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YOUTH INTERNAL MIGRATION IN GEORGIA THROUGH THE LENSE OF CIVIC AND POLITICAL ACTIVISM



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ABBREVIATIONS

EU - The European Union
CSOs - Civil Society Organizations
GeoStat - National Statistics Office of Georgia
IDP - Internally Displaced People

SUMMARY

The population of Georgia's capital is increasing at the expense of depopulating the regions. The current statistics illustrate the harsh reality – the decreasing trend in the Georgian population over the past few years (GeoStat, 2022). There is a similar trend for the regions of Georgia; for example, according to GeoStat's published data, in 2018 the population of the Imereti Region was 507,000 but by 2022 it numbered 466,600. Also, in Samegrelo-Zemo Svaneti, the population in 2018 was 320,800 people but by 2022 this has declined to 301,200.

The situation is different when it comes to the population of the capital: from 2018 to January 2022 the population in Tbilisi increased by 43,100 people (GeoStat, 2022). One way to keep youth in the regions and, indeed, in the country is to have an appropriate and time-relevant urban policy that encourages civic and political youth activism at a local level. Thus, it is extremely important to discuss both concepts in the context of the development of the potential for youth and their empowerment in the regions.

Reflecting Georgia's Soviet past and the experience of a low level of civic activism, Georgian society still struggles with organizing itself. There are still mental, social, and political factors that impede civic and political activism. In fact, there is no statistical information about activism in Georgia, the existing studies are outdated and the context has probably changed since past research projects were carried out. However, as an example, it is possible to quote a study conducted in 2017 with the support of the European Union (EU): "The importance of civic activism for Georgian students". (Bezhanishvili, et.al 2017). According to the study, 42.6% of the 420 respondents involved in the research had never once participated in any type of community-based civic activism-related event, while only 23% had participated in some kind of similar activity during the previous year (2016). In this study, it is mentioned that the number of male respondents that participated in different forms of civic activism was twice the number of female participants.

A second publication that addresses this issue was published in 2017 with the support of Friedrich-Ebert Stiftung's "Generation in Transition", which revealed that 45% of the participants were interested in the ongoing political process in Georgia. According to the data, young people's nihilistic attitudes toward political issues may stem from the belief that "their interests are either not sufficiently or not at all represented in Georgian politics". A very few respondents – only 2% - believed that young people's opinions are reflected in the current political agenda (Friedrich-Ebert Stiftung, 2017).

The report below attempts to explore the civic and political activism of young people aged 18-35 in five target regions – Imereti, Samegrelo-Zemo Svaneti, the Autonomous Republic of Adjara, Shida, and Kvemo Kartli and the perspectives of regional cross-sectoral cooperation. In addition, the study is an attempt to analyze the root causes that urge young people to leave the regions and, lastly, it offers possible solutions to reduce internal migration.

THE TARGET AUDIENCE

The Target Audience

The target audience of this research is, on the one hand, local governments of the respective target regions, and on the other hand, the Civil Society Organizations (CSOs), private sector, donors, youth and individuals who are interested in civic and political activism, cross-sectoral cooperation and internal migration issues. The report will help local governments receive constructive feedback, be more accountable, and plan and implement more youth-centered programs. Also, the report is an opportunity for CSOs to voice their concerns about the relevant issues in their local communities and provide recommendations for the private and public sectors, donors, and CSOs to help create more citizen-centered policies and programs. The overarching goal of producing this report is to communicate to a wider audience the challenges that young people face in the regions.

METHODOLOGY

In order to explore this research topic, a qualitative research method was employed which included the following components:

- ▶ Conducting focus group interviews in the target regions
- ▶ Conducting in-depth, key informant interviews in the target regions with representatives of local CSOs and self-government representatives
- ▶ Narrative analysis

Focus Group

The focus group was conducted utilizing the interview guides which were prepared beforehand and were facilitated by the moderator. The guide included up to 15 questions which were divided into three main blocks. The first block was dedicated to defining the concepts of civic and political activism, the second block was about cross-sectoral cooperation and best practices, and the third block the root causes of youth internal migration and finding ways to solve those issues.

In total 16 focus group interviews were conducted which engaged 83 participants (aged 18 – 35). Each focus group consisted of up to six participants. The chart below illustrates the regional divide in terms of the number of participants and gender distribution:

REGION	THE NUMBER OF PARTICIPANTS
The Autonomous Republic of Adjara	13 (8 Female/5 Male)
Imereti	16 (11 Female/5 Male)
Samegrelo-Zemo Svaneti	17 (11 Female/6 Male)
Shida Kartli	14 (10 Female/4 Male)
Kvemo Kartli	12 (8 Female/4 Male)

With the consent of the respondents, the focus group interviews were recorded for further analysis. The recordings were transcribed and analyzed using a thematic analysis approach.

In-depth Interview

In the target regions 12 interviews were conducted with the local governments and CSOs, out of which five were with the government and the other seven were with CSO representatives. In each region, the research was carried out in one particular city: Batumi, Kutaisi, Mestia, Zugdidi, Gori, Rustavi and Tbilisi. The CSOs were selected based on the following pre-determined criteria: - the organizations must have had at least five years of experience working on youth-related issues and have implemented an advocacy campaign in cooperation with the local self-government.

Narrative Analysis

The in-depth interviews were complemented by content analysis, which implies using first and second-hand sources/data (government documents, reports, and interviews). In the initial stage of the research, a desk review on civic and political activism, as well as youth internal migration, was carried out to gain theoretical information and empirical evidence. For this, both Georgian and foreign literature was reviewed. Finally, the report includes only estimates without providing critical analysis.

RESEARCH LIMITATIONS

Limited literature

In the focus groups, 83 young people participated who represented five different regions, which does not provide an accurate full picture of the regions. However, it is worth mentioning that responses received to the questions from the several different focus group participants who were residing in the same regions were repetitive. It allows us to see the overall trends but it does not allow regional generalization. Due to data saturation, the interviews were terminated after the sixteenth interview. Because the young people participating in the research are an active and motivated segment of society in the regions, the results might not accurately reflect the total. In terms of representation of the study, it is worth noting that information shared by the participants reflects the reality of a specific city, whereas the general situation in the region may be different. Although the examples provided in the report are about certain cities, the focus group participants represented different municipalities and communities.

Inaccurate Data

The lack of accurate internal migration data was one of the challenges of the study during the internal migration situation analysis in Georgia, the population fluctuates from year to year, but data on internal migration in terms of the age divide does not exist.

