



## **Educational Needs Assessment of Khoni Municipality Population**

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## *Abstract*

The current study aims to identify the educational needs of the Koni Municipality population. For this purpose, qualitative research, namely focus group discussions were conducted in the region. Total of 6 focus groups were conducted in the town of Koni and village of Nakhakhulevi. Respondents were divided into focus groups according to their age and place of residence, rural or urban settlements within Khoni municipality. The research showed that poverty and unemployment are one of the most pressing economic issues in the municipality. Majority of the currently employed individuals in the municipality work in agricultural, retail trade and furniture production sectors. Due to lack of educational centers in the municipality and limited financial resources, the majority of the local population does not have access to post-secondary formal or informal education. Namely, among most demanded skills and knowledge were foreign language proficiency, computer literacy and craftsmanship. Thus, these are the spheres the population would be willing to have training courses locally.

## Introduction

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 educational needs assessment of the Khoni Municipality population in order to identify their basic needs and requirements for certain skills and knowledge necessary for improving their employability opportunities. Considering this wider aim, the research had the following objectives:

- ✓ Identify how the residents of the Khoni municipality evaluate current economic situation of local population in the municipality;
- ✓ Identify the major employment opportunities in the municipality according to the residents of the Khoni municipality;
- ✓ Identify the major opportunities for getting post-secondary education in the municipality according to the residents of Khoni municipality; and lastly,
- ✓ Identify the major needs related to the non-formal education in the municipality.

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 governor'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 recent years, in order to assess educational and labor market needs in Georgia several studies have been carried out. Generally, labor market in Georgia can be characterized by deep rooted structural issues. According to the recent trend in the Georgian labor market, there is a noticeable imbalance between market supply and market demand. In the local labor market there is relatively high demand on vocational education, however, majority of individuals who actively seek a job have university degrees (Amashukeli, Lezhava & Gugusvhili, 2017). Additionally, according to substantial part of surveyed employees, the major problem of unemployment in Georgia is incompatibility of current market demands and qualifications of workforce. Service sector workers, were named as the most high in demand professions (ACT, (2015).

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

To tackle the issue, in 2013 Georgian government initiated national wide 7 year reform of vocational education. One of 3 strategic goals for the project included improvement educational quality of workforce, in order to meet labor markets demands (Ministry of education, science, culture and sport of Georgia, 2017). In 2014, after project was officially initiated, 30% of all graduates from vocational school were able to find a job within 3 month. Out of the 30%, 65% were employed on a job which was directly related 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 (Ministry of education, science, culture and sport of Georgia, 2017).

The reform also includes increasing accessibility for general population to vocational education. That is, subsidizing fees for vocational education, improving infrastructure- renovating old educational centers and building new ones, in regions where this type of educational centers were absent.

Additionally, the 7 year plan also included raising awareness among local population on vocational education. Generally, in previous decades in Georgia this type of education, compared to higher education was regarded as a less prestigious, which acted as disincentive

for local population to study in vocational education institutions. However, as the recent evidence shows population's attitudes towards vocational education has been gradually changing, 61% of Georgian population considers this type of education as "prestigious". Additionally, according to 62% of respondents attitudes towards vocational education in Georgia has been positively changing.

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 are without, adult educational centres, so far only few of those centres are constructed with government funding. Another (Bedenashvili, 2016).

## Research Method

For the purpose of the research project, a qualitative research approach was chosen, namely focus group discussions were conducted in the municipality. Total of 6 focus groups were carried out, each of them consisting of 8 individuals (48 respondents in total). Purposive sampling methods was used for respondent selection. Individuals were selected according to the following criteria: place of residence, age and sex. The focus groups involved both rural and urban residents, males and females. In respect to age, the following categories were distinguished: 15-24 age group,<sup>1</sup> 25-60 age group and 60+ age group.

In addition, the focus groups discussions included IDPs from Abkhazia and South Ossetia, as Khoni is distinguished to have IDP population as well. In order to have a wider picture of the region, we selected two locations (one urban and one rural) for the research: the town of Khoni, as the administrative center of the municipality, and the village of Nakhakhulevi, one of the largest villages in the municipality having 3,902 inhabitants (Khoni Municipality, n.d).

In order to obtain information from the focus group participants, focus group guide was designed. In total, guide included 10 questions, which were categorized under 2 major topics: current economic situation in the Khoni municipality and current educational needs of individuals residing in the municipality. As the focus group guide was semi-structured, moderators were able to ask follow up questions on relevant topics.

