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## How the Job Guarantee Proposal Could Combat the Curse of Joblessness in Georgia

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*Bard College*

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**How the Job Guarantee Proposal Could Combat the Curse of Joblessness in Georgia**

Senior Project Submitted to The Division of Social Studies

of

Bard College

by

Nana Tsurtsunia

Annandale-on-Hudson, New York

May 2024

Bard College



## **Dedication**

*Dedicated to everyone in Georgia fighting for their freedom and a better future.*

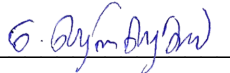
## **Acknowledgements**

I extend my sincere gratitude to my professors Pavlina Tcherneva, L. Randall Wray, Sanjay Desilva, Michael Martell, Kyle Mohr, and Aniruddha Mitra for their limitless support and inspiration throughout my academic journey.

## Plagiarism Statement

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Nana Tsursumia





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## **Introduction**

Peeling back the layers of Georgia's economic history, we find a persistent but familiar challenge: joblessness and beneath it, we find a multitude of factors shaping the Georgian labor market. By understanding these factors, we can not only identify the cause of the problem but explore possible solutions to tackle this issue. This research paper aims to uncover the reasons why Georgia struggles with persistent unemployment, poverty, inequality, brain drain, and a declining population. In order to get to the root of this relentless economic predicament the paper closely examines labor market trends with its dimensions and attempts to present the Job Guarantee program as a valid solution for policymakers to consider.

Although I have only lived through Soviet Georgia and the challenging times of the 90s through the retellings of my grandparents and parents, the mark it has left on Georgia's political and economic systems makes it very hard to be oblivious. Despite the strong sentiments that Georgian people carry towards their country, the economic and political situations have forced many to leave their home and loved ones, in hopes of a better future. The inspiration for this research paper comes from the consistent economic struggles I have seen amongst my people.

To answer the research question, I will first present a historical overview of Georgia or better contextualization of the country's political, economic and social dynamics. Then I will research data on Georgia's labor market and analyze the trends that emerge focusing on their contributions to the persistent economic issues of the nation. Next I will evaluate the analyzed data and the issues that have emerged with the trends in order to later address them in my policy proposal. Next I will present the Job Guarantee proposal as a possible public policy option for solving these issues. Then I will evaluate how the Job Guarantee program can address the emerging issues in Georgia's labor market and benefit the economy of Georgia as a whole. The

importance and implications of the paper are further discussed at the end of the research, noting further contributions that could be made to the research.

## **Historical Context**

Georgia is located at the intersection of Eastern Europe and Western Asia. It is part of the Caucasus region, bounded by the Black Sea to the west, Russia to the north and east, Turkey, Armenia and Azerbaijan to the south. The history of 20th-century Georgia starts with it being part of the Russian Empire and the Soviet Union for about a century, with four years of independence between them from 1918 to 1922. Both the Russian Empire and the Soviet Union had strong authoritarian regimes enforced by authoritarian institutions. During the Russian Empire, Georgia had a traditional peasant-agriculture economic system, and during the Soviet Union - communist system. In the Soviet era, Georgians were very much detached from the outside world, and the economic-political system was extremely centralized. During this time, the Georgian economy was actually colonial in nature, the industry was underdeveloped, and agriculture mainly produced plantation crops and was tied to Russia. Georgia gained independence in 1991, however, had a very painful transition process, both politically and economically. Because there was no fundamental discontinuity between the Russian Empire and the Soviet autocratic experience, Georgians were missing market memory; they had gained the freedom of autonomy but didn't know how to use it. As a newly independent Republic, Georgia lacked a base for stable political and economic development, and an armed rebellion against the new government of Zviad Gamsakhurdia drove the country into civil war in 1991-93. The loss of the huge market that had existed in the Soviet Union, compounded by the political and military conflict of the 1991 Civil War, had a significant impact on Georgia. When that stabilized,

Georgia entered a period of modernization, but to this day, it deals with the effects of two centuries of Russian-Soviet rule, faces daily economic, social, and political challenges, and is struggling to become an established completely democratic state.

Georgia's unfavorable starting conditions have translated to the consistent economic problems it faces today: a high rate of positive net migration, brain drain/loss of human capital, population decline, consistent unemployment, poverty, inequality, and high inflation.

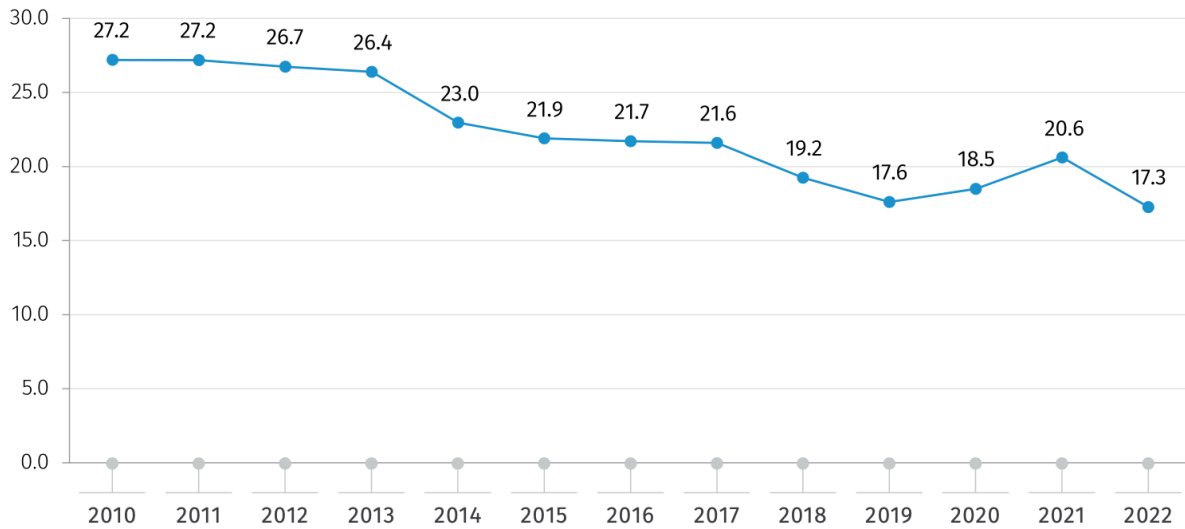
## **Labor Market Trends in Georgia**

Georgia's history unfolds unemployment as one of the most persistent problems of the economy and the population as a whole. In order to get to the bottom of why unemployment persists to be a hard-to-solve topic in Georgia, the roots of the labor market trends need to be examined. This chapter is going to analyze the main trends of Georgia's labor market in depth and extract main overarching issues that need to be addressed while trying to propose a solution. It will start by discussing employment in Georgia as a whole and then further discuss main areas of Georgia's labor market in subchapters. The main areas are presented as the main indicators of the labor market, youth unemployment, gender dynamics in the labor market, inequality and poverty, minimum wage, poverty and migration, brain drain and human capital loss.

### **Labor Market Overview**

The line graph below shows the national unemployment rate for Georgia from 2010 to 2023. Georgia's unemployment rate has shown a decreasing trend since 2010. The unemployment rate after the 2008 dual crisis in Georgia (the Russo-Georgian war of 2008 in combination with the global financial and economic crisis of 2007- 2009) stood at 27.2 percent in 2010, yet declined to 17.3 percent by 2022, showing an almost 10 percent decrease. While these numbers are very impressive, it is important to look at other labor market indicators, such as the amount of labor force and employed persons, to see a fuller picture.

**Graph 1 - Unemployment rate, 2010-2022, (percent)**

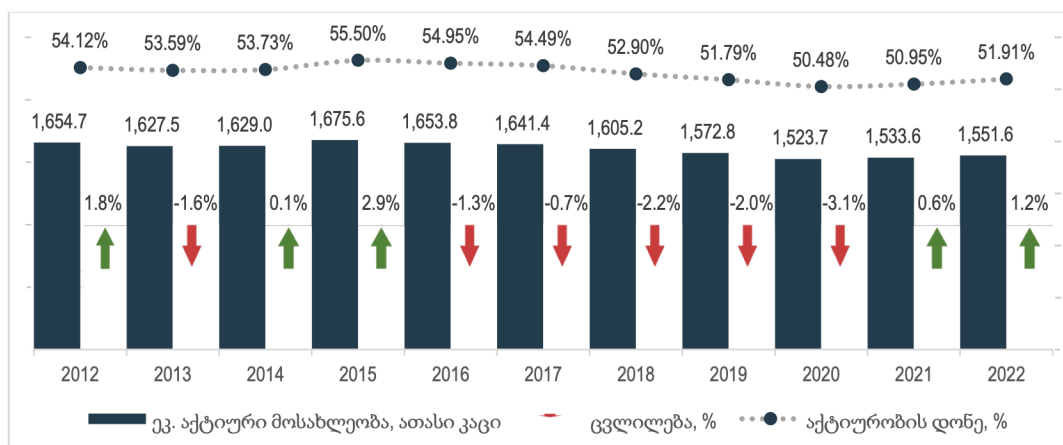


*Source: GeoStat*

The main reason for the favorable unemployment rate indicators has been a decrease in labor force participation. The graph below shows the labor force participation rate from 2010 to 2022, indicating a downward trend from 2015 to 2019 just before the Covid-19 crisis further started to negatively affect the economy, resulting in a 3.7% decrease from 55.5 % to 51.8%, which amounted to 103 000 people, while the unemployment rate declined by 4.3% from 21.9% to 17.6% in the same period. It is worth noting that the labor force participation and employment rates exhibit a similar pattern. They both increased from 2012 to 2015 and decreased afterward. It can be inferred that when employment opportunities increase, labor force participation also goes up, and vice versa; thus, people exit the workforce as they become further discouraged. Some might attribute the decrease in the labor force to the common trend of positive net-out migration and the declining working-age population in Georgia. However, the decline in the labor force and the participation rate cannot be solely attributed to migration or aging. If this was

the case, the labor force participation rate would remain the same or even increase, as the share of the labor force to the working-age population would not be affected.

**Labor Force and Labor Force Participation Rate, 2012-2022,  
(thousand persons, percent, percent change)**



Source: GeoStat, graph by Ministry of Economy and Sustainable Development of Georgia

Bar - active population, thousand persons, Arrows - percentage change  
Dots - labor participation rate

According to the most recent data from GeoStat<sup>1</sup>, around 1.1 million people of the working-age population were out of the labor force in 2023, which means that they were neither working nor actively looking for a job—this is a significant number for Georgia, as it accounts for almost half of the working-age population. A large part of this neither employed nor job-seeking population is engaged in subsistence farming. In 2023, 401,000 people produced agricultural products mainly for family and consumption<sup>2</sup>. Composite measure of labor underutilization which combines time-related unemployment and combined rate of unemployed and potential labor force was reported to be 34.7 percent in 2022 by the official data of Geostat.

<sup>1</sup>Danish Trade Union Development Agency. *Labour Market Profile Georgia - 2021*. 2021. <https://www.ulandssekretariatet.dk/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/LMP-Georgia-2021-final-rev.pdf>.

<sup>2</sup>National Statistics Office of Georgia (Geostat). "Employment and Unemployment." <https://www.geostat.ge/en/modules/categories/683/Employment-Unemployment>.

From the economic viewpoint, in the face of unemployment and low labor participation we get a so-called opportunity cost of the output that is lost because of the unutilized workforce (i.e., the output that might have been produced if those who are unemployed were employed). Moreover, the government loses income in the form of less tax-payers. In developed countries, and some developing ones as well, the opportunity cost is further deepened since the government has to pay more unemployment benefits.<sup>3</sup>

To comprehensively analyze labor market trends it is important to examine the employment rate to determine how much of the decreasing unemployment rate can be attributed to a decrease in labor force participation. A small rise in employment mixed with a large decline in the overall labor force might lower the unemployment rate, but this decrease in unemployment might hide the fact that much of the population has given up and dropped out of the work force altogether. Employment rates grew the most between 2013 and 2015, when the employment rate increased by 4 percent and the number of employed increased by 111,000 however, Georgia had trouble sustaining these numbers. From 2015 to 2019, the number of employed decreased by 13 thousand while in the same period the labor force decreased by 103 thousand. Thus, as the total size of the labor force and the number of those employed both decreased during 2015-2019, the sizable drop in the unemployment rate of 4.3% during the same period can be completely attributed to the decrease in labor force participation, rather than an increase in employment opportunities.

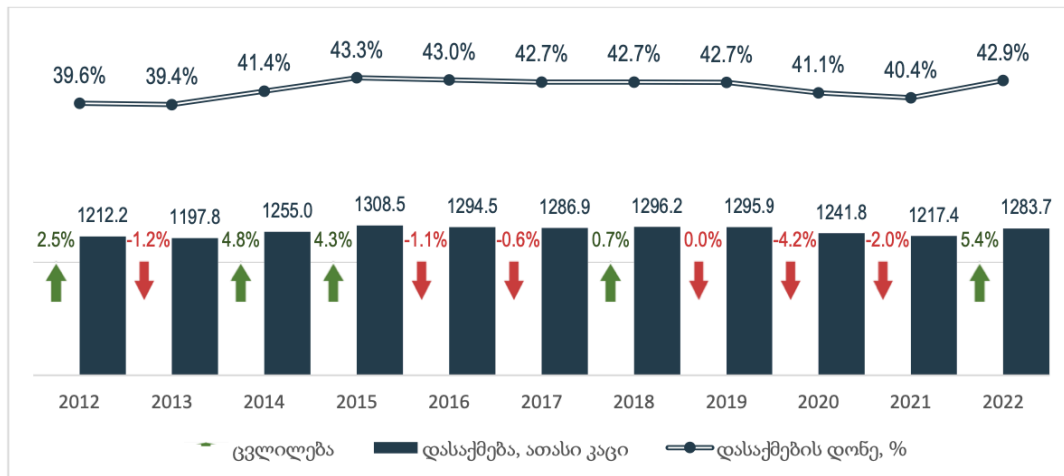
After 2019, the economy started to recover from the COVID-19 crisis; the real Gross Domestic Product showed a record-high growth rate of 10.6 percent and 11.0 percent in 2021

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<sup>3</sup>შოთა გვეშელაშვილი, "5000 ლარზე □აღალი ყოველთვიური □ემოსავალი □აქართველოს □ოსახლეობის მხოლოდ 0.7%-ს □ქვს," *BM.GE*, 2021, <https://bm.ge/news/5000-larze-magali-yoveltviuri-shemosavali-saqartvelos-mosaxleobis-mxolod-07-s-aqvs/95665>.

and 2022, respectively<sup>4</sup>. In addition, the unemployment rate is declining and returning to its initial levels, standing at 17.3 percent in 2022, even surpassing that of the pre-crisis level, which was 17.6 percent. Nevertheless, if we look closer and observe how labor force and employment indicators behaved in the same period, we will see that both are less than the pre-crisis period; the labor force decreased by about 21 thousand in total from 2019 to 2022 while the amount of employed decreased by about 12 thousand in the same period. On that account, even if unemployment rates are similar to pre-covid levels, this obfuscates the fact that many members have dropped out of the labor force, and that ultimately the labor market is worse off than it was before COVID-19.

