

**Decree №356 of the Government of Georgia**  
**July 13, 2021**  
**Tbilisi**

On the adoption of the State Strategy for Civic Equality and Integration 2021-2030 and the Action Plan 2021-2022 of the State Strategy for Civic Equality and Integration 2021-2030

**Article 1.**

In accordance with the Article 6 of the “Law of Georgia on the Structure, Authority and Rules of Operation of the Government of Georgia”, the following shall be approved:

1. The State Strategy for Civic Equality and Integration 2021-2030 (**Appendix 1**).
2. The Action Plan 2021-2022 of the State Strategy for Civic Equality and Integration 2021-2030 (**Appendix 2**).

**Article 2.**

The Decree shall enter into force upon its publication.

**Prime Minister Irakli Gharibashvili**

*Appendix 1*

# **State Strategy for Civic Equality and Integration 2021-2030**

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## I. INTRODUCTION

The utmost priority of the Government of Georgia (GoG) – democratic consolidation, socio-economic enhancement and European and Euro-Atlantic integration – grounds on the idea of the realization of fundamental human rights and the principles of equality. Therefore, the GoG considers continuous enhancement of the Policy for Civic Equality and Integration, as the top priority in terms of strengthening the country’s multiethnic and culturally diverse society. From this perspective, the objectives of the authorities are oriented toward the consolidation of a unified, stable, rule of law and multicultural society, through the conduct of pluralistic and inclusive policy, the core value of which is a human being and their rights.

The citizens of diverse ethnic identities residing in Georgia have a centuries-long history of tolerance, solidarity and peaceful coexistence. Building upon this, the **State Policy for Civic Equality and Integration** further strengthens the mentioned traditions and practices, and based on the principles of equality and common European values, strengthens it within the framework of the state policy. The Government considers cultural diversity and contribution of ethnic minorities to the country’s sustainable development as one of the most significant factors. Full-fledged integration of ethnic minorities, supporting cultural diversity, ensuring safe and tolerant environment for the purpose of developing a society, where each member enjoys a dignified life and the privileges of democratic governance, equal rights, opportunities and is able to fully participate in public life, are declared as the main pillars of the Government’s policy. Consequently, each citizen, regardless of ethnicity or cultural belonging, is considered as a strength and a valuable member of the society.

The Constitution of Georgia guarantees the provision of civic equality and integration, and it also represents the positive commitment of the country taken within the framework of international mechanisms and agreements under which Georgia has a duty to establish an appropriate legal space, and facilitate and protect the exercise of these rights. The implementation of the Civic Equality and Integration Policy is in line with the constitutional and international standards and norms. Equality and protection of the ethnic minority rights are guaranteed by the Georgian legislation and the relevant mechanisms.

The Office of the State Minister of Georgia for Reconciliation and Civic Equality coordinates the development of the State Policy for Civic Equality and Integration, its implementation and reporting process. The main mechanism of the State Policy is the State Strategy for Civic Equality and Integration and the relevant Action Plan.

The Government of Georgia has elaborated the present “**State Strategy for Civic Equality and Integration 2021-2030 and the Action Plan**” with the guidance and coordination of the Office of the State Minister of Georgia for Reconciliation and Civic Equality. The long-term priorities and objectives of the country have been identified within the framework of the Strategy, aiming to develop interagency, multi-sector, single and consistent policy, which will facilitate efficient and coordinated implementation of the processes, as well as the protection of ethnic minority rights, and enhanced support and fulfillment of positive commitments toward international community on strengthening of the society based on the principles of equality.

State Strategy for 2021-2030 is the second strategic document on civic equality and integration. Strategic planning was preceded by “**The National Concept on Tolerance and Civic Integration and 2009-2014 Action Plan**” and “**The Strategy for Civic Equality and Integration and Action Plan for 2015-2020**” of the Government of Georgia, which serves as a foundation for the institutional development of a systemic management of Civic Equality and Integration Policy. Relevant mechanisms have been developed and significant steps have been taken in regard to expanding the opportunities for ethnic minorities. Dynamic work has been carried out to overcome the existing challenges and improve achievements.

The present State Strategy is based on the results achieved over the past years in the field of civic equality and integration, and it takes into consideration the existing challenges identified in the aftermath of interim and final assessments of the 2015-2020 Strategy, as well as in the conclusions published by the Advisory Committee on the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities of the Council of Europe regarding Georgia and in the studies of local NGOs. The recommendations presented within the framework of those assessments have been reviewed and taken into consideration in the process of the development of the present Strategy. The grounds for the identification of the strategic goals in the forthcoming years, as well as for the elaboration of objectives oriented at relevant long-term and sustainable results, have been prepared and the mechanisms for their implementation have been established.

The Strategy is based on the vision of strengthening democracy and the rule of law, which implies equality of each and every citizen by and before the law; strengthening tolerant and inclusive environment, in which each citizen enjoys safe and dignified life, and takes full part in public life; where cultural diversity and equality, as main values and the most significant assets for democratic development in the country, are not only recognized, but the consensus on these issues is achieved and shared across the wider public.

The **goal of the present Strategy** is to further strengthen civic equality and integration in the country which implies the enhancement of inter-ethnic relations, protection of their cultural values and identities, full-fledged realization of the principles of equality in the society, so that every citizen, regardless of their ethnic origin, is able to contribute to the country’s economic, political and public life, and to the process of democratic development.

For the purpose of achieving this goal, the Strategy takes into consideration the country’s progress in recent years with regard to civic equality and integration. The goals introduced in the document have been defined with the consideration of common national interests and the fundamental human rights and freedoms that are in line with high international principles and standards. The needs and values for the protection of ethnic minority rights, preservation of identity and the development of ethnic culture are being considered and shared by various ethnic representatives.

**Ethnic identity** implies preservation of the symbols of heritage, such as language, culture, traditions, their reinterpretation and the identification with them by an individual.

