

**Teacher recruitment and career development**  
**Policy Paper**

September 2021

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## Executive summary

There is a contradiction surrounding the teaching profession in Georgia: in our research we constantly hear about the huge respect society has for teachers who have been doing the job for most of their lives. In many communities, veteran teachers are some of the most respected people, almost local heroes. But at the same time, there is a stereotyped image of “Soviet” teachers using outdated methods, (in spite of the fact that a majority of Georgian teachers did not teach during the Soviet Union), a picture of teachers from a time gone by imparting obsolete knowledge in an old-fashioned way.

Indeed, it is true that Georgia’s teachers tend to be older, and international and national student assessments show that there is no positive relationship between the number of years a teacher has been employed and student achievement. Data from the Teaching and Learning International Survey (TALIS) 2013 and 2018, showed that the average age of teachers was 48 and 50 – higher than the TALIS average by 5 and 7 years, respectively—the highest age of any of the 48 countries studied.<sup>1</sup> Georgian teachers tend to stay longer in their jobs than TALIS or OECD average.

In addition, the distribution of teachers across the country and across types of settlement is uneven. Owing to decades of migration from the countryside to urban centres—especially Tbilisi—rural schools have few pupils and many teachers, whereas schools in Tbilisi have a much higher student to teacher ratio. In addition, because of limited work opportunities, half of rural teachers work part time.

Furthermore, teaching in Georgia suffers from a severe image problem. There is a perception of the profession having low salaries and teachers themselves having low prestige. This perception plays a role in stopping brighter and more motivated young people from becoming teachers. In spite of this image though, real remuneration for teachers has gone up considerably over the years. A full-time teacher salary compares well with other careers, especially in rural areas, where the average teacher salary is higher than the average household income.

Increases in salaries and opportunities for professional development have certainly made teaching a more appealing career path in Georgia. However, in spite of these positive trends, until recently it was difficult for novice teachers to get hired full-time. Between 2015-2018 only 821 teachers under the age of 30 entered Georgia’s public school system.<sup>2</sup>

In 2019 the Georgian government decided to facilitate a generational shift in the country’s teachers. To encourage older teachers to retire, and thus make room for younger teachers, the government announced a reform for teachers of pensionable age, allowing them to retire in exchange for a one-off bonus worth two years of their salary. Around 8,000 retirement-age teachers took this package, 5,000 of which were replaced by new teachers. This reform has produced positive trends in terms of the average age of teachers as one third of new hires were under 30 years of age. However, Georgian teachers are still significantly older than the OECD or TALIS averages. A possible threat is that now as new teachers have entered the system, it once again becomes ‘locked’ and reluctant to accept any more ‘new blood’.

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<sup>1</sup> National Assessment and Examinations Center (2020), *Teaching and Learning International Survey TALIS 2018*, p157

<sup>2</sup> Data provided by EMIS upon request, August 2021

Another ongoing structural issue concerning the teaching profession in Georgia is that, even though it attracts people who are motivated by the ‘right reasons’, it fails to attract the brightest school leavers into teacher training programmes—at least according to achievement scores in the standardized national exams. While there is a minimum threshold that all university applicants need to pass, the scores are assessed only in relation to each other rather than objective grade criteria. The one-year teacher training course for university graduates also requires passing an exam set by training provider universities, however, they are generally able to accept a high number of applicants and are more demand-flexible.

Another important factor for producing competent teachers is the practical element of teaching programs/courses—making sure trainees have actual, classroom experience. While available teaching courses and programs do have a “practical” component, it is insufficient for trainees to get hired as teachers. The practical element of teacher training courses is both insufficient in terms of a trainee’s resume, and in terms of the trainee being fully prepared and confident enough to start teaching a class.

Another important issue is the on-the-job professional development. While training modules are continuously offered to teachers, they are not tailored to the needs of teachers and are not demand-based. Teachers in our focus groups noted that there had not been any surveys of their training needs so they are left to choose from a menu of training options that are often not appropriate for them. They also said that the trainers themselves are often not fully qualified to be giving the training.

There is a wide consensus that Georgia needs new blood in the teaching profession, a new generation of young, highly motivated and innovative teachers around the country who will prepare Georgian students for the modern world. However, as our research has shown, it has proven difficult to attract large numbers of young Georgians into the profession. This policy paper will examine the demographic profile of teachers across Georgia; will discuss the various attempts that have been made to attract new talent into the profession and look at teachers’ ongoing professional development; it will also discuss the barriers to recruiting young blood into the profession and make recommendations as to how these issues might be alleviated.

## 1. Methodology

The research for this policy paper was part of a year of research that has been conducted by GeoWel, as part of the US State Department financed Education Advocacy Project. This, in turn, followed on the research done in 2018 and 2019 for McClain Action for Children (MAC). The current project conducted extensive desk and field research within the project.

Desk research involved analysis of secondary data provided by the government, international organizations and local researchers. We analyzed quantitative data provided by:

- The National Statistics Office of Georgia (GeoStat)
- The National Assessment and Examination Center (NAEC)
- The Education Management Information System (EMIS)
- The Education and Science Infrastructure Development Agency (ESIDA)

The Government data included, and was not limited to, the number, status and exam scores of schools, students, teachers, teacher qualification, school location and infrastructure, etc.

We also reviewed data and analysis provided by the major international assessment surveys that Georgia has undertaken in recent years. This included:

- Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) 2009, 2015 and 2018 – focusing on student performance in reading, maths and sciences;
- Teaching and Learning International Survey (TALIS) 2013 and 2018 – a survey of teachers focusing on working conditions and learning environments; Teacher Education and
- Development Study in Mathematics (TEDS-M) 2008 – a study of how teachers are prepared to teach mathematics in primary and lower secondary school.