**Employment and Employment Rate, 2012 - 2022,  
(thousand persons, percent, percent change)**



Source: GeoStat, graph by Ministry of Economy and Sustainable Development of Georgia

Bar - employed population, thousand persons, Arrows - percentage change  
Dots - employment rate

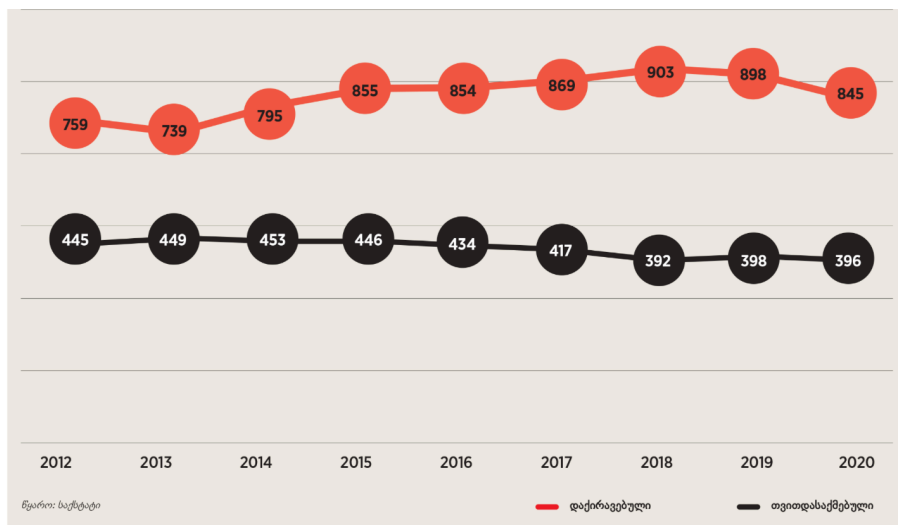
Although the overall employment growth in Georgia has been stagnant since 2015, it is important to analyze the distribution of employment between self-employed and hired workers.

<sup>4</sup>National Statistics Office of Georgia (Geostat). "Gross Domestic Product (GDP)".  
<https://www.geostat.ge/en/modules/categories/23/gross-domestic-product-gdp>.



Looking at the number of employed individuals alone does not provide us with a clear understanding of the dynamics of job creation, which is a crucial indicator for evaluating the success of the country's economy. The graph below depicts the distribution of self-employed and hired workers, providing insights into the number of jobs created. Between 2013 and 2015, the number of hired workers increased significantly from 739,000 to 855,000, indicating a rise of 116,000 in hired-workers. In contrast, the number of self-employed individuals remained mostly unchanged. Therefore, the reduction in unemployment from 26.4 percent to 21.9 percent during this period can be solely attributed to the creation of new jobs in the country.

**Distribution of Employment by Hired and Self-employed, 2012-2020,  
(thousand persons)**



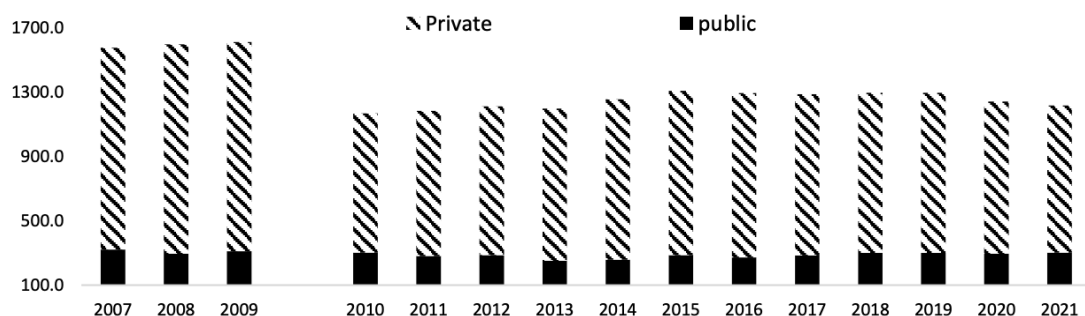
*Source: GeoStat, graph by Forbes  
red - hired workers, black - self-employed*

The above dynamic changes after 2015 show an interesting trend: while the number of hired workers has been increasing slowly, the number of self-employed has also been decreasing, which is why we didn't see any change in employment level indicators. From 2015 to 2019, the number of self-employed decreased by 52,000 while the number of hired workers increased by

43,000. This is because as new jobs are created, they are demanded not only by the unemployed but also by the self-employed workers, as wages and working conditions are usually very low for the self-employed category. As a result, we observe a trend where an increase in the number of hired workers is offset by a decrease in the number of self-employed workers. With this type of job growth, it will be very difficult for Georgia to solve its unemployment issues as job growth doesn't automatically transfer to employment growth in the country.

While analysis of hired vs self-employed workers shows us information about the job growth in the country, it conceals the roles played by private and public sectors in how jobs are actually created. Public sector employment has been increasing yearly in Georgia over the last decade when observing statistics from GeoStat. In 2021, the number of employed workers reached 316,000, representing an increase of 34,000 from the previous year 2020 (281.9 thousand) and a 40 thousand person increase from 2019 (276.9 thousand). Along with growth in the number of people employed, the public sector's share of total employment has also expanded. In 2021, the public sector accounted for 24.8% of total employment, an increase of 1.7 percent from 2018-19 (23.1%) and 4.2 percent from 2014 (20.6%). This indicates a notable shift towards greater reliance on public sector employment in job-creation.

**Distribution of hired-workers by sector, 2010-2021, (thousands)**



*Source: GeoStat, chart by Shamugia Egnate*

Consequently, the private sector's role in employment has declined in terms of share and actual numbers even though Georgia was ranked 7th out of 190 nations in the 2020 World Bank 'Doing Business' assessment.<sup>5</sup> In 2021, the private sector employed 916.0 thousand workers, which is a decrease of 31 thousand from 2020 (947.1 thousand) and a significant drop of 106 thousand from its peak of 1,022.6 thousand in 2016.

This decline suggests a relative contraction of private sector opportunities over the last decade and reflects challenges in private sector job growth and highlights the importance the Georgian public sector plays in creating more job opportunities.

## Youth Unemployment

Youth unemployment in Georgia has traditionally been high despite being the only age group to which salary satisfaction doesn't translate to work satisfaction, while promotion prospects and having a job is much more important than the prerequisites for career advancement.<sup>6</sup> The line graph below shows main indicators of the share of youth in Georgia's labor market. In the graph below we can see that from 2017 to 2021, the share of youth in the 15+ population remained more or less the same, fluctuating between 13 percent to 14 percent; however, the share of youth in the labor force of Georgia has been declining from 2017 to 2021, amounting to a 4.1% decrease in total, with the biggest drop occurring from 2019 to 2020 due to Covid-19, reaching its lowest point at 8.5 percent in 2021. The share of youth in the 15+ population outside the labor force has remained stable from 2017 to 2019 at 16.2 percent. However, it increased after that to 18.4 percent in 2021. This increase is largely attributed to the

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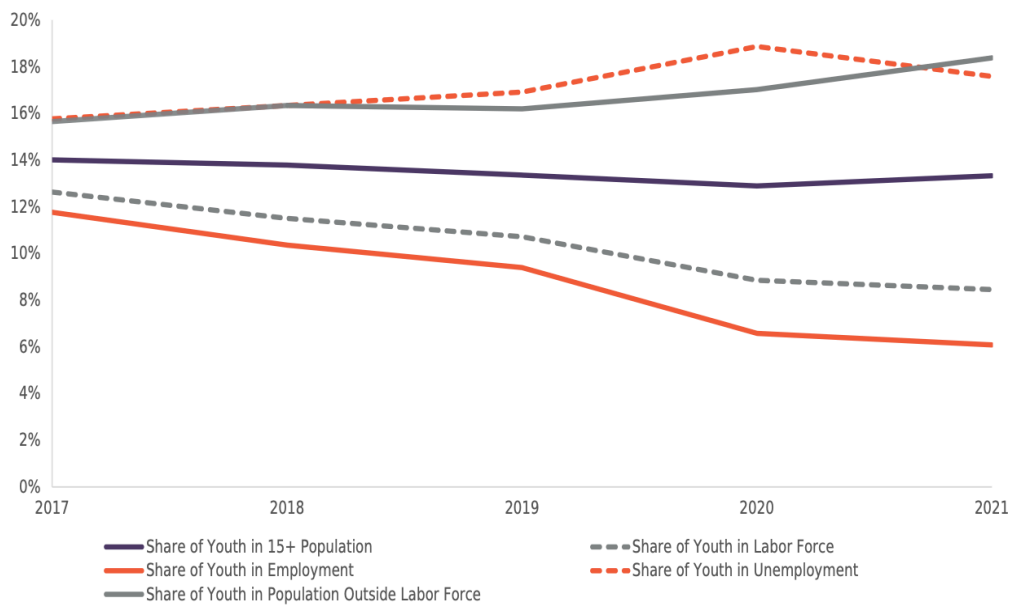
<sup>5</sup>World Bank. "Business Ready (B-Ready)." 2020.

<https://www.doingbusiness.org/en/reports/global-reports/doing-business-2020>.

<sup>6</sup> Lezhava, Diana & Amashukeli, Mariam & Gugushvili, Nino. (2017). *Education Return, Labour Market and Job Satisfaction in Georgia*, p.p. 25,.28, 105., p.105.

COVID-19 crisis, which had a particularly negative impact on young people. Many lost their jobs, and some left the labor force entirely, as the share of youth in employment decreased and the share of youth outside the labor force increased. The most drastic change in the youth labor market indicators is the share of youth employment, which dropped from an already very low indicator of 9.4 percent to 6.1 percent in 2021.

**Share of Youth in Georgia’s Labor Market, 2017-2021, (percent)**

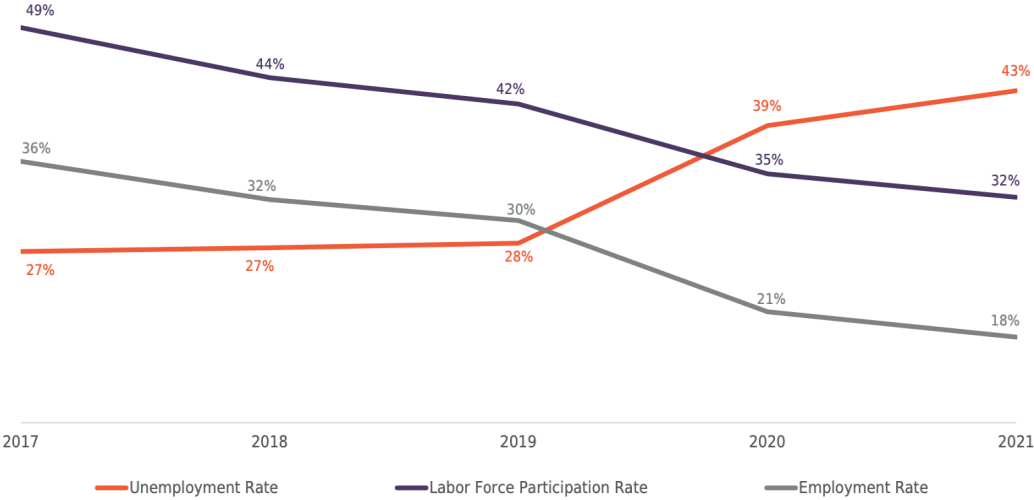


*Source: GeoStat, graph by PMC RC*

The line graph below shows the main labor market indicators for the youth, including the labor force participation rate, employment rate, and unemployment rate. While in Georgia, the overall unemployment rate has decreased from 2017 to 2019, from 21.6 percent to 17.6 percent, respectively, this has not been the case for the Georgian youth. In the same period, the unemployment rate for the youth has shown a slow but increasing trend, increasing by a total of 2 percent, from 26 percent to 28 percent in 2019. After 2019, when the COVID-19 crisis hit,

youth unemployment grew dramatically, increasing by 11 percent in 2020 to 39 percent, followed by a further rise of 4 percent in 2021 to 43 percent. The youth unemployment rate in Georgia is very high compared to the ECA average of 16 percent, and that of aspirational peers (Czech Republic, 6 percent; Estonia, 11 percent)<sup>7</sup>.

**Labor Market Indicators for the Youth, 2017-2021, (percent)**



*Source: GeoStat, graph by PMC RC*

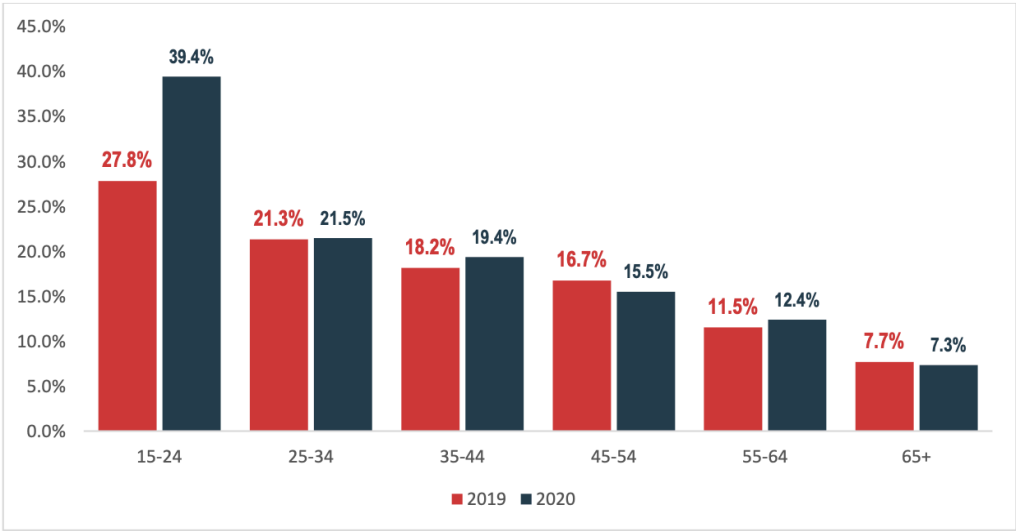
With rising unemployment during the observed period, labor force participation has been declining drastically. From 2017 to 2019, it declined by 7 percent from 49 percent to 42 percent, while from 2019 to 2021, by 10 percent from 42 percent to 32 percent. The employment rate has also behaved in a similar manner for the youth: declining by 6 percent from 36 percent to 30 percent between 2017-2019, and continuing to drop further from 30 percent to 18 percent in 2021, amounting to a total of 18 percent decrease from 2017 to 2021. More specifically, the number of youth in the labor force decreased from 207 thousand in 2017 to 129 thousand in

<sup>7</sup>World Bank. *Charting Georgia's Future: Competitive, Connected, Capable*. 2022. <https://doi.org/10.1596/38375>.

