



Educational Needs Assessment of Khoni Municipality Labor Market

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Tbilisi

2019

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Abstract

The Objective of the current study was to identify the most demanded expertise on the Khoni labor market. For this purpose, qualitative research method, namely in-depth interviews were utilized. Total of 11 interviews with the local employers from governmental agencies, non-governmental organizations and private businesses were carried out. Overall, according to the employers, there is a high demand on high as well as low skilled labor force in the municipality. Computer literacy, clerical work and foreign language knowledge was equally underlined as essential by all employers. As for the non-formal education, only those employers whose organization depends on high skilled labor force (production, local municipality administration and healthcare sector, NGOs) allocate certain funds for training their personnel. Taking into account the general market demands on the local labor market, respondents named computer literacy, financial literacy, and foreign languages as the most desirable educational programs for raising the skills of the existing/potential employees.

Intruduction

The present report was prepared by the Center for Social Sciences within the project Economic Participation, Housing and Social Infrastructure for IDPs and Host Communities implemented by DVV International and commissioned by Danish Refugee Council (DRC). The study aimed at conducting the needs assessment of the Khoni Municipality employers in order to identify the demand on certain skills and knowledge that would help the development of the local labour market. Considering this wider aim, the research had the following objectives:

- Determine what knowledge and skills are necessary for employees to have in order to increase their chances of employment on local labor market according to the market representatives.
- Determine what value the local employers ascribed to non-formal education and training of staff/potential employees.
- Determine the most widely spread means for recruiting the potential employees according to the market representatives.

The report consists of several parts, such as introduction containing general characteristics of the Khoni Municipality and an overview of the educational needs in the country, in order to create a context and general understanding of the issue. This is followed by the research aim and objectives, methodology and demographic characteristics of the research participants, data analysis and the conclusions.

Khoni Municipality

Khoni is a town located in the western part of Georgia, Imereti Region. It is located on the north western part of Imereti region on the left bank of the Tskhenistkali River and is an administrative center of the Khoni municipality. According to 2014 population census of Georgia, Khoni Municipality has total of 23,570 inhabitants. 14,583 individuals reside in rural areas, while 8,987 in urban (Geostat, 2014). Khoni municipality comprises of 12 administrative settlements (including the town of Khoni) (The state representative of governeur's administration of imereti, 2019).

According to the administration of state representative website, agriculture is the leading industry in Imereti. Most widespread agricultural activities include animal husbandry, winegrowing, beekeeping and fruit growing. Although there are not many tourist facilities, Khoni municipality has some potential in this respect. One of the most famous tourist destinations in

the municipality include Okatse Canyon and various historical sites, such as Nadarbazevi ruins (The state representative of governor's administration of imereti, 2019).

In respect to educational institutions in the Khoni municipality, currently, there are 26 public schools in the municipality. On average, schools have 237 students, however, out of 26 only 3 schools have more than 200 students. More than half of those organizations (15 schools) have less than 100 students. On average, schools in the municipality employ 38 teachers. Apart from public schools there are currently no other educational institutions in the municipality (The state representative of governor's administration of imereti, 2019).

Educational needs in Georgia

In order to better understand the Khoni Municipality context, it is also interesting to look at the educational needs in wider Georgia. In recent years, education gains more and more attention from the scholars. Therefore, several studies have been carried out in order to assess educational and labor market needs in Georgia. Generally, labor market in Georgia can be characterized by deep rooted structural issues. One of the pressing issues is incompatibility of market labor market demands and educational level of workforce in Georgia. 61% of job seekers on Georgian labor market have either vocational or higher education i.e. medium and high skilled labor force respectively. In contrast, on labor market there is a high demand for low skilled workers. Therefore, there is a clear imbalance between supply and demand on Georgian labor market (Amashukeli, Lezhava & Gugusvhili, 2017). The results of this study is also congruent with research results from another study, carried out by ACT Research in 2015. Namely, according to the substantial part of the surveyed employees, the major reason for unemployment in Georgia is incompatibility between the current market demands and qualifications of workforce. Service sector workers were named as the most high in demand professions (ACT, 2015).

This tendency is also evident from earlier study results. In 2011, the service sector demand for workforce was mainly observed on low to medium skilled workers. However, majority of the available workforce were individuals with higher education (USAID & IOM, 2012). Same issues were present in one of the fastest growing tourism and food processing industries in western Georgia, In Adjara region. Again, one of the major issues for the local employers was identified to be the incompatibility between demand and supply on local labor market (Ministry of Education, Culture and Sport, Giz, BMZ, 2012).

