

**Title: Public Policy on Accessibility of Higher Education - Policy Declarations and Reality in Georgia<sup>1</sup>**

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**Abstract:**

Accessibility and quality of education, as priorities of the system are declared in all relevant state policy and technical documents of Georgia. Despite this fact, there is an evidence that higher education system is not equally accessible. At the same time none of the state documents define the concept and criteria of accessibility and quality for different levels of education.

The accessibility issue of the general education, due to its mandatory character and ensured financing from the state, is regulated better than for other levels of education. Accordingly, the focus of my research was on higher education and the goal of the research was to study how and if policy declarations and documents on accessibility of higher education are translated into the reality. For this it was important to elaborate accessibility criteria for higher education, to study existing situation of equal accessibility based on elaborated criteria and to compare the results with the state policy documents, declarations and programs to find out the linkages and gaps in the chain of policy formulation and policy implementation. The research develops policy recommendations to increase effectiveness of higher education system to meet the education needs of different groups, including vulnerable ones.

The method of content-analyses has been used along with the interviews and small-scale poll. The study was organized according to the following steps:

- Content-analyses of existing legislation, state programs, strategies and literature on the accessibility of higher education;
- Interviews and small-scale poll;
- Identification of the criteria of accessibility;
- Analyses of existing situation based on identified criteria;
- Identification of challenges and gaps between policy declarations and reality;
- Conclusions and recommendations.

The important part of the study was the elaboration of accessibility criteria and the assessment of existing situation towards defined criteria to see the picture of HE accessibility into practice. Study also revealed that criteria are interrelated and the absence of one influences another too much or vice versa. In case of one criteria is met, the rate of accessibility of HE increases. Major findings of the study are that despite high number of vacant places offered by universities, the HE accessibility is a challenge for different groups and there is the gap between policy declarations and existing situation where policy declarations and state programs are not translated into the actions and practice.

Principal Conclusions of the study:

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*1 The study has been conducted in frame of the project: "Making an Impact in Public Analysis in Georgia: Improving Research, Education and Engagement (MIPAG)" through partnership of Tbilisi Free University, Agricultural University of Georgia and North Texas University with the support of US Embassy in Georgia.*

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- Accessibility of Higher education is stated as a priority by Government of Georgia;
- State documents (legislation, programs, strategies and etc.) represent the “wish list” and do not provide the clear vision, strategy and action plans *how* to ensure accessible higher education;
- Several criteria define the accessibility of higher education;
- Accessibility criteria are interrelated where one criterion plays important role and influences the other, so it is important to elaborate holistic approach in decision-making;
- Although universities offer sufficient number of vacant places for future students, Higher education is not equally accessible, especially for vulnerable groups.

### **Points for Practitioners:**

The paper develops suggestions for practitioners and policy-makers of Georgia to: develop accessibility criteria and assess accessibility of the higher education system; improve the chain from policy formulation to policy implementation with clear and concrete planning, monitoring and evaluation instruments; develop diversified opportunities and tools based on the needs and capabilities of youth and adults wishing to acquire higher education; support higher education institutions to be established as a centers for knowledge transfer for all citizens.

Paper also represents the first study in the country with intention to formulate clear criteria for accessibility of education system and connect that to the policy formulations and practice.

**Keywords:** Public Policy of Higher Education, Accessibility of Higher Education, Public Policy, Higher Education

### **Introduction:**

Today the higher education utilizes the student centered approach and is founded on the principles of democracy, equity and equality. Institutions of higher education are knowledge makers and knowledge managers whereby accessibility and quality play the most important role for the success of individuals, institutions and society as a whole.

This paper focuses on the issues of accessibility of higher education in Georgia, specifically, at BA level education. The paper has the goals to assess accessibility of higher education in Georgia, reveal links and gaps between policy declarations and practice and to suggest recommendations for the improvement of HE accessibility.

The study conducted is unique for Georgia, due to its complex character. This study represents the first attempt to formulate clear criteria for accessibility of higher education and to assess the existing situation towards elaborated criteria, find the gaps between policy declarations and reality and build recommendations for public decision-makers.

# **Public Policy on accessibility of higher education - policy declarations and reality in Georgia**

## **Introduction:**

Today the higher education utilizes the student centered approach and is founded on the principles of democracy, equity and equality. Institutions of higher education are knowledge makers and knowledge managers whereby accessibility and quality play the most important role for the success of individuals, institutions and society as a whole.

