



Labour and Employment Policy: Opportunities and Challenges for Undergraduate Students

Mariam Davitadze, PhD

Grigol Robakidze University, Batumi, Georgia

[Doi: 10.19044/esipreprint.11.2023.p123](https://doi.org/10.19044/esipreprint.11.2023.p123)

Approved: 02 November 2023

Posted: 05 November 2023

Copyright 2023 Author(s)

Under Creative Commons CC-BY 4.0

OPEN ACCESS

Cite As:

Davitadze M. (2023). *Labour and Employment Policy: Opportunities and Challenges for Undergraduate Students*. ESI Preprints. <https://doi.org/10.19044/esipreprint.11.2023.p123>

Abstract

The presented article discusses the mechanisms of employment and promotion of undergraduate students, which, on the one hand, will improve the socio-economic status of students, and on the other hand, will help them combine work and study. Based on the review of the international literature, the circumstances and features promoting the employment of students were studied, the challenges faced by undergraduate students in Georgia during employment were analyzed and identified. As a result of the obtained data, such hindering circumstances of employment were determined, such as unsuitable work schedule, lack of student work in the labour market, low interest of employers in employing students, wages and working hours. Based on the sources, approaches, practices and mechanisms in the world focused on the promotion of student employment, which in itself improves the socio-economic status of students and increases their motivation to study, have been identified. The article presents the advantages and disadvantages of mechanisms promoting the employment of undergraduate students and generalizes them in relation to the existing international practice. The results of the research will be of interest to state representatives and employers who employ students and face certain challenges, representatives of the education field, specialists in the field and individual experts, however, the issue of development of programs supporting the employment of students by the state, their sphere of influence and the initiatives of employers to employ students is a separate subject of research.

Keywords: Student employment; employers; employment promotion; work-study balance

Introduction

Against the background of the current social situation in Georgia, the number of students with suspended status is increasing every year. The reason for suspension of status is usually the inability to pay tuition fees (16, 2). Therefore, in terms of improving the socio-economic status of undergraduate students, it is important to involve the state and develop policies that will help undergraduate students to find a suitable job and, in turn, improve their socio-economic status. The implementation of employment promotion measures by the state is absolutely crucial. It not only stimulates the workforce but also directly benefits citizens by increasing their economic and social well-being. The creation of decent jobs, fulfilling work opportunities and incomes are fundamental components of ensuring human social rights and the well-being of society as a whole (10, 2). The Government of Georgia took an important step in fulfilling its role in promoting economic and social rights by ratifying the UN International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights in 1994 (6). In accordance with the mentioned pact, the state of Georgia recognizes the fundamental right to work. As part of its responsibility, the government is obliged to create and maintain healthy and safe working conditions for its population, while actively promoting the creation of decent jobs. This commitment emphasizes the importance of promoting a conducive work environment and sustainable employment to improve the overall well-being of its citizens. The level of unemployment in Georgia is one of the important challenges. According to the 2022 report of the National Statistical Service of Georgia, the unemployment rate is 16.7%. Among them, the largest rate comes from citizens aged 15 to 24, totaling 84.7%. These data show that people of this age, mostly undergraduate students, do not have a job (7). The priority of the Government of Georgia is the improvement of the social and economic conditions of the citizens, among them the main priority is the creation of jobs. However, it is important to develop a policy within this priority that will promote the employment of undergraduate students and create a balanced work environment in proportion to their education. The practice of developed countries in the world shows that students can get a high level of complete academic education while working, where they have appropriate conditions and a flexible work schedule. Based on Saktstat data, it can be said that working in parallel with studying in Georgia prevents undergraduate students from getting a complete higher education, since employers do not offer students appropriate working conditions, which is manifested in inflexible work schedules and low pay. We have seen that the