2021, resulting in a total decrease of 37.4 percent.<sup>8</sup>. It is clear that the labor market indicators for the youth have shown very unfortunate trends all of which have been exacerbated by the COVID-19 crisis.

It has to be noted that the youth age group (ages 15-24) has been the most affected by the COVID-19 crisis out of all the age groups. The bar chart below shows the change in the unemployment rate across different age groups in Georgia from 2019 to 2020. While in 2020, the unemployment rate increased by 11.6 percent for the youth, it remained almost unchanged for all the other age groups, changing by 0.6 percent on average. As the youth are more likely to be less experienced and highly skilled compared to other age groups, they are the most vulnerable to layoffs during the crisis.

**Unemployment Rate Change by Age Groups, 2019-2020, (percent)**

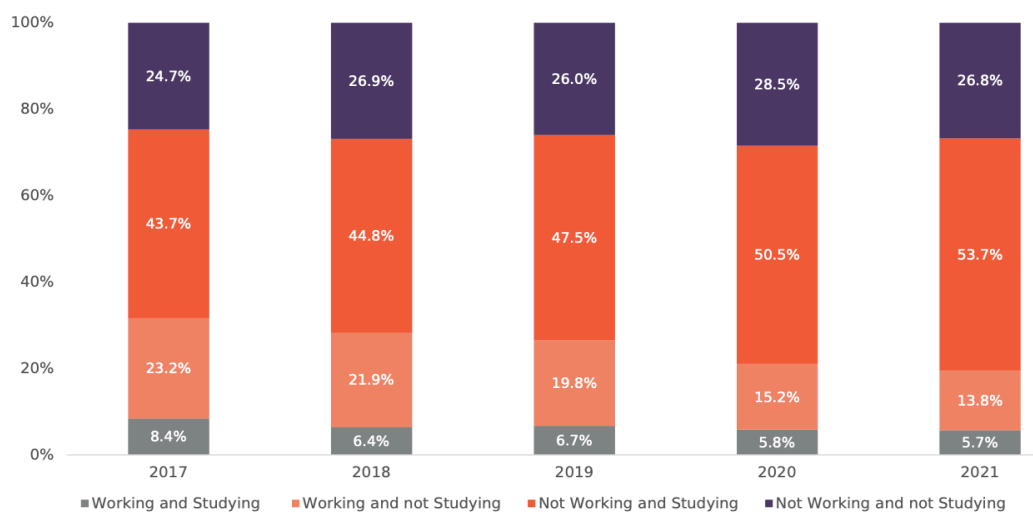


*Source: GeoStat, graph by Ministry of Economy and Sustainable Development of Georgia*

<sup>8</sup>Khishtovani, Giorgi, Sopho Basilidze, and Nikoloz Bakradze. "Youth Employment in Georgia." *PMC Research*, November 29, 2022. [https://www.pmcresearch.org/slider\\_file/bd086385cfba5a063.pdf](https://www.pmcresearch.org/slider_file/bd086385cfba5a063.pdf).

Many young people in Georgia are choosing to pursue higher education instead of joining the labor market. In fact, as of 2021, 53.7 percent of youth are studying but not working, which is an increase of 10 percent since 2017. This trend has been especially noticeable after the COVID-19 crisis in 2020, with a 3 percent increase in the share of youth studying but not working. In terms of high enrollment rates, higher education has always been a social norm for Georgia rather than fully attributed to the prospect of improving future employability. A large proportion of those with tertiary education take lower-skilled jobs and work in occupations that do not require a tertiary degree as growth in high-skilled jobs has been shown to be very slow<sup>9</sup>.

### Share of Employment and Education Status in Youth, 2017-2021, (percent)



*Source: GeoStat, graph and calculations by PMC RC*

On the other hand, there has been a significant decrease in the share of youth who are working but not studying, which has decreased by 9.4 percent compared to 2017. It seems that young people in Georgia prioritize their education over employment, either by choice or

<sup>9</sup> European Training Foundation. "Georgia Education, Training and Employment Developments 2021" 2021. [https://www.etf.europa.eu/sites/default/files/document/CFI\\_Georgia\\_2021.pdf](https://www.etf.europa.eu/sites/default/files/document/CFI_Georgia_2021.pdf).

necessity, and it is likely that they are being forced to prioritize education as unemployment rates have been rising for their age group. Share of youth who are neither studying nor working has increased by 2.1 percent over the analyzed period, reaching 26.8 percent in 2021. This means that every fourth Georgian youth is not engaged in either education or employment. Unfortunately, Georgia has one of the highest NEET (not engaged in education, employment, or training) rates among the Eastern Partnership countries. In 2020, only Armenia had a higher rate than Georgia. Additionally, Georgia's NEET rate was three times higher than the EU average in 2020.<sup>10</sup>

It is also very important to note that when we increase the age range of youth from 15-25 to 15-29, the percentage of youth neither in employment, education or training goes up to 34.6 percent in 2021<sup>11</sup>, which means that every third Georgian youth in between ages 15-29 is not engaged in either education, employment or training. This means that they are neither improving their future employability through investment in skills nor gaining experience through employment; therefore, they are especially vulnerable to both the labor market and social exclusion, as their chances of finding good jobs declines over time. With already highest rates of emigration for youth out of all age categories, 14 percent for 20–24 years old and 12.4 percent for 25–29 years old, and employment and education being the main reasons for migration, poor employment prospects for young people further exacerbate this trend.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>10</sup>World Bank. "Share of Youth Not in Education, Employment or Training, Total (% of Youth Population)". <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SL.UEM.NEET.ZS>.

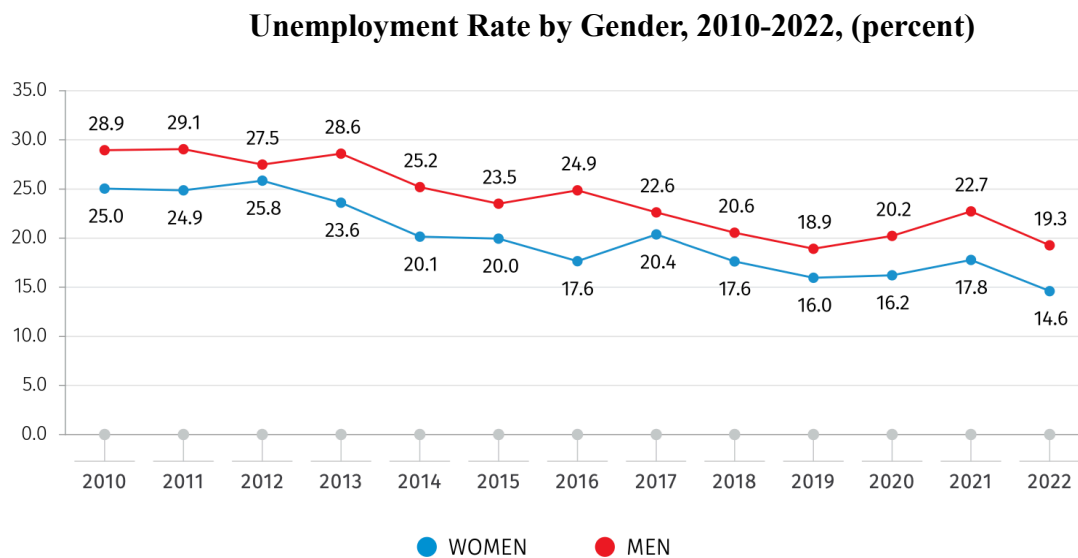
<sup>11</sup>National Statistics Office of Georgia (Geostat). "Employment and Unemployment." [www.geostat.ge/en/modules/categories/683/Employment-Unemployment](http://www.geostat.ge/en/modules/categories/683/Employment-Unemployment).

<sup>12</sup>Abesadze, N., O. Abesadze, R. Kinkladze, and N. Paresashvili. "Emigration Statistics – The Herald of the Survival of the Population of Georgia or the Demographic Crisis." *Vilnius-Tech*, 2023. <https://etalpykla.vilniustech.lt/handle/123456789/153933>



## Gender Dynamics in Labor Market

Women traditionally have lower unemployment rates than men, 14.6% and 19.3% in 2022, respectively (shown in the graph below); however, this doesn't mean they have better labor market outcomes than men, in fact, it is the opposite. Since unemployed individuals are those who are actively seeking work and are prepared to start working immediately, many women who are not employed do not meet this definition, as they do not have the time to work in the labor market. This is because household responsibilities, such as caring for children and elderly family members, typically fall under women's purview, making it difficult for them to find the time to work outside of the home. As a result, women face a significant barrier when it comes to entering the labor market. This, in turn, decreases women's labor force, thus the share of unemployed from the labor force, resulting in lower unemployment rates.

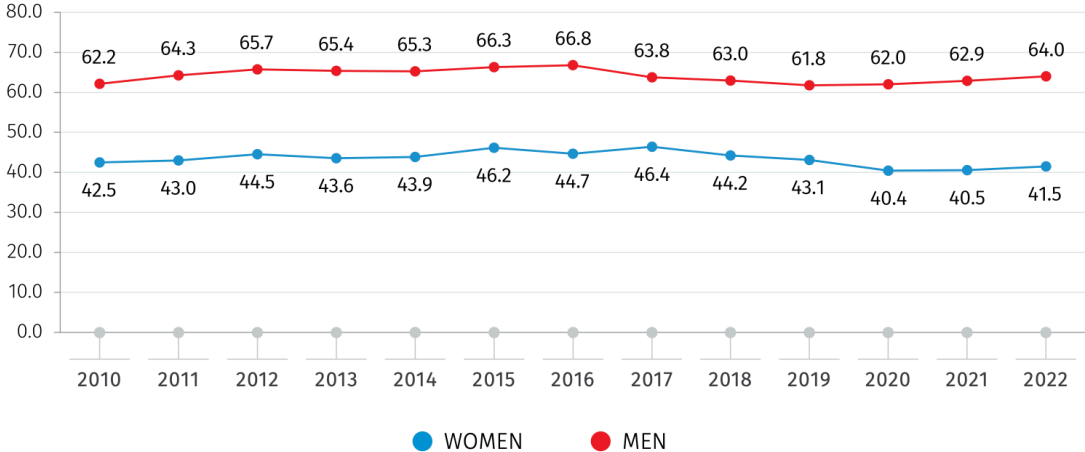


*Source: GeoStat*

The graph below shows the labor participation rate by gender. The gender gap in labor force participation hasn't seen any improvements and quite the opposite in fact. The participation

rate of women has decreased from 2010 to 2022, and the gap has widened, reaching in 2022 the highest point ever recorded in the observed period. The gender gap in labor force participation narrowed down in 2017 when labor force participation for women peaked, while that of men declined over the same period. The decrease in the labor participation rate for men was 3.0 percent from 66.8 percent to 63.8 percent, whereas for women the increase was 1.7 percent from 44.6 percent to 46.4 percent. However, this level of labor force participation for women and the decrease in the gender gap couldn't be sustained. The gap increased again after 2017, reaching the largest gap of 22.5% in 2022 over the observed period; the labor force participation rate for women dropped by 5 percent from 2017 to 41.5 percent in 2022, while it slightly increased by 0.2 percent for men to 64.0 percent. It has been estimated that the economic costs of gender gaps in labor participation reduce GDP in Georgia by 11%.<sup>13</sup> Women's lagging participation in employment and entrepreneurship leads to large resource misallocations, implying high economic costs.

**Labor Force Participation Rate by Gender, 2010-2022, (percent)**

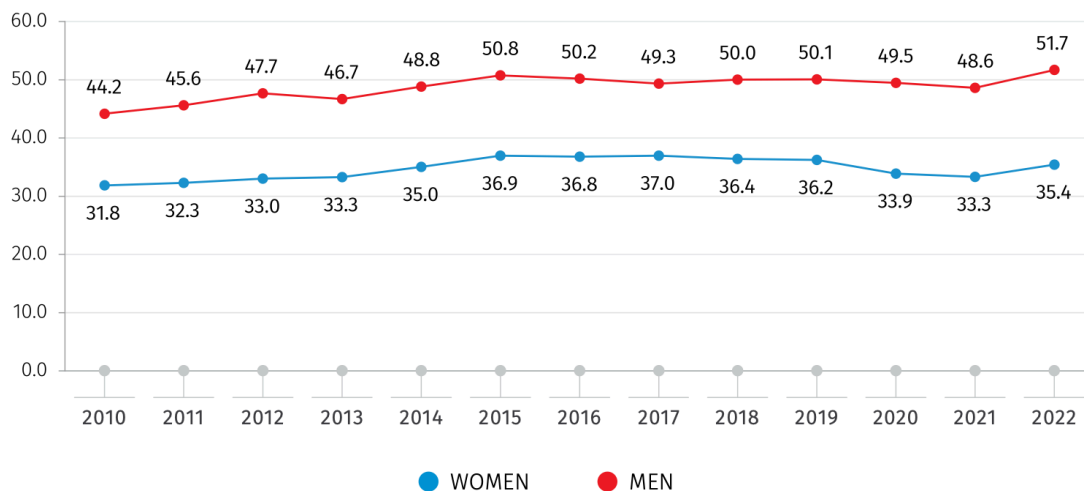


Source: GeoStat

<sup>13</sup> Marc Teignier and David Cuberes, “Aggregate Costs of Gender Gaps in the Labor Market: A Quantitative Estimate,” *UB Economics*, 2014, <https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.2405006>.

Since the unemployment rate is lower for women than for men, but labor force participation is also lower for women than for men, it is useful to look at the employment rate to make it more visible to what extent men have higher employment levels than women. The graph below shows the employment rate by gender in Georgia, between 2010-2022. While Georgian women have higher enrollment rates at all educational levels and score better<sup>14</sup>, men have significantly higher employment rates than women. The difference in employment rate between men and women each year ranges around 12-14 percent, with women having lower employment rates. It is interesting to observe that during the COVID-19 crisis, already low employment levels for women dropped more sharply than for men. From 2019 to 2020, the employment rate for men dropped by 0.6% from 50.1 percent to 49.5 percent, while for women, it dropped by 2.3 percent from 36.2 percent to 33.9 percent. It's also clear that while men's employment rate exceeded pre-crisis levels in 2022, women's employment rate didn't even recover.

**Employment Rate by Gender, 2010-2022, (percent)**



Source: GeoStat

<sup>14</sup>World Bank. *Georgia - Country Gender Assessment*. 2021. <https://documents.worldbank.org/en/publication/documents-reports/documentdetail/407151616738297662/georgia-country-gender-assessment>.

Among those out of the labor force (not working but not seeking hired labor or not trying to start their own business), domestic tasks and low wages are the main reason for staying out of the labor force. Domestic tasks account for 49% of women and 5% for men willing to work but not seeking employment<sup>15</sup>. This reverses the positive effects of higher female educational attainment.