Within the framework of this document, **civic equality** implies dignified living conditions for each citizen regardless of their ethnic or other belonging, when an individual is protected by the universally

recognized principles and norms of international law, the Constitution of Georgia and the legislation against the discrimination of any form and substance, is equal before the law, lives in a tolerant environment, enjoys equal rights and opportunities, as well as equal responsibilities and obligations. Furthermore, a citizen has the opportunity for the full-fledged realization of his/her capacity, using his/her native language, preservation and development of ethnic culture.

**Civic integration** implies inclusion of citizens of all ethnic origins into a multi-ethnic society, which envisages their active involvement in social and political life, formation of a stable, positive emotional connection with the state, and fostering the sense of identity and belonging.

For this purpose, the state has an obligation to establish respective conditions and mechanisms for building an inclusive and equal society and ensure the citizens' full participation, as well as use international best practice by taking into consideration the peculiarities of Georgian historical experience.

Civic integration is a dynamic, multidimensional and multi-faceted process and requires full participation of each member of both, ethnic minorities and majorities in the integration processes, their proper motivation and efforts, as well as sharing of responsibilities. Hence, the target of the Strategy is considered to be the representatives of both minority and majority.

By developing this Strategy and the corresponding Action Plan, the Government of Georgia demonstrates its ambition and vision to implement effective integration of the multiethnic society of our country through complex and systemic approaches. The **objective of this Strategy document** to that end is to provide the inter-agency, multi-sector, unified and consistent approaches, to **create the framework** for policy implementation and support the coordinated public agency and inter-agency activities for its realization. The Strategy implementation requires concerted approach of all implementing institutions on the one hand, and employing versatile and diversified action strategies by them, on the other hand. The above-mentioned principle was also used in the process of working on the Strategy document (2021-2030) and the Action Plan.

Within the framework of the Strategy, the state policy is viewed in three dimensions – in the context of the **country's strategic development**, the **Sustainable Development Goals** and **Georgia's European choice**.

## STRATEGY PRIORITIES

The State Strategy for Civic Equality and Integration 2021-2030 aims to ensure the implementation of long-term and irreversible positive changes with regard to civic equality and integration, and for the purpose of the implementation of the corresponding policy defines **five priority directions**:

- ❖ State Language to support integration;
- ❖ Access to quality education;

- ❖ Equality, civic and political participation;
- ❖ Social and economic integration;
- ❖ Intercultural dialogue.

Within the framework of the strategic priorities and each defined objective, special emphasis is placed on the development of effective mechanisms and supportive target programs for the purpose of empowering female and youth representatives of ethnic minorities as well as on the implementation of proactive approaches for the improvement of their social and economic conditions and the development of equality-focused policy, institutional capabilities.

Human rights represent the initial point of civic equality and integration policy. The achievements and progress of the mentioned policy is the message for the Abkhaz and Ossetian citizens living in the occupied territories of Georgia, so that they have the trust in our common future in a unified country, where civic equality is ensured and the identity and rights of each citizen are protected.

## METHODOLOGY OF STRATEGY DEVELOPMENT

The Strategy and Action Plan were prepared with the guidance of the Office of the State Minister of Georgia for Reconciliation and Civic Equality (hereinafter referred to as the State Minister's Office) in cooperation with the administration of the Government of Georgia and the active participation of the relevant state agencies, the civil sector, the Public Defender's Office and the Council of National Minorities at the Public Defender's Office.

With the aim of structuring the strategy development process, the working principles of the Government Commission, which coordinates the process, and a scheduled working plan were defined. The secretariat of the Government Commission was assigned to lead and coordinate the process. The public announcement on launching the Strategy development process was uploaded by the secretariat on the web page of the State Minister's Office at [www.smr.gov.ge](http://www.smr.gov.ge) and the State Minister's Office called upon the interested actors, among them, the state agencies, the representatives of ethnic minorities and NGOs, within a defined time-frame, to submit their vision on the Strategy and priorities, proposals, statistical data, studies and concept papers that could have been valuable in the process of the preparation of the Strategy. For the same purpose, all interested actors and organizations, as well as civil society representatives working on civic integration issues were informed in written form.

Local and international partner organizations having expertise in the field, including UN Association of Georgia, Center for Civic Integration and Inter-ethnic Relations, Human Rights Education and Monitoring Center, the Council of Europe, the OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities and others were asked to conduct a situation analysis and identify challenges, and present their visions of profile-specific activities. The obtained information, documents and proposals were used in the process of analysis.

The development of the Strategy started with the preparation of the concept. The main principle was the approach, according to which the Strategy document was to be developed with a full-fledged

participation and shared responsibilities of all members involved in the working group and all interested actors.

In the **first phase** of the Strategy development, upon setting up<sup>1</sup> a responsible inter-agency working group, the group members were provided with a special training course on public policy analysis, planning, monitoring and assessment focused on new regulations for common procedures, methodology and standards for developing, monitoring and assessment of government policy documents pursuant to #629 Resolution of the Government of Georgia dated as of December 20, 2019.<sup>2</sup> The entire cycle of the Strategy development (policy planning) was based on the above-mentioned regulations and relevant guideline recommendations; the process was inclusive; wide participation of the interested parties and actors, including the representatives of ethnic minorities, was ensured.

The situation analysis was conducted in line with the sector-specific fields of the Government Commission of Civic Equality and Integration (hereinafter – Commission)<sup>3</sup> and each member agency of the working group. International and local experts in the field of strategic planning were invited to take part with the aim of supporting analytical process and its efficient coordination.

The interim and final performance assessment documents (prepared by a group of independent experts) of the 2015-2020 State Strategy on Civic Equality and Integration, as well as the reports on the fulfillment of annual action plans were examined in detail with the aim of efficient planning of civic equality and integration policy. A catalogue of international and local analytical materials (documents and recommendations) on human rights, civic integration and related fields was prepared. The compiling of the logical framework took place in line with the sector's challenges identified during the situation analysis with the use of the Problem Tree analysis method.