We also reviewed the National Assessment of Georgian as a Second Language 2016, conducted by NAEC, reports by the Georgian Human Rights Ombudsman and research and analysis reports by local researchers and experts. We also referred to our 160-page research report from 2019, which comprehensively reviewed the Georgian education system.<sup>3</sup> In addition, we extensively reviewed and analyzed ordinances of the government of Georgia and the Minister of Education and Science regarding school funding, teacher remuneration and career entry/development.

Another extensive trove of data that was processed by GeoWel was the public school infrastructure assessment data for individual public schools that GeoWel received from ESIDA in 2019. Within the Education Advocacy Project, we were able to scrape the 2,233 individual excel spreadsheets and create a single database of public school infrastructure and analyze the collated data. Moreover, GeoWel created a publicly available interactive map of these schools, available in English and in Georgian at <https://geowel.org/en/public-school-map/>.

In addition to detailed desk research, we conducted considerable field research. This included:

- 50 online focus groups with parents and teachers of the 300 schools with the poorest infrastructure condition as recorded in the 2018-2019 Public school infrastructure assessment database;
- 24 online focus groups with public school teachers and students' parents, representing schools throughout Georgia, with 113 participants in total;
- 58 phone interviews and follow-up interviews with public school teachers, parents, experts and government representatives.

The fieldwork took place between February-September 2021. The sampling was designed to include as many rural and disadvantaged communities as possible, including ethnic minority settlements.

Based on this research we prepared four policy documents in different topics, published 10 articles on various national and international media outlets (Civil.ge, Eurasianet.org, Open Democracy), and 12 blogs on our website. The articles were written by GeoWel senior researchers and a professional journalist. We also

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<sup>3</sup> G=<https://geowel.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/GeoWel-Education-Report-for-MAC-Final.pdf>

conducted a webinar<sup>4</sup> on the impact of COVID pandemic on general education, attendees included teachers, parents and journalists.

## 2. Teacher demographics

### 2.1. Age

Teaching is often described more as a vocation than merely a job, with teachers drawn to the profession by an urge to do something for society and to help bringing up the next generation.<sup>5</sup> Nearly all Georgian teachers do the job for the 'right reasons' – because teaching allows them to aid the development of children and young people (97%) and to provide a contribution to society (96%).<sup>6</sup> But along with these laudable aims, there are more prosaic reasons Georgians go into teaching: because it provides job security (93%) and a reliable income (88%). The kind of steady career path and benefits teaching provides are especially attractive in a country like Georgia, where chronic un- and underemployment have been a feature of life for decades and where, especially in rural areas, teaching is one or sometimes the only employment path that offers a guaranteed cash income, especially for women, who make up 83% of total teaching body in Georgia.<sup>7</sup>

That may explain why many Georgian teachers stay in their jobs so long. Among 48 countries and territories covered in the TALIS 2018 survey, Georgia has the highest average teacher age – 50.4 years – compared to the OECD average of 44.1 and TALIS average of 43.4. Moreover, it has one of the highest percentage of teachers aged 50 and above, representing 53.5%, third after Lithuania and Estonia. Neighbouring Turkey, by comparison, has the youngest teachers, with an average age of 35.5 and only 6.3% of the teacher body over the age of 50.<sup>8</sup> According to EMIS data, only 821 teachers under the age of 30 were hired by public schools in 2015-2018.<sup>9</sup> In addition, Georgian teachers tend to stay the longest at the same school – for 18 years on average, about half a professional career, compared to the OECD average of 10.<sup>10</sup> This indicator for teachers at elementary schools, which are often rural and offer tuition between grades on through nine, is even higher – 24 years.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> GeoWel Research (2021), *Webinar: COVID-19 Impact on Georgia's General Education System*.

<https://geowel.org/en/webinar-on-covid-19-impact-on-georgias-general-education-system/> (Reviewed August 11, 2021)

<sup>5</sup> Interviews and focus groups conducted with teachers, July-August 2021

<sup>6</sup> TALIS 2018 Results (Volume I), Annex C. List of tables available on line, Table I.4.1. Motivation to join the profession, by teachers' teaching experience. <https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/sites/1d0bc92a-en/1/3/3/index.html?itemId=/content/publication/1d0bc92a-en&csp=1418ec5a16ddb9919c5bc207486a271c&itemIGO=oecd&itemContentType=book> (Reviewed August 4, 2021)

<sup>7</sup> National Assessment and Examinations Center (2020), *Teaching and Learning International Survey TALIS 2018*, p157

<sup>8</sup> TALIS 2018 Results (Volume I), Annex C. List of tables available on line, Chapter 3. The Changing Landscape of Teaching. <https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/sites/1d0bc92a-en/1/3/3/index.html?itemId=/content/publication/1d0bc92a-en&csp=1418ec5a16ddb9919c5bc207486a271c&itemIGO=oecd&itemContentType=book> (Reviewed August 4, 2021)

<sup>9</sup> Data provided by EMIS upon request, August 2021

<sup>10</sup> TALIS 2018 Results (Volume I), Annex C. List of tables available on line, Chapter 3. The Changing Landscape of Teaching. <https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/sites/1d0bc92a-en/1/3/3/index.html?itemId=/content/publication/1d0bc92a-en&csp=1418ec5a16ddb9919c5bc207486a271c&itemIGO=oecd&itemContentType=book> (Reviewed August 4, 2021)

<sup>11</sup> National Assessment and Examinations Center (2020), *Teaching and Learning International Survey TALIS 2018*, p36

It may seem counterintuitive, but international and national assessments show no positive relationship between the number of years a teacher has been employed and student achievement – in OECD countries there is no correlation, while for non-OECD countries the correlation is negative: countries distinguished by high achievement in PISA, PIRLS, TIMSS are not countries with older than average teachers. This is readily apparent in Georgia too, a country with some of the longest serving teachers and some of the lowest student attainment scores among TALIS countries.<sup>12</sup>

