

# HIGHER EDUCATION AND RESEARCH INTERNATIONALIZATION IN GEORGIA 2030



Erasmus+



# Recommendations

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### Recommendations



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## Higher Education and Research Internationalization in Georgia 2030

### Recommendations

#### Background

“Higher Education and Research Strategy 2030” is being developed in the framework of the Public Administration Reform in Georgia, implemented by the Georgian government with the support of the European Union. Internationalization aspects of Higher Education and Research in Georgia have been studied by the National Erasmus+ Office (NEO) and Higher Education Reform Experts (HERE) and followed by the set of recommendations to be amended to the main strategic document. These recommendations are based on a desk research, focus groups and interviews and built on the previous studies of the Georgian NEO and HERE team<sup>1</sup>. We’d also like to acknowledge support of Finnish colleagues<sup>2</sup>, who generously shared their experience and answered our many questions.

In this document following definition of internationalization has been used: **The intentional process of integrating an international, intercultural or global dimension into the purpose, functions and delivery of post-secondary education, in order to enhance the quality of education and research for all students and staff, and to make a meaningful contribution to society<sup>3</sup>**

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<sup>1</sup> <http://erasmusplus.org.ge/en/publications>

<sup>2</sup> [Finnish National Agency for Education \(EDUFI\) & Ministry of Education and Culture of Finland](#)

<sup>3</sup> [De Wit, H. \(2015\) INQAAHE conference, Chicago, U.S.](#)

### **Internationalization goals**

**Main goals** of higher education and research internationalization in Georgia are:

- enhancing quality of education and research;
- attracting additional resources: intellectual and financial;
- enhancing Georgia's (not only academic) visibility;
- supporting development of a multicultural society.

**Main messages** for the mobilization of local and international stakeholders and attraction of potential partners shall be the following:

- Georgia is a welcoming country and easy and comfortable to cooperate with due to
  - Liberal legislation and liberal visa policy
  - Academic freedom, ensured by the constitution
  - Established European QA standards
- Georgia is opening doors for international staff and students from all over the world
- Georgia strives for innovation while preserving academic traditions.

Joint efforts of governmental authorities and educational institutions backed up with strong political will and financial investments are needed to achieve these goals.



### **Why internationalization?**

Georgia has to invest in internationalization of its higher education and research to keep up with globalization and stay competitive. Internationalization is not an end in itself, but an instrument for development: besides academic, it has political, economic and cultural aspects. Internationalization of higher education and research can contribute to the generating knowledge and skills, required for the global labour market; fostering job creation and boosting economy; developing intercultural awareness and tolerance; ensuring peace and state security.

Georgia has implemented an impressive package of reforms and succeeded in modernizing many aspects of higher education and research. Being a member of the Bologna Process since 2005, Georgia has mostly implemented all requirements to align with European Higher Education Area, but quality remains an issue and Georgia's academic visibility is limited. Enhancing international cooperation could seriously improve quality of educational services and help to overcome remnants of the soviet legacy in study programmes development and delivery. Introduction of joint/multiple degree programmes and inviting international staff, as well as international programme accreditation are key instruments here. This will solve the problem of critical mass in some fields of study and enable synergy in universities<sup>4</sup>, as well as lead to the increased student motivation in general and attract more international students.

Besides improved quality of study programmes, internationalization will also enhance employability of graduates: we shall prepare students for the global labor market, which dictates new requirements. To develop international competences, multiculturalism and cross-cultural awareness, students shall be exposed to other cultures, challenging them to understand different views and attitudes. Student exchange programmes shall be widely supported and promoted, ensuring equal access. Same is true for staff mobility – networking and experience sharing with international colleagues has significant impact not only at individual, but also institutional and by the extension, national levels<sup>5</sup>.

Georgia's research productivity is quite limited despite impressive growth by 316% from 1993 to 2019<sup>6</sup> - we are a small country in transition and although being granted the upper middle-income status, Georgia has modest financial resources and funding of higher education and research is very low - 0.4% and 0.3% of the GDP respectively.<sup>7</sup> International research collaboration eases access to additional funding sources and affects not only quantity, but also quality of research projects. The fact that 70% of publications from Georgia are the result of international collaborations<sup>8</sup> indicates on the one hand that in the absence of local resources Georgian scientists are actively seeking for international partnerships, but on the other hand, that we are attractive for collaboration – these collaborative activities should be further promoted and supported by the government and universities.