THE MAIN FINDINGS

Youth Challenges

- ▶ In the Samegrelo-Zemo Svaneti Region, youth stated that the top-down management style and lack of a participatory approach employed by public institutions remains an acute issue at the local level.
- ▶ The poor infrastructure creates obstacles, preventing youth from being more civically active. Therefore, youth lacks access to quality education, and engagement in non-formal educational activities is low.
- ▶ The priorities set by the local self-government in Imereti Region do not meet the real needs of local youth. One of the main hinderances is the absence of spaces for youth and a lack of dedicated resources.
- ▶ One of the biggest problems in Upper Adjara is the poor infrastructure, which leads to youth mobility issues within the region. It frequently happens that the populations in the villages do not have access to basic needs – clean water, sanitation, and public transport. Internet access remains an issue in many remote villages and is considered a luxury.
- ▶ One of many issues that youth residing in Adjara face is that organizations implement activities that are one-off and are not sustainable. In addition, decisions made about the needs of the local population are frequently made without consultation, which causes alienation of youth from the decision-making bodies and, as a result, creates distrust.
- ▶ Society's mentality and gender stereotyping remain a noteworthy challenge. It often happens that senior family members do not allow girls to attend training, especially if it requires them to travel to a different city.
- ▶ In the Shida Kartli Region, the respondents identified unemployment as one of the key challenges. Inadequate pay, lack of jobs, and inability to realize their full potential forces young people to leave their region.
- ▶ On the one hand, the proximity to the capital of the Kvemo Kartli region offers young people more opportunities to develop; however, on the other hand, it discourages youth engagement in activities at local level.
- ▶ Rustavi has an exceptionally active civil society that plans and implements many activities advocating local ecological issues in cooperation with different sectors.

Youth Internal Migration

- Low-quality education is one of the causes of internal migration in the Adjara Region. Poor communications and infrastructure in remote areas impede access to resources. Moreover, this denies youth their constitutional right to have access to quality education and other resources.
- The initiatives implemented by international donors and local organizations do not reflect the real needs of the local population.
- In Samegrelo region, according to the young people, lack of access to quality education, dedicated space for youth, educational activities for youth, and stereotyping continue to be acute challenges.
- In Upper Svaneti, although migration to larger cities is still a relevant issue, unlike other regions reverse migration occurs here more often than anywhere else. This may be due to the opportunities that the development of the tourism industry provides for local youth.
- The reasons for internal migration in Imereti region are mainly related to socioeconomic factors. Lack of access to jobs, resources, and opportunities force young people to move to the capital.
- In Shida Kartli Region poor infrastructure – roads and municipal/intercity transportation -remain one of the challenges that youth face. The proximity to the capital is a positive aspect as it creates an opportunity for young people to find jobs, however, at the same time; it causes a brain-drain from the region.
- Similarly to Shida Kartli, one of the challenges that Kvemo Kartli youth face is poor intercity transportation between Rustavi and Tbilisi, which impedes commuting and access to resources, and they lack opportunities at local level.

Youth Civic and Political Activism

- The level of activism among the youth interviewed was low, which was caused mostly by their nihilistic attitudes. Young people do not think that they have the power to produce tangible results. Therefore, activism is less of a priority for them.
- Attitudes towards civil and political activism differ. According to the respondents' answers, young people are relatively skeptical about political activism compared to civic activism. They avoid being affiliated with any particular party and they prefer to take a neutral stance.
- For young people, political activism is associated with unwanted labels. However, most of them believe that results can be achieved quickly and more efficiently through political activism.
- Civic activism was relatively popular among the respondents. An absolute majority had been either an organizer or participant in one of the following forms of activism at local level: creating a petition, attending public discussions at the governor's office, and organizing/attending rallies.

- The level of activism shown across the regions is more or less the same. However, the focus group interviews illustrated that those young people in the regions, when compared to the youth residing in urban areas, are more active. They cooperate with local governments closely and they achieve positive results.
- The common challenge that all the regions face is a lack of encouragement to promote youth activism at a local level. Most of the time, and this applies especially to the regions, voicing criticism can lead to personal conflict. Consensus and finding common ground are not considered successful strategies for gathering power.

Cross-sectoral Cooperation

- Judging by the example of Samegrelo-Zemo and Svaneti, Zugdidi Municipality has implemented several successful initiatives with the involvement of the private and civil society sectors, along with foreign donors' support.
- Personal contacts largely determine whether or not representatives of different sectors will cooperate.
- Across all regions, one of the main issues the participants raised was the frequent personnel changes in the public sector, as a result, the trust and the business relationships established with specific individuals are lost. Establishing effective communications with new staff requires extra time and energy, which complicates timely decision-making.
- Using the example of Kutaisi and Zugdidi Municipalities, it can be said that cross-sectoral cooperation can, in most cases, be considered successful. Frequently, local government holds consultation meetings with the local CSOs, which can be deemed as a positive practice.
- Cross-sectoral cooperation could be considered challenging in the Adjara Region, as, despite the joint initiatives being implemented, the private sector is still reluctant to cooperate with the local CSOs as well as with the local government.
- The focus group participants from Shida Kartli assessed cross-sectoral cooperation overall positively. However, there have been cases when the reason for cooperation has been personal benefit from the initiative, which negatively affects the future of the cooperation and the efficiency of the work they do. The participants stated that most of the time cooperation is on a surface level, and young people's opinion is usually not taken into account during the decision-making process when it comes to youth activities and programs.
- Unlike the respondents from the other regions, the Shida Kartli focus group participants stated that it is easier to cooperate with the local private sector than the public sector. They think that there is a lot to be done before the different sectors can come together and collaborate and for each sector to find its role in solving the issues and acting in unison.
- Based on the example of Kvemo Kartli, there is positive experience and practice of public and SCOs collaborating. For instance, the local activists' group cooperates with the local Mayor's office successfully and they have implemented multiple joint initiatives.
- According to the participants, sometimes the cooperation between the public and civil society organizations is hindered by the perception that they are each other's rivals, which leads to an unhealthy relationship between the two sectors. The critical stance of organizations toward self-government reduces the chances of cooperation and inhibits them from being vocal about issues that are problematic at local level.

INTRODUCTION

Nowadays, migration is considered to be a global phenomenon which plays a crucial role in countries' socioeconomic development. The borders between countries are slowly disappearing and people are being given more and more opportunities for mobility to study and work abroad. The job market has surely become global in this rapidly changing world. The reason for migration is, in most cases, to gain access to quality education, the pursuit of a better careers, wages, and generally the desire to live a better-quality life. Historically, migration has always manifested itself in different shapes and forms and is considered one of the preconditions for development. It should be said that migration from one place to another is closely connected to innovation and development.