As the movement to recognize unpaid care work is gaining momentum with time-use surveys<sup>16</sup>, recently conducted Georgia's first time-use survey in December 2022. The survey found that women's overall proportion of time spent on unpaid domestic and care work was 17.8 percent, around five times the time spent by men (3.7 percent) – far more than the global average gender gap (of three times more). The results also reveal that 66 percent of Georgia's population engages in unpaid domestic work, albeit with women (88.3 percent) and men (39.6 percent) participating at starkly different rates. The Georgia Time-Use Survey found that on average, mothers spent 20.4 hours per week on childcare, while fathers spent only 3.9 hours. Even mothers who are employed full-time, spent four times as much time on childcare than their male counterparts. In all areas of residence, men spend 0.7 hours per day on unpaid domestic work; in contrast, women spend 5 times more in rural areas (3.6 hours) and 4.7 times more in urban areas (3.2 hours). Women who are employed full-time spend 2.7 hours daily on unpaid domestic services—five times more than the 0.5 hours for fully employed men.<sup>17</sup> Consequently, men tend to have more time available for paid labor than women, which creates disparities in earnings and economic opportunities between the genders.

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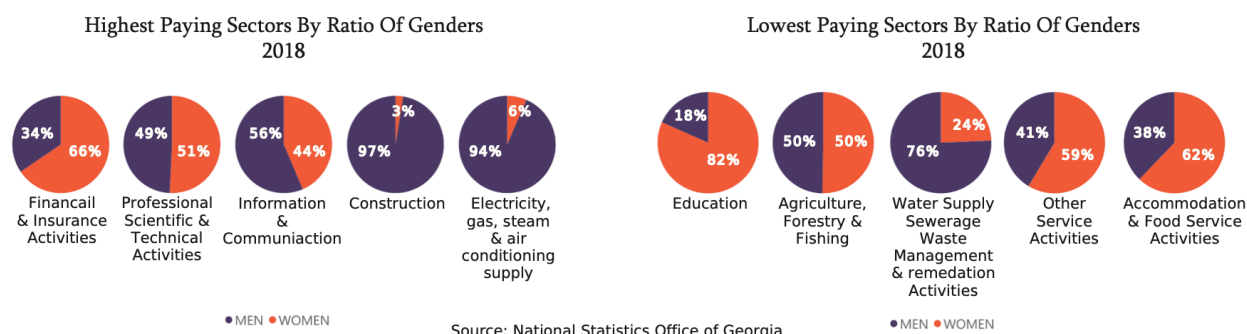
<sup>15</sup> Ibid

<sup>16</sup>UN Women. *Time to Care: Unpaid Work and Gender Inequality in Georgia*. 2022. <https://georgia.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/2022-12/GTUS%20thematic%20report%20on%20Unpaid%20Work%20WEB%20ENG%20%282%29.pdf>.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid

Gender differences in wages remain significant, as women earn less than two-thirds of men's average monthly salary. In 2019, the male-female average observable wage gap among Georgians was almost 64 percent, of which 18 percent was not associated with occupational segregation and discrimination<sup>18</sup>. One factor contributing to the gender pay gap is the varying gender distributions across industries, with women being disproportionately employed in lower-paying sectors. Only one of the top five sectors with the highest average wages has a significant female workforce, while three of the bottom five sectors with the lowest average wages are predominantly female.

### Distribution of Gender by Highest and Lowest Paying Sectors, 2018, (percent)



Source: Geostat, graph by PMC RC

Even in the financial and insurance activities sector, which is the only higher-paying sector predominantly occupied by women, men still make more than women. On average, women earn 1830 GEL per month while men earn 3,234 GEL<sup>19</sup>. This suggests that men are likely to hold higher-paying positions in this sector, which contributes to the gender pay gap. It is also important to note that men work 3.5 hours more on average per week in this sector than

<sup>18</sup> Asali, Muhammad, and Rusudan Gurashvili. "Labour market discrimination and the macroeconomy." *Economics of Transition and Institutional Change* 28, no. 3 (2020): 515-533. <https://www.econstor.eu/bitstream/10419/193395/1/dp12101.pdf>

<sup>19</sup> "ქალი და კაცი საქართველოში" საქართველოს სტატისტიკის ეროვნული სამსახური, Geostat, 2021 <https://www.geostat.ge/media/2021.pdf>

women<sup>20</sup>. However, this is not enough to account for such a drastic difference in the average monthly salary between men and women. Women make up about 82% of the Education sector, which accounts for around 20% of employed women, the average for both genders is around 850 GEL<sup>21</sup>, making it the lowest-paying sector. The data also shows that the education sector offers the most flexible working hours out of 16 occupational sectors analyzed by average hours worked by gender. Both men and women spent the least hours on average in this sector, 27.1 hours and 31.8 hours, respectively, when the average hours worked for women is 37.6 hours a week and for men 42.6 hours. This is a 5-hour difference per week on average. Thus, it is plausible that the gender differences in employment distribution by sector can be attributed to the working hours demanded by these sectors, in addition to the fact that gender norms play a significant role in this. Social roles affect how household responsibilities are divided, which in turn influence women's career choices, leading them to opt for jobs that offer flexibility.

## Inequality & Poverty

### Inequality

Over the last 14 years, Georgia has made improvements in reducing inequality and poverty after the dual crisis it experienced in 2008.-9. The Gini coefficient by total consumption expenditure decreased by 0.08 from 0.42 in 2010 to 0.34 in 2022, and the population below the national poverty line also decreased from 37.3 percent to 15.6 percent in the same period.<sup>22</sup> The country's GDP Per Capita more than doubled, reaching 6,675 US dollars in 2022,<sup>23</sup> and

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<sup>20</sup>Ibid

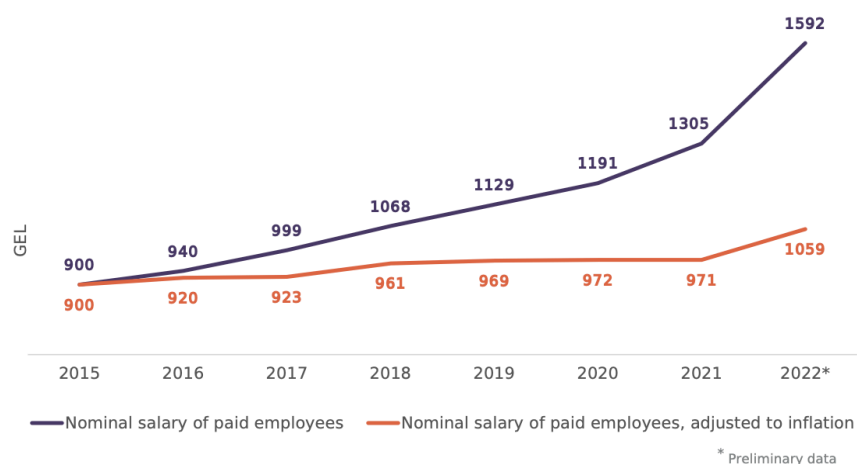
<sup>21</sup>Ibid

<sup>22</sup>National Statistics Office of Georgia (Geostat). "Living Conditions."  
<https://www.geostat.ge/en/modules/categories/192/living-conditions>.

<sup>23</sup>World Bank. "GDP per Capita (Current US\$) - Georgia."  
<https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NY.GDP.PCAP.CD?locations=GE>.

unemployment decreased from 27.2 to 7.3 in the same period<sup>24</sup>. However, these numbers conceal the reality of how people are actually doing in terms of living conditions. Public opinion surveys show that poverty and related issues such as unemployment, low wages, inflation, and high prices remain significant challenges for Georgian society<sup>25</sup>.

### Nominal and Inflation-adjusted salaries of paid workers, 2015-2020, (GEL)



Source: GeoStat, graph by PMC RC

Between 2015 and 2022, the nominal salaries of paid employees in Georgia increased from 900 GEL to 1592 GEL, which is a 76.8 percent increase, as shown in the graph above. Yet, when we adjust for inflation, the salary growth over the same period is only 159 GEL, equivalent to a 17.6 percent increase. During the same period, the real GDP grew by 34.7 percent<sup>26</sup>, which is double the growth rate of inflation-adjusted salaries, which implies that the growth in GDP has not been adequately reflected in the salaries of workers. It is important to note that salary data is

<sup>24</sup> "Findings from December 2022 face to face survey", NDI and CRRC Georgia, February 2023. [https://www.ndi.org/sites/default/files/NDI%20Georgia\\_December%202022%20poll\\_public%20version\\_ENG\\_vf.pdf](https://www.ndi.org/sites/default/files/NDI%20Georgia_December%202022%20poll_public%20version_ENG_vf.pdf)

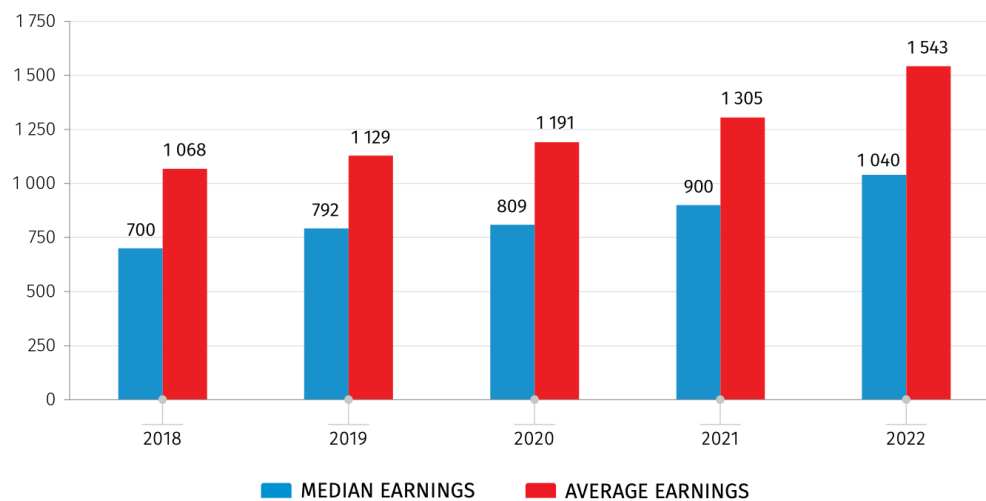
<sup>25</sup>Ibid

<sup>26</sup>Bakradze, Nikoloz, Sopho Basilidze, and Nikoloz Nurashvili. "Household Income and Income Inequality in Georgia." *PMC Research*, 2022. <https://pmcg-i.com/app/uploads/2023/09/Household-Income-and-Income-Inequality-in-Georgia-2013-2022-ENG.pdf>

only based on the earnings of hired workers and does not include those of self-employed workers, who typically earn less.

The average salary can be skewed by outliers, particularly at the very high end of the salary spectrum, thus it is more important to consider the median monthly salary instead of the average. Median salary focuses on the middle value, so it's not as affected by a small number of very high or low earners and provides a clearer picture of what most people experience as it represents the income level that divides the population in half. National Statistics of Georgia released median earnings statistics for the first time in October 2021. In the numbers released on October 10, 2021, Georgia's National Statistics Office<sup>27</sup> reported that the median wage was 900 GEL, about one-third lower than the average salary. Over the observed period, this trend stands as median earnings are around one-third lower than the average every year.

**Median and average monthly earnings, 2018-2022, (GEL)**



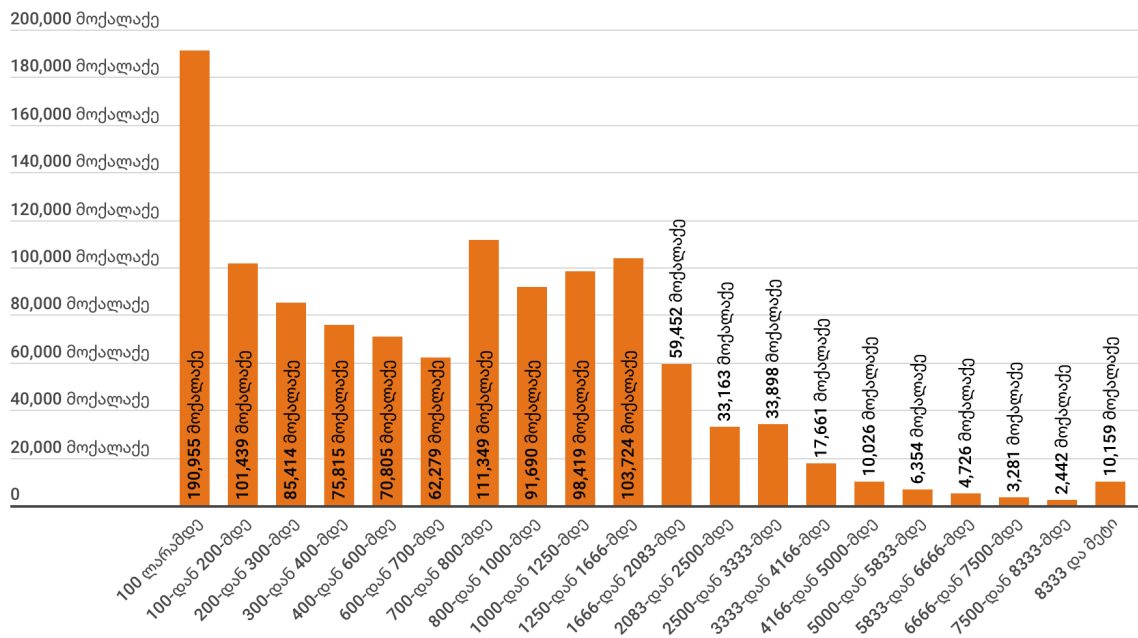
*Source: Geostat*

<sup>27</sup>National Statistics Office of Georgia (Geostat). 2023. "Average Median Earnings of Employees 2022.". <https://www.geostat.ge/media/57384/Average-Median-Earnings-of-Employees---2022.pdf>.



Although median salary indicates the amount most wage workers make, it does not reveal how many people earn a particular amount. The graph below shows monthly salary earnings based on different salary categories. The data is skewed to the left, meaning most wage workers are concentrated at the low end of the distribution spectrum. The highest number of wage workers is in the lowest wage category, which considers workers earning 0-100 GEL. This category amounts to 191 thousand workers. The subsistence minimum for a working-age male was 206 GEL in March 2020<sup>28</sup>. Individuals who made 100-200 GEL monthly was 101 thousand, meaning that almost 300 thousand workers were making less than the subsistence minimum necessary to survive (subsistence minimum in Georgia in April 2020 was 199 GEL<sup>29</sup>).

### Number of Citizens by Monthly Earnings, 2020



Source: Revenue Service of Georgia, chart by bm.ge  
(y-axis - number of people, x-axis - salary range)

<sup>28</sup>National Statistics Office of Georgia (Geostat). "Subsistence Minimum." <https://www.geostat.ge/en/modules/categories/791/subsistence-minimum>.

<sup>29</sup>Ibid

It is important to consider that some of these individuals were probably employed seasonally on agricultural work, as agriculture work is a significant part of how people make ends meet. In 2020, 447 thousand people were reported to engage in subsistence agriculture<sup>30</sup>. However, data presented also does not account for the statistical indicators of “informal employment,” which mainly include individuals in the agricultural sector. In addition, the share of informal employment in non-agricultural employment was 31.7 percent in 2020<sup>31</sup>. This accounts for a large share of the population, leading to low productivity, wages, and poor working conditions, as well as limited access to social protection.

