Recruitment of schoolteachers in Georgia: an integrity assessment

EPPM

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Abbreviations

EPPM	International Institute for Education Policy Planning and Management
NEPC	Network of Education Policy Centers
CAPI	Center for Applied Policy and Integrity
INTES	Integrity of Education Systems
OECD	Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development
TALIS	Teaching and Learning International Survey
MoES	Ministry of Education and Science
MoESCS	Ministry of Education, Science, Culture and Sports
TPDC	National Center for Teacher Professional Development
GoG	Government of Georgia

Chapter 1. Introduction

Research background

This report was prepared by the International Institute for Education Policy, Planning and Management (EPPM) - Georgia in the framework of the project *Integrity of education systems (INTES): training for civil society organizations*. The project is a joint initiative by the Center for Applied Policy and Integrity (CAPI) and the Network of Education Policy Centers (NEPC), and it is supported by the Education Support Program of the Open Society Foundations. The project provided civil society organizations – members of NEPC from Georgia, Kyrgyzstan, Moldova and Mongolia with initial training on integrity assessments in education, which was followed by locally led explorations of integrity in selected areas and reform priorities in education in these four countries.

The focus of this work in Georgia was on the integrity of schoolteachers' recruitment. The goal of the integrity assessment[1] was to identify and analyze corruption risks and to find out ways to eliminate the risks.

The integrity assessment was conducted concurrently with reform activities carried out in Georgia. Reformatory steps made in schoolteacher recruitment and hiring process created unprecedented number of vacancies in the country and simultaneously, provoked a risk of integrity violations during schoolteacher recruitment process. The focus of the assessment was to identify existing flaws, corruption facts and risks (favoritism, nepotism, etc.) in the process of the recruitment of schoolteachers' and subsequently produce policy recommendations.

Teacher policies in Georgia: a focus on recruitment and integrity

Over the last decade, different measures were taken to improve teachers' policy in Georgia. Most fundamental and complex reforms concerning teacher profession were prepared and launched in 2015. Georgian government approved a document introducing schoolteachers' recruitment, professional development and career advancement scheme (hereinafter "Scheme") on February 20th of 2015. It remains as main document so far regulating complexities of teachers' policy. This "Scheme" is a unified system that involves teachers' certification, recruitment, professional development and dismissal components and ways to launch their professional activities, means and opportunities to advance professionally, performance evaluation, and evaluation-based career growth. The law on general education and "Scheme" classifies teacher's profession as regulated profession; identifies different ways of entering the profession; sets a fair policy of teacher recruitment; establishes remuneration policy based on teachers qualification and performance; creates numerous opportunities for teacher professional development; introduces flexible mechanisms for career advancement; introduces efficient and complex system of teacher evaluation which is based on principals of fairness, objectivity, validity, equity, reliability and transparency.

However, it is worth mentioning that during the period of 2015-2019 not all the components of the above-mentioned "Scheme" were fully implemented for different reasons. Many issues in teacher policy still remain problematic, e.g.: recruitment of high achieving students to