Based on the scale of migration, there are two types of internal and external (international) migration identified here. Internal migration implies movement from one region to another within the country, with the purpose of settling in a new place, either temporarily or permanently. Internal migrants move to a new place but remain in their country of origin; for example, village populations move to urban areas (Glossary on Migration, 1998)

Since Georgia gained independence, the reason for internal migration has been labor migration – relocation from villages to cities. The desire to improve social and economic conditions forced a significant section of the population to abandon their places of residence and not only move to the city, but also leave the country. Among the plethora of other reasons, a lack of available high-paying jobs and a sense of instability forced the Georgian population to leave their country/place of residence.

According to estimates published by The National Statistics Office of Georgia (GeoStat), it can be assumed that the highest rate of unemployment is among the age group 15-19, followed by the 20-24 age group and after that comes the 25-29-year-olds (Chart 1). The young people who should be generating wealth and gaining work experience at a local level are forced to leave their communities and move to urban areas due to the lack of job opportunities.

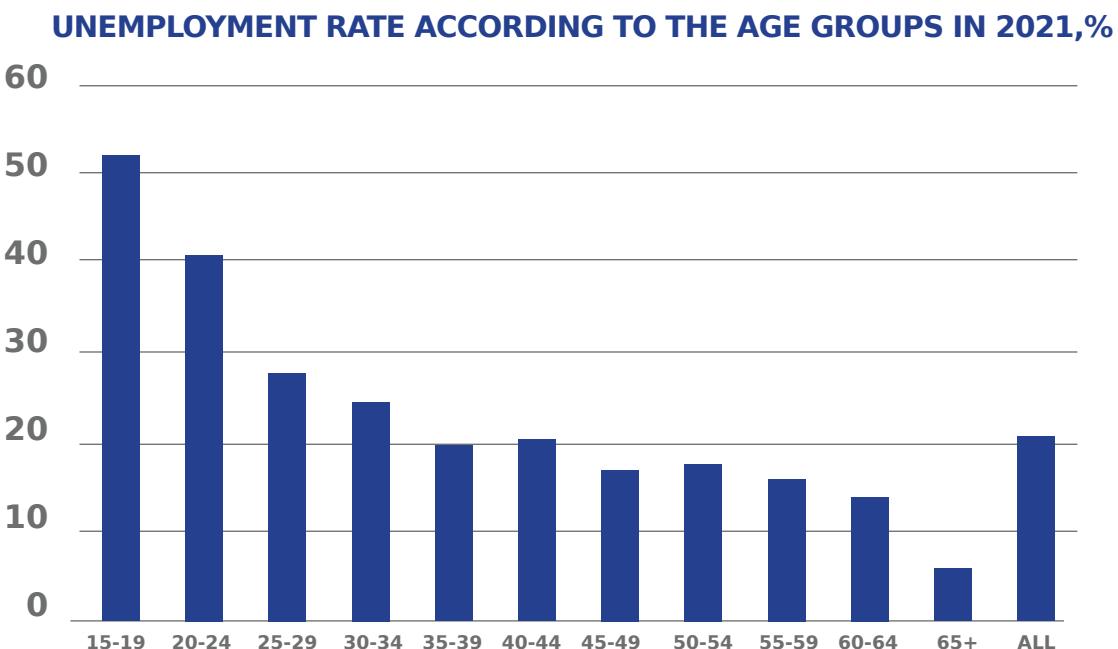


Chart 1. Unemployment rate according to the age groups in 2021

Source: Geostat, 2021

(Available at: <https://www.geostat.ge/ka/modules/categories/683/dasakmeba-umushevroba>)

Georgia's geopolitical location, plus its socioeconomic and political situation, are considered to be the root causes for involuntary internal migration. Therefore, it is crucially important for a country such as Georgia to prioritize and plan and implement internal and external migration policies rationally. Given that this is a complex topic, it requires more in-depth and multilayered analysis. The document below emphasizes the importance of internal migration and policies, along with young people's attitudes on this issue.

THE RESEARCH FINDINGS

In the research target regions, from the focus group interviews it is clear that unemployment, regardless of the age group, remains one of the most acute challenges in Georgia. The Geo-Stat statistics indicate that the increase in the unemployment rate over the last few years has been significant.

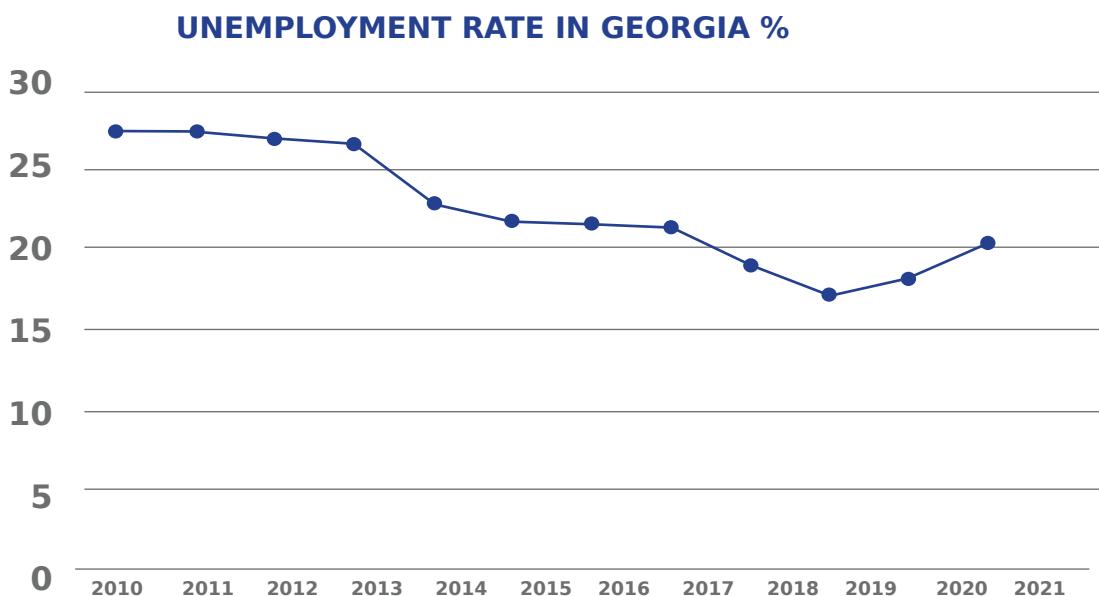


Chart 2. Unemployment rate in Georgia

Source: Geostat, 2021

(Available at: <https://www.geostat.ge/ka/modules/categories/683/dasakmeba-umushevroba>)

If we examine closely the dynamics of the unemployment rate over the past few years (Chart 2), it is noticeable that there was an increase in the unemployment rate in 2019-2021. If we take a closer look at this issue from the city/village perspective, during the past four years the rate increased almost on the same level in both areas. However, it is worth noting that "employment" excludes jobs in the informal economy, so might not give us an accurate depiction of the real situation.

