Anti-Discrimination Measures in Georgian Education System

Report

UNESCO's Medium Term Strategy (2002-2007) provides that "education becomes truly inclusive, in particular by effectively reaching the unreached-especially the poor, women and girls, rural populations, minorities, refugees and countries or populations victims of disasters and people with special needs"[1].

Despite the fact that all the problems in terms of availability of educational opportunities are not completely solved yet, a number of activities and measures have been taken in an attempt to assure equal access to education without regard to race, sex, religion, economic or social background etc.

"Neutrality and non-discriminative attitude" in secondary schools is stipulated in the Law of Georgia on General Education - "***Either form of discrimination shall not be allowed at the school; a school shall not use its powers and resources in a way that may directly or indirectly result any discrimination of a pupil, parent or teacher or their associations; shall observe and encourage establishing of tolerance and reciprocal respect between pupils, parents or teachers, irrespective of their social, ethnic, religious, lingual and world outlook belonging; on the base of equality shall provide individual and collective right of members of minorities to use their native language, preserve and express their cultural values"***(Clause 13, points 3, 4, 6, 7) .

The present report describes the constitutional and legal framework established for the implementation of equality of opportunity in education; discusses issues on how vulnerable people and disadvantaged groups are empowered to assure access to education and describes policy measures and educational programmes implemented for the elimination of discrimination in education system.

Discrimination[2] in Georgia mostly concerns to minorities living in densely populated areas, Georgian citizens living in high mountainous and remote regions, children with special needs and deprived of parental care, refugees and people living in conflict zones, vulnerable and disadvantaged groups. The present report makes special emphasis on the above-mentioned groups and describes the activities which have been implemented in this regard.

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[1] UNESCO Medium Term Strategy (2002-2007); p. 3.

[2] It should be underlined that in this report the term "discrimination" is used with regard to education and its availability for all.

In 2004-2005 the Parliament of Georgia adopted two basic laws - Law of Georgia on General Education and Law of Georgia on Higher Education[3]- thus providing legal framework that prohibits any kind of discrimination and promotes equal education opportunities. For example, Law of Georgia on Higher Education defines that "***A higher education institution shall ensure Equal treatment for all, regardless of one's ethnic or social origin, gender, political or religious beliefs, etc***". According to the Law of Georgia on General Education pupils, teachers and parents have significantly increased rights in school management process. For instance, Law of Georgia on General Education, clause 39, point 1 stipulates that ***"Equal number of representatives of parents and the pedagogical council as well as representatives of self-governance of secondary level pupils shall be elected in the board of trustees"***. Law of Georgia on Higher Education grants special rights to students. In accordance with the above-mentioned law "***Students shall comprise one-third of the entire body of the Senate".***

Under the Constitution of Georgia, Clause 35 and Law of Georgia on General Education, clause 7, ***"Everyone shall have the right to receive education and the right to free choice of a form of education; the state shall provide basic education at its own expense. Citizens shall have the right to receive free secondary education at state educational institutions in accordance with a procedure and within the framework established by law***".

According to Government's decree №182 and in line with the Law of Georgia on General Education, (clause 22), the volume of voucher calculated per pupil according to the financial normative was defined in the amount of GEL 220[4]. But in order to provide similar conditions for all pupils, according to the above-mentioned decree, the dimension of voucher for city schools was defined in the amount of GEL 220, for rural schools – GEL 330 and for schools situated in high mountainous regions- GEL 396.

Several activities have been carried out by the Ministry of Education and Science of Georgia in order to provide similar conditions (alike other Georgian citizens) for minorities living in densely populated areas, Georgian citizens living in the mountainous and remote regions, refugees and people living in conflict zones.

Unified National Admission Exams with a focus of ensuring equal access to education was one of the measures against discrimination. The Unified National Admission Exams provided all the entrants with equally competitive conditions. Only few years ago education was available for the privileged group of society. Certainly, there were few cases when less privileged entrants also gained entrance in higher education institutions due to their skills and knowledge. Yet, most of entrants enrolled in higher educational institutions through protectionism and corruption.

[3] The Law can be downloaded from the Ministry of Education and Science webpage www.mes.gov.ge or from the Bologna Secretarial webpage http://www.dfes.gov.uk/bologna/

[4] Presently 1 USD = 1.79 GEL and 1 EURO =2.12 GEL

Consequently, the rights of many entrants were violated and they did not have equal access to education.

The first Unified National Admission Exams in 2005 were of utmost importance not only for Georgian education system reform, but for assuring democratic and legitimate development of the country. Unified National Admission Exams enabled everybody to exercise their legitimate rights to gain education without discrimination or exclusion. "Through the new system of admission exams the vicious circle of systemic corruption was transformed into the virtuous circle of meritocracy and the new generation of students who truly earn their places at higher education institutions of Georgia will turn into constructive partners and consumers of knowledge and services offered at the modernised higher education institutions.

