

**Educational marginalization: Georgia's Ethnic Minority Groups**  
**Policy Paper**

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## Executive Summary

Georgia is a country proud of its tradition of inter-ethnic tolerance. Some 16% of the country's population are ethnic minorities, mostly Armenians and Azerbaijanis, and government policy stresses the multi-ethnic, multi-cultural character of the Georgian state. However, in spite of these sentiments, more than 15 years of educational reforms are still leaving most ethnic minority children behind.

Most of Georgia's minorities live in rural, monoethnic settlements isolated from the rest of Georgian society, most obviously by language: 74% of native Azerbaijani speakers and 51% of native Armenian speakers do not speak Georgian fluently.<sup>1</sup> This is partly the reason why representatives of these communities look to Baku or Yerevan (or to Russia) rather than Tbilisi for work opportunities and migration.

In terms of civil integration, the state is obligated to provide quality education to its ethnic minority citizens. Nearly two thirds of teachers at s are Practitioners – lowest teacher status which “directly reflects on the teaching quality.”<sup>2</sup> Non-Georgian language schools also show lower achievement scores in national and international testing, compared to Georgian schools.

In 2016, 56% of Azerbaijani language school and 44% of Armenian language school students failed their final exams, compared to just a quarter of Georgian students.<sup>3</sup> Moreover, a quarter of ethnic minority applicants failed their university entrance exams in 2018 compared to 13% of Georgian speakers.<sup>4</sup> In addition, PISA 2015 and 2018 show that there are significant differences in performance of Georgian and Azerbaijani students – differences which are to socio-economic profile AND language of instruction.

The lack of state language knowledge is the critical challenge. Some 64% of minority 7<sup>th</sup> graders are unable to pass the minimum threshold of achievement in Georgian as a Second Language subject, and only 12% achieve the high level. Writing is the most challenging competence, with a 78% failure rate.<sup>5</sup> Language competences are significantly worse in rural schools – 82% of rural schoolchildren score below the minimum threshold, while only 30% from urban schools do so. Azerbaijani-speaking students are worst-off with 87% of students failing the tests, while this indicator is 60% for Armenian-speaking students (and only 23% for Russian-speaking students). These sector-specific differences stand even when controlling for rural/urban disparities.<sup>6</sup>

The situation is even more difficult given that many teachers in s do not speak fluent Georgian themselves, meaning that children are often left alone with textbooks and difficult terminology.<sup>7</sup> In addition, Georgia does not produce Armenian or Azerbaijani language and literature textbooks, so they have to use old textbooks,

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<sup>1</sup> 2014 General Population Census, *Demographic and Social Characteristics: Population by region, by native languages and fluently speak Georgian language*. <http://census.ge/en/results/census1/demo> (Reviewed May 11, 2021)

<sup>2</sup> State Strategy for Civic Equality and Integration 2021 – 2030, p21

<sup>3</sup> Tabatadze Shalva & Gorgadze Natia (2017), School voucher funding system of post-Soviet Georgia: From lack of funding to lack of deliverables. *Journal of School Choice*, p20. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15582159.2017.1408000> (Reviewed May 18, 2021)

<sup>4</sup> Factcheck (2018), *Statistics of the results of the 2018 Unified National Examinations*.

<https://factcheck.ge/ka/story/37544-2018-erthiani-erovnuli-gamotsdebis-shedegebis-statistika> (Reviewed May 13, 2021)

<sup>5</sup> NAEC (2019), National Assessment: Georgian as a Second Language, VII grade, p14

<sup>6</sup> NAEC (2019), National Assessment: Georgian as a Second Language, VII grade, p97

<sup>7</sup> Focus groups and interviews with teachers and parents from minority settlements/s or sectors (April-May 2021)

approved in 2011, or import foreign textbooks from neighboring Armenia and Azerbaijan.<sup>8</sup> In both cases, textbooks are inconsistent with the current national curriculum. Making matters worse is the fact that, as pension-age teachers retire every year with very few to replace them, some teachers have to cover subjects for which they have no training. In spite of extensive need and multiple vacancies, especially in sciences, it has proved persistently difficult to attract minorities to the teaching profession. In order to try to remedy the situation, since 2009 Georgian-speaking teaching assistants and consultants have been dispatched to some minority schools. However, studies by the Social Justice Center found “no significant difference in the achievements of the students with whom these teachers work.”<sup>9</sup> Cultural and economic issues, such as early marriage and child labour also add to the challenges supporting lower achievement among ethnic minority students of Georgia.

While the integration strategy 2021-2030 action plan of 2021-2022 lists ambitious quantitative goals to remedy the situation, considerable research and planning needs to be put into the quantitative and content part of the envisaged actions, more elaborated in the recommendation section.

## 1. Methodology

The research for this policy paper was part of a year of research that has been conducted by GeoWel, as part of the US State Department financed Education Advocacy Project. This, in turn, followed on the research done in 2018 and 2019 for McClain Action for Children (MAC). The current project conducted extensive desk and field research within the project.