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[1] Terms "integrity assessment', "INTES assessment" and "assessment" will be used interchangeably in the given paper.
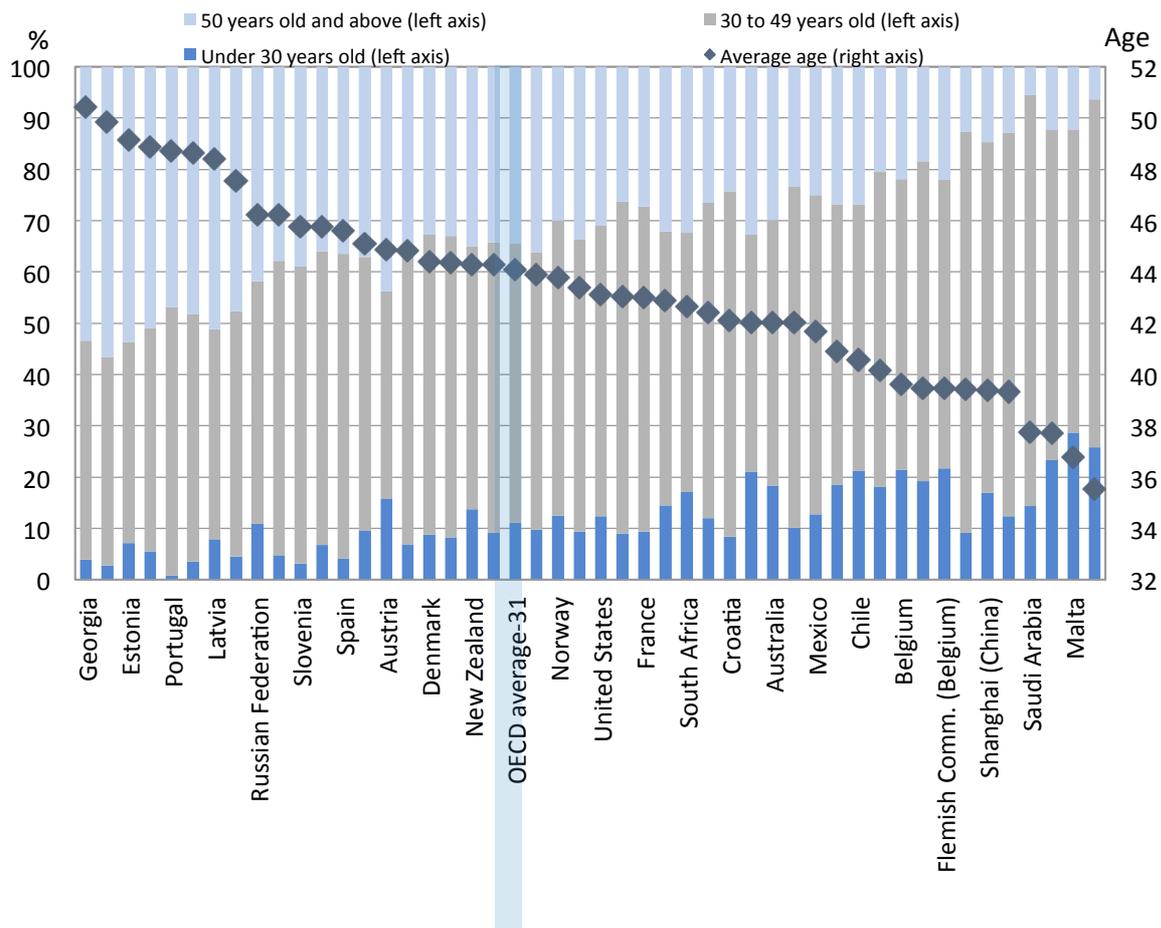
teacher preparation study programs at a tertiary level; recruitment of new, qualified candidates to the profession; dismissal of teachers of retirement age (teachers' rotation); outcome oriented professional development; flexible teacher recruitment system; and teacher salaries. For example, components regarding teacher recruitment and dismissal were left without any attention from 2015 (from the moment of adoption of new "Scheme") until summer of 2019, when specific procedures for teacher recruitment and dismissal were introduced (decree of the Minister № 174/N, issued 20.08.2019).

One of the main reasons why these components of the scheme failed to be implemented was the permanent instability in system development strategies, frequent changes of high officials and attempts of radical changes in country's education policies. In the period of 2015-2019 four ministers of education were changed. During this period policy regarding teacher recruitment and dismissal, as well as teacher staffing decisions were chaotic, inconsistent, and inert, that mostly can be related to the attempts of avoiding worsening social context in teachers' community.

Georgian labor legislation allows teachers of retirement age to continue working in schools. Schools have autonomy to make staffing decisions; however, they avoid taking responsibility and try to maintain status quo because of various reasons (i.e. complicated legal regulations of dismissing teachers, deficit of new employees, nepotism, etc.). This is fostered by weakness of monitoring, evaluation and assessment mechanisms and/or their non-existence (e.g. school effectiveness evaluation system, effective mechanism of teacher selection, internal control of hiring process, external mechanisms of monitoring and many more). In fact, instable and inconsistent policies regarding teachers' recruitment and dismissal fosters creation of personnel policy gaps, "aging" of the system, and increasing inertness towards novelties and innovations (aging and less qualified teachers are not leaving the system and therefore, young and qualified people randomly have an opportunity and interest to enter the system).

An average age of Georgian teachers became 50 years and which was one of the highest among OECD countries (Teaching and Learning International Survey (TALIS) OECD, 2018). This situation created a real high risk, caused a deficit in certain regions, and in case Georgia did not take any measures we would face a need to change a big number of teachers in a very short period of time.

Figure 1. Percentage of lower secondary teachers, by age group and average age of teachers

Legend:
- 50 years old and above (left axis)
- 30 to 49 years old (left axis)
- Under 30 years old (left axis)
- Average age (right axis)

Countries (left to right): Georgia, Estonia, Portugal, Latvia, Russian Federation, Slovenia, Spain, Austria, Denmark, New Zealand, OECD average-31, Norway, United States, France, South Africa, Croatia, Australia, Mexico, Chile, Belgium, Flemish Comm. (Belgium), Shanghai (China), Saudi Arabia, Malta

Due to the specificity of Georgian educational system, that is the fact that up to 70% of schools are small scale schools, on the one hand there is an abundance of teachers overall, but on the other hand there is a deficit of teachers in certain regions (unequal geographic distribution) and disciplines. A student-teacher ratio varies greatly according to school location, type, and the number of students at schools. The deficit is even worsened due to a big number of teachers of retirement age. In 2018, there were 60 000 teachers employed in public schools. Minimum age – 19, maximum age – 95; 25% of teachers were in the range of - 60-95 (MoES 2018). (See Figure 2)