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<sup>1</sup> Within this age group there were several minor representatives. For their involvement, the informed consent was obtained and signed.

## Main Findings

### *Demographic characteristics of the focus group participants*

As it was evident from the study, our respondents' educational status varied according to the age categories. Majority of individuals from higher age categories possessed university degrees, whereas in lower age group, the most respondents were high school students or early graduates. Majority of respondents who had higher education, obtained their degrees from Kutaisi State University. From this trend we can presume that in order to receive higher education, the residents of the Khoni municipality mainly migrate to Kutaisi. Among focus group respondents, there also were individuals who recently graduated from high school and plan to further their education at the university level. Respondents were employed in various sectors, including teachers employed at public schools of the Khoni municipality. Some of them were employed at the local library and in the agricultural sector. A minority of focus group members were small business owners. Focus group discussions also included respondents who were unemployed or retired.

### *Economic situation in the municipality*

To identify the general social environment, in which local population currently lives, respondents were asked to evaluate their socio-economic context in the municipality. Focus group participants assessed the overall economic situation in the municipality as "overwhelmingly negative". Various local economic problems were identified. According to them, the most salient issues in the municipality were unemployment and poverty, which is evident in other regions of Georgia as well. Lack of vacancies and employment opportunities were regarded as the biggest determinant of those economic difficulties in the Khoni municipality.

*"Not all can go and work in a factory, even if he/she wants to. There are not enough vacancies and that is a problem" (Khoni, 60+ age category).*

*"The major determinant of economic difficulties, like other regions and villages, is unemployment. That is the number one problem. More vacancies are there in a village, more economically strong a family is, so there are employment issues here. People are economically very poor" (Nakhakhulevi, 25-60 age category).*

Issues associated with employment are regarded as the primary factor contributing to poverty. According to the respondents, poverty is the most widespread problem in the entire Khoni municipality. This concern was evaluated as common for individuals regardless of their place of residence. However, poverty is a larger issue in villages and rural areas.

The economic hardship was even more intolerable among refugees from the regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia. According to the focus group members, the fact that refugees

cannot satisfy their basic needs is the most vivid indicator of a high poverty rate among those social groups.

*“There are people who have not seen food in ages, especially among refugees, who are plenty in our settlement. There is one family, which has not more than 45 laris a month, sometimes I look out from the window and they eat nothing but bread. There are plenty, grown up men, single who eat nothing but bread. This is the life in our village. There is hopelessness everywhere here. For example, I am ill and I need medicines worth of 400 lari, I mean per month. I have numerous illnesses, which I cannot even name. I have 200 lari pension and plus some 60 lari a month. What can I buy with it, food? Medicine? It is not enough for anything” (Nakhakhulevi, 65+ age category)*

Due to poverty and unemployment, the local population faces another issue, that is, massive emigration from the Khoni municipality. As reported by the respondents, it is difficult to find any decent job in local labor market. Thus, a substantial part of the local community is forced to emigrate to larger Georgian cities. A considerable amount of locals also intermittently leave Georgia to find temporary jobs abroad.

*“... and then we will go to Turkey, we will work for 20 lari a day, 15-20 lari and that is a maximum. There is one person I know who went to Turkey the other day and returned with 100 laris. Everybody wants to leave nobody wants to stay here” (Khoni, 25-60 age category).*

One cause of migration, apart from the lack of vacancies, is low wages and salaries, which are generally offered by the local employers. According to the respondents, remuneration offered by employers is too low and does not match the effort which must be exerted by employees. Therefore, low paid jobs are regarded as “unworthy” by the respondents. In most cases, alternatives for that type of work is considered to be emigration to foreign countries or self-employment in local agricultural activities. According to focus group members, the average salary in Khoni municipality ranges from 250-350 laris, which is considered insufficient for satisfying even the basic needs of an average family living in the municipality. The amount of the average salary stated by respondents is almost twice as low as it was stated in official reports. The average salary in the Imereti region is 667 GEL (Geostat, 2018). This can be regarded as an indicator of the high poverty rate in the region. The tendency that local populations have low salaries was underlined both in Khoni and Nakhakhulevi.