Moreover, international mechanisms, including the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities (FCNM)<sup>4</sup>, Universal Periodic Review (UPR)<sup>5</sup>, European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI),<sup>6</sup> as well as assessments of local actors in the field of Human Rights, namely the various research findings and recommendations of the Public Defender<sup>7</sup> and the Council of National Minorities at the Public Defender's Office were reviewed. During Strategy development, along with the national legal and institutional framework, the obligations under international agreements, and the working strategies of relevant sector fields and concepts were considered.

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<sup>1</sup> The following state agencies participated in the working group: Ministry of Education and Science; Ministry of Culture, Sport and Youth Affairs; Ministry of Environmental Protection and Agriculture, Ministry of Defence of Georgia, Ministry of Justice, Ministry of Regional Development and Infrastructure, Ministry of Internal Affairs; Ministry of Economy and Sustainable Development; LEPL – State Language Department; Administrative Office of Human Rights Protection; National Parliamentary Library of Georgia; National Statistics Office; State Governors' Administrations of Kvemo Kartli, Samtskhe-Javakheti and Kakheti

<sup>2</sup> <https://matsne.gov.ge/ka/document/view/4747283>

<sup>3</sup> Resolution N122 of February 20, 2020 of the Government of Georgia

<sup>4</sup> <https://rm.coe.int/3rd-op-georgia-en/1680969b56>

<sup>5</sup> <https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/G15/187/99/PDF/G1518799.pdf?OpenElement>

<sup>6</sup> <https://rm.coe.int/fourth-report-on-georgia/16808b5773>

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.ombudsman.ge/geo/saparlamento-angarishebi>



Problem analysis was followed by the discussion on how the existing instruments could become more effective and what interventions, strategic alternatives could create the opportunities for essential and crucial changes with regard to social inclusion, employment, enhanced state language competence, access to quality education and development of intercultural dialogue for various groups, including ethnic minorities.

Despite the restrictions imposed on tête-à-tête meetings during COVID-19 pandemic, the working process was intensively conducted in a remote mode using various electronic communication platforms.

In the **second phase** of the Strategy development, with the aim of discussing the findings revealed at the stage of situation analysis and improving logical framework of the strategy, as well as defining strategic priorities, alternative goals and objectives, about ten meetings/discussions of the working group were held in different formats with various target groups in the capital, as well as in the regions densely populated by ethnic minorities.

As a result of the situation analysis and assessment, the policy vision, strategic priorities, goals, objectives and indicators were defined and agreed in the working group within the framework of the Government Commission. The period of validity of the Strategy has been defined as the following 10 years.

The draft copy of the Strategy document was published on the website of the State Minister's Office and the interested actors had been invited in March 2021 to submit their views and suggestions in written form.

The following Strategy documents were reviewed and finalized based on the received recommendations:

- ❖ 2021-2022 Action Plan (Appendix N2) – it introduces activities planned to achieve strategic goals and objectives;
- ❖ Logical Framework (Appendix N3) – it implies impact indicators of strategic goals and objectives, which determine the achievement rates and targets;
- ❖ Public Consultations Report (Appendix N4) – it contains detailed information on the views and recommendations submitted.

After having developed the Strategy project, the document was delivered to international organizations and local NGOs, as well as the representatives of academic circles for their consideration and comments. The OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities provided the international expertise of the document and attested its conformity with the existing international standards.

Based on the needs analysis and assessment, the NGOs and international organizations, ethnic minorities, experts, as well as representatives of sector-specific state agencies presented their comments, recommendations and proposals that were considered in detail by the working group. The significant part of those were taken into consideration within the present document. (Appendix N4)

With the purpose of reviewing and agreeing the Strategy vision, goals, objectives, activities, and relevant indicators, about twenty meetings/discussions were held with the agencies via different communication

means, including the electronic ones. In addition, ten more meetings with interested actors were held at the final stage of the strategy development for the purpose of presenting and reaching an agreement on the document project.

The final version of the elaborated documents was discussed with the Commission and the Administration of the Government of Georgia, after which it was submitted to the Government of Georgia for approval.

## II. LEGAL FRAMEWORK OF THE STRATEGY

The present Strategy document considers the civic equality and integration policy in view of international and domestic policy, Georgia's European choice and relevant political reforms. Georgia is a member of all major international human rights protection mechanisms, which, along with other rights, determine the issue of the **protection of ethnic minority rights**. According to the universally recognized principles and norms of international law and the Georgian legislation, Georgian citizens, regardless of their ethnic, religious or linguistic belonging, have the right to preserve and develop their culture without discrimination, use the native language in their personal or public life.

As a result of comprehensive constitutional reform, ethnic minority rights were repeatedly inscribed in the **Constitution of Georgia in 2018**, once again proving the significance that the state attaches to the citizens of Georgia - the representatives of ethnic minorities - and to the protection and development of the most significant features of their identities – their culture, language, and distinctive character. According to Article 11 of the Constitution of Georgia, all persons are equal before the law. Georgian legislation and the relevant mechanisms provide for a number of guarantees and procedural norms for the protection of ethnic minority rights and their participation. Among them:

- ❖ Law of Georgia on Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination
- ❖ Organic Law of Georgia on The State Language
- ❖ Government Program 2021-2024 - Toward Building a European State
- ❖ National Strategy for Human Rights Protection and the Action Plan
- ❖ Unified Strategy for Education and Science of Georgia 2017-2021
- ❖ 2019-2023 National Strategy for Labor and Employment Policy in Georgia
- ❖ Culture Strategy 2025<sup>8</sup>
- ❖ National Youth Policy Concept 2020-2030, *etc.*

Georgia remains committed to the obligations taken within the international organizations. Hence, civic integration process is also based on international practices and political-legal regulations determining international standards of ethnic diversity management, as well as international agreements, principles and standards in the area of Human Rights.