The accessibility and quality of higher education are two important indicators of successful education system. Accessible and quality education supports long-term social and economic development of the State and that's why higher education plays important role in the development of human capital and economic growth.

This paper focuses on the issues of accessibility of higher education in Georgia, specifically, at two stages of higher education (BA and MA), and does not include the doctoral level. The paper has the goals to assess accessibility of higher education in Georgia, reveal links and gaps between policy declarations and practice and to suggest recommendations for the improvement of accessibility.

Accordingly the research is conducted to analyze policy declarations, state programs and projects and their links to the existing situation based on defined accessibility criteria: geographical accessibility; availability/accessibility on distance and/or electronic education; financial accessibility (system, families); accessibility of physical environment and infrastructure; accessibility of educational resources (for SEN students); linguistic accessibility; accessibility of programs/specializations; accessibility of system (system created barriers).

The research conducted is unique for Georgia, due to its complex character. This research represents the first attempt to formulate clear criteria for accessibility of higher education and to assess the existing situation towards elaborated criteria, find the gaps between policy declarations and reality and build recommendations for public decision-makers.

## **Methodology:**

The method of content-analyses, interviews and small-scale poll has been used for the study. Analyses of legislation, state programs and strategies, projects of sectoral ministries and literature review has been conducted to find out state vision and concrete plans for HE accessibility; the assessment of existing situation has been studied based on the accessibility criteria. 28 students from state and private universities participated in small-scale poll, interviews have been conducted with parents (of already enrolled students) and Department of Higher Education and Science Development of the Ministry of Education and Science of Georgia<sup>3</sup>.

## **1. Education System in Georgia – General overview**

The education system of Georgia covers the following sectors: preschool, general (12 years), vocational and higher education.

Since 2005 Georgia is a part of Bologna process thus expressing its readiness for integration of Georgia' higher education system into the international educational environment. Accordingly, Georgia has joined and recognized such an important documents of Bologna process as "Lisbon Convention" (1997), "Sorbonne Declaration" (1997), "Prague Communiqué" (2001), "Berlin Communiqué" (2003), "Bergen Communiqué" (2005), "London Communiqué" (2007),

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<sup>3</sup> Now: "Ministry of Education, Science, Culture and Sport of Georgia"

“Budapest-Vienna Declaration”<sup>4</sup>. In the mentioned documents the attention is paid to the quality, accessibility, mobility, social dimension and recognition of qualifications of higher education.

The concept, goals and organization of higher education is defined by the “Law on Higher Education”<sup>5</sup> according to which there are 3 types of HE providers: 1) Universities; 2) Teaching Universities and 3) Colleges.<sup>6</sup>

Today there are 30 state and private universities, 19 teaching universities and 5 colleges in Georgia<sup>7</sup> that provide tertiary education. Around 42,000 students have been accepted for the BA and MA programs totally in all universities for 2018-2019 academic year. This dynamics during last 5 years remains the same ranging from 29,000 to 45,000 new students per year. As for distribution between BA and MA levels, the number of students admitted for BA are 3 times higher than those for MA.<sup>8</sup>

### 1.1. Legislation, State Strategies and Programs

In this chapter the major state documents are analyzed towards 2 directions: 1. Is the Higher Education the part of the state policy reflected in relevant documents? 2. If HE is the part of the documents, is there any vision, strategy, program on the accessibility?

- a) The “Law on Higher Education” states that the State is responsible for the accessibility of higher education. The accessibility issues also are delegated to the Higher education institutions;
- b) One of the major governmental document: “Social and Economic Development Strategy of Georgia – Georgia 2020”<sup>9</sup> declares that the important factor of inclusive development is creation of equal opportunities and accessibility to all levels of quality education systems. The document states that it is important to elaborate the effective state financing system for HE;
- c) During last 4 years, the Ministry of Education, Science, Culture and Sports elaborated 2 draft strategies, then in 2017 the 3<sup>rd</sup> strategy has been adopted but its actual implementation did not start. In fall 2018 the new Minister announced the new reform but the relevant strategy and action plan has not been adopted and introduced yet. In all the mentioned documents the accessibility of HE has been declared, but no strategy and action plan have been developed and realized in practice;
- d) In 2013 Georgia ratified the UN “Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities”, based on which the government of Georgia issued the action plan for equal opportunities. The focus in this document is towards accessibility of physical environment and infrastructure and the elaboration of financing system for special education needs students.