In 2005-2006 academic year, within the framework of ***Social Programme for financial assistance of students*** enrolled in higher education institutions, 250 grants were allocated to entrants living in highly mountainous and remote regions, entrants who completed secondary education in conflict zones, Azerbaijanian secondary schools of Kvemo Kartli (Lower Kartli) and Kakheti, Armenian schools in Ninotsminda and Akhalkalaki. Besides, grants were allocated to the descendants of people who died for the territorial integrity of Georgia and those who were deported from Samtskhe-Javakheti during the communist regime.

In June 26, 2005 Minister of Education and Science of Georgia issued decree № 374 ***"On the introduction of Special Programme promoting Foreign Nationals study in Georgian accredited Higher Education Institutions and on the rule of allocating State Grants to them ".*** The main purpose of this decision was to encourage Georgian emigrants to return home and establish closer links between the former Georgian citizens and our country.

In December 31, 2004 Minister of Education and Science of Georgia approved ***"Civil Integration Programme"*** in order to provide individual and collective right of members of minorities to use their native language, preserve and express their cultural values on one hand, and on the other, to learn the state language. To date, the members of minorities have an opportunity to get education in their own languages and preserve their language and cultural identity as well. But due to absence of Georgian schools, teachers, manuals etc. densely populated places of ethnic minorities do not have opportunity to learn the state language. "Civil Integration Programme" aims to solve this problem and to facilitate the process of social integration, and raise public-mindedness through teaching the state language to all the citizens of Georgia. Specifically, "Civil Integration Programme" envisage to:

1. Elaborate new teaching programmes and standards for learning the Georgian language and literature. Elaborate methodological recommendations, hold trainings for teachers (financial support for teaching Georgian language in non-Georgian

schools of Samtskhe-Javakheti is provided by the OSCE high commissioner in issues of national minorities);

2. Create an appropriate learning environment as well as effective system of teaching and knowledge assessment within the framework of secondary school reforms (Project Ilia Chavchavadze);
3. Execute situational analysis of non-Georgian schools and elaborate necessary recommendations (programme of studying in non-Georgian schools; group of analysis and consultation financed by the UN Fund of Development and Reforming);
4. Take necessary measures for integrating teachers and learners in a civic environment (programme of school partnership);
5. Provide non-Georgian schools with Georgian textbooks, books, magazines and newspapers;
6. Raise motivation to participate in the Unified National University Entrance Examinations. Prepare non-Georgian university entrants for the exams in Georgian language and literature (programme of preparing national minorities for the Unified National University Entrance Examinations);
7. Upgrade professional qualification and knowledge of the state language among the local public servants.

Besides, in 2005-2006 academic year projects ***"Future starts today"*** was implemented aimed to send (one year contract) teachers from different regions to the vacant positions of teachers of Georgian Language and Literature, History of Georgia and Geography of non-Georgians schools (regions populated by minorities).

Georgia is involved in international programme "Education for All" since 1999. Throughout this period national forum representatives participated in all activities and international meetings dedicated to this issue and held under the auspices of UNESCO.

By the initiative of Georgia and under the auspices of UNESCO several sub-regional and national conferences have been held. For example, in December, 2001 international seminar - "Education for All- Learning to Live Together" was held in Tbilisi for the South Caucasian countries. At the meeting Georgia was declared as the coordination center of the Dakar Framework for Action in the region.

Several measures have been taken in line with the Dakar Forum:

- President of Georgia affirmed "State Programme for Assisting Children - 2002-2007";
- "Pre-School Education Improvement Programme- 2001-2005" was implemented together with UNDP and Open Society Georgia Foundation;

- ❖ Parliament of Georgia adopted "Law of Georgia on Adoption" which meets the requirements of "the Hague Convention on the Protection of Children".

Apart from the afore-mentioned activities, in May 30-31, 2005 the first national conference "**The Great Volga River Route**" was held under the aegis of UNESCO in Tbilisi, Georgia. Associated schools of UNESCO took part in this activity. The project encompassed 18 countries and aimed to the maintenance and development of the world heritage.

In 2005 ***Z. Zhvania School of Public Administration*** was founded. The primary goal of this school is to offer lifelong learning opportunities to the potentially or already employed public servants in the representative and state administration bodies at central, regional and local levels (especially ethnic minority representatives). The school also provides representatives of national minorities with the state language courses.

Decree №145 (August 12,2004) of Minister of Education and Science of Georgia resulted in several activities to encourage 10 Osetian and 11 Georgian students(enrolled in Georgian High Education Institutions in academic year 2004-2005) from Tskhinvali region. The programme envisaged paying tuition fee for those students and granting them monthly scholarship in the amount of GEL 50.