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<sup>8</sup> Resolution of the Government of Georgia N 303; 2016, 1 July

The strategy is, *inter alia*, in full compliance with the goal of the Agreement signed in 2014 between Georgia and the EU - “Association Agreement between Georgia, of the one hand, and the European Union and the European Atomic Energy Community and their Member States, of the other,” such as carrying out democratic reforms, including via the protection and integration of ethnic minority rights and cultural diversity.

Also, the following documents:

- ❖ Association Agenda between the EU and Georgia;
- ❖ Council of Europe’s Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities;
- ❖ UN International Covenant on Civil and Political, Economic, Social and Cultural Rights;
- ❖ UN Convention for the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination;
- ❖ Recommendations and Guidelines of the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance;
- ❖ Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women;
- ❖ The Hague, Oslo, Lund, Warsaw, Ljubljana, Graz, and Tallinn thematic Recommendations and Guidelines of the OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities;
- ❖ UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) – National Document.

When formulating issues pertaining to education, the present Strategy and Action Plan envisage the best practices of European countries that are listed in the first thematic report of the Advisory Committee of the Council of Europe and in the Hague Recommendations of the OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities. As for the use/competence of the native and state languages by ethnic minorities, the document grounds on the 3<sup>rd</sup> thematic report of the Advisory Committee of the Council of Europe and Oslo recommendations of the OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities.

### III. SITUATION OVERVIEW

Georgia is a multiethnic country, which has been distinguished for its tolerant attitudes toward other ethnic groups living in the country for centuries, as well as intercultural relations, peaceful coexistence and positive practices in making joint efforts to the benefit of the country. Ethnic and cultural diversity is the country’s wealth and a significant asset for its democratic and sustainable development.

According to the results of the 2014 census, ethnic minorities constitute 13.1% (488 136 persons) of the population of Georgia (3 713, 8 excluding Abkhazia and Tskhinvali region/South Ossetia). Major part of ethnic minorities are ethnic Azerbaijanis (6.27%) and ethnic Armenians (4.53%). They are mainly densely settled in Kvemo Kartli, Samtskhe-Javakheti and Kakheti regions. Apart from that, smaller ethnic groups (Kists, Udis, Avars, Assyrians) densely or dispersedly (Ossetians, Yezids, Kurds, Ukrainians, Russians, Greeks, Jews, Roma, and other ethnic groups) reside in various parts of the country. These minorities make up about 2.4% of the population of Georgia.

Ethnic Composition <sup>9</sup>	Total (thousand persons)	Percentage Distribution
Georgian	3 224,6	86,8
Azerbaijani	233,0	6,3
Armenian	168,1	4,5
Russian	26,5	0,7
Ossetian	14,4	0,4
Yezidi	12,2	0,3
Ukrainian	6,0	0,2
Kist	5,7	0,2
Greek	5,5	0,1
Assyrian	2,4	0,1
Other	14,3	0,4
Refused to answer	0,6	0,0
Nationality is not indicated	0,5	0,0

During the past years, significant progress was achieved regarding the integration of ethnic minorities – the legislation was improved, the efforts were made to strengthen the institutional approaches and mechanisms. **“The State Strategy for Civic Equality and Integration and respective Action Plan (2015-2020)”** was assessed positively by local and international institutions from the perspective of the results achieved - social-economic conditions of ethnic minorities, their participation in decision-making, access to education, learning the state language, civic participation, information and awareness-raising, preservation and protection of cultural diversity.

2020 was an exceptional year, when the whole world, including Georgia, had to face an unprecedented challenge due to the pandemic caused by the novel Coronavirus. The all-encompassing crisis impeded the fulfillment of the planned objectives of the Strategy. The foremost priority of the government was to deal with the challenges caused by the global pandemic, which on the one hand, was directed toward citizens’ healthcare, and on the other hand, overcoming the economic crisis. In accordance with the epidemiological situation in the country, for the purpose of preventing the spread of the virus and to adequately respond to it, in the regions densely populated by ethnic minorities, all efforts were undertaken to regularly inform the population in their native language, as well as supply the vulnerable citizens with food and hygienic items. This has played a crucial role as the population followed the measures taken by authorities and contributed to the prevention of further spread of the disease.

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<sup>9</sup> General Census of Population, 2014 [www.geostat.ge](http://www.geostat.ge)

Despite the results achieved in regard to civic integration, in the course of the assessment of the current situation, it was revealed that certain needs and challenges remain, the efficient response to which within the scope of the new strategy is of essential significance, and it will facilitate the realization of the potential of the country's ethnically diverse population, the consolidation of civic equality, equal and effective exercise by the representatives of various ethnic origins, as by full-fledged citizens of Georgia, of their social, political, economic, and cultural rights. The need to improve the quality of the knowledge of the state language in the regions densely populated by ethnic minorities deserves special attention. In addition, further improvement of participation in public life remains a challenge both at the central and local levels. Also, the representatives of relatively small ethnic groups with good command of state language and high degree of engagement in different spheres of public life, mostly require support in terms of social-economic and cultural integration. The challenges they face are interrelated and require assessment and response through an integrated approach.

### **3.1. Teaching the State Language**

According to the 2002 census data, only 30.99% of non-Georgian speaking population could speak the state language. Moreover, according to the 2014 census, 44,5% of the ethnic Armenians and 73,9% of Azerbaijani citizens had poor competence of the state language<sup>10</sup>.

The lack of state language knowledge considerably impedes ethnic minorities' full participation in the country's political, economic and social life; to a certain extent, it also hinders sharing each other's culture and traditions. Therefore, the Strategy considers the state language as one of the main instruments for civic integration. Hence, the intervention aims to improve the Georgian language competence and its intensive use.

The language policy for the ethnic minorities stems from the country's development aims, as well as domestic and international integration processes, the civic equality goals and implies the strengthening and promotion of the status of the state language in the regions densely populated by non-Georgian speaking population on the one hand, and the improvement of teaching of minority languages as native languages, on the other one.