There are significant differences in the subjects taught by older and younger teachers. According to TALIS 2018 the youngest teachers teach foreign languages and sports, while teachers of 60 and above tend to teach maths (32%), Georgian (29%) and natural sciences (29%).<sup>13</sup>

## 2.2. Number of teachers

Another important indicator is the number of students per teacher. This has been increasing over the last decade or so. In 2013 there was one teacher per 8.2 students in Georgia, in 2018 – per 8.7 students and in 2020 – per 9.7 students.<sup>14</sup> The changes have occurred on the account of increasing student numbers, as until 2019 the number of teachers has been steady. The high ratio of teachers to students may seem like a positive thing, as it might seem to imply small class sizes. But the class size and the number of teachers per student vary enormously across Georgian schools. Average class size increases dramatically from rural to urban settlements. It also increases along with the size of the settlement, with Tbilisi having large classes – potentially reaching over 30, while the EU average is 23.<sup>15</sup> The smaller size of rural settlements, along with increasing urban migration, means fewer students in rural settlements, leaving a disproportionally high number of teachers in those areas. Almost half of these rural teachers work part-time – 48.2%. The main reason there are so many part-time teachers in Georgia is limited work opportunities rather than choice – most Georgian teachers would rather teach full time.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> National Assessment and Examinations Center (2020), *Teaching and Learning International Survey TALIS 2018*, p 38

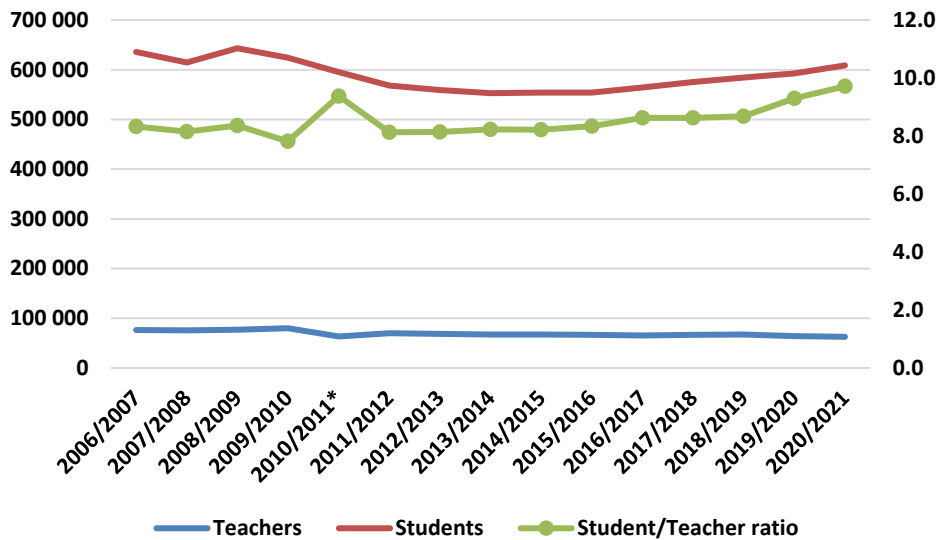
<sup>13</sup> National Assessment and Examinations Center (2020), *Teaching and Learning International Survey TALIS 2018*, pp32-33

<sup>14</sup> National Statistics Office of Georgia, *General Education: Number of General Education School Teachers; Number of General Education Schools and Pupils in them*. <https://www.geostat.ge/en/modules/categories/59/general-education> (Reviewed August 23, 2021)

<sup>15</sup> National Assessment and Examinations Center (2020), *Teaching and Learning International Survey TALIS 2018*, pp38-42

<sup>16</sup> Teaching and Learning International Survey (TALIS) (2015), Final Report, p266

Figure 1. Number of students and teachers and student/teacher ratio, 2006-2020



Reference: National Statistics Office of Georgia (GeoStat)

The slight decline in the number of teachers in the last couple of years has occurred due to education reforms that affected teachers of a pensionable age, allowing them to retire in exchange for a one-off bonus worth two years of their salary.<sup>17</sup> This was a conscious decision by the education authorities, who hoped by this effort to create career openings for new teachers, get new blood in the system, and reduce the average age of the Georgian teacher. In total, almost 8,300 teachers registered for the retirement package, creating the same numbers of new vacancies. Out of these, 5000 positions were filled by new teachers, while the rest were allocated to already working teachers (see Section 3, below).<sup>18</sup>

### 2.3. Teacher qualifications across the country

There are multiple levels of teacher in Georgia, from Teacher Practitioner (who has not passed a competency exam), to Senior Teacher (who has passed), to Lead Teacher, to Mentor. In addition, Teacher Seeker is a person employed by the school and simultaneously pursuing a teacher training program, the completion of which gives them Senior Teacher status, allowing them to skip the “Practitioner” stage. Finally, government data show there are 3,989 teachers with no status. These include some 1,187 teachers at private schools, who do not use the government teacher status scheme, teachers waiting for their status to be assigned, and replacement teachers hired by schools on a temporary basis.