The aforementioned incongruences in demand and supply of the local labor market can be explained by several factors. One of the determinants of this problem might be the lack of the vocational educational centers in Georgia. According to the trends in the recent decade in Georgia, the majority of the newly created jobs are in tourism and food industries (ACT, 2015). These sectors can be regarded as one of the fastest growing businesses in the region as well as in Georgia as a whole. The most in-demand expertise is on low to medium skilled jobs, such as cook, baker, waiters/waitress, maids, bellhops, etc. One of the precondition of this issue is the lack of educational centers where individuals can gain this type of knowledge (ACT, 2015). Similar tendency is observed in Western Georgia, namely in Adjara region, where tourism along with food processing and apparel industries are one of the fastest growing in the region. Likewise, in this instance low to medium skilled jobs were in-high demand. According to surveyed employers, lack of vocational education facilities was one of the pressing issues for supply of suitable candidates (Ministry of Education, Culture and Sport, Giz, BMZ. 2012).

To tackle this issue, the Georgian government initiated a nationwide 7-year reform of the vocational education in 2013. One of the 3 strategic goals for the project included improvement of the educational quality of workforce in order to meet the labor markets demands (Ministry of Education, Culture and Sport, Giz, BMZ. 2012). In 2014, after the project was officially launched, 30% of all graduates from the vocational schools were able to find jobs within 3 month. Out of the 30%, 65% were employed on jobs, which were directly related to their specialty. The employment rate sharply increased in 2015 to 54%, the figure gradually increased to 60% in 2017. However, in the same year only 56% of all hired graduates were employed with their specializations (IRS, 2018).

Alongside with the rising demands on vocational education, in recent decade there also has been increasing demand on adult education. In 2009 Ministry of education and science in partnership with adult education association, designed a long term action plan regarding adult education centres. Although, there has been some progress regarding adult education in Georgia, reforms still lag behind. The major issues and challenges are related to the lack of educational facilities, number of regions in Georgia do not have any adult educational centres; so far, only few of those centres are constructed with the governmental funding. (Bedenashvili, 2016).

Research Method

In order to obtain suitable data from the employers currently operating in the municipality, a qualitative research approach, namely in-depth interviews were conducted. The major reason why the method was chosen is connected with the low number of employers in the municipality. As it was difficult to find employers from the similar industries and sectors, consequently it was also problematic to organize focus groups which would consisted of employers from the same industries. The interviews were conducted using semi-structured interview guide. The instrument allowed interviewers to ask questions already designed in advance, as well as follow up questions.

Overall, 11 in-depth interviews were carried out. In order get comprehensive information on local labor market demands, respondents from various sectors were interviewed, in particular: 1 interview was conducted with the representative of the Khoni municipality, 2 interviews – with the local non-governmental organizations, and 8 interviews with local businesses. We tried to cover all the existing spheres represented on the market, namely, the following sectors were included in the research: construction, healthcare (hospitals and drug stores), retail trade, food industry and production sector. Initially, it was also planned to interview the representatives of general educational institutions as one of the biggest employers in Khoni Municipality. However, it was difficult to access the local schools as they required an official permission from the Ministry of Education, Sports and Culture of Georgia. Even though, we addressed the ministry with the request, it was not possible to get their permission within the project framework. Therefore, this sector was replaced with the local private businesses. Thus, this can be regarded as the study limitation.

In order to get more in-depth information from the labour market representatives, we tried to target those organizations having more than 3 employees. Thus, the size of an organization under respondents' ownership varied from 3 employees to 35 employees. The only exception was administration of Khoni municipality which employed 120 individuals.

Main Findings

Means of recruiting personnel

According to our study respondents, there are various methods used for attracting and recruiting employees. However, it turned out that two of these methods are more widespread in Khoni. Namely:

Personal connections - According to the respondents, the most common way for searching a proper candidate on a desired position is one's social links. For instance, majority of our respondents use personal acquaintances for "putting the word out" that there is a new job available. According to the respondents this is the most effective method for attracting the suitable candidates as the town of Khoni is not a big settlement, social bonds between local population is strong, therefore, spreading information and attracting potential employees using "word of mouth" method demands less time and less resources.

"We mainly use personal connections, it is a small settlement. Everybody know each other. When we need a specialist, we just tell our friends and relatives. Usually, soon some comes for an interview" (Production sector).

Generally, using informal practices for candidate attraction and recruitment is the most widespread practices among employees in Georgia, which is probably due to effectiveness of this method (Amashukeli, Lezhava & Gugusvhili, 2017).

