



NCEQE ANNUAL REPORT

2023

LEPL - National Center For Educational
Quality Enhancement (NCEQE)

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Abbreviations:

ACA - the Academic Cooperation Association;
AIC - Academic Information Center of Latvia;
ANACEC - National Agency for Quality Assurance in Education and Research of Moldova;
BFUG - The Bologna Follow-up Group;
BICG - Bologna Implementation Coordination Group;
CAF - Common Assessment Framework;
CEENQA - Central and Eastern European Network of Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education
DUGEOR - Project funded by Erasmus+;
DZS - Czech National Agency for International Education and Research;
FIBAA - German Foundation for International Business Administration Accreditation;
GAIN - Global Academic Integrity Network;
GEC - International business and management consulting company;
ECTS - European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System;
EFMD - European Foundation for Management Development;
EHEA - European Higher Education Area;
ERCs – Educational Resource Centers;
ENAI - European Network of Academic Integrity;
ENIC Centers -European Network of Information Centers;
ENQA - European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education;
EQAR - European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education;
EQAVET - European Quality Assurance in Vocational Education and Training;
EQPR - European Qualifications Passport for Refugees;
ESG - The Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area;
ESTDEV - The Estonian Centre for International Development;
ESU - European Students' Union;
ETF - European Training Foundation;
ETHICS - Erasmus+ Capacity Building and Institutional Development Program;
EUA – The European University Association;
EURASHE - The European Association of Institutions in Higher Education;
EVBB – The European Association of Institutes for Vocational Training;
HAKA - Estonian Quality Agency for Education;
IAAR - The Independent Agency for Accreditation and Rating of Kazakhstan;
IBM SPSS - Statistical software;
INQAAHE - The International Network for Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education;
LRC - Lisbon Recognition Convention;
NARIC - Network of National Academic Recognition Information Centers of the European Union;
PDCA- Plan, Do, Check, Act;
PLA - Peer Learning Activity;
PROFFORMANCE - Program funded by Erasmus+;
QMS Quality Management System - Electronic system of authorization and accreditation;
QUATRA - Program funded by Erasmus+;
QQI - Quality and Qualifications Ireland;
SAYP - Academy of Young Professionals of the Swedish Institute (SI);
SICI- The Standing International Conference of Inspectorates;
SQUARE - Program funded by Erasmus+;

TAIEX - Technical Assistance and Information Exchange instrument of the European Commission;
TEQSA - Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency of Australia;
TPDC - National Center for Teacher Professional Development;
TPG A on QF - Thematic Peer Group A on Qualifications Framework;
TPG B on RLC - Thematic Peer Group B on the Lisbon Recognition Convention;
TPG on QA - Thematic Peer Group on Quality Assurance;
USAID HICD – USAID Human and Institutional Capacity Development Program;
USAID LTA - USAID program "Learning Together Activity";
WFME - World Federation of Medical Education.

Introduction

This document presents the 2023 activity report of the National Center for Educational Quality Enhancement (here in after referred to as the Center). The activities given in the document were carried out within the strategic cycle of the Center for 2021-2025 and include the activities implemented to develop the quality of Early and Preschool, General, Vocational, Higher Education; the development of National Qualifications, the provision of Educational Services, the measures implemented for the Internationalization of Education and the Institutional development of the Center.

There are five chapters in this document. The first chapter presents a report on the activities carried out within the institutional development of the Center, the second chapter is devoted to the activities carried out in the direction of education quality assurance, the third chapter presents information on the measures carried out within the national qualifications, the fourth chapter is devoted to the development of educational services, and the fifth chapter presents the report of the activities carried out in the direction of the internationalization of education.

Chapter I. Institutional Development

Coordination Council

On April 25, 2023, the composition of the Coordination Council was renewed by Order of the Minister of Education, Science and Youth of Georgia. In accordance with the regulations of the Center, the term of office of the Coordination Council is determined for two years. Representatives of various agencies, representatives of educational institutions, foreign experts, representatives of international organizations working in the direction of education, students, representatives of the civil sector are represented in the renewed council. It is worth noting that the renewed Coordination Council includes both new and 2021-2023 Coordination Council members.

During 2023 the Coordination Council, in accordance with the Statute of the Center, discussed and agreed on important issues for the education system and for the Center as an institution. The meetings of the Coordination Council were held in online format; Four meetings were held in total, of which 2 meetings were held by the renewed Coordination Council. The members discussed and agreed on 21 issues; In particular:

- ✓ The issue of transferring the coordination of the Bologna process to the Ministry of Education, Science and Youth of Georgia and, accordingly, the amendment to the Statute of the Center;
- ✓ 2022 Annual Report of the Center;
- ✓ Internal quality assurance policy document of the Center;
- ✓ Draft on the amendments in the Authorization Provision of Educational Institutions;
- ✓ Draft on the amendment in the Order № 99/N of the Minister of Education and Science of Georgia on “Approval of the Authorization Provision and Fee of Educational Institutions”;
- ✓ Changes in the regulations of the Planning, Research and International Relations Department;
- ✓ Providing information about the ENQA Members' Forum;
- ✓ Changes in the regulations of VET Quality Assurance Department of the Center.
- ✓ Changes in the regulations of the General Education Quality Assurance Department;
- ✓ Introduction to the prepared draft of the self-assessment report for the membership of the ENQA Quality Assurance Agency;
- ✓ The possibility of joining the International Network for Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education (INQAAHE);
- ✓ Planned changes in the Center's 2024 staff schedule project;
- ✓ 2024 Action Plan draft of the 2021-2025 strategy;
- ✓ Selection of the approximate dates for the regular Coordination Council meetings in 2024;
- ✓ The issue of joining the European Association of Institutes for Vocational Training (EVBB);
- ✓ Acquaintance with the results of the thematic analysis: "The results of the thematic analysis of the evaluation of the effectiveness and efficiency of the midterm self-evaluation reports presented to the Center every three years and the future vision of taking into account the recommendations";
- ✓ Amendments to be implemented in the law: "Amendments to be implemented in the accreditation provision regarding the accreditation of the Educational Program of Special Educational Needs Teacher;
- ✓ Projects of the main parameters of the Center's 2024 budget;
- ✓ The draft of the labor safety and health protection policy document;
- ✓ Draft of amendments: the draft of the Ministry of Education and Science of Georgia on making amendments to the Order № 99/N of the Minister of Education and Science of Georgia of October

- 1, 2010 on “On the “Approval of the Authorization Provision and Fee of Educational Institutions”;
- ✓ Draft of amendments: on the planned changes to the Order № 99/N of the Minister of Education and Science of Georgia of October 1, 2010 on “on the Approval of the Authorization Provision and Fee of Educational Institutions”;

Minutes of the meeting of the Coordination Council and information about the members are public and available [on the website of the Center](#).

Action Plan for 2024

In order to develop the 2024 Action Plan of the Center's 2021-2025 strategy, the Center started working on the Action Plan in September 2023. Planning, Research and International Relations Department together with the structural units of the Center coordinated the preparation of the draft 2024 Action Plan. The departments have developed activities for each strategic objective with relevant indicators, evidence, timelines and resources. It should be noted that in the 2024 Action Plan, a number of activities are accompanied by reasons/justifications for their development. This is due to the Center's policy of evidence-based decision-making.

To ensure the participation of external stakeholders in the planning process, in November 2023, the draft of Action Plan was presented to various stakeholders. Up to 350 people attended the meetings held online, including representatives of Early and Preschool Education Institutions, representatives of General, Vocational and Higher Education Institutions, associations of kindergartens, representatives of Resource Centers, members of councils and members of the expert pool of the Center. The final draft was presented to the Center's Coordination Council for approval and they endorsed the draft Action Plan. On December 22, the Center's 2024 Action Plan was approved by the corresponding order of the Director, and [was published on the website of the Center](#).

Document Management

In 2023, in the direction of document management, the electronic system for booking a visit to the Center located on the Center's website (<https://booking.eqe.ge/>) was updated. In order to increase the satisfaction of the customers of the Center, a training was conducted for the employees of the Center (document management) in the direction of effective services (service +).

In addition, in accordance with the rules of the legislation, additional records No. 1 and No. 2 of the Center's 2006-2020 cases for permanent and long-term storage as well as the consolidated nomenclature of the Center's 2024 cases were approved.

Human Resources Management

In order to carry out evaluation of the Center's employees, an evaluation system was piloted, within the framework of which the evaluation of employees was carried out by the method of evaluation of performed functions and competencies. The evaluation criteria were the quality of performance, timeliness of performance and amount of work. The number of features to be evaluated did not exceed 7 and was not less than 3. The employees of the Center were evaluated with 3 basic (key) competencies – outcome orientation, analytical thinking, accuracy and orientation on results, while the employees of managerial positions were additionally evaluated with one management competency - team development.

In order to effectively run the evaluation system, a calibration (standardization) meeting was held for the employees of the Center's leadership positions, which provided for the establishment of uniform standards during the evaluation of employees and the reduction of the risks of non-uniform approaches. Instructions for working in the assessment system (a guide) were prepared.

Considering the results of the employee satisfaction survey, in accordance with the identified challenges, in order to support the professional development of employees, training in the direction of communication and coordination was conducted for the employees of the managerial positions.

The Center was involved in the process of introduction of the human resources management strategy in the system of the Ministry of Education, Science and Youth of Georgia and prepared an internal situation analysis document. The mentioned activity was carried out with the involvement and support of the European Union project "Stepping up governance reform in Georgia". The document presents an analysis of internal and external factors in the direction of human resources management in the Center in 2020-2022, in which the main findings and challenges were identified in this direction, namely: creating a professional development system, managing evaluation results, creating a team-oriented corporate environment and digitizing HR. The document was prepared based on the results of the employee satisfaction survey, considering statistical and quantitative indicators.

During the reporting period, 30 competitions were held for the Center's vacant positions, including 7 for Center employees, 11 for authorization/accreditation experts and 12 for interns.

Strategic Communications

During the reporting period, the Center held a series of meetings with persons interested in the authorization process of Early and Preschool Education Institutions and those interested in the authorization process of public schools. In particular, in the direction of ensuring the quality of general education, the management of the Center and representatives of relevant structural units participated in the working meeting organized by the Georgian School Administrators Association. Principals of general educational institutions were introduced to the changes made in the authorization standards and procedures and their questions were answered. The representatives of the Center met with the heads of more than 300 public schools in the authorization process and heard their feedback on the authorization process.

With regards to the quality of early and pre-school education, a meeting was held in an online mode with the representatives of the municipalities and associations of kindergartens that were involved in the self-assessment at the first stage. In addition, a working meeting was held with the heads of Educational Resource Centers, the purpose of which was to ensure the involvement of Resource Centers in the process of authorization of public schools and to plan measures to strengthen their capacities.

The Center organized a cycle of meetings with students of Vocational Educational Institutions, the purpose of which was to acquaint the students with the Center's activities, achievements, current and future projects, both locally and internationally. At the meeting, a presentation was held on the activities of the Center, the mechanisms for ensuring the quality of vocational education, the rights of students and the forms of their involvement in the issues of quality assurance of education, the internationalization of the field of education and the possibilities of continuing studies abroad.

The Center published the third edition of e-journal - "[Education Quality Digest](#)", which was posted on the Center's official website, and information about the publication was distributed on the Center's social network accounts. The journal presents articles on quality assurance processes in education, examples of

best practices at the local and international levels, a brief analysis of changes in legislation, and a variety of information for the interested parties.

A 2023 media relations plan was developed, in which all important events to be implemented by the Center were set out. During the reporting period, the Center actively cooperated with various media outlets; the Center's Director, the deputies and representatives of relevant departments were invited to the thematic TV programs. In addition, articles and news about the Center's activities, achievements and future plans prepared by the Center's employees were distributed in various information websites and electronic magazines. During 2023, the information on the website of the Center was constantly updated in Georgian and English languages.

Team building was organized by the Center, in which about 150 employees of the Center took part. The event consisted of various activities, the purpose of which was: team development, bonding, formation of positive mood among employees, development of teamwork skills, development of common team spirit and improvement of communication quality in the team.

Annual International Conference of the Center

From February 27 to March 1, 2023, the Center held an Annual International Conference, where the main directions of the Center's activities in 2022, important issues, achievements and challenges of higher, vocational, general, early and preschool education were discussed in the context of the development of the quality of education. The conference focused on the importance of quality assurance at all levels of education. Important steps taken in the direction of internationalization of education were noted. The participants of the conference were: representatives of the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA), the European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education (EQAR), the World Federation of Medical Education (WFME), the European University Association (EUA), the European Students' Union (ESU) and international experts, representatives of the Ministry of Education, Science and Youth of Georgia, local self-government, schools, Vocational and Higher Educational Institutions, Early and Preschool Education Institutions, as well as partner local and international organizations, members of the Center's Coordination Council, members of the Accreditation, Authorization and Appeals Council and experts, students, employers and other interested parties.

Provision of Material-Technical Base and Software

In 2023, a number of supporting activities were implemented in the direction of procurement and material-technical provision of the Center. In order to ensure risks of physical security:

- ✓ The building of the Center was fully equipped with modern fire safety devices and equipment; Modern fire alarm, emergency lighting and sound systems were installed;
- ✓ The procedure for conducting an inventory of the Center's assets and liabilities was developed and approved;
- ✓ In order to improve the services provided by the Center, an independent service space for legal entities was created and technically equipped;
- ✓ In order to improve the services provided by the Center, a modern system of managing the queue of citizens was installed and launched.
- ✓ The existing car park of the Center was updated with five units of hybrid vehicles;

- ✓ The existing computer systems of the Center were partially updated, about forty new computers were purchased and installed.

Within the 2023 annual State procurement plan of the Center, 150 State procurement contracts were signed, the total value of which amounted to 1,125,941.82 (one million one hundred twenty-five thousand nine hundred and forty-one GEL and 82 Tetris) GEL.

In 2023, a total of 1 complaint was submitted to the Public Procurement Disputes Resolution Board, which was resolved in favor of the Center.

Information Security

In order to implement the information security management system, in 2023, according to the pre-developed action plan, the Center described the existing assets, approved the risk management methodology, according to which the risks are identified/assessed, and appropriate controls are introduced/identified. A risk management plan was developed within the framework of the Action Plan for the implementation of the information security management system.