<sup>17</sup> Ordinance of the Government of Georgia #371 of August 6, 2019 On Amendments to the Resolution №241 of the Government of Georgia of May 23, 2019 on the Approval of the Teacher Professional Development and Career Advancement Scheme. <https://matsne.gov.ge/ka/document/view/4629546> (Reviewed August, 2021)

<sup>18</sup> Edu.Aris.ge (2021), More than 2,000 math teachers left the system - how many teachers conducted the first lesson in 2019-2020. <https://edu.aris.ge/news/sistemidan-2-000-ze-meti-matematikis-maswavlebeli-wavida-ramden-maswavlebeli-daufiqsirda-pirveli-gakvetili2019-2020-wels.html> (Reviewed August 23, 2021)



Figure 2. Teacher number by statuses

Teacher status	N
No status	3 989
Seeker	2 092
Practitioner	9 838
Senior	37 738
Lead	8 766
Mentor	324
<b>Total</b>	<b>62 747</b>

Reference: Data provided by EMIS upon request (February 2021)

Breaking down Georgia's ranked teachers geographically, we find that:

- 23% of all Georgian teachers work in Tbilisi, 66% of them are Senior Teachers
- Kvemo Kartli has the lowest share of Senior Teachers, 45%, and the second highest share of Practitioners 33%
- Samtskhe-Javakheti has the highest share of Practitioners, and about the same share of Senior Teachers, 41% and 43% respectively
- Shida Kartli and Imereti have the highest share of Lead Teachers, 24% and 22% respectively
- Racha-Lechkhumi-Kvemo Svaneti do not have any Mentor teachers at all
- In total there are 10,000 Teacher Practitioners in Georgia – they receive the base salary and if they do not pass the next teacher competency exams, will have to leave school

Figure 3. Breakdown of teachers in each region by teacher statuses, 2021

Region	No status	Seeker	Practitioner	Senior	Lead	Mentor	Total
Tbilisi	7%	4%	9%	66%	14%	1%	100%
Imereti	5%	3%	8%	61%	22%	1%	100%
Kvemo Kartli	8%	5%	33%	45%	9%	0.3%	100%
Adjara	7%	4%	17%	62%	10%	0.4%	100%
Samegrelo-Zemo Svaneti	6%	3%	15%	63%	13%	0.3%	100%
Kakheti	5%	3%	12%	67%	12%	1%	100%
Samtskhe-Javakheti	7%	3%	41%	43%	5%	0.2%	100%
Shida Kartli	4%	2%	7%	62%	24%	1%	100%
Guria	4%	2%	10%	67%	16%	1%	100%
Mtskheta-Mtianeti	8%	3%	9%	69%	10%	0.1%	100%
Racha-Lechkhumi-Kvemo Svaneti	11%	4%	14%	63%	9%	0%	100%
Abkhazia <sup>19</sup>	7%	5%	26%	54%	8%	0.4%	100%
<b>Total</b>	<b>6%</b>	<b>3%</b>	<b>16%</b>	<b>60%</b>	<b>14%</b>	<b>1%</b>	<b>100%</b>

Reference: Data provided by EMIS upon request (February 2021)

### 3. Image, salaries and qualification

Teaching in Georgian suffers from a severe image problem. There is a perception of the profession having low salaries and teachers themselves having low prestige. This perception plays a role in stopping brighter and more motivated young people from becoming teachers. While, overall, 94% of teachers in Georgia are satisfied with their job, only 41% think that their profession is valued in society.<sup>20</sup>

One stereotype about teachers in Georgia is that they are poorly paid. However, real remuneration for teachers have gone up considerably over the years: they now vary between GEL 385-2000. Senior teachers, who comprise 60% of the current teaching body, receive between around GEL 900-1200, while more junior teachers receive between around GEL 400-600. The 15% most qualified teachers (lead and mentor teachers) earn between around GEL 1600-1900.<sup>21</sup> These salaries are attractive or at the very least decent, especially in

<sup>19</sup> The schools administratively in Abkhazian Autonomous Republic are physically located in cities of Zugdidi, Senaki, Kutaisi and Tbilisi - in areas of high concentration of Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs).

<sup>20</sup> TALIS 2018 Results (Volume I), Annex C. List of tables available on line, Chapter 4. Attracting and Effectively Preparing Candidates, Motivation to join the profession, by teachers' teaching experience. <https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/sites/1d0bc92a-en/1/3/3/index.html?itemId=/content/publication/1d0bc92a-en&csp=1418ec5a16ddb9919c5bc207486a271c&itemIGO=oecd&itemContentType=book> (Reviewed August 4, 2021)

<sup>21</sup> Order #126/N of the Minister of Education and Science of Georgia of September 28, 2015 On setting the minimum amount and conditions of remuneration for public school teachers.

<https://matsne.gov.ge/ka/document/view/2995627?publication=14> (Reviewed May 28, 2021)

rural areas, where the average salary of a teacher is higher than the total average cash income of a household.<sup>22</sup>

Figure 4. Average total cash income and transfers per household by settlement type, 2019 (GEL)

	Urban	Rural	Total
Wages	397	118	515
From self-employment	83	37	120
From sales of agricultural products	5	60	64
Property income (leasing, interest on deposit, etc.)	12	1	13
Pensions, scholarships, assistances	108	93	201
Remittances from abroad	35	15	50
Money received as gift	61	32	93
<b>Total</b>	<b>702</b>	<b>355</b>	<b>1 057</b>

Reference: Statistical Yearbook of Georgia 2020

Based on our focus groups and interviews with both experienced and novice teachers, as well as trainee teachers waiting for their exam results, the gradual increase in salaries and the linking of salaries to experience and educational attainments is regarded as positive, more so among novice teachers, and it seems to be changing the negative image of the profession.<sup>23</sup>

“When we talk about why so many people decided to enter schools, it is because the salaries increased and became dependent on your abilities, passing exams, and so on,” said a Civic Education teacher.<sup>24</sup>

Indeed, more and more people are applying for teaching degrees, teacher conversion courses or teacher training courses. All universities providing the combined bachelor+master’s primary teacher program report increased annual demand and available slots too, with over 400 enrolled students in 2019 and over 900 available slots announced in 2021.<sup>25</sup> Teacher training courses are also in high demand and increasingly competitive, with TSU doubling its slots between 2016 and 2019. However, these are mostly used by current Teacher Practitioners who want to train for the Senior Teacher status exams.<sup>26</sup>

The high demand largely stems from the availability of state scholarships for teacher training courses, amounting a GEL 2000 lump sum. Around 1000 people take these courses solely on the state scholarship. The real number is higher, as there are some people who finance their studies themselves.