Official job vacancy posting - in addition to the abovementioned informal practices of personnel seeking, employers also use advertisement in order to attract suitable candidates. The job vacancy announcement can be divided into 2 categories. In the first case, recruitment announcement is published on the workplace itself, for instance, in supermarkets. However, according to the respondents, most of the time the announcements remain unnoticed.

"Sometimes when we are hiring, I publish a job advertisement in my supermarket, however, even though, we have lot of clients, the announcement stays unnoticed" (Retail trade sector).

The second most widespread practice in this case is job posting via internet. Advertisements are usually published on special employment websites especially through the website of the local government.

"Here in local mayor's office, we recruit candidate only according to the regulations. That is, job announcements are published on the internet. Anyone can send their CV. In the end if a candidate can satisfy all the requirements we recruit him/her"(Local Municipality).

Occasionally, employers also announce job vacancies on local TV and radio stations. However, this method is deemed as ineffective compared to the aforementioned ones.

Priority criteria during recruitment

After discussing means of personnel recruitment, it is also relevant to examine which characteristics of a candidate are regarded as a priority in the recruitment process. Although standards of candidate assessment varies according to sectors, certain tendencies still can be identified.

Work experience - The respondents were unequivocal in their assessment that work experience appropriate for a particular position is the first and essential characteristic a candidate should possess. For instance, candidates which were applying on nurse position were required to have experience in nursing. A candidate's work experience was especially important for respondents whose organization mainly depends on high skilled labor force, such as healthcare sector, Khoni municipality administration and production sector. In case of local hospitals, the candidates are even asked to represent documents, which prove their work experience, which is not surprising considering the specificity of this sector. According to our respondents, work experience is predominantly related to higher productivity, while for some respondents, having work experience was equal to "professionalism". Consequently, in the recruitment process, questions asked about work experience are most frequent.

Motivation - Other criteria for assessing the candidate mainly include personal characteristics. One of the most demanded attributes for a candidate is underlined to be high level of motivation. Respondents defined "high motivation" as a high level of determination and efforts put into the work process. Similar to work experience, high level of motivation is also associated with employees' higher productivity. According to the interviewees, the most common way to measure candidate's motivation is a face-to-face interview.

The current results are congruent with research findings from other studies. In 2012, employers operating in tourism, apparel, ICT and food processing sector considered motivation as one of the crucial characteristics for an employee. Additionally, work experience was also considered as one of the desirable characteristics. Work experience in those industries was even preferred over a university degree (Ministry of Education., Culture and Sport., Giz, BMZ. 2012).

Conscientiousness - Along with motivation, conscientiousness was one of the criteria, which was usually taken into account by employees during the recruitment process. Under this term respondents mainly implied diligence, discipline, ability to neatly carry out work. Interviewees also regarded this personal trait as "uncommon" among candidates and current employees. Yet again, parallels can be drawn with aforementioned studies. One of the facets of

conscientiousness - discipline was regarded as one of the necessary characteristics for an employee (Ministry of Education., Culture and Sport., Giz, BMZ. 2012).

Teamwork - Ability to work and co-operate with other group members was regarded as an important characteristic. However, compared to the aforementioned skills and expertise, much less importance was ascribed to this characteristic. One of the reason for this tendency might be the fact that local organization usually employ 5 to 35 individuals, therefore, team coordination might not be a major issue for local employers. When talking about teamwork, respondents usually stressed importance of communication skills and ability to “get along” with other employees.

Recruitment for official documentation

Generally, one of the widespread practices among respondents was hiring employees on temporary contracts. In case of NGOs the period of employment depended on expected duration of a project. Same tendency was evident in construction and production sectors, where workers are hired on temporary contracts, according to the current needs of an employee.

In healthcare sector, there are small hospitals, (including Psychiatric hospital) are located in Khoni town. The biggest clinic in the municipality currently employs 27 personnel. The smallest organizations were present in retail trade sector which included drug store, pastry shop and supermarket. The average number of employees in those enterprises varied between 4 to 7 individuals.

After examining the priority competencies for the local employers, within the scope of this study, it is interesting to discuss how important our respondents consider the official documents proving individual's education and qualifications. Two major tendencies are evident in this respect. According to the first group of employers, when hiring a candidate, they demand documents proving individual's formal education. In contrast, the second group of respondents usually do not demand document of any kind.

The major motive for the respondents from the first group to demand such documents, was formal regulations and legislations present within an organization. This included respondents from healthcare sector, retail trade sector (drug store) and local municipality administration. As it turned out the employers mainly demanded university degree diplomas. Again, this requirement is due to the specificity of the employment sector, in particular, those sectors who depend on the high skilled force and higher education. However, as it is obvious from the quotation below, this is just a formal requirement set out by the law/regulations, and rarely come from the employers themselves.