*“The unemployment is an issue but the fact that people have low salaries is an issue on its own. We work day and night but the remuneration is minimal. I am a headmaster of one of kindergartens in Khoni, why should I have salary of 350 laris? I have numerous responsibilities. Everything is my responsibility, at the end of a day I am exhausted and at the end of a month there is nothing for me” (Nakhakhulevi, 25-60 age category).*

According to the respondents, another factor that contributes to economic hardship in the Khoni municipality is education and problems associated with accessibility to education (which will be discussed at lengths in later chapters). Due to the economic hardship, local population finds it difficult to continue studies in other cities. At the same time, the municipality does not have its own educational facilities, such as educational training centers or vocational educational institutions. According to the study respondents, previously there

was a vocational training center in Khoni, nevertheless, it was closed and thus, the population is deprived of a possibility to get educational locally. The problem of education accessibility, as well as other factors which prevents the local population from continuing their studies after high school, consequently ends up in a shortage of skilled labor force in the local communities and thwarts the overall development of the Khoni municipality.

*“There used to be many vocational education centers. Quality of teaching was very high. People from various Georgian regions used to study here” (Khoni, 25-60 age category).*

*“There used to be various vocational educational centers in Khoni, it was such a popular place that even people from east Georgia came to study here. Now everything is closed down.” (Nakhakulevi, 65+ age category)*

In evaluation of the economic situation in Khoni municipality, the least emphasized factor is lack of motivation. The absence of will to find a job and work as the cause of poverty was more popular among younger aged focus groups. However, compared to the major causes of economic hardship, i.e. unemployment, low salary and lack of motivation was regarded as additional and not as major factors contributing to this issue.

*“You will rarely see a person who is employed. They do not even have the motivation to work” (25-60 age category).*

As we have seen, the current economic situation of the local population in Khoni municipality is assessed as overwhelmingly negative. However, Khoni municipality cannot be regarded as an exception from other parts of the country. On average, in 2016, every 7<sup>th</sup> family in Georgia lived below the poverty line. In the same time period, in Georgian rural areas the poverty rate was nearly 18% compared to 10% in urban areas. The poverty index for Georgia can be regarded as significantly higher than that of developed countries (Freidrich Ebert Foundation, 2017).

### ***The main source of income for local population***

After discussing the overall economic condition in the Khoni municipality, it will be relevant to summarize major sources of income for the local population. As was previously stated, lack of vacancies is a major economic issue in the municipality. However, respondents were able to identify major sectors where local population is currently employed.

Regardless of the location the focus groups took place, whether in Khoni or in Nakhakhulevi, agriculture was named as the major source of income among local population. Widespread employment in this sector is caused by various factors, one of which is the lack of employment opportunities in other fields. A considerable part of the local community who cannot find a job on the local labor market, due to lack of choice, are compelled to agricultural activities for obtaining sustenance.

*“If a person is employed in the government sector, then he/she has a salary, it is not necessarily high, even for high ranking officials but there is agriculture and it turns out that it is the main source of ‘survival’” (Khoni, 25-60 age category).*

Although considerably less common, another motive for engaging in agriculture is the loss of financial aid provided by the social services. That is, if an individual is formally registered as an employee, he/she is guaranteed to lose financial aid. Even though according to the respondents the amount is “little”, it is still more than the average salary. Therefore, according to the respondents, from a rational perspective, some individuals prefer to engage in agricultural activities, which does not entail possibility of losing financial aid from the social services.

Regarding sub categories of agriculture, where majority population is currently employed, the respondents named: farming, animal husbandry, and beekeeping.

**Farming** - For the majority of the residents in Khoni municipality, farming represents a major source of income. Individuals engaged in this type of activity mainly farm land of their own. Cultivated crops primarily include various nuts and a variety of different types of fruit. In some cases, in order to accomplish certain tasks which require more workforce, farmers utilize their social connections with other farmers by non-formally hiring other villagers. Issues regarding farming are predominantly related to availability of farming machines. There is either a shortage of such vehicles or hiring these types of machines is deemed as “too expensive”.

*“We are people who were mainly born in a village, our major sources of income are animal-husbandry and farming. However, large portions of farming land is not farmed yet. Farming machines are not available in the region or it is too expensive to hire those” (Nakhakhulevi, 25-60 age category).*

**Animal husbandry** - Apart from farming, animal husbandry is another common source of income for the local community. Cows, chickens, and sheep are the most widely spread domesticated animals.

*“If a person does not have an income at all, he/she might have chicken and that will be their major source of income. If someone has a cow he can get some milk from it and that is all” (Nakhakhulevi, 25-60 age category).*

**Beekeeping** - Beekeeping was also listed as a source of income. Similar to farming activities municipality residents who produce honey mainly sell their product at local marketplaces. The beekeeping and honey production in the municipality is mainly small scale business.

