



SUMMARY

EWMI's Research Findings for the Strategic Support and Policy Grants (SSPG) Program on Healthcare, Education, and Social Protection

This document summarizes EWMI's research findings based on focus group discussions, meetings with policymakers and civil servants from relevant ministries, and interviews with experts and pundits. The focus group discussions were held in February 2022. The meetings and interviews with government representatives and experts were held in March and April 2022.

Healthcare

Citizens expressed interest in seeing CSOs enact the following solutions to address issues in the healthcare system:

- ✚ Monitoring, control, and supervision over the quality and appropriateness of medical services, prescribed medications, and how public funds are spent by hospitals through the universal healthcare program.
- ✚ Consultations, in which CSOs offer information on available state medical services and patients' rights.
- ✚ Address shortcomings in the medical education, certification, and professional development of doctors.
- ✚ Draw public attention to the most problematic issues, such as the high prices of medications.
- ✚ Research the reasons behind high and inconsistent pricing for medical services.
- ✚ Advise the government on how to implement best practices and systems of healthcare.
- ✚ Raise the level of state funding or co-funding for medical problems (such as medical tests and other services) relevant to specific age groups, including youth.
- ✚ Divert state funding from people who have a higher income to support socially vulnerable groups and pensioners more generously.
- ✚ Modify the hospital sector and medical services so that they become more affordable, convenient, and accessible for citizens in the regions.

Experts and policymakers shared the following perspectives:

The government is implementing a regulation that obliges pharmacists to offer patients the three most affordable generic medications available and is introducing a system of electronic prescriptions that allows for the monitoring of prescriptions by doctors. The following activities are needed:

- ✚ Explore the attitudes of citizens, doctors, and pharmacies toward new regulations concerning electronic prescriptions and generic medications to identify obstacles and fine-tune policy decisions.
- ✚ Study the economic impact of this regulation on the pharmaceutical market, competition, small pharmaceutical companies, and employment.
- ✚ Raise citizen awareness on how to reduce medication expenditures through this regulation.

Priority should be given to policy analysis, which could focus on the following areas:

- ✚ Research of international best practices to reform/replace the universal healthcare program and/or redesign the healthcare financing model to reduce citizens' out-of-pocket payments as well as exorbitant state expenditures.

- ✚ Amendment of the universal healthcare program's coverage with a focus on vulnerable groups.
- ✚ Implementation of a DRG (diagnosis-related groups) system and nosology-based costing as a means of hospital reimbursement.
- ✚ Introduction of selective contracting of hospitals to ensure high-quality standards and cost containment.
- ✚ Definition and implementation of indicators for service quality.
- ✚ Promotion of systemic changes in the economic model of pharmacies, insurance companies, and hospitals to reduce the costs of medications.
- ✚ Promotion of public hospitals and the development of a primary healthcare system ("village doctors").
- ✚ Expansion of geographic accessibility to quality healthcare services in the regions.
- ✚ Promotion of life-long professional development of doctors and nurses.
- ✚ Efficient and effective regulation of medical services and M&E models.

Education

Citizens expressed interest in seeing CSOs enact the following solutions to address issues in the education system:

- ✚ Help recruit younger teachers and open school doors to new teachers who are willing to develop and learn new skills.
- ✚ Develop an oversight mechanism to audit how teachers are applying the knowledge gained during training to their teaching process.
- ✚ Influence education policy and ensure the involvement of key stakeholders.
- ✚ Mobilize active parents.
- ✚ Work with teachers who are open to change.
- ✚ Assist in incorporating teaching methods that are more productive, student-oriented, and interactive.
- ✚ Analyze existing problems and cooperate with the MES to resolve them.
- ✚ Provide services such as high-quality, regular training for teachers to improve their teaching skills; intellectual competitions; training; sporting events; English, computer, and Georgian language courses for children in ethnic minority settlements; and joint classes organized by CSOs and teachers.