Teacher Distribution according to Age

- 19-29 YEARS OLD: 4%
- 30-39 YEARS OLD: 18%
- 40-49 YEARS OLD: 27%
- 50-59 YEARS OLD: 26%
- 60-69 YEARS OLD: 19%
- 70-95 YEARS OLD: 6%
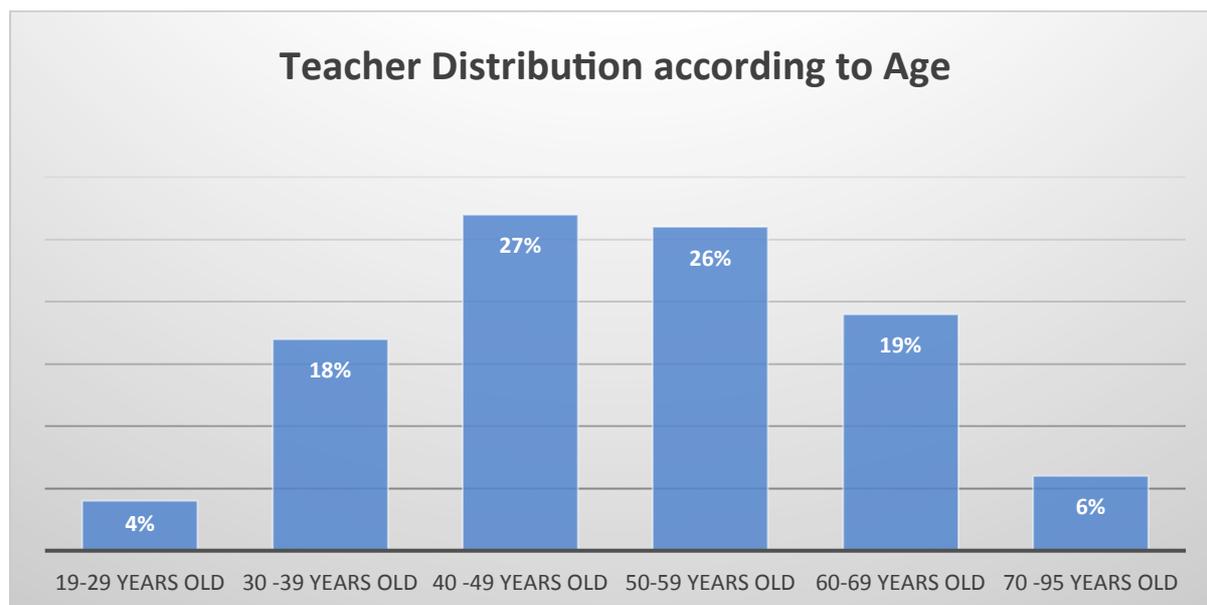
Source: Ministry of Education and Science 2018

To remedy the above-described situation Georgian Ministry of Education, Science, Culture and Sports (MoESCS) had an initiative to give teachers of retirement age a monetary reward that equaled their two-year salary if they voluntarily left the system. From 15 000 teachers who reached retirement age approximately 6 000 left the system and received the reward (MoESCS 2019). In order to fill in new vacancies, the Ministry initiated a centralized procedure for recruiting teachers. On August 20, 2019 the Ministry issued a decree № 174/N regarding hiring and dismissing schoolteachers. The decree defined mechanisms and procedures of teacher hiring and dismissal, the rules and conditions of holding a competition, the stages of the competition, the rights and rules for the selection committee. The National Center for Teacher Professional Development (TPDC) issued a decree №182 on August 21st, 2019 and defined common dates for announcing competitions for all schools. From August until November 2019, a large-scale teacher rotation process was implemented. Data collection phase of this research coincided with the described period, therefore EPPM research group had an opportunity to observe the process as it was unfolding and to analyze its results.

EPPM research team studied and analyzed the process, focusing on the issues of biased decisions/favoritism in the hiring process and staffing decisions in this difficult context, and tried to identify policy gaps, which facilitated the proliferation of such decisions across the

country.

Research methodology and evidence collection

The report relies on a methodology for the assessment of integrity of education systems (INTES), which was developed in the framework of the OECD by the Center for Applied Policy and Integrity and has guided education integrity assessments and research since 2010.

The declared aim of INTES is to help national authorities and stakeholders understand the policy-related conditions under which corruption in their education systems thrives and support the development of solutions that improve these conditions in ways that prevent malpractice at its roots. The approach follows the assumption that integrity problems and corruption in education are not phenomena that affect the sector "from outside", but a consequence of deeper-rooted problems in the education system itself, which can (and should) be addressed with the means at the disposal of decision-makers, practitioners, and stakeholders in that sector (OECD, 2018).

The INTES methodology seeks to deliver answers to two questions: whether participants in education engage in corrupt practices and if yes, how the conditions in which they participate in education may play a role in that (Milovanovitch, Expectations, Distrust and Corruption in Education: Findings on Prevention through Education Improvement, 2020). The focus is on the ways in which policies and practices in education may create opportunities and incentives for education participants to engage in corrupt conduct.