Desk research involved analysis of secondary data provided by the government, international organizations and local researchers. We analyzed quantitative data provided by:

- The National Statistics Office of Georgia (GeoStat)
- The National Assessment and Examination Center (NAEC)
- The Education Management Information System (EMIS)
- The Education and Science Infrastructure Development Agency (ESIDA)

Government data included, and was not limited to, the number and status of schools, students, teachers, teacher qualification, school location and infrastructure, etc.

We also reviewed data and analysis provided by the major international assessment surveys that Georgia has undertaken in recent years. This included:

- Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) 2009, 2015 and 2018 – focusing on student performance in reading, maths and sciences;
- Teaching and Learning International Survey (TALIS) 2013 and 2018 – a survey of teachers focusing on working conditions and learning environments; Teacher Education and

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<sup>8</sup> Focus group with s/sector teachers (May 7, 2021)

<sup>9</sup> Social Justice Center (2020), Systemic challenges of the education policy towards the ethnic minorities in Georgia, p21.

[https://socialjustice.org.ge/uploads/products/pdf/Systemic\\_challenges\\_of\\_the\\_education\\_policy\\_1606470388.pdf](https://socialjustice.org.ge/uploads/products/pdf/Systemic_challenges_of_the_education_policy_1606470388.pdf)

(Reviewed August 19, 2021)

- Development Study in Mathematics (TEDS-M) 2008 – a study of how teachers are prepared to teach mathematics in primary and lower secondary school.

We also reviewed the National Assessment of Georgian as a Second Language 2016, conducted by NAEC, reports by the Georgian Human Rights Ombudsman and research and analysis reports by local researchers and experts. We also referred to our 160-page research report from 2019, which comprehensively reviewed the Georgian education system.<sup>10</sup> In addition, we extensively reviewed and analyzed ordinances of the government of Georgia and the Minister of Education and Science regarding school funding, teacher remuneration and career entry/development.

Another extensive trove of data that was processed by GeoWel was the public school infrastructure assessment data for individual public schools that GeoWel received from ESIDA in 2019. Within the Education Advocacy Project, we were able to scrape the 2,233 individual excel spreadsheets and create a single database of public school infrastructure and analyze the collated data. Moreover, GeoWel created a publicly available interactive map of these schools, available in English and in Georgian at <https://geowel.org/en/public-school-map/>.

In addition to detailed desk research, we conducted considerable field research. This included:

- 50 online focus groups with parents and teachers of the 300 schools with the poorest infrastructure condition as recorded in the 2018-2019 Public school infrastructure assessment database;
- 24 online focus groups with public school teachers and students' parents, representing schools throughout Georgia, with 113 participants in total;
- 58 phone interviews and follow-up interviews with public school teachers, parents, experts and government representatives.

The fieldwork took place between February-September 2021. The sampling was designed to include as many rural and disadvantaged communities as possible, including ethnic minority settlements.

Based on this research we prepared four policy documents in different topics, published 10 articles on various national and international media outlets (Civil.ge, Eurasianet.org, Open Democracy), and 12 blogs on our website. The articles were written by GeoWel senior researchers and a professional journalist. We also conducted a webinar<sup>11</sup> on the impact of COVID pandemic on general education, attendees included teachers, parents and journalists.

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<sup>10</sup> GeoWel Research (2019), *Educating Georgia: Key Findings*. <https://geowel.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/GeoWel-Education-Report-for-MAC-Final.pdf> (Reviewed August 11, 2021)

<sup>11</sup> GeoWel Research (2021), *Webinar: COVID-19 Impact on Georgia's General Education System*. <https://geowel.org/en/webinar-on-covid-19-impact-on-georgias-general-education-system/> (Reviewed August 11, 2021)

## 2. Ethnic Minority Students

Georgia is a country proud of its tradition of inter-ethnic tolerance. “The population of different ethnic identities living in Georgia are linked by centuries-old cohabitation history full of tolerance, peace and solidarity”, as the State Strategy for Civic Equality and Integration 2021-2030 states.<sup>12</sup> The integration strategy also says that the full integration of ethnic minorities, the creation of a tolerant environment and the provision of equal rights and opportunities is one of the main directions of state policy, and that these equal rights are guaranteed by the constitution.<sup>13</sup> However, for many representatives of Georgia’s ethnic minority communities, this rhetoric does not match the reality.