The tendency that majority of local population is engaged in agricultural activities can be regarded as additional factor, which contributes to the aforementioned poverty issue. Namely, this sectors can be classified as a low productive industry, i.e. contribution of this share of the sector in GDP is fairly low. Low productivity means low income for individuals employed in this sector, consequently low income is one the major indicators of poverty (Freidrich Ebert Foundation, 2017).

According to the information obtained from the focus groups, provisions produced in the agricultural sector, are used for personal consumption by farmers. Additionally, they are also sold by the local population at marketplaces in Khoni town and nearby villages. In rare cases,

farmers also supply local supermarkets. Unlike individuals who use individually produced agricultural goods for their own consumption, farmers who sell their own agricultural goods can be classified as self-employed (Geostat, N.O).

In addition, retail trade sector, especially supermarkets, are one of the few businesses in the municipality that is growing. Newly created vacancies are mainly in low skilled vacancies for instance, supermarket consultant and cashiers.

*“Almost everyone is employed at local supermarkets... at least most of local population is currently employed in the supermarkets” (Nakhakhulevi, 25-60 age category).*

Regarding the production sector, the furniture production represents a main source of income for a considerable part of local residents. Small scale business, where this type of products are made, is quite common in the municipality. However, according to the respondents, the majority of staff in these enterprises are self-taught personnel, which is regarded as an obstacle for growth of business. Compared to other employment possibilities in the municipality, focus group members expressed more motivation to find a job in this sector. The major reason for positive evaluation of furniture production industry is an economic one; average income for an individual employed in this sector exceeds that of those employed in other sectors, including, most importantly, the agricultural sector.

*“[name is identified] is in this business (furniture production). His whole family is so wealthy now. There are lot of like him here. 2-3 families also moved to Tbilisi” (Nakhakhulevi, 60+ age category).*

As stated by the respondents, financial aid sent back by emigrated individuals to their families constitutes a major source of income for a considerable number of families. Those who cannot find a job in the local labor market and cannot or do not wish to engage in agricultural activities emigrate to foreign countries. The population predominantly migrates to neighboring countries and Eastern Europe. Most emigrated individuals are female.

*“In a number of cases, major source of income for a family is money sent by emigrated person. I think about 2000 women have already emigrated from Khoni” (Khoni, 65+ age category).*

A substantial part of the emigrated individuals also include youth. It is hard to assume, on average, how much money those emigrated family members send back to their homes; however, according to the focus group participants, emigrants usually make triple the salary for the same amount of work performed.

*“Supply and demand does not change much here, I cannot think of a business here that is prospering here. It is totally opposite, everything is going downwards, and everybody wants to leave this place, youth and everybody who still can. People usually go abroad to bring something from there. This is the tendency here. You have to go to Tbilisi or to Turkey and Greece”(Khoni, 25-60 age category).*

## *Major employment opportunities in the municipality*

### *Means of seeking a job*

As issues associated with employment are some of the most central ones in the municipality, it would be interesting to discuss those means, which are utilized by the local community in the job seeking process.

When discussing job seeking methods, respondents named “officially announced job vacancies” as the major source of employment opportunities. However, officially announced competitions for a vacancy are only associated with the public sector. Therefore, it is questionable whether this is the most common way of job seeking for local community members. Furthermore, according to the respondents, the common practice of announcing a job vacancy is job posting an announcement at the workplace, evident primarily in the case of mayors offices, supermarkets and restaurants.

*“There are advertisements for job vacancies, of course representatives of local administration are constantly in contact with us in some cases there are meeting with them. If there is something going on in the municipality they will definitely let us know. There is no shortage of information here” (Nakhakulevi, 25-60 age category)*

Other more infrequent instances of job vacancy announcements is via internet. However, the popularity of job seeking using internet varied according to age categories; not surprisingly, this way of searching for a job was most popular among respondents from 15-24 age category but least popular in focus groups who were older than 60.

*“internet web-sites are quite common mean for job seeking. Altahugh, only youth know to how to search for job vacanices on the internet... elders do not have enough knowladge to do the same.” (Nakhakhulevi, 60+ age category)*

Later in focus group discussions it became apparent that respondents’ social connections in the settlement play instrumental role in finding a job in the municipality. As was the case with farming, social connections can play a crucial role in job seeking. In the municipality, utilizing one’s non-formal social connections to find a job is regarded as a commonplace practice. In this instance, employers can use their social capital to find a suitable candidate for a desired vacancy and vice versa, individuals can directly contact their acquaintances who are employers and ask for assistance in job seeking. This method was evaluated as the most effective way of finding a job. An individual who seeks a job and has more social connections than others on labor market is more likely to find a job. The tendency was similar for rural and urban areas.