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<sup>4</sup> [K.Gurchiani, \(2020\), "Internationalization of Higher Education in Georgia"](#)

<sup>5</sup> [Erasmus+ CBHE Impact Study Georgia, \(2021\)](#)

<sup>6</sup> [M.Chankseliani, A.Lovakov, V.Pislyakov \(2021\), "A big picture: bibliometric study of academic publications from post-Soviet countries"](#)

<sup>7</sup> [UNESCO, \(2020\), Data for the Sustainable Development Goals](#)

<sup>8</sup> [M.Chankseliani, A.Lovakov, V.Pislyakov, \(2021\), "A big picture: bibliometric study of academic publications from post-Soviet countries"](#)

Internationalization is not only enabling access to additional financial resources – it contributes to the creation of revenues. “Education services are considered engines of economy”<sup>9</sup> – revenue of the higher education sector in Georgia is steadily rising: tertiary education remains profitable with net income up from GEL 11.5mn in 2009 to GEL 42.8mn in 2018. With increased revenues and efficiency, the net profit margin hit 25% in 2017-18<sup>10</sup>. Internationalization of this sector is only increasing its profitability. Existing 10% of international student body (and growing) could be considered as a good starting point for the further development of international higher educational services in Georgia, bringing both financial and reputational benefits. Higher education as an export industry in Georgia is already working and should be further developed. Quality assurance should be an absolute priority and shared responsibility of the government and universities.

Higher education and research are affecting economic development. There are direct links between internationalization of higher education and research and economic growth<sup>11</sup>. International partnerships could contribute to innovations, attract foreign investments and lead to increased competitiveness. COVID19 outbreak has clearly showed how strongly our economies and wellbeing of people depend on scientific achievements and international collaboration. Being a small and relatively poor country with limited human resources Georgia cannot stay isolated – internationalization of higher education and research are opening doors to a globalized world.

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<sup>9</sup> [G.Shive, \(2010\), “Exporting higher education services”](#)

<sup>10</sup> [E.Bochorishvili, N.Peranidze, \(2020\), „Georgia’s Education Sector”](#)

<sup>11</sup> [J.Lane, \(2013\), Higher Education, Internationalization, and Economic Competitiveness](#)

## **Recommendations**

**N.B.** Part of recommendations listed below has been developed by HEREs K.Gurchiani and I.Darchia for the policy papers “15 Years of Bologna Process in Georgia – Achievement, Challenges and Recommendations” (2020).

### **General recommendations for the attention of the Georgian government**

- Georgian government shall promote the idea of internationalization in Georgia and abroad and coordinate policies while ensuring consistency between different stakeholders’ actions (establishing of a working group/committee from representatives of relevant ministries, authorities and institutions – MoES, MFA, MIA, MESD, MOF, universities, etc.);
  - Promotional campaign should include re-activation of Study in Georgia programme and increased outreach in social media, as well as participation in international fairs and organization of promotional visits in target countries; Study in Georgia should be linked to international search engines<sup>12</sup>; Georgian embassies should be actively involved in promoting Georgia as destination for education and research;
- Georgian government shall define priorities for higher education and research internationalization while a) identifying economic links - one of the main goals shall be linkage of internationalization actions with country’s economic development politics in a long-term perspective; b) identifying countries for collaboration and bilateral mobility - internationalization should support the idea of Georgia as regional educational hub;
- Georgian government shall increase funding of higher education and research, specifically for collaborative projects and international QA; Relevant budget allocations shall be discussed and agreed with universities and research institutions in order to develop new and ensure sustainability of already existing international partnerships, including joint study programmes;
  - Universities should be encouraged to participate in international studies (f.e. EUA) with possible governmental financial support;
  - Universities should be encouraged to participate in international rankings in order to enhance visibility and competitiveness;
  - Universities should be encouraged to apply for international programme accreditation in order to attract more international students;
- Georgian government shall develop supportive mechanisms for enhancing higher education and research internationalization, such as
  - taxation policy for local donors - practice has shown that private companies in Georgia don’t invest in education – there are no private scholarships, student internships and placements are generally ensured via personal contacts and public-private partnerships are not sustainable. In order to attract and include non-academic stakeholders in university activities these partnerships shall be financially beneficially for all parties involved. Modification of taxation system could be a stimulating measure – private contribution shall be considered as a charity and tax exempted respectively;