Some 16% of the country’s population are ethnic minorities, mostly Armenians and Azerbaijanis.<sup>14</sup> The bulk live in rural, monoethnic settlements in the south and east of the country. They are isolated from the rest of Georgian society, most obviously by language: 74% of native Azerbaijani speakers and 51% of native Armenian speakers do not speak Georgian fluently.<sup>15</sup> Minorities look to Baku or Yerevan (or to Russia) rather than Tbilisi for opportunities for work and study and there is large-scale emigration. In terms of civil integration, the state is obligated to provide quality education to its ethnic minority citizens. The first document to institutionalize this civil equality and integration policy was the National Concept of Tolerance and Civic Integration, 2009-2014. But there is a long way to go, the integration strategy 2021-2030 admits there is still lots to do in terms of full integration of ethnic minorities and highlights the need to improve state language knowledge in ethnic minority communities:

“Despite the results achieved in regards to civic integration, the assessment of the current situation revealed that there still remain certain needs and challenges that are essentially important to be effectively addressed in frame of the new strategy... Particular attention is required by the need to improve the quality of state language knowledge in densely populated ethnic minority regions.”<sup>16</sup>

The most obvious place to teach ethnic minorities how to speak Georgian is at school. There are 291 schools that are either non-Georgian language or bilingual Georgian and either Russian, Azeri or Armenian, catering for 84,000 students.<sup>17</sup> The breakdown of Georgian schools by language of instruction is provided in the table below.

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<sup>12</sup> State Strategy for Civic Equality and Integration 2021 – 2030, p3

<sup>13</sup> State Strategy for Civic Equality and Integration 2021 – 2030, p3

<sup>14</sup> 2014 General Population Census, *Demographic and Social Characteristics: Population by region, by native languages and fluently speak Georgian language*. <http://census.ge/en/results/census1/demo> (Reviewed May 11, 2021)

<sup>15</sup> 2014 General Population Census, *Demographic and Social Characteristics: Population by region, by native languages and fluently speak Georgian language*. <http://census.ge/en/results/census1/demo> (Reviewed May 11, 2021)

<sup>16</sup> State Strategy for Civic Equality and Integration 2021 – 2030, p15

<sup>17</sup> Data received from EMIS upon request, June 2021

Figure 1. Number of schools and students in non-Georgian language or bilingual public schools

Language of instruction	School		Students	
	N	%	N	%
Armenian	117	6%	12 746	2%
Azerbaijani	80	4%	15 603	3%
Russian	11	1%	4 847	1%
Armenian, Azerbaijani	2	0.1%	154	0.0%
Azerbaijani, Russian	2	0.1%	349	0.1%
Armenian, Russian	1	0.0%	14	0.0%
<b>Total non-Georgian language</b>	<b>213</b>	<b>11%</b>	<b>33 713</b>	<b>6%</b>
Georgian, Azerbaijani	33	2%	13 822	3%
Georgian, Armenian	10	0.5%	3 628	0.7%
Georgian, Russian	33	2%	30 805	6%
Georgian, Azerbaijani, Russian	1	0.0%	1 423	0.3%
Georgian, Armenian, Russian	1	0.0%	745	0.1%
<b>Total Georgian mix language</b>	<b>78</b>	<b>5%</b>	<b>50 423</b>	<b>10%</b>
<b>Total non-Georgian and mix language</b>	<b>291</b>	<b>16%</b>	<b>84 136</b>	<b>16%</b>
<b>Georgian</b>	<b>1 787</b>	<b>86%</b>	<b>464 221</b>	<b>85%</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>2 078</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>548 357</b>	<b>100%</b>

Reference: Data received from EMIS upon request, June 2021

## 2.1 Reform efforts

For more than 15 years, Georgia has seen education as the primary means to integrate its minority population: ethnic minority children who speak fluent Georgian and have received a quality education in Georgian schools will go on to be able to find jobs in Georgia or continue their studies at Georgian universities and become fully integrated citizens of the multi-ethnic Georgian state. Thus, the Georgian education system has aimed to provide ethnic minority students with Georgian language skills and increased access to education on preschool, secondary, higher and vocational levels and adult education programs. The first textbooks to teach Georgian as a Second Language were created as far back as in 2005. Other efforts include teacher training programs by Teachers' Professional Development Center (TPDC) and the Zurab Zhvania School of Public Administration, a project for the professional development of school principals in their preferred language, the introduction of bilingual teaching and teacher training, the assignment of Georgian-speaking consultant-teachers to schools and the improvement of textbooks. These efforts have coincided with reforms to Georgia's education sector overall, which includes the reconstruction of rural schools and increases in teachers' salaries.

## 2.2. Educational inequality

But in spite of these continuing efforts, there still exists a huge educational attainment gap between ethnic Georgians and minorities. Teachers at schools represent 10% of the total teaching body (2020).<sup>18</sup> Nearly two thirds of teachers at these schools are Practitioners – lowest teacher status which “directly reflects on the teaching