*“Whatever you do here, you will definitely need strong social connections and some acquaintances... if you want a job you will have to call your fiend and relatives.” (Nakhakhulevi, 25-60, age category)*

*“Mainly social connections determine whether you get a proper job or not.” (Khoni, 15-24 age category)*

As it is evident, in order to find a job, the local population mainly make use of their personal social connections. Generally, compared to formal methods of job seeking, this approach is the most widespread and effective method in the rest of Georgia as well (Lezhava, Amashukeli, Gugushvili, 2016).

### *Most demanded knowledge and skills for employment*

On the question of what skills and knowledge are most demanded by employees in the local labor market, answers vastly varied. The respondents identified a number of skills and types of knowledge, which would have helped them to find a job in the local labor market. In rural as well as urban areas, knowledge related to agriculture and its sub categories were regarded as the most demanded expertise in the municipality. According to respondents, demand for agricultural products in the municipality is relatively high, particularly from the retail trade sector, local supermarkets and grocery stores. The demand for local agricultural goods has consequently increased demand for knowledge in this field.

*“We mentioned a minute ago that one should study until he/she reaches old age and if someone is going to open a center here, we people will be able to learn something there. Everything needs expertise even farming. If youth want to learn something we should create opportunities for them” (Nakhakulevi, 60+ age category).*

When talking about educational requirements needed for employment in the local labor market, respondents stressed the importance of vocational education. In this instance, the category included technical as well craftsmanship specialties. According to the respondents, due to growing food sector in the municipality, the demand for culinary skills and knowledge has been gradually increasing over the years. Additionally, as mentioned, furniture production is one of the most widespread sources of income in the municipality. According to focus group members, as this sector developed over the years, subsequently, skilled manual workers grew in demand in this industry.

Apart from knowledge which can be classified under vocational education, knowledge of foreign languages, especially English and Russian, were most demanded in the local labor market. According to the respondents, proficiency in those languages was mainly by employers operating in the service sector, restaurants, hotels and supermarkets.

*“Nowadays knowledge of foreign languages is in high demand. Every employer needs it. If a young person is proficient in foreign languages than he/she might be regarded as a person with some future” (Khoni, 60+ age category).*

Along with foreign languages, computer literacy was also named as one of the necessary skills for employment.

*“Knowledge of computer programs might help you to find a job in Khoni. You can start your job in numerous places even in bank. Nowadays every job requires knowledge of computers” (Nakhakhulevi, 15-24 age category)*

As stated by the respondents, clerical workers were some of the most sought after individuals in Khoni municipality. A variety of sectors require those professionals allowing for job opportunities in restaurants, supermarkets and banks. The demand for clerks was also high among small scale business owners. It should be mentioned that university degrees was not regarded as a “must have” in this case. According to the respondents as specialists are extremely scarce in the municipality, even individuals regarded as “practitioners” were considered as sufficient for local labor market demands.

*“If you are a clerk you can start a job in almost any organization. Every organization and school has its own clerk so this kind of expertise is definitely needed” (Nakhakhulevi, 15-24 age category).*

### *Personal skills and characteristics*

Along with the aforementioned knowledge, focus group members named a number of skills and personal characteristics which employers in Khoni find crucial. However, compared to professional expertise, skills and personal characteristics were considered less important. Nevertheless, communication skills were regarded as one of the most demanded abilities in the local job market. According to the respondents, this characteristic was in high demand especially for the service sector where interpersonal communication is one of the determinants of good service.

*“This skill [communication] is quite important, especially in supermarkets, where communication with customers is very important. So, yes those skills are in demand” (Khoni, 60+ age category).*

Motivation was regarded as another critical skill in the local labor market. Compared with the aforementioned expertise term, motivation can be vaguer. In this case, the term implies dedication and initiative. According to focus group members, regardless of sector and industry, employers in most cases demand those characteristics in the workplace.

In Khoni municipality there is a considerably lower demand for professions, which require formal education, and demand is especially low for vacancies, which require university degrees. Exceptions are clerks and teachers. Individuals from the latter group are employed in local public schools. Whereas, employment possibilities for clerks include various sectors such as local banks, supermarkets, and local enterprises.