Over the past years, the activities conducted with the aim of raising the level of state language competence have acquired complex and regular character both methodologically and in terms of actors' participation. The legal guarantees and opportunities of learning the Georgian language have been created at every level. There is a problem of the development of consistent, continuous and unified system of teaching the language at preschool, general school, vocational, higher and adult education levels. Therefore, the solution to this problem and the full realization and efficient implementation of the curricula are very acute.

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<sup>10</sup>Source: National Statistics Office of Georgia

[http://census.ge/ge/results/census1/demo?fbclid=IwAR16xUDF3w7zviYDz\\_sIzduS6VmvQPR5ow0Fg\\_CG7KsOxmb2ezQN5tvPnGw](http://census.ge/ge/results/census1/demo?fbclid=IwAR16xUDF3w7zviYDz_sIzduS6VmvQPR5ow0Fg_CG7KsOxmb2ezQN5tvPnGw)

In regard to the adult education, the policy of teaching the language to ethnic minorities has been transformed significantly; at the same time, the segment of the beneficiaries became wider and more diverse. Previously, the curricula was devised exclusively for schoolchildren (in non-Georgian schools) and public servants (LEPL Zurab Zhvania School of Public Administration, Georgian Language Centers). For the time being, Georgian language courses are available for different target groups, and they cover all age groups and professional segments. As a result, the knowledge of the Georgian language among ethnic minorities is improving from year to year. LEPL Zurab Zhvania School of Public Administration, which is oriented toward the adults' segment, implements diverse programs for teaching the state language via 13 educational centers and 171 mobile groups. In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, these mobile groups carried on their activities in the distance-learning format. The School provides the interested persons with a state language teaching course as well as relevant language programs, taking into consideration communication and professional vocabulary. About 16 000 participants successfully completed the Georgian Language course in 2015-2020. Also, language learning programs became available to the clergy. On the initiative of the State Minister's Office, LEPL Zurab Zhvania School of Public Administration launched the Georgian Language learning courses for religious persons in Akhalkalaki, Ninotsminda, Marneuli and Dmanisi municipalities (over 100 beneficiaries). Their involvement positively affected the local population's motivation to learn Georgian.

Georgian language course is continuously delivered for minority representatives in the armed forces at 10 field training military bases (111 beneficiaries), as well as for the convicts in the penitentiary system. The employees in the system of the Ministry of Internal Affairs in Akhalkalaki and Ninotsminda municipalities actively participated in the state language learning program.

According to the new Law on Early and Preschool Education, the development of basic Georgian communication skills in non-Georgian kindergartens has become compulsory. Teaching the Georgian language that implies the specific vocabulary for vocational education program has been planned for vocational school students.

From 2015, a long-term methodological course for teaching Georgian language was delivered to the consultant-teachers participating in the program "Georgian Language for Future Success" (over 200 participants). Their activities in non-Georgian speaking villages considerably improved the level of Georgian language competence among schoolchildren.

Activities toward informal education also played an important role. Namely, integrated summer camps for majority and ethnic minority representatives were organized with the aim to intensify the level of Georgian language competence; non-Georgian school pupils and consultant-teachers of the program took part in the camps. After the completion of the program the interest remained high. Population expressed the interest to renew and expand the program.

Despite the achieved results, the issue of knowledge and use of Georgian language still remains a challenge in the regions densely populated by ethnic minorities, which creates problems not only in their daily communication, but also reduces their ability to access information on current developments, employment, education opportunities, and services. There is a need for more effective intervention in order to expand and improve the quality of the programs, which relates to many factors (programs,

resources, teachers, geographic coverage, etc.). For the purpose of overcoming the existing challenges, we are looking for more effective ways to enhance pragmatic competence of all target age groups while enriching the programs with activities that support integration.

## **3.2. Quality of Education**

### **3.2.1. Preschool Education**

With the aim of improving access to preschool education, an intensive construction of kindergartens was carried out in the regions densely populated by ethnic minorities over the past years; however, preschool education, as an important instrument of civic integration policy, which serves as a ground for general education and prepares for acquiring Georgian language competence, is not utilized properly. The most effective way of studying the state language is to start it at the level of preschool education. The problems related to the development of efficient mechanisms for integration and transition at preschool and elementary school levels, still remain.

In the municipalities, considering their local context, the elaboration of the strategies within the framework of a large-scale government reform of early and preschool education is in line with the new educational and infrastructural standards. It aims to address the issue of mobilizing qualified personnel as well as educational and teaching, infrastructural issues for the implementation of the requirements within the new Law on Early and Preschool Education and Care.

As to the existing preschool establishments, the quality of education and care, is in great need of substantial improvement.<sup>11</sup> Georgian language educational standards and curricula are being prepared for non-Georgian language kindergartens; their introduction will enable the learning of the Georgian language at an early age in respective age groups.

It is noteworthy that non-Georgian language preschool establishments are also involved in the school readiness program. Access to this program for the representatives of ethnic minorities has considerably increased in recent years. In order to implement the above-mentioned program, LEPL National Center for Teachers' Professional Development retrained 27 coordinators/methodologists of preschool educational programs through teachers' professional development training module in the municipalities densely populated by ethnic minorities (Akhalkalaki, Akhaltsikhe, Ninotsminda, Akhmeta, Lagodekhi, Sagarejo, Bolnisi, Gardabani, Marneuli, Tsalka, Dmanisi); however, the teachers and preschool administration representatives have not yet undertaken the preparatory professional development training, which is extremely necessary for the implementation of the programs that are in line with the new standards.

Also, there is a need to address the issue of access to school readiness program and its effective realization in kindergartens. This component will greatly determine the readiness of the adolescents for general education and will affect their further development.

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<sup>11</sup> Final Assessment of the Implementation of the State Strategy for Civic Equality and Integration and Action Plan for 2015-2020, [www.smr.gov.ge](http://www.smr.gov.ge)

Elaboration and translation of the teaching and methodological materials in ethnic minority languages, training of preschool teacher educators, and taking effective and timely steps for their professional development remains a challenge.