The scope of "corrupt conduct" implied in this report may include practices for which there is criminal liability as well as softer, sector-specific actions, which are harmful, but may not qualify as corrupt by international standards. Both types of practices are subsumed in the notion of "integrity violation": an action which is intentional, systemic, involving education participants in professional positions (*e.g.* administrators, principals, teachers), and contradicting the values and principles that apply to the education sector of the country under assessment (OECD, 2018). The report follows thereby the 2019 update of the INTES typology of integrity violations[2], which describes nine forms of such system-wide conduct (Table 1).

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[2] For the latest update of the INTES typology see www.policycenters.org/INTES

Table 1. INTES typology of integrity violations in education

No.	Name	Definition of the practice
1	Illicit provision or denial of access to education	Arbitrary withholding or providision of access to education by those in charge of access, in exchange for undue benefit or the prospect thereof.
2	Improper private supplementary services	Services such as private tutoring, which are provided by teachers or other professionals privately and for personal gain in addition to their regular work in education, to students and in subjects or areas which they teach or otherwise cover in that regular work, with the purpose of student advancement and/or support.
3	Politicisation of education	Building and promoting political and quasi-political connexions, loyalties and networks in (public) education with a view to using them for personal or political advantage.
4	Undue recognition of student achievement	Intentional over-marking or under-marking of students in regular education and the fraudulent granting of graduation credentials in exchange for personal benefit or the prospect thereof.
5	Favouritism in staffing decisions	Redistribution of public resources in the form of employment contracts, employment-related promotions and benefits in favour of relations, friends, colleagues or people who are otherwise close to those in charge of the staffing decisions.
6	Misappropriation of funds in education	Embezzlement of assets (funds) in education by someone who does not own them but is entrusted with their management or control.
7	Procurement fraud	Use of fraudulent schemes to procure goods and services for education providers in view of personal enrichment.
8	Cheating	Misrepresentation through fraudulent means (including plagiarism) by those seeking formal recognition of student achievement, of the work they have done and/or the knowledge and skills they have acquired.
9	Accreditation and licensing fraud	The use of fraudulent means, including of personal favours or the prospect thereof, to obtain a license to operate, degree-awarding powers, and/or programme accreditation.

Source: (OECD, 2018)

In line with the INTES methodology, this report also gathered evidence on vulnerable areas in education, which create the conditions for integrity violations to thrive, with the purpose of

informing practitioners and decision-makers on how to change these conditions for the better. "Vulnerable areas" are defined as weaknesses (shortcomings or gaps) in education policy and practice which may provide education participants such as teachers, principals, parents, education administrators, with opportunities and reasons to engage in integrity violations (OECD, 2018) (Kovac Cerovic, Jovanovic, & Milovanovitch, 2019).

The aim of this study is to identify the opportunities and incentives of favoritism in the schoolteacher hiring process in Georgia and provide relevant policy recommendations. The rationale for choosing this specific IV is current attempt of large-scale reforms of schoolteacher recruitment and dismissal process in Georgia. It was interesting to observe and evaluate the on-going process so that to prepare policy recommendations and help policymakers to remedy any flaws discovered during the assessment.

Qualitative research methods and analysis of secondary sources were utilized in order to study favoritism in staffing decisions. Desk research covered existing literature in relation to this topic, published articles, interviews, television appearances, similar studies done by other countries, and national legislation[3]. Public information regarding the number of vacancies announced, number of people hired, any complaints received by the ministry and its centers, was solicited from the Ministry of Education, Science, Culture and Sports of Georgia (MoESCS) and its various centers for evaluation. However, the Ministry did not provide the solicited information. A response letter received from the Ministry stated that they are not collecting information on competitions held in public schools.

The INTES assessment is also based on the information collected from focus group discussions and in-depth interviews. Focus group discussions (hereinafter "FGD") were held both in the capital and in regions including a region with ethnic minorities. It was important to cover regions with ethnic minorities since in general, favoritism is more widespread in those regions because of their small size, small number of population who are either relatives or have different kinds of relations, and also due to limited access to public information and lack of knowledge of Georgian and/or English language in these regions. According to a research " Ethnic Minority Students and University Graduates Professional Development, Career Advancement and Employment Opportunities and Perspectives" conducted by the Centre for Civic Integration and inter-Ethnic Relations *"... students emphasize the importance of wide circle of acquaintances for employment opportunities and think that nepotism is more important than education and professionalism…wide circle of acquaintances influences employment opportunities in ethnic minority communities much more than generally in Georgian society"* (Gorgadze N, Tabatadze Sh. p. 69. 2017).