modern education system and the labour market cannot respond to the challenges faced by bachelor's degree students looking for work. The following circumstances were highlighted, which were expressed in the readiness of the students of the mentioned level for employment. Recent studies have shown that student employment programs in Georgia are less effective, in many cases employment is seasonal and short-term and cannot provide financial stability for students. The existence of the mentioned problem dictates its thorough study and the development of mechanisms that will not only promote the employment of undergraduate students from the state and private sector and create a stable financial situation for them, but also develop the labour market and improve cooperation between educational institutions and employers. However, it should be noted that the private and public sectors may not have the same approaches to employment. In the process of regulating such cases, the state has an important role, since it should create such mechanisms that encourage the process of employment of undergraduate students by the private sector. Financial incentives for employers can be considered as incentive mechanisms. The main issue of the article is to identify specific challenges and ways to solve them, to develop such programs by the state and the private sector that ensure that undergraduate students are offered appropriate employment conditions along with higher education. We admit that the number of undergraduate students seeking employment in Georgia is quite high. If the labour market and the state ensure the creation and offer of suitable working conditions for them, the number of undergraduate students looking for work will decrease. Our analysis is based on international studies, opinions in scientific literature. In addition, a quantitative study was conducted, as a result of which it was revealed that there are specific circumstances that have a negative impact on the process of student employment and education at the same time.

Involvement of the state, employer and educational institutions in the employment of undergraduate students

Recently, an important trend has been revealed in the scientific literature, regarding the fact that in the era of the knowledge economy, higher education plays a crucial role in terms of global development. It serves as a driving force for competition and is often referred to as the "engine of the economy". Through research and innovation, higher education institutions significantly contribute to the generation of new knowledge and the continuous development of critical competencies. This dynamic process not only enhances economic growth, but also strengthens the country's ability to adapt and develop in a more complex and interconnected world (4, 3).

It should be noted that higher education is the cornerstone of the knowledge economy, which is the basis of economic development, innovation and competitiveness. Governments, businesses and individuals are realizing the importance of higher education in the development of the future and are investing more in higher education to reap the benefits of a well-educated and adaptable workforce (15, 3).

The challenge of employment of young people and students is discussed in many scientific works. As a result of Papiashvili and Bezhanidze's 2022 research, the hindering circumstances, perspectives and problems related to the access to higher education in Georgia and students' well-being and socio-economic status were identified. According to the Eurostandard study, 46% of students in Georgia are employed, although the mentioned study does not differentiate which level students are talking about (19, 33). It is worth noting the fact that the motivation of students to study at a higher educational institution is employment in the future, although the majority of them are either looking for a job or bypassing the profession to work in a low-paid job, which has a negative effect on their career growth and reduces the prospect of career advancement (16, 20). In addition, it is undeniable that for the economic development of the country, the presence of highly qualified personnel in demand in the labour market is essential, and to ensure this, not only educational systems in compliance with modern standards are a necessary condition, (Provider of training of specialists according to employers' requirements) (12, 4) but also, existence of close cooperation between employers and educational institutions.

The academic literature has detailed university-employer collaborations that have a positive impact on teaching and learning. It should be noted that in practice we often come across the situation when it is in the employer's interest to establish strong ties with higher educational institutions. Based on the growing mismatch between education and the qualification requirements for employment in the labour market and the increasing competition for attracting intellectual resources in the labour market, development-oriented employers have realized that young people and students must possess all the necessary skills necessary in the conditions of modern technological development to overcome the existing challenges (12, 30).

Another group of scientists believes that only cooperation between employers and educational institutions is not enough to solve the challenges in the labour market, which are related to the abundance of undergraduate students in the labour market and their employment promotion. They believe that the state social policy should be focused on the promotion of student employment, which is reflected in the introduction of relevant programs and mechanisms (13, 335-344). Therefore, the role of the state in close

cooperation between educational institutions and employers is essential. On the basis of the close cooperation of the mentioned three links, it is possible for educational institutions to raise specialists who are needed by employers, and the state will be able to increase the number of employees and develop the labour market. The mentioned opinion is interesting and noteworthy for all three parties.