During the reporting period, high priority risks were identified and their risk assessment was summarized. In addition to the above, trainings were conducted for the employees of the Center in order to raise awareness of information security.

From the point of view of information security, issues of security incidents, violations, or vulnerabilities are reviewed, incidents are responded to, and an analysis of the results is prepared. Periodically, together with the cyber security team, the challenges and vulnerabilities facing the IT infrastructure and information security were analyzed; the technology improvements were summarized and their impact on security and its future development were analyzed.

During the year, the general state of information security was summarized, challenges and obligations for improvement were recognized. Periodically, based on the need, the Information Security Council was held.

Labor Safety

In order to ensure labor safety, a draft of the labor safety and health protection policy document was developed, according to which the main objective of the labor safety and health protection policy is creation of a safe working environment to promote the protection of life and health of employees and third parties at the workplace, determination of general principles of labor safety requirements and preventive measures which are related to issues of labor safety at the workplace, existing and expected threats, training of employees, provision of information to them, consultation, equal participation of employees in issues of labor safety and health protection and fulfillment of legal obligations. It should be noted that the existing legislation in the country in the direction of labor safety is presented as mandatory norms. Accordingly, the Center undertakes to establish strict control over the accurate and timely fulfillment of the legal requirements of labor safety, mitigating and preventing the costs related to accidents and occupational diseases. The purpose of developing labor safety requirements is to establish and define labor safety rules and instructions, to determine the safe method of performing work and the minimum standard of training necessary to perform it, which should be provided as training to all employees of the Center.

This document was agreed upon by the Coordination Council of the Center. The Center's Director shall approve the document.

Protection of Personal Data

Different types of training were conducted in the direction of personal data protection and public information, which served to train employees in the mentioned direction.

In 2023, the manual prepared by the Center on the protection of personal data was sent to the Ministry of Education, Science and Youth of Georgia. The need to take measures related to the adoption of the new law of Georgia on public "Personal Data Protection" by legal entities under public law under the Ministry was determined according to the document. The need to develop such regulatory acts, which were not included in the original plan, was on the agenda. Accordingly, drafts of regulatory acts (on video monitoring and audio monitoring) were developed during the reporting period. In addition, recommendation documents were developed, which were also submitted to the Director of the Center in the form of a project (Regarding business correspondence, human resources and hotline operators' activities).

State Internal Financial Control System

According to the Law of Georgia on State Internal Financial Control and international audit standards, in December 2022, considering the tasks and goals facing the organization, the main risks of the organization/current processes were assessed. As a result, the amendment of the internal audit strategic plan for 2021-2023 and the Annual Plan for 2023 were approved. In 2023, it was planned to conduct 3 audits (2 systemic and 1 compliance audit). Based on the amendment to the order "On establishing the minimum information security requirements for the entities of critical information systems of the first and second categories", an amendment was made to the 2023 Annual Plan of the internal audit, according to which the compliance audit of the information security management system, strategic planning and internal quality assurance mechanism development process was replaced by a systematic audit. In addition, since the period of implementation of the 2022 efficiency audit has been transferred to the next reporting year, in 2023, the N4 audit report of 2022 has also been completed.

In 2023, two audits were completed, and the N3 audit began. In addition to the audits, in order to effectively implement the controls, the implementation of the recommendations issued within the framework of the audits was monitored. In particular, the monitoring of the implementation of the recommendations issued within the framework of audit checks was carried out, the results of which were reported to the Director of the Center and the audit entities.

Internal audit constantly analyzes the progress of implementation of recommendations issued by its own and the State Audit Service and the Internal Audit Department of the Ministry of Education, Science and Youth of Georgia.

In order to implement the international standards of internal audit, in cooperation with the Ministry, a pilot of the quality assessment system of the Internal Audit Department of the Center was implemented, within the framework of which the self-evaluation of the Internal Audit Department, the evaluation of the service by the audit entity, as well as the evaluation of the quality of the consulting services provided were carried out. As a result, in 2023, a change was made in the statute of the Internal Audit Department. "Policy of Internal Audit Service" was developed. Also, the quality assurance and development program and relevant forms, the procedure for documenting and conducting proceedings of the internal audit activity, and the document defining the consulting assurance activity were developed. In addition to the above, the risks in the organization were assessed and the internal audit Strategic Plan for 2024-2026 and the Annual Plan for 2024 were developed, which also includes the recommendations of the Ministry and the results of the external assessment of the Ministry.

In 2023, the internal audit carried out an external assessment of the internal audit activity of the Resource Officer Service of educational institution.

Management of Financial Resources

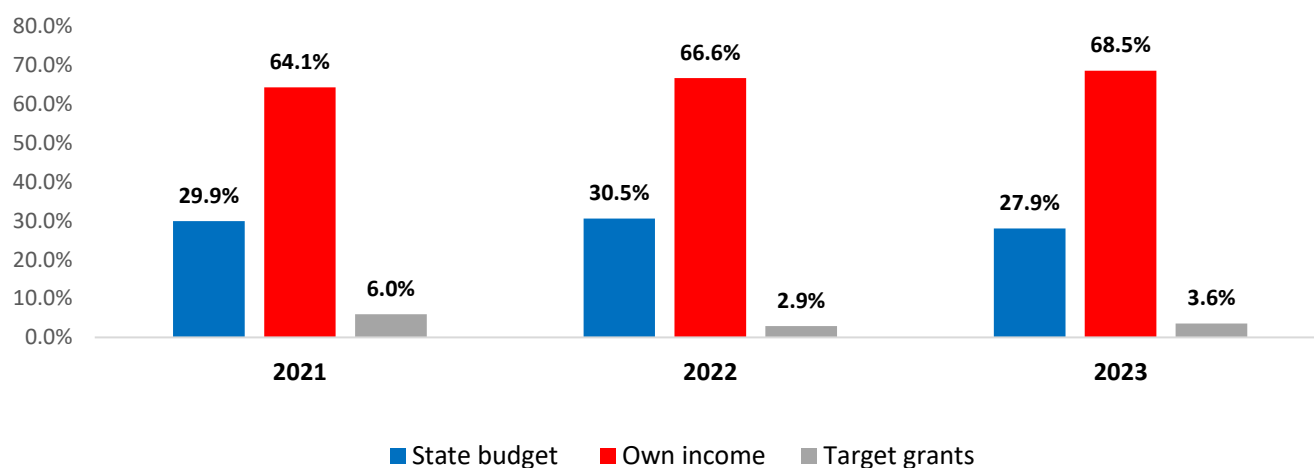
In 2023, a number of supporting activities were implemented in the direction of financial security. In particular, the draft forms of the 2024-2027 budget with relevant information were prepared and agreed upon with the Ministry. Information on the main parameters of the Center's 2024 staff list and budget was prepared and presented to the Coordination Council.

During the year 2023, reports of the implementation of the state budget for 3, 6, 9 months and year of 2022 were submitted to the Ministry; 2022 financial statement with attachments (balance sheet). At the end of each quarter, the quarterly budget execution plan was monitored. In the budget, changes were made according to the needs, the Department ensured an agreement with the government on the adjusted budget for 2023.

In accordance with the action plan and the budget application forms, the 2024 budget application draft of the VET Quality Assurance Department was developed. A concept has been developed, which describes the new payment possibilities and presents the ways of its implementation.

During 2023, the Center administered 4,866,647.00 GEL received from the state budget and 9,467,697.00 GEL from its own source of income, thus, providing the works to be carried out by the Departments of Higher Education Quality Assurance, VET Quality Assurance, General Education Quality Assurance, Early and Preschool Education Quality Assurance, and Educational Services Development Department within the framework of proceedings and necessary for the proper functioning of the Center.

In 2021-2023, the share of own funds in the Center's financial income is characterized by an increasing trend, the rate of which reached 68.5% in 2023, which is reflected in the graph presented below and emphasizes the Center's financial independence. In addition, it should be noted that the Center's financial income is diversified and consists of State budget funds, own funds and a targeted grant.



Graph 1: Trend of financial indicators in 2021-2023

Development of Internal Quality System

In 2023, based on PDCA (Plan- Do- Check- Act) basic quality management model, the Center continued to develop the internal quality assurance system, to identify, describe, analyze and implement changes for improvement of the processes in the Center.

In 2023, the Center with the support of USAID HICD (USAID Georgia Human and Institutional Capacity Development Activity - HICD) cooperated with the GEC consulting company on optimization and development of the Center's business processes. With the help of consulting company GEC, the register of identified business processes was reviewed and optimized, an operational manual was created - management of business processes, a document of technical requirements of the knowledge management and sharing system was developed, a part of business processes was developed in Visio-format, which simplifies the perception of processes and an internal electronic portal of the Center was created to ensure the storage of optimized business processes and their use. The representatives of all structural units of the Center were given face-to-face training, within which they studied the essence, purpose and boundaries of the business process system.

In 2023, the Center used the CAF (Common Assessment Framework) methodology for the first time to conduct organizational self-assessment. Based on international practice, with the appropriate methodology, the guideline was developed. Meetings were held with the structural units of the Center and questionnaires were filled out considering the CAF methodology. As a result of analyzing the questionnaires, findings/challenges have been identified. Based on this, an analysis document was developed. The main challenges were shared with the relevant services, in response to the identified challenges, they planned a total of 8 activities in 2024, which were reflected in the Center's 2024 Action Plan.

Internal Researches and Analytical Documents

Research of Customer Service Satisfaction

During the reporting period, a customer satisfaction survey of the Center's services was carried out. The purpose of the survey was to receive feedback from identified service users, individuals and legal entities, regarding the services provided at the Center. The satisfaction of service users was evaluated in the following 5 areas: consultations related to standards and procedures for authorization of early childhood education and/or preschool education institutions; administrative support service for the activities of the Center's Coordination Council; case-based monitoring service implemented for the purpose of bringing accredited higher education programs into compliance with the "National Qualification Framework" and "Classifier of Fields of Study"; non-Formal education recognition service; supporting activities of the Council for the Authorization of General Education Institutions. In accordance with the research directions, it was carried out using quantitative (data collection method: survey) and qualitative methodology (data collection method: focus group discussion). The target groups were consumers who received the services of the Center during the research period (from July 1, 2022 to June 30, 2023). Quantitative research data were processed with statistical data software - IBM SPSS, using descriptive statistics. The results of the evaluation of the work performed by the groups involved in the implementation of the service are as follows:

- The degree of customer satisfaction with the consultation service related to the standards and procedures for the authorization of Early Education and/or Pre-school Education institutions

offered by the Center to the interested parties, in accordance with the defined criteria, is generally evaluated as of high quality. As for the timing of receiving the Center's feedback on the request made through the hotline regarding the authorization consultation, according to the respondents, the feedback is mostly received within the shortest time (1-3 working days) provided by the answer alternatives in the questionnaire, which indicates the practice of immediate response to the request. Answers also correspond to 4-6 working days (2nd in order of frequency), and in a small part a relatively big time-frame - 7 working days and more is noted. It is recommended to additionally study the practice related to the time frame for providing feedback on the request recorded by the hotline in the Center and to formally define the terms. It is recommended to consider the requests of a small part of the respondents regarding the consultation service: maintaining the electronic platform for the registration of institutions; receiving information in a more detailed, simple form within the consultation and increasing the number of consultation days;

- **The degree of satisfaction of the members of the Coordination Council with the administrative support service of the activities** of the Center's Coordination Council is high, according to its constituent components. Regarding the changes in the process of administration of the activities of the Council, a specific request was made by foreign experts, which is related to the dates of the sessions of the Council. According to their opinion, it is recommended to determine the dates of the regular session of the Council at the beginning of the year. In order to develop the supporting activities of the Council, it is recommended to determine and implement the objectives of various developmental measures;
- **Users consider the case-based monitoring service implemented for the purpose of bringing accredited higher education programs into compliance with the "National Qualification Framework" and "Classifier of Fields of Study"** as a necessary and useful service. The comments aimed at improving the service refer to the procedural part of the service and are related to the issues of excessive detailing of the assessment process, overlapping of components within the framework of parallel proceedings, and overlap of deadlines for parallel proceedings, which in turn leads to a high cost of resources for the parties involved in the process. According to the respondents, it is recommended to revise the service procedure, as well as to ensure the consistent (and non-simultaneous) implementation of different proceedings.

Difficulties related to the interpretation of information were noted in connection with the expert assessment. On the recommendation of the participants, before preparing the report regarding the object of assessment, for greater clarity, it is better for the expert to address the Higher Education Institution (HEI) in a dialogue/meeting format.

In relation to the experts' report, the dissatisfaction of the part of participants is related to the non-presentation of the basis for sharing/not sharing the position of the institution in the report, which indicates the need to reflect this in the report. As mentioned, in the conditions of achieving the desired result, the difference between the opinions/views of educational institutions and experts regarding the conduct of the process (irrelevantly) becomes the basis for issuing a recommendation. Therefore, it is appropriate to additionally discuss the above with a group of experts.

Cases related to possible shortcomings related to the work of the Council were noted: confusion of processes during discussion at the session; the high influence of a member of the Council, who is a specialist in a specific field, on the recommendations issued regarding the corresponding programs of the same field, which places the programs in unequal conditions. It is recommended that the discussion on the mentioned issues be continued from the side of the Center.

Some of the participants consider the term determined by the Council for the HEI to correct the shortcomings inappropriate (in certain cases), which indicates the need to review the issue of defining the term (considering the type of change and the current study period);

- **The survey revealed the satisfaction of the respondents in the direction of the service of obtaining the right to recognition of non-formal education.** According to the respondents, the technical deficiencies in the process of submitting the service application to the Center, which were related to the QMS system, were noted as a challenging issue, however, based on the appeal, the problems were eliminated in time;
- **The satisfaction of the members of the authorization council of General Education Institutions with the Center's supporting activities,** according to its constituent components, is highly rated. The needs related to the support activities of the Council are aimed at increasing the awareness of the Council about the standards and the rights and duties of the Council provided for by the Statute of Authorization (1), regulating the number of issues to be discussed at the Council's session (maximum, 5-6 issues), and, if necessary, scheduling an additional session (2). It is recommended that this is reviewed by the responsible department. When planning the development activities of the Council, it is desirable to consider the following requirements of the Council named during the research: development of a methodological guide; organization of workshops aimed at analyzing the working experience of the Council; sharing of additional material requested from schools by experts to the council and organizing council meetings with subject experts. In addition, in order to perfect the procedure of administration of the activity of the council and to ensure a uniform approach to the process of administrative support of the councils operating in the Center, it is recommended to develop the rule of providing organizational-financial support for the activity of the authorization council of general education institutions.