“This is the request of ministry of healthcare. Personally I would not have demanded it. I only need his/her education. I can assess an individual’s competences just by observing his/her behavior. It usually takes 1 or 2 month” (Drug store owner).

In more sporadic cases, the respondents demand this type of documents regardless of any regulations in the organization. Once again, university degree diplomas were the only requested document. Trust towards the Georgian educational institutions was relatively high in this case; consequently, this type of document was regarded as a valid evidence of an individual’s qualifications.

According to the opposite tendency, the other segment of the employers do not regard diplomas and training certificates as documents, which hold a value of any sort. The respondents were generally skeptical towards educational institutions (including universities), where individuals can obtain diplomas, certificates etc. The reason for such mistrust was underlined to be low quality education and credential inflation.

“Compared to the training certificates, university degrees have more value. It is written that you have attended certain courses and subjects, but does it really measure how deep is your knowledge in the field?” (NGO sector).

“Personally, for me diploma signifies nothing, unless I can personally assess candidate’s work at the workplace. Someone might have obtained it years ago, someone might have obtained thanks to their relatives, and sometimes the quality of education is not high and so on. To be honest I currently do not have any employee with a degree” (Food sector).

Generally, tendency that university degrees are losing its value on Georgian labor market is evident from other studies. The graduates themselves generally assesses quality of knowledge obtained during this studies as “average” or “below average”. This might be regarded as an indicator that educational institutions are not able to provide local labor market with sufficiently qualified personnel (Lezhava, Amashukeli, Gugushvili, 2016). The trend may partially explain why our respondents expressed their skepticism towards educational centers and consequently, towards diplomas obtained from those institutions.

Additionally, along with respondents’ doubts, lack of certain regulations in an organization discouraged employers from examining documents which prove individual’s qualifications.

“To be honest I do not demand any documents from my employees. Years ago there were special regulations, according to which, I had to demand this type of document from a candidate. However, today there are no such regulations” (Food processing sector).

Knowledge and skills demanded by the local labor market

After discussing employers practices related to recruitment, it will be appropriate to see how our respondents assess the current situation on the local labor market. That is, what knowledge and skills are currently in high demand in local municipality. In this respect, the following tendencies were observed:

Specific knowledge

Vocational education - According to the employers, there is a high demand on individuals with vocational education, such as trade and craftsmanship professions on the local labour market. Our interviewees generally evaluated overall educational level of local workforce as “low” or “unsatisfactory”. Lack of educational institutions in the municipality was considered as one of the strongest determinants of this problem. It should be mentioned that currently, there are no such centers in Khoni at all; however, as it was reported by our respondents, a vocational education institution is under the construction at the moment.

“I think this is the first problem in the municipality, we need qualified workforce. There are no vocational education centers here. People have to travel to either Kutaisi or Tbilisi. This is why we need at least one center here. School education is not enough, deeper specialization is needed... There is one vocational center under construction and that is a good news” (NGO sector).

Demand on vocational education can be divided into several categories. In service and food processing sector, there is a high demand on individuals with expertise in culinary. Cooks are especially in high demand.

„There is almost shortage of all kinds of staff. Cook is one of them. It is extremely hard to find someone with that knowledge. “(Food processing sector)

“As we are speaking about food processing sector, there is generally a high demand on cooks in this sector. I am currently building a hotel in Khoni but it is very hard for me to find a person with experience and knowledge in culinary” (Food processing sector).

Apart from culinary education, in service sector there is a high demand of waiters/waitresses, hotel personnel (mainly low skilled labor, such as hostess, maids) and tour guides. As the tourism sector is small but fast growing industry in the municipality, respondents believe that demand on those jobs is bound to grow even higher in the coming years.

When speaking about vocational education, respondents underline high demand on manual workers. Generally, construction sector is the one in need of these workers. As reported, available

workforce usually lacks appropriate knowledge and qualifications, as they had not undergone any formal or non-formal education programs in this field.

In addition to the technical education, respondents named other expertise and knowledge which are currently in high demand on the local labor market.

Clerical work - Specialists in this sector was one of the most demanded ones, regardless of industry the employers currently operate. In this instance, bookkeeping was regarded as a “universal” profession needed for all type of organizations. Despite its extreme high demand in local labor market, apparently, individuals with this expertise is hard to find in the Khoni municipality.

“Regarding clerks there is a catastrophic situation. This course should be the first one on the list, in your center. Even I (employer) am willing to attend the course in bookkeeping... The education in clerical work is so low that once, due to my clerk’s mistakes, I was fined with 52 000 lari” (Food sector).