While monthly salary refers to the earnings received by an individual from their employment within a given month, monthly household income, on the other hand, encompasses the total income earned by all household members within a given month in a country. It includes not only the salaries or wages earned by individuals working within the household but also other sources of income such as rental income, investments, government assistance, or any other sources of revenue received by household members. Monthly household income provides a broader picture of the financial resources available to support the household's needs and expenses.

According to official statistics, 2022, average monthly cash and non-cash inflows per household was 1453 GEL<sup>32</sup>, out of which 87 percent was in cash and transfers, amounting to 1,265 GEL (the other two were non-cash inflows and others). The largest share of income - 46 percent comes from wages (shown in the pie chart), which is 580 GEL per month on average.

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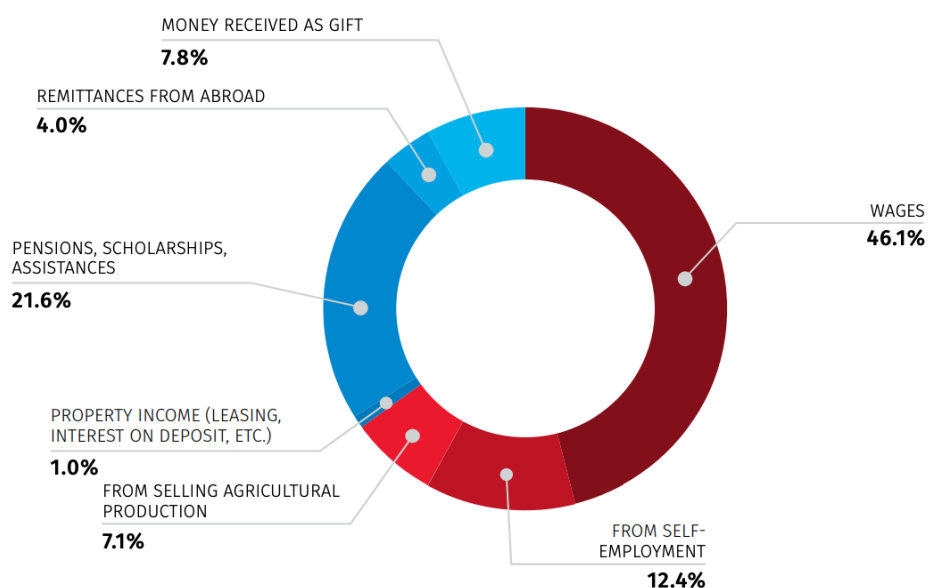
<sup>30</sup> National Statistics Office of Georgia (Geostat). "Employment and Unemployment.". <https://www.geostat.ge/en/modules/categories/683/Employment-Unemployment>.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid

<sup>32</sup> National Statistics Office of Georgia. 2023. "Indicators of Living Conditions (Household Incomes and Expenditures) - 2022.". <https://www.geostat.ge/media/53715/Indicators-of-Living-Conditions-%28Households-Incomes-and-Expenditures%29---2022.pdf>

The second largest source of income — pensions, scholarships, and assistance, comprise 21.6% of the average monthly income of families, which is 273 GEL on average. Self-employment is the third largest source of income, accounting for 12.4 percent of the total income, which means an average income of 157 GEL per month. However, this amount is almost two times less than the previous category, indicating that income from self-employment is very low.

### Distribution of Cash incomes and Transfers, 2022, (percent)



Source: GeoStat

In 2022, the median household income in Georgia was 1145 GEL<sup>33</sup> indicating that most households earned less than the average income. If we consider the median household income instead of the average income, the average wage contribution for a median household with the same proportions would amount to 458 GEL. Furthermore, since the average wage is higher than

<sup>33</sup> Bakradze, Nikoloz, Sopho Basilidze, and Nikoloz Nurashvili. "Household Income and Income Inequality in Georgia." *PMC Research*. 2022. <https://pmcg-i.com/app/uploads/2023/09/Household-Income-and-Income-Inequality-in-Georgia-2013-2022-ENG.pdf>.

the median wage, the contribution of wages decreases for a median household income. In addition, as the median household earns less income, the contribution of pensions, scholarships, and other forms of assistance increases, which means that the actual percentage contribution of wages for a median household would be less. Therefore, the actual income earned by most households through wages is less than 458 GEL. In addition, the new subsistence minimum proposed by Koguashvili and Archadze<sup>34</sup> is 520 GEL. This was proposed in 2020 and would increase if adjusted for inflation in 2022. Half of Georgian families would be earning below the subsistence minimum if their only source of income was wages, suggesting that wages are low in Georgia.

### Subsistence minimum

The calculation methodology has been criticized for being unrealistic and generating a significantly low figure.<sup>35</sup> The subsistence minimum in Georgia is determined based on the minimum food basket for a working-age male. The food basket consists of 40 items, providing 2,300 calories. It was established in 2003 by the Minister of Health and hasn't been updated since. The cost of the minimum food basket is multiplied by 0.86, assuming a discount of 14% due to bargaining. The value is then divided by 0.7 since 70% of the subsistence minimum is allocated for food expenses, and the remaining 30% is for non-food expenditures. Non-food expenses are not specified as they stem from food costs. Therefore, only food prices affect the subsistence minimum amount, which is very unrealistic. For example, in Georgia, the monthly

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<sup>34</sup>Koguashvili, Paata, and Joseph Archvadze. "The Subsistence Minimum in Georgia and the Necessity for Determining Its Optimal Level", 2020. <https://openurl.ebsco.com/EPDB%3Agcd%3A12%3A14132844/detailv2?sid=ebsco%3Aplink%3Ascholar&id=ebsco%3Agcd%3A142894763&cr=c>.

<sup>35</sup>Georgia Fair Labor Platform. "Living Wage." January 18, 2024. <https://shroma.ge/en/living-wage-en/>.

average inflation rate in 2022 compared to 2021 was highest for primary consumption goods<sup>36</sup>. Among all consumption goods, transportation and housing had the highest inflation rate (18%+), followed by food and non-alcoholic beverages (18%) and then transportation (16%), water, electricity, and other fuels (16%). This also means that inflation most negatively affects the poor. It is important to note that the subsistence minimum increases yearly due to inflation, which is solely based on food prices. If other primary consumption good inflation rates were considered, it means that the real amount of subsistence minimum has been downplayed more and more since 2003 as years go by. The current distribution of costs, where food expenses account for 70% and non-food expenses account for 30%, significantly reduces the real subsistence minimum figure. In reality, the share of non-food expenses, which includes transportation, clothing, utilities, healthcare, and other expenses, is much higher than the current 30% allocation for non-food expenses in the subsistence minimum.

Koguashvili and Archvadze propose a new subsistence minimum in their paper of 2020<sup>37</sup>. The proposed minimum is GEL 520, which is 320 GEL higher than the official minimum of 200 GEL<sup>38</sup> in 2020 per working-age male. They aim to establish actual physiological norms for the population of Georgia that align with international standards. This ensures that the minimum adequately addresses the nutritional needs of the population. To calculate the new minimum, the actual cost of food at current prices is considered while defining the food basket based on these norms. The proportion of the food basket in the subsistence minimum is adjusted to 50%, which is a more balanced approach between food and other costs compared to the previous 70%.

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<sup>36</sup> "Ending Poverty in Georgia: New Economic Modeling." UNDP. 2023.  
<https://www.undp.org/publications/ending-poverty-in-georgia>.

<sup>37</sup> Koguashvili, Paata, and Joseph Archvadze. "The Subsistence Minimum in Georgia and the Necessity for Determining Its Optimal Level" EBSCO, 2020.  
<https://openurl.ebsco.com/EPDB%3Aagcd%3A12%3A14132844/detailv2?sid=ebsco%3Aplink%3Ascholar&id=ebsco%3Aagcd%3A142894763&cr=c>.

<sup>38</sup> National Statistics Office of Georgia (Geostat). "Subsistence Minimum."  
<https://www.geostat.ge/en/modules/categories/791/subsistence-minimum>.

Additionally, the proportions of animal-origin calories have been changed, as recommended by nutritionists. Despite proposing a higher minimum, they still incorporate a discount rate of 13.5% for bargaining. However, they believe the rate shouldn't exceed 2-3%.

### Minimum Wage

Georgia's official private sector minimum wage currently stands at 20 GEL or 7.50 dollars per month. That makes it one of the lowest monthly minimum wages in the world<sup>39</sup> and among former Soviet countries, Georgia has the lowest minimum wage. Moreover, monthly MW is at least 9 times less than its neighboring countries in the Caucasus region and beyond Azerbaijan (\$76), Armenia (\$114), Moldova (\$115), Ukraine (\$123), Russia (\$132) and Belarus (\$155)<sup>40</sup>. Since its introduction in 1999, it has never been adjusted to changing inflation or the standard of living in Georgia. It is important to note that it is very unlikely that anyone in Georgia actually earns ₾20 per month. The 'unofficial' monthly minimum wage is said to be closer to 350 GEL<sup>41</sup>. A 2022 study by the International School of Economics at Tbilisi State University<sup>42</sup>, found that 11.9% of male employees and 24.6% of female employees make less than 350 GEL per month. Even more troublingly, 11.7% of women and 5.4% of men make less than 250 GEL. However, even 350 GEL is not even close to the actual subsistence minimum and is only slightly higher than that of the official one.

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<sup>39</sup>Skuad. "Minimum Wages across the Globe in 2023..

<https://www.skuad.io/blog/a-global-guide-on-minimum-wage-by-country>.

<sup>40</sup>FES South Caucasus. "Impact of Possible Growth of Minimum Wage in Georgia." 2019..

<https://southcaucasus.fes.de/news-list/e/impact-of-possible-growth-of-minimum-wage-in-georgia>.

<sup>41</sup>Tatia Nikoladze, "Minimum Wage in Georgia - Pros and Cons," English Jamnews, October 31, 2022,

<https://jam-news.net/minimum-wage-in-georgia-pros-and-cons/>.

<sup>42</sup>Cecilia Smitt Meyer, "Would a Higher Minimum Wage Meaningfully Affect Poverty Levels among Women? – A Simulation Case from Georgia" Free Network, March 2, 2023,

<https://freepolicybriefs.org/2023/02/27/minimum-wage-poverty-levels-women/>.

A public opinion poll conducted by the Caucasus Research Resource Center (CRRC)<sup>43</sup> showed that 80 percent of Georgians either fully or rather support having a minimum wage regulation in Georgia. According to a survey conducted in spring 2020, the percentage of people who support the idea of increasing the minimum wage has increased by 5 percentage points. The perceived minimum wage that people consider decent on average is 1,208 GEL, which is about six times higher than the current subsistence minimum. When people were asked about their expected decent salary, the average response was 1,778 GEL.

### Poverty

Poverty in Georgia continues to fall though not as rapidly as before. Poverty decreased at a high rate of 3-4 percent annually from 2010 to 2013. The decrease slowed from 2013 to 2015 to around 2-3 percent annually. After 2015, the decline was slower until 2019, decreasing by a total of 2.1 percent. Due to the COVID-19 crisis, there was an increase in poverty by 1.8 percent other than 2020 to 21.3 percent. However, it has decreased significantly onward, totaling roughly a 5.7 percent decrease from 2020 to 2022. But if we don't consider the increase in poverty during the crisis, the average annual decrease in poverty would amount to 1.3% in the 2018-2022 years which is slower than the previous years.

Georgia outperforms neighboring Armenia and Black Sea country Moldova with a lower poverty rate (2021 results) and is close to the poverty rate of neighboring Turkey (14.4% in 2020)<sup>44</sup>. In addition, the poverty reduction has been much smaller in the neighboring and regional countries.<sup>45</sup> Its share of the population below the national poverty line was 15.6 percent in 2022. However, when the poverty line is increased to an international poverty rate measured

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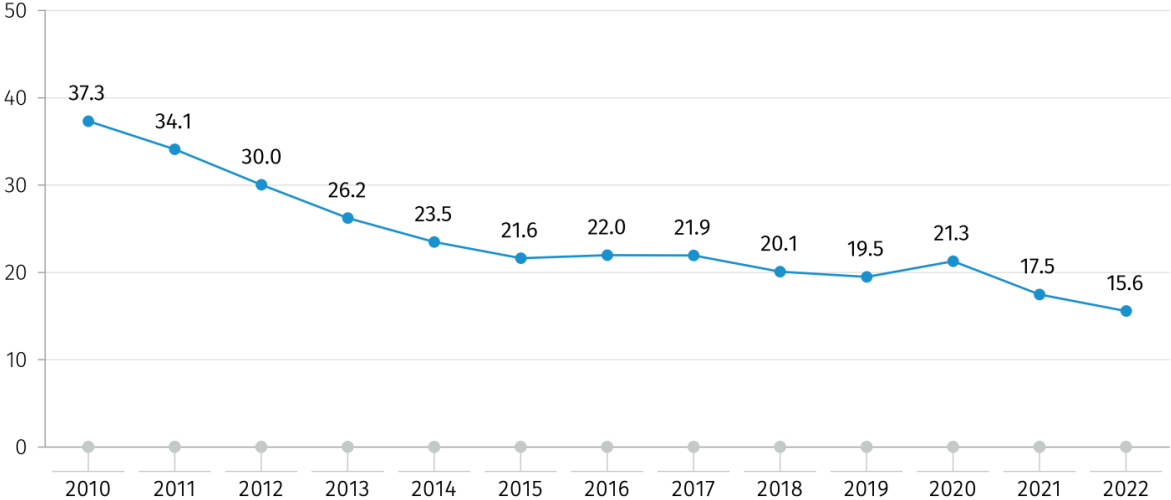
<sup>43</sup> Sichinava, David, "Minimum Wage in Georgia - Two Years of Broad Public Support", *Friderich-Ebert-Stiftung*, 2021, <https://library.fes.de/pdf-files/bueros/georgien/18400.pdf>

<sup>44</sup> UNDP. "Ending Poverty in Georgia: New Economic Modeling." 2023. <https://www.undp.org/publications/ending-poverty-in-georgia>.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid

against the upper middle-income class poverty line (\$6.85/day, expressed in 2017 PPP), the share of the population below the poverty line increases from 17.5 percent to 55.4 percent in 2021.<sup>46</sup>

**Share of population under absolute poverty line, 2010-2022, (percent)**



Source: GeoStat

The decrease in poverty throughout the past years can be explained by increased social assistance program coverage, which rose from 11.7 percent of the population to 17.4 percent from 2018 to 2022, while in the meantime, the share of the population below the national poverty line decreased from 20.1 percent to 15.6 percent in the same period. Even though higher levels of social security can lift more households out of poverty in the short term, it is not a long-term solution, and these numbers should not create a false illusion that the people who no longer qualify to be considered below the national poverty line are doing good. The assistance amounts are very low and lower than the subsistence minimum in Georgia. The average monthly

<sup>46</sup> World Bank. 2024. "Poverty and Equity Briefs." <https://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/poverty/publication/poverty-and-equity-briefs>.



subsistence minimum in (334 GEL) in 2021 was 62% higher than the average monthly subsistence allowance (221 GEL)<sup>47</sup>.