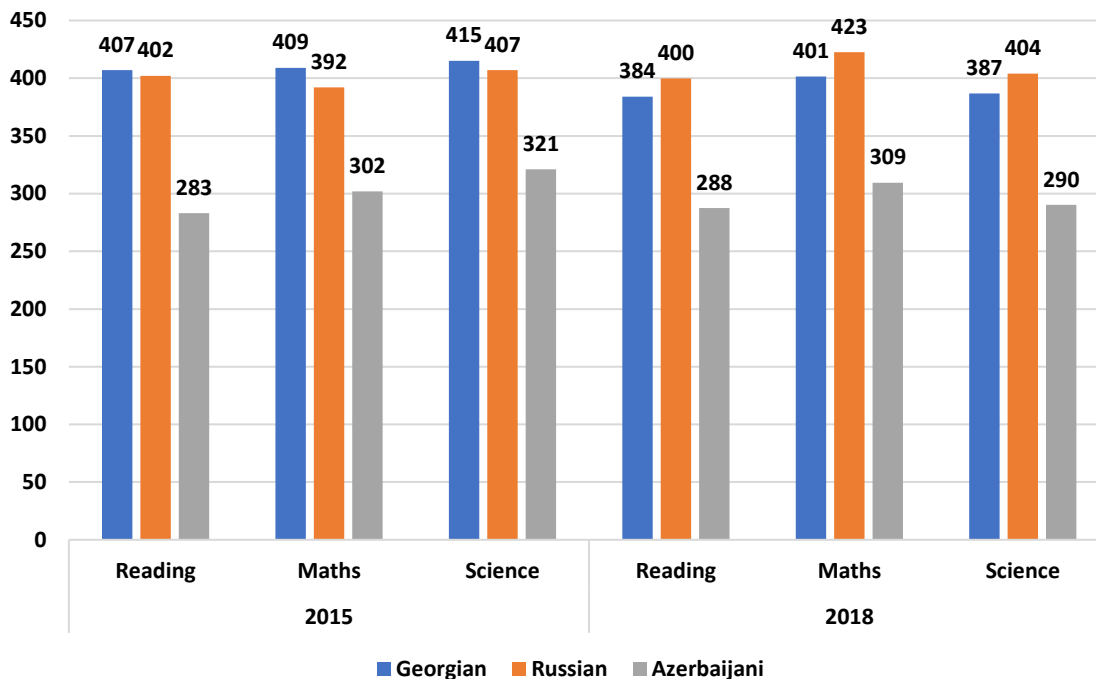
<sup>18</sup> State Strategy for Civic Equality and Integration 2021 – 2030, p20

quality.”<sup>19</sup> Furthermore, given that most ethnic minority communities are rural communities, these schools suffer from the same chronic infrastructural and other problems as most rural schools in the country (see GeoWel’s [policy report](#) on Rural Schools in Georgia).<sup>20</sup>

In 2016, 56% of Azerbaijani language school and 44% of Armenian language school students failed their final exams, compared to just a quarter of Georgian students.<sup>21</sup> A quarter of ethnic minority applicants failed their university entrance exams in 2018 compared to 13% of Georgian speakers.<sup>22</sup>

PISA reports underline the impact that the language of instruction has on student performance. Neither the 2015 nor 2018 reports include data breakdown for Armenian speaking students due to them making up less than 5% of the sample. But scores of both years show that there are significant differences in performance of Georgian and Azerbaijani students.

Figure 2. PISA score differences in student achievement according to teaching language



Reference: PISA 2015 & 2018 Georgia reports

<sup>19</sup> State Strategy for Civic Equality and Integration 2021 – 2030, p21

<sup>20</sup> GeoWel Research (2021), *Rural Schools in Georgia*. <https://geowel.org/en/education-policy-paper-rural-schools-in-georgia/> (Reviewed September 24, 2021)

<sup>21</sup> Tabatadze Shalva & Gorgadze Natia (2017), School voucher funding system of post-Soviet Georgia: From lack of funding to lack of deliverables. *Journal of School Choice*, p20. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15582159.2017.1408000> (Reviewed May 18, 2021)

<sup>22</sup> Factcheck (2018), *Statistics of the results of the 2018 Unified National Examinations*. <https://factcheck.ge/ka/story/37544-2018-erthiani-erovnuli-gamotsdebis-shedegebis-statistika> (Reviewed May 13, 2021)