## *The educational opportunities and challenges in Khoni Municipality*

### *Obstacles for obtaining post-secondary education*

As mentioned above, in the Khoni municipality, in rural as well as in urban areas there are currently no educational centers or institutions other than public schools. Majority of vocational centers were closed down several decades ago. Although at present there are no vocational education institutions in Khoni municipality, one is scheduled to open in the next couple of months. Respondents from all age categories, especially within the 14-25 and 25-60 age brackets, expressed their motivation to study in this type of educational institution.

*“It is very good news that soon there will be new vocational center in Khoni. There used to be lot of centers in Khoni and now they are all closed down. It used to include courses from in all profession” (Khoni, 25-60, age category).*

The absence of educational institutions in Khoni acts as an additional incentive to emigrate in other Georgian cities, where those type of organizations are present. Therefore, in order to gain vocational or higher education, local community members have to migrate (at least temporarily) mainly to Kutaisi or Tbilisi. Typically, migration is relatively long term and lasts for 2-4 year.

The migration of local population to other Georgian cities is related to other hindrances for local community who aspire to gain education after leaving school, such as lack of financial resources available to them. According to the focus group participants, economic status of an individual is the most decisive factor in determining whether he/she will be able to gain further education. Since continuing studies generally requires students to migrate to larger Georgian cities for several years and to pay tuition among other fees, post-secondary education often places an additional economic burden on their families. Other costs assumed by the student and their family include rent and communal fees. If we discuss educational fees in the context of current economic issues in the municipality, which was assessed as “overwhelmingly negative”, it is evident that only a minority of residents in the local community have a chance to continue their education.

*“If he/she can pass exams, every parent will try everything to cover tuition fees for their children. It is still strongly connected to economic issues and status if you have to pay 2250 lari, it turns out that you have to pay around 500 lari per month. When I was a student I had to pay 563 and it was extremely difficult to cover those fees” (Khoni, 60+ age category).*

Additionally, financial barriers also include fees for courses which are dedicated to the preparation of students for university entrance exams. As school education was deemed “not sufficient” for passing the exams, thus, families in Khoni municipality usually have to pay extra for private tutors who generally offer intensive courses in subjects that are mandatory to pass the university entrance exams. This issue was especially prevalent for younger respondents between 15-24 who plan to advance their studies in higher educational institutions.

*“Generally, the problem is that the school does not give us enough education to... for example pass university entrance exams on our own. This is our problem, we, who are planning to*

*continue our studies in universities have to prepare with private tutor. In this regard, I cannot say that there is high level of education in our schools” (Khoni, 15-24 age category).*

Once again, parallels can be drawn to results of research carried out by ACT. Similar to the Koda, Shaumiani, Senaki and Jvari settlements, the local population also has limited access to education due to scarce resources in the municipality (DVV International, 2017).

Respondents also identified lack of motivation as a factor which determines whether local community members continue their studies in vocational education centers. Generally, compared to higher education, vocational education is less prestigious. Consequently people from the municipality have less incentive to study in these types of institutions.

*“Regarding vocational education, what we can obviously notice is that youth have a bit negative attitudes toward vocational education. For instance there are children who get below average marks in a school and when it comes to studying in vocational school, he/she is hesitant. He she/he thinks that quality of education is low there and eventually stays outside of university too. They cannot go to university and they do not want to study in vocational centers” (Khoni, 15-24 age category).*

*“In Georgian society, people overexaggerate value of university degree. It does not matter in which field, the main goal is to obtain that university degree” (Khoni, 25-60 age category).*

In this instance, those tendencies are partially incongruent with results from another study. Namely, in 2015 about 61% of all surveyed respondents in Georgia regarded vocational education as “prestigious” compared to 27% who regarded this type of education as “disreputable”. I.e. compared to Khoni municipality on national level, this type of education is not regarded as less prestigious (ACT, 2015).

It should also be mentioned, that there might have been certain inconsistencies regarding respondents’ opinions. As we have seen, on the one hand, regardless of respondents demographic attitudes, one of the major discouraging factors for local population to obtain vocational education was the low social reputation which this type of education entailed for the individual. On the other hand, almost opposite tendency was evident in focus group discussions. That is absence of vocational educational centers in the municipality. I.e. even though there are currently no such educational institutions, considerable segment of local population does not want to take up vocational education courses anyway, while others are willing to have such opportunities locally.