Additionally, expertise and skills of already employed clerks lag behind of modern standards. For instance, as reported, there is a serious problem of computer literacy among the existing personnel.

Knowledge of Foreign languages - In this respect, lack of personnel being fluent in foreign languages was regarded as a mutual problem for respondents from the different industries. Proficiency in English and Russian languages were regarded as the most suitable for local employer’s needs. One of the first sectors where this kind of expertise is valued is service sector, to be more exact local restaurants, hotels and cafes. In this instance, knowledge of those languages was required for employees who had a direct communication with clients. It was particularly underlined that waiters/waitresses, maids, cashiers, tour guides should possess at least one foreign language in order for the organization to operate properly.

NGO sector also stressed the importance, as well as demand on the higher levels of proficiency in English language. As mentioned, due to lack of qualified personnel organizations experience difficulties in communicating with their international counterparts. Additionally, local NGOs do not fully utilize possibilities regarding grants and funding as most of the projects has to be written in English; and due to lack of proficiency, they are not able to participate in this type of competitions. The need for English/Russian proficiency was also underlined by the production and construction industries. According to them the demand on foreign languages is due to fact that majority of key indicators on machines are in either English or Russian languages, and staff finds it difficult to operate with these machines.

Engineering - The demand for this type of expertise is high in construction and production sectors, which in our case included production of construction materials. Lack of educational centers, not only in the municipality but also in the whole region, where those type of specialists are trained, has resulted in the extreme shortages of individuals with this type of expertise. Due

to this issue employers have to mainly rely on individuals who have expertise from the similar fields.

Pharmaceutics - This type of knowledge was usually demanded in pharmaceutics and partially in healthcare sector. Even though, there are currently few small drug stores in Khoni town, employees from this sector have also experienced severe staff shortages. Similar to engineering, there are currently no educational centers in Khoni as well as in nearby municipalities, which consequently leads to the lack of people who possess this type of expertise.

Skills and Personal characteristics

Apart from specialist knowledge, respondents also named traits, which are in high demand on the local labor market. Two most desirable personal characteristics were identified, such as communication skills and motivation.

Demand on interpersonal communication skills was especially high in service industry, where employees have to directly communicate with clients. In our case, the respondents from retail trade sector (drug store, supermarket) and food industry regarded those set of skills as the major factor determining the overall quality of the provided service.

“If we are talking about my sector [service industry], firstly employee should possess communications skills. I always tell my employees that whenever they start working, they should leave all their personal hardships behind. You cannot communicate effectively when you are constantly frowning” (food sector).

The second highly demanded personal characteristic on the local labor market was motivation. Generally, higher levels of motivation was associated with higher levels of productivity at the workplace. In this instance, respondents defined term motivation as an ability to be resilient, energetic and dedicated.

Factors affecting shortage of qualified labor force on the labor market

As it has been pointed out by the employers, there is a number of expertise currently in-demand on the local labor market. Respondents also discussed number of factors, which determine scarcity of human resource in the aforementioned fields.

The lack of educational centers in Khoni municipality was named as the first major cause of the problem. As there are currently no possibilities to gain any type of post-secondary education, the municipality is not able to satisfy needs of the local labor market. Similar to these tendencies, a study carried out by USAID Georgia, also underlined the similar issue as the factor, which determined lack of qualified workforce in the local labor market. Namely, according to this study

a lack of vocational educational centers results in the shortage of specialists who are generally in high demand in local Georgian labor market (USAID Georgia, 2012).

As pointed out, the lack of educational opportunities increases emigration from the Khoni municipality. As the local population is unable to further continue their education and consequently find an employment, they leave for bigger cities with more opportunities for education and employment. The later factor acts as an incentive for emigrants in a long run not to return to the Khoni municipality. Emigration trends greatly diminish overall number of labor force in the municipality, which for employers further aggravate problem of finding a suitable personnel even for the low skilled positions.

“In rural areas there is one obvious problem, there are less opportunities for education and personnel development. There are more possibilities for development and personal growth in the bigger cities, for instance, in Tbilisi and Kutaisi” (NGO sector).

“Everybody wants to leave Khoni, nobody wants to stay here. If they are lucky and find a job in a city, I am sure that they won't be coming back” (production sector).