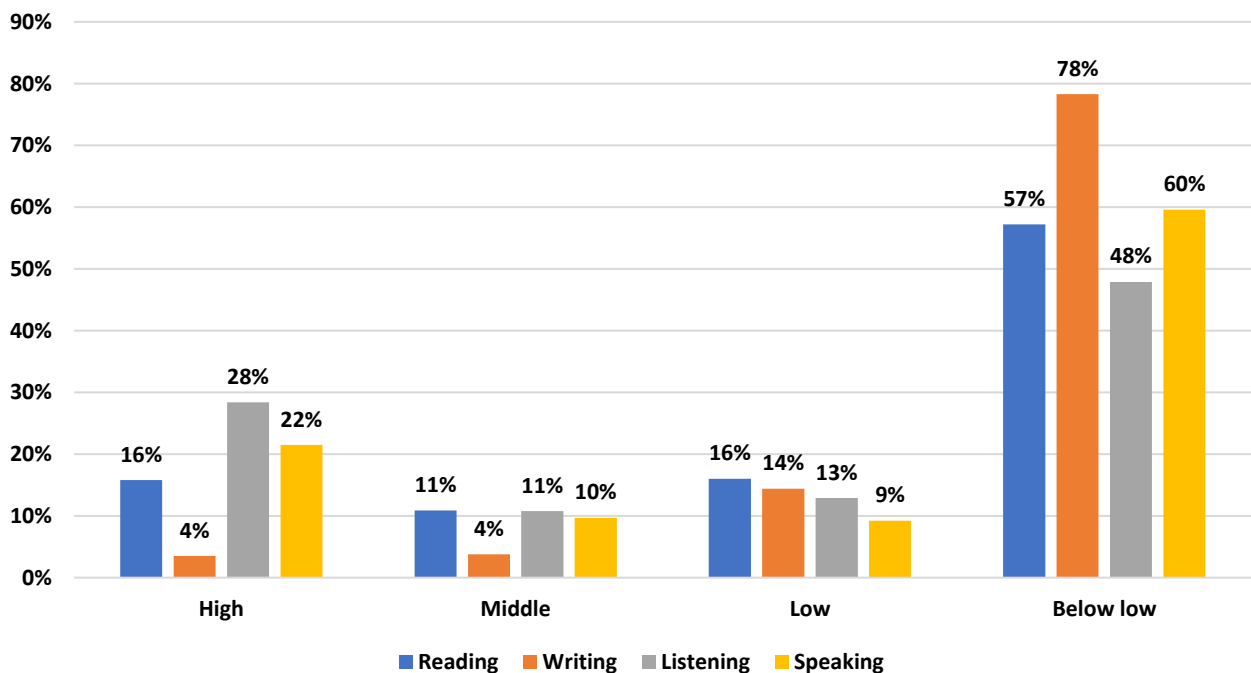


However, in PISA 2015, correcting for socio-economic status reduces the score differences in reading and science between Georgian and Azerbaijani students by about half. The linguistic effect in math scores after such correction fully disappears but public/private division appears.<sup>23</sup> This underscores that it is poverty that drives educational attainment gaps seen across the Georgian education system, and shows that ethnic minority children, who are more likely to be poor than average Georgian children, face a double disadvantage: both from their socio-economic status and from the language of instruction, in at least some subjects.

### 2.3. The language gap for pupils and teachers

According to the national assessment of Georgian as a Second Language conducted by NAEC in 2016, 64% of 7<sup>th</sup> graders are unable to pass the minimum threshold of achievement in Georgian as a Second Language subject, and only 12% achieve the high level. Writing is the most challenging competence, with a 78% failure rate.<sup>24</sup>

Figure 3. Percentage distribution of students according to achievement levels in four areas of language competence



Reference: National Assessment of Georgian as a Second Language 2019

Language competences are significantly worse in rural schools – 82% of rural schoolchildren score below the minimum threshold, while only 30% from urban schools do so. Scores are the lowest in minority settlements.<sup>25</sup> Azerbaijani-speaking students are worst-off with 87% of students failing the tests, while this indicator is 60%

<sup>23</sup> PISA 2015 Georgia Report (2017), p151

<sup>24</sup> NAEC (2019), National Assessment: Georgian as a Second Language, VII grade, p14

<sup>25</sup> NAEC (2019), National Assessment: Georgian as a Second Language, VII grade, pp18-20

for Armenian-speaking students (and only 23% for Russian-speaking students). These sector-specific differences stand even when controlling for rural/urban disparities.<sup>26</sup>

Not speaking Georgian is the primary disadvantage facing ethnic minority children, which prevents them fulfilling their potential, and drives many of the educational inequalities discussed above. Since most ethnic minorities live in monoethnic minority settlements, for children, primary school is where they first encounter Georgian. From six years old they start to learn Georgian as a second language, followed at secondary school by several other subjects in Georgian (history, geography and civic education). But from their first day at school, minority children face difficulties: parents cannot help their children with Georgian subjects at home because they also do not speak Georgian. Children often need parental engagement in homework, especially in primary school, so ethnic minority schoolchildren are at a greater disadvantage. The situation is even more difficult given that many teachers in s do not speak fluent Georgian themselves, meaning that children are often left alone with textbooks and difficult terminology.<sup>27</sup>

As a result, many ethnic minority parents prefer their children to go to Georgian instead of s – in total 34,000 or 40% of ethnic minority schoolchildren go to s. This is a good solution for some students, who are more immersed in the Georgian-language environment. But, as one teacher from Gori municipality explained, without extra efforts from teachers, minority students' education can suffer both in Georgian and in their native language.<sup>28</sup>

