

# LOVE.DIST@NCE

Improving Access and Quality of Inclusive Higher Education  
One Student at a Time

## NEEDS ANALYSIS FOR TARGET GROUPS POPULATION IN GEORGIA

Learning Optimization and Academic Inclusion via Equitativa Distance Teaching and Learning (LoveDistance)



The European Commission support for the production of this publication does not constitute an endorsement of the contents which reflects the views only of the authors, and the Commission cannot be held responsible for any use which may be made of the information contained therein.

# LOVE.DIST@NCE

Improving Access and Quality of Inclusive Higher Education  
One Student at a Time

## EXCLUDED POPULATIONS IN GEORGIA - TARGET GROUPS

Georgia has always been one of the most diverse countries in the Caucasus, gathering different ethnic and religious minorities in a country. According to recent statistics, the majority of the population in a country is ethnic Georgian 86%, while the biggest ethnic minority groups are Azerbaijanians – 6.3%. Armenian ethnic groups are represented as only 4.6% of the whole population<sup>1</sup>. There are also Russians, Ukrainians, Yezidis, Kists and Greeks but in total they represent only 2% of the whole population. As for the regional coverage, also you might see the families from ethnic minority groups living together with ethnic Georgian families, but it's also a practice that in some cases you might see the town or a village with inhabitants from only one ethnic group. As for the religious diversity, the majority are orthodox Christians with 83,4 %, after that comes Muslims with 10,7%, Armenian apostolic with 2,9 and very small number of Catholics, Jehovah's Witnesses and Yazidis<sup>2</sup>.

Another population that we can state as an excluded one might be the students with special needs and students who have part time jobs at the same time of their studies.

## HIGHER EDUCATION PRESENCE OF EXCLUDED POPULATIONS

Being a Post-soviet country, Georgia experienced some economic problems, which influenced the universities as well. The majority of the HEIs in Georgia have been transforming nowadays. Georgian HEIs have to respond to the new external forces of the National Authorisation of Universities. The new Authorization Standard offered by the National Centre for Educational Quality Enhancement for Georgian HEIs to obtain authorisation in order to carry out HE activities as obligatory measures clearly urge HEIs to have a well-developed educational programmes that supports effective implementation of educational and research activities and ensure their relevance with constantly changing environment; Individualized educational programs should offer students appropriate format and conditions of teaching, learning and assessment to students with different requirements or special educational needs. Being an integral part of the European HE Area since 2004, Georgian universities have been trying to align their teaching and learning processes with European HE standards and requirements to ensure compatibility of its curriculum, synchronization of the learning outcomes that support effective student mobility and enhance the degree of internationalization within the national education system in general and individual HE institutions in particular. That said, HEIs have been seeking effective ways to provide quality teaching and learning processes.

---

<sup>1</sup> [https://web.archive.org/web/20170205175903/http://geostat.ge/cms/site\\_images/files/english/population/Census\\_release\\_ENG\\_2016.pdf](https://web.archive.org/web/20170205175903/http://geostat.ge/cms/site_images/files/english/population/Census_release_ENG_2016.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> [https://web.archive.org/web/20170205175903/http://geostat.ge/cms/site\\_images/files/english/population/Census\\_release\\_ENG\\_2016.pdf](https://web.archive.org/web/20170205175903/http://geostat.ge/cms/site_images/files/english/population/Census_release_ENG_2016.pdf)

# LOVE.DIST@NCE

Improving Access and Quality of Inclusive Higher Education  
One Student at a Time

Although the government of Georgia and the educational policy in the country state that education is one of the most valuable assets, still there are families and children beyond the secondary and higher education. The reasons vary from segment to segment. In some cases, this can be the socio-economic situation in the families, with low income etc. While in other cases, that can be somehow connected to their traditions and the way of living. In a very few cases, that can be also connected to their religious beliefs. As the majority of the students have to pay for their education, it's very common for them to have a job at the same time of their studies. In some cases it means they are unable to attend all the classes.

