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INSTITUTIONAL BARRIERS TO EMPLOYMENT IN THE HEALTHCARE SECTOR: REGULATIONS AND THEIR IMPACT

Abstract. The healthcare sector is critically important for a country's socio-economic stability, as public health directly influences not only the overall quality of life but also workforce productivity and national economic growth. A well-functioning healthcare system ensures a healthier population, leading to a more effective labor force and increased economic output. However, despite its significance, the employment process in Georgia's healthcare system faces numerous institutional barriers that limit the sector's ability to attract, integrate, and retain skilled professionals. These barriers not only restrict job opportunities for newly trained medical personnel but also negatively impact the accessibility and quality of medical services across the country.

This study comprehensively examines the key institutional obstacles within the Georgian healthcare labor market. It identifies the primary challenges, including low wages that demotivate medical professionals, a significant mismatch between education and employment due to a lack of structured career guidance, insufficient digitalization within the sector that hampers efficiency, an acute shortage of nursing staff that affects service quality, and the absence of a long-term strategic vision for workforce planning and healthcare modernization. These factors collectively contribute to labor market inefficiencies, high turnover rates, and an imbalanced distribution of healthcare professionals, particularly between urban and rural areas, exacerbating regional disparities in medical service provision.

The research methodology is based on a mixed-method approach, incorporating both quantitative and qualitative research techniques to provide a thorough assessment of the issue. Quantitative research was conducted through structured surveys. These surveys assessed key employment-related challenges, regulatory barriers, and workforce expectations. Qualitative research was carried out through in-depth interviews with industry professionals to gain deeper insights into systemic inefficiencies and potential policy interventions.

Based on the research findings, this study proposes several policy recommendations aimed at improving employment conditions within the healthcare sector. These include revising the salary system and implementing financial incentives to increase workforce retention, developing career mentoring programs to better align medical education with labor market demands, accelerating the digital transformation of healthcare services to enhance efficiency, actively promoting the nursing profession through training programs and better compensation structures, and formulating a long-term employment strategy that integrates technological advancements and systematic workforce planning.

Addressing these institutional barriers is crucial for modernizing Georgia's healthcare system, ensuring the long-term sustainability of the sector, and improving the overall quality of medical services. Implementing the proposed reforms would not only enhance job satisfaction and professional growth opportunities for healthcare workers but also contribute to better public health outcomes and a more resilient healthcare infrastructure.

Keywords: *Healthcare Employment, Institutional Barriers, Workforce Retention, Digital Transformation, Policy Reform.*

JEL Classification: I18; J24; O15; H51.

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Introduction. The healthcare sector is one of the most fundamental pillars of a country's economic and social stability, as its efficiency is directly tied to public health, quality of life, and workforce productivity. A well-functioning healthcare system ensures

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not only the well-being of individuals but also contributes to economic development, as a healthy workforce is a key driver of productivity and national progress. However, despite its critical importance, the employment process within the healthcare system faces a range of institutional barriers that restrict both the competitiveness of the sector and the quality of medical services.

These institutional barriers are shaped by legal, administrative, and economic factors, which directly impact workforce formation, professional development, and integration into the labor market. Legal restrictions and bureaucratic obstacles often complicate licensing and accreditation processes, making it difficult for newly trained professionals to enter the workforce efficiently. Administrative inefficiencies, such as a lack of structured career pathways and ineffective workforce planning, further exacerbate these issues. Economic constraints, including low wages and limited funding for healthcare institutions, discourage professionals from staying in the sector and drive skilled personnel toward private healthcare or international opportunities.

The challenges presented by these institutional barriers are particularly severe in regional areas, where access to healthcare services is already limited. The shortage of medical personnel in these regions exacerbates social inequality, as rural populations struggle to obtain adequate healthcare services. The uneven distribution of medical professionals between urban and rural areas creates disparities in healthcare accessibility, leading to worse health outcomes and a decline in overall quality of life.