It should be also mentioned that on the national level, there is a high rate of emigration, which contributes to the reduction in numbers of Georgia's labor force. The tendency has its negative as well as positive side. In the short term, emigration of workforce to other countries might have detrimental effects on local labor market. However, in a long run, emigrated workforce might come back to home country with enhanced professional skills and knowledge (Ministry of Economy and Sustainable development of Georgia, 2017). Although, in Khoni's case as respondents stated, most of the emigrants do not return to their home settlements. Consequently, local labor market loses the long term benefits from the abovementioned emigration.

The third reason underlined by our study respondents contributing to the shortage of the labor force is a lack of motivation of the local population to work, which in turn is caused by the low salaries on the Khoni labor market. According to the respondents, average salary, which ranges from 250 to 300 GEL, is not enough to act as an incentive for local population to start working. Once again low salaries in the region stimulates local workforce to seek work in the larger cities.

“There is definitely demand for workforce on local labor market. Some might say that salaries are too low, but I say are there any alternatives? If there are not you have to work right?” (Food processing sector).

It should be mentioned that this factor was stated by the respondents from all industries, but it was especially popular among interviewees from low productive sectors (for instance food sector), where according to the respondents, they “had hard time” hiring even low skilled employees. This tendency might partially be explained by results from another study: generally,

in Georgia employers who have demand low skilled labor force have difficulties in recruitment of this type of personnel due to harsh work conditions and low pay (Ministry of Economy and Sustainable development of Georgia, 2017).

Overall, according to the employers, those were the most salient factors that contribute to the lack of workforce on local labor market. During in depth interviews respondents also discussed issues which arise due to lack of knowledge and expertise in the local labor market.

Respondents stated a lack of qualified human resources in the local labor market as the factor having the biggest detrimental effect on the growth of their business. In this case, qualified human resources was regard as a factor which overall determines whehter organisational goals are met or not. Consequently, not only was this variable considered as an obstacle for further growth of their enterprises, but it was also regarded as the major reason why large number of organizations close down in the municipality. The absence of specialists in the municipality greatly reduces overall effectiveness of local organizations.

*“I have number of plans, related to further growth and development of my business. However, due to lack of specialists in the municipality I have put off my plans... Sometimes it is even hard to maintain the business, let alone expand it”
(Food processing industry).*

This tendency is partially congruent with results from similar studies, with 28% of all surveyed employers (currently operating in Georgia) in the study, qualification of human resources was the second biggest determining factor for growth of their business (Ministry of Economy and Sustainable development of Georgia, 2017).

Non-formal education in Khoni labor market

Means of personnel qualification enhancement in the municipality

Apart from the current needs on the local labor market, the employers were also asked about the importance of the qualification enhancement of their personnel, as well as about the means they utilize in order to raise the knowledge and expertise of their employees. Two major tendencies were identified in this respect. For the first group, qualification enhancement was a priority; as reported, they typically use non-formal education methods, mainly short term training courses. The second group of respondents attributed less importance to training courses as a means of qualification enhancement. Informal educational practices was more popular in this instance.

The first group, included employers from sectors where mostly medium to high skilled personnel is needed to accomplish organizational goals - local municipality administration, production, healthcare sector, NGOs. The major motive for employers to dedicate financial resources to

training programs was mentioned to be the raise of knowledge in certain specialist fields. For instance, in the case of local municipality administration, the trainings are conducted to keep personal up-to-date with the latest changes in various legislative documents in Georgia. Additionally, apart from financed training programs, this type of services was also provided by NGOs who conducted this type of educational programs free of charge. The overall effectiveness of the training programs carried out by NGOs were positively evaluated.

“Yes there is a high demand on training programs in the local municipality, we sometimes buy services like this... Usually NGOs operating in the municipality provide us with such services”(Local administration).

“Those considering that there are no other means of qualification enhancement. Those courses, offered by other NGOs are more or less effective” (NGO).

As there are no dedicated training centers in the municipality, the training mainly takes place in an organization’s office. Trainings are usually scheduled outside of working hours. The major reason for this type of practices was that organizing the training programs during the working hours would hinder the working process. This was especially true in the healthcare sector.

“Training were conducted for medical personnel, it lasted for 1 week, but in was conducted outside of work hours not to inhibit work process” (Healthcare sector).

In rarer cases, employers also dedicate funds to finance international training programs for their employees. Apart from boosting knowledge and skill of personnel, the certificates obtained from those educational programs were regarded an additional reward for the employers. In this instance, this type of documents were regarded as an additional asset in competition for grants, which are occasionally announced in the municipality.

“There were international trainers in the region and they conducted trainings here. Personnel was awarded with certificates. When I am writing a proposal for a project, I always indicate that I have staff with those certificates” (Construction sector).