“Due to the language problems many children from our would transfer to the Georgian school. The parents understood that their kids would be unable to progress in life without knowing the Georgian language, so they would transfer them there. But then the child was in shock – twenty-five children in the class, five non-Georgian language kids, the teacher would not even think about paying proper attention to them, so the children would remain without knowledge, without skills. After a few years they would realize that they are unable to study there and would come back to Azerbaijani school, but by then without proper knowledge of either Azerbaijani or Georgian.”<sup>29</sup>

This points towards another issue: the fact that instruction in minority languages can also be problematic. Georgia does not produce Armenian or Azerbaijani language and literature textbooks, so they have to use old textbooks, approved in 2011, or import foreign textbooks from neighboring Armenia and Azerbaijan.<sup>30</sup> In both cases, textbooks are inconsistent with the current national curriculum. A tender for new textbooks was unsuccessful due to low quality of the translation, so they still teach with the old textbooks.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> NAEC (2019), National Assessment: Georgian as a Second Language, VII grade, p97

<sup>27</sup> Focus groups and interviews with teachers and parents from minority settlements/s or sectors (April-May 2021)

<sup>28</sup> Focus group with s/sector teachers (May 6, 2021)

<sup>29</sup> Focus group with s/sector teachers (May 6, 2021)

<sup>30</sup> Focus group with s/sector teachers (May 7, 2021)

<sup>31</sup> Public Defender of Georgia (2019), *Inclusive education: Achievements and challenges*.

<https://www.ombudsman.ge/eng/spetsialuri-angarishebi/inkluziuri-ganatileba-mightsevebi-da-gamotsvevebi>

(Reviewed August 18, 2021)

Because these countries have an 11-grade school system, final year students in the Georgian K12 system are left “without a book” for their native languages and have to repeat the 11-grade material.<sup>32</sup>

Georgian and s employ the same curriculum. In s all subjects are taught in the students’ native language, except for history, geography and civic education which are taught in Georgian and this is mandatory. However, the reality is not the same for all schools, as many have to teach as much in the native language as possible due to the deficit in Georgian-speaking/bilingual teachers.

“Even when there are bilingual textbooks, often teachers do not speak Georgian, which creates further problems,” said one teacher from the predominantly Azerbaijani settlement of Marneuli. “If the teacher does not know Georgian [language], they are unable to transfer knowledge in either language.”<sup>33</sup>

Making matters worse is the fact that, as pension-age teachers retire every year with no one to replace them, some teachers have to cover subjects for which they have no training. In spite of extensive need and multiple vacancies, especially in sciences, it has proved persistently difficult to attract minorities to the teaching profession.<sup>34</sup> This might be because the lack of Georgian language knowledge prevents minority teachers from advancing up the career ladder as they struggle with language tests — even if they teach a non-Georgian language subject.<sup>35</sup>

“There is no teaching exam in the Azerbaijani language. This creates big problems for teachers. You can’t move forward. I have been working since 2016 and I am still a Teacher Seeker [a type of trainee]. Teachers of [minority] language and literature don’t have the opportunity to pass their exam and move forward in the career advancement scheme,” said a minority teacher from Gori Municipality.<sup>36</sup> This, in turn, deters many minority-Georgians from going into the teaching profession.

“I had to pass natural sciences in order to gain a senior teacher status, but I am a philologist by profession — and you want to qualify with your subject, which is impossible.” — Teacher from Akhaltsikhe municipality<sup>37</sup>

In addition, some ethnic minority areas, as throughout rural Georgia, provide only base-level (10 grades) education, after which it is necessary to go to another location for upper-secondary (10-12 grades) or VET education.<sup>38</sup> One of the main problems stemming from this is the lack of specialist teachers in minority languages.<sup>39</sup>

To try to remedy the situation, since 2009 Georgian-speaking teaching assistants and consultants have been dispatched to some minority schools. However, studies by the Social Justice Center found “no significant

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<sup>32</sup> Public Defender of Georgia (2019), *Inclusive education: Achievements and challenges*.

<https://www.ombudsman.ge/eng/spetsialuri-angarishebi/inkluziuri-ganatleba-mightsevebi-da-gamotsvevebi>

(Reviewed August 18, 2021)

<sup>33</sup> Interview with teacher at /sector (April 27, 2021)

<sup>34</sup> Interview with teacher at /sector (April 27, 2021)

<sup>35</sup> Focus group with s/sector teachers (May 7, 2021)

<sup>36</sup> Focus group with s/sector teachers (May 7, 2021)

<sup>37</sup> Focus group with s/sector teachers (May 7, 2021)

<sup>38</sup> Civic Development Institute (2017), *Educational Needs of Ethnic Minority Students*, p32

<sup>39</sup> Liberali (2016), *Ethnic Azerbaijanians and State Language – “They Hear Georgian Only at Lesson of Georgian Language”*. <http://liberali.ge/articles/view/26140/etnikuri-azerbajanelebi-da-sakhelmtsifo-ena--qartuli-mat-mkholod-qartuli-enis-gakvetilze-esmit> (Reviewed 10 September 2019)

difference in the achievements of the students with whom these teachers work.”<sup>40</sup> The report found that these “consultant-teachers” worked with only 15% of non-Georgian language students, and that half of the consultant teachers left the job after a year.