Part of the scientists, while researching the problem of employment of young people and students, pays special attention to the motive of employment of young people and students. According to studies, it is confirmed that less attention is paid to this issue. In the main results of the Eurostudent VI (2016-2018) national survey, the main employment motives were distributed as follows: The motivation of 44% of respondents is to cover living expenses, 74% see work as an opportunity for self-realization and gaining experience in the labour market, 41% note that the main motivation is to pay for education, 25.3% work to support the family (14, 16). As a result of the "Eurostudent VII" survey, in which 26 countries took part, the indicators of various motivations for student employment are slightly different: More than half of students (70%) cite covering their own expenses as the motivation for working, 64% work hard to buy things they want, which they could not otherwise afford, and 56% of students try to get work experience in the labour market, and one in five works to support the family (8). Based on the mentioned researches, compared to previous years, positive dynamics can be observed in the determining factors of students' employment motivation, which gives grounds for assuming that the balance of study and work is difficult but possible if appropriate conditions exist. This assumption is strengthened by the practice of developed countries in the world, which shows that students can get a high-level complete academic education at the same time as a job, where they have appropriate conditions and a flexible work schedule. For example, it is possible to cite the state policy of employment and promotion of students in the Federal Republic of Germany, which provides for the upper limit of working time for students, which includes 2 types of work, secondary job – Nebenjob, no more than 20 hours a week and short work - Minijob - no more than 13 hours a week (3). Exceptions to the working hours restrictions can only be made during semester breaks, when students can work no more than 40 hours per week, and their study subject must be thematically related to their work (2), (1). In addition, in educational institutions, there is the possibility to postpone the meeting and to change the time of coming to the consultation with the lecturer, if necessary (e.g. due to work, release for exam) Based on the above, it should be said that in the Federal Republic of Germany, students have the opportunity to be employed while studying and to get both

education and work experience, which is supported by the employer on the one hand and the educational institution and the state on the other hand (3).

Despite the growing economic situation in Georgia, the policies of both the state and educational institutions aimed at ensuring the employment and promotion of students are in need of improvement and are completely unable to respond to the challenges in the labour market, which we face during internships, internships and employment of undergraduate students. This is confirmed by many studies conducted in Georgia, including a study conducted in Tbilisi State University in 2010 on the assessment of student services. From the quantitative data of the research, it can be seen that the majority of students (58%) consider student practice as an important stage in the path of academic and career development, while only 13% believe that the university helps students to use this opportunity, that is, the actual help from the university in this regard is very low. As for students' willingness to cooperate with the university for career development, 59% of students expressed their willingness to do so (11, 11). As for the promotion of employment of students by the state, it would be embarrassing not to mention the Law of Georgia "On Promotion of Employment", which regulates the mechanisms of promotion of employment. The law defines the circle of persons, the promoting body of the regulation mechanisms "SLP Employment Agency" and the conditions of employment, the conditions of internship. However, the economic group of the society - students is not identified as a separate component of the regulation in the circle of persons of the mentioned law. The law also regulates the principles of managing and registering a single employment base, where students have the opportunity to register their own application as an employer, but nothing is said directly about promoting the employment of students or undergraduate students and encouraging employers. Chapter 5 of the mentioned law also regulates the issues of employment of vulnerable groups, where the main object is to promote the employment of persons with disabilities and socially vulnerable persons (5).

Regulations on promotion of part-time employment of students in Georgia are not presented in the Organic Law of Georgia, the Labour Code. There are no official statistical data on part-time employed persons in Georgia, however, from the data posted on various employment platforms (part-time vacancies) it is established that the interest of both the employee (including undergraduate students) and the employer in part-time jobs is high, which once again emphasizes the urgency of this issue and the need to regulate it at the legislative level (18, 113).