Thematic Analyses

The work on the thematic [analysis in the direction of the effectiveness of the 3-year interim reports](#) of authorization-accreditation has been completed. The recommendations issued within the framework of the analysis are mainly intended for the Center and serve both for the future development of the three-year reports and, in general, the subsequent evaluations of the authorization/accreditation carried out by the Center, for the future improvement of the quality assurance mechanisms of higher education.

In addition, work on the thematic analyzes of cyclical assessments of authorization (2018-2023) and accreditation (cluster of 2022-2023) has begun. These analyzes will help the Center to identify both positive practices and existing challenges, and within the framework of the given recommendations, it shall be further discussed to give directions for the development processes.

During the reporting period, the Center carried out a thematic [analysis: "Analysis of the best international practices and national legal framework for the introduction of microcredits in the higher education system of Georgia"](#). The purpose of the analysis is to identify the needs of the relevant legal framework for the introduction, implementation and recognition of microcredits in the Higher Education system of Georgia through the review of existing framework documents and international practices in the direction of introduction, implementation and recognition of microcredits in the higher education system of Georgia and to develop appropriate recommendations for initiating legislative changes. The analysis was conducted using a desk research methodology.

As a result, the following recommendations were developed: due to the fact that the mechanisms of Recognition of Informal Education in Georgia were created relatively late and there is practically no similar experience at the level of Higher Education, it is appropriate to start piloting the introduction of

microcredits in the first stage, in pilot mode, in educational institutions that meet specific criteria. Further, by observing the existing practice and identifying the challenges, it will be possible to introduce microcredits on a larger scale in the Higher Education system.

At the initial stage, it is advisable to take into account the New Zealand model, which provides for the involvement of the National Center for Educational Quality Enhancement in the external quality assurance process of microcredits.

Taking into account the specifics of the Higher Education system, in order to establish realistic, measurable and achievable learning outcomes within the framework of the microcredit program and to be able to measure and evaluate the achievement of the outcomes, it is appropriate to determine the minimum volume of microcredits at no less than 1 ECTS credit, and the maximum volume of no more than 30 ECTS credits.

It is advisable, at the first stage, to determine the range of study areas in which microcredit program will be implemented in pilot mode and which will be recognized at a specific level of formal higher education. It is advisable to determine the development, implementation and admission prerequisites of microcredits in a specific area.

For admission to the program, it is recommended that the applicant has at least a complete general education certificate, or its equivalent. The implementing institution shall have the right to determine higher/different admission requirements.

In order for microcredits to be used to deepen communication and cooperation between Higher Education Institutions and the actors of the employment market, in order to obtain the right to implement it, the institution, in cooperation with the relevant employer, must present a reasoned justification why it is necessary to develop and implement a microcredit program in a specific field of study. Recommendations for the legal regulation of the introduction, implementation and recognition of microcredits in the higher education system of Georgia, in order to introduce the microcredit system in the national legislation, the concept of microcredit, its implementing entities, as well as the mechanisms of microcredit recognition and quality assurance should be defined at the legislative level.

There are two possibilities for introducing the microcredit system: a) the implementer shall be only a Higher Education Institution and b) the implementer shall be the HEI as well as legal entity that does not have the status of a Higher Education Institution. Also, recognition of microcredit can be done at the central level (by the Center), or at the level of the institution (directly implemented by the Higher Education Institution).

However, after selecting the appropriate alternative from the above-mentioned alternatives, it is possible to define further regulations at the legislative level.

The following can be proposed as an external quality assurance mechanism: a) microcredit accreditation; b) evaluation of microcredit implementation and/or recognition mechanism (internal quality assurance mechanism) within the framework of authorization standards by microcredit implementing/recognizing HEI.

The existence of an internal mechanism for ensuring the quality of microcredit implementation will facilitate the implementation process of microcredit by the implementers.

Policy Briefs

During the reporting period, three policy briefs were elaborated on the education. The purpose of a policy brief is to present a challenge and to briefly assess policy options for a specific issue. During 2023, policy briefs were produced on the following topics: strategic approach to planning thematic analysis in higher and vocational education on the example of Estonian Quality Agency for Education (HAKA); automatic

recognition of education - alternative ways of recognition of education and EQAVET indicator No. 5: Employment rate of graduates of vocational educational programs. In each document, the existing problems and challenges related to the mentioned issues are discussed, international experience is shared, and relevant recommendations are offered based on this. A policy briefs will help policy makers to analyze the issue/challenge raised in them and make a decision based on the recommendations presented.

Chapter II. Activities Carried Out in the Direction of Quality Assurance

Higher Education Quality Assurance

Development of Authorization and Accreditation Processes

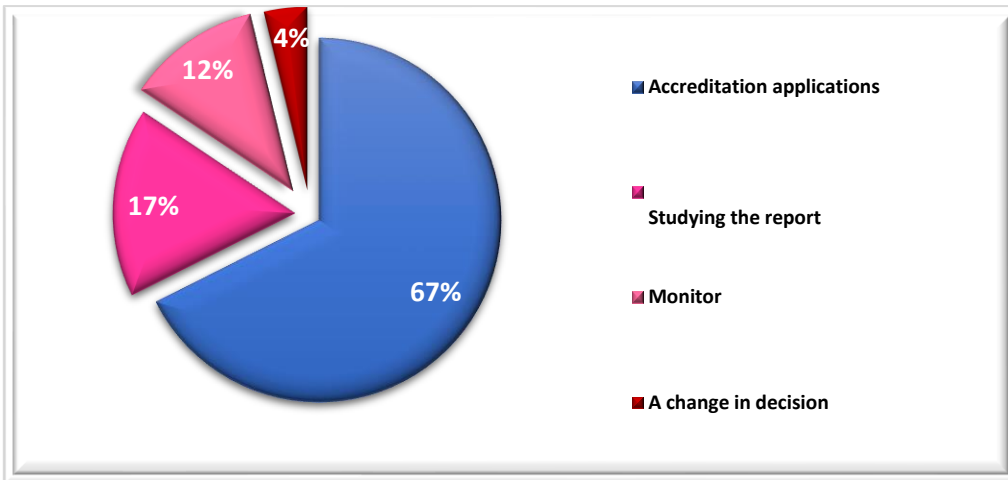
The year 2023 for the Higher Education system was distinguished by important implemented activities and results, which are essential for the promotion and consistent development of quality assurance processes of Higher Education.

As a result of the important reforms implemented in the Higher Education Quality Assurance from 2023, international experts were involved in the evaluation process of all levels and types of higher education programs; they lead the accreditation experts' panel in the capacity of Chairman. The experts panel, along with international experts, includes local experts in the field, a student and an employer. The involvement of an international expert in the process of External Quality Assurance provides support for the internationalization process, more objectivity, impartiality and sharing of useful international practices.

In 2023, in its very first time the Center carried out international accreditation of Higher Education programs operating in a foreign country. In 2018, the Center received recognition from the World Federation of Medical Education (WFME), which, among many advantages, primarily means the recognition of the education received by graduates of medical programs administered by higher educational institutions of Georgia in the United States of America and many other countries abroad. This, in turn, contributes to successful employment and career advancement of graduates. A clear example of this is the fact that in order to receive international accreditation, in 2023, three educational programs of medicine were registered at the Center, and local accreditation experts from British, Hungarian, Georgian and foreign universities were involved in the evaluation process. The international accreditation process carried out by the Center ensures the sharing of the experience of the Center in terms of ensuring the quality of Higher Education, increasing the Internationalization of Higher Education and supporting the development of the quality of education through international cooperation, as well as the professional development of local experts and representatives of the Center.

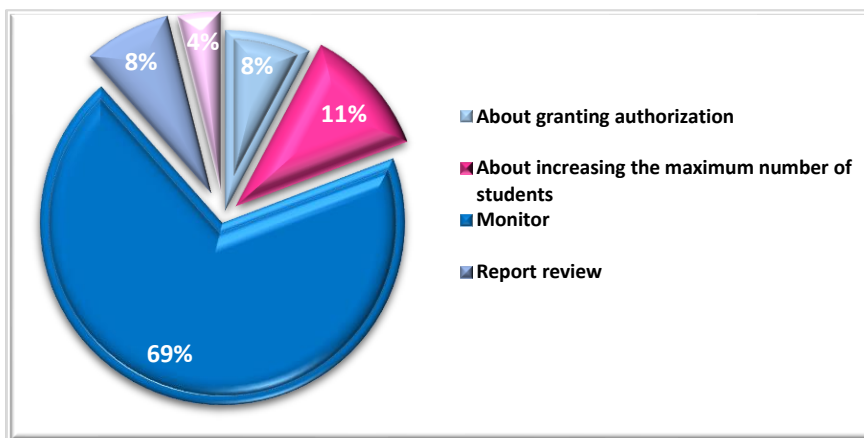
Administrative Proceedings in the Higher Educational Institutions

In 2023, authorization and accreditation site visits in the institutions were carried out on site and the Council meetings were held remotely. During the reporting period, meetings of the Authorization, Accreditation and Appeals Councils were held, including 8 meetings of the Authorization Council of Higher Educational Institutions, 72 meetings of the Accreditation Council of Educational Programs and 2 meetings of the Appeals Council. Accreditation Council for Educational Programs discussed 484 topics. As a result of the discussions, the Council made the following decisions: Accreditation was granted to 341 educational programs; conditional accreditation was granted to 16 educational programs; accreditation was denied for 2 educational programs; as a result of the monitoring, administrative proceedings were stopped for 63 educational programs; the review of the submitted report on the implementation of recommendations was carried out in relation to 89 educational programs; 20 decisions were revised.



Graph 2: Accreditation proceedings of Higher Educational Programs:

During the reporting period, the Higher Educational Institutions Authorization Council made 26 decisions, including: 2 decisions on granting authorization to Higher Educational Institution, 18 decisions on termination of monitoring administrative proceedings; on acceptance of the report regarding the implementation of the recommendations issued by the Authorization Council - 2 decisions; Correcting a technical inaccuracy in the decision - 1 case, regarding increasing the maximum number of students - 3 decisions, including 2 were approved and 1 was refused to increase the maximum number of students.



Graph 3: Authorization proceedings of Higher Educational Institutions:

The Appeals Council delivered 2 decisions: 1 decision was related to the acceptance of the appeal based on the decision made by the Accreditation Council of Educational Programs, and 1 decision was the refusal to accept the appeal based on the decision made by the Accreditation Council of Educational Programs.

Supportive Measures for the Higher Educational Institutions

Workshops were conducted for newly appointed members of the Accreditation Council of Educational Programs to acquaint them with the intricacies of assessing Higher Educational programs. Additionally, workshops were organized for members of the Authorization Council of Higher Educational institutions and the Appeals Council. The topics of the meetings were related to the review of the specifics of the system of higher education quality assurance and the introduction of the principles of the Council's activities.

Throughout the year, thematic informational meetings and trainings were held with the representatives of various private and public universities, including topics related to the recognition of accreditation granted by a foreign agency in Georgia and quality assurance of joint programs.

It should be noted that a training was held under the supervision of an international expert, in which representatives of institutions that have to undergo authorization in 2024 were involved. Within the framework of the training, the expert shared his experience regarding the preparation of the self-assessment process for the Authorization of Higher Educational Institutions.

Based on the international experience gained within the year, the current practice was revised and in order to support the Higher Educational Institutions and develop quality assurance mechanisms, the existing guidelines were modified, and new guidelines were developed:

- Suggestions for evaluating the methodology for determining the maximum number of students;
- Suggestion for evaluation of the methodology for determining the maximum number of places for students in a Higher Educational Institution/medical doctor one-cycle educational program;
- Guideline for Preparing the Authorization Self-Assessment Report;
- Guideline for preparation of self-assessment process and report for Higher Educational program accreditation purposes.

Experts' Pool of Authorization of Higher Educational Institutions and Accreditation of Higher Educational Programs

In the field of Higher Education, 20 new experts were added to the authorization expert pools and 86 experts were added to the Accreditation pool. In addition, the process of attestation of accreditation experts was conducted in the fields of Art, Sports and Defense and at the same time, preparations for the selection of experts in the field of business and administration started in 2024. Six joint trainings were held for new members of the Authorization and Accreditation expert pools (local and international).

The manual of accreditation experts was qualitatively updated according to the analysis of the activities of accreditation experts and in connection with the transition to the cluster accreditation model.

Quality Assurance of Vocational Education

Administrative Proceedings in the Higher Educational Institutions

During the reporting period, 19 meetings of the Council granting the right to implement vocational training and vocational retraining programs were held in the direction of vocational education, covering 105 topics. Additionally, 23 meetings of the Authorization Council were held, addressing 111 topics.

In order to confirm the compliance with the Authorization standards, 23 administrative proceedings of monitoring were carried out - 16 according to the request of the Council, 6 planned and 1 unplanned monitoring, and 3 planned monitoring in order to determine the compliance with the standards of the implementation of vocational training/retraining programs.

In 2023, in 8 institutions implementing Vocational Educational programs, Institutional evaluations were conducted within the framework of external quality assurance of the of education - 8 administrative proceedings of reauthorization/authorization. During the year, 14 administrative proceedings regarding the addition of a vocational educational program, 15 administrative proceedings of increasing the maximum number of vocational students, 5 administrative proceedings of changing the place/space of implementation of the vocational educational program were carried out.

During the year 2023, the administrative proceedings of registration without obtaining the right/or obtaining the right was carried out in the electronic system for 209 vocational training and retraining programs, among them, 126 administrative proceedings for registration in the electronic system without obtaining the right for vocational training/retraining programs, 83 administrative proceedings for obtaining the right and 3 administrative proceedings for planned monitoring.

Supportive Measures and Supportive Manuals for Vocational Educational Institutions

According to the order of the Director of the Center, updated forms of applications and Experts reports utilized in the Authorization process were approved, updated onto the Center's official website, and dispatched to Educational Institutions.