<sup>22</sup> National Statistics Office of Georgia (2020), Statistical Yearbook of Georgia 2020. <https://www.geostat.ge/en/single-archive/3351> (Reviewed August 24, 2021)

<sup>23</sup> Focus groups and phone interviews with public school teachers and recent graduates of teaching programs conducted in March-August 2021

<sup>24</sup> Focus group with teachers (August 14, 2021)

<sup>25</sup> NAEC, Unified National Exams, Results Archive 2019. <https://naec.ge/#/ge/post/1985> (Reviewed August 31, 2021); NAEC, Unified National Exams, Examination Programs 2021. <https://naec.ge/#/ge/post/1843> (Reviewed August 31, 2021)

<sup>26</sup> GeoWel Research (2019), Educating Georgia: an overview of Georgia’s General Education system and a consideration of opportunities and challenges. <https://geowel.org/en/educating-georgia-key-findings/> (Reviewed August 16, 2021)

Figure 5. Annual volume of teacher training state grant, 2016-2020 (GEL)

Academic year	Budget (GEL)
2016/2017	2 133 000
2017/2018	2 054 250
2018/2019	1 498 500
2019/2020	1 845 000
2020/2021	1 964 250

Reference: Ordinances of the Government of Georgia<sup>27</sup>

Moreover, since 2021 special education teachers are also able to engage in professional development schemes, meaning they are also eligible to salary increases based on their competence. This is expected to increase the attractiveness of these position.<sup>28</sup>

#### 4. Entering the profession

Increases in salaries and opportunities for professional development have certainly made teaching a more appealing career path in Georgia. However, in spite of these positive trends, until recently it was extremely rare for novice teachers to get hired full-time. Between 2015-2018 only 821 teachers under the age of 30 entered Georgia's public school system.<sup>29</sup>

In 2019 the Georgian government decided to facilitate a generational shift in the country's teachers. To encourage older teachers to retire, and thus make room for younger teachers, the government announced a reform for teachers of pensionable age, allowing them to retire in exchange for a one-off bonus worth two years of their salary.<sup>30</sup> In this way, the state "expressed its gratitude to older teachers who have reached the retirement age, established the history of secondary education and raised many generations, for their many years of invaluable pedagogical work", as stated by the Deputy Education Minister Irina Abuladze.<sup>31</sup> The aim of the reform was to "give the person having reached the retirement age the opportunity to quickly retire

<sup>27</sup> Ordinance of the Government of Georgia N415 of 24 August 2016 on Approval of Volume and Amount of Funding Persons Enrolled in Teachers Training Program; Ordinance of the Government of Georgia N269 of 1 June 2017 on Approval of Volume and Amount of Funding Persons Enrolled in Teachers Training Program for Academic Year of 2017-2018; Ordinance of the Government of Georgia N412 of 9 August 2018 on Approval of Volume and Amount of Funding Persons Enrolled in Teachers Training Program for Academic Year of 2018-2019; Ordinance of the Government of Georgia N429 of 04 September 2019 on Approval of Volume and Amount of Funding Persons Enrolled in Teachers Training Program for Academic Year of 2019-2020; Ordinance of the Government of Georgia N518 of 21 August 2020 on Approval of Volume and Amount of Funding Persons Enrolled in Teachers Training Program for Academic Year of 2020-2021

<sup>28</sup> Order of the Minister of Education and Science #04/N of January 22, 2021 On Approval of Rules for Conducting the Special Education teacher Exams. <https://www.matsne.gov.ge/ka/document/view/5083287?publication=1> (Reviewed August 24, 2021)

<sup>29</sup> Data provided by EMIS upon request, August 2021

<sup>30</sup> Ordinance of the Government of Georgia #371 of August 6, 2019 On Amendments to the Resolution №241 of the Government of Georgia of May 23, 2019 on the Approval of the Teacher Professional Development and Career Advancement Scheme. <https://matsne.gov.ge/ka/document/view/4629546> (Reviewed August, 2021)

<sup>31</sup> Ministry of Education and Science of Georgia (2019), *About 6,000 registered retired teachers will receive cash awards in the beginning of October*. <https://mes.gov.ge/content.php?id=9344&lang=eng> (Reviewed August 23, 2021)

with dignity and fill the system with new, young teachers who need to quickly improve their competencies," said the then prime minister Giorgi Gakharia.<sup>32</sup>

Preliminary data analysis shows that the reform has had positive effects on several quantitative indicators:

- In 2019-2020 over 5000 new teachers entered the school system.<sup>33</sup>
- One third of the new teachers were under 30 years of age.<sup>34</sup>
- Among the retired teachers 28% taught math, 22% taught natural sciences and 16% taught music<sup>35</sup>, meaning that the high average age of teachers in math and natural sciences has decreased.
- Between 2018 and 2020 the average age of teachers decreased from 50.4 to 48.9 and the share of teachers over the age of 50 fell from 53.5% to 48%. However, both of these figures are still significantly higher than 2018 TALIS averages of 43.3 and 31.4, respectively.<sup>36</sup>
- Between 2018 and 2020 the percentage of teachers under the age of 30 increased from 3.9% to 5%<sup>37</sup>, though this is still significantly lower than the 2018 TALIS average of 11.5%.<sup>38</sup>

Figure 6. Age distribution of teachers who conducted their first lesson in public schools in 2019-May 2021

Age	N	%
20-29	1743	34%
30-39	1 492	30%
40-49	1 035	20%
50-59	588	12%
60-69	173	3%
70 or more	24	0.5%
<b>Total</b>	<b>5 055</b>	<b>100%</b>