### *Obstacles for obtaining non-formal education*

As it was mentioned in the previous chapters, other than school education there are currently no educational centers, including non-formal educational institutions, in the municipality. Similar to gaining formal education, in order for the local community to gain non-formal education, they must travel to other cities, for instance Tbilisi and Kutaisi, or surrounding municipalities. In cities and nearby municipalities the most widespread educational institutions, which provide local population with non-formal education, are training centers.

Apart from obvious geographical obstacles - that is travel distance to other settlements - the local community encounters financial difficulties that hinder their accessibility to non-formal education as well.

*“You have to travel to Kutaisi, at least. People who have no means of survival here in the municipality, cannot obviously travel there. Those who do not have food, do not seek education. If he/she want to travel and attend courses, he/she has to pay money right?” (Nakhakulevi, 25-60 age category).*

Although, currently there are no permanent training centers in the Khoni municipality, occasionally, there are short-term training programs available to the local population, usually organized by the local government. The training courses are organized with a focus on issues and topics related to agriculture. In relatively fewer cases, training courses are also organized by NGOs, including Georgia-based as well as European-based organizations. The training topics covered by these associations are also related to agricultural issues in the municipality.

In case of youth, unique tendencies regarding non-formal education can be identified. As it has been mentioned, if an individual wants to pass university entrance exams, it is highly recommended for her/him to undergo courses with a private tutor. In this instance, this type practices can be classified under non-formal education category (Bedenashvili, 2016). However, the only motive to complete this course is individual’s plans, whether he/she is planning to continue their studies in higher education. If not individuals have less incentive to study with a private tutor. Additionally, for local population the accessibility to this type of programs heavily depends on financial resource, which as we have seen is a rather scarce in the municipality. Therefore, it can be assumed that majority of youth do not complete this type of courses. Regarding other non-formal educational programs, compared with other age brackets, younger members of the population, have more access to various training courses. The courses mainly include free language learning classes organized by the local government.

The least common means to gain non-formal education are distance learning and online training courses. However, these types of courses are only available to a minor part of Khoni municipality residents, since a considerable part of the local population does not have access to internet.

*“Whoever has access to internet has also access to those type of courses... unfortunately here not many have access to it” (Nakhakhulevi, 25-60 age category).*

It is also interesting that the respondents’ attitudes towards non-formal educational courses are quite positive, as they expressed high levels of motivation to attend these training courses. In this instance, main incentives mentioned are the chance to develop personally and the opportunity to attain more knowledge in certain fields. The knowledge and skills acquired were regarded as goal itself, i.e. receiving education was perceived as having value by itself. Additionally, obtained knowledge was recognized as a means of achieving certain goals; for instance, increasing the probability of finding a job by polishing one’s interpersonal skills to better communicate with others, etc.

*“New training courses can be so interesting, it might help you in finding a better job, or you might find new interests and pursue a career in other fields. You might be able to change your future in a more positive way. Even one training course might help you to change yourself and your life as a whole” (Khoni, 25-60 age category).*

### *Most desirable training courses for local population*

In the end, after clarifying the needs for expertise on local labor market and educational opportunities, it will be relevant to evaluate what training courses the local population would find valuable. We asked the respondents to name certain courses that they see appealing for career development. The following ones were most commonly mentioned:

**Computer Courses** - During discussions, courses concentrated on computer literacy were regarded as the most needed and desirable in the municipality. As there is a lack of such courses in Khoni, respondents were unequivocal in agreement that this course would be beneficial for the whole settlement. This tendency is not surprising, as it was earlier mentioned, computer literacy was one of the most demanded expertise in the municipality.

**Culinary** - Also evident was the consensus among different focus groups that culinary courses would be advantageous. Due to high demand for cooks in the local labor market, this course was considered to be a desirable program to offer. Additionally, the course was regarded as a catalyst for reducing aforementioned problems such as migration and unemployment.

**Foreign languages** - Similar to computer and culinary skills, language courses were also recognized as important due to pragmatic reasons. According to the focus group members, language proficiency would greatly increase an individual's chance for finding a job. Language courses in English and Russian were the most stated ones. Apart from pragmatic motives, focus group members also regarded these activities as holding intrinsic value in itself. For instance, taking up language courses was considered to be a way to broaden one's worldview.