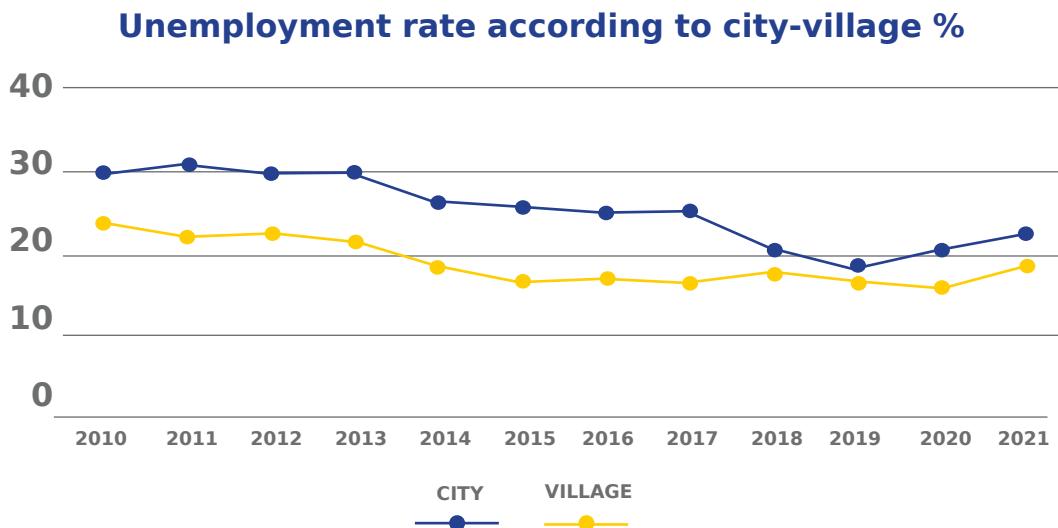


Chart 3. Unemployment rate according to city-village

Source: Geostat, 2021

(Available at: <https://www.geostat.ge/ka/modules/categories/683/dasakmeba-umushevroba>)

If we look at the unemployment rate by region, (Chart 4), in 2021 Racha Lechkhumi and Lower Svaneti show the highest rate of unemployment, followed by Kvemo Kartli and Imereti. In Georgia, the unemployment rate in the 2nd quarter of 2022 (Chart 5) was 18.1% which means that every fifth person was unemployed.

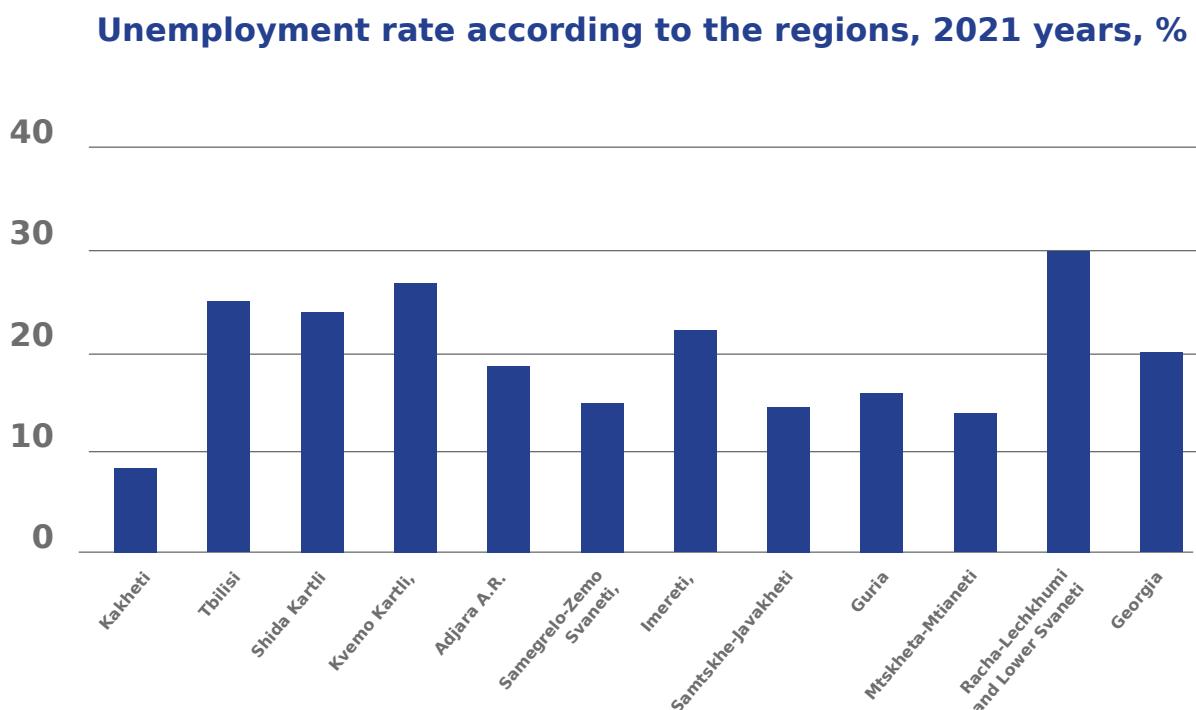


Chart. 4. Unemployment rate according to the regions, 2021

Source: Geostat, 2021(Available at: <https://www.geostat.ge/ka/modules/categories/683/dasakmeba-umushevroba>)

Unemployment Rate, per 1000 people

	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022 I	2022 II
Labor power, per 1000 people	1629.0	1675.6	1653.8	1641.4	1605.2	1572.8	1523.7	1533.6	1490.7	1551.5
Employed, per 1000 people	1255.0	1308.5	1294.5	1286.9	1296.2	1295.9	1241.8	1217.4	1201.1	1269.9
Unemployed, per 1000 people	374.0	367.2	359.2	354.5	309.0	276.9	281.9	316.2	289.6	281.6
Unemployment rate, per cent	23.0	21.9	21.7	21.6	19.2	17.6	18.5	20.6	19.4	18.1