The guideline to justify the feasibility of the Vocational Educational program was prepared within the framework of the United Nations Development Program (UNDP VET phase 3). Also, within the framework of the United Nations Development Program (UNDP VET phase 3) 360-degree self-assessment platform of Vocational Educational Institutions was prepared.

- ✓ Recommendations on determining the budget of the program were prepared by the department, which were placed on the website of the Center. Also, analysis document was implemented which establishes compatibility of Higher, Vocational and General education level regarding to the standards and procedures of authorization of educational institutions.

In order to strengthen the capability of institutions implementing Vocational Educational programs, a meeting was held in the reporting period in the quality assurance. 100 individuals attended the meeting. The topic covered the issues regarding the implementation of the budget of the program. After the meeting, recommendations were prepared, which was delivered to educational institutions and placed on the Center's website.

The meeting was held within the framework of the Vocational Educational program, which integrates the learning outcomes of general education at the secondary level, to discuss/summarize the recommendations identified as a result of the evaluation and analysis of the current state of confirmation of the general

education secondary level learning outcomes achieved by the vocational student. The representatives of institutions implementing integrated programs and Skills Agency Georgia attended the meeting.

The meeting/training was held in regard to prove the feasibility of the labor market research and vocational educational programs. 77 individuals attended the meeting.

The workshop was held with the support and active involvement of the European Training Foundation (ETF) in connection with the integration of EQAVET indicators and the implementation of the evaluation of the progress of the vocational education system with the mentioned indicators. At the meeting was also discussed the assessment report carried out according to 5 indicators in 2022.

In 2023, the system was evaluated according to 2 new indicators. The relevant report was prepared regarding the evaluation results.

In 2023, with the support of the United Nations Development Program and considering the project objective, five agricultural vocational educational programs were selected, which were evaluated using the two new EQAVET indicators (5th and 6th indicators). Also, 4 vocational educational institutions were identified that have been running selected programs for several years and have recorded at least one stream of graduates. Also, 8 indicators of EQAVET were integrated into the self-assessment form (2; 3; 4; 5; 6; 7; 8 and 9) which must be submitted for the reauthorization of vocational educational institutions in the form of program assessment and program implementation feasibility documents. Educational institutions adopted the mentioned forms in 2023, with the system set to start receiving the initial data by 2027.

The meeting was held with Educational Institutions implementing vocational educational programs. The meeting was attended by 118 representatives of Educational Institutions who implement, or wish to implement, vocational training/retraining programs developed within the framework of authorized vocational educational programs. At the meeting, the findings and relevant recommendations were discussed as a result of the analysis within the framework of the registration (confirmation) of vocational training and retraining programs in the electronic system.

Additionally, in order to strengthen the opportunities, during the reporting period, an online meeting was held regarding the issues of quality assurance of vocational training/retraining programs for institutions and legal entities.

Experts' Pool for Authorization of Vocational Educational Institutions

In the first half of 2023, a competition was announced for the selection of the Center's vocational education quality assurance specialists according to the certification procedure. A secretariat and a commission were defined to conduct the certification of the Center's vocational education quality assurance specialists. As a result of the mentioned process, after issuing the relevant order, 25 individuals were granted the status of certified specialist in quality assurance of Vocational Education for 5 years. 23 among the mentioned individuals were added to the experts' pool.

During the reporting period, a workshop/training of field experts was held, where challenges and recommendations related to the evaluation of authorization standards, desk research and site visit process, preparation of report, oral hearing and challenges of experts' evaluation, distribution of responsibilities within the panel members were discussed. Also, "Cases" were discussed in working groups. A similar workshop/training was held remotely for field experts who could not physically attend the training on May 19. In total, 74 field experts were trained.

In 2023 the evaluations of Experts in Quality Assurance of Vocational Education were analyzed in order to evaluate and analyze the activities of experts in quality assurance of vocational education. The document includes the results, findings and recommendations regarding experts' performance evaluation study.

In order to familiarize with the rules and conditions for the development and implementation of joint and exchange programs, an informational meeting of Vocational Educational Institutions was held remotely for the members of the authorization expert pool, and 71 individuals attended it.

Authorization Council of Vocational Educational Institutions, the Council Granting the Right for Implementing Vocational Training/Vocational Retraining Program.

To enhance the capabilities of the newly appointed members of the Vocational Educational Institutions Authorization Council, a working meeting was held. The primary focus was on strengthening the capabilities of the Authorization Council in the standards and procedures of the authorization of Vocational Educational Institutions. This encompassed introduction and analysis of the function-duties of the Council. Strengthening of decision-making and reasoning based on expert report and discussion of the issue at the Council meeting. Furthermore, a workshop was held in order to strengthen the capability of the Vocational Educational Institutions Authorization Council. During the training, attention was drawn on the following issues: review of current practices of the Council's activities; Initial authorization/reauthorization - scope of evaluation and decisions; integrating EQAVET indicators into updated forms; familiarization with planned changes in the charter; 2022-2023 monitoring analysis; familiarization with current processes and news in the direction of vocational education; the role of labor market analysis in decisions made by the Council.

The workshop was held in order to strengthen the capability of the Council granting the right to implement vocational training/retraining programs, which focused on the following topics: review of the current practice of the Council's activities; The role of labor market analysis in the Council's decisions; the role of labor market analysis to justify the need for the program; 2021-2023 statistics - acquisition/registration of rights by legal entities/educational institutions.

Non-Formal Education

In 2023, two additional institutions acquired the right to recognize non-formal education. 11 institutions have received the right to non-formal recognition for now: LTD Community college Natali academy LTD Tegeta Academy; LTD Academy of Business & Technology LTD Georgian business Academy; LEPL - College Blacksea; LEPL - College Spectre; LEPL College Iberia; LTD Georgian College of Iakob Gogebashvili; LEPL - College of Culture; LEPL - International Educational Academy BDC; LEPL - Gldani Vocational Education and Training Center. Informal education recognition services are available in 11 areas: Business and Administration, Information and Communication Technologies, Personal Services, Engineering and Engineering work, Security Services, Education, Healthcare, Architecture and Construction, Agriculture, Production and Processing, Art.

During the reporting period, two documents were prepared: an analysis document regarding the quality assurance mechanisms for the Recognition of Non-Formal Education in Vocational Education, and an annual report on the activities of consultants for the Recognition of Non-Formal Education. In 2023, five certified non-formal education recognition consultants conducted in total 16 recognition processes, resulting in 13 applicants receiving partial recognition and 3 obtained full recognition.

Supporting the Development of Vocational Education Quality

In 2023, within the framework of the sub-program for the development of the quality of Vocational Education, the project of the website of the training program in the state language was fully created; The project of the scheme of the stages of obtaining the right of the training program in the state language was prepared; drafts of short and long guidelines for obtaining the right of the training program in the state language (infographic, presentation and video); a short project of the guideline on the qualification requirements for the staff implementing the training program in the state language; Information about the expert pools for the website of the state language training program; information about the council for the website of the state language training program; the draft of the rules for selection of experts, activity and termination of membership of the expert pools; draft of the selection rule of the council for granting the right to implement the training program in the state language; forms to be used in the process of administrative proceedings (applications and experts' report, 4 forms in total) in accordance with the draft of the rules for the development and implementation of training programs in the state language.

For the first time, in the education system of Georgia, a mechanism of cooperative visits was introduced on the level of institutions implementing vocational educational programs, which through mutual evaluation and sharing of best experiences will play an important role in supporting the cooperation network and quality-oriented educational institution. Using collaborative visits as a quality assurance improving mechanism between professional educational institutions is a common practice in various European countries. Collaborative visits for mutual sharing of experience and improvement of quality assurance mechanisms of vocational educational institutions are recommended and supported by the European Training Foundation(ETF). The principle of conducting cooperative visits, which are carried out for the purpose of mutual evaluation and sharing of best practices, involves providing appropriate analysis and feedback to professional educational institutions from those who have experience working in the field of vocational education and are familiar with the specifics of the given field. Conducting collaborative visits is a unique opportunity for vocational educational institutions to receive detailed and objective feedback from trusted, highly qualified and thoroughly trained colleagues. The experience gained from the visits will be beneficial for the hosting institution and the visiting institutions, as the mentioned mechanism strengthens the institutions which implements vocational educational programs by identifying their strengths and weaknesses. For the successful implementation of the above mentioned mechanism, a methodology for the implementation of cooperative visits was prepared within the framework of the sub-program; 4 forms are needed to conduct the process: Form of initiation of cooperative visit; collaborative visit schedule form; form of certificate of participation in a cooperative visit in a vocational educational institution; form of a feedback; visual material for a better understanding of processes and stages; The above mentioned documents were made public and a corresponding window was created on the Center's official website - <https://eqe.ge/ka/page/parent/1058/kolegialuri-vizitebi>, where the mentioned documents have been placed for access.

A presentation of the methodology of cooperative visits was held with the representatives of the vocational educational institution. It's worth noting that attendees positively assessed the initiative presented by the Center regarding the introduction of cooperative visits between vocational educational institutions.

For the first time in Georgia, LLC - College "Modus" hosted a visit on the topic - "Organization of the educational process" with the cooperation of vocational educational institutions. Representatives of public and private vocational educational institutions participated as visiting institutions. Including: LEPL Ilia Tsinamzgvirshvili College; LTD - Batumi Higher Maritime Engineering School ANRI, LTD Community college Natali academy LTD Third Medical college, LTD Community College "Amagi"; LEPL College "Opizari".

The Vocational Education Quality Assurance Experts' annual conference was held, where new approaches of professional development of quality assurance experts of vocational education, innovative methods and best practices were shared. Also, attention was drawn on current active topics and ways and possibilities to concourse national quality assurance standards with European standards (EQAVET).

The workshop was held in order to strengthen the capability of the Vocational Educational Institutions Authorization Council.

Furthermore, a workshop was held and the legal regulative documentation of vocational education was reviewed in order to improve quality assurance mechanisms and bring them closer to the European framework. Within the framework of the meeting, active working processes was started regarding the charter of authorization of vocational educational institutions and the changes of standards. Project of amendments in relevant documents have been developed, in which the issue of integrating EQAVET's eight indicators is considered.

A workshop was held to enhance the capabilities of the individuals responsible for the quality assurance of the institutions implementing vocational educational programs. The meeting was the summary activity of the training cycle, which was held for the target audience during November 13-16. Representatives of 75 institutions attended the training and workshop. After completion of the attendees were given certificates of participation in the trainings. This activity helps to the formation of a common vision and approach to quality assurance issues, including the understanding of the ways and possibilities of bringing together the national quality assurance standards with the European standards (EQAVET) in the current process, and a better understanding of the role of institutions.

The reports from the expert panel on the authorization of the vocational educational institution were analyzed in the part focused on presenting exemplary experiences of the educational institutions. From March 2020 to December 2023, from 800 reports placed on the Center's official website 19 of them reflected information regarding the institution's best practices.

Other Significant Activities

A working group was created, which was assigned to review/analyze the regulatory acts of the Vocational Educational system; If necessary, preparation of drafts of amendments to the regulatory acts of the Vocational Education system; Introduction/feedback to stakeholders the analysis and changes in the regulatory acts of the Vocational Educational system. The working group has initiated a change in the charter of authorization of Vocational Educational Institutions, referring to the implementation of annual self-assessment of institutions. In the direction of reviewing the authorization charter and standards, the representatives of the quality assurance departments of Vocational, Higher and General Educational Institutions reviewed the Authorization Standards and highlighted the differences that are presented in the existing standards. Also, a draft of the amendment to the charter of authorization of Vocational Educational Institutions was prepared; Issues were identified that should be reflected in the Law of Georgia "On Vocational Education". The identified issues were delivered to the Ministry of Education, Science and Youth of Georgia.

General Education Quality Assurance

Reform of the General Education Quality Assurance System

In the beginning of 2023, the Ministry of Education and Science of Georgia introduced a draft order proposing amendments to the Order № 99/N issued by the Minister of Education and Science of Georgia on October 1, 2010, titled “On the Approval of the Regulation and Fees for Authorization of Education Institutions” was issued. These amendments encompassed several updates including new standards for authorization of General Educational institutions; revised procedures for authorization of general educational institutions, and updated fees for authorization of General Educational Institutions. The presented changes ensure the development of internal and external quality assurance mechanisms of the General Educational system.

In the process of implementing updated quality assurance mechanisms, in 2023, the capabilities were strengthened of General Educational institutions and all stakeholders involved in the authorization process, namely, public and private schools, the General Educational Institutions Authorization Council, members of the General Educational Institutions Authorization Expert Pools, and representatives of Educational Resource Centers (ERCs). 8 working meetings of the coordination group created in connection with the implementation of the updated standards of the authorization of the General Educational institution and the managing of the authorization process of public schools were held. According to the interests of the institutions, individual support and consultation of general education institutions was carried out on the issues to implement new standards and various administrative proceedings (authorization, addition of general education program, change of the place/space of implementation of the general education program, increase of the maximum number of student places for general educational institutions) A cycle of trainings were held in connection with all four standards of authorization of the general educational institution. About 500 public, 200 private schools and other stakeholders were consulted individually regarding the authorization issues.

Regarding the authorization process, 5 extended informational meetings were held with representatives of public schools, along with an additional 5 meetings with representatives of private schools. To enhance the capability of Educational Resource Centers, online training was conducted for the employees of all ERCs throughout Georgia, specifically focusing on the authorization procedures of general educational institutions (comprising 2 training sessions). Additionally, a series of three-day training (in 4 training groups) was held for ERC specialists and 2 meetings for ERC leaders regarding the authorization procedures of public schools (importance of the compliance plan and the role of the ERC in the process of its implementation; needs of schools; consulting of schools)

Furthermore, drafts legislative and by -laws changes were developed in the direction of quality assurance of general education (Law of Georgia on General Education; Law of Georgia on Development of Quality of Education; Law of Georgia on Authorization of Educational Institutions and Approval of Fees, Order of the Minister of Education and Science No. 99/N of October 1, 2010) were approved: New authorization forms regarding the implementation of general educational activities (In total 6 forms), in order to obtain the status of a general educational institution, the procedure for submitting an authorization application to the Center and the form of informing about the implementation of the recommendations issued by the Council for the Authorization of General Educational Institutions.