It is noteworthy that the rate of enrollment of early-age children in preschool in Georgia is 65%, and in the regions densely populated by ethnic minorities is 25,5% (on average), which is 95% lower than in European countries. The enrollment rates are significantly lower for ethnic minority children from socially vulnerable groups and those living in rural areas.<sup>12</sup>

### 3.2.2. General Education

The development of general education opportunities is one of the main priorities for the state policy on civic integration. According to the Law of Georgia on General Education, the citizens of Georgia, whose native language is not Georgian, have the right to acquire the complete general education in their native language in accordance with the National Curriculum, as provided by the legislation (the Law of Georgia On General Education, Article 4, paragraph 3). There are about 300 non-Georgian public schools in Georgia (14% of the total number of schools), which is proportional to the number of schoolchildren (approximately 52 000 schoolchildren, 10% of the total number). Most non-Georgian language schools and sectors (76,7% ) are located in rural areas and only 23, 3% in urban areas.

As per 2020, the number of non-Georgian schoolteachers was 10% (6715) of the total number of teachers. The majority of them (43.40%) are Azerbaijani language speakers, 39,70% - Armenian language speakers and 16,90% - Russian language speakers. In most schools, the teaching process is conducted in several sectors simultaneously (Georgian-Azerbaijani, Georgian-Russian, Georgian-Armenian, Georgian-Azerbaijani-Russian, and Georgian-Russian-Armenian sectors).

#### Number of teachers according to language instruction <sup>13</sup>

Azerbaijani language	2914	43.40%
Armenian language	2668	39.70%
Russian language	1133	16.90%
<b>Total</b>	<b>6715</b>	<b>100.00%</b>

The curriculum of non-Georgian language schools envisages teaching of all subjects taught in Georgian language schools. The majority of the subjects are taught in the native language of ethnic minorities, however, it is mandatory to teach social sciences (history, geography, and civic education) in Georgian language. For the time being, this requirement is only partly met in some schools due to the lack of

<sup>12</sup>Study on Quality of Early Childhood Education in Georgia, 2018, UNICEF, <https://www.unicef.org/georgia/media/1236/file/Preschool%20Quality%20Study.pdf>

<sup>13</sup> Final Assessment of the Implementation of the State Strategy for Civic Equality and Integration and 2015-2020 Action Plan [www.smr.gov.ge](http://www.smr.gov.ge)



human resources or teachers' poor language competence and insufficient qualification. For the same reason, the quality of general education still remains a challenge while teaching other subjects. As per 2020, more than 62.7% of the teachers working in the above-mentioned schools had the status of a practicing teacher, which, according to the scheme of Teachers' Professional Development, is the lowest level and it is directly reflected in the quality of teaching. In non-Georgian schools, 24.5% of the teachers have the status of a senior teacher, only 1% belong to the category of a lead teacher and only 7 teachers hold the status of a mentor, which constitutes 0,1% of the total number of non-Georgian school teachers.

Moreover, disparity in the introduction of National Curriculum between non-Georgian and Georgian schools, as well as the use of the outdated textbooks and irregularity of teachers' professional development programs creates unequal educational environment for non-Georgian schoolchildren.

The main focus of the educational policy is on the teachers' adequate training. Special state programs envisage the deployment of young, professional and highly motivated teachers to the regions, among them, bilingual teachers, who obtained their qualifications within so called "1+4 Educational Program", and have high competence in the State and native languages. The state creates special conditions for them in terms of benefits and living conditions. However, the need for Georgian language and literature teachers for non-Georgian language schools has not been addressed so far.

An important message on the need of strengthening the policy of teaching the Georgian language is delivered through a study (National Assessment and Examinations Centre, 2019 "State Assessment – Georgian, as a Second Language"), which clearly demonstrates that most non-Georgian schoolchildren are interested in learning the state language, while their parents believe that the knowledge of Georgian language will help them with employment and integration.

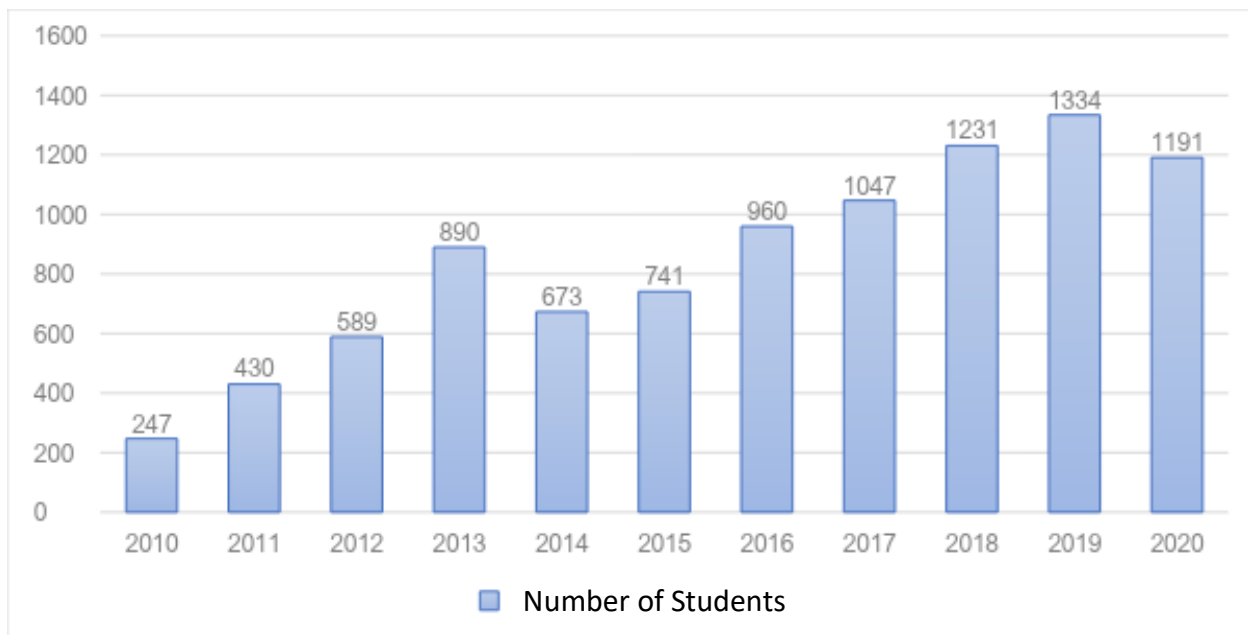
The content of the textbooks in ethnic minority languages, which are provided from the neighboring countries hinders their identification with Georgia, as well as with their native country and brings confusion. The issue needs to be addressed urgently through the development of textbooks in Georgia. Moreover, there is a need to solve such important issues as the selection of effective module of multilingual education and its implementation, translation of textbooks in different subjects, multicultural education, improvement of teachers' qualification. In a number of schools, there is an acute need for the development of infrastructure and resources, among them teaching materials, IT and laboratories.