<sup>12</sup> Such as f.e. <https://www.mastersportal.com>, <https://www.phdportal.com>, <https://gradtrek.com> etc.

- liberalisation of visa policy for incoming students;
- liberalisation of foreign staff employment, including recognition of international medical licensees;
- respective legal changes including simplified procurement and financial management rules for public universities in order to enhance participation in international programmes;
- development and recognition of online degree study programmes;
- Georgian government shall ensure accessibility to higher education internationalization while developing supportive actions starting from the general education cycle – enhancing teaching of foreign languages at the school level, improving access to internet and modern technologies, specific scholarship programmes for vulnerable groups, etc.
- Create employment opportunities for international students during and/or following their studies, as well as career opportunities in order to keep best human resources;
- Government shall ensure Georgia to be a safe place for international students and staff while preventing and eliminating discrimination and prejudices and supporting development of a multicultural society.

#### **Specific recommendation for the attention of the NCEQE**

- Develop and tailor quality assurance mechanisms for of joint/multiple degree programmes;
- Develop and tailor quality assurance mechanisms for online / blended degree programmes;
- Monitor and evaluate progress and when necessary, provide recommendations to universities.

#### **Specific recommendation for the attention of the GNSF**

- Further develop supportive mechanisms for research organizations - when national funding of research is so low, access to international funding should be promoted and supported. Actions to implement: 1) provision of information about grant programmes and eligibility of Georgian participants; 2) international partner search (where relevant); 3) project writing, including project budgeting; 4) project management for selected projects. Big universities could have (and some of them already have) supporting units/services, but for smaller universities and other research organizations, including NGOs, centralized supporting service should be established at the GNSF;
- Develop and implement special grant programs for the financing of joint international doctoral programmes;
- Promote Georgia as a place for field research and attract international projects.

#### **Specific recommendation for the attention of the higher education institutions**

- It is recommended to re-consider what exactly universities understand under internationalization and more specifically, which aspects of internationalization are they striving. Universities have to assure respective resources – intellectual and financial – to achieve internationalization goals - this has to be linked to the university mission and reflected in institutional strategies and action plans;
- Universities have to strengthen International Relations Offices and invest in IRO staff capacity building;

- Universities have to offer supporting services to staff and students in order to enhance access to international projects and activities – language courses (including specific courses for staff), modern technologies, etc.
- Universities should be encouraged to join international networks and organizations such as EUA, EURASHE, etc. Membership in these organizations facilitates networking with colleagues, development of joint projects, including joint study programmes, staff and students exchanges, best practice sharing, participation in conferences, etc. At the same time universities have to encourage professors and doctoral students to join international professional networks individually and provide funding and supportive measures, f.e. in form of sabbatical leaves;
- Develop and implement double and joint programmes for conferring academic quality at national and international levels;
- Introduce international job recruitment: support involvement of international staff where necessary to fill the gaps - considering virtual teaching experience introduce hybrid model for foreign professors;
- Promote international mobility for staff and students:
  - Internal mechanisms to ensure more equity and increase wider engagement in mobility programs;
  - Monitoring and evaluating the mobility process;
  - Diversification of mobility forms, including encouraging a blended or fully online approach;
- Promoting virtual internationalization
  - Development of online teaching. Explore possibilities of integrating non-formal education (MOOC) courses to diversify teaching and overcome the problem of critical mass;
  - Increase online engagement based on problem and resource access analysis;
  - Lobby legislative changes in the Law on Higher Education for recognition of online education;
- Special focus on internationalization at home
  - Curriculum level
  - Virtual internationalization (see above)
  - Integration of international students
- Follow up activities for international alumni;
- Conducting research to measure the effect: study of direct and indirect beneficiaries, analysis of the impact of internationalization on improving the quality of the system or institutions, study of the sustainability of international programs and projects;
- Local networking of Georgian universities should be encouraged – regular meetings of IRO representatives / FB group should create platform for experience sharing, problem discussion, formulating joint statements, etc.