In line with the updated regulations and standards, various methodological documents and guidelines were implemented and published on the Center's website. In order to implement the approaches focused on national minorities, information material on the rights of students and their protection mechanisms was prepared in Armenian and Azerbaijani languages and publicly placed on the website of the National Center

for the Educational Quality Enhancement (<https://eqe.ge/ka/page/static/1022/mostsavleta-uflebebi>).

A new self-assessment questionnaire of general educational institutions was developed in Georgian and translated into Armenian and Azerbaijani languages. The electronic self-assessment platform was adapted on the Azerbaijani and Armenian languages. The draft of the rule of self-assessment by the general educational institution was developed.

Administrative Procedures in the General Educational Institution

As a part of the General Educational Quality Assurance reform, after the new Authorization Standards and updated procedures came into action in 2023, the procedures of gradual authorization of public schools also began. 339 public school authorization applications were submitted to the Center. In 2023, 332 administrative proceedings of Public schools were finished. The decision on the authorization of all schools, together with the relevant reports and the attached protocol, is published on the website of the Center (<https://eqe.ge/ka/page/static/973/daskvnebi-gadatsyvetilebebi>).

In 2023, 310 three-level and 22 two-level public schools were authorized. An informational document about authorized schools, including the mentioned 332 public schools, is presented on the following link: <https://eqe.ge/ka/page/static/93/zogadsaganmanatleblo-datseebulebebi>.

Trial evaluations of authorization were conducted in 3 public and 6 private general education institutions according to the updated standards and procedures. Simulation evaluations of authorization were carried out in those private general educational institutions that have to be reauthorized in 2024 and expressed their readiness to be involved in the simulation procedure.

In 2023, the administrative proceeding of authorization of 55 private schools was completed (49 administrative proceedings started in 2022 and was carried out under the old regulations, and 6 administrative proceedings were carried out under the updated regulations). In addition, the following administrative proceedings related to private schools ended in 2023: Verification of the fulfillment of authorization conditions (monitoring) - 8, increasing the maximum number of places for students - 6; addition of general educational program - 4; change of place/space of program implementation-18; recognition of foreign recognized general educational program in Georgia - 2.

Additionally, new forms of evaluation of experts participating in administrative proceedings were implemented. An analysis of the reports of the authorization expert groups was prepared in the direction of the identified inaccuracies. The purpose of the analysis was to identify systemic problems. In total, 332 reports of public-school expert groups were analyzed. The results of the analysis were presented to all stakeholders on an expert conference, a coordination council meeting and an informational meeting for schools.

Authorization Council of the General Educational Institutions

In 2023, the new composition of the General Educational Institutions Authorization Council¹ was appointed, and the term of appointment of the Council members was set for two years. To enhance the capability of the members of the authorization Council of general educational institutions, 2 trainings were held regarding the new authorization standards and updated regulations. Additionally, an external

¹ Order No. 17 of the Prime Minister of Georgia, dated February 8, 2023

workshop was held in connection with the meeting of the simulation authorization Council of public schools.

The Council meetings are public. The number of meetings of the Authorization Council of General Educational Institutions - 71 meetings in total (January - 4; February - 4; March - 4; April - 2; May - 5; June - 2; July - 1; August - 5; September - 10; October - 13; November - 13; December - 8). In addition, the number of meetings of the Appeals Council - in total 3 meetings (January 12; May 24; July 20)

Authorization Expert Pool of General Education Institutions

A new body of experts for the Authorization of General Educational Institutions was approved, and in 2023, for the first time, in accordance with the new regulations, schools were evaluated by General Educational Quality Assurance experts and General Educational Quality Assurance subject experts. In order to strengthen the capabilities of experts, trainings and workshops were held regarding the authorization process, new standards and evaluation.

A three-day training was held for General Educational Quality Assurance experts, in total 4 trainings (about 160 people attended), and 4 two-day trainings were held for subject experts (with a total of 260 participants). Furthermore, 7 working/informational content meetings were held with the experts (to discuss technical issues of preparing draft reports; Also, discussion of the presentation to be presented on the Council meetings; maintaining a unified approach in administrative proceedings).

In the end of 2023, the Center organized a conference of experts, which aimed to summarize the circumstances revealed during the authorization proceedings and share experience among experts.

Quality Assurance of Early and Preschool Education

Reform of the Early and Preschool Education Quality Assurance System

Within the framework of the ongoing reform in the direction of early and preschool education, the resolution of the Government of Georgia was approved - "On the approval of the temporary rule for the Authorization of early and/or preschool education and educational institutions, as well as the suspension and termination of the authorization of the institution", the order of the Minister of Education and Science of Georgia - "Rule of selection of members of the authorization council of early and pre-school education and educational institutions". An authorization Council² of early and pre-school education and educational institution was created, which consists of 8 members. In order to strengthen the capabilities of the Council, a three-day working meeting was held within the framework of the sub-program for the promotion of kindergarten diagnostic self-assessment.

A quality assurance framework for early and preschool upbringing and education was created, which regulates the authorization process, defines authorization standards, and establishes requirements for building infrastructure and material-technical base arrangements.

Standard N4 on "Support of the upbringing and educational process" was implemented and approved for early upbringing education and/or pre-school upbringing and education and educational institution authorization. Questionnaires for assessing the compliance of the institution/institution status seeker with

² By order No. 168 of the Prime Minister of Georgia, dated September 19, 2023

the requirements determined by the decrees in the direction of sanitary-hygienic norms, food organization and food quantity and building infrastructure and material resources.

In addition, following was implemented and approved by the order of the Director of the Center:

- ✓ A draft of the Rules for the selection of experts for the authorization of the Early Upbringing and Education and/or Preschool Upbringing and education and Educational institution, was also prepared including their activities and termination of membership of the expert pool;
- ✓ The questionnaire form for the assessment of the performance of the expert group by the early upbringing and education and/or preschool upbringing and education and educational institution;
- ✓ the form of the questionnaire for the evaluation of the panel members performance by the chairman of the expert group and/or the person determined by the National Center for Educational Quality Enhancement;
- ✓ the questionnaire form for the evaluation of the performance of the chairman of the panel by the members of the expert group and/or the person determined by the National Center for Educational Quality Enhancement;
- ✓ Code of ethics for experts in early upbringing and education and/or pre-school upbringing and education and educational institution authorization.

In 2023, preparatory work was carried out in order to fulfill the obligation defined by the Law of Georgia on Early and Preschool upbringing and Education by 2024. In particular, a methodology for the analysis of the results of self-assessments of institutions was prepared, according to which the list developed on the processed data will be the basis for the schedule for the authorization of kindergartens. According to the methodology, 10 analysts were trained, which ensures the readiness of the system to fulfill the obligation defined by the Law of Georgia on early and preschool upbringing and education by 2024.

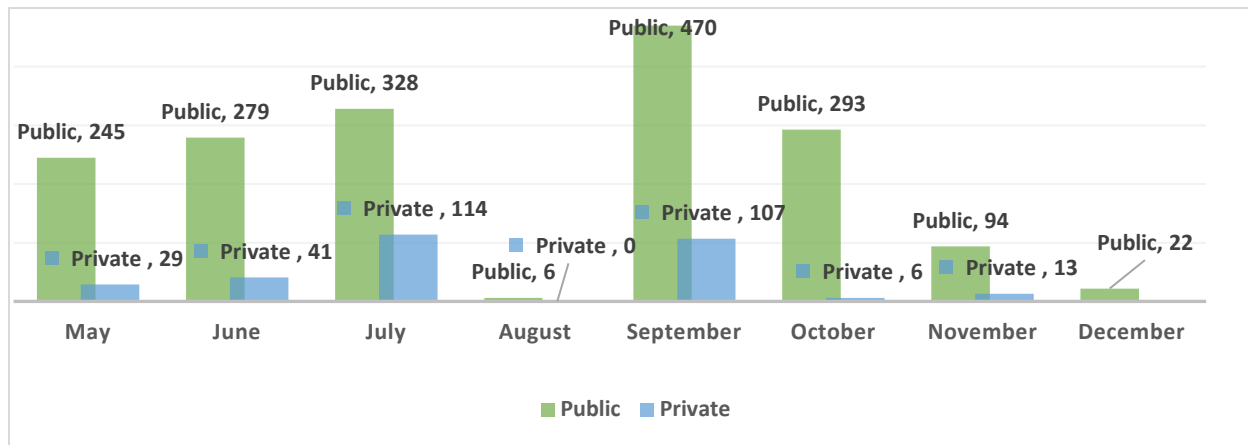
Conducting Institutions' Self-assessment

Self-assessment electronic platform "Kg.eqe.ge" was piloted. In the first stage, a concept was prepared, pilot institutions were selected and communication was established with them in order to obtain informed consent for participation in the process. Pilot was conducted in seven Institutions. As a result, the identified errors were eliminated and the platform was prepared for functioning.

Self-assessment questionnaires in Armenian and Azerbaijani language were prepared and integrated into the platform for the parties involved in the self-assessment process (parent/legal representative, educational staff, technical staff).

The coordinated management of the institution's self-assessment process was based on the concept of self-assessment and was distributed over a period of 8 months - from May to December 2023. During the distribution, the period of summer vacations of kindergartens, the geographical and climate conditions of the mountainous regions and other specific conditions were taken into consideration. The process took place with intense workload; however, it was accompanied with individual specificities.

The process of implementation of self-assessments by the kindergartens was carried out with the support of the Center. In particular, the self-assessment specialists were selected from the certified specialists of early and preschool upbringing and education quality assurance of the National Center for Educational Quality Enhancement. A self-assessment specialist was attached to each facility individually and had a 5-6-week period of support. In mutual agreement with each Kindergarten, the specialist had to develop a plan-schedule of supportive activities, where information about trainings/meetings/site visits and exact dates of completion of works were outlined.



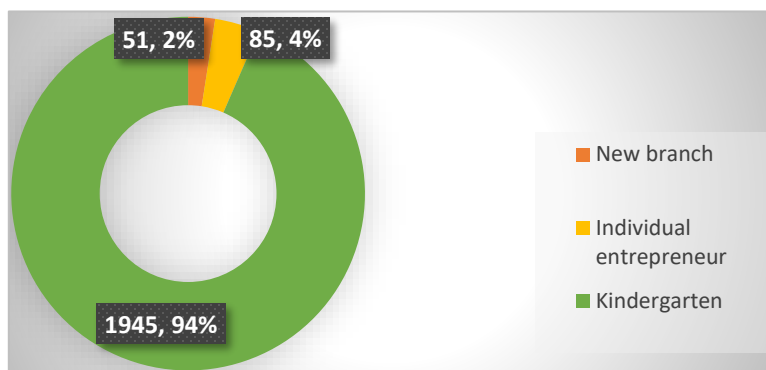
In the process of self-assessment, additional information is collected according to the location of each institution, human resources and material-technical base, infrastructural equipment, photos and a report on the progress of the process and main challenges.

Graph 4: Registered Institutions

One of the most important stages of the diagnostic self-assessment process is the analysis of the information obtained as a result of the self-assessment. For this purpose, within the framework of the sub-program, a self-assessment analysis methodology and a relevant tool were developed. The implemented documentation enables the calculation of scores for evaluations of institutions and analysts, thereby determining the conditional rating score of each kindergarten. This rating score serves as the basis for creating the authorization schedule for these institutions.

Analysts with appropriate qualifications were selected and trained for the analysis of self-assessments carried out by the institution. The training took place in a mixed format, with on-site attendance and remotely, the authors of the methodology introduced the analysts to the content issues, the specificity of the methodology, the technical directions of data processing and the implemented tools.

During the reporting period, early childhood and/or preschool upbringing and education service provider institutions/individual entrepreneurs were registered, who submitted self-assessment according to the legislation. As of December 31, 2022, 1,945 institutions were registered in the electronic system of initial registration, as of March 31, 2023, 85 service provider entities registered as individual entrepreneurs were added to the mentioned amount and as of October 15, 51 branches of existing institutions were added.



34 institutions informed the Center about the termination of their activities.

As a result, as of 2023, 2,047 kindergartens are functioning within the framework of the legislation. Self-assessment by 2,047 institutions is submitted on the electronic platform.

Experts Pool of Early and Preschool Upbringing and Educational Authorization

According to the order of the Director of the Center, an authorization experts' pool was created, which includes 24 curriculum experts, 30 experts in the field of nutrition, 31 experts in sanitary and hygienic norms, and 50 quality assurance experts.

In order to strengthen the capabilities of the members of the authorization experts' pool, in accordance with the topics defined by 5 training modules, the Center conducted trainings.

- In order to strengthen curriculum experts, 2 two-day trainings were held on the topic of "curriculum assessment";
- In order to strengthen experts in the field of nutrition, a two-day training was held;
- In order to strengthen the experts in the field of sanitary and hygienic norms, a two-day training was held;
- In order to strengthen quality assurance experts a two-day training was held.

Strengthening the Capabilities of Stakeholders in Early and Preschool Education

In 2023, the Center implemented a number of activities aimed to strengthen the capabilities of representatives of institutions operating in the private and public sector, municipalities and associations of kindergartens. The process included providing information on self-assessment and authorization, preparing supporting methodological documents and ensuring accessibility.

Within the framework of the United Nations Children's Fund - UNICEF project, a guideline regarding standards for authorization of early upbringing and education and/or pre-school upbringing and education was prepared, which covers the components of all four authorization standards 2,200 copies of the guidelines were printed and distributed free of charge to 2,047 institutions registered in the electronic system of initial registration 5 methodological guidelines were prepared within the sub-programme of diagnostic self-assessment of kindergartens Guideline of the authorization process, methodological guideline of strategic planning, methodology and tools for determining the maximum number of children, methodology for drawing up a communication plan methodology, developing a regulatory tools and mechanism for food organization and food quantity nutritional value norms.

In order to strengthen the capabilities of the involved parties, workshops were held throughout Georgia, which included meetings with representatives of private and public kindergartens, associations of kindergartens and municipalities. In particular, in order to raise awareness and with involvement of 68 municipality and kindergartens associations 6 online meetings were held on the topic of: "The role and responsibility of municipalities in the process of self-assessment and authorization". In order to raise the awareness of the representatives of the association of kindergartens, two two-day intensive workshops were held. By the initiative of the Batumi Kindergartens Association, a two-day workshop was held within the framework of the sub-programme for the managers of the municipalities of Adjara region, associations of kindergartens and public kindergartens of Batumi on the topics of early and preschool upbringing and education quality reform and authorization standards. For representatives of private kindergartens, four

intensive online format workshops were held regarding the issues of early and preschool upbringing and education quality reform and authorization standards. Involvement and awareness of stakeholders in early and preschool upbringing and educational quality reform issues is increased.