Chart. 5. Unemployment Rate, per 1000 people

Source:Geostat, 2022

(Available at: <https://www.geostat.ge/ka/modules/categories/683/dasakmeba-umushevroba>)

The 2019 “Migration Profile” report developed by The Government’s Commission on Migration Issues is the so-called “third interim report” which aimed to consolidate official data related to migration. The document focuses on ecomigrants and internally displaced people (IDPs), however, it does not mention involuntary internal migration and its root causes. According to the data provided by GeoStat, the population in the villages decreases year by year, which points to a challenging socioeconomic situation in the regions that forces the population to leave. One of the main goals of the regional development policy is to work on internal migration issues. Specifically, a mechanism should be developed that will reduce the outflow of young people from the regions and create development opportunities for them (The Government’s Commission on Migration Issues, 2019).

According to the regional development strategy for 2018-2021, the program-related priorities were the following:

- ▶ Improvement of basic infrastructure, promoting competitiveness and sustainable development in regions;
- ▶ Supporting the development of the small and medium-size enterprises, growth-oriented sectors, and exports;
- ▶ Supporting the development of human capital;
- ▶ Promotion of local development and supporting specific regions based on their needs;
- ▶ Enhancing the quality and effectiveness of regional development institutions and preparing pilot regional development programs;
- ▶ According to the above-mentioned priorities, more than 100 initiatives and events in the regions of Georgia should have been implemented between 2018- 2021 (MRDI 2022).

It is a fact that, despite the regional development strategy listing all the important priorities that could potentially create opportunities for young people, it has yet to have a positive impact on youth internal migration.

The purpose of the following study is to identify the root causes of youth internal migration in the respective regions (Adjara, Imereti, Samegrelo-Zemo Svaneti, Shida, and Kvemo Kartli) among youth aged 18-35, to explore the ways in which national and local governments, along with other sectors, can contribute to reducing the internal migration in the regions.

In addition, the report offers recommendations for national as well as local governments, CSOs, and foreign donors. One of the priorities of the study is to attempt to fill a gap – the lack of Georgian and foreign literature about Georgian youth migration issues. This research encompasses civic and political activism among youth, and access to resources, which are very closely linked to the internal migration issue.

YOUTH CHALLENGES ACCORDING TO REGION

The main area of research was to identify challenges that youth faces in the regions regarding social and political activism. For this reason, the interviews were conducted with the representatives of the governmental and non-governmental sectors. The consultation meetings were organized with heads of youth departments of the Mayors' offices and CSOs which have been operating in the region for more than five years. In addition, the general needs and challenges of youth in terms of increasing their engagement were discussed during interviews. As a result, what was shown was that there were some similarities between the regions, but also differing challenges.

SAMEGRELO-ZEMO SVANETI REGION

While talking about the challenges for youth, the problems of regions not practicing local bottom-up governance and inclusive decision-making are the biggest challenge in the Samegrelo Zemo-Svaneti region.

Infrastructural, as well as social and cultural obstacles that young people face daily, were identified during the focus group interviews. Most youngsters do not have access to quality education and cultural stereotypes do not let them enjoy all the benefits that the universities offer, e.g. female students are often not allowed by their families to live in a dormitory. As a result, they have to travel to attend lectures several kilometers from their villages and back every day. Another big challenge in the Samegrelo Zemo-Svaneti region is a high level of unemployment and fewer possibilities for youth to engage in non-formal educational activities. According to the focus group participants, on the one hand, local government bodies do not encourage youth civic and political activism and, on the other hand, young people tend to restrain themselves from activism as they are afraid of the consequences – especially if their family members work in the public sector.

IMERETI REGION

Even though local government, as well as the non-governmental sectors, work hard to identify the needs of young people in the region and advocate existing challenges, youth's potential is still untapped in Imereti.

As focus group participants mentioned, the priority of the local government is to organize youth camps and festivals while the non-governmental sector offers a broader variety of events and space for youth discussions. Young people living in Imereti expressed their wish to have closer cooperation with local self-government.

The biggest challenges in Imereti is lack of spaces where young people can gather, discuss their problems and plan future steps. They also have very limited financial as well as human resources.

THE AUTONOMOUS REPUBLIC OF ADJARA

The biggest problem in Adjara is the poor condition and functionality of transport, which leads to limited mobility for locals. According to the respondents, poor local infrastructure, especially in the mountainous parts of Adjara, also has a negative impact on youth engagement and activism. Often, village residents do not have the possibility to satisfy their basic needs - such as drinking water and proper roads. As a result, civic or political activism becomes the least priority for youngsters as they have to think about these basic needs.

"When a young person is not able to satisfy very basic needs, everything else becomes not important." Respondent, 26

Another problem is access to the internet, which is very limited, or a luxury, in many parts of the region. This issue itself is directly connected with access to information. Therefore, many young people are not actively engaged in on-going processes or activities because they simply do not have the information about them.

Similarly to other regions, the problem of not having youth spaces is applicable in Adjara. There are no places in towns and villages where youngsters can gather, discuss different issues and develop action plans. It is worth mentioning that many of the activities planned for youth are one-offs and lack any sustainability element. Young people have a feeling that decisions about them are being made in their absence - in the capital or the regional center. As a result, they do not consider their engagement as important, lose trust, and tend to be passive.

Last but not least, public attitudes and gender stereotyping are still serious issues in Adjara. According to the focus group participants, in frequent cases families do not allow girls to attend trainings that are organized in another city, especially if an overnight stay is required. The implementing organization plays a crucial role in this regard, because if the organization has a good reputation it is more likely that the family will agree to let the girl participate.

SHIDA KARTLI REGION

The most relevant issue that was mentioned in Shida Kartli was unemployment on a local level. Inadequate salaries and lack of employment possibilities force youngsters to leave the region. The problem of youth spaces is relevant for Shida Kartli, as well. Young people not only lack the spaces where they can meet and discuss various issues, but also places to have fun. On top of that, there is a big problem with the regional transport system, especially public transport from/to villages, which is an additional restriction for youth mobility.

„Access to internet is still a big problem in many villages. Often internet is not affordable for locals and they do not have opportunities to learn about different programs or events.“ Respondent, 34

Access to the internet is another challenging issue in Shida Kartli, especially in the villages near the occupied territories. This has a negative impact on access to information for young people and they often remain excluded. In addition, youngsters living in villages have to carry out hard physical work daily and usually do not have time or energy to engage in social and political activism.