Reference: Data provided by EMIS upon request, August 2021

This reform in 2019 made progress in making room for new blood in the education system and making the Georgian teaching profession younger. However, it was a one-off, and the system needs to maintain this

<sup>32</sup> Batumelebi Netgazeti (2020), *The retirement program for teachers of retirement age should continue – Gakharia.* <https://batumelebi.netgazeti.ge/news/286092/> (Reviewed August 23, 2021)

<sup>33</sup> Edu.Aris.ge (2021), More than 2,000 math teachers left the system - how many teachers conducted the first lesson in 2019-2020. <https://edu.aris.ge/news/sistemidan-2-000-ze-meti-matematikis-maswavlebeli-wavida-ramden-maswavlebeli-daufiqsirda-pirveli-gakvetili2019-2020-wels.html> (Reviewed August 23, 2021)

<sup>34</sup> Data provided by EMIS upon request, August 2021

<sup>35</sup> Edu.Aris.ge (2021), More than 2,000 math teachers left the system - how many teachers conducted the first lesson in 2019-2020. <https://edu.aris.ge/news/sistemidan-2-000-ze-meti-matematikis-maswavlebeli-wavida-ramden-maswavlebeli-daufiqsirda-pirveli-gakvetili2019-2020-wels.html> (Reviewed August 23, 2021)

<sup>36</sup> Education Coalition (2021), *Overview of Teacher Professional Development System in Georgia*

<sup>37</sup> Education Coalition (2021), *Overview of Teacher Professional Development System in Georgia*

<sup>38</sup> TALIS 2018 Results (Volume I), Annex C. List of tables available on line, Chapter 3. The Changing Landscape of Teaching. [https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/sites/1d0bc92a-en/1/3/3/index.html?itemId=/content/publication/1d0bc92a-en&\\_csp\\_=1418ec5a16ddb9919c5bc207486a271c&itemIGO=oecd&itemContentType=book](https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/sites/1d0bc92a-en/1/3/3/index.html?itemId=/content/publication/1d0bc92a-en&_csp_=1418ec5a16ddb9919c5bc207486a271c&itemIGO=oecd&itemContentType=book) (Reviewed August 4, 2021)

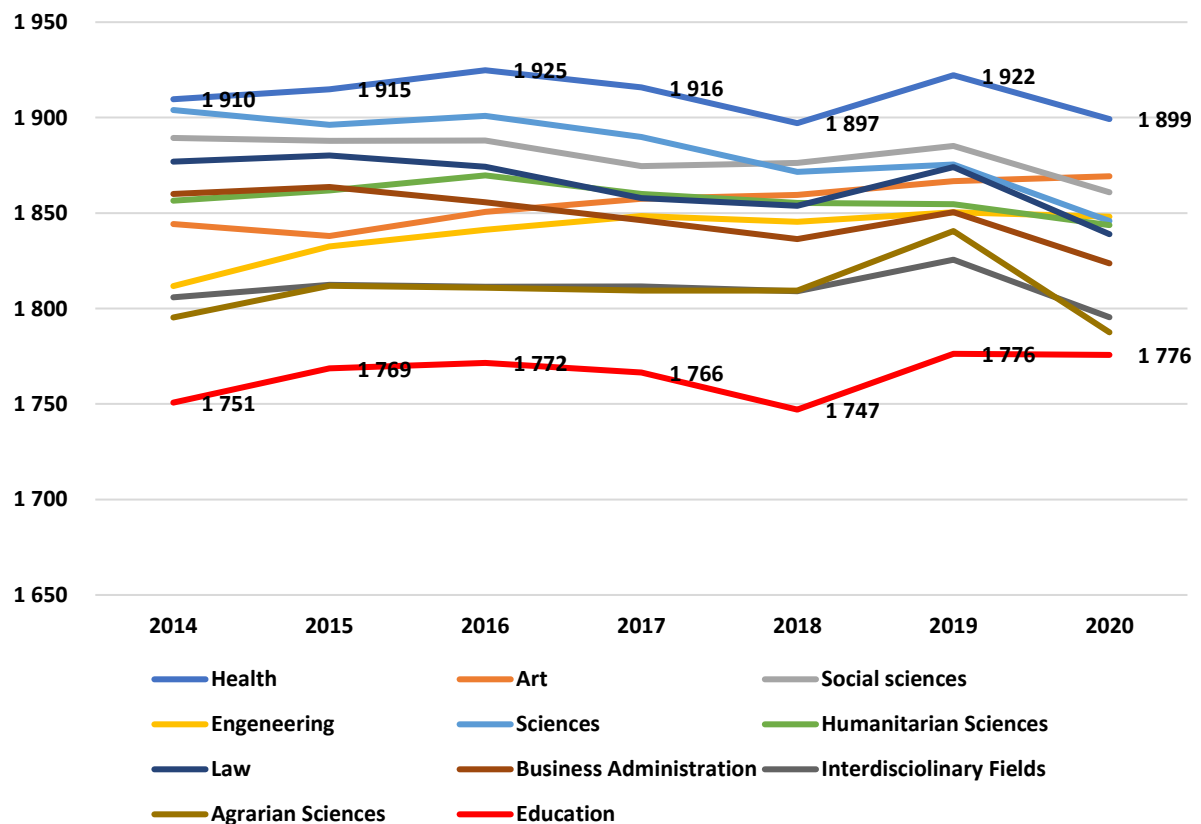
positive trend, even if at a slower rate. A possible threat is that now as new teachers have entered the system, it once again becomes ‘locked’ and reluctant to accept any more ‘new blood’.

There are several main points in teaching that need particular attention in order to ensure competitiveness and qualification of the teachers in the profession: admission to teacher training programs and teaching methods themselves.