As mentioned above, the role of the policy of the educational institution is also important for ensuring the promotion of student employment, which is manifested in the close cooperation of the educational

institution with the private sector. In order to achieve the aforementioned close and successful mutual cooperation, many obstacles must be overcome (9, 5), (17, 4). First of all, it is important to have common goals, common views and needs in relation to the benefits received, in order to facilitate mutual initiatives and projects. The quality of communication between the private sector and educational institutions should be improved and the barriers of individual mentality such as lack of mutual understanding, willingness and flexibility should be overcome (12, 24). In other words, if private companies and universities work in tandem to expand the frontiers of knowledge, it will become a powerful engine for innovation and economic growth, and it will have a positive impact on teaching and learning. The existing model of cooperation between the private sector and higher educational institutions in Georgia is at the initial stage of development and needs to be refined. It is based on several aspects of flawed cooperation (internships, internships, a number of joint events, etc.) that do not bring the positive results that close cooperation could bring. Cooperation between higher educational institutions and employers can play an important role in introducing innovations, implementing joint projects and researches, providing continuous education and developing educational programs adapted to the demands of the labour market (12, 5). Against the background of low competition of professional personnel in the labour market, the mentioned close cooperation with the educational institution for the private sector will have a positive effect in the future in terms of increasing the professional human capital. For example, we can cite countries such as Austria and Germany, where companies understand the need for professional human resources and take responsibility for the professional development of young people and students. Companies such as Daimler, BASF and Siemens are in close cooperation with the educational institutions from which they bring students and train them in their training schools. At such time, students are given the opportunity to acquire deep theoretical knowledge and get practice in a real work environment. In addition, it is important that the state agencies play an active role in deepening the mutual cooperation between educational institutions and the private sector (12, 24). The successful and close cooperation of the mentioned three links will significantly increase the possibility of creating customized, part-time jobs for undergraduate students.

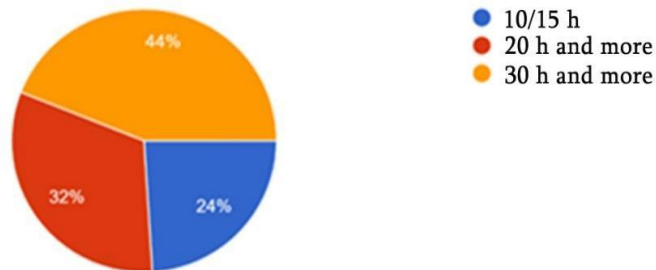
Research

In order to determine and analyze the causes of the circumstances hindering students' education and the possibility of employment at the same time, the opinions in the Georgian and foreign scientific literature were studied. The situation in the labour market in Georgia in terms of student

employment was analyzed. Also, a quantitative survey questionnaire was prepared and undergraduate students living in Georgia were interviewed. The purpose of the study was to identify specific needs that would contribute to the employment opportunities of undergraduate students in the workplace with appropriate conditions. A survey was prepared, an online questionnaire was prepared through the Google platform and sent to the target groups, including the thematic groups in social networks.

190 respondents took part in the research. In terms of working hours, 44% of undergraduate students work more than 30 hours a week, which suggests that the student is physically unable to fully engage in the educational process. (see Appendix 1.)

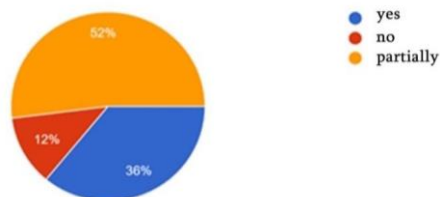
Appendix 1.



Based on the analysis of international literature, it is established that one of the factors of students' motivation is gaining financial independence. According to our research, 36.4% of respondents have monthly income from 800 GEL to 1000 GEL, which we consider to be a positive factor.

52% of respondents believe that the study schedule is partially adjusted to their work schedule. (see Appendix 2.)