Experts and policymakers shared the following perspectives:

- ✚ To improve geographic accessibility of preschool education (particularly in ethnic minority settlements), political programs should be monitored and public demand must be raised for building new kindergartens. Preschool education should become mandatory, the salaries of preschool teachers should grow, and the authorities should require that stringent food safety and physical security standards be met by private kindergartens.
- ✚ To reduce the large gap in performance between students of private vs. public schools and Tbilisi vs. regional schools, the poor qualifications of teachers and student absenteeism must be addressed, and reasons for high school dropouts must be studied. Younger teachers should be attracted through means that include insisting that school principals publicly announce new job openings. The funding model of schools must be changed, and schools and universities must cooperate in preparing the types of teachers that schools need. One way to address this issue is to study the effectiveness of state-funded teacher preparation programs at universities so that they can be modified based on evidence.
- ✚ To improve the quality of education, the Teachers Professional Development Center (TPDC) plans to send quality assurance groups to assess teachers and help them improve their quality of teaching through self-development. The Ministry of Education also plans to conduct diagnostic surveys of students in grades four through nine to assess progress in teaching.

- ✚ Despite increased state funding and improved regional coverage, the number of students willing to enroll in vocational education instead of higher education remains low. Higher enrollment rates could be achieved through methods that include modifying the funding model of vocational schools, reducing drop-out rates, recruiting businesses to sponsor/participate in dual programs (apprenticeship), teaching entrepreneurial skills, and introducing professional orientation at schools.
- ✚ The higher education funding model should be reoriented from enrolling and teaching exceedingly large quantities of students to allocate more funds for STEP degrees and academic research generation, which will make the authorization mechanism more flexible and university programs more market-oriented.
- ✚ The level of Georgian language teaching at ethnic minority schools must be improved and the graduation rates of 4+1 program students should be increased.

Policy analysis and research could focus on the following topics:

- ✚ The effectiveness of ongoing or planned education initiatives and quality of teaching interventions such as the New School model, Instructional Coaching, TLCs (teacher learning communities), and Lesson Study.
- ✚ Evaluation of the national curriculum, teachers' competencies, and professional development, school management, and parent involvement.
- ✚ Analysis of the economic efficiency and effectiveness of various higher education state funding programs and social grants.
- ✚ Outcome and/or impact evaluation of School Resource Officers and psychological services.
- ✚ Children who are often "left behind", including children with disabilities or special needs and ethnic minority students.
- ✚ Professions in demand and students' attitudes toward them.
- ✚ School principals' managerial decision-making, including appointment and dismissal of teachers.

Social Welfare

Citizens expressed interest in seeing CSOs enact the following solutions to address issues in the social welfare system:

- ✚ Raise public awareness and provide information on state social services and programs, eligibility criteria, and how to access those services.
- ✚ Monitor how social assistance is disbursed.
- ✚ Introduce a quality control mechanism to ensure that adequate food is served at municipal diners.
- ✚ Allocate greater financial assistance to children who are orphans, without parental care, or come from socially vulnerable families.
- ✚ Make extracurricular activities available free of charge for children living in villages.
- ✚ Collect more information about young people's needs in villages and support youth work.
- ✚ Develop vocational education programs and organize training in agriculture.
- ✚ Introduce regulations to support local producers of agricultural products, including the creation of collection centers for agricultural produce in villages, support for villages that are not located near highways to help them sell their goods and development of irrigation systems.

Experts and policymakers shared the following perspectives:

- ✚ The government is implementing a "public works" system as a welfare-to-work program to reduce the welfare dependency of beneficiaries of the state-sponsored Targeted Social Assistance program. There is a need for evaluating the effectiveness/impact of the "public works" program and the one-year grace period for those beginning work while still on welfare benefits.

- ✚ It is important to monitor and analyze Targeted Social Assistance, including the scoring method (and/or other monetary assistance), to ensure that TSA adequately assists vulnerable groups in a more efficient, fair, and transparent manner. Policy analysis of alternative systems for poverty reduction/income support is also needed.
- ✚ Special attention should be paid to the decentralization of social protection policies and services. This includes the development of local services for vulnerable groups and citizens (including children with special needs) so that services are more geographically accessible and sustainable. The singular municipal social assistance system should be substituted with more optimal forms, and child benefits and services should be analyzed.
- ✚ It is important to make financial support to IDPs more sustainable and needs-based (e.g., move from a status-based to a needs-based IDP social assistance system).