## EXCLUDED POPULATION BARRIERS FOR HE

The target group in a country as general are students coming from ethnic minority groups (Azerbaijanis and Armenians) whose religious or traditional views don't let them leave their families and move in the capital or in any big city to get quality education. Also we are considering Georgian nationals that are fleeing Russian occupied areas. Besides, some of the students coming from economically poor regions of the country can't afford paying tuition and living expenses, they isolate themselves and can't get sufficient education. In addition to this, the majority of students in Georgia have to pay for the higher education degree, thus they need to work at the same time of their studies.

The majority of the study programs in Georgian Higher Educational Institutions are delivered in Georgian Language. That is seen as one of the biggest barriers for the ethnic minority groups. They are getting secondary education in their first language and getting classes in Georgian as their second language. Also the Ministry offers increased number of hours of Georgian Language classes, normally done by the native speaker teachers, but it's not easy for pupils to read and write into the Georgian when graduating schools, as they use Georgian only at schools and all the communication and socialization are done in their first language, as this is the language used with their parents, with their friends, they watch TV channels on their first language and etc. As already stated above, GE HEIs do offer the preparatory courses into Georgian for students coming from ethnic minority groups, they are having intensive language courses for one year and after this are admitted on BA studies.

As Georgia is still a developing country, some families are having financial problems and they are unable to pay for their children wishing to get higher education. Although there are government scholarships which students can apply for, this number is limited and not all the applicants are selected. For this reason sometimes students are starting working at the same time of their studies, trying to pay the tuition fees.

Another factor that can be somehow related to the accessibility of Higher education is the demographic coverage of the universities in the country. As stated above the majority of the universities are located either in the capita, or in the biggest regional cities. That said, if a student from villages or living in peripheral areas wishes to get higher education, she/he must change the place of living, move to a bigger city, find an accommodation. In addition to this increased expenses, there is also a psychological issue, as traditionally in Georgian communities children won't leave their parents' houses and live together two or three generations, and for some students it can be a real life challenge to start living alone.

# LOVE.DIST@NCE

Improving Access and Quality of Inclusive Higher Education  
One Student at a Time

## DISTANCE LEARNING IN HES

Strengthening distance learning in Georgia will be beneficial for those students who live in the borders of the conflict regions, live far away from the city, employed ones who consider moving around as a problem. This way of teaching will be also beneficial for students with such religious backgrounds that forbids receiving education in a traditional way, in the auditorium. They will get a chance to get higher education via distance learning, without leaving the home. It will also help to involve people with special needs in higher education. For some vulnerable groups, distance learning will be one of the opportunities to gain economic independence, prosperity and create a secure future.

Georgian legislation does not provide distance learning opportunities. But the current pandemic situation showed us that the state should take care of this issue very carefully. It is needed to take care of legislative changes and allow Georgian universities to implement distance educational programs. For this purpose, it will be necessary to develop / adjust and offer educational programs / courses focused on distance learning to students. Universities should try to introduce innovative teaching methods that will be complementary to the result-oriented distance learning. It is also important to regulate / develop the infrastructure needed for distance learning. Recognition of full distance learning at the level of Georgian legislation is impossible at this stage, however, given the current situation, it is possible that some changes will be made to support this direction.