### 1.2. Literature Review

There are few studies on the accessibility of higher education in Georgia. The publication „Rural Disadvantage in Georgian Higher Education Admissions: A Mixed-Methods Study”<sup>10</sup> explores the accessibility of HE according to the urban-rural background of students. The study concludes that the persons from rural areas have less chance to continue HE than those from Cities and Urban Centers. The author suggests to use regional ranging system for the selection of future students, that is based on the competition on regional and not central level. The second study also from 2011 “Study of Private Tutoring in Georgia” reveals that more than 90% of respondents (students, parents) agree that it is necessary to have private tutoring to pass exams and continue study in university. The study also reveals that low-income families cannot afford private tutoring and may be excluded from receiving higher education. The third study: “Study of Education Accessibility in Caucasus” covers all levels of education and reveals the financial factor for accessibility of HE.

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<sup>4</sup> www.mes.gov.ge

<sup>5</sup> 21.12.2004

<sup>6</sup> Each of them provides different levels of HE: 1) BA, MA, PhD; 2) BA and MA; 3) BA

<sup>7</sup> www.eqe.ge

<sup>8</sup> www.geostat.ge

<sup>9</sup> Government of Georgia, 17.06.2014I #400

<sup>10</sup> Chankseliani M., „Rural Disadvantage in Georgian Higher Education Admissions: A Mixed-Methods Study“, *Comparative Education Review*, 2011, Vol. 57, No. 3, pp. 424-456

## 2. Accessibility Criteria and Analyses of Existing Situation Towards Criteria

For the assessment of existing situation on HE accessibility eight accessibility criteria are suggested:

### 2.1. Geographical accessibility

As mentioned above there are 30 universities in Georgia which offer all three levels of education (BA, MA and PhD). 25 universities are located in the capital city Tbilisi, 2 universities in Kutaisi, 1 in Batumi, 1 in Telavi and 1 in Samtskhe-Javakheti (see illustration 1).

Illustration 1: physical location of universities in Georgia



Accordingly, the 83,3% of universities, including specialized ones (medical, arts, conservatory and etc.) are located in Tbilisi. Out of 30 universities, 12 are state and 18 private universities, where out of 12 state universities, 8 are located in Tbilisi and others in regions (Kutaisi, Batumi, Telavi, Akhaltsikhe) and out of 18 private universities 17 located in Tbilisi and one in Region – Kutaisi.

Concentration of universities in the capital city Tbilisi from one hand is logical, due to the city's cultural, economic and social role in the country, on the other hand due to the many other factors: low-quality of (public) general education, absence of effective financial mechanisms for youth, low amount of tuition fees, absence of scholarships and stipends, absence of university dormitories and other supporting housing and relatively high living prices in capital limits HE accessibility for youth living in regions and coming from vulnerable families. Although state distributes tuition fees on a competitive basis, its number is low and do not cover living costs, so those persons from vulnerable and low-income families, even with state tuition fee grants, cannot afford study in capital. As mentioned, certain educational programs also are accessible only in Tbilisi, where only persons (even from regions) with middle or high-income families can participate.

The geographical accessibility is important to analyze and show the disparities for different groups to access HE in situation of absence of other supportive mechanisms. The paper cannot give recommendations to establish universities in each region, rather the paper suggest to make solutions based on other accessibility criteria, so that geographical accessibility cannot prevent equal opportunities for all persons to participate in HE.

## **2.2. Accessibility on distance education/electronic programs**

Modern educational process cannot be imagined without distance and electronic education, which plays very important role in educational accessibility. Moreover, HE can be accessible within and out of country through distance education, which is tailored to the needs and possibilities of learners. Although distance education is relatively new form of education, but the demand is growing because its flexibility and accessibility to many people, including youth.