**Georgian language courses** - Surprisingly, along with foreign languages, Georgian language courses was deemed as one of the desirable educational programs. The main core of respondents who specifically named this course largely included individuals from 15-24 age group. As already mentioned, the quality of school education was evaluated as “fairly low” by the respondents and because one of the mandatory exams in Georgian university entrance exams is Georgian language, this type of educational program was considered as an additional asset, which increased their chances of enrolling in university. Respondents from older age groups had less pragmatic motives for choosing this course. Namely, Georgian language was regarded as one of the crucial elements of the culture and increasing language skills in their mother tongue already carried value by itself.

**Beekeeping** - The main motive for respondents to choose this course was quality improvement in honey production. As production of honey mainly takes place in home environments, the quality of this product is deemed to be “too low”. Consequently, the local

population comes across difficulties in selling this product in Khoni as well as in neighboring municipalities.

**Clerical work** - Courses in financial literacy were regarded as one of the most needed ones in the municipality. Not only there is a high demand for this type of expertise in the local labor market, but lack of workforce with this knowledge was related to financial mistakes and losses for local enterprises. Consequently courses in this field were considered to be some of the most beneficial and “urgently” needed ones.

**Furniture production** - Much like beekeeping, even though the furniture production business is growing, the low product quality is still considered an issue. Therefore, from a pragmatic perspective, this course was also regarded as beneficial for the whole municipality.

**Courses related to tourism sector** – In this instance, these courses mainly include training of hotel personnel. Most of these professions do not require university degrees. They include: maids, bellhops etc.

**Small business management** - This course was especially popular among respondents from 15-24 age category. Generally, as it has already been mentioned, small business enterprises in beekeeping and furniture production are quite common place in Khoni municipality. However, due to lack of knowledge and experience, only a minority of those enterprises manage to grow. Consequently, small business management courses were regarded as one of the instrumental means for tackling this issue.

**Project writing and management** - According to respondents, occasionally local administration, as well as NGOs, announce grants for a number of agricultural related projects. Even though local population has motivation to participate in these competitions, only a minor percentage of them actually take part in those projects. The major reason for this tendency is lack of knowledge in writing those types of projects.

**Training courses in sales sector** - Once again, as a considerable part of local population is engaged in retail sales sector, courses in sales was regarded as one of the educational programs, which best fit the needs of the local population’s employment opportunities.

**Hairdresser** - Even though there is not high demand in Khoni town for this type of specialization, current stylists and hairdressers are regarded specialists who “lack necessary knowledge”, therefore, the program was regarded as a suitable mean of staff retraining.

**Cultural education** - The educational program dedicated to cultural education was one of the few which was not chosen by the respondents due to pragmatic motives. The main incentive for respondents to attend this type of courses was the chance to satisfy their psychological needs, for instance need for self-expression. The course was mainly considered desirable by women respondents, especially in 25-60 and 60+ age categories. Cultural education mainly included handicrafts, knitting and sewing.

## Conclusion

To summarize, as it is obvious from the abovementioned, the local population is mainly employed in agricultural, furniture production and retail trade sectors. For a considerable segment of Khoni municipality residents, a major source of income was financial aid sent by their relatives and family members.

Additionally, it can be concluded that there are number of economic problems in the Khoni municipality. The pressing issues for the local population are poverty and unemployment, which in turn is related to accessibility of education. Due to the absence of educational centers in the municipality, in order to gain formal as well as non-formal education, the population has to migrate to large Georgian cities. As a result of the high level poverty only a minor part of the population can afford to pay tuition fees, thus a large part of Khoni municipality residents remain without any education, especially without formal education.

According to the major tendencies, the most demanded knowledge in the local labor market is for foreign languages (English and Russian), computer literacy, clerical abilities, furniture production and culinary expertise. Regarding skills and personal characteristics, motivation and communication skills were considered to be one of the most demanded abilities for local employers. Corresponding to local labor market demands, the most desirable courses for the local population were in foreign language courses, computer literacy, financial literacy, furniture production, and culinary. Other valuable courses for local population, from a practical perspective also include educational programs in beekeeping, small business management, and project management. From a less pragmatic viewpoint, respondents' also expressed motivation to take part in various cultural education programs, mainly handcrafts.

Considering the abovementioned, we can conclude that the Khoni Municipality is in great need for educational opportunities. It should be underlines that the majority of those courses named by the study respondents are already offered by DVV international in various educational centers across Georgia, thus implementing them in Khoni Municipality using the existing curricula will be a large asset for the development of the local labour market as well as for satisfying the needs of the population (DVV International, 2017).

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