## ETHNIC MINORITY STUDENTS

Areas with Ethnic minorities in Kakheti Region are: Kabali village, Karajala village, Pankisi Gorge, Kvareli and Lagodekhi Municipalities. Large groups of ethnic minorities in the Kakheti Region are Azerbaijanians, Kists, Lezgins and Ossetians as well. If we characterize ethnic minorities in regards of their Georgian language knowledge, we can receive the following picture: Ossetians, Kists and Lezgins study in Georgian schools and master Georgian language at school; Azerbaijanian people study in Azerbaijan schools and don't know Georgian well (in most cases speak poor Georgian); For Azerbaijanian and Kist minorities (especially for women) religion and/or cultural traditions create barriers to get in HEIs. According to the results of the study of Pankisi Gorge carried out by TeSaU 71% of Kist respondents think that HE or VE are necessary for their career advancement. This positive attitude is caused by their better involvement in social-economic life with Georgian populations than Azerbaijanians. They are better speakers of Georgian language than Azerbaijanians. About 1500 students are currently enrolled at Iakob Gogebashvili Telavi State University (TeSaU). Out of them, about 100 students are representatives of ethnic minorities (Azerbaijanians and Kists). Every year TeSaU enrolls 6 to 10 students from an ethnic Azerbaijanians Georgian citizens and 10 to 20 students from Pankisi Gorge where ethnic minority of Kists live.

ISU offers specially designed curricula to students coming from ethnic minority groups, year is devoted to intensive courses in Georgian language and if the students finish it successfully they are allowed to enter the Bachelor study program without taking the centralized national exams. Although the number of the students

# LOVE.DIST@NCE

Improving Access and Quality of Inclusive Higher Education  
One Student at a Time

coming to this program is increasing year by year, not all of them are able to finish either the preparatory level or the next –Bachelor's one. We need to state that the study program on this preparatory level contains not only Georgian language, but courses related to Georgian culture, tolerance and Information and Communication Technology. All the students need to take ICT classes as a mandatory and they are taught the usage of MS. Office, email communication and the way of conducting effective presentations.

BSU has ethnic minority students, although their number is small (about 20). Ethnic minority students mainly study at educational programs such as the Georgian Language Preparation Program for Abkhazians, Azerbaijanis, Armenians, and Ossetians. Minimal numbers of ethnic minority students are enrolled in Russian philology, Turkish philology, and other similar programs.

## RELIGIOUS MINORITY STUDENTS

Majority of students who study at TeSaU are Christians. Those, who represent the ethnic minorities represent the Muslims and are in the religious minorities group at TeSaU.

The majority of the students studying at ISU are Orthodox Christians, but muslims and Armenian Christians are also represented from those ethnic minority groups. There is no issue related to religious beliefs that can be seen as a barrier of the teaching process. According to ISU internal initiative, those religious minorities are having holidays when they are having the major religious celebrations.

Adjara, due to its historical past and geographical location, is a religiously diverse region. Especially in high-mountainous Adjara, a certain part of the population still follows the Muslim religion. Therefore, students of different religions and denominations study at BSU from both the Adjara region and other parts of Georgia. Due to the fact that religious freedom implies the inviolability of a person's beliefs, students of religious minority are given the opportunity to be fully integrate into the study and educational process without religious discrimination at the university. Due to the need to protect the inviolability of student's beliefs, the university does not conduct any research to determine their religious affiliation and does not have official statistical information on how many followers of which religion are studying at the university.

## STUDENTS WORKING AT THE SAME TIME OF THEIR STUDIES

At TeSau some of the students work simultaneously to support their own studies. This hinders their full participation in the learning process and affects their academic achievement. Attendance of the lectures most of the time becomes the indicator of their academic achievement. Not having the supportive mechanism of such students is coming from a top-bottom approach as there is no special regulation from the state to support them.

The number of the students having either part time or full time jobs during their studies are significantly high at ISU, Although we don't have the exact numbers but the majority of MA and PhD students are having full

# LOVE.DIST@NCE

Improving Access and Quality of Inclusive Higher Education  
One Student at a Time

time jobs. In some cases, this might be a problem on the Bachelor's level as the classes are during the day time and students skip them as they are unable to leave the working places. As for the reason for having a job, in most cases, they simply need their own income to cover the tuition fees. In addition to this, some of them are coming from regions and they have accommodation expenses as well. The university offers the majority of the MA and PhD classes in the evening after the working hours, they normally start at 7:00 in the evening. This creates space for those who are working 40 hours a week to attend the classes.