Textbooks for minority children are another pressing issue. Many are low-quality translations and are not compatible with the current national curriculum. Furthermore, some textbooks contain discriminatory elements towards Georgia’s minority groups, or just ignore them altogether, running the risk of students developing “ever-lasting negative attitudes”.<sup>41, 42</sup> Moreover, teachers have limited knowledge of multicultural education and its objectives.<sup>43</sup> The clause on non-discriminatory content of textbooks was removed from textbook approval rules in 2011 and added back in in 2012.<sup>44</sup> Therefore, 2011 textbooks contain such elements.

#### 2.4. Cultural and economic issues

While it is clear that there remains much to be done for the Georgian education system to improve standards for minority pupils, there are other factors at play that result in educational inequalities. Lower school attendance and a high dropout rate is another huge problem. Students from s predominate among those who drop out of school.<sup>45</sup> Economic and cultural issues, such as child labor and early marriage greatly affect their access to general education. Boys tend to be taken out of class for seasonal agriculture-related work, while girls in some communities drop out for marriage, as one teacher from a in Telavi municipality explained.

“The tendency is that when children reach a certain age, mostly after the 9<sup>th</sup> grade, they pay less attention to education. Early marriage is an accepted custom. Also, they [boys] go away for work.”

Even if the kids do not drop out despite the employment, it still affects their level of education and motivation, as a teacher from Tsalka municipality remarked:

“Child labour has effects beyond school absenteeism. A child who has been working in the field the entire day won’t be able to study in the evening, won’t be able to prepare homework properly. When seasonal agricultural work begins, we notice a downturn in students’ progress, and then again we need communication

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<sup>40</sup> Social Justice Center (2020), Systemic challenges of the education policy towards the ethnic minorities in Georgia, p21.

[https://socialjustice.org.ge/uploads/products/pdf/Systemic\\_challenges\\_of\\_the\\_education\\_policy\\_1606470388.pdf](https://socialjustice.org.ge/uploads/products/pdf/Systemic_challenges_of_the_education_policy_1606470388.pdf) (Reviewed August 19, 2021)

<sup>41</sup> Tabatadze, S. & Gorgadze, N. (2013), Intercultural Education Research in Primary Grades of Georgia.

[https://cciiir.ge/images/pdf\\_eng/PUB2\\_ENG\\_PRINT\\_edited\\_new\\_table%20final\\_10\\_01\\_2014.pdf](https://cciiir.ge/images/pdf_eng/PUB2_ENG_PRINT_edited_new_table%20final_10_01_2014.pdf) (Reviewed August 20, 2021)

<sup>42</sup> Social Justice Center (2020), Systemic challenges of the education policy towards the ethnic minorities in Georgia, p18.

[https://socialjustice.org.ge/uploads/products/pdf/Systemic\\_challenges\\_of\\_the\\_education\\_policy\\_1606470388.pdf](https://socialjustice.org.ge/uploads/products/pdf/Systemic_challenges_of_the_education_policy_1606470388.pdf) (Reviewed August 19, 2021)

<sup>43</sup> Social Justice Center (2020), Systemic challenges of the education policy towards the ethnic minorities in Georgia.

[https://socialjustice.org.ge/uploads/products/pdf/Systemic\\_challenges\\_of\\_the\\_education\\_policy\\_1606470388.pdf](https://socialjustice.org.ge/uploads/products/pdf/Systemic_challenges_of_the_education_policy_1606470388.pdf) (Reviewed August 19, 2021)

<sup>44</sup> Tabatadze, S. & Gorgadze, N. (2013), Intercultural Education Research in Primary Grades of Georgia.

[https://cciiir.ge/images/pdf\\_eng/PUB2\\_ENG\\_PRINT\\_edited\\_new\\_table%20final\\_10\\_01\\_2014.pdf](https://cciiir.ge/images/pdf_eng/PUB2_ENG_PRINT_edited_new_table%20final_10_01_2014.pdf) (Reviewed August 20, 2021)

<sup>45</sup> State Strategy for Civic Equality and Integration 2021 – 2030

with parents that ‘he’s a really good boy and maybe it’s possible that he helps you for less time’. Their parents are not financially well-off, so... Even if they go to school, it’s unproductive. A tired child won’t be able to take part in lessons properly. Both the motivation and interest are somewhere else.”

It is likely that one of the most effective ways to mitigate the socio-economic conditions that lead to early marriage and child labor is through education. Yet in spite of more than fifteen years of intensive effort on the part of the government, and multiple attempts at reform, it is clear that there remains a huge attainment gap for Georgia’s ethnic minority students. While things such as funding, employment opportunities and teaching materials appear to be improving, it is clear that the pace of these improvements is slower than one would expect, resulting in meagre overall improvements in Georgian language knowledge and overall educational attainment. This is an issue that must be addressed if Georgia is to live up to its own published state strategies and constitutional guarantees, and successfully integrate its minority communities.