According to the decision of the Ministry of Education and Science of Georgia in order to provide similar conditions for all the entrants certain special measures had to be taken in advance. For some entrants the Ministry of Education and Science of Georgia implements a special programme called ***"Preparing for the Unified National University Entrance Examinations***". Within the framework of this programme the following group of entrants will participate in preparatory courses:

1. ***people living in conflict zones;***
2. ***members of minorities living in densely populated areas;***
3. ***Georgian citizens living in mountainous and remote regions;***
4. ***children of people who were lost or died for the territorial integrity of Georgia;***
5. ***descendents of deported people from Samtskhe-Javakheti during the communist regime;***
6. ***Foreign citizens with Georgian ethnic origin.***

In order to provide equal access to information and the necessary skills for obtaining the information –the programme ***"Deer Leap"*** has been launched aiming at complete computerization and internet connection of all schools in Georgia. Primary goal of this programme is to introduce information and communication technologies in secondary education institutions and promote its usage in teaching processes. The programme absorbed GEL 3,3 m

for the year 2005 from the state budget. This amount has increased considerably and reached GEL 8 m in 2006. Additionally BP allocated a grant amounting USD 2,5 m in 2006.

It is noteworthy, that gender discrimination is almost non-existent in the Georgian schools. Statistics shows that the total number of pupils in 2004 was 628 257, out of this 255 569 were girls and 372 688- boys.

The Ministry of Education and Science of Georgia has launched the **Material-technical Rehabilitation Programme for Public Schools in Georgia - "Iakob Gogebashvili".** The programme aims at creating the secure environment for 400 000 school-children, by rehabilitating the school buildings and bringing them up to international standards. In 2004-2005, 27 new schools were built and 100 had been repaired (19 schools in Tbilisi and 81- in the regions). In 2006 GEL 60 000 000 m is allocated to the programme. The program priorities and objectives for 2006 are the rehabilitation of 60 schools in Tbilisi, 145 schools in regional centers and constructing 45 new schools buildings. The program priorities and objectives for 2007-2008 are to rehabilitate 43 orphanages, 409 schools in the remote mountainous regions, 1200 schools in the rural areas.

As to children deprived of parental care and with special needs, in 1994 Georgia joined the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), which states: "States Parties recognize the right of all children to education" (Article 28). Accordingly, the state have to protect those children who have no access to education and provide its availability for all, especially vulnerable and children with special needs.

There are 43 residential institutions with 5000 children in Georgia under the Ministry of Education and Science of Georgia. This network of institutions for children is inherited from the Soviet system. Today children residing in such institutions fall into several categories such as: orphans, social orphans, children with disabilities (mentally retarded and tuberculosis infected), children deprived of parental care. During the last few years Ministry of Education and Science of Georgia with the support of donor organizations tries to solve efficiently the problem of those children and provide them with quality education. Law of Georgia on General Education, clause 9, point 3 refers to the education of such children and states that ***"Managerial bodies of the system of education shall create special and corrective curricula for pupils with limited abilities, as well as for pupils who need long-term medical treatment, according to which their teaching, education, treatment, social adaptation, integration in social life is carried out. The state shall provide funding of such pupils".***

In 2001 Ministry of Education and Science of Georgia developed and financed " ***Programme of Alternative Forms of Care for Orphans and Children Deprived of Parental Care in Residential Institutions".*** This programme aims to provide residential institutions (orphanages,

special boarding schools, infant houses, etc.) with material-technical basis and ensure deinstitutionalization of orphans and children deprived of parental care.

The programme of deinstitutionalization is the first attempt in Georgia intending to introduce and provide different forms of family based alternative care for children. ***Deinstitutionalization*** is implemented in three main directions:

- **reintegration of institutionalized children** in their authentic families providing the necessary conditions for the children in a less restrictive and more socially inclusive environment;
- **Prevention-** envisages assistance of the family and prevention of children placement in residential institutions;
- **Foster Care -** placement of institutionalized children in foster care families.

Until now Deinstitutionalization programme assisted 850 children.

Institutionalized children form a segregated underclass and face significant disadvantages in adapting to mainstream society once they "age out" of the institution at age 18. In order to solve this problem, Ministry of Education and Science of Georgia carried out the project on ***"Further Education of Institutionalized Children and Children Deprived Parental Care"***. The primary goal of this project is not only to provide those children with education, but to facilitate their socialization and integration.

Until recently there have been few alternatives to institutionalised care or education in special schools for disabled children in Georgia. However, this situation has now changed with the enactment of the General Education Law of Georgia which stipulates that ***general educational institutions are authorized to create the conditions for inclusive education.*** It also states that "***a school shall not use its powers and resources in a way that may directly or indirectly result in any discrimination of a pupil, parent or teacher or their associations***" (Clause 31 section 4). These two clauses create an unprecedented opportunity for Georgia to reduce the need for institutionalization that in the past often used to offer the only opportunity for education and care for children with disabilities. Pilot projects on inclusive education have been launched in 10 Tbilisi Schools and consequently children with special needs were involved in teaching process. Monitoring of this process revealed that due to inclusive education socially isolated, alienated and disabled children are more integrated into society. However, it is essential to provide parents of healthy children, pupils and teachers with courses of professional development and training. Besides, as our society is not yet ready for such rapid changes, it is of utmost importance to ensure preliminary psychological preparation of children before placing them in mainstream schools. Public awareness campaigns have decisive role with regard to the shame and stigma associated with disability and for elimination of existing stereotypes.