Due to the economic situation in the country, the issue of employment is a hot question in the agenda in recent years. Some of the BSU students have been working since the first years of their studies, especially at the masters level. The university itself helps students who want to work. BSU has an information website which is constantly updated, various official social networks (Facebook, Twitter, YouTube), which together with the multifunctional student portal provide information to students about training, events, existing vacancies, etc. The University cares about the employed students: at Master's educational programme lectures start at 18.00, while the study process for the Doctoral students is planned based on the agreement with them; Moreover, they can refill the missed hours (group work practical lessons/laboratory work, etc.) by taking the consultation hours which appear to be the official part of the working schedule of the Academic Staff, however some part of the students, due to the tough schedule at work, still find it difficult to attend the lectures even following the special timetable due to what they face some complications in terms of gaining credits in the timeframe defined by the educational programme.

## REFUGEES STUDENTS

There are no refugee students at TeSaU.

Ilia State University, being one of the biggest state universities located in the capital, counts the students coming from refugee families as well. Namely, these are ethnic Georgian who had to leave their houses due to Russian Occupation. They do speak Georgian language and there isn't any barrier connected to this, but these families are not financially well supported, and in most cases they might have economic problems. The government of Georgia offers some scholarships to these groups, but they are limited. In some cases, students coming from these families don't own personal computers and or don't have the internet connection at home (this might happen not only in the case of this specific group).

Over the years, the university has had a large number of students expelled from Abkhazia and Tskhinvali. At present, their number at BSU is around 30 and is mainly determined by the students whose families were IDPs and still have IDP status. This category of students receives some financial support from the university Student Assistance Fund, as well as the Ministry of Education, Science, Culture and Sport of Georgia and the Ministry of Education and Culture of the Autonomous Republic of Abkhazia by the allocated scholarship and cash assistance.

# LOVE.DIST@NCE

Improving Access and Quality of Inclusive Higher Education  
One Student at a Time

## STUDENTS WITH SPECIAL NEEDS

TeSaU started to adapt its infrastructure for students with special needs, such as wheel users, but they are not represented at TeSaU at the moment. On the other hand there are some students with cognitive disabilities who really need academic support from the university side. The European experience is very important in this regard. The Erasmus Plus CBHE project DARE helped TeSaU in this direction. TeSaU Piloted and ran free preparatory courses for University entrance exams, offered academic support for prospective students from TGs and for students with special needs. Increased the collaboration with students' self-government to raise awareness among students and faculty members to the unique voice and of ethnic minorities and promote ideas of diversity, inclusive society, equal opportunities on Campus, by adjusted events so all could feel comfortable.

ISU has adopted all of its buildings that meet the requirements of people with special needs. There are students who use wheelchairs and can easily go from one place to another, the major facilities like cafeteria and library are also adapted. There are few blind students and students with hearing problems, the university is trying to offer individual study programs where necessary, as it is also centralised to detect the student's needs, once they are enrolled at the university (if they have dyslexia, or any other learning disorder). There is also a center which supports students having psychological problems and they offer consultations. Still the university is lacking a special centralized center (like our Israeli colleagues does) which would be responsible for designing and developing student support services in this aspect.

During the current period, 8 students with special educational needs are enrolled in BSU. Students have a variety of restrictions, including movement restrictions. BSU has developed a mechanism of creating an individual curriculum for the students with special educational needs, which envisages planning the study process based on the consideration of their abilities, special needs and academic level in order to ensure the students' smooth involvement in the educational process. BSU is experienced in providing service to the disadvantaged students, yet until now, it has never had blind students, students lacking hearing and speaking abilities. The University, in accordance with the relevant Regulations, is ready to provide relevant service to the students with special educational needs in various directions as it is given below:

- To assign readers for the blind (with providing electronic versions of lectures/books) students;
- To invite the expert in using language of gestures (providing lectures/electronic versions of the books) for the students lacking hearing and speaking abilities;
- Environment adaptation for those using wheelchair, etc;