KVEMO KARTLI REGION

Being closer to the capital than other regions has both a positive and a negative impact on young people living in Kvemo Kartli. Since most activities are organized in Tbilisi, residents of Kvemo Kartli, especially Rustavi, have opportunities to be actively involved in the capital, however, this tendency leads to there being fewer events within the region. Respondents believe that it is very important for the local government to develop a youth policy that aims to change this behavior.

„Poor functioning of intercity transport is a big challenge for youth as it limits mobility as well as access to the various resources.“ Respondent, 30

Throughout the past several months, different activities have been organized by local government in Rustavi to motivate local youth to be more active. Rustavi is an exception compared to the other target cities as youngsters did not mention the lack of youth spaces as a problem. Rustavi has a very strong civil society and activists who are working hard to advocate various issues, especially related to ecology and air quality.

YOUTH INTERNAL MIGRATION

Since youth internal migration is one of the top challenges, the present chapter discusses the main reasons for youngsters to leave their regional hometowns.

SAMEGRELO-ZEMO SVANETI REGION

Like other regions of Georgia, youth (and not only) internal and external migration is a very challenging issue. The main reasons for this are similar in every region. The most common problems that respondents in Samegrelo-Zemo Svaneti identified were low quality education, lack of youth spaces and youth-oriented educational activities on a local level. Gender stereotyping and public opinion play a big part in girls wishing to leave the region and move to the capital where they can feel free and be more independent. Some other problems that youngsters face in this region are related to the poor infrastructure, e.g. lack of drinking water, gas, proper internal roads and access to the internet. It is worth mentioning that lately there is a trend for counter-migration back to the regions. This is caused mostly by the ability to travel to university as well as the increased prices for rental apartments in bigger cities and inflation.

Unlike Samegrelo and other regions, young people tend to return to Svaneti more and more. Due to the fact that Svaneti is one of the top tourist destinations in Georgia, many locals have family businesses there, thus there are seasonal as well as constant employment opportunities for youngsters. The development of the local business sector in Svaneti provides great opportunities for young people as they are able on the one hand to gain specific experience and, on the other hand to use their income to cover their tuition fees at university. At the same time, they contribute to the popularization of their region. As in other regions, lack of youth spaces, poor communication and infrastructure are the main problems in Svaneti. Young people say that frequent occurrences of nepotism makes them want to leave the region and try for themselves in bigger cities as there are more opportunities.

„There is a tendency of counter migration in Svaneti lately. For instance, in one particular village which had only two families left couple of years ago, there are twenty-two families residing there at this moment.”, Respondent, 28

IMERETI REGION

Focus group participants pointed out that the main reasons for youth internal migration are connected to socio-economic factors. Lack of employment on a local level and lack of access to resources and opportunities force them to seek better labor condition and income and eventually, to move to the capital.

„Youth does not have faith in future and employment perspective. They do not have a possibility of self-realization. Therefore, people who are willing to work and live better, leave regions”. Respondent, 27

When finishing school, youngsters planning to enter universities are unaware of prospective demand in the labor market of particular professions. Young people are ashamed of physical labor and express less interest in the agricultural sector and vocational learning. Focus group members mentioned that students who are not so successful in the capital, return to the regional universities because it is easier to obtain degrees there. In addition, one more reason why youngsters leave the regions is the cultural stereotyping that has an influence on their behavior and attitudes.

THE AUTONOMOUS REPUBLIC OF ADJARA

Participants in Adjara focus groups emphasized different reasons for youth internal migration from the villages to bigger cities. Even though Batumi is one of the biggest cities in Georgia, the low quality of education and management, as well as poor infrastructure, make youngsters want to leave the region and move to the capital. One more important aspect that respondents mentioned was the lack of readiness of the universities to embrace students' differing opinions and receive their critical feedback. This also contributes to the internal migration as young people do not feel welcome or that they are heard properly.

In addition, uneasy socio-economic conditions, especially in the mountainous parts of the region, play a crucial role in forcing youth to leave the region. The low level of education and the poor infrastructure make Adjarian youth more vulnerable. Often they are unable to go to a regional centre because of lack of roads and/or public transport. There is a problem of drinking water in a number of villages and the internet is not available for everyone. The latter results in their having limited access to education, especially for online classes.

Respondents pointed out that there is a problem of trust towards different organizations that are implementing activities in Adjara. Young people have a feeling that activities are usually one-off and do not focus on long-term results. This fact has a negative impact on the attitudes and motivation of the local people.

SHIDA KARTLI REGION

The main reason why young people migrate to bigger cities or the capital is their determination to seek more opportunities. As in case of Kvemo Kartli, Shida Kartli is also close to Tbilisi, which has a controversial effect on youth employment. On the one hand, being close to Tbilisi opens up a broad variety of employment possibilities for the locals but, on the other hand it leads to the loss of qualified employers who could establish business and contribute to local regional development.

Respondents believe that the biggest challenge for Shida Kartli is poor infrastructure with bad roads and unreliable municipal transport. Youngsters also struggle because there are no youth spaces, or many educational or cultural events – there is not even a proper cinema or library. Even though Gori is one of the top tourist destinations in Georgia, this is not reflected in the quality of the infrastructure.

KVEMO KARTLI REGION

Residents of Kvemo Kartli commute on a daily basis. Due to the fact that the region is very close to the capital, a majority of locals either study or work in Tbilisi. There are a number of factories in Rustavi which are the main local source of employment, but not enough. Another challenge is the unstable municipal transport system, which limits youth mobility.

DEFINITIONS OF CIVIC AND POLITICAL ACTIVISM - YOUTH PERSPECTIVE

One of the research goals was to identify how young people perceive civic and political activism and if those two differ from each other. The focus group discussion also included conversations on whether the participants had been engaged in any activism, and how. The participants were asked to define civic and political activism separately and then identify the common and different things between these two terms. The majority asserted that civic activism is a broader concept than political activism. The first one is free from ideology while the latter is all about it. Youngsters believe that civic activism is connected with mainstreaming, advocating and lobbying the challenges that a specific civic group is facing. Its final goal is always to achieve public well-being and improve social conditions. Participants think that civic activism is not always interlinked with politics.