#### 4.1. Admissions to the teacher training programs

An ongoing structural issue concerning the teaching profession in Georgia is that, even though it attracts people who are motivated by the ‘right reasons’, it fails to attract the brightest school leavers into teacher training programmes—at least according to achievement scores in the standardized national exams. For example, each year between 2014 and 2020 students admitted to study education had the lowest average admission scores, compared to 10 other fields.<sup>39</sup>

Figure 7: Student average university admission test scores by field of study, 2014-2020 the



Reference: Data provided by EMIS upon request (September 2021)

<sup>39</sup> Data provided by EMIS upon request (September 2021)

Entrance requirements for bachelor's and master's education courses (as well as teacher training courses) are relative, meaning that while there is a minimum threshold that all applicants need to pass, students' scores are assessed only in relation each other rather than objective grade criteria. The one-year teacher training course also requires passing an exam set by universities, however, they are generally able to accept a high number of applicants and are more demand-flexible.

In order to ensure that new Georgian teachers have competitive skillsets and high qualifications, the government should exercise significant quality control on recruitment to teacher training courses. TEDS-M shows that Georgian government has exerted "weak control" on such programs.<sup>40</sup> For comparison, Germany has a combined control mechanism for teacher training programs, which means that even though all highschool graduates are eligible to apply for university, the state establishes high requirements for admission to teacher training courses. In Germany, candidates' school graduation exam results need to be in the top 30% of their cohort.

#### 4.2. Trainee teacher work experience and in-job development

Another important factor for producing competent teachers is the practical element of teaching programs/courses—making sure trainees have actual classroom experience. While available teaching courses and programs do have a "practical" component, it is insufficient for trainees to get hired as teachers. The practical element of teacher training courses is both insufficient in terms of a trainee's resume, and in terms of the trainee being fully prepared and confident enough to start teaching a class. Teachers in our focus groups and interviews underlined the importance of having actual teaching experience when looking for a job, which is often pivotal in even being considered for a teaching vacancy at public schools.

"I was looking [for a teaching job] for almost a year in schools in Tbilisi and Rustavi. I went to several interviews, one school told me 'You will find communication with parents difficult, because you are young'. I had no hope anymore. I was 23. They were rejecting me because of age. They want young teachers but at the same time, they don't. From my [teacher training] class only two [graduates] work at a school. Nineteen of them changed professions, a few went to work in a bank, a few in office work. They were looking [for a teaching job] and they could not find any." – Primary school teacher.<sup>41</sup>

This is an issue throughout Georgia, based on our interviews and focus groups with teachers.<sup>42</sup> TALIS 2018 also says that teacher recruitment trends do not differ by type of settlement.<sup>43</sup>

"I am not interested in [a teaching job] in Tbilisi. I was looking in the regions. I could not even reach the interview stage. When you ask people like me, and by that, I mean people with no [teaching] experience, they say that schools do not really look at the CVs [of candidates without experience] but just randomly choose

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<sup>40</sup> National Assessment and Examinations Center (2010), TEDS-M 2008, p53. <https://naec.ge/#/ge/post/1498> (Reviewed August 24, 2021)

<sup>41</sup> Interview with a primary school teacher (August 11, 2021)

<sup>42</sup> Interviews and focus groups with teachers (July-August 2021)

<sup>43</sup> National Assessment and Examinations Center (2020), *Teaching and Learning International Survey TALIS 2018*, p157

[CVs] from the pool. So, if I am proactive, call them and ask if they are considering me [for the position] or not, there is more chance that they open and check my CV.” - Recent graduate of teacher training course.<sup>44</sup>

Based on the experience of our respondents, working for private schools in order to build their CV is one solution. These schools often pay much less than public schools and many teachers only work there in order to gain official work experience.<sup>45</sup> Moreover, very often schools tend to hire only applicants that are personally known by the people doing the recruiting.

“I have started [looking for a job] recently. I check vacancies on teacherjobs.ge every day. So far there were only three vacancies for Georgian language teachers in my area. One in private and two in public schools. We’ll see what happens. However, from what I see among my acquaintances, I think, if you don’t have someone you know at the school... Such people have more privileges.” - said a recent university graduate waiting for their teacher status exam results.<sup>46</sup>

The Teacher Seeker program was assessed positively by our respondents in terms of gaining experience.<sup>47</sup> This program allows persons with an academic degree in any of the subjects taught at school to enter school, begin working in a classroom, and undergo teacher training course remotely. In up to two years, upon completing all requirements, a Teacher Seeker gains a Senior Teacher status. Teacher Seeker positions are announced and recruited by schools, and these teachers are remunerated at the minimum teacher salary.<sup>48</sup>

“I started working last year, through the Teacher Seeker program. I applied via teacherjobs.ge. I worked a bit for a private school and then came to a public school via interview. I was a Seeker for a year and received my [teacher] status recently. You don’t have to go to university, it’s very convenient, you are in charge of your studies, you are not limited in time, you regulate when you will complete the course plus you do the practical part at school. It was a lot of effort, I invested a lot of work, but it was productive. I started with GEL 500 [salary] and it immediately doubled when I received the status.” – Civic Education teacher.<sup>49</sup>

The Teacher Profession Entry and Career Development Scheme introduced teacher statuses in 2015. The idea was that the teachers who were unable to pass the test would have to leave the school in order to make way for a new wave of more qualified teachers. However, in practice, teachers who were unable to pass the competence test were assigned “Practitioner” status and were given multiple additional “last chances” to gain Senior Teacher status and not be obligated to resign. The most recent “last chance” for these teachers was announced this summer.<sup>50</sup> This has meant that many young and fully qualified teachers were unable to

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<sup>44</sup> Interview with a recent graduate of teacher training course (August 5, 2021)