### Special note on medical education

22 Georgian HEIs are offering accredited medical programmes<sup>13</sup>. It is clear that for the country with population less than 4 million this is an enormous overrun. Notably, all 22 HEIs offer also English-speaking medical programmes and are actively recruiting international students – currently up to 85% of international students studying in Georgia are enrolled in medical programmes. Medical education is de facto a leading export product of Georgian higher education system.

Although it started rather as a business initiative for profit purposes, internationalization of medical education in Georgia is an accomplished fact with impressive results and growing potential. **Instead of limiting activities of medical schools, existing situation shall be acknowledged and supported by the Georgian government by making medical education an “official” educational trade product.** Responsibility for quality medical education shall be shared by the government and institutions. Specific supporting activities shall include: staff development measures (language courses, teaching and assessment methodology, etc.), international accreditation, coordinated recruitment policy of international students in target countries, recruitment of international staff and granting the right of medical practices, and most importantly – prioritised funding of bio-medical research in order to enhance quality of education provision. Supporting higher medical education will contribute to the quality enhancement, development and internationalization of medical services in the country, linking internationalization with economic opportunities (f.e. medical tourism, pharmacological industry development, etc.).

Supporting internationalization of medical education at the governmental level could create a good example for promotion of international educational services in other fields of study.

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<sup>13</sup> Medicine and Dentistry. Pharmacy, Public Health and other bordering disciplines have not been considered.

## Annexes

### Annex I: Internationalization of Higher Education and Research in Georgia

Unified Strategy for Education and Science 2017-2021<sup>14</sup> was strongly focused on internationalization: **The specific goal of higher education is internationalization of higher education and ensuring access to quality higher education for the individual and professional development of the individual and the improvement of employment / The specific goal of science, technology and innovation is to modernize and internationalize the science, technology and innovation system for the creation of new knowledge and support of sustainable development of the country.**

Strategic objectives included among others internationalization of quality assurance procedures, promotion of joint doctoral programmes and generally, joint degrees, and facilitation of staff and student mobility. In the total absence of any coordination, universities and governmental agencies still managed to achieve significant results, although to a different degree:

- **Higher Education Institutions** – internationalization is understood by the majority of Georgian universities as attracting international students and staff, joint projects/activities with international partners, involvement in international programmes, support of the implementation of joint MA and PhD programs and joint supervision practices by international and local professors. Authorization standards, developed by the NCEQE, require internationalization at the institutional level - Standards 2.1: Leadership of the HEI supports international cooperation of the institution and the process of internationalization and 6.2: University works on internationalization of research, development and creative activities. These aspects are reflected in institutional strategies, mostly developed formally for authorization purposes - leading universities start to revise these documents, partly reflecting on COVID19 induced changes. There is an increasing tendency of inviting international teaching staff, also built on distance teaching experience. Internationalization at home as a phenomenon is largely neglected. Mostly internationalization is perceived as a possibility for additional funding (higher tuition fees for international students, funding from international donors), but also as a tool for quality improvement and enhancement of competitiveness.
- **National Center for Educational Quality Enhancement (NCEQE)** – being the only agency for external quality assurance in the country, the Center is in charge of authorization of educational institutions and accreditation of educational programs and actively promotes participation of international experts in site visits. NCEQE became member in the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA), the European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education (EQAR), has been awarded recognition status by the World Federation for Medical Education (WFME) and closely collaborates with number of other international organizations.
- **International Education Center (IEC)** implements governmental scholarship programme by ensuring international education taking into account the priorities of state development and cooperates closely with other donor programmes from the USA, France, Italy and Hungary. Since 2014 over 1 000 beneficiaries have studied abroad at master and doctoral levels with governmental scholarships, though the impact study, conducted by the State Audit in February

<sup>14</sup> [Ministry of Education and Science of Georgia, Unified Strategy for Education and Science 2017-2021](https://www.mes.gov.ge/content.php?id=7755&lang=eng)  
<https://www.mes.gov.ge/content.php?id=7755&lang=eng>

2021 showed, that the programme didn't address priority areas and 30% of beneficiaries do not realize the knowledge gained abroad.