For FGDs we decided to select teachers who went through schoolteacher recruitment process. In FDGs we mixed teachers who were hired, teachers who were rejected and those ones who were rejected by one or more school but hired by another one. We wanted this diversity among FGD participants in order to hear different perspectives and ideas, and let participants hear each other's ideas and cause meaningful discussion. We did not include school principals and/or other officials in FGDs with teachers to avoid asymmetric power relations that could cause silencing some FGD participants.

In order to select FGD participants we utilized nominations strategy. We asked our partner institutions (Educators and Scientists Free Trade Union, Universities, and schools) to gather

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[3] Please find the list of the researches, studies and legislative documentation in the bibliography section.

focus group participants for our study, because they collaborate with different groups of teachers including those ones that would suit above-mentioned predetermined criteria.

In-depth interviews were held with school principals, deputy principals, Teacher Professional Development Centre (TPDC) representatives, MoESCS representatives, schoolteachers (who expressed their wish to participate separately in an interview instead of focus group) who participated in hiring process, and educational experts. School principals for in-depth interviews were chosen from the list of schools that had announced vacancies (See Table 2).

Table 2. In-depth interview participants

Principals	6 (4 principals from regions and 2 from the capital)
Deputy principals	2
Ministry representative	2
National Centre for Teacher Professional Development Representative	1
Education expert	2
Teacher	3 (2 from region, not hired; 1 from capital, rejected/hired)
Total	16

Approximately 10-12 people participated in each Focus Group Discussion. Three FGDs were held with 29 participants (12 from the capital and 17 from regions). Out of 29 participants 17 were hired, 2 were rejected and 10 were rejected by one or more school but hired by another one (See Table 3). We also had two more FGDs planned, one in region and one in the capital, however, these FGDs were cancelled since only a few participants came to the meeting. We transformed these FGD into in-depth interviews.

Table 3. FGD participants

Focus Group	Number of Participants	Capital	Region	Hired	Not Hired	Hired/not Hired
1	11	11	0	9	0	2
2	10	1	9	4	2	4
3	8	0	8	4	0	4
Total	29	12	17	17	2	10

Research data was collected in September and October of 2019. The data was analyzed and the initial report was drafted in November and the first half of December of 2019.

Chapter 2. Favoritism in the recruitment of teachers: description of problematic practices

Regulatory and policy background

On February 20th, 2015 Georgian government issued a decree № 68 on "Entry into Profession, Teacher Professional Development and Career Advancement Scheme". The

scheme defines four different categories of teachers. In order to get promoted from one category to another a teacher needs to satisfy higher qualification requirements through professional development. Promotion to the next category means increased salary.

Minister's decree № 174/N (issued 20.08.2019) regarding hiring and dismissal of schoolteachers defines teacher recruitment and dismissal procedure. According to the decree, when having an open position for a teacher, a school principal first announces an internal and/or an open competition. The principal's decree defines the dates, conditions, and hiring committee composition. The announcement regarding the competition should be published on the following website - http://teachersjobs.ge/. The dates of announcing the competition on the mentioned website is defined by the TPDC head.

According to the named decree, the hiring committee should consist of at least three members and one of the members should be an out of school person (an independent specialist). During the interviews held this year often out of school members and/or observers were TPDC, MoESCS, and Educational Resource Center (territorial body of the ministry) representatives. Functions and responsibilities of observers were not defined in any document and oftentimes, apart from observing the process they were actively involved in the work of the hiring committee.

The legislation amendments in 2019 created the grounds for approving the Minsters' decree № 174/N for the transitional period ending up in 2023, allowing a person with Bachelor diploma (without requirements of subject specific study fields) to become a novice teacher with a condition that she/he will act in the classroom under the supervision of a tutor and in parallel will take a teacher preparation program or a distant learning program within two years from starting working at school.

The above described amendment significantly simplifies the requirements towards a teacher that existed even before 2015 when the qualification requirements and teacher standards were revised. Before the legislation amendment in 2019, in order to become a teacher, a person should satisfy requirements set by a professional standard and one of the following standards: a) Complete an integrated teacher preparation program; b) complete an MA program in education and take a subject test; c) hold a BA/MA diploma in the relevant field/subject she/he is going to teach and complete a teacher preparation study program or a distance learning teacher preparation course within two years from starting working; d) hold a BA/MA diploma in the relevant field/subject she/he is going to teach and complete a teacher preparation program within a BA program and complete a subject test; e) should have a degree stating that it also grants permission to teach and take a subject test; f) hold a doctoral degree in education or in the relevant field/subject she/he is going to teach.

In comparison to these requirements, the above-mentioned requirement specified by the legislation amendment in 2019 is very simplified and allows a person without teaching experience, subject specific education and pedagogical knowledge to teach at school for two years. More importantly, it states that the person can take a distant learning course instead of teacher preparation program.

As already mentioned, in the year of 2019 Georgian government offered teachers who reached retirement age an opportunity to retire and get a two-year salary as a reward. As a result, approximately 6 000 teachers retired and therefore, many vacancies appeared at schools. At the same time, only a little more than 2 000 vacancies were announced. As a MoESCS's representative pointed out, the main reason for that is the fact that 50% of

schoolteachers did not work full time. Therefore, their teaching hours were first redistributed to local teachers and then, positions were announced for the hours that were left vacant.