**Amount of monetary benefit by score rating per adult and per child, 2020 (GEL)**

კეთილდღეობის ქულა	ბენეფიტის ოდენობა შინამეურნეობის ერთ წევრზე	ბავშვთა ბენეფიტი
< 30 001	60 ლარი	200
30 000 – 57 000	50 ლარი	200
57 000 – 60 000	40 ლარი	200
60 000 – 65 000	30 ლარი	200
65 000 – 120 000	0	200
> 120 000	0	0

*Source: Econometria Consultores, table by Social Justice Organization,  
(I column: rating score, II column: per adult, III column: per child)*

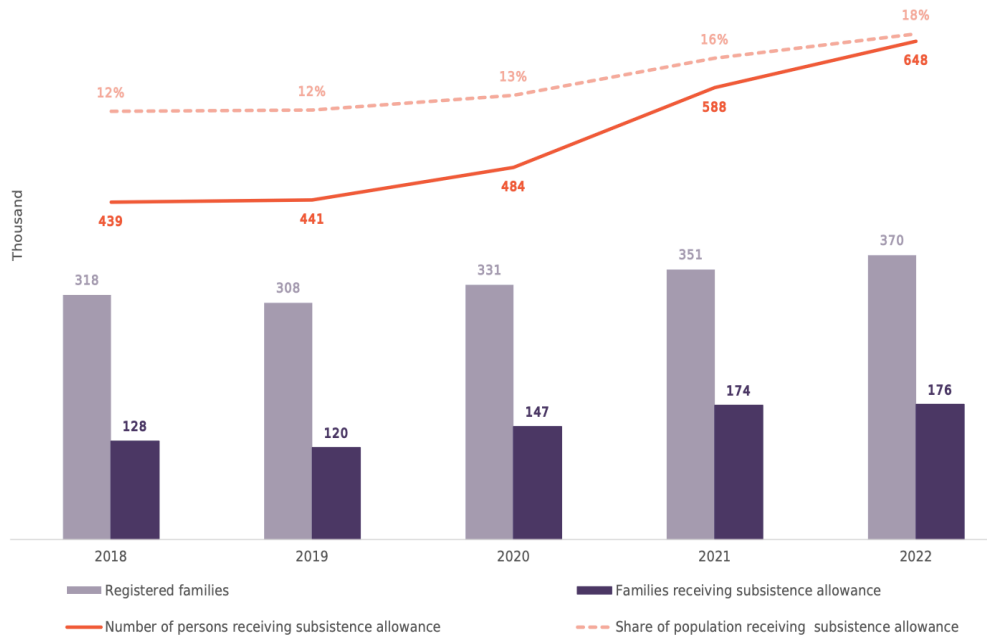
The subsistence allowance program in Georgia offers financial assistance to the country's most impoverished families, whose rating score is below 120,001. The rating score is calculated by the social services agency and is based on the family's income and assets. The lower the score, the more financially disadvantaged the family is. The table above shows how much allowance is given to the family according to their rating score. If the family has less than a 30001 rating score, each household member will receive 60 gel per month; if the household has a child member, 200 GEL per month is given to each child. As the rating score increases, a benefit for adult household members decreases; however, for the child, it stays the same. The average monthly subsistence income per family amounted to 334 GEL in 2021.

From 2018 to 2022, the number of families receiving subsistence allowance shifted. There was a slight decline in the number of both registered families and those receiving the allowance in 2019 compared to 2018 shown on the graph above. However, from 2019 to 2022,

<sup>47</sup>PMC Research. "Subsistence Allowance in Georgia (2018-2022)." 2023. <https://pmcg-i.com/publication/issue-143-subsistence-allowance-in-georgia-2018-2022/>.

the number of registered families jumped by 20 percent, or by 370,000, and at the same time the growth in families receiving the allowance was even more notable, which surged by 47 percent to reach 176,000. It's worth noting that the COVID-19 pandemic likely played a role in the increases observed in 2020 and 2021. The total number of people relying on this support also saw a significant rise. There was a 48% increase in the number of individuals receiving the allowance, going from 439,000 in 2018 to 648,000 in 2022 which translates to a rise in the share of the population receiving subsistence allowance, from 12% to 18%. The number of people registered in the system seeking subsistence allowance increased from 946,397 to 1,097,489<sup>48</sup>, which is a significant number considering Georgia’s small population of 3.7 million.

### Beneficiaries of Subsistence allowance, 2018-2022



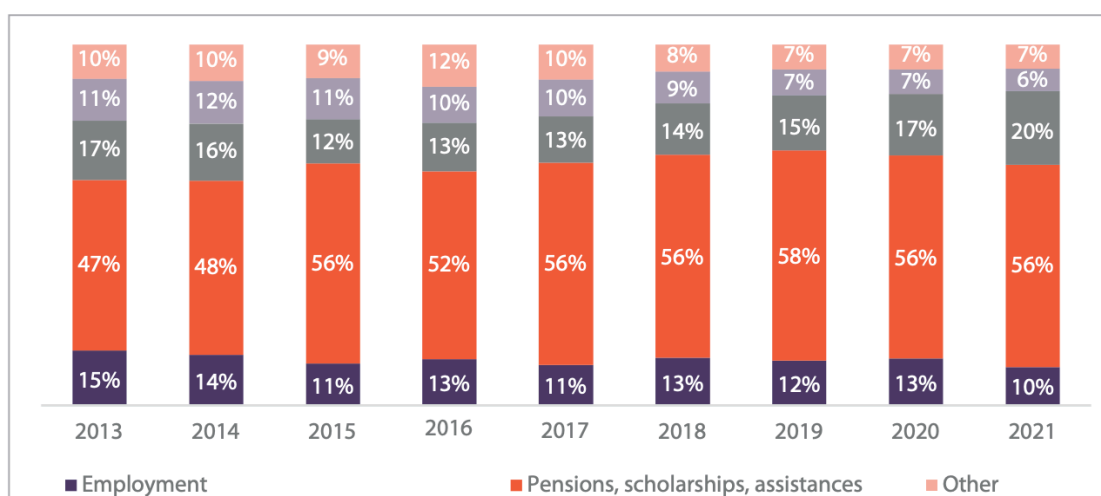
Source: Geostat and Social Service Agency, chart by PMC RC

<sup>48</sup> “პროგრამის სოციალური ეფექტი და სიღარიბის დაძლევის პოტენციალი მიზნობრივი სოციალური დახმარება საქართველოში”, სოციალური სამართლიანობის ცენტრი, 2023.

[https://socialjustice.org.ge/uploads/products/pdf/მიზნობრივი\\_დახმარება\\_1705494960.pdf](https://socialjustice.org.ge/uploads/products/pdf/მიზნობრივი_დახმარება_1705494960.pdf)

While higher levels of social security can lift more households out of poverty in the short term as mentioned, it is not a long-term solution. Recent study by Unicef<sup>49</sup> indicated that this program does not help beneficiaries to get out of poverty and that it instead encourages them to maintain a low income to remain eligible to receive the allowance as wages are too low to make up for the lost assistance allowance. The bar chart above also provides evidence for this statement. It shows that the main income sources for the lowest-income segment (quintile I, bottom 20 percent of the population) were pensions, scholarships, and assistance, with a relatively low share from employment. The proportion of income from pensions, scholarships, and assistance increased over the covered period from 47% in 2013 to 56% in 2022, while the share from employment decreased from 15% to 10%. In addition, employability of the lowest income segments of the population has been steadily declining and is projected to decline reaching close to zero exacerbating their poverty cycle further and highlighting the need for public sector intervention.

**Composition of income sources for the bottom 20%, 2013-2021, (percent)**



*Source: Geostat, graph and calculations by PMC RC*

<sup>49</sup> UNICEF. "A Detailed Analysis of Targeted Social Assistance and Child Poverty and Simulations of the Poverty-Reducing Effects of Social Transfers." 2019. [https://www.unicef.org/georgia/media/2486/file/TSA&CHILDPOVERTY\\_eng.pdf](https://www.unicef.org/georgia/media/2486/file/TSA&CHILDPOVERTY_eng.pdf).

## Migration

Georgia is a rare example of a lower middle-income country experiencing a secular decline in population. Georgia's population peaked in the early 1990s and has declined since then. The size of the working-age population is shrinking as well. The driving forces behind these trends are low fertility, brain drain, and sustained out-migration. The fertility rate has been declining since 2016, reaching 1.7 in 2023, which is below replacement levels<sup>50</sup>. Projections indicate that Georgia's population will continue to decline<sup>51</sup>. This, together with outmigration of the working-age population has been increasing Georgia's dependency ratio since 2011.<sup>52</sup> A high dependency ratio indicates that the economically active population and the overall economy face a greater burden to support and provide the social services needed by children and the elderly, who are often economically dependent, especially in Georgia.

Negative net migration has also contributed to the decline in population. It has eventually emerged as one of the vital problems in the Georgian labor force trends. Today, it is widely considered as one of the causes for the labor shortage in the country. As the IMF<sup>53</sup> notes, "Georgia's population is expected to continue shrinking and aging, with the share of the population that is 65 and older expected to increase significantly. The population decline is attributable to low birthrates and sustained net emigration." To get to the root of the emigration issue and how it acts in the labor market, it is necessary to consider the reasons for people leaving the country.

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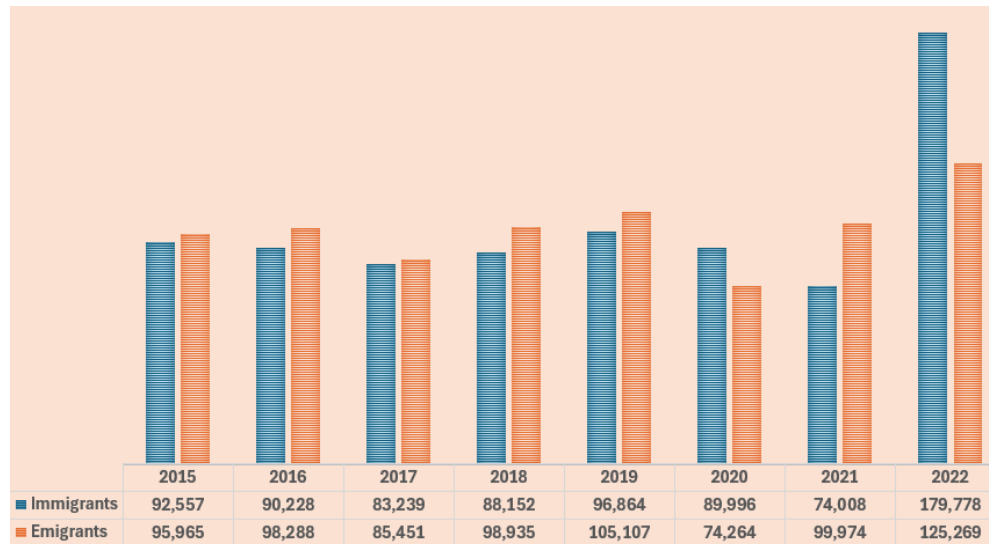
<sup>50</sup> "Births", National Statistics Office of Georgia, Geostat. <https://www.geostat.ge/en/modules/categories/319/births>.

<sup>51</sup> "Georgia Population Growth Rate 1950-2024." MacroTrends. <https://www.macrotrends.net/global-metrics/countries/GEO/georgia/population-growth-rate>.

<sup>52</sup> World Bank. "Age Dependency Ratio (% of Working-Age Population) - Georgia." <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SP.POP.DPND?locations=GE>.

<sup>53</sup> IMF, "Georgia: Selected Issues," June 28, 2018, <https://www.elibrary.imf.org/view/journals/002/2018/199/article-A002-en.xml>.

## Distribution of migration and Emigration by year, 2015-2022, (number of persons)



Source: Geostat

According to the estimates, in 2020 the number of Georgian emigrants abroad was around 22 % of the total population<sup>54</sup>. At the same time, according to the findings of the face to face survey conducted by the NDI in 2022,<sup>55</sup> “one in five Georgians is thinking of emigrating in the next 12 months to seek working opportunities elsewhere. This number is even higher among the population under 50 - almost every third citizen under 50 is thinking about leaving Georgia.” Taken from the same sample of population, the survey indicated that “the Georgian public views rising prices/inflation, unemployment, poverty and wages as the top problems facing their country – and no other concern comes close. A plurality (48 percent) say Georgia's economy is in bad shape, while the majority (51 percent) doubt the government's ability to solve economic problems.” Additionally, the government’s political decisions, resulting in persistent instability

<sup>54</sup> OECD. "Close to 900 000 Georgian citizens currently live abroad, representing a quarter of Georgia's population." OECD iLibrary.

[https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/sites/c282e9fe-en/index.html?itemId=/content/component/c282e9fe-en#:~:text=Close%20to%20900%20000%20Georgian,Georgia's%20population%20\(Figure%202.1\).](https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/sites/c282e9fe-en/index.html?itemId=/content/component/c282e9fe-en#:~:text=Close%20to%20900%20000%20Georgian,Georgia's%20population%20(Figure%202.1).)

<sup>55</sup> NDI and CRRC Georgia, “Findings from December 2022 face to face survey,” February 2023, [https://www.ndi.org/sites/default/files/NDI%20Georgia\\_December%202022%20poll\\_public%20version\\_ENG\\_vf.pdf](https://www.ndi.org/sites/default/files/NDI%20Georgia_December%202022%20poll_public%20version_ENG_vf.pdf)

among the Georgian population, exacerbates the problem of emigration and the brain drain, resulting in the loss of high-skilled workers.<sup>56</sup> This creates a cycle of brain drain, where the population is migrating due to employment-related reasons, while migration itself worsens the problem of unemployment itself. Concurrently with emigration of the skilled workforce, a lot of workers are immigrating to Georgia due to work opportunities that Georgian citizens pass on due to undesirable salaries.<sup>57</sup>

The population of Georgia with the highest emigration is 20–24 years old (14%), then 25–29 years old (12.4%) and 30–34 years old (11.8%). At the same time, the 20–34 age category is the most active in terms of birth in Georgia. Age-specific birth rates in this age group range from 81.6 to 121.8 per thousand. This age is also the most active in the age structure of emigration. Since 2019, the natural increase in Georgia has been decreasing and its rate has been negative for the last two years. Thus the increasing intensity of migration processes accelerated the depopulation process in Georgia. This creates a huge problem in the labor force, since not only it promotes labor shortage, but also drives out educated, skilled workers from the country.<sup>58</sup>

Table below demonstrates emigration broken down according to sex and education. It is clearly evident that the highest percentage of the emigrants, in both male and female emigrants, have completed or are in the process of completing higher education, standing at 73.7% and 66.7% respectively. The analysis shows that a significant part of the active and able-bodied population of Georgia went abroad legally or illegally to find a job. The number of those who want to emigrate is characterized by a growing tendency as well. The biggest portion of the

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<sup>56</sup>Gabrichidze, Nini. "Georgia downplays mass emigration amid economic, political frustration", eurasianet, February 2023. <https://eurasianet.org/georgia-downplays-mass-emigration-amid-economic-political-frustration>

<sup>57</sup>Ibid

<sup>58</sup> Abesadze, Nino, Otar Abesadze, Rusudan Kinkladze, and Nino Paresashvili. "Emigration statistics—the herald of the survival of the population of Georgia or the demographic crisis." Vilnius-Tech, 13th International Scientific Conference (2023). [https://etalpykla.vilniustech.lt/bitstream/handle/123456789/153933/01\\_13th\\_BM\\_2023-945.pdf?sequence=1](https://etalpykla.vilniustech.lt/bitstream/handle/123456789/153933/01_13th_BM_2023-945.pdf?sequence=1)

population migrating has higher education, which exacerbates already existing issues of lack of qualified labor in Georgia furthermore.