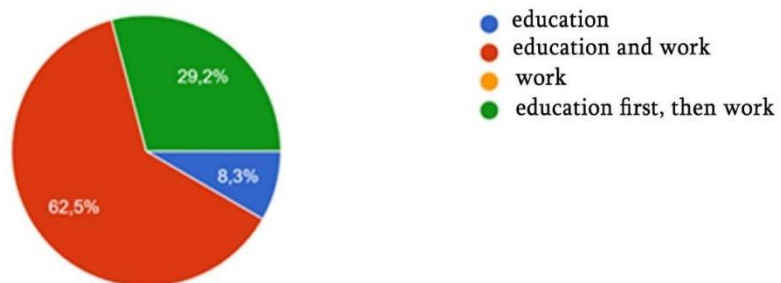
Appendix 2.



In order for undergraduate students to be able to receive a quality education while working, students express their opinions about balancing work and study. Most of them think that studying should take place in the morning hours or in the first half of the day, working time should be no more than 4 hours a day and weekly working time should not exceed the study time.

The majority of interviewees cite gaining an independent financial status as the reason for working while studying. Most of the interviewees express dissatisfaction that they cannot study fully because their work schedule is not flexible. Respondents in the study express their opinions regarding the role of the state in the process of promoting student employment, which is manifested in the introduction of various mechanisms, including the possibility of online learning if desired, redistribution of the time factor and preferential schedule, state regulation of students' working hours.

A positive part of the study is that 62.5% of the respondents would choose education and work together if given a choice, which once again emphasizes the fact that the majority of students would be employed if there were appropriate conditions in the labour market. (see Appendix 3.)
Appendix 3.



Conclusion/recommendations

The international literature and research analyzed in the article confirm that the current situation in the labour market and educational system of Georgia is completely unable to respond to the challenges related to the employment of undergraduate students and creates the basis for the assumption that the issues related to the employment of students should be regulated by law, establishing close cooperation between the employer, educational institutions and the state, Which will support the employment of undergraduate students by offering them appropriate working conditions, determining part-time working hours for undergraduate students, offering

them appropriate remuneration and combining study and work without affecting the learning process. These are the components of the state student employment promotion program, which further requires research to determine the interests of all stakeholders and the pros and cons of implementing the student employment promotion state program. Based on the review of the international literature presented in the article and the analysis of the conducted studies, we present recommendations that can be evaluated and implemented/implemented with the involvement of interested subjects. It would be desirable for the educational institution to record information about the skills, knowledge and experience of undergraduate students and post it on the student employment portal, which employers will have access to and will be able to find and employ the appropriate resource according to their requirements and needs in the event of a vacancy, Also, if the educational institution registers the information about the employers in the city and their field of work and posts it on the student employment portal, to which undergraduate students will have access and will be able to submit their resume and cover letter regarding the start of the service; The development of a program to promote the employment of excellent undergraduate students (in the case of 90 and above points) by the state will also bring positive results, on the basis of which the state will recommend excellent students and help them to start temporary work in the public service on a part-time basis; More student jobs will emerge if the government encourages the private sector to employ undergraduate students and will reduce employers' income taxes by a certain amount in light of the corresponding wages paid to undergraduate students; The combination of study and work of students will be significantly improved without affecting the quality of education if the state exempts undergraduate students from income taxes in case of part-time student work, which means only 20 hours of work per week during the study period; Undergraduate students can save a lot of time and money getting to university if educational institutions offer them partial online lectures; In addition, it will have a positive impact on the employment of students by offering them online services with a flexible work schedule, during which they will be able to work part-time remotely during their studies anywhere in the country. One of the most important recommendations can be the state regulations on the promotion of the employment of undergraduate students, which implies the maximum working hours for undergraduate students determined by law and the corresponding minimum salary.

Conflict of Interest: The author reported no conflict of interest.

Data Availability: All of the data are included in the content of the paper.

Funding Statement: The author did not obtain any funding for this research.