<sup>45</sup> Interviews and focus groups with teachers (August 2021)

<sup>46</sup> Interview with a recent university graduate waiting for teacher status confirmation exam results (August 5, 2021)

<sup>47</sup> Focus group with and phone interviews with teachers (August 2021)

<sup>48</sup> Ministry of Education and Science of Georgia (2019), A teaching search program has been launched for those interested in teaching. <https://mes.gov.ge/content.php?id=9346&lang=geo> (Reviewed September 3, 2021); Edu.aris.ge (2018), Search program - another way to enter the teaching profession and its implementation dates. <https://edu.aris.ge/news/madzieblobis-programa-maswavleblis-profesiashi-shesvlis-kidev-erti-gza-da-misi-amoqmedebis-vadebi.html> (Reviewed September 3, 2021)

<sup>49</sup> Focus group with teachers (August 14, 2021)

<sup>50</sup> Edu.aris.ge (2021), *Endless "Last Chance"*. <https://edu.aris.ge/news/dausrulebeli-bolo-shansi.html> (Reviewed August 27, 2021)



take up positions, as the under-qualified Teacher Practitioners being given yet another last chance to pass their exams postpones the freeing up of a bulk of teaching slots by at least another semester.<sup>51</sup>

Another important issue is the on-the-job professional development. While training modules are continuously offered to teachers, they are not tailored to the needs of teachers and are not demand-based. Teachers in our focus groups noted that there had not been any surveys of their training needs so they are left to choose from a menu of training options that are often not appropriate for them. They also said that the trainers themselves are often not fully qualified to be giving the training. While such trainings are useful for some, more experienced teachers feel their time is wasted. Professional development modules require diversification, needs assessment and provision of training based on that.

“The training was horrible, a torture. Ten-day training, two hours every evening. It really would have been better to have longer training for fewer days. Firstly, the trainer was very incompetent in computer technologies. Then, they mixed something very basic up while speaking, a mistake that a trainer should not be making. We were correcting them along the way. Trainings like this do not give me anything. And it’s unacceptable for a teacher or trainer to be sexist. Then I found out, the training was not mandatory. This was not indicated anywhere and no one told me.” – Teacher from Tbilisi<sup>52</sup>

## 5. Recommendations

Even though 8,000 retirement age teachers left the profession as part of the one-off 2019 reform, this was not enough to rejuvenate the entire teaching body in Georgia, especially considering that over 2,000 of the newly vacant positions were allocated to already existing teachers, meaning only about 5,000 novice teachers were hired, only one-third of which were under 30 years of age. Indeed, data provided by EMIS shows that around 200 teachers hired were 60 or over and 24 teachers – 70 or over.<sup>53</sup> As the number of years in teaching do not correlate positively with student achievement, but teacher qualification does, this shows there is still much work to be done to get younger, better qualified teachers into the profession in Georgia.<sup>54</sup>

The goal of Georgia’s education system needs to **be increasing the competitiveness of the teaching profession and rejuvenation of the teaching body with highly qualified and competitive teachers**. This will require incentives and support during teacher training, hiring and on-job training, as well as employment outflow. In addition to this:

- A dignified retirement plan is required in order to encourage teachers who have stayed in the profession the longest to retire. One option is providing a one-off retirement award, similar to 2019, although too many such rewards could set unrealistic expectations of them being given to retirees every year.
- A strong public relations campaign from the government and stakeholders focusing on the good salaries, the prestige, the meaningfulness, the moral reward and the “coolness” of the profession.

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<sup>51</sup> Interviews with recent graduates of 60-credit teacher training programs (August 2021)

<sup>52</sup> Focus group with teachers (August 14, 2021)

<sup>53</sup> Data provided by EMIS upon request, August 2021

<sup>54</sup> National Assessment and Examinations Center (2020), *Teaching and Learning International Survey TALIS 2018*, p 38

Meaningful efforts in this direction have been made by the National Teacher Prize<sup>55</sup>, but the situation calls for a larger push.

- Recognizing and rewarding Lead and Mentor teachers (Lead Teachers comprise 14% of the teaching body, Mentors – only 0.5%).
- Recognizing and further training the most successful teachers along with improvement of the profile and support for school principals. This can serve as a further career development path for successful teachers, increasing the attractiveness of teaching as a career choice.
- Setting higher exam thresholds for aspiring teachers to enter university for the combined bachelor+master program, and for graduating from teacher training courses. This might mean fewer teachers qualify, but increasing the bar slowly and steadily over several years, coupled with growing salaries (as recently announced by the Prime Minister<sup>56</sup>) and concerted publicity campaigns will attract brighter students to teacher education programmes.
- In addition, support needs to be provided for trainee teachers coming from rural or under-represented communities and/or poor socio-economic backgrounds, who are studying the most in-demand subjects. In order to ensure the return on investment for the system, the stipend can be conditional – available for those who will stay in teaching for, say, five years.
- By popularizing successful teachers' positive experiences of the Teacher Seeker programme and by highlighting its flexible approach to self-management, and the likelihood of becoming fully employed in school at a Senior Teacher salary, more and brighter candidates can be attracted
- Providing high quality training to new teachers in their first few years is essential. The training of teachers as trainers and investing in capacity development of teachers as trainers in schools is an area that should be looked at
- The trainings developed and conducted by Teachers' House (TPDC) need to be better tailored to the level of education and experience of the participants. Trainings need to be diversified based on systematic periodic surveys of teachers about their training needs

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<sup>55</sup> National Teachers Prize. <https://www.tprize.ge/>

<sup>56</sup> RadioTavisupleba (2021), The Prime Minister promises teachers an average salary of 2,200 GEL by 2030. <https://www.radiotavisupleba.ge/a/31326135.html> (Reviewed September 6, 2021)