- **National Science Foundation of Georgia (GNSF)** implements grant calls, targeted programmes and projects, and is involved in international scientific networks and joint projects. One of the priorities of the GNSF, as stated in the Action Plan 2015-2019 was "to internationalize Georgia's science through integration of Georgia's scientific circles into international science network and though strengthening international collaboration in research". GNSF offers wide range of different calls often focusing on international participation, but in fact, doesn't provide any support to Georgian universities and research organizations at system level in partner finding and/or project writing.

#### **Annex II: Relevant statistics<sup>15</sup>:**

- From 64 statelty recognized HEIs, 51 (80%) have international students and only 20 (31%) – international staff. 152 international academic staff teach at Georgian HEIs (increasing tendency, mostly due to online teaching).
- International students comprise 10% of student body in Georgia: 15 846 international students from 43 countries study currently at Georgian HEIs - 84.8% are medicine students. 8 297 of international students (52%) are from India, followed by students from Azerbaijan (10%).
- Only 18 study programmes have international accreditation (out of 1590, making 1.13%).
- 195 study programmes are offered in languages other than Georgian, making 12.26% of total programmes, with English being a language of tuition in 169 programmes (other languages: Russian, German and French).
- There are only 14 study programmes (0.88%) offering joint/double degrees in cooperation with European partners.
- Total annual expenditure of foreign students in Georgia is 195 million GEL, which amounts to 0.6% of Georgia's GDP and 6% of its export of services<sup>16</sup>. A rough and conservative lower estimate for the amount of total expenditure incurred by all foreign students in Georgia annually is 40 million USD<sup>17</sup>.
- Georgia is very successful in the Erasmus+ programme, ranking 6<sup>th</sup> among 141 partner countries with a total of 10 368 international mobility scholarships for students and staff (6 509 outgoing to the European countries and 3 859 - incoming to Georgia).
- 11.3k Georgian students studied in foreign countries in 2017, up from 7.1k in 2013<sup>18</sup>.
- 70% of publications from Georgia are the result of international collaborations.

<sup>15</sup> Statistical data as for May 2021 is provided by Education Management Information System ([www.emis.ge](http://www.emis.ge))

<sup>16</sup> [Brief Migration Profile: Foreign Students in Georgia \(2017\)](#)

<sup>17</sup> [A.Zhvania, \(2016\), "Study in Georgia: Prospects of Internationalization of Higher Education"](#)

<sup>18</sup> Eurostat, (2013, 2017)

### **Annex III: Georgia in Horizon 2020 and MSCA**

Performance in Horizon 2020<sup>19</sup> (Turkey, Switzerland, Norway and Iceland data have not been provided)

	NET EU contribution	Signed grants	Number of organizations involved	Applications	Eligible proposals	MSCA participation
<b>EaP countries</b>						
Armenia	3.62 M	35	43	312	271	10
Azerbaijan	0.6 M	18	19	83	72	6
Belarus	2.9 M	55	64	400	351	41
<b>Georgia</b>	<b>8.23 M</b>	<b>55</b>	<b>62</b>	<b>504</b>	<b>424</b>	<b>11</b>
Moldova	7.43 M	68	86	550	457	14
Ukraine	45.39 M	226	314	2838	2201	80
<b>Other Associated countries</b>						
Albania	5.52 M	47	52	605	476	4
Bosnia & Herzegovina	8.7 M	69	117	729	582	21
North Macedonia	14.21 M	87	117	908	740	4
Montenegro	4.62 M	39	64	323	264	10
Serbia	132.7 M	409	586	3983	3113	109
Tunisia	12.57 M	73	92	706	512	22
Israel	1.26 B	1642	2006	15213	13015	295

<sup>19</sup> [Webgate Europe, \(2017-2020\) Key Figures - Georgia](#)