In order to support the adjustment of the Educational programmes to the needs of the students with the individual educational need, the University takes care of development of the relevant environment and procedures. Coming out from the fact that there is no possibility to adapt the complete building, the Administration of the University found and applied all alternative means to sort out this problem. In particular, the University managed to ensure carrying out the study process for the students with special needs, on the ground floor of

# LOVE.DIST@NCE

Improving Access and Quality of Inclusive Higher Education  
One Student at a Time

the first building of the institution, where it is technically impossible to install ramps; to install ramps in the fourth and the fifth campuses; to arrange sanitary knots on the ground floors for SEN; to arrange a panoramic elevator and ramps between the first and the second campuses. Placement of acoustic signal devices for the blind students is also planned. The student dormitory is completely adjusted to the students with special educational needs.

## STUDENTS LIVING IN REGIONS (OUTSIDE OF THE CITIES)

TeSaU is the only one higher education institution in the region and it gives the chance to host population not only from the city but from different remote parts of Kakheti. As far as there are not the student hostels, TeSaU students have to rent the flat, room or live with the relatives in Telavi to attend the lectures. This is not comfortable for their families, as it increases their expenses. But this is the only one way for them to attend the lectures in the university. With all of this in mind, TeSaU administration sees and understands the need of creation and support of online courses. Management body of the university is aware that this process will increase the attendance of employed students together with the students with special needs, students living in the regions and generally students with special populations living in Kakheti. However, there should be done much in terms of control of quality of distance learning process.

The majority of the students studying at ISU are coming from different cities or regions of Georgia. In some cases it is another stress factor for those students, as they have to leave their families, close relatives and start living alone. Living alone is not a specification for Georgian culture, normally people are living at the same place with their parents even after they get married. So, in addition to financial problems these students might have (As they need to find accommodation and need some travel expenses) they might also have stress as they start living alone, or with someone they have not lived before. The university doesn't have any current policy on how to handle and support this case.

Due to its geographical area, BSU has a large number of students from the regions, including the high mountainous regions. More than 50% of BSU students are from different municipalities of Adjara, but in addition, students from Guria, Samegrelo, Imereti and other regions are also enrolled in BSU. They are supported by the University with well-equipped dormitories for up to 200 residents including residential blocks (blockchain for 5 students) with its own bathroom and kitchen, 3 blocks adapted for people with disabilities (one on each floor) and a conference hall. The building is provided with an adapted elevator.

## REFERENCES

- [1] Center for Civil Integration and Inter-ethnic Relations [https://www.cciir.ge/images/pdf\\_eng/CCIIR%20annual\\_eng.pdf](https://www.cciir.ge/images/pdf_eng/CCIIR%20annual_eng.pdf)

# LOVE.DIST@NCE

Improving Access and Quality of Inclusive Higher Education  
One Student at a Time

- [2] Kadagishvili, Nino. 2019. An Assessment of the Educational Needs of Ethnic Minorities in Georgia From an Educational Policy Perspective [http://www.etd.ceu.edu/2019/kadagishvili\\_nino.pdf](http://www.etd.ceu.edu/2019/kadagishvili_nino.pdf)
- [3] National Bureau of Statistics of Georgia [https://web.archive.org/web/20170205175903/http://geostat.ge/cms/site\\_images/\\_files/english/population/Census\\_release\\_ENG\\_2016.pdf](https://web.archive.org/web/20170205175903/http://geostat.ge/cms/site_images/_files/english/population/Census_release_ENG_2016.pdf)
- [4] National Center for Educational Quality Enhancement <https://eqe.ge/eng/static/69/education-system/higher-education>
- [5] Office of the State Minister of Georgia for reconciliation and Civic Equality. 2019. Program 1+4. <https://smr.gov.ge/en/page/58/saganmanatleblo-programa>
- [6] Open Society foundation and Institute of Social Studies and analyses. 2019. Research of participation of ethnic minorities in the political life. <https://osgf.ge/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/Analytical-Report-ISSA-GEO.pdf>