All participants agreed that in Georgia civic activism is associated with confrontation between the government and civil society and rarely oriented on finding a solution. They believe that it is still hard for representatives of different sectors to discuss issues constructively and be open to different opinions. Civic activism demands mobilization of human as well as financial resources. It is a way to make government be more accountable to its citizens. Focus group participants pointed out that civic activism should be oriented to solving a particular issue and not gaining power.

DEFINITION OF CIVIC ACTIVISM BY YOUNG PEOPLE

The majority of the respondents agreed that civic activism is a way for a single citizen to voice her/his needs and demand positive changes. Youngsters believe that civic activism is a catalyst for political change. Some of them think that through civic activism it is possible to advocate civic issues and to ensure that central and local governments act as they should. Civic activism is associated with the unifying of people with similar opinions who want to make their ideas heard by the decision makers. Some respondents could not distinguish between these two forms of activism. They believed that civic and political activism balanced and even complimented each other. Youngsters think that it is often hard to reach goals with only civic activism and that is when you need to practice political activism – sometimes being a member of a political party gives a person such a mandate, which is vital if changes are to be made.

Generally, all the participants of the focus groups have been engaged in civic activism at least once. The most common forms of civic activism that were mentioned during the discussions were street protests, preparing manifests and petitions, attending Sakrebulo hearings about the budget and collecting signatures. Unstable socio-economic conditions in the country trigger civil activists to protest and advocate their needs - however, the participants believed that civil activists should be free of political ideologies, be objective, non-partisan and advocate challenges in an unbiased way.

The overall challenge shown in every region was that civic and political activism is not promoted on a local level. In addition, expressing a critical opinion often leads to confrontation and cooperation and is not a successful way to deal with challenges.

DEFINITION OF POLITICAL ACTIVISM BY YOUNG PEOPLE

The focus group participants believed that it is not good idea in Georgia to be affiliated with any particular political party. Being a political activist means to be associated with a particular political party's ideology and be involved in party endeavor. Lack of trust towards the political parties, nihilism and a feeling that their voice does not matter, forces youth to distance itself from political activity. In many cases, when civil activists become political activists, they "lower" their voices and tend to be less critical towards the government. Political parties struggle as well because what they offer is not attractive to young people – parties do not have a place in them to fulfil youth's ambitions, to develop or gain new experiences, thus they leave. Youngsters believe that career development within a political party is not based on the principle of merit. It was mentioned that civic activism serves as a route to a future in politics as most of politicians have begun their careers in civic activism. The benefit of being a political activist is usually the gaining of a formal status but also gives some kind of mandate to have an impact on the decision-making process. In the end, political activism is associated with undesirable labeling by society, and young people try to stay out of it.

CROSS-SECTORAL COOPERATION

Representatives of governmental and non-governmental sectors were interviewed within the framework of the research. Shown below is an overview of cross-sectoral cooperation in the target regions. This cooperation is important for consolidating resources and achieving the common goals. The non-governmental sector plays a big part in defending and developing a country's democracy. With the help of international donors, it mobilizes resources in order to maintain social and financial sustainability. Cross-sectoral cooperation is a prerequisite to co-habitation, consensus and the forming of a democratic society. The Civil Society Assessment Report of Georgia 2019 says that the non-governmental sector struggles with cooperation with the private sector in the first place, but also with the public sector. The non-governmental sector has a close cooperation with the media and with international partners, but not with other civic groups. The reason for the lack of success in cooperation between the private and non-governmental sectors is a fear of reputational damage. The report suggests that the private sector considers non-governmental institutions as biased (Kvashilava and others 2019).

SAMEGRELO-ZEMO SVANETI REGION

Zugdidi Mayor's Office has a positive experience of cooperation with private and non-governmental sectors. It has implemented various social projects with the help of international donors and Embassies. The authors of such initiatives are usually young people (25-35 years old) employed in public institutions.

„Young people do not want to be affiliated with political parties because it reduces their chances to get employed in public sector“. Respondent, 34

There is a Youth Council in Zugdidi that targets 14-29-year-old youngsters and offers them various activities, helped by the Mayor's office as well as international donors. In addition, there is a possibility of submitting project proposals aiming at community development to the Mayor's office and getting co-financing. However, it was mentioned that cross-sectoral cooperation is highly dependent on personal contacts and that the organizations that are in close cooperation with local self-governance often become less critical and objective.

IMERETI REGION

The cooperation among public, private and non-governmental sectors is organized within different educational initiatives, however, there are some barriers. There are also cases of cross-sectoral cooperation within the framework of donor-funded projects. Respondents said that local government is mostly open to new initiatives, however it is easier to organise successful cooperation if personal contacts are involved. One of the most challenging issues identified was the frequent change of employers in the public sector. It prolongs the communication process and has a negative impact on building trust. Youngsters believe that even though the number of public servants is high, it is extremely hard to find a person who is not indifferent and who truly cares to carry out his/her job.

„Mainly the activities that are focused on youth include entertainment events that are not in compliance with local needs“, Respondent, 35

Based on interviews with non-governmental sector representatives, there are cases of successful cooperation among municipalities in the Imereti region. For instance, Kutaisi and Baghdati municipalities implement joint initiatives. Respondents also mentioned that cooperation between the non-governmental and public sectors is mainly limited to consultation meetings and maybe a few initiatives.

THE AUTONOMOUS REPUBLIC OF ADJARA

While talking about cross-sectoral cooperation, group from Adjara covered two directions – cooperation between civil and public sectors and cooperation between private and non-governmental sectors.

According to them, there is visible progress in terms of cooperation, however it is still not sufficiently effective as to be a basis for community development. Both of the above mentioned directions have their own specifications. Civil society believes that public institutions are not open to different perspectives and perceive them as opponents. Personal contacts and reputation play a big role here, as well. For instance, an interview with one of the non-governmental organization in Adjara illustrated how much influence a single organization can have on local governance just because it has a lot of international donor support - which is very valuable for the region.

Some of the respondents believed that civil society does not address local needs and that leads to a decreasing level of trust towards them.

„Local needs assessment are not usually made and most donor-funded projects are oriented on single-time activities and are not sustainable. “ Respondent, 22

It is worth mentioning that the only time the private sector is supportive of civil society is when the person working for a private company has a background of being involved in civic activism. Otherwise, cooperation is almost non-existing. In general, as in other regions, personal contacts and organizational reputation have a big role in intersectoral cooperation. Usually, the cases of cooperation with newly established organizations are less because people tend to care about the positive experience and trust that has been built throughout the years. Respondents also mentioned that there are few or no cases of cooperation between the big cities/capital and local organizations. It is caused by the fact that the regional centers/capital do not know local regional needs, the projects are planned in a wrong way and lack a sustainability component.