All in all, while the majority of non-Georgian language communities do want their children to learn the state language, believing that it will help in employment and integration, the main focus of education policy regarding ethnic minorities has been based on short-term quantitative goals that are not monitored correctly.<sup>46</sup> (Re)training and teaching assistance is an important component for increasing bilingual teaching skills, yet the piecemeal character of these interventions might indicate the need for reviewing the content and methodology of the trainings. In addition, the vision to remedy the educational attainment gap needs to take into account other socio-economic factors that might be affecting the already disadvantaged minority communities.

## 2.5. Government plans

The integration strategy 2021-2030 speaks very little on how the government is going to remedy the poor level of state language knowledge and unequal access to quality secondary education for ethnic minorities.

Overall, the strategy aims:

- To plan the expansion of the bilingual teaching model in minority communities. This involves retraining of teachers in the Georgian language and Georgian-taught subjects as well
- Maximum effort should be allocated to textbook development – and textbooks should avoid stereotypical and discriminatory terminology – and should also focus on awareness raising on these issues
- Improvement of state language knowledge among ethnic minorities by formal and informal education

The main resolution planned in the Action Plan for 2021-2022 is teacher trainings.

The action plan focuses on ambitious quantitative indicators such as:

- Sending teachers to s – 251 by the end of 2021
- Retraining 1200 teachers in Georgian language by 2021
- Retraining 200 teachers of Georgian as a second language by the end of 2021
- Long-term retraining of 1500 teachers in professional skills by the end of 2021
- Developing a handbook of Georgian as a second language and a grammar by the end of 2021

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<sup>46</sup> State Strategy for Civic Equality and Integration 2021 – 2030, p22

- Developing guide and resources for Georgian as a second language based on the third-generation national curriculum by the end of 2021
- Financing 5 master's program students by the end of 2022
- 2024 - 83.5% of graduates of s fluently speak, write and read in Georgian, this indicator increases and reaches 99.5% for 2030. The 2020 indicator is 47.8%
- The number of students enrolled in 1+4 university program, which facilitates the entry of minority students into Georgian universities by offering a year of intensive Georgian tuition, increases by 5% by 2024 (the program finishes in 2024)

Currently most of the items in the plan are in the implementation stage.<sup>47</sup> The Teachers' House has been sending teaching assistants and consultant-teachers to s since 2009. Teacher consultants work independently and teach Georgian as a second language and receive higher remuneration. The assistants help teachers (mainly the teachers of Georgian as a second language) with class planning and management, therefore this action is not very different from previous years' work.

The financing of master students is also prolongation of an existing programme, within which the teaching assistants who decide to continue their studies in the education sector and thus leave work at school are provided with a scholarship by the state. In this way the state invests in them returning to the sector with higher qualifications and a raised academic profile. On the other hand, retraining 1200 teachers is a huge goal, as the experience of the past shows that even when offered, very few teachers choose to participate in elective trainings. TPDC has reached this goal by conducting a very intensive awareness-raising campaign. The main motivation for teachers to take part in the trainings was the need for passing competency exams to gain Senior teacher status by 2023.

### 3. Recommendations

A number of steps need to be taken to teach minority children the state language properly, and to address the general performance discrepancy between Georgian and s and students.

First and foremost, high-achieving multilingual teachers must be attracted to teach in low-achieving s. This means increasing the attractiveness of the job via teacher benefits, but also increasing the number of qualified multilingual teachers—there are now far too few such people. The Integration strategy 2021-2030 does address this issue partly – via trainings – however, trainings have proven to be insufficient so far, therefore, the curriculum of the trainings need to be reconsidered and made more rigorous and extensive. Also, language knowledge is not something one can address simply by short-term trainings. Therefore, the need for attractive teaching jobs is more prevalent here. The allocation of teacher-consultants to aid during the teaching process is also a viable option, but this needs to be systematic and non-short-term.

A team of textbook translators needs to be assembled, composed of bilingual teachers and professional translators. Textbooks should contain the entire text in both languages in order to qualify as a bilingual textbook – otherwise it will be impossible for students to work independently with textbooks. This needs to be organized by the ministry, as tenders for the publication of minority textbooks have been unsuccessful and

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<sup>47</sup> Interview with Nino Berikashvili, Manager of Support Program of the Teachers' House (TPDC) (September 7, 2021)

the publication of non-Georgian language or bilingual textbooks appears to be unprofitable for private sector publishers.

Moreover, textbooks need to be rigorously screened for discriminatory content in order to remove or correct any content that contains discriminatory elements based on religion, ethnicity, disability, special needs, age, gender, etc.

The periodic student competency assessment also needs to identify each student's individual challenging competency first and foremost in Georgian language, in order for teachers to use more student-tailored approach/homework.