Understanding the impact of institutional barriers on employment in the healthcare sector is essential for designing effective policies that can improve workforce retention and optimize the overall efficiency of healthcare services. This research aims to examine the underlying causes of employment-related challenges and explore potential policy solutions that can enhance the sector's capacity to attract and retain skilled professionals.

The object of this study is the institutional barriers to employment in Georgia's healthcare sector, while the subject consists of healthcare professionals (both employed and job-seeking), employer organizations, and state regulatory bodies.

The study aims to identify and assess institutional barriers in the Georgian healthcare sector, examining their scope and impact while also analyzing legal and

administrative restrictions that hinder the recruitment and retention of new professionals. Additionally, it explores regional disparities in healthcare employment opportunities, particularly between urban and rural areas, and evaluates international best practices in healthcare employment, comparing them with Georgia's current system to propose effective reforms.

This study seeks to provide a comprehensive analysis of the key employment challenges within the healthcare sector and identify practical recommendations that can contribute to the efficiency and sustainability of the workforce. By addressing these barriers, the research aims to support the modernization of Georgia's healthcare system, improve the quality of medical services, and enhance the overall stability and resilience of the sector.

Literature Review. The role of institutions in economic development has been widely discussed in modern economic literature, where researchers analyze their influence on investment, innovation, and labor market structures. Institutions can be classified as inclusive or extractive, determining the sustainability and growth potential of an economic system (Acemoglu & Robinson, 2012; Arnanian-Kepuladze, 2014).

Inclusive institutions play a significant role in economic growth as they ensure the rule of law, property rights protection, and fair competition, creating an environment that encourages innovation and investment (North, 1990). In contrast, extractive institutions concentrate power in a narrow elite, restricting economic freedoms and hindering development.

Studies on the economic transition of post-socialist countries indicate that weak institutions and corruption often slow down economic development and reduce public trust in the state (Kornai, 2004). According to Kornai, institutional reliability and administrative efficiency are essential for the stability of economic relations, although his analysis places less emphasis on the role of the private sector.

D. Rodrik (2007) highlights that economic institutions determine investment levels, innovation rates, and economic productivity. His model emphasizes that regulations alone are not enough; institutions must be flexible and capable of adapting to technological and social changes.

Other research has examined legal and administrative barriers to business and employment (Djankov et al., 2002; Arnanian-Kepuladze, 2018). Excessive regulations often restrict economic freedom and contribute to

the growth of informal markets. For long-term economic growth, institutional efficiency and adaptability to change are essential (Rodrik, 2007).

The role of digital technologies and innovations in institutional reform is becoming increasingly significant. Research suggests that artificial intelligence and blockchain-based public registries can significantly reduce corruption and bureaucratic obstacles (Brynjolfsson & McAfee, 2014). K. W. Brown and P. J. Taylor (2019) emphasize that digital transformation in healthcare requires not only technical capacity but also adaptive institutional frameworks. In addition, E. G. Clark and V. Patel (2018) highlight that digital health technologies in developing countries often face implementation challenges due to limited infrastructure and training.

G. Dussault and M. C. Franceschini (2006) underline that geographical imbalances in healthcare personnel distribution negatively affect access to services in rural areas. Similarly, L. H. Nguyen and A. T. Hoang (2020) discuss the persistence of healthcare access inequalities in Southeast Asia, which reflect institutional challenges rooted in governance and resource allocation.

J. Frenk et al. (2010) propose that transforming healthcare education is essential for building health systems that are resilient and equitable. Furthermore, K. Sheikh et al. (2015) advocate for governance frameworks that support better healthcare performance, while R. E. Scott and M. Mars (2015) note that telehealth can bridge healthcare gaps in underserved regions, though institutional readiness is critical.

These perspectives demonstrate that institutions have a complex influence on economic development, and their effectiveness significantly determines a country's economic condition. In the Georgian context, particular attention should be paid to the transparency of the judicial system, the digital transformation of public administration, and the improvement of the business environment, which will contribute to the sustainability of economic growth.