Chapter III. National Qualifications Development

Changes in the Classifier of Fields of Study

The initiatives were prepared for changes in the study field classifier, as a result document was updated 5 times during 2023³. Changes were made in the description of six detailed fields in the classifier: "Educational Science", "Audiovisual Methods and Media Production/production", "Performing Arts", "Therapy and Rehabilitation", "Transport Services", "Sports". The following fields of study are removed from the classifier: Academic Choir Conducting, Symphony Orchestra Conducting, Literature Studies, Comparative Literature Studies/Comparative Literature research and from the second column Conflict Studies. The names of the detailed fields have been changed to the following four fields - Educational Science, Theatrology, Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation, Maritime Science. The following four fields of study were added to the classifier in the first column: Musical arts, literature studies, comparative literature studies/comparative literature research, transportation services, ground transportation process services. In the third column of the classifier, three fields of study were added to the fields of vocational education - "cargo expedition", "warehouse operation" and "steel and concrete works".

Changes Related to National Qualifications

In the fields of study located in the detailed field of music and performing arts, qualification granting possibilities have been specified in accordance with the references/terms in brackets. "environment", "agriculture", "forestry", "personal services" and "engineering and engineering work" were also specified. Also, formulations of the titles of qualifications corresponding to the Maritime Engineering and Maritime Electrical Engineering. The deadlines for submitting the self-assessment report for the purpose of determining the compliance of the higher educational programs and the Georgian language training educational program, the teacher training educational program and the veterinary training educational program with the "National Qualifications Framework" and the "Study Fields Classifier" were determined.

Sectoral Benchmarks

With the involvement of all stakeholders and in accordance with the cluster accreditation plan, sectoral councils were created, 12 sectoral benchmarks were developed by them - the sectoral benchmarks of higher education of educational policy, the sectoral benchmarks of higher education of literature studies and comparative literature studies/comparative research of literature, sectoral benchmarks of higher education of music and performing arts, sectorial benchmarks of higher education of finance, sectorial benchmarks of higher education of business administration, sectorial benchmarks of higher education of marketing. The sectoral benchmarks of higher education of dentistry (developed in the field of regulated studies according to the European directive), the sectoral benchmarks of higher education of land transportation process services, the sectoral benchmarks of higher education of sports, the sectoral benchmarks of higher education of teacher education. 6 sectorial documents have been updated/modified: Sectoral benchmarks of higher education of maritime engineering, sectorial benchmarks of higher education of maritime electrical engineering, sectorial benchmarks of higher education of maritime

³ [17/11/2023 – Order of the Minister of Georgia - 123/N - webpage, 21/11/2023; 15. 17/11/2023 - Order of the Minister of Georgia - 122/N - webpage, 20/11/2023; 20/09/2023 - Order of the Minister of Georgia - 89/N - webpage, 21/09/2023; 13. 27/07/2023 Order of the Minister of Georgia - 71/N - webpage, 31/07/2023; 12. 06/07/2023 - Order of the Minister of Georgia - 62/N - webpage, 06/07/2023.](#)

science, updated sectorial benchmarks of higher education of conflictology, sectorial benchmarks of higher education of sports, sectorial benchmarks of higher education of teacher education.

In 2023, 188 working meetings were held with various sectoral councils, and 24 consultation meetings. Financial and intellectual funds were raised in the process of developing the sectoral benchmarks of higher education, specifically:

In order to share international best practices in the process of developing the sectoral benchmarks of public administration higher education, a foreign expert was invited with the cooperation of the Center and the USAID public administration program and their financial support, who drew important findings and based on this a package of recommendations was prepared for the sectoral council. In addition, in order to develop the document of the sectoral benchmark of public administration higher education, the final meeting was held, where the council members had face to face meeting with the invited expert.

With the financial support of the USAID Education for the Future program, a two-day working meeting was held in Natakhtari. The meeting was held with the participation of the sectoral council, the Center and stakeholders, the purpose of which was to develop the draft of the sectoral benchmarks of the teacher training program (60 credits) of higher education.

Other Significant Activities

During the reporting period, the existing concept for the development of the electronic register of national qualifications was modified and the relevant technical task was developed. Tasks of the register were prepared by the working group. In order to create an electronic register of qualifications, the concept of an electronic register of national qualifications was developed with the support of experts from the EU project - "Technical support for the development of relevant skills for the labor market in Georgia". In the development of the portal, the Educational Management Information System is involved.

Chapter IV. Development of Services

Development of Educational Services

During the reporting period, a number of international practices were analyzed in the direction of the development of educational services and instructions were developed, including the guidelines for the recognition of general education received during the period of study abroad in general educational institutions, for current and future employees of the Educational Services Development Service Eflow video tutorials and PDF manuals, manuals on educational services for employees of the various departments of the Center involved in service delivery (Human Resources Management and proceedings Management; Public Relations and Organization Department).

A report was written on the principles of automatic recognition of international practices. Automatic recognition on the systematic level is the guaranteed recognition of the relevant degree without going through a separate recognition procedure (Bachelor = Bachelor and Master = Master). A foreign diploma is recognized at the same level and grants the same academic rights in another European Higher Education Area (EHEA) country as it has in the issuing country. Automatic recognition (access) does not indicate automatic admission in higher educational institutions. Qualifications and learning outcomes at the program level are still subject to outcome assessment to determine whether a qualification meets the specific requirements and criteria for admission to a particular study program. In most countries of the European Higher Education Area (EHEA), student admission is the prerogative of higher educational institutions. In the European region, within the framework of the implementation of the obligations assumed by the Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications Related to Higher Education - the Lisbon Convention, the Bucharest Communiqué adopted in 2012, the participating countries of the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) for the first time committed to the long-term goal of automatic recognition of relevant academic degrees. The Center reviewed the experiences of the 5 ENIC-NARIC member countries in an analysis document on automatic recognition. The analysis document provides an overview of regional and intergovernmental agreements on automatic recognition: Baltic (Republic of Lithuania, Republic of Latvia, Republic of Estonia); Baltic-Benelux (Flemish Community of Belgium, French Community of Belgium, German-speaking Community of Belgium, Grand Duchy of Luxembourg, Kingdom of the Netherlands) Nordic Region (Kingdom of Denmark, Republic of Finland, Iceland, Kingdom of Norway, Kingdom of Sweden, Faroe Islands, Greenland, Åland Islands). The analysis of the current practice of automatic recognition has shown that the implementation of the reforms of higher education in Georgia, the full implementation of tools developed in the context of the European higher education space, such as quality assurance standards and guidelines, the European system of transfer and accumulation of credits, the European qualification framework for higher education and the 3 cycle system, will contribute to automatic implementation of recognition mechanisms. They will also facilitate mobility and higher education cooperation in Europe, facilitate access to education and most importantly help Georgian educational system to align with the obligations of the Lisbon Recognition Convention (LRC). In the future perspective, the introduction of the mentioned mechanisms will help Georgia become a full member of the European Union, and education will be reliable and of high quality.

An analysis of international practices was carried out on the topic - "Similarities and differences in the recognition procedure for the purposes of continuing education or employment (regulated professions)". A document has been developed that reviews the practices and experiences of the following countries, the

similarities and differences of the recognition procedure in the context of continuing education or employment (regulated professions): Kingdom of Norway; Republic of Estonia; Republic of Finland; Republic of Italy; Federal Republic of Germany; Kingdom of the Netherlands; Republic of Bulgaria; Republic of Lithuania; United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland. The analysis of the current practice of automatic recognition has shown that the implementation of Georgian higher education reforms, the full implementation of tools developed in the context of the European higher education space, such as quality assurance standards and guidelines, the European system of transfer and accumulation of credits, the European qualification framework for higher education and the 3-cycle system, will facilitate automatic implementation of recognition mechanisms. It will also promote mobility and cooperation related to higher education in Europe, it will simplify access to education and most importantly help Georgia's educational system to be in line with the obligations of the Lisbon Recognition Convention (LRC), which Georgia is obliged to implement. In addition, it is important to note that the European Commission has already recommended granting Georgia the status of a candidate country of the European Union. In the perspective of the future, the implementation of the mentioned mechanisms will help Georgia become a full member of the European Union, with quality and reliable education.

The international practice of "recognition of higher education received in a distance form, including in the context of quality assurance" was studied, in which the practice and experience of the following countries were reviewed, in the context of the recognition of higher education obtained in a distance from abroad and the implementation of higher education programs in a distance form: United Kingdom, Kingdom of Sweden, Ukraine, Estonia, Poland, Malta. At this stage in Georgia, distance education is not subject to recognition. In particular, the National Center for Educational Quality Enhancement leads Georgia in the recognition of education received abroad in accordance with international agreements, legislative and sub-legal normative acts of Georgia and this rule. The legal act in the field of higher education in Georgia represents recognition of higher education received in a distance form and the international practice of quality assurance mechanisms, the Law of Georgia "On Higher Education".

Statistical Data on Educational Services Provided in 2023



Scheme 1. Statistical data on educational services provided in 2023.

Accreditation of the Public Servant Professional Development Program

In 2023, five institutions implementing professional development programs for professional civil servants presented the self-evaluation report for the first time: these are: Defense Institution Building School; LEPL - Training Center of Justice of Georgia; (LEPL) Zurab Zhvania School of Public Administration; LEPL - Public Audit Institute; LEPL - The Academy of the Ministry of Finance. Self-evaluation analysis was carried out during the reporting period. The study identified challenges at the systemic level, and in response, developmental recommendations were formulated.

Two working meetings were held with the newly composed Accreditation Council for the Professional Public Official and Professional Development Programs. During the meeting, discussions were held regarding the standards and indicators outlined in the accreditation statute for professional development

programs of public officials, as well as the accreditation process and operational rules of the Council for Accreditation of professional development programs for professional public officials. The discussions encompassed the issues associated with coordinating cooperation between the Accreditation Council and the Center, as well as the challenges in the program implementation process, in particular: the challenges related to the implementation of professional development programs using electronic learning methods/forms and ensuring the objectivity and relevance of the trainee evaluation process.

Two accreditation proceedings were carried out. (LEPL) Center of Electoral Systems Development, Reforms and Training received accreditation on the "Personal and Professional Competences Development Course" within the program Professional Development of a Public Official in the form of classroom training. The Public Audit Institute was awarded the accreditation of the professional development programs for public officials in the form of an electronic course in "Officer Managerial Skills" and "Development of Personal and Professional Competencies".

In 2023, 7 consultations were conducted with accredited institutions of the professional development program for professional public officials, encompassing both remote and face-to-face formats.

Chapter V. Internationalization

Cooperation and Visits with Quality Assurance Agencies

Cooperation with the European Association for Higher Education Quality Assurance (ENQA)

In 2023 National Center for Educational Quality Enhancement hosted the annual international ENQA Members' Forum. The Center was chosen as a host based on the decision of the ENQA Governing Board. The forum was attended by: the representatives from 32 European countries, heads of 55 quality assurance agencies, representatives from various agencies, heads of the European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education (EQAR), representatives from the Association of European Universities, members of the European Students' Association, and representatives from the Bologna Process Working Group and their respective delegates. The participants discussed current issues and trends related to higher education policy and quality assurance issues within the European area. The decision of the ENQA Board that Georgia and the Center would host the annual international forum reaffirms that recent changes in higher education quality assurance align with common European standards and approaches⁴.

In 2023, the National Center for Educational Quality Enhancement completed its work on renewing the ENQA membership status⁵. For this purpose, the Center prepared a self-assessment report and submitted it to ENQA. The report presents the development indicators and outcomes achieved during the period following 2019. Based on the report and the application submitted, an external evaluation by ENQA was conducted in October 2023. The results of the assessment will be announced in 2024. Based on the initial opinions expressed by the experts, the Center expects a positive final assessment. It is important to highlight that the Center's membership in ENQA serves as a fundamental prerequisite, ensuring the alignment and harmonization of the national higher education system with European education systems through sharing the exchange of European values. This, in turn, contributes to the simplification of procedures for the recognition of qualifications issued in Georgia abroad.

Sharing International Experience

Funded by the USAID's follow-on project, Promoting the Rule of Law in Georgia (PROLoG), the representatives from the Center visited Germany. During their visit, they familiarized themselves with the specific activities and operations of the quality assurance agency FIBAA. They shared their institutional evaluation experience, focusing on program evaluation and systematic evaluation. They engaged in detailed discussions regarding the implementation of the law educational program, including its external and internal quality assurance mechanisms. Additionally, they explored the specifics of graduates entering the legal profession. It is worth noting the systematic assessment model, according to which the German Quality Assurance Agency studies the internal quality assurance mechanisms of higher educational institutions as part of the external assessment of quality assurance. Under this model, the higher educational institution itself is responsible for accrediting educational programs and ensuring quality monitoring during program implementation. It is possible to consider this model as one of the potential prospects for the development of quality assurance mechanisms in operation within Georgia.

Researching international practices is crucial for the Center. For this purpose, the Center obtained funding from the American Congress within the framework of the "Open World Leadership Program" and the Center's employees and representatives of the state higher educational institutions of Georgia were on a

⁴ <https://www.enqa.eu/events/enqa-members-forum-2023/>

⁵ Since 2019, the center has been a full member of the mentioned organization.

study visit to the United States of America. The Center is keen on collaborating with international quality assurance agencies, including those operating in the United States of America.