The Georgian Law on Higher Education doesn't recognize distance education, it only describes "electronic education", that may be organized distantly, but persons should go through all the same procedures as for onsite education. In practice this form of education is not working and is only limited to few courses (not BA or MA). To see the real picture within the universities, I have looked at the web portals of 2 state Universities: Ilia State University (Tbilisi) and Akaki Tsereteli State University (Kutaisi). Both of them have some efforts towards electronic courses but none of them provide graduate (distance) education or any distance learning (different courses) for adults or other interested groups.

The importance of distance learning has been mentioned in the interview of the Head of Higher Education and Science Development Department of the MoESC<sup>11</sup> (2015), who mentioned that a solid work should be done to prepare the system for distance education where the most challenging issue is the acquisition of relevant qualifications. Since then the situation remains the same, the legislation has not been developed, the state policy has not been expressed and universities still are not providing distance education.

The development of distance education and the relative infrastructure/network across the country would be the important factor for elimination barriers created by geographical and financial inequality, especially for persons from low-income and vulnerable groups. By itself the distance education has broader opportunities to all the members of society for development and growth.

## **2.3. Financial accessibility (system/families)**

Financial accessibility is most important and challenging issue for the HE system in the country. In all state documents the GoG<sup>12</sup> recognizes the importance to increase financing of education, but corresponding programs to increase accessibility and to promote equal opportunities to participate and enjoy from HE do not exist or cover very limited amount of beneficiaries.

The HE is financed from the state based on the principle "money follows student" on a selective basis: those persons who receive state grant (only for tuition fees, directly paid to universities) are selected and identified based on their scores received in the unified state university entry exams. Those, who have no state grant have to pay tuition fee by themselves directly to universities. This situation pushes universities to be oriented on the quantity of students. To receive as many students as possible (and accordingly state or individual financing) the tuition fees of most universities became equal of state grants. Some private universities have higher tuition fees and if student has even 100% of state grant, this is not sufficient to cover tuition fee and the students/families have to pay additionally. It also should be mentioned that due to the low quality of general education, most families pay to private tutors for preparation of university entry unified state exams. This situation created additional barriers to those from low-income and vulnerable families and sets the picture when if you pay in private tutoring/private schooling you get more chances to receive state grant. The very limited amount of persons receives 100% state grant and majority of students do not receive any financial support from state and/or universities to cover their tuition fees. It has to be mentioned that additional to state grants the GoG has certain financial mechanisms for socially vulnerable students, once they are admitted to HEI (for ethnic minorities, for students living in border zones, for certain groups of socially vulnerable students, some stipends

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<sup>11</sup> Ministry of Education, Science, Culture and Sport

<sup>12</sup> Government of Georgia

(not sufficient even for transportation) to students with high academic achievements). Also very few universities have possibilities to students for stipends (also very low amount, not covering minimum living costs).

Taking also into consideration that there is high rate of unemployment in the country, students are not able to find jobs and pay for their study. Financial institutions do not provide student loans and even when it happens the vulnerable families are not able to participate due to their low and/or unstable incomes.

The parents, interviewed within this study mentioned financial issues as most challenging for accessible HE. They mentioned that the families should limit their everyday needs to pay for private tutoring for preparation of HE admission exams.

27 Students out of 28, participated in small-scale poll underlined that they had private tutoring to pass HE admission exams. The one student said that she was studying in private school where school itself provided tutoring for admission exams. 88,9% of students said that they had private tutoring in 4 subjects<sup>13</sup>, others mentioned 3 subjects. 89,3% of students mentioned that higher education is not equally accessible for all, 3,5% said that they don't know the issue.

The topic of financial accessibility is rather wide then described shortly in this paper, which tries to initiate discussions and policy actions towards HE accessibility. Conditions described above show that there are not diverse financial mechanisms to support accessibility of HE and existing conditions limit the full-fledged participation in HE of persons from low-income and vulnerable families.

#### **2.4. Accessibility of physical environment and infrastructure**

Under this criterion the following has been considered: physical environment of HE Institutions towards accessibility and infrastructure of settlements for people with special needs.

Despite the fact that the GoG in different declarations and legislation takes the responsibility to protect rights of disabled persons, the infrastructural accessibility is very low in the country and HE Institutions are not exclusion. In some cases, the ramps to enter the building are organized but do not offer any other options for Special Education Needs students. None of universities have infrastructure to meet the needs of blind, deaf or other students. The infrastructure, transport and other building in settlements, including big cities and capital Tbilisi are not adapted for disabled people as well, so that a SEN person even if she/he has high academic skills, is excluded from the higher education system.