Manifestations of the integrity violation

According to a common definition, favoritism is a generic term that encompasses corrupt practices around the (ab)use of office to redistribute public (state) resources in favor of relations, friends, colleagues or people who are otherwise close to the office holder (Amundsen, 1999). The resources could flow for instance in the form of procurement or employment contracts, or employment-related promotions and benefits. Common forms of favoritism are *nepotism* in the form of family ties between selected members of staff (active and former), *patronage* (political affiliations), and *cronyism* (connections and friendship) (Milovanovitch, M., Bloem, S., 2019).

Based on the interview and focus group discussion results incidents of favoritism during teacher hiring process were identified during the hiring process carried out in August-October 2019. Majority of respondents pointed out that favoritism in staffing decisions during teacher hiring process existed. The very first question to FGD participants was regarding favoritism in teacher recruitment process, more specifically, whether favoritism existed in this process. The vast majority, approximately 99 percent of respondents answered that it did. The idea was corroborated with several facts that are presented below.

Undue influence on recruitment decisions

It was found out that majority of school principals received phone calls from educational central offices, and/or city and regional administrative offices in support of different candidates. On several occasions, school hiring committees received recommendation letters from municipalities and other administrative office representatives who could not be competent to give a recommendation to a schoolteacher. A school principal stated the following *"I received several calls. Also, I received a recommendation letter from the city hall. I received calls from the Ministry as well. Other colleagues told me the same."*

Applicants had an expectation that those ones with right acquaintances who could ask someone a favor of hiring them, would have more chance to be hired. One of the applicants wrote in his/her motivation letter (that was part of the application documentation) – *"I know that I will not be hired because I do not have anyone to support me. But I will try anyways, maybe your committee is an exception"*.

There were cases when Educational Resource Centers (territorial body of the Ministry) directly instructed school principals to hire someone. One of the teachers who got a job in this way said that the head of the educational resource center told him/her to which regional school to go to for an interview. After being hired, he/she thanked the director of the center publicly via social media. There were other *"thank you"* letters in social media addressed towards different officials.

The research group expected beforehand to find out some facts of favoritism, however, what was extremely unexpected was the fact that people who got employed due to protectionism were publicly thanking their patrons. This fact illustrated that some teachers do not even consider favoritism an integrity violation.

Although many respondents evaluated the interview process positively and stated that it was comprehensive and adhered to all the rules, some teachers pointed out that the interview process was a formality. For example, it lasted for only two-three minutes and sometimes group interviews were held that is even more unacceptable. These facts made interviewees believe that candidates were preselected for vacancies. One respondent said: *"I know for sure that the interview was a formality in two schools. Later I was told that candidate had already been chosen"*.

On several occasions, candidates were told not to apply for a job because the position was already taken and the competition was announced just to satisfy the requirements of formal procedure. For example, one of the interviewees mentioned the following: *"I applied for a teaching position in one regional school and was asked for an interview by the principal. However, one teacher who worked at the same school and happened to be my teacher told me not to go to the interview since they had already had a candidate chosen for the position"*.

Recruitment in exchange for bribes

Several respondents shared information regarding possible facts of asking bribes in exchange to hiring someone on the announced vacancies. One respondent stated: *"It has not happened in my school, but I have heard from my colleagues that there are certain prices set for teacher positions in some schools."* One FGD participant from ethnic minority region mentioned the following *"this practice is widespread in our region. If in cities applicants pay money for positions, in rural areas they use non-monetary compensations"*. Due to the nature of this research it is impossible to identify the scope of this violation, but the fact that several respondents mentioned the issue leads us to assume that this phenomenon does exist in the system.

Chapter 3. Vulnerabilities in education policy and practice which facilitate the integrity violation

Limited effectiveness of the system due to lack of monitoring mechanism

As already mentioned, this year Georgian government offered teachers who reached retirement age an opportunity to retire and get a two-year salary as a reward. As a result, approximately 6 000 teachers retired and therefore, many vacancies appeared at schools. Later on, competitions were announced several times, but at the beginning of December 2019 there were still many vacancies posted on the website. The research group do not have information how many vacancies were filled because neither MoESCS nor TPDC seems to collect and/or analyze this information.

TPDC representatives stated, "The fact that applicants submit their documentation online and that both school representatives and TPDC representative have access to this information, and everyone knows what are the minimal criteria that an applicant should satisfy is fostering transparent teacher recruitment process".

However, once we solicited data regarding the number of vacancies filled in and whether hired applicants satisfy the requirements set out for their positions, the ministry of education was not able to provide us with the requested data and they stated in their response letter that they do not collect this kind of information. Therefore, it seems that there is no follow-up monitoring mechanism that would

allow to evaluate whether the candidates selected for the positions satisfied qualification requirements and whether the system fosters transparent teacher recruitment process.