SHIDA KARLI REGION

The cross-sectoral cooperation in Shida Kartli was assessed in a more or less positive way, however there is a problem of the motive. Respondents said that usually the motive of co-operation was the securing of a personal benefit. They believe that cooperation is mainly a facade and that the public sector is not truly interested in what civil society thinks. Some of the inter-sectoral councils that have members from different sectors are often biased and people tend to avoid voicing a critical opinion in order to maintain good personal relationships.

The problem is that locally there is not a platform that could encourage youth be more active and engaged. The only time when government needs youth is in the pre-election period. In reality, they do not consider what youngsters think and all this boosts nihilistic attitudes. Only temporarily, after an election, the newly elected pretend that they care about different opinions, but in a long-run they just act according to their agenda. Shida Kartli is no exception in terms of emphasizing the importance of personal contacts – often the success of cross-sectoral co-operation depends on it.

Respondents pointed to the need of cooperation between the municipalities, believing that fruitful communication and cooperation within the region is crucial for regional development.

Shida Kartli was the only region where the respondents underlined the responsibility of a citizen. They mentioned how important it is that a person who was involved in donor-funded activity/project realize the amount of resources spent on her/him and feel the responsibility. These types of people are expecting more to be active and share obtained knowledge and experience for further development of their community and region.

In terms of cooperation with the private sector, Shida Kartli participants feel that it is easier to deal with businesses than the public sector. The main obstacle in the way of cooperation is trust, and in order to enhance cooperation, trust should first be built between the different sectors.

KVEMO KARLI REGION

Rustavi is a good example of having a public sector, especially a youth department, which is open to new initiatives. However, respondents believe that more joint projects and programs are needed. Youngsters mention that sometimes information about planned activities are not shared through youthful channels, i.e. social networks, and that limits the participation level.

„Public sector does not provide information about different activities through relevant and appropriate channels and platforms“, Respondent, 29

Participants mentioned that lately there is a positive change regarding the involvement of the private sector in different initiatives. They tend to fund more and more activities. There are many cases when public and private sectors implement joint educational, recreational and cultural events. The remaining concern that Kvemo Kartli participants point to is the lack of organizations that aim to influence local politics and the political agenda.

CONCLUSION

Nowadays, youth internal migration is one of the most challenges issues in Georgia. More and more young people have to leave their region and the country every year in hope to improve their socio-economic conditions and quality of education.

The situation regarding cross-sectoral cooperation varies according to region. In some of the municipalities, different sectors are more open while in others there are a few cases of successful cooperation. It is very important to enhance co-operation and consider different perspectives while making a decision. Personal relationships should not have an impact on the process of addressing the challenges and the priority should be the finding of solutions for community problems.

The regional development policies should focus on sustainable and balanced opportunities that will use citizens' potential to satisfy their needs and improve their quality of life. It is very important to effectively use material, labor and financial resources for youth. In addition, the private sector should encourage local initiatives through the boosting of social and economic development as well as infrastructure.

RECOMMENDATIONS

FOR LOCAL GOVERNMENTS

Rustavi is a good example of having a public sector, especially a youth department, which is open to new initiatives. However, respondents believe that more joint projects and programs are needed. Youngsters mention that sometimes information about planned activities are not shared through youthful channels, i.e. social networks, and that limits the participation level.

- Support youth engagement on a local level – provide youth involvement in decision making through developing different mechanisms, i.e. develop spaces for youth, provide these with the necessary equipment, increase the budget for youth and promote youth participation in Sakrebulo meetings and public discussions.
- Increase access to information and to education through dissemination via the relevant platforms and channels. Use appropriate and understandable wording for youth. Enhance communication between public officials and youngsters.
- Develop infrastructure – improve municipal roads and transport system, especially in the mountainous parts of the country. Increase access to the internet for vulnerable youth, for instance through one-time subsidies.
- In addition to sports and recreational activities, organize more educational events in cooperation with non-governmental sector on the local level.

- ▶ Deepen cooperation with civil society and the private sector – reduce favoritism on a local level; stop perceiving different sectors as rivals and focus on joint initiatives aiming at youth empowerment.
- ▶ Offer attractive employment opportunities and labor conditions to qualified youngsters so that they stay in the region or motivate them to return to their hometowns.
- ▶ Enhance cooperation among different municipalities of the same region and organize joint activities.
- ▶ Create a platform for experience-sharing among different regions and follow the best practices. Plan regular meetings and discussion areas for future cooperation.
- ▶ Produce statistics for internal migration in terms of age. Create internal strategies to manage migration that will focus on regional development and decrease migration levels.

FOR CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANIZATIONS

- ▶ Plan and implement sustainable programs – instead of implementing one-off activities, focus more on long-term projects.
- ▶ Focus on NEET (Not in Employment, Education or Training) youths and ensure their inclusion. Offer them professional orientation and career planning consultations.
- ▶ Deepen cooperation among non-governmental organizations that operate in the same region. Plan joint initiatives focusing on youth empowerment.
- ▶ Promote non-political, non-partisan and neutral civil society organizations that will not be affiliated with any political power.
- ▶ Develop programs based on real-needs-assessment on a local level. Include local NGOs and youth in the process of planning and developing programs that are meant to be implemented for them.
- ▶ Establish regional platforms for civil society organizations in order to consolidate resources.

FOR THE PRIVATE SECTOR

- ▶ Develop and offer paid internship programs in cooperation with local government and NGOs for enhancing employment level locally.
- ▶ Focus on NEET youths and offer them relevant programs that would help them gain experience and become qualified for future employment.
- ▶ Support local entrepreneurs – organize relevant training courses and consultations for experience-sharing and learning.

- Enhance social responsibility – financially support local educational, cultural and professional events that aim to empower youth.
- Offer qualified local youth attractive employment opportunities and labor conditions so that they do not have to leave the region.
- Create scholarship funds for successful students who study in the region. This will also encourage locals to enter local universities.

FOR DONORS

- Conduct needs assessment on a local level as a precondition for development of a particular programs. Define priorities based on the real needs of a particular region/municipality.
- Conduct quality control of the activities funded – focusing not only on the number of beneficiaries but orientating on the long-term results.
- Contribute to the empowerment of regional, local civil society organizations - disseminate financial resources to local NGOs who are operating locally instead of giving grants to already big and experienced organizations.

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