#### **2.5. Accessibility of educational resources**

The educational resources in Higher education system in Georgia are very limited to all students and mostly represented in English language, although this criterion has been analyzed towards the situation for special education needs students. Educational resources are not accessible for students who have such some disabilities as blindness, deafness. No one resource is elaborated in brail font, the sign language is also not developed in the country, so for persons with the mentioned disabilities there is no chance to receive higher education. It should be also mentioned that there is a lack of qualified human resources within the system to teach SEN students.

#### **2.6. Linguistic accessibility**

The system of general education recognized and fully finances 3 instruction languages in schools: State (Georgian), Armenian and Azerbaijani, in some cases – Russian sectors as well. All following steps of education (vocational and higher education) are provided only in Georgian language. Around 14,9% of public schools provide teaching in non-Georgian languages, with around 53,000 students.<sup>14</sup> The fact that the teaching of state language in non-Georgian

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<sup>13</sup> HE admission exams were conducted in 4 subjects until 2019 summer cycle. From 2019 there will be only 3 subjects administered centrally by the MoESCS

<sup>14</sup> Education Management Information System of MoESCS

language schools is very low quality creates the barriers for non-Georgian students to participate in any form of continued education and limits their opportunities for further work and development. The low quality of state language education is the result of absence of state policy, low qualification of school administration and teachers and absence of relevant educational resources and opportunities.

State recognizes the challenges and the critical situation of education of non-Georgian language groups, but still there are only very few programs to improve the knowledge of state language among non-Georgian language population. One of those programs “Georgian Language for Future Success” is to send Georgian Language teachers to non-Georgian language schools for co-teaching of state language. The special agency under the MoESCS (Zurab Zhvania School of Public Administration) delivers some trainings for non-Georgian language civil servants. There is also the possibility for non-Georgian language persons to be enrolled in so-called “1+4 program” in HE, where 1 means that persons enrolled are trained in State language during one year to be prepared for 4-year BA studies. The participation in this program is also limited and available for those persons from middle and high income families and with good basic knowledge of State Language and other skills which they have to prove on the exams.

To improve linguistic accessibility, it is not enough to intervene on the level of higher education. The interventions should start from preschool and compulsory general education so that non-Georgian language groups have a chance for continued education and employment opportunities and are included into society.

## **2.7. Accessibility of programs/specializations**

Under this criterion the opportunities of different groups to be enrolled in the specializations of their interests is considered.

When compare to other accessibility components, the program/specialization accessibility may seem less actual, but from the long-term perspective it plays important role on different spheres of the life of country. Describing geographical and financial conditions for HE accessibility showed that concentration of specialized universities in the capital Tbilisi together with restricted financial mechanisms to support students, limits them for acquisition of desired profession. To discuss a case of a young woman from small village far from capital and wishing to become musician and apply to be enrolled in State Conservatory (which is only available in Tbilisi), we may have the following assumptions: If the family has the financial resources for: a) preparation for enrollment exams (private tutoring), b) cover living costs in Tbilisi (housing, transport, food and etc.) and c) in case person doesn't receive 100% state grant – to pay additional or full tuition fee - then she will become a student and enjoy her selected profession/education. If there is the family, who cannot afford all listed 3 components, the person has no chance to become a student and receive HE in her selected field. Having this situation, we should recognize that the system is losing potential professionals (either she receives no HE, or receives HE in other more accessible field, or she emigrates). It is very important to take this factor into consideration when working on state policy and strategies on education accessibility and human capital development.

## **2.8. Accessibility of system**

The criteria “system accessibility” is conditionally suggested and may be replaced by more appropriate definition. Under the criterion it is considered how and if the system and its components (legislation, institutions, business organization, financing and etc.) are supporting the accessibility of HE and give equal opportunities to all. Mostly under this criterion the transfer policy from different educational levels are analyzed.