Qualification requirements allow for recruiting staff without adequate qualifications

As noted, in 2019 the Ministry of Education approved a decree, which allows candidates with Bachelor diploma (without requirements of subject specific study fields) to become novice teachers.

The research team was not able to find out a reasonable argument for the necessity of adopting the mentioned transitional provision. According to the current legislation, teacher profession is a regulated profession in Georgia, and it is obligatory that all teacher preparation study programs are accredited according to accreditation standards and sector benchmarks. The latest amendment in the legislation contradicts this principle of regulated profession, moreover, there are no regulations for distant learning programs/courses and therefore, they do not undergo any kind of quality assurance mechanism. Therefore, a teacher preparation distant learning course cannot be an alternative to a teacher preparation study program.

In fact, evidence from the field suggests that this measure also does not ensure the provision of relevant employees. One of our interviewees, a school principal pointed out - *"I hired an inexperienced candidate and let him/her in the classroom and at the same time provided him/her with a tutor"*. This approach enables inexperienced and not qualified teachers to enter the classroom without any preparation. The created situation increases the cases of favoritism since this enables decision makers to make decisions in favor of their friends, relatives or acquaintances under the disguise of teacher shortages and flexibility of qualification requirements.

Poor management and unrealistic timing of the national teacher recruitment campaign

TPDC defined dates for posting vacancies for teachers on a designated website, but the timing of these announcements and the associated deadlines were tight, which created additional difficulties for schools to carry out the recruitment process properly and find suitable candidates. For city schools the period from August 22 until August 31, 2019 was allocated to post vacancies; for regions – August 22 until August 3. In cities interviews should be held on September 1 and 2, and on September 3rd candidates should be notified their results. In regions, interview dates were September 4 and 5, and on September 6, the results should be sent to applicants.

The TPDC decree specifying these dates was issued on august 21st, the announcement by schools should be made on the following day, afterwards applicants had only 10 days to apply to vacancies, and only 2 days were allocated for holding interviews, one of which, September the 1st was Sunday. The rush was aggravated by the fact that school year was to start on September 16th.

Many teachers pointed out the fact that a big number of vacancies posted simultaneously created lots of difficulties. During the interviews, participants said that *"they were running from one interview to another"* and could not get to all the interviews they were asked to go

and often were late for the interview. All these caused chaos and inconvenience. Quote from an interview with a teacher *"I was asked to come to an interview from three different schools at the same time. I could not attend all of them"*.

Because the given competition was held within an extremely tight timeline, in some cases people who got hired were not the best possible applicants but those ones who were available at the moment. For example, one school principal mentioned the following *"I hired someone just to be able to provide lessons for students. I did this in physics and sports. We asked five candidates to come to a job interview but only one appeared. I did not have other options"*. One teacher also mentioned the following *"I signed the agreement on September the ninth and school began on September sixteenth. I had only one week before starting teaching. I do not have a tutor"*. Since teaching process was to start soon after hiring sometimes novice teacher, in some schools there was no opportunity left to provide them with the necessary support and supervision. The latter fosters the development of opportunities for favoritism as well.

Another teacher added that *"due to three-day interview process many schools were left without a teacher and additional competition was announced. Many of those who did not deserve to be hired got hired not to interrupt a teaching process"*. One more interviewee said the following *"I received a call at 10 PM on Saturday and was asked to go to a job interview on the following day, on Sunday at 9 AM. My friend was hired on September 15th since there was no time left before beginning of the school year"*.

Low awareness of stakeholders

The vast majority of interviewees and focus group participants evaluated the decision of the government regarding teachers who reached retirement age as a very positive one. However, they pointed out that neither this decision nor the following legislative changes were discussed with school principals, educational experts, international and non-governmental organizations, or other stakeholders. An educational expert during an interview stated that *"the process was not participatory"*. The process lacked transparency and participation on its planning, implementation, and evaluation stages. The process was not monitored or evaluated. The latter together with other factors fuels distrust towards the reform policy.

The aim of the above-mentioned governmental decision was to recruit young and qualified teachers at schools. This aim was partially achieved in terms of filling out the vacancies. However, there is no valid information regarding how qualified the teachers are who were recruited in the school system. The organizers of the process did not properly advertise the process or inform the society. During the interview, an educational expert mentioned that *"teacher hiring process is an exceedingly difficult procedure in Georgia and not many people have information regarding this issue. They do not know what the ways are of starting a teacher profession and what benefits can it bring"*. It is worth mentioning that during focus group discussions with teachers it became obvious that sometimes, even teachers who went through the hiring process and were recruited, were not well aware of all the different ways of entering the teacher profession, what qualification requirements they needed to satisfy, what professional development opportunities exist in the system, etc.