**Distribution of departure by sex and education, 2015, (percent)**

		General secondary education	Specialized secondary education	Higher and incomplete higher education	Total (%)
1.	Males	5.3%	21.0%	73.7%	100.0%
2.	Females	3.7%	29.6%	66.7%	100.0%

*Source: research by Zubiashvili*

The material conditions of the population stands out as the main reason for departure from the country as shown in the table below, indicating the further effect of unemployment and poverty in Georgia. When looking at the labor characteristics of current emigrants, the IPPMD survey finds that 60% were unemployed before leaving the country and that 97% were of working age. Their unemployment rate has significantly decreased since they emigrated, which further confirms that unemployment is one of the biggest push factors for leaving the country.<sup>59</sup> Besides living conditions, a large part of the population wants to depart for educational reasons, confirming the lack of presence of proper education in the country. Without an increase in job creation and educational quality, the situation will worsen.

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<sup>59</sup>OECD, *Migration and the Labour Market in Georgia*, 2017, <https://doi.org/10.1787/9789264272217-8-en>.

### Distribution of reasons for migration who wants to go abroad, 2015, (percent)

	Reason for departure	Permanently		Temporarily	
		males	females	males	females
1	Material conditions	35.3	31.6	26.1	8.2
2	Housing conditions	5.9	10.5	1.0	1.1
3	Political situation in the country	0	5.3	1.8	1.6
4	Education	29.4	21.0	29.7	41.8
5	Reunification with family members	0	0	0.9	3.3
6	To explore other countries	23.5	21.1	36.9	39.6
7	Other	5.9	10.5	3.6	4.4
	Total	100	100	100	100

*Source: Research by Zubiashvili*

It is true that the growth of international migration is accompanied by the inflow of remittances and its share in the incomes of the population is systematically increasing, but at the same time, the negative impact of these processes on the functioning of the labor force and the demographic in the country is intense. According to a 2017 study<sup>60</sup> commissioned by the State Commission on Migration Issues, remittances made up half or even three-quarters of the family budget for every other emigrant. Additionally, in 15 percent of cases, remittances were the sole source of income for the family.

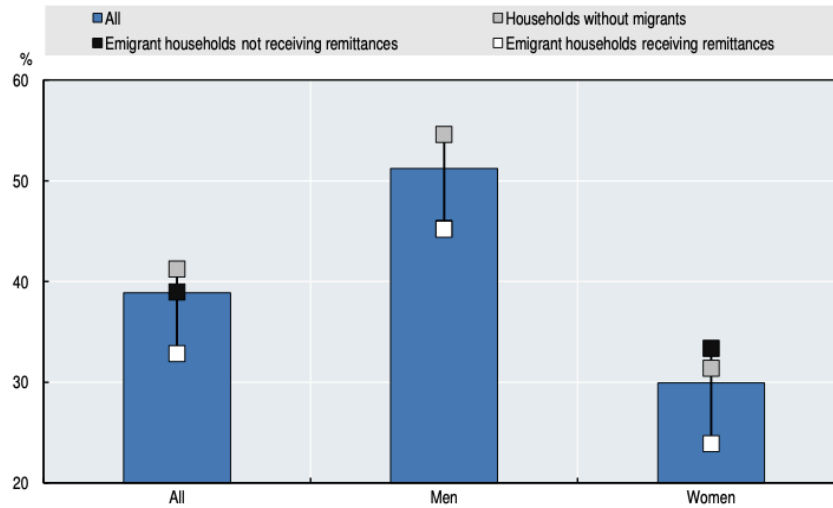
The figure below demonstrates that most household members work if they do not have emigrants in the household, while most members do not work if their household is receiving remittances. This can be seen in both male and female members of the household. This means that if the sender of remittances were to lose their job, it could cause financial difficulties for the family in Georgia, resulting in dependency among recipients. Some stakeholders interviewed as part of the IPPMD study felt that although remittances provide an important source of income for Georgia's economy and are a means of survival for many families, they could hamper economic

<sup>60</sup>State Commission on Migration Issues. *Migration Profile of Georgia*, 2017. [https://migration.commission.ge/files/migration\\_profile\\_2017\\_eng\\_final\\_.pdf](https://migration.commission.ge/files/migration_profile_2017_eng_final_.pdf).



activities because they are usually spent on primary consumption rather than on potential strategic long-term profit-making activities.

### Share of household members aged 15-64 who are working, 2017, (percent)



Source: OECD 2017

The multiple factors discussed that are contributing to emigration from Georgia have clearly caused the country to experience a serious brain drain. In turn, due to the loss of Human Capital, the country's economic potential cannot be fully utilized, and national wealth cannot be increased to the maximum possible level. This makes for one of the most serious issues to be combated by Georgia in order to resolve the persistent trends in the labor market

# **Evaluation of the Dynamics of Georgia's Labor market**

## **Jobless Growth**

Analysis shows that stagnant job creation remains a central issue that contributes to the country's unemployment and labor force participation problems and highlights the important role of the public sector in job creation. While the unemployment rate has dropped by 10% since 2010, this improvement masks a crucial factor: shrinking labor force participation. Discouraged individuals are leaving the workforce altogether, leading to a statistically lower unemployment rate. This trend is particularly concerning as almost half of the working-age population remain outside the labor market, with many (401 thousand) relying on subsistence agriculture and many engaging in informal employment (31.7 percent) leading to low productivity, wages, and poor working conditions, as well as limited access to social protection. This worsens social and income inequality issues as these groups are gradually pushed away from the workforce.

Employment hasn't kept pace with the declining unemployment rate, in fact, the number of employed individuals has decreased between 2015 to 2019, indicating a lack of job creation. Georgia has shown a trend where economic growth doesn't translate into job growth and employment levels are still lagging behind even after the economy's recovery from the COVID-19 crisis. The analysis highlights a significant shift in employment dynamics in Georgia, showing a growing reliance on public-sector employment while the private sector's role has declined. Public-sector employment has steadily increased over the past decade, while the private sector experienced a decline. Overall, this shift underscores challenges in private-sector job growth and emphasizes the increasing importance of the public sector in creating employment opportunities in Georgia.

From 2015 onwards, Georgia has displayed a trend where the increase in employment through hiring workers is offsetting the decrease in self-employed workers. This shift reflects underlying challenges, such as low wages and poor working conditions in the self-employed category, prompting individuals to seek waged employment instead. This highlights that Georgia's job creation primarily relies on hiring workers. With an already low rate of job growth, this trend exacerbates Georgia's unemployment challenges, as job growth doesn't automatically transfer to employment growth in the country. If this pattern is kept up, it will be a very difficult and long road for Georgia to solve its unemployment issues.

## High Youth Unemployment and NEET Rates

Georgia's youth labor market is facing serious challenges marked by rising unemployment, declining labor force participation, and a high prevalence of youth disengaged from education and employment. Youth unemployment in Georgia has traditionally been high even though youth is the only age group to which salary satisfaction doesn't greatly contribute to work satisfaction.

The decline in youth labor force participation accompanied by a notable increase in youth unemployment rates signifies significant challenges within the labor market. The COVID crisis has illuminated the drastic difference in the extent of vulnerability of youth to crisis compared to all the other age groups. The pandemic-induced economic downturn exacerbated pre-existing challenges, leading to job losses and decreased employment opportunities.

The sharp decline in youth employment rates, accompanied by a rising number of youth prioritizing education over entering the labor market, highlights critical shifts in the youth

demographic's engagement in work and education. Analysis has shown that many young people are likely compelled, rather than choosing, to prioritize education due to limited employment opportunities. This is evidenced by the growing share of youth categorized as "NEET" (Not in Education, Employment, or Training), alongside rising unemployment rates among this demographic. It implies that students are not willingly giving up employment for education but are instead being forced out of the workforce. Some are lucky enough to transition to education, while others who become unemployed are left behind entirely because education comes with a cost.

It is clear that youth is significantly vulnerable to both the labor market and social exclusion. Every third Georgian ages 15-29 are in NEET and are neither improving their future employability through investment in skills nor gaining experience through employment thus their chance of finding good jobs declines over time. With already highest rates of emigration for youth out of all age categories and employment and education being the main reasons for migration, poor employment prospects for young people further exacerbate this trend.

## Inequality in Gender Labor Outcomes

Analysis of the data on gender dynamics in Georgia reveals entrenched disparities in labor outcomes, primarily driven by low female labor force participation rates and a persistent gender wage gap due to discrimination as well as occupational segregation. These issues are strongly linked to the unequal distribution of household responsibilities between men and women, perpetuating economic inequalities and hindering overall economic growth.

The declining trend in labor force participation among women, coupled with a widening gender gap indicates persistent barriers preventing women from entering or remaining in the

labor force. This contrasts with men's relatively stable or slightly improving participation rates. The persistently low employment and labor participation rate among women in Georgia cannot be attributed to a lack of qualifications, as evidenced by their higher educational enrollment across all levels of education and generally better academic performance compared to men. The research shows that women are kept out of the labor force due to domestic tasks and low wages. Household responsibilities, especially childcare, account for a substantial proportion of women not seeking employment. This unequal distribution limits women's ability to enter and remain in the workforce.

COVID-19 highlighted women's greater vulnerability to economic crises as women experienced more pronounced declines in employment rates compared to men widening the employment rate gap. Recovery period of COVID-19 crisis has also highlighted slower employment recovery for women in the labor market.

The persistently large gender wage gap reflects broader systemic issues of occupational segregation and discrimination as women earn less than two-thirds of men's average monthly salary of which 18 percent can't be associated with occupational segregation and discrimination. Major contributing factors to the gender pay gap have shown to be the varying gender distributions across industries, with women being disproportionately employed in lower-paying sectors as well as lower positions than men. Women's career choices are strongly related to expected social norms and unequal distribution of household responsibilities forcing women to work fewer hours and opt for more flexible jobs.

# Inequality and Poverty

## Income Inequality

Georgia's economic progress over the years is characterized by a reduction in inequality and poverty alongside a significant increase in GDP growth and a decline in unemployment. However, beneath these positive macroeconomic trends lies a more nuanced reality of persistent challenges faced by many individuals and families across Georgian society, evidenced by public opinion surveys, revealing persistent challenges of poverty, unemployment, low wages, inflation, and high prices facing Georgian society.

Wage growth has not kept pace with the broader economic expansion, as evidenced by the more substantial growth in real GDP. The fact that median wages are consistently lower than average wages (by about one-third) underscores the income disparities within Georgian society. The distribution of wage earners by salary category reveals a significant concentration of workers at the lower end of the earnings spectrum. Many individuals earn below the subsistence minimum, which raises concerns about the adequacy of wages to meet basic living standards. The breakdown of household income sources also reveals that wages alone are often inadequate to meet basic needs, pushing households to rely on other sources such as pensions, social assistance, self-employment, and remittances.

## Need for New Subsistence Minimum and Minimum Wage

The evaluation of Georgia's official and unofficial minimum wage and comparisons with substance minimum highlight a need for setting a new minimum wage. Georgia practically doesn't have an established minimum wage as it has been set at 20 GEL per month (approximately \$7.50) and hasn't been updated since its introduction in 1999. The unofficial

minimum wage of 350 GEL, which a substantial amount of people earn, is also indicated to be lower than the actual subsistence minimum wage and slightly higher than the official minimum subsistence. This extent of low wages contributes to the challenges of poverty and insufficient income to meet basic needs. The majority of Georgians believe that the current minimum wage is inadequate and advocate for significant increases to align with perceived decent living standards at 1,208 GEL, highlighting the stark disparity between public expectations and existing wage policies.

The research reveals that the methodology used to determine the subsistence minimum in Georgia is outdated and unrealistic. The focus solely on food expenses and a fixed percentage allocation does not reflect the actual cost of living, particularly considering the highest rising inflation rates for primary consumption goods. The subsistence minimum needs to be revised urgently as it is used by social assistance programs to determine the amount of subsistence allowance. In addition, it creates a false impression about what is actually necessary to survive, which conceals how low the unofficial minimum wage is in Georgia, (even though it is still very clear without it) and might play a part if Georgia decides to actually set a minimum wage.

### Poverty Cycle

The increase in social assistance program coverage coincides with a decrease in the population below the national poverty line, indicating a short-term success in alleviating poverty. Concerns have been raised about the sustainability and long-term impact of such programs. It has been shown that these programs increase the reliance on social assistance programs for the bottom 20 percent and disincentivize people from working as low wages do not provide enough incentive to risk losing their allowances. In addition, employability of the lowest income

segments of the population has been steadily declining and is projected to decline reaching close to zero exacerbating their poverty cycle further and highlighting the need for public sector intervention.

## Net out-migration, Brain Drain and Declining Workforce

Georgia's experience of population decline and increasing emigration rates poses significant challenges to its labor market and the future of the overall economy. The low fertility rate and significant emigration have resulted in a higher dependency ratio, which puts a greater burden on the economically active part of the of society to support dependents. This places a strain on social services and economic productivity. The situation is worsened by high migration rates among the younger population (20-34 years old) as this age group represents a critical segment for both birth rates, affecting the country's demographic structure and potential for sustainable development.

The outflow of a significant portion of Georgia's working-age population, especially among the youth and educated, skilled individuals, contributes to a shortage of qualified labor within the country. This deprives the economy of valuable human capital and limits the country's potential for economic growth and innovation. The main factors driving emigration are economic conditions, unemployment, poverty, and perceived lack of educational and employment opportunities. The cycle of brain drain is revealed when the population is migrating due to employment-related reasons, while migration itself worsens the problem of unemployment itself. Research finds that more than half of those deciding to emigrate are unemployed in Georgia, while after they emigrate, their unemployment rate falls significantly. This further confirms that



unemployment is one of the biggest push factors for leaving the country and indicates a lack of quality job opportunities in Georgia.