References:

1. Absolventa. Nebenjob Werkstudent: Alle rechtlichen Regelungen im Überblick. <https://www.absolventa.de/karriereguide/vertragsarten/werkstudenten-job> , www.absolventa.de (28.09.2023)
2. Agentur Junges Herz. Werkstudentenvertrag – Lohn, Arbeitsrecht und Versicherung, <https://www.agentur-jungesherz.de/hr-glossar/werkstudentenvertrag-lohn-arbeitsrecht-und-versicherung/#:~:text=W%C3%A4hrend%20des%20Vorlesungszeitraumes%20d%C3%BCrfen%20Werkstudenten,welcher%20der%20Student%20t%C3%A4tig%20wird> , <https://www.agentur-jungesherz.de> (28.09.2023)
3. Allwörden, Daad (Deutscher Akademischer Austauschdienst). Der Nebenjob. <https://www.daad.de/de/studieren-und-forschen-in-deutschland/erste-schritte-deutschland/nebenjobs/> , www.daad.de (12.09.2023)
4. Bregvadze, T. (2013). Strategic development of higher education and science in Georgia, Analysis of higher education policy according to five strategic directions. Tbilisi: International Institute for Education Policy, Planning and Management
5. Georgia, The Parliament of Georgia. (2020). Law of Georgia on Employment Promotion (270170000.05.001.019966, 17.05.2023) Tbilisi: Legislative Gazette.
6. Georgia, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Georgia. (2000). International agreement of Georgia. International on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights Pact, (430003000.00.000.000338) Tbilisi: Legislative Gazette.
7. Georgia. National Statistical Office of the state of Georgia. (2022). Account. Unemployment rate by age in 2022.
8. Hauschildt, K., Gwosć, C., Schirmer, H., Cras, F. (2019). THE SOCIAL DIMENSION OF STUDENT LIFE IN THE EUROPEAN HIGHER EDUCATION AREA IN 2019. Eurostudent VII.
9. Healy, A., Perkmann, M., Goddard, J., & Kempton, L. (2012). Measuring the Impact of University Business Cooperation. European Commission
10. Human Rights Research Institute. Grigol Robakidze University. (2017). Analysis of state employment policy in Georgia and European countries. www.gruni.edu.ge (12.09.2023)

11. Javaxishvili, N. (2011). Promotion of employment of students by higher educational institutions of Georgia. Tbilisi: Tbilisi State University <http://erasmusplus.org.ge/> (29.09.2023)
12. Kikutadze, V., Kvirkvaia, M., Dagelishvili, N., Gujaraidze, G., Tavxelidze, T. (2022). A study of cooperation between higher educational institutions and employers in Georgia, pp 4-30
13. Millard, L., Hargreaves, J. (2015). Creatively employing funding to support innovation. *Innovations in Education and Teaching International*. Issue 3. (Volume 52, 2015) pp. 335-344 www.tandfonline.com (12.09.2023)
14. Ministry of Education and Science of Georgia. Ipm studies. National project of Eurostudent VI Tbilisi. www.mes.gov.ge (29.09.2023)
15. Ministry of Education and Science of Georgia. Unified strategy of education and science 2017-2021. www.mes.gov.ge
16. Papashvili, A., Bejanidze, T. (2022). Higher education and social justice - Study of students' social needs Friedrich Ebert Stiftung <https://library.fes.de/pdf-files/bueros/georgien/19631.pdf>
17. Rakovska, N., Pavlin, S., & Melink, M. (2014). Assessment of cooperation between higher education institutions and employers in Europe. European Commission Results of the 2019-2021 Eurostudent survey. <https://www.mes.gov.ge> (28.09.2023)
18. Shudra, T. (2014). Part-time work. Labour Law. Tbilisi: „meridiani“
19. Socio-Economic conditions of Georgian higher educational institutions students related to other European countries. Eurostudent Results 2019-2021