To enhance and optimize the internationalization of Georgian higher education and improve recognition of education and qualifications obtained abroad, it is important for the Center to conduct research on international practices and implement successful approaches within the Georgian higher education framework. It is also important to collaborate with American higher education institutions and quality assurance agencies. This cooperation will enable the relevant services of the Center, such as the Higher Education Quality Assurance Department and the Educational Services Development Department, to gain insights into quality assurance mechanisms. Ultimately, this collaboration will enhance the quality and international accreditation of Georgian universities, including recognition of programmatic accreditation issued by American agencies. Finally, these processes will facilitate mobility and professional development opportunities for students and academic staff, enhancing their career prospects, and academic experiences. During the working visit, the project participants visited several American higher education institutions, including: Clark University; Worcester Polytechnic Institute - WPI; Harvard University; University of New Hampshire; University of Southern Maine; University of New England. During the visit, project participants and representatives from host institutions engaged in discussions regarding internal and external mechanisms for ensuring the quality of education. They explored issues such as teaching and learning methodologies in universities in the USA, management practices for research and educational institutions, quality assurance mechanisms, admission prerequisites for educational programs, and important considerations related to qualification recognition.

The representative of the Center attended the ASIIN Global Conference organized by the German quality assurance agency ASIIN. The conference focused on topics related to the integration of artificial intelligence into the educational process and its impact on quality assurance processes. During 2024, it is planned to organize a workshop to share the experience with the higher educational institutions of Georgia. It is important that the Academy in Georgia reaches a consensus regarding the feasibility of integrating artificial intelligence into the teaching-learning process.

Furthermore, the representative of the Center attended the conference organized by the Association of Academic Cooperation and the Czech National Agency for International Education and Research. Additionally, employee mobility was conducted in Tallinn, Estonia, as part of the Thematic Peer Group on Quality Assurance (TPG C on QA). During the mobility program, participants familiarized themselves with the specific operations of the Estonian Quality Assurance Agency and subsequently shared their experiences with employees at the Center.

The representatives of the Center participated in the 30th annual meeting of the "European Information Centers and National Academic Recognition Information Network" (ENIC-NARIC Network) in Stockholm, Sweden. EB/NAB (ENIC Bureau (EB) and NARIC Advisory Board (NAB) within the 2021-2023 work plan implementation report shared the results achieved in two years. At the meeting, the UNESCO representative spoke about the importance of the Global Convention on the Recognition of Education. The convention has gained the necessary amount of support to enter into force, and accordingly, its more active implementation will begin. Currently, 26 countries worldwide have become parties to the convention. Some countries are in the process of ratification. As part of the global convention, there are plans to establish an information network similar to ENIC-NARIC for the participating parties. At this stage, Georgia has not yet ratified the above-mentioned convention, but active work has been started in this direction. Unlike the Lisbon Convention, the 2019 Convention encompasses not only the European region but the entire world. Accordingly, it is important for Georgia to join the above-mentioned convention and to establish active communication with the participating parties, since, to get higher education in Georgia,

students come from non-European areas, and subsequently, the issue of recognition of diplomas issued in Georgia will arise more often in those countries than in the European area.

In addition, workshops were held on various issues. During the meeting, completed, ongoing, and planned grant projects of the European Council and the European Commission related to the implementation of the Lisbon Convention were reviewed. It should be noted that in 2023, the Center won a grant from the European Council within the framework of a grant competition. The grant is aimed at facilitating the promotion of the implementation of the procedure for recognizing the education received by refugees. The importance of the project and its value in the implementation process of the Lisbon Convention were acknowledged and emphasized at the meeting. Furthermore, during the session, the latest, developed good practices and tools used in the context of automatic recognition within the network were shared.

The representative of the Center won the competition of the Academy of Young Professionals (SAYP) of the Swedish Institute (SI) and was granted the opportunity to participate in the educational training module titled "Cooperation beyond Borders - Transnational Public Administration and Organizing (TPAO)," created by Södertörn University in Stockholm.

The main component of the module involved discussing an international activity, project, or service carried out within the context of transnational public administration in each participant's respective organization. The theoretical aspect of the module focused on the four main pillars of public administration, namely collaborative capabilities, resources and networks, power influences, and reforms.

As part of the project "TPG-LRC Constructing Recognition in the EHEA - TPG-LRC CoRE," the Center's application was chosen for participation in training activities provided by staff mobility at "CIMEA" in Rome, Italy. Within the framework of the mentioned project, representatives from both sending and host countries exchanged experiences and knowledge regarding various issues such as forming the legal framework for implementing the Learning Recognition Center (LRC), qualifications of refugees, and their recognition, and etc. regarding these issues. Additionally, two representatives from the Center were chosen to participate in a workshop for employees handling documents issued in Slavic and Arabic-speaking countries as part of the "TST2 - ENIC-NARIC support" project. The meeting on the recognition processes of documents issued in Slavic-speaking countries was hosted by the Polish ENIC-NARIC Center in Warsaw. On the other hand, the meeting focusing on procedures for recognizing documents issued in Arabic-speaking countries was hosted by the Swedish ENIC-NARIC Center in Stockholm.

Additionally, the Center received full funding from the Technical Assistance and Information Exchange (TAIEX) of the European Commission for a study visit to the Republic of Estonia. A study visit was held in Tallinn, Republic of Estonia, in which representatives of the Center and the National Center for Teacher Professional Development (TPDC) participated. During the visit, various issues were discussed, including internal quality systems of general education institutions, teachers' professional development, school autonomy, student evaluation system, school curriculum and school self-assessment. During this visit, plans were made for future mutual cooperation, aiming to align the quality of education in general educational institutions with European standards and procedures.

The Center participated in an international conference held in Yerevan, Armenia, titled "Equipping stakeholders with the necessary competencies to detect and combat educational fraud/DETECT." The conference served as a culmination event for the ENIC Center of Armenia within the framework of a project funded by the European Council.

The Center participated in the General Assembly of the Standing International Conference of Inspectorates (SICI) held in Bilbao, Spain. The assembly discussed various issues related to the development of quality in general educational institutions, including: Inspection role - improving the education system through research; research-based decision-making and improving the quality of secondary education institutions

benchmarking with successful models, such as those observed in England. At the General Assembly, it was decided that the main focus of SICI for 2024 will be "Inspection in a rapidly changing environment of the education system." The Center became a member of the mentioned organization in 2022, with its primary objective being to share international experiences and best practices in general education.

The Center participated in the General Assembly and Seminar of the Central and Eastern European Network of Quality Assurance Agencies (CEENQA) in Astana, Kazakhstan. The event was hosted by the Independent Agency for Accreditation and Rating of Kazakhstan (IAAR). The agencies reviewed current and newly implemented changes during the event. The representative of the Center presented the latest developments in higher education during the event, such as: the process of transition to cluster accreditation, hosting ENQA event in Georgia and involvement in international projects. A seminar on "People and Culture in Quality Assurance Agencies" was held. During the panel discussion, member agencies of CEENQA shared their experiences and best practices in human resource management, discussed the role of digitalization, and its impacts on quality assurance processes. It should be noted that the Center has been a member of CEENQA since 2020. The aim of the network is to contribute to the enhancement of quality assurance in higher education within the Central and Eastern European region.

The Center took part in the forum on quality assurance of professional education organized by the European Training Foundation (ETF) in the city of Kishinev, Republic of Moldova. The Center was invited by the Foundation to be an external evaluator of the quality assurance system of vocational education of the Republic of Moldova. The Center provided up to ten recommendations to its Moldovan colleagues for enhancing the quality of vocational education. An agreement was reached on certain issues of future cooperation, such as the use of evidence in the external quality assurance process, as well as the integration of EQAVET indicators into the quality assurance framework.

The Ministry of Education, Science, and Youth of Georgia, along with the Center, received an official invitation from the European Commission to nominate suitable candidates for the Advisory Council of the European Qualifications Framework. The decision of the European Commission stems from its resolution on June 23, 2022, by which the European Commission acknowledged Georgia's European perspective and progress towards joining the European Union.

The European Qualifications Framework Advisory Group is a representative body, aiming at implementing the principles and recommendations of the European Qualifications Framework, ensuring their transparency within the European higher education space. The advisory group consists of: the representatives of the structural units responsible for the administration of education in the European Commission and the Council of Europe, EU member states and EU strategic partner states. The European Commission's decision on Georgia to join the Advisory Group of the European Qualifications Framework is another recognition of the successful reforms that have been implemented in recent years, including the development of Georgia's higher education sector, elaboration and implementation of the National Qualifications Framework (NQF) and the study field classifier.

On June 19-20, 2023, the 62nd meeting of the Advisory Council of the European Qualifications Framework took place in Brussels, Belgium. The first item on the meeting's agenda was dedicated to the accession of new members, including Georgia and Moldova. The Center received an invitation to participate in a workshop from a representative of the European Training Foundation (ETF). The next meeting was held on June 28 to discuss potential cooperation with the Center within the framework of the Foundation's current project on the electronic register of qualifications.

Representatives of the Center attended the European Training Foundation (ETF) event titled "Advancing the Systems for Validation of Non-formal and Informal Learning" in Ankara, Republic of Turkey. Representatives from 16 countries attended the meeting. The event discussed mechanisms for recognizing

non-formal education, focusing on institutions with the authority to grant non-formal recognition, such as employers' unions.

The Center participated in the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA) assembly in Dublin, Ireland. The main issues discussed during the meeting were related to the recognition of qualifications in higher education, ongoing efforts concerning academic integrity, agenda items for the Bologna Ministerial in 2024 regarding quality assurance, and possibilities for developing European standards and guidelines for quality assurance in higher education (ESG-2015).

On July 4-5, 2023, the first session of the Intergovernmental Conference of the States Parties to the 2019 Global Convention on the Recognition of Higher Education Qualifications took place at the UNESCO office in Paris, France. A representative from the Center attended this session. During the session, discussions were held regarding the adoption of regulations for the Intergovernmental Conference of the States Parties to the Global Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications Related to Higher Education; presentation of basic principles by the Secretariat; report on the registered status of ratification; presentation of the 2023-2025 work program; determining the date and place of the next intergovernmental conference sessions; report on Regional Recognition Conventions. It is important to note that Georgia plans to ratify the global convention, and the process has already begun.

On November 17, 2023, an international forum was held in the city of Baku, Azerbaijan, which was attended by a representative from the Center. The forum aimed to discuss issues related to the recognition of educational documents at the IV and V levels of the European Qualifications Framework (EQF), as well as the recognition of online and distance education. Representatives of Azerbaijan, Turkey, United Kingdom, Malta, TAICEP and ETF participated in the forum.

Under the auspices of USAID - within the framework of "Learn Together Activity (LTA)", the center hosted a delegation of the Ministry of Education and Science of Tajikistan. The purpose of the visit was to share Georgia's experience of educational reforms, focusing on areas within the Center's competence, including: Preschool and General Education; High Education; Authorization and Accreditation issues. During the meeting, the Center introduced its main activities through the presentation to the Tajik colleagues. The delegation from the Ministry of Education and Science of Tajikistan positively evaluated the Center's activities and emphasized the importance of sharing the extensive and diverse experience of the Center on issues of quality assurance of education.

The Center hosted the representatives of the Estonian Centre for International Development (ESTDEV) and the Estonian Quality Agency for Education (HAKA). During the meeting, the parties discussed the main outcomes achieved through the agreement signed between the Estonian Centre for International Development (ESTDEV) and the National Center for Educational Quality Enhancement in 2023. The agreement aimed to support the development of internal quality systems in Georgia's general education institutions. The representatives from the Estonian Centre for International Development positively evaluated the activities conducted within the project and acknowledged the achieved results. Furthermore, during the meeting, the parties discussed future cooperation opportunities that would contribute to supporting the internal quality systems of general educational institutions in the country.

The representatives of the Center participated in a remote working meeting, the purpose of which was to share experiences related to the development of the system of qualifications in Georgia with the representatives of the higher education system of San Marino. The involvement of the Georgian side in the meeting was initiated by the working group of San Marino Bologna Process, which was established in 2021.

The aim of the group is to be supported by San Marino in joining the Bologna process. The representatives of the Center shared with their foreign colleagues the activities carried out in the direction of introducing

the updated national qualifications framework and study area classifier. They also discussed the future steps planned to ensure the alignment of the national qualification framework with the European qualification's frameworks.

Bologna Process Implementation Supervisory Board - BFUG

Organized by the Ministry of Education, Science, and Youth of Georgia and the National Center for Educational Quality Enhancement, with financial support from the Erasmus+ program, Georgia hosted events for the Thematic Group on National Qualifications of the Bologna Process (TPG A on QF). Participants included the Ministry of Education, Science, and Youth of Georgia, the higher education system, representatives from other relevant state agencies, higher education experts, and delegates from 25 countries participating in the Bologna process. During the two-day meeting, participants discussed the self-certification mechanism of the Bologna process, which allows countries to confirm the compatibility of their higher education systems with the common European higher education area. Additionally, they discussed the work accomplished by the group and outlined the next steps to be taken.

Since 2021, Georgia, along with Austria and Latvia, has co-chaired the thematic working group on the national qualification framework of the Bologna Process (TPG A on QF).

The purpose of the group is to promote the implementation of the key commitments and recommendations of the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) at the national level and to propose policy recommendations for the working structures of the Bologna Process. In the mentioned group, Georgia is represented by the National Center for Educational Quality Enhancement. 28-member countries of the Bologna process and European institutions are members of the group: European Commission, Council of Europe, European Student Union and European Union of Higher Education Institutions.

Representatives of the Center travelled to Vienna, Austria, to participate in the fifth workshop of the Peer Learning Activity (PLA) and Qualifications Framework Thematic Group (TPG A on QF). The workshop on Peer Learning Activity (PLA) focused on the implementation of one of the main commitments of the Bologna Process, national-level learning outcomes at the higher education level, discussions around the main challenges related to this implementation. The event was organized by the Austrian Ministry of Education as part of the "Qualifications Framework for Trust, Transparency, and Diversity (QUATRA)" project. The workshop on Peer Learning Activity (PLA) focused on the implementation of one of the main commitments of the Bologna Process, national-level learning outcomes at the higher education level, and discussions around the main challenges related to this implementation.

A representative from the Center participated in the Bologna Implementation Working Group meeting in Bucharest, Romania. The PLA-meeting was organized by the secretariat of the same group and EURASHE. The PLA meeting was focused on practical implementation mechanisms of student-centered teaching-learning approaches at the system level within the European higher education space. The Center participated in the work of the Bologna Implementation Teaching and Learning Working Group on drafting recommendations regarding the professional development of academic staff. At the forum of ENQA members, the Center presented a presentation on the topic - From Rome Ministerial Communique to real action: contribution of the Center in PROFFORMANCE+ for supporting enhancement of T&L in HE with the focus on sustainability, focusing on Georgia's experience and progress in integrating sustainability principles into Higher Education. This topic aligns with the emphasis placed on sustainability in the Rome Communique.