In the regions densely populated by ethnic minorities, the involvement of secondary level schoolchildren in educational process is very low, and is much lower than that of Georgian language schools. In these schools attendance rates and students drop out still remain a challenge, which mainly relates to their employment. The predominant reason for girls dropping out is mostly their marriage at an early age.

### 3.2.3. Higher Education

Within the framework of the State Strategy for Civic Equality and Integration, a special preferential policy has been developed for ethnic minority representatives with the aim to improve their access to higher education<sup>14</sup>; after the completion of the Georgian Language Educational Program<sup>15</sup> (1+4 Educational Program) the students are enrolled in selected departments of higher education institutions. This unique and simplified approach is an opportunity to enhance access to higher education for non-Georgian school graduates. While previously young people were giving priority to getting higher education in neighboring countries due to their lack of knowledge of Georgian, nowadays the above-mentioned program has drastically changed their attitude to higher education, increased their motivation to acquire education and prioritize Georgian universities. Therefore, the number of students enrolled in the Program compared to 2010 (247 entrants) has seen a fivefold increase and in 2020 their number equaled to 1191 (see the Diagram).

**Diagram. Number of “1+4 Educational Program” students by years**



Nowadays, we already have a significant number of well-prepared, educated, highly qualified ethnic minority youth - the program graduates - with knowledge of their native language, an excellent command of the state language and a set of professional skills, who are actively involved in various spheres of public life. The studies of the students' attitudes in the period of 2013 and 2016 demonstrate the growth dynamic of positive attitudes toward the Program: “As a result of the system of quotas, the

<sup>14</sup>Young people are enrolled in the course by passing one exam in their native language –Armenian, Azeri (General Skills Test) and Ossetian, Abkhaz languages (Native Language Test).

<sup>15</sup>The so called “1+4 Educational Program” – educational program for Bachelors, certified medical students/dentists/ veterinary students

number of those wishing to apply for higher education has increased substantially”.<sup>16</sup> However, it is noteworthy that “students enrolled at the Bachelor’s level have certain problems, which in some cases are related to financial difficulties or poor language or academic preparation”.<sup>17</sup> Consequently, the university graduation rate is quite low (about 30%) and notwithstanding its popularity and the lack of alternative options, the program needs to be further improved in the light of the current prospects, both in terms of content, methodology, and its organization in order to make it more efficient for educational and integration purposes.

In regard to career choices, the most of non-Georgian students prefer business administration degree programs (37%); the interest in liberal arts is also high (27%), as well as in law and social sciences. The demand for exact and natural sciences (technology, engineering and mathematics) is very low. The percentage of school graduates wishing to continue their studies has significantly increased and make up 21%. This is definitely a positive trend that creates opportunity for training future teachers for non-Georgian schools.<sup>18</sup>

#### **3.2.4. Vocational and Adult Education**

For full-fledged integration of ethnic minorities, vocational and adult education is one of the priority components, since it is the most significant precondition for prompt employment and engagement in economic and social life. With the aim to overcome the existing language barrier, the Georgian language course has been integrated into professional programs for ethnic minorities. Meanwhile, as a result of expanding the network of educational institutions, access of ethnic minorities to vocational education increased due to geographic proximity.

Since 2016, non-Georgian applicants can take vocational tests in Azerbaijani, Armenian or Russian languages, get enrolled in vocational educational institutions and pursue the occupation of their choice after completing a Georgian language module. Due to success of the initiative, the number of non-Georgian speaking citizens interested in vocational education has substantially increased. The government has undertaken appropriate steps to meet the existing needs; in 2020, the Ministry decided to launch a process of developing new state language programs to further improve the quality and access to education for ethnic minorities.

As per 2020, 432 persons expressed interest in taking test in their native language, and as a result 223 were enrolled in respective programs. In future, more efforts will be made to offer such programs in the regions densely populated by ethnic minorities. Such educational programs were offered in two new municipalities of Marneuli and Akhalkalaki.

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<sup>16</sup> The study of the results and efficiency of preferential policy in the higher educational system of Georgia, pp. 2010-2019, p. 99

<sup>17</sup> Ibid, p. 46

<sup>18</sup> Ibid, p. 57

Adult education and training was added to vocational education system from 2019. They were offered job oriented short training courses.<sup>19</sup> The LEPL Zurab Zhvania School of Public Administration is the key actor in providing vocational training for ethnic minorities. It develops and implements training programs for public servants in view of current needs and requirements. In order to strengthen the capacity of local self-government bodies, they also develop special training modules for target groups and ensure their engagement.

### **3.3. Supporting smaller ethnic minority groups**

The State Policy for Civic Equality and Integration envisages a unified approach to both large and small ethnic minority groups with the aim to protect and support their cultural identity and enhance their participation in different spheres of social life. It takes into account the needs and interests of each group.

The majority of smaller ethnic minority groups has a good command of the state language; they are well-educated and informed about the state programs and services; are actively involved in various spheres of public life. The government supports and promotes their culture, traditions, implements cultural and educational projects.