Research Methodology. To examine the institutional barriers to employment, both quantitative and qualitative research methods were utilized. The research methodology includes a literature review, data collection, and data analysis, allowing for an in-depth assessment of the impact of institutional barriers on the employment process in the healthcare sector.

The literature review was conducted based on academic articles, reports from

international organizations, and regulations governing Georgia's labor market. This approach helped evaluate the theoretical aspects of institutional barriers and their influence on employment.

Data Collection

Data were gathered from two primary sources:

1. Secondary sources – including reports from international organizations (e.g., WHO, OECD), data from Georgia's National Statistics Office, and relevant research studies.

2. Primary sources – collected through surveys and interviews.

A survey was conducted with four different groups:

- medical students – 183 respondents;
- newly employed doctors – 138 respondents;
- employer-managers – 27 respondents;
- representatives of professional associations – 3 direct interviews.

Closed-ended questionnaire surveys were conducted with medical students, newly employed doctors, and employer-managers. These surveys included questions assessing barriers in the labor market, the impact of regulations, difficulties in the employment process, and career expectations.

In-depth interviews were conducted with representatives of professional associations to gain deeper insights into the impact of institutional barriers and potential policy changes.

The collected data were analyzed using both quantitative and qualitative methods.

Based on the findings, recommendations were developed to reduce institutional barriers and improve the employment process in the healthcare sector. The survey results identified major challenges, including:

1. Complex licensing and accreditation processes.
2. Excessive bureaucratic regulations.
3. Barriers to entering the labor market.
4. Limited opportunities for salary growth and career development.

The data obtained from this study will support the development of improved policies by various stakeholders, including government bodies, medical education institutions, and employers. The findings will contribute to simplifying the employment process and fostering the sustainable development of the healthcare sector.

Main Results. The study identified several major institutional barriers that significantly affect employment in Georgia's healthcare sector, the recruitment of qualified personnel, and the quality of services. These barriers