1. Transfer from full general education into HE: starting from 2005 there is the central unified examination system to all to be enrolled in HE institutions. Since 2011 and until the academic year 2018-2019 more centralized exams have been added to those who wish to continue education in HE institutions. School leaving exams in eight subjects have been introduced in 2011 to receive school graduation document that has been a pass to participate in further 4 university entry exams. Since 2018-2019 academic year, school leaving exams are abolished and instead of 4 university entry exams, 3 left to enroll in HE institution. Having in total 12

exams and some of them duplicated (Georgian Language and literature, Foreign language) created additional burden to the families to pay for private tutoring and limited HE accessibility to vulnerable groups.<sup>15</sup>

2. Transfer from vocational education into HE: until today the system has so called “dead ends” in continuing education from vocational to higher education. The fact is that one of conditions to continue HE is the completion of full general education (12 grades), while if a student selects 9 years of basic education + 3 years of vocational education, she/he is not allowed to participate in HE with these 2 certificates. To continue in HE she/he must either return to school and complete full general education, or pass the exams in all subjects of grades 10, 11 and 12, then pass school leaving exams and then pass university entry exams. This situation created enormous barriers for students wanted to acquire some vocational education and have a chance for HE, so they preferred to stay in general education path to easily participate in further educational programs. This situation is mentioned in all relevant state documents and strategies. In 2018 the Parliament of Georgia adopted the law, focusing on the elimination of dead-ends and to allow students simultaneously receive vocational and general education components from 2019-2020 academic year.
3. The system problem is also the selection of prospective students based only on the results of unified centralized exams and not having another assessment instruments for selection, such a portfolio, projects, or some criteria set by universities.

### 3. Conclusions and Recommendations

#### 3.1. Conclusions

Working on the study showed that the challenge of accessibility of higher education is existing and also it should be studied more deeply. The study revealed that the higher education in Georgia is not accessible for different groups due to the several factors. The study also revealed that the state underlines the importance of accessible higher education in almost all policy documents and declarations, although there is no link from policy to practice and policy declarations are not translated into reality. Also it is obvious that state documents and legislation are not coordinated towards educational accessibility and state programs look like “wish list” rather than real vision and concrete steps to ensure educational accessibility. There is also absence of any state document for implementation of state declared policies, including the budgeting for concrete activities on educational accessibility.

In most cases one type of accessibility (i.e. distance learning) can be solution to increase accessibility on HE, so that it is important to have holistic approach in decision-making process.

Conclusions per criterion are following:

1. Geographical accessibility:
  - Most of Universities located in Capital Tbilisi and geography of specializations is quite limited;
  - Geographical accessibility plays important role in decision making when choosing the desired universities and/or specializations for low income families from regions;
  - Geographical accessibility becomes less important if other accessibility factors are developed.
2. Accessibility on distance and/or electronic education
  - Legislation does not define “Distance Education”;
  - System of Distance Education is not elaborated yet. It doesn’t exist even in the long –term strategic documents;
  - Accordingly, none of Universities have opportunities for distance learning;
  - Electronic learning is defined by the legislation almost for 10 years, but not implemented yet - state universities do not have /do not use electronic teaching and learning setting;
  - Distance education minimizes the financial burden for low-income families especially from regions;

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<sup>15</sup> Here we do not discuss the quality of tests and do not answer question “what the tests are measuring”

- Distance education becomes very important and can eliminate the gaps of accessibility when geographical and financial accessibility is low.

### 3. Financial accessibility

- State provides certain amount of tuition fee grants to study on first and second levels of HE;
- In some private universities and specializations the tuition fee is higher than 100% state grant (if student receives 100% financing and is enrolled in private university where fee is higher, state does not pay full tuition and she/he should pay additional amount to study, but if student receives 100% financing and is enrolled in private university where tuition fee is lower than state grant – amount of financing from state equals to the tuition fee), so low income families have less chances to apply to private universities;
- The amount of state 100% grants is limited and there is low percentage of beneficiaries;
- State has some supporting programs for certain groups, but the amount of beneficiaries is limited;
- State stipends (distributed among high academic performers) cannot cover even accommodation costs in big cities);
- Fees for study even in public universities are not accessible to low income and vulnerable families;
- State has no diversified financial mechanisms (or needs based financing except mentioned above);
- Financial accessibility also plays role for preparation for exams (private tutoring);
- Financial accessibility ranked #1 among problems identified by parents interviewed;
- Financial accessibility plays important role for families/prospective students while choosing the university and/or specialization;
- Financial accessibility is a challenge not only to cover fees associated with HE (tuition, living costs and etc.), but also to prepare for HE entrance;
- financial accessibility is very critical when quality of general education, system of university entrance and financing of students are poor