The motive to fund employees’ training to obtain certificate is partially inconsistent with the tendency mentioned before;, namely, considerable part of respondents did not demand any kind of document, which would prove candidates non-formal education; even demanding documents proving ones formal education is rather uncommon practice among the respondents. Consequently, even though employers do not demand certificates of this kind it might still be regarded as an important educational asset for them.

The second group of individuals i.e. employers who do not conduct or dedicate any funds to personnel training included employers from food, retail store sectors, where low skilled labor is in high demand. Employers named number of factors due to which they are unable to train personnel.

Interestingly, the lack of financial resources, factor which was named as the most widespread hindrances for employee training (USAID Georgia, 2012), was not named as an obstacle for local employers to provide staff with necessary training. The first one of the frequently stated factors was “lack of time”. This issue is related to the aforementioned problems, namely extreme shortage of specialists and lack of educational centers in the local labor market. As qualified employees in organizations cannot be replaced by other staff members, employers are unable to send staff to even short-term training courses to the settlements, where such educational centers are present.

“Of course we have desire to train our staff. However we do not have time for training... generally, time is crucial in the service sector” (Food sector).

Another common cause named by the interviewees was lack of willingness of employers to finance this type of educational programs. In this instance, interviewees did not see any need to train or finance non-formal educational programs for them. The alternative for non-formal education was informal educational practices: at workplace employers and other already experienced employees train new staff members themselves. The informal training methods were regarded as an effective technique for the qualification enhancement of employees.

“Sometimes you have to train your staff yourself. While working, they can usually learn a lot.” (Food sector).

“To be honest there has been no need to train staff. We usually train our employees at workplace. If he/she, does something incorrectly, than colleges might teach him/her how to perform certain task correctly” (Food sector).

Generally, among companies currently operating in Georgia, informal learning method was most widespread methods of employee knowledge and skill enhancement. However, the major reason for this practices was lack of financial resources (USAID Georgia, 2012), not absence of will from employers to train staff.

To summarize, two tendencies are evident: there is one group of respondents who occasionally use non-formal educational practices, mainly short term training courses to enhance staff's knowledge, and a group of employers who do not use such practices and utilize only informal means of teaching. This tendency can be determined by the nature of the work itself. As the first group mainly included employers from sectors, where there is higher demand of high skilled labor force, qualification enhancement can be essential for this type of organization. In contrast, the second group of respondents mainly included individuals from industries which were dependent more on low skilled workforce, therefore employers have less incentive to dedicate resources to personal training. As it was evident from respondents' comments, they themselves regarded such educational programs as “unnecessary”.

Prioritized non-formal educational course for employers

Taking into account aforementioned tendencies, it will be relevant to discuss what non-formal educational courses would be suitable for the Khoni Municipality. The following priority courses were chosen by the interviewees taking into account both, general as well as specific market needs associated with their own business. First of all, employers stated number of desirable courses. Eventually, they were given list of courses which is offered by DVV international in other regions of Georgia (DVV, 2017). Following this evaluation process, it is evident that most of the courses chosen by the employers overlapped with educational programs already taught in DVV international's adult educational centers. However, several courses were named which are not being taught at the moment in those educational institutions.

Courses offered by DVV international

Computer literacy courses - Irrespective of employers business activities, computer literacy was considered as one of the “universal” demanded expertise on the local labor market. However, employers whose business generally requires high skilled labor force (for instance, production sector) have expressed more interest towards these type of programs. Although, there are currently computer literacy courses in Khoni town organized by local municipality administration, the target group for the course are school students. Therefore, those courses are insufficient to satisfy demands of the local labor market. In this instance, under term “computer literacy” respondents meant level of proficiency in Microsoft office programs. When discussing need of this course, respondents made a prediction that along with the future development of the municipality in general, this type of knowledge potentially will be even more demanded.

“Yes, I am sure that in future parallel to technological developments, lots of things that is being done today on paper will be done in digital form. In this regard I am sure that demand specialists who are proficient in computer programs will rise even more” (Local municipality administration).

Foreign languages - According to the aforementioned demand on local labor market, the respondents stated the course in foreign languages as one of the desirable educational programs in the municipality. Language courses in English and Russian were most often selected ones, while the third least needed language course was German.

“It would be extremely useful to impliment foreingn language courses in the municipality. Every organisation needs individuals who are profiecient in English and Russian” (Food sector).

Financial literacy - As it was evident in previous chapters, respondents regarded individuals with expertise in clerical work as an extremely demanded as well as scarce on the local labor market. Consequently, it was logical from interviewees to select this type of training course. The educational program was equally demanded for all respondents, regardless of their industry and sector.