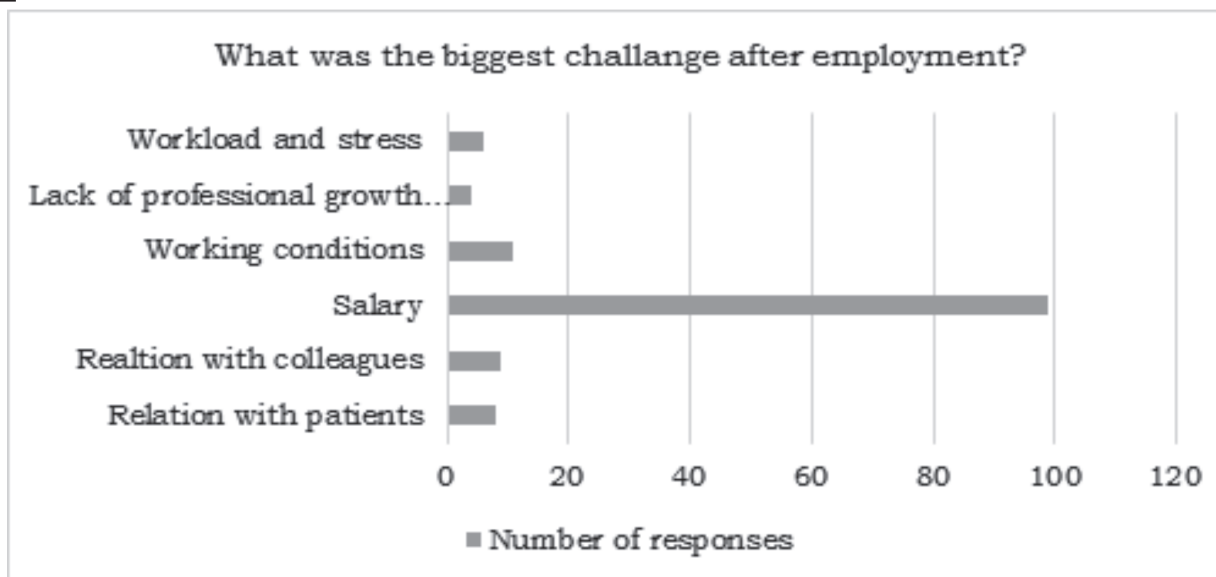


Fig. 1. Biggest challenge after employment

Source: built by the author according to the data collected from private survey

include economic constraints, a mismatch between education and employment, low levels of digitalization, a shortage of nurses, and the absence of a long-term strategic vision. Timely identification and resolution of these issues are crucial for modernizing the healthcare sector.

1. Economic Institutional Barriers

The study found that one of the main factors affecting employment in Georgia's

limited career progression significantly reduce healthcare worker retention, especially in low- and middle-income countries.

72% of newly employed respondents (99 participants) confirmed that low wages were their primary demotivating factor.

In 2020, the average monthly salary in the healthcare sector was 1,108 GEL, while in the regions, the average salary for nurses did not exceed 300 GEL.

Why do you think it is difficult to find specialists in nursing and related fields?

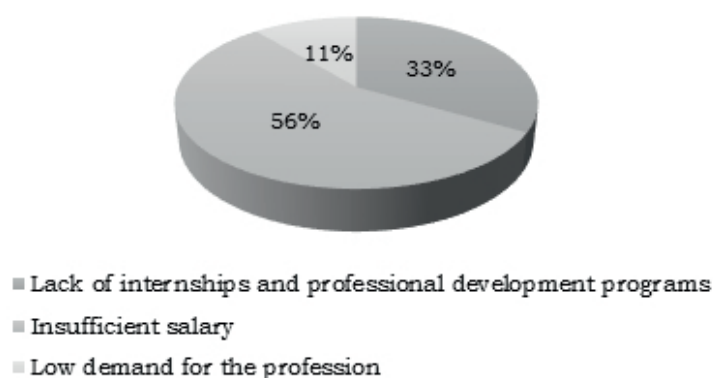


Fig. 2. Difficulties in finding specialists in nursing and related fields

Source: built by the author according to the data collected from private survey

healthcare sector is low wages, which is particularly problematic for newly employed doctors and nurses. P. J. Harris and T. T. Nguyen (2019) find that low wages and

to become a doctor. Davis and Thompson (2017) suggest that aligning educational curricula with employment market demands enhances the readiness of medical graduates

63% of employer-managers (17 respondents) stated that the shortage of nurses negatively impacts service quality in clinics.

To improve the recruitment and retention of healthcare personnel, a revision of the salary system and the implementation of incentive programs is necessary.

2. Mismatch Between Education and Employment

The study revealed that most students have only partial knowledge of the career path required

to integrate effectively into the workforce.

55% (91 students) have only partial information about the necessary steps in their medical career.

20% (37 students) have no information regarding professional development opportunities.

45% of newly employed respondents stated that their expectations regarding employment did not align with reality.

To address this issue, career mentoring programs should be developed to help students understand the professional pathway during their studies. Additionally, greater integration between medical education and employment markets through internships and practical training programs is required.

3. Low Level of Digitalization and Lack of Electronic Services

The lack of data management systems hinders the effective functioning of the healthcare sector. E. G. Clark and V. Patel (2018) also highlight that digital health technologies in developing countries often face implementation challenges due to limited infrastructure and workforce training, which aligns with findings in the Georgian context.

48% of surveyed managers (13 respondents) stated that low levels of digitalization create significant obstacles in clinic management.

23% of professional association representatives (10 respondents) confirmed that the implementation of data analysis platforms would significantly improve service delivery.

To address this issue, the introduction of digital data management systems is essential to optimize healthcare sector operations.

4. Nurse Shortages

37.5% of nurses in Georgia are over 50 years old, indicating that upcoming

retirements will further exacerbate workforce shortages.

63% of employer-managers (17 respondents) confirmed that the lack of nurses reduces operational capacity in clinics.