### 4. Accessibility of physical environment and infrastructure

- Almost none of universities have adopted infrastructure and physical environment for students who have special educational needs (students with disabilities);
- Very few institutions have ramps to enter the building but no other options inside building for SEN students are offered. Also nothing is done in terms of adaptation of environment for deaf and blind students even with high academic skills;
- Environment of cities, buildings, transport is not adapted as well;
- Existing physical environment and infrastructure prevents students with academic skills but certain disabilities to participate in HE;
- Development of distance learning will partially solve the accessibility problem for SEN persons, as well as other opportunities will support inclusiveness of HE.

### 5. Accessibility of educational resources (only SEN students)

- There is an absence of educational materials for blind and deaf students, also absence of materials even on the level of general education, thus preventing participation of deaf and blind children in higher education;
- Appropriate educational materials for general education level will raise the chances of participation in higher education;
- Available educational resources and infrastructure will push the SEN persons to decide to continue study in higher education;
- When infrastructure is a big challenge, distance learning with adapted educational resources will create accessibility to HE for SEN students.

## 6. Linguistic accessibility

- Quality of Georgian language teaching in general education is very low that prevents participation of non-Georgian students in Georgian language HE;
- Many ethnical minorities continue higher education in Armenia and Azerbaijan because of language and financial accessibility;
- Linguistic accessibility is very much depending on the quality of teaching-learning of state language in schools and on the financial accessibility.

## 7. Accessibility of programs/specializations

- Accessibility on desired programs and specializations is very crucial in long-term perspective;
- When certain specializations (i.e. medicine) can be received only in Capital, families with low income cannot apply because they have to pay not only tuition but also living costs. In this cases motivated people are not able to access education of their choice;
- Accessibility on programs and specializations very much depend on geographical and financial accessibility.

## 8. Accessibility of system

- To qualify for participation in unified university entry exams student had to pass 8 school leaving exams on certain level then to pass 4 exams – university entry exams (from 2019 summer admissions the school leaving exams are abolished and 3 entry exams remained instead of 4);
- Most of school pupils use private tutoring to pass exams, which is financial burden for many families not only for low income ones;
- Absolute majority of students (27 out of 28) participated in survey and all parents participated in interview say that they used private tutoring to continue education in universities. All of them used private tutoring for university entry exams, most of them used private tutoring for school leaving exams;
- It is not studied deeply if and how the quality of general education causes the need of private tutoring, but the gaps between exam topics and school program has been obvious;
- Transition from vocational education to higher education is still dead-end of the system planned to change from 2019-2020 academic year.

### 3.2. Recommendations

Recommendations are provided for policy-makers to gradually achieve the accessible and equal Higher Education System:

- To ensure continuous and lifelong learning accessibility of education should remain among high priorities of the State;
- Accessibility study should be conducted to have very detailed information, including the needs of each university as well as needs and opportunities for young people;
- Based on the study Education Accessibility Policy and strategic plan should be elaborated and supported by concrete actions and budget;
- Financial models to support HE should be diversified and also needs based financing approach should be discussed i.e. family allowances, tax benefits for parents through tax deduction on educational expenses and etc.;
- Existing financing should be analyzed in terms of its effectiveness and new model of financing HE system should elaborated;
- The system to continue in HE should be analyzed and the effective decision should be made to create more links between general and higher education and to recognize the achievements and activities of students in enrollment decision-making;

- State should take it very seriously the very active practice of private tutoring (shadow education) and study in details the reasons to minimize its role for continuous education;
- State should take into consideration the importance of distance education and develop policy, regulations and infrastructure for its implementation. Distance education will solve problems not only for students and youth but also will support adult education;
- Audit of infrastructure to develop accessible environment is very important. Also the criteria of “adaptive environment” should be defined in university authorization documents;
- Development of appropriate educational resources for SEN persons is very important for inclusive education system, so these resources should be supported on all levels of education starting from preschool education;
- Interventions to support language minorities wide participation in HE education should be created besides existing one model. It is important to support especially those living in bordering and monolingual communities;
- Public-Private collaboration should be paid attention in terms to attract private sector to invest in HE and Human Resources development.

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