While it is important to note that remittances from migrants contribute significantly to Georgia's output and household incomes, alleviating poverty for many families, there are concerns about their long-term impact on economic development. Heavy reliance on remittances for basic needs can limit investments in productive sectors and increase the economic vulnerability of recipients.

# **Job Guarantee Proposal**

In Georgia the specter of unemployment persists as a critical issue affecting economic stability and societal well-being. As private-sector job growth struggles to keep pace with demand, exploring innovative solutions to foster employment security and reduce labor force discouragement becomes imperative. A Job Guarantee (JG) program emerges as a promising strategy to achieve these objectives. This chapter will discuss the overall JG concept, what economic grounds it is based on and the benefits that can be reaped from its implementation.

## **Policy Overview**

Job Guarantee is an academic policy proposal aimed at providing a sustainable solution to problems of inflation and unemployment based on Hyman P. Minsky's "employer of last resort" (ELR) policy. It aims to create full employment by having the state promise to hire unemployed workers, anyone who is ready and willing to work, as an employer of last resort. Employer of last resort is a type of employer to whom workers go last to look for jobs when no other jobs are available.

One of the foremost benefits and advantages of a JG program is that it acts as an automatic stabilizer that controls inflation. When private sector employment declines, meaning that firms or non-governmental organizations start firing their staff, the public sector reacts by offering jobs for those who are left unemployed. We can also look at it from a different perspective. Usually, when there is a recession in the economy, what the government does is that it uses expansionary economic policies to increase aggregate demand and one of these policies is increasing government spending, which in our case would be done through offering jobs to the ones who were left unemployed. So in a recession, the increase in public employment will

increase net government spending, and stimulate aggregate demand and the economy. Conversely, in a boom or inflation, when private sectors demand more workers, public sector employment decreases, also decreasing government spending, as there are less JG jobs needed to be funded, lessening stimulation and automatically stabilizing inflation. In this way, the nation always remains fully employed, with a changing mix between private and public sector employment.

Since the JG wage is open to everyone, it effectively establishes a national minimum wage—firms will have no choice but to take the minimum wage set by the JG, or else, workers will take the jobs provided by the public sector. By effectively establishing a minimum wage, the JG Program would act as a mechanism that ensures price stability within the economy through fixing the price of employed labor.

One of the main benefits of JG is that it aims to create meaningful employment opportunities that benefit both individuals and society by creating projects and jobs based on the needs of local communities at the minimum wage. One of the priorities of JG is providing essential public services such as childcare, eldercare, and maintaining and developing infrastructure, reducing business costs and attracting private investment.

In addition, the JG program automatically responds and provides jobs demanded during recessions. During times of crisis, as the private sector lays off workers, the need for social services grows. During this time in the JG program, people would be moving from private sector jobs to public sector ones, where they would be working on socially beneficial jobs, resulting in an automatic increase in the supply of jobs being demanded. JG workers can support emergency response efforts. For example, during COVID-19, there was a surge in COVID-19 testing, vaccination, home care for the isolated, delivery and disinfection services, which could have all

been provided by the public sector. As economies rebuild, the government can facilitate access to labor through job programs that expand during periods of economic slowdown and shrink during periods of private-sector job growth.

## Job Guarantee Benefits For Georgia

Job Guarantee represents a critical intervention in breaking the cycle of poverty and inequality patterns. By providing meaningful employment opportunities coupled with a decent minimum wage, this initiative aims to lift people out of poverty, give them economic security, accelerate income growth for lower-income groups, thereby narrowing the economic divide among Georgian society.

## Addressing Lack of Jobs

Job Guarantee means that jobs will be provided to everyone who is able and willing to work. This means that people who have been looking for jobs but cannot find one will get employed; people looking for full-time jobs but working part-time will also move to their full employment possibilities. By maintaining a pool of readily available jobs in the public sector through a JG program, Georgia can ensure a baseline level of employment security for its citizens, reduce discouragement among potential workers, and address its declining labor force participation problem. It can also address declining human capital and skills caused by an increasing share of long-term unemployment among unemployed Georgians.

While private-sector job growth has been lagging, a JG program can provide a buffer against job losses in the private sector and act as a complementary measure. It ensures that individuals have access to employment even if private-sector opportunities are limited and

contributes to overall employment stability. This can stabilize income levels and stimulate demand for goods and services, indirectly supporting private sector growth. For those engaged in subsistence agriculture or informal self-employment, often facing low wages and poor working conditions, a JG program will offer stable, formal employment with fair wages and benefits reducing income inequality and marginalized employment.

### Addressing Income Inequality and Poverty Cycles

With rising concerns about the adequacy of wages to keep up with rising prices and meet basic living standards, for more than half of Georgian families, urgency for establishing a new minimum wage in Georgia has become clear. JG would effectively establish a national minimum wage and would act as a mechanism for ensuring price stability within the economy through fixing the price of employed labor. JG will positively target people at the bottom in terms of income. It will increase their income faster than the top-income earners by providing a decent minimum wage and employment for the unemployed, decreasing the gap between low—and high-income groups.

JG will help the ones who are trapped in a poverty cycle. It will reduce the Georgian population's increasing dependency on social assistance programs and eliminate the decreasing employability of the lowest income segments as a factor contributing to the poverty cycle in Georgia. By providing stable employment opportunities with fair compensation, the JG encourages discouraged beneficiaries to participate in the labor market by providing a minimum wage higher than their subsistence allowance. This in turn decreases government costs of poverty reduction and increases in tax revenue that would result from the rise in employment.

JG will ensure that, during recessions, when private sector employment declines, meaning that firms or non-governmental organizations start firing the most vulnerable of the Georgian population (youth, women, and the poor), the public sector provides jobs and benefits to those willing and able to work. This means that during recessions, public spending goes to the most vulnerable to the crisis (the youth, women, and the poor), distributing public spending equitably and promoting economic equality. Because workers, especially those at the low end of the income distribution, have a higher marginal propensity to consume, we would expect a substantial uptick in sales for businesses.

### Promoting gender equality

Evaluation of gender dynamics in Georgia has revealed low labor participation, occupational segregation, and discrimination as the main contributors to unequal outcomes in gender labor markets. It has shown that the main cause lies in the unequal distribution of unpaid domestic and care work, forcing women out of the labor force and forcing them to work fewer hours and opt for more flexible jobs, which are usually low-paying and contribute to the gender wage gap. The main reason why the JG is especially important in addressing gender inequality issues in Georgia is that it addresses the root cause of the problem by offering publicly provisioned child and elderly care services.

Since it has been shown that Georgian women work fewer hours in the labor market and more in unpaid domestic and care work, offering such care services provides the flexibility necessary to make it possible for women to spend less time on unpaid domestic work and more on paid work, all while promoting gender income equality.

As women work in lower-paying sectors and positions and occupational segregation has been tightly linked to how household responsibilities are distributed, a JG would give women opportunities to pursue a wider variety of career choices. It would also increase the share of women in higher-paying sectors and positions, thus eliminating the wage gap associated with occupational segregation. In addition, since women tend to concentrate in lower-paying sectors and wages have shown to be very low in Georgia, the minimum wage automatically set by the JG would disproportionately benefit women.

Since labor force participation is one of the main challenges in Georgia's unequal gender labor market outcomes, mostly caused by women not having enough time due to their domestic responsibilities, providing accessible public care services would make it easier for women to leave the housework and then women to join the labor force, improving gender outcomes. Ensuring that those willing and able to work will get a job addresses the issue of workers facing discrimination because of their identity, such as gender, further promoting equality.

As women are more vulnerable to the effects of a crisis, they often lag behind men in terms of economic recovery. However, a JG program could help address this imbalance by automatically targeting those most in need of support, by ensuring that those who are willing and able to work will get a job during the time of crisis, promoting long-term stable economic gender equality.

## Addressing Youth Unemployment, Brain Drain and Declining Workforce

The outflow of a significant portion of Georgia's working-age population, especially among the youth and educated, skilled individuals, contributes to a shortage of qualified labor within the country. This deprives the economy of valuable human capital and limits the country's

potential for economic growth and innovation. The main factors driving emigration are economic conditions, unemployment, poverty, and perceived lack of educational and employment opportunities. The cycle of brain drain is revealed when the population is migrating due to employment-related reasons, while migration itself worsens the problem of unemployment itself. Research finds that more than half of those deciding to emigrate are unemployed in Georgia, while their unemployment rate falls significantly after they emigrate. This further confirms that unemployment is one of the biggest push factors for leaving the country, indicating a lack of quality job opportunities in Georgia.

While it is important to note that remittances from migrants contribute significantly to Georgia's output and household incomes, alleviating poverty for many families, there are concerns about their long-term impact on economic development. Heavy reliance on remittances for basic needs can limit investments in productive sectors and increase the economic vulnerability of recipients.

Remittances are mostly spent on primary consumption goods, which increases recipients' dependency on them. As the recipients are unemployed and discouraged, providing easy access to a guaranteed job through the JG can encourage them to enter the labor force, earn more, and channel remittances towards investments rather than daily consumer goods.

## Potential Job Guarantee Program Targets for Georgia

The projects should be created and implemented through the community-level consultative process. The following areas are recommended as they are the most relevant to the Georgia's economic and labor market circumstances from among the following areas:



*Infrastructure Projects:* Initiating and supporting infrastructure projects such as road construction, building maintenance, urban renewal, and public park development can not only improve public amenities but also create job opportunities in construction, engineering, and related fields that have been shown to increase labor productivity at high rates in Georgia.

*Caretaking work:* As unpaid care work emerges as primary reasons for low labor participation among women and affecting their career choices, caretaking work such as child-care, elderly-care services can greatly encourage women to join the labor force and reduce inequality. This will also be beneficial with Georgia's growing aging population and increased demand for social services.

*Agricultural Development:* As Georgia's large portion of population is engaged in agricultural work, supporting agricultural projects and training provides opportunities for employment in farming, agribusiness, and food processing. Food processing in particular has shown to be a highly demanded sector with lack of qualified workforce<sup>61</sup>.

*Education and Training Programs:* as the general education system in Georgia has shown low learning outcomes offering educational and training programs to enhance skills and employability. Particularly, too few kids attend early childhood education and, as a result, enter the general education system unprepared to learn<sup>62</sup>. This could include preschool education provision, workshops, and targeted professional development courses based on community needs.

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<sup>61</sup> European Training Foundation. "Georgia Education, Training and Employment Developments 2021" 2021. [https://www.etf.europa.eu/sites/default/files/document/CFI\\_Georgia\\_2021.pdf](https://www.etf.europa.eu/sites/default/files/document/CFI_Georgia_2021.pdf).

<sup>62</sup> IMF, "Georgia: Selected Issues," June 28, 2018, <https://www.elibrary.imf.org/view/journals/002/2018/199/article-A002-en.xml>.

## Challenges for Implementing Job Guarantee

One of the very challenging aspects I want to emphasize is government corruption and repression Georgia struggles with and has struggled with since its independence from the Soviet Union. If the project will not reach a large scale and will only be limited to some amount of individuals, which is very likely to be the case in the beginning, it is very possible for the government to use publicly guaranteed jobs as a tool for repression by threatening to fire employees whenever the necessity emerges. For example, right now, there are protests being held in Georgia night after night against “The Foreign Agent Law” or what has been called by the protesters — “The Russian Law”<sup>63</sup>. The government has used its publicly employed population as a tool to counter the protests and financed them to go to the capital to protest against the protestors. The media has shown and proved how a lot of these people are being forced to come to the capital and stand with the government in fear of losing their jobs. Some don’t know where they are going and what the protest is for, and some are against the “Russian Law” but think that they have no choice but to obey. These examples reach far beyond just protests and extend to voting as well. One of the reasons why joblessness and the issues that come with it have to be solved urgently is precisely this. People in Georgia are living in constant political and economic insecurity to the extent that it becomes very easy to exploit them, especially for the government through money. By guaranteeing jobs and providing benefits that come with it, individuals will have greater economic security and be able to make free and more informed political decisions. It is important to also mention that besides guaranteed employment, more large-scale projects are needed to enhance education quality and standards in Georgia.

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<sup>63</sup>Nechepurenko, Ivan. "A Proposed Law Targeting ‘Foreign Interests’ in Georgia Riles the Opposition." *The New York Times*, April 30, 2024. <https://www.nytimes.com/2024/04/30/world/europe/georgia-foreign-agent-bill.html>

## Future Implications of the Research

In order to fully draw up a precise Job Guarantee Proposal for Georgia, a lot more specified statistical information is needed on the labor market in Georgia, i.e the skillset of the labor force to get to where the mismatch of skills exactly happens. Implementing a JG program requires careful planning and a comprehensive understanding of several key components. First, it is important to identify the eligible target population for the program, which could be all unemployed individuals or specific demographics such as youth, women or long-term unemployed. In addition, it is important to determine the geographical scope and duration of the program, whether it will be local, regional, or national, to set clear expectations for the program.

It is also important to have a clear financial plan. This includes conducting a thorough cost analysis to estimate the total budget required including wages, benefits, administrative costs, etc. Additionally, it is important to identify potential sources of funding before and after the program is implemented, which may include increased tax revenue. It is also important to calculate a new minimum wage that would provide decent living standards in addition to working hours and benefits.

Last but not least, it is essential to assess what types of jobs are needed on a community level and identify suitable job opportunities that address these needs. Developing job descriptions, skills, and performance metrics aligns the program with participant capabilities, ensures that participants are matched with suitable jobs, and maximizes the program's effectiveness and impact.

## **Conclusion**

Upon researching the labor market trends and considering the benefits of the Job Guarantee Proposal, it is evident that the unemployment crisis in Georgia calls for-immediate action, and that the hope for continuation of joblessness growth in the next few years is not at all far-fetched. Though relieving many citizens from unemployment right away, the long-term benefits of the Job Guarantee should not be dismissed. The program will aid the country in reaching its economic potential and implementing ideals that are currently at the core of citizens' will - further pursuing the EU membership of Georgia. It is important to note that there is still a lot of further research that needs to be done in order for Georgia to fully implement the program. Regardless, considering all of this, it becomes clearer that Georgia's network of economic challenges, from unemployment (stemming from factors including traditional gender roles, lack of job opportunities and, indirectly, migration) to poverty, inequality, and population decline, could and can be attacked headfirst with the Job Guarantee program, for not only does it address immediate financial hardships...but also fosters a sense of dignity, purpose, and community resilience - all of which are necessary to string together the communities that compose Georgia after the unstable period following independence. Indeed, it stands as a testament to Georgia's commitment to inclusive growth, social justice, and European integration—an embodiment of the nation's aspirations for a brighter and more sustainable future.

Combining historical context with contemporary data analysis, we've uncovered that unemployment is not so much a standalone problem as it is a symptom of bigger issues, all of which contribute to the current socio-economic landscape. Central to our findings is the recognition of the urgency addressing persistence unemployment and issues that come along with it in Georgia. Thus, the concept of a Job Guarantee program emerges as a beacon of

hope—a transformative policy intervention with the potential to redefine the stagnant socioeconomic reality by offering meaningful employment opportunities to all who seek them.

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