemented in the context of strengthening and increasing the scale of public-private cooperation, the lack of readiness and will of the private sector may become an important hindering factor in the process of implementing the strategy.

# Implementation of the strategy

Implementation of the strategy requires effective coordination and alignment with national or institutional action plans. The implementation of the strategy will be jointly coordinated by the Vocational Education Development Department and International Relations and Strategic Development Department of the Ministry of Education, Science and Youth of Georgia, in cooperation with relevant agencies of the Ministry and other involved parties. These two departments will be responsible for coordinating the preparation of the annual report on the implementation of the strategy and the corresponding action plan, and for the final evaluation after the implementation of the strategy. It should be noted that the first action plan of the strategy implementation stage will cover the years 2024-2026.

The monitoring reports will analyze whether the strategic framework meets the requirements related to the vision and the common goal, whether the implementation of the strategy and activities are oriented to the strategic goals and in compliance with them. In addition, it will be evaluated whether the strategy and the activities of the action plan developed after the approval of the strategy reach the target indicators of the measurement indicators.

The stages of monitoring and evaluation will be based on the "Work Process of Policy Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation in the Ministry of Education, Science and Youth of Georgia" approved by the order N390129 of the Minister of Education, Science and Youth of Georgia dated April 3, 2024 - a standard work procedure prepared in order to effectively design the policy document and prevent the process without hindering it, that aims to strengthen monitoring and evaluation, research of evidence and analytics, with the expert support of the technical assistance project of the European Union - “Public Governance Reform”.

The monitoring and evaluation reports will be public and will be posted on the official website of the Ministry of Education, Science and Youth of Georgia. The public will be informed about the progress achieved through electronic and other media means. Moreover, by using different mechanisms, the transparency of the implementation of the strategy will be ensured.

# Communication and information measures regarding the implementation of the strategy

During the implementation of the vocational education strategy, effective communication and information mechanisms will be used:

* **Public awareness campaigns:**
* **Objective**: increasing public awareness of the importance and benefits of vocational education.
* **Method**: Multimedia platforms (TV, radio, social media, print media) will be used to reach diverse audiences.
* **Target groups**: prospective and existing vocational students, parents, vocational education teachers, employers and the general public.
* **Involvement of interested parties:**
* **Objective**: to ensure active involvement of stakeholders and consideration of their opinions/positions in the decision-making process.
* **Method**: Organization of forums, workshops and round tables with representatives of government agencies, educational institutions, private sector and civil society organizations.
* **Target groups**: Ministry of Education, Science and Youth of Georgia, vocational educational institutions, Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Georgia, international and non-governmental organizations.
* **Distribution of progress reports and publications:**
* **Objective**: Ensuring transparency and accountability in the implementation of the strategy
* **Methods**: The stages of annual monitoring and evaluation will be based on the "Work Process of Policy Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation in the Ministry of Education, Science and Youth of Georgia" approved by the order N390129 of the Minister of Education, Science and Youth of Georgia dated April 3, 2024 - a standard work procedure prepared in order to effectively design the policy document and prevent the process without hindering it, that aims to strengthen monitoring and evaluation, research of evidence and analytics, with the expert support of the technical assistance project of the European Union - “Public Governance Reform”.
* The monitoring and evaluation reports will be public and will be posted on the official website of the Ministry of Education, Science and Youth of Georgia. The public will be informed about the progress achieved through electronic and other media means. Moreover, by using different mechanisms, the transparency of the implementation of the strategy will be ensured.
* **Target groups**: All stakeholders.
* **Feedback and continuous improvement:**
* **Objective**: to ensure the compliance of the strategy with the existing needs.
* **Methods**: Implement feedback systems such as surveys/focus groups, online forums, etc. Provide periodic reviews and evaluations to update communication strategies based on stakeholder feedback.
* **Target groups:** All stakeholders involved in vocational education.
1. European Skills Agenda for sustainable competitiveness, social fairness and resilience European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training, "Quality Assurance in VET [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Council Recommendation on vocational education and training (VET) for sustainable competitiveness, social fairness and resilience," 2020. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Research of demand based on skill – 2022, Ministry of Economy and Sustainable Development of Georgia, 2023 [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Country Gender Equality Profile of Georgia. UN Women 2021 [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Socio-Economic Status of Vocational Educational Students. 2020. ACT [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Vocational Education Dropout Research. Report. Technical Support for the development of the knowledge-skills tailored to labor market needs and employment (skills4jobs TA Project)”.2022 [↑](#footnote-ref-6)