Chapter 4. Conclusions and recommendations for action

Conclusions

In conclusion, it can be stated that most respondents positively evaluate GoG's efforts to improve staffing policies and approve the reform plans that were introduced into the teacher recruitment system. The majority of teachers who undergone the competition, regardless of the results (ones that got employed and those ones that did not get employed), see job openings in schools as a progressive change and believe that this will help to hire new and qualified staff, improve and rejuvenate the system. However, many believe that there are many problematic issues and obstacles to achieving these goals. They think that the widespread practice of integrity violation is one of the most important obstacles. Favoritism, in all its forms (nepotism, patronage and cronyism) is a widespread phenomenon in Georgia. Favoritism became more problematic when large number of teachers left schools and hiring of new teachers began (from Fall, 2019).

Risks of corruption is high in teacher hiring process and many respondents think that among other factors that foster integrity violation, the most important is improper planning and implementation of education policy. This situation is aggravated by accelerated changes and the lack of consistent monitoring. New and simplified qualification requirements increased corruption risks as well. New opportunities emerged for the development of favoritism and corruption schemes. This situation is exacerbated by non-transparent and closed nature of teacher recruitment reform processes. The stakeholders have only limited information on the processes and procedures for entering teacher's profession.

Some teachers do not consider favoritism to be an integrity violation. They openly speak about the support they got from different patrons during the hiring process.

Recommendations

Priority 1. Apply the principle of evidence-based decision-making process when planning important policy changes

Planning process should precede important policy changes. Before making any kind of decisions, potential risks and desirable outcomes should be identified. All existing data should be analyzed and based on the results of the analysis appropriate actions should be planned, including the timeframe of actions, potential risks and challenges of implementation, desirable outcomes, assessment methods of the process, etc.

Priority 2. Planning and implementing policy changes should be a participatory process

Planning and implementation of teachers' recruitment changes should be open, transparent, and participatory. All stakeholders should be involved in planning and implementing policy changes and assessing the results of the changes. This is extremely important in order to be able to make accurate planning decisions on the first stage since these people are fully involved in the process and have experience and knowledge of all details that can be missed by high officials. Therefore, their diverse perspectives will be beneficial when planning policy changes. Furthermore, their active involvement in the planning process will simplify the implementation process of the policy changes as they will already be well informed

regarding the changes, will have less doubts and questions regarding the rationale and content of the changes, and overall will be better equipped to implement the changes. Lastly, without wide involvement of different stakeholders the assessment of the results of policy changes will not be valid, reliable, trustworthy, and/or transparent.

While planning the changes in teachers' recruitment, effective mechanisms for awareness rising and information campaigns for different stakeholders should be elaborated. Taking into account the fact that part of the teachers and officials does not even consider that favoritism is integrity violation, there is a need for more proactive awareness raising and information campaigns about nature, forms, negative effects and consequences of integrity violations.

Priority 3. Mechanism for assessing recruitment process and its results should be implemented

Not analyzing the results of recruitment process fosters favoritism as well since once hired to the position, no one checks whether the hired person satisfies the requirements set out for the granted position. During the study, we received different answers from different interviewees regarding number of people hired, number of vacancies filled, relevance of hired candidates' qualifications with the granted positions, etc. Additionally, ministry officials offered different and contradicting data in television interviews.

Priority 4. Legislation should specify relevant qualification requirements for novice teachers

Drastic drop down of qualification requirements for all novice teachers and setting irrelevant qualification requirements can cause two negative effects: hiring unqualified persons and fostering favoritism in staffing decisions. Therefore, in order to avoid these negative effects, it is recommended to set adequate and relevant qualification requirements for novice teachers. Most importantly, it is recommended to require a novice teacher to have a degree in the subject he/she is going to teach and to require them to take a teacher preparation program offered by the universities that are quality assured. Another option would be to assure quality of distant learning programs; however, it will require relevant changes in legislation and setting quality assurance standards for distant learning programs.

Priority 5. Encourage school principals to use their legal right and lead teacher recruitment process

Although school principals have a legal right to hire and dismiss schoolteachers, the given research demonstrated that they randomly use this right. The reason for not utilizing their legal right seems to be difficult legislative procedures and different constraints set from the Ministry. For example, even though legally school principals are responsible for hiring their staff, the MoESCS and TPDC identified dates of announcing vacancies on the designated website. The latter put schools in a difficult situation since the timeline was extremely tight. School administration should be fully in charge of announcing vacancies any time depending on their necessities. Therefore, school principals should be given opportunities to utilize their legal rights and fulfill their obligations accordingly.

Priority 6. Create an effective system of performance-based school evaluation that will take into consideration teachers' qualifications and performance of students and teachers among other criteria

Schools should be evaluated based on its teachers' qualifications and performance of students and teachers among other criteria. Performance based evaluation should necessarily assess the quality of teaching process, student achievements, teachers' professional development, etc. School principals will be motivated to pay special attention to quality teaching and therefore, will be discouraged to get involved in different integrity violations.

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