D. S. Miller and R. T. Johnson (2018) report that global nursing shortages require both international collaboration and country-

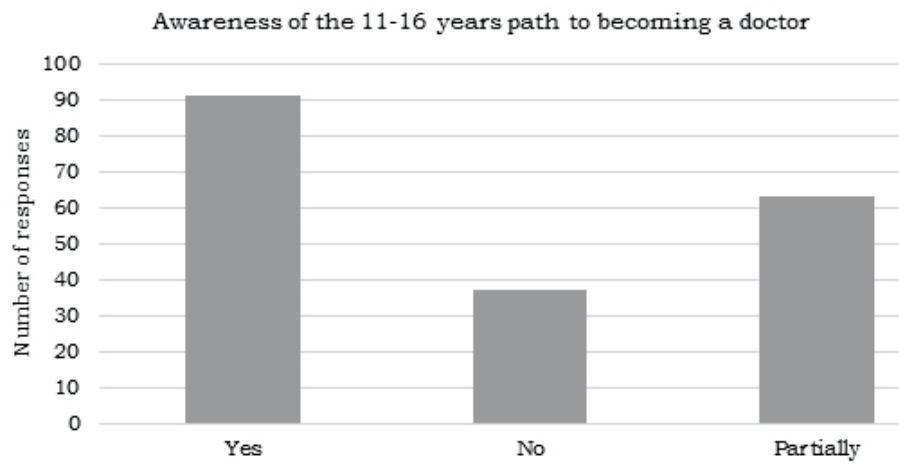


Fig. 3. Awareness of the 11–16-year path to becoming a doctor

Source: built by the author according to the data collected from private survey

Were your expectations about employment and reality aligned?

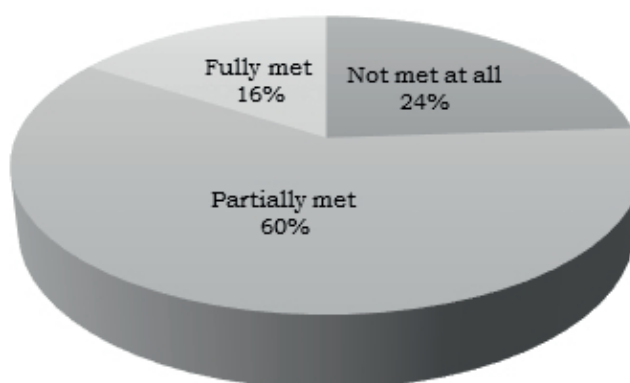


Fig. 4. Expectations between employment and reality

Source: built by the author according to the data collected from private survey

specific policy action to ensure a sustainable supply of qualified personnel.

To address this issue, programs for nurse training and motivation, as well as salary increases and social incentives, need to be implemented.



Fig. 5. Challenges in the process of hiring new staff

Source: built by the author according to the data collected from private survey

Why do you think it is difficult to find specialists in nursing and related fields?