On April 27-28, 2023, the 5th TPG B on LRC meeting (5th TPG B on LRC meeting) was held in the city of Tirana, which was attended by the representatives of the Center. The following issues were discussed at

the meeting: Monitoring the implementation of the Lisbon Recognition Convention; the role of higher educational institutions in the process of recognition; the distribution of responsibilities among competent authorities that carry out recognition procedures.

The Center also participated in the PLA meeting of the Bologna Implementation Teaching-Learning Working Group, which focused on discussing practical implementation mechanisms for student-centered teaching-learning approaches at the system level within the European higher education space. The second part of the meeting involved small group work and discussions focused on preparing a draft note regarding student-centered learning in the Tirana Ministerial Communiqué. This draft note is intended to serve as the foundation for the Tirana Communiqué.

The Center also coordinated the work of a working group for the Tirana Ministerial Communiqué on ethical issues arising from the development of digitalization and artificial intelligence.

Signed Memoranda

Within the framework of the forum, memorandums of cooperation were signed, on the one hand, between the National Center for Educational Quality Enhancement and the German Foundation for International Business Administration Accreditation (FIBAA), on the other hand, between the Armenian National Center for Professional Education Quality Assurance Foundation (ANQA) and the Moldovan National Agency for Quality Assurance in Education and Research (ANACEC). The parties will collaborate to ensure the quality of higher education, which includes organizing various workshops, training sessions, and conferences. Additionally, staff members and experts in authorization and accreditation will participate in exchange programs.

The Center signed a memorandum of cooperation with the Latvian Academic Information Center (AIC). Within the framework of the memorandum, cooperation in developing the national qualifications framework and organizing joint events are envisaged as key areas of collaboration. Also, cooperation in the direction of higher education quality assurance mechanisms, recognition of diplomas and qualifications.

Membership in International Organizations and Networks

In 2023, the Center became a full member of the International Network of Quality Assurance Agencies of Higher Education - INQAAHE. INQAAHE is a global platform focused on improving internal and external quality assurance in higher education, the main goal of which is to develop and promote the improvement of the quality of higher education with the support of the international community. Today, it unites more than 300 quality assurance agencies and organizations worldwide working towards improving education quality. INQAAHE focuses on developing theory and practice in higher education quality assurance, quality improvement, conducting thematic research, sharing expert knowledge, and promoting international recognition of qualifications among agencies.

Membership in INQAAHE at the international level ensures increased recognition for the Center and fosters the establishment of international contacts, specifically in the development and promotion of higher education quality. By joining the network, the Center had the opportunity to cooperate with more than 300 quality assurance agencies that work worldwide in the direction of quality assurance in higher education. Additionally, the Center is given the opportunity to share best practices and experiences in various aspects of higher education quality assurance, participate in conferences and workshops, and showcase the country's higher education system on international platforms.

Georgia has become the 22nd partner country to join the European Qualifications Passport for Refugees. The European Qualifications Passport for Refugees (EQPR) serves as a practical tool that facilitates the swift integration of refugees into their new society. EQPR was developed in 2017 to assist member states in addressing the challenges posed by the refugee crisis. Additionally, the mentioned mechanism helps the refugees to organize their life in the host country. Specifically, this mechanism evaluates the qualifications of refugees, especially in cases where documentation is insufficient or limited.

The document does not constitute an official act of recognition; instead, it provides information about the applicant's education level, work experience, and language skills based on available data. The documentation provided by the refugee is assessed, and a structured interview is conducted as part of the evaluation process. As a result, the document contains reliable information that may be relevant for employment applications, internships, qualification courses, and study admissions. EQPR supports the implementation of Article VII of the Council of Europe/UNESCO Lisbon Recognition Convention. This facilitates the recognition of refugee qualifications even in cases where full documentation is unavailable. In 2023, the Center became a member of the European Association of Institutes for Vocational Training (EVBB). EVBB aims to enhance the quality of vocational education and training within European countries and at the European level. Becoming a member of the organization is a significant step for the country in terms of internationalizing professional education. It fosters cooperation among its members and facilitates the organization of professional education within member countries and at the European level. On the other hand, the mentioned processes ensure the Center's involvement in international discussions about education policy. International cooperation processes facilitate discussions on future cooperation initiatives, relevant activity issues, awareness-raising efforts, receiving expert support, and exchanging good practices mutually.

In 2023, the Center became a member of the Global Academic Integrity Network which is a consortium of education quality development agencies and authorities involved in higher education, coordinated by the Quality and Qualifications Agency of Ireland (QQI) and the Australian Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency (TEQSA). The aim of the network is to raise awareness among students about the dangers of academic fraud services, to implement mechanisms to eliminate such threats, and to maintain trust in national higher education systems at the international level. Types of academic fraud include: doing a paper/assignment for someone else, selling and buying someone else's work, and a student using someone else's work to get a grade. Commercial academic fraud is a widespread problem in many countries, which threatens students and the activities of higher education institutions, because its consequences directly affect the quality and credibility of Higher Education, both domestically and internationally. Membership in the network will allow the Center to share international experience in combating academic fraud and contribute to raising awareness of the threats it poses. Membership of the network will also help the Center to develop international cooperation in this direction and, in cooperation with higher education institutions, to contribute to the development of existing regulatory frameworks at the national level in order to reduce the threats posed by services and platforms that promote academic fraud.

International Projects

To promote the implementation of the Lisbon Convention and improve the mechanism for recognizing refugees' education, the Center implemented a project under the Council of Europe's grant program - "Promoting the implementation of procedures for recognizing education received by refugees." The Center received a grant for the project within the framework of a small grant competition organized by the Council of Europe. The grant competition aimed to support the ENIC Centers of participating countries in implementing their obligations under the Lisbon Convention within the Council of Europe's education

program. The Center participated in the grant competition on behalf of Georgia, the submitted grant application received full funding from the Competition Commission of the Council of Europe.

The project was created to support policies, mechanisms, and procedures for recognizing the education of refugees and individuals with refugee status (including those with international protection, asylum seekers, or similar statuses) and to review Georgia's legislative framework related to this matter. The project aimed to promote Georgia's educational system, particularly in terms of education recognition, to ensure compliance with the obligations outlined in the Lisbon Recognition Convention (LRC). Additionally, the project aimed to support the Center as an institution to effectively manage recognition mechanisms and procedures. Within the project framework, the Center conducted a study of best international practices related to the recognition of refugee and international protection status education. This included assessing higher educational institutions' readiness. The outcomes will be used to develop a guide and conduct training sessions for higher educational institutions and relevant stakeholders. Information brochures for potential applicants will also be prepared based on these findings.

In 2023, the Center implemented the project "Development of the Internal Quality Assurance System of General Educational Institutions" as part of the grant agreement with the Estonian Centre for International Development (ESTDEV). The project aimed to support the enhancement of the internal quality assurance system in general educational institutions. This included analyzing internal quality mechanisms according to new Authorization Standards, developing methodological materials and guidelines for improving the internal quality system, and building the capacities of General Educational institutions to ensure effective internal quality mechanisms. As part of the project, 15 active General Educational institutions were selected based on geographical coverage considerations. Their school self-assessment reports were analyzed and key findings and challenges were identified, and internal quality assurance mechanisms in secondary schools were analyzed in accordance with the new accreditation standards. The following key challenges were identified according to the four standards. Within the framework of the project, methodological documents/guidelines of a recommendatory nature were developed to support the internal quality development of General Educational Institutions. Based on the mentioned recommendation manuals, general educational institutions developed internal regulatory rules in 6 main directions. At the final stage of the project, a conference was held with the purpose of supporting and developing the internal quality assurance of General Educational Institutions in Georgia.

Within the grant agreement signed between UNDP and the National Center for Educational Quality Enhancement, work on the evaluation methodology of vocational programs based on the indicators of the European Framework for Quality Assurance of Vocational Education (EQAVET) was completed in 2023. A program evaluation document was developed based on the methodology. Five Vocational Educational programs of the agricultural direction were selected, which were evaluated in accordance with the 5th and 6th indicators of EQAVET. In addition, a guide on justifying the feasibility of Vocational Educational programs, a 360-degree self-assessment platform for Vocational Educational Institutions, and questionnaires were prepared as part of the project.

The project for the standardization of directors of Vocational Educational Institutions was developed. Representatives from the Ministry of Education, Science, and Youth of Georgia, the Skills Agency, and the National Center for Educational Quality Enhancement were involved in developing the project draft. The developed standard was submitted to the Ministry of Education, Science, and Youth. Meetings were held with the representatives of vocational educational institutions, the Council granting the right to implement the vocational training/retraining program and the directors of vocational institutions.

As a result of the introduction of the system, it will be possible to have external and internal quality assessment mechanisms in the Georgian VET system. Both types of quality assessment will contribute to

the improvement of the quality of teaching and learning in vocational education and the introduction of a student-centered learning process in VET colleges. Moreover, the project measures will enhance vocational colleges' capacity to make evidence-based decisions during the authorization process and to analyze the local labor market while developing programs. This will foster collaboration between vocational colleges and the local private sector. The project will be implemented from June 2023 to August 2025.

ERASMUS + programs

SQUARE

"Erasmus+" program SQUARE - "Strengthening the Quality and Relevance of the Third Mission in Georgian Universities", which was about strengthening the quality and relevance of the third mission of the university in Georgian universities, has ended. The Ministry of Education, Science and Youth of Georgia, the Ministry of Economy and Sustainable Development of Georgia, the National Center for Educational Quality Enhancement, the International Accreditation Council EFMD (Belgium), eight Georgian and three European universities were involved in the program along with Tbilisi Ivane Javakishvili State University. As part of the project, Georgian universities collaborated with international partners to develop methodologies and guidelines for planning, implementing, and evaluating the third mission. They also formulated the strategy for the third mission. Through coordinated efforts between the National Center for Educational Quality Enhancement and the Ministry of Education and Science, the evaluation of third mission activities was integrated into quality assurance standards.

A workshop was conducted from November 20-23, 2023, at NOVA University in Lisbon, Portugal, to analyze the activities completed during the final phase of the program. This workshop focused on the tasks outlined in draft package 6 of the program.

ETHICS

The Center joined the Erasmus+ opportunity and institutional development program - ETHICS "ETHICS - Responsible Conduct of Research – Research Integrity and Ethics in Georgian Universities". The goal of the program is to initiate a systemic improvement intervention aimed at enhancing the quality of universities and research organizations. The specific objectives of the project are to introduce mechanisms to ensure research ethics, research integrity, and academic integrity. Working groups were created within the framework of the program, focusing on policy changes such as updating accreditation-authorization standards and creating expert training modules or MOOCs for retraining. A working group dedicated to updating and modifying authorization standards has been established, involving employees from the Center and the Ministry of Education. This working group is actively working on revising the authorization standards. The program will be implemented in 2023-2027 under the coordination of Ilia State University, and together with the Center, the Ministry of Education, Science and Youth of Georgia, Shota Rustaveli National Science Foundation, local higher educational institutions, as well as partners from the European Union, namely the Netherlands and the Czech Republic, are involved in it.

During the reporting period, the representatives of the Center visited Akaki Tsereteli State University in Kutaisi. During the visit, participants had the opportunity to attend training sessions for researchers and

research integrity officers conducted by representatives of the European Academic Integrity Network (ENAI) from the Czech Republic, Great Britain, Portugal, and the Netherlands.

The opening event of the program was held on May 2-5, 2023, in the city of Prague, Czech Republic, at Charles University, which was attended by representatives of the Center, the Ministry of Education, Science and Youth of Georgia, the Shota Rustaveli National Science Foundation, higher educational institutions of Georgia, as well as the universities of the Czech Republic and the Netherlands. and representatives of quality agencies attended. Workshops on planning and implementing the program were conducted in a four-day format with active participation from all partners.

DUGEOR

Within the Erasmus+ funded program "Strengthening the Implementation of Dual Education in Georgian Higher Education" (DUGEOR), a representative of the Center visited Graz, Austria, to participate in a study visit. The main goal of the program is to support the development and implementation of the dual education model (DUGEOR model) to modernize the higher education system. The program is divided into 6 draft packages, with the 2nd draft package focusing on studying the best practices of foreign countries in terms of dual education.

Within the framework of the program, two representatives of the Center went on a study visit to the Serbian city of Novi Sad. Within the framework of the program, two organizational meetings were held for representatives of the Center aimed at summarizing the achievements of the program and planning future activities.

Additionally, a study visit was conducted to the Baden-Württemberg State University of Dual Education in Heilbronn and Stuttgart, Germany, which has many years of successful experience in dual education and can serve as a model for other countries. During the visit, the heads of the relevant program at the host university introduced the content, structure, and learning outcomes of the dual education programs to the participants, which students achieve upon completing the program. A working meeting was conducted with the students of the dual program, during which they delivered a presentation about the programs they are enrolled in and discussed the advantages of dual education in terms of developing practical skills and enhancing employment prospects.

PROFFORMANCE +

In 2023, the Center continued to participate in the ERASMUS+ program, PROFFORMANCE+ and support its implementation. The Center is involved in the activities envisaged by the program: Consortium meetings, seminars on best practices in teaching and learning, events, workshops (PLA), and specialized working groups (WG) are organized for the program focusing on priority directions such as digitalization, inclusion, internationalization, and sustainable development. Additionally, the development of the PROFFORMANCE teaching assessment tool is underway as part of the program's initiatives. One of the program activities included hosting a series of seminars at the Center focusing on innovative methods for assessing student learning. The Center also actively disseminates information about the planned seminars with interested parties; it as well as hosted the program (PLA) workshop. The event aimed to facilitate a discussion among project partners regarding the tools, teaching-learning methods, and evaluation methods developed as a result of joint work within the PROFFORMANCE+ project. Representatives of the Ministry of Education, Science and Youth of Georgia, the National Center for Educational Quality Enhancement, the representatives of partner organizations of 8 different European

countries, local and international experts of higher education, academic and administrative staff of authorized higher educational institutions in Georgia took an active part in the workshop. The tools and methods developed by the project participants will significantly contribute to their active use and implementation in educational and scientific processes.