Business management - The course was mostly popular with respondents from private sector, to be more exact, from the retail trade and food sectors. The main rationale behind the respondent's choice was growing number of small scale business enterprises in the municipality. The certain amount of local population own private business enterprises in the municipality. However, due to lack of knowledge, necessary skills and scarce resources available to them, majority of these businesses are unable to grow and eventually close down. Accordingly, educational programs in small business management was regarded as a suitable course in tackling this issue.

Project writing and management - The main argument for selecting this program was grant funding opportunities, which are occasionally announced in the municipality. However, due to lack of knowledge in project management among the local community and employers, potential of those funding are underutilized. Additionally, the course was especially popular for respondents from NGOs and local municipality administration. The tendency is not surprising as funding of those organizations are partially dependent on various project grants, therefore, it would be logical from employers to ask for training courses which are directed at improving individuals' skills in project writing.

Furniture production - Respondents interviewed in the study did not include any representatives from this industry. However, this course was still one of the most often selected educational programs from the list. The tendency can be explained by the fact that those type of enterprises are quite common in the municipality. However, similar to the other small scale business organizations, furniture production sector also experiences various financial and economic setbacks. The respondents named lack of knowledge in the sector as one of the determinants of low productivity of this sector. Consequently, the programs were chosen to improve the current situation in this sector.

Culinary - Once again, according to the abovementioned market demands, this course was most selected one by employers from the food sector. However, due to high demand, respondents from other industries also underlined need for this type of educational programs.

Beekeeping - The course was one of the least selected ones. As respondents pointed out, the beekeeping and honey production is fairly widespread among Khoni municipality residents. In most cases, the business is small scale. Produced honey is usually sold on local marketplaces and used for personal consumption. The quality of produced honey was evaluated as low, thus, respondents considered the course as a mean to improve quality of production.

Other desirable courses for the local employers

Apart from courses offered by DVV international, interviewees named educational and training programs, which are not currently being offered in DVV international's centers.

Engineering - As it is evident, demand on those type of specialists is mostly noticeable in construction and production sectors. Although, it will be difficult to thoroughly encompass expertise related to engineering in a short term training course, due to scarcity of engineers employers regarded even basic educational programs in this field as highly desirable.

"We need chemical engineers, construction engineers... even the basic knowledge is scarce here" (Production sector).

Craftsmen - In this instance, by word "craftsman" respondents implied low to medium skilled construction workers: construction carpenters, electricians, welders, etc. Educational programs in this sector were mainly requested by the employers from construction and production sectors. However, due to high market demand on those specialties, respondents from other industries also stressed need for this type of training programs in the municipality.

Conclusion

Overall, it can be stated that the following major trends were identified as a result of the present research. Namely, according to the respondents on the local labor market there is a severe shortage of qualified labor force. There is high demand on high as well as low skilled labor force. The demand on former group is especially noticeable in production and healthcare sectors as well as in governmental agencies (Khoni municipality administration). Our respondents also identified specific knowledge that is in high demand based on the sector. In particular, engineering is in high demand for employers in production and construction sectors, pharmaceutical knowledge is essential for the healthcare and retail trade sectors (drug store), while food sector is in need of culinary knowledge. Computer literacy, clerical work and foreign language knowledge is equally demanded for all employers, regardless of their industry.

Interesting trend observed within the study is connected with the non-formal education. None of the interviewed employers generally demand educational documents proving candidates non-formal education (for instance, training certificates). The first group of employers, respondents whose organization's effectiveness is mainly dependent on high skilled labor force (production, local municipality administration and healthcare sector, NGOs) occasionally use non-formal educational practices (such as training courses) for personnel qualification enhancement. Usually, those educational programs are provided by international as well as Georgian based NGOs free of charge; however, on some occasions, the organizations also dedicate their own funds to finance this type of training programs. The second group of employers do not use any non-formal educational practices for personnel qualification enhancement. This segment of interviewees included respondents whose organization is mainly dependent on low skilled labor (food sector, retail trade sector). Therefore, personnel training and qualification enhancement was not regarded as a priority. In this instance, informal educational practices were regarded as sufficient means of staff qualification improvement.

Last but not least, taking into account general market demands in the local labor market, respondents named desirable educational programs. As it is evident, courses selected by the employers overlap with educational programs which is already offered by DVV international. The most desirable courses for employers, regardless of sector of activity included: Computer literacy, financial literacy, foreign language courses. Therefore, considering the abovementioned, we can conclude that implementing the educational courses offered by DVV international, as well as enriching them with additional required courses will be a large asset for the Khoni Municipality to improve the skills and knowledge of local population and support the development of the local labour market.

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