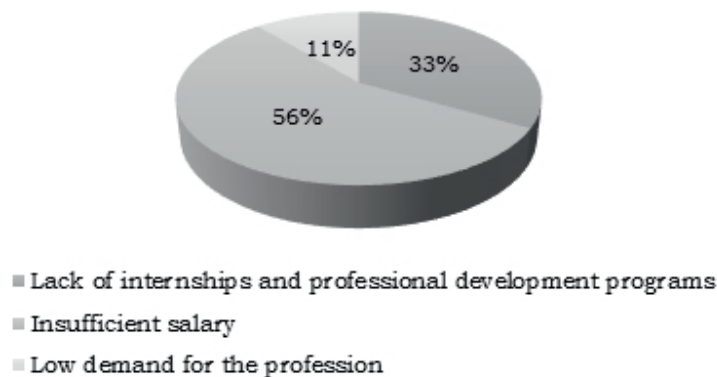


Fig. 6. Difficulties in finding specialists in nursing and related fields

Source: built by the author according to the data collected from private survey

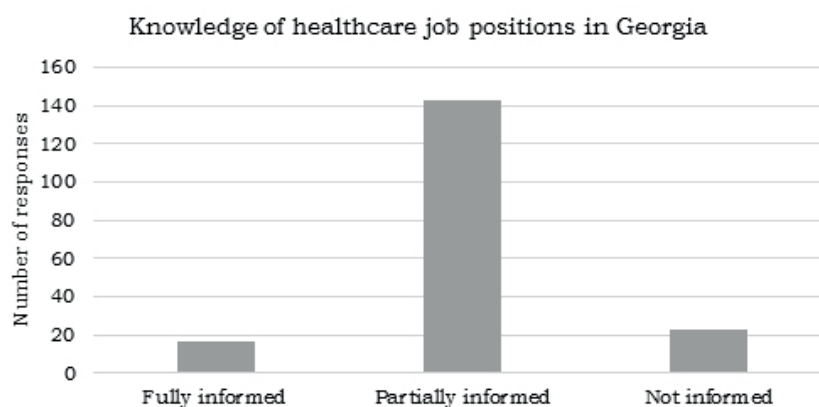


Fig. 7. Knowledge of healthcare job positions in Georgia

Source: built by the author according to the data collected from private survey

5. Lack of a Long-Term Strategic Vision

Medical association representatives confirmed that the government does not have a long-term employment strategy. J. A. Smith and L. M. Roberts (2020) identify that institutional weaknesses in developing countries often obstruct healthcare workforce development and prevent effective strategic planning. Similarly, A. D. Lopez and C. J. L. Murray (2021) highlight that policy interventions should be evidence-based and proactively address future workforce shortages to avoid systemic collapse.

To improve the situation, a long-term employment strategy should be developed, integrating technological innovations, medical education reforms, and data management mechanisms.

Conclusion. The study results indicate that institutional barriers in Georgia's healthcare sector pose a significant challenge to the recruitment and retention of qualified personnel and the overall delivery of medical services. These barriers are manifested through persistently low wages, a mismatch between the structure of medical education and labor market demands, insufficient levels of digitalization, a critical shortage of nursing staff, and the absence of a coherent, long-term employment strategy. As J. A. Smith and L. M. Roberts (2020) identify, such institutional weaknesses

in developing countries frequently obstruct healthcare workforce development, and Georgia is no exception.

Addressing these challenges requires a coordinated policy response. Increasing wages and introducing targeted motivation programs is essential to retain professionals, particularly in rural and underserved areas, where A. D. Lopez and C. J. L. Murray (2021) emphasize that workforce shortages are often most acute. Equally important is improving the alignment between educational institutions and labor market needs, ensuring that students are adequately prepared for medical careers; as R. E. Davis and S. A. Thompson (2017) suggest, integrating employment readiness into medical education increases graduate success.

Digital transformation is another crucial dimension. The lack of effective electronic services and accessible data complicates workforce management and reduces service efficiency. E. G. Clark and V. Patel (2018) argue that the success of digital health systems in developing countries depends not only on technology but also on institutional readiness and proper infrastructure. Additionally, M. L. Garcia and S. H. Lee (2020) stress the need for strategic planning and long-term workforce forecasting in healthcare systems to ensure stability and adaptability.

To guide these reforms, establishing a reliable system for collecting and analyzing healthcare labor market data is necessary. K. S. Nair (2019) points out that such systemic inefficiencies in human resource management frequently undermine healthcare delivery in emerging economies. Moreover, as G. Cometto and S. Witter (2013) highlight, setting measurable targets for workforce development and tracking progress are vital components of effective healthcare planning.

Ultimately, the modernization of Georgia's healthcare sector requires more than technical reforms; it demands a structural shift in how institutions support healthcare professionals and manage long-term workforce development. M. E. Kruk et al. (2018) call for a global health system revolution focused not only on access but also on quality, while A. M. Williams and Y. H. Chen (2021) remind us that economic constraints continue to hinder equitable healthcare access unless they are systematically addressed.

Through the implementation of these integrated reforms, Georgia can significantly reduce institutional barriers, retain skilled professionals, and build a more resilient and equitable healthcare system that meets both current and future public health needs.

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ІНСТИТУЦІЙНІ БАР'ЄРИ ДЛЯ ПРАЦЕВЛАШТУВАННЯ В СЕКТОРІ ОХОРОНИ ЗДОРОВ'Я: НОРМАТИВНО-ПРАВОВІ АКТИ ТА ЇХНІЙ ВПЛИВ

Сектор охорони здоров'я є критично важливим для соціально-економічної стабільності країни, оскільки здоров'я населення безпосередньо впливає не лише на загальну якість життя, але й на продуктивність праці та національне економічне зростання. Добре функціонуюча система охорони здоров'я забезпечує здоров'я населення, що призводить до підвищення ефективності робочої сили та зростання економічного виробництва. Однак, незважаючи на свою важливість, процес працевлаштування в системі охорони здоров'я Грузії стикається з численними інституційними бар'єрами, які обмежують здатність сектору залучати, інтегрувати та утримувати кваліфікованих фахівців. Ці бар'єри не лише обмежують можливості працевлаштування для новоспечених медичних працівників, але й негативно впливають на доступність та якість медичних послуг по всій країні.

У цьому дослідженні всебічно проаналізовано ключові інституційні перешкоди на ринку праці у сфері охорони здоров'я Грузії. Воно визначає основні проблеми, серед яких низька заробітна плата, що демотивує медичних працівників, значна невідповідність між освітою та працевлаштуванням через відсутність структурованої профорієнтації, недостатня діджиталізація в секторі, що перешкоджає ефективності, гостра нестача середнього медичного персоналу, що впливає на якість послуг, а також відсутність довгострокового стратегічного бачення щодо планування робочої сили та модернізації системи охорони здоров'я. У сукупності ці фактори призводять до неефективності ринку праці, високої плинності кадрів і незбалансованого розподілу медичних працівників, особливо між містом і селом, що поглиблює регіональні диспропорції в наданні медичних послуг.

Методологія дослідження ґрунтується на змішаному підході, що включає як кількісні, так і якісні методи дослідження для забезпечення ґрунтовної оцінки проблеми. Кількісне дослідження проводилося за допомогою структурованих опитувань. Ці опитування оцінювали ключові проблеми, пов'язані з працевлаштуванням, регуляторні бар'єри та очікування робочої сили. Якісне дослідження проводилося шляхом глибинних інтерв'ю з фахівцями галузі, щоб отримати глибше розуміння системної неефективності та потенційних політичних втручань.

На основі отриманих результатів у цьому дослідженні пропонується кілька політичних рекомендацій, спрямованих на покращення умов зайнятості в секторі охорони здоров'я. Серед них - перегляд системи оплати праці та впровадження фінансових стимулів для підвищення рівня утримання кадрів, розробка програм кар'єрного наставництва для кращого узгодження медичної освіти з потребами ринку праці, прискорення цифрової трансформації медичних послуг для підвищення ефективності, активна популяризація професії медичних сестер через навчальні програми та кращі структури оплати праці, а також розробка довгострокової стратегії зайнятості, яка б інтегрувала технологічний прогрес та систематичне планування трудових ресурсів.

Усунення цих інституційних бар'єрів має вирішальне значення для модернізації системи охорони здоров'я Грузії, забезпечення довгострокової стійкості сектору та підвищення загальної якості медичних послуг. Реалізація запропонованих реформ не лише підвищить задоволеність роботою та можливості професійного зростання для медичних працівників, але й сприятиме покращенню результатів громадського здоров'я та створенню більш стійкої інфраструктури охорони здоров'я.

Ключові слова: *зайнятість у сфері охорони здоров'я, інституційні бар'єри, утримання кадрів, цифрова трансформація, політична реформа.*

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