In 2016 with the state's support the teaching of smaller ethnic minority languages, namely: Ossetian (in 2 schools), Chechen (in 7 schools), Avar (in 3 schools), Udi (in 1 school), Assyrian (in 1 school) was introduced in public schools of Kakheti region for the first time. These languages are taught upon request in public schools of Kakheti (Kvareli, Lagodekhi, Pankisi Gorge) and Mtskheta-Mtianeti regions (village Kanda).

There is a special focus on the Roma population as those living in vulnerable conditions. Their involvement in ongoing social protection programs as well as their participation in social life is very low. Their negative attitude toward education remains a challenge; however, the process has been launched with respective measures undertaken: Bringing Roma adolescents to school and developing individual education plans facilitated their socialization and improved attitudes toward educational activities. In the process of integration of Roma community, some positive changes can be observed with regard to their attitudes toward state institutions – they apply to medical establishments (maternity houses) more frequently, which significantly simplifies issuing birth certificates for the newly born. The access of the Roma community to information on available state services is still a challenge. The process of registration, arrangement of identification documents and granting the relevant legal status is underway. Despite the steps taken in this direction, part of the Roma population does not have ID cards. Therefore, more efforts should be made to ensure legal documentation for Roma. The current situation needs complex analysis. Primarily, it is important to define the number of Roma, and maintain accurate official statistics which will enable to identify specific, outcome-oriented activities that are tailored to their needs.

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<sup>19</sup> Source: The Ministry of Education and Science of Georgia.

### 3.4. Civic-political participation

Civic, political and social integration of ethnic minorities is one of the key objectives in the development of a democratic society. Despite a number of projects and initiatives implemented in this direction, more important steps should be taken to achieve tangible results in terms of political participation.

For the efficient realization of the principles of equality, it is essential to ensure equal electoral environment and raise awareness among ethnic minorities to guarantee their informed choice. In order to increase ethnic minority representation and participation in central and self-governing bodies, it is equally important to inform the society and to conduct focused educational activities related to legal and other rights.

In Parliamentary, Presidential and Local elections held in the country, participation of ethnic minorities has increased in recent years. In this respect, the role of the Central Election Commission of Georgia (CEC) was significant as it had been intensively informing citizens about the election process, preparing and retraining election officials, translating election documentation into Armenian and Azerbaijani languages; also, funding NGOs working toward raising awareness about the electoral processes. As a result of the above-mentioned activities, participation of ethnic minorities in political and election processes has increased.

In Parliamentary election (2016, 2020), Local self-government election (2017) and Presidential election (2018) held in Georgia the proportion of Precinct Election Commission members represented by ethnic minorities did not change notably- -(8641 representatives)<sup>20</sup>; 3507 ethnic minority representatives took a course on election administration and were provided with certificates.

**Table. Statistical data on Precinct Election Commission members speaking Azerbaijani and Armenian languages**

Elections	Number of Armenian speaking, Election members (total)	Armenian Precinct Commission	Azerbaijani
Parliamentary elections held on October 8, 2016	2 681	1 343	1 338
Local elections held on October 21, 2017	2 742	1 368	1 374

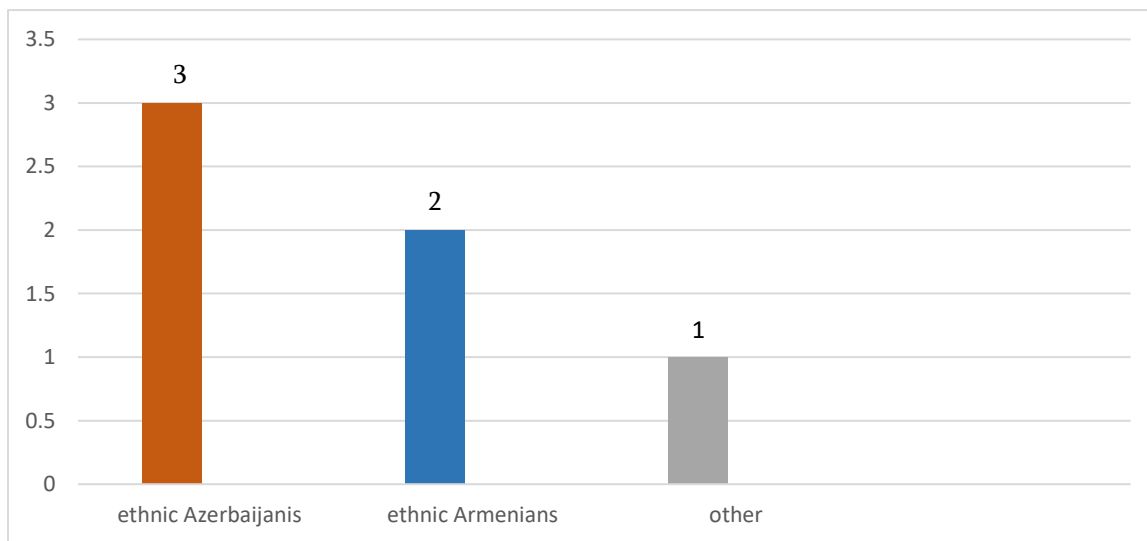
<sup>20</sup> Final Assessment of the Implementation of the State Strategy for Civic Equality and Integration and Action Plan for 2015-2020, [www.smr.gov.ge](http://www.smr.gov.ge)

Presidential elections held on October 28, 2018	1 639	762	877
Parliamentary elections held on October 31, 2020	1 579	861	718

Also, it is noteworthy that small grants were allocated to civil society organizations and ethnic minority communities with the purpose of strengthening electoral culture and information campaign. In 2015-2020, about 74 projects were funded with total budget of over GEL 2 000 000 to support the engagement of ethnic minority voters in the election process. The projects were implemented in the regions densely populated by ethnic minorities.

Ethnic minority representation in local political institutions remains low. It must be noted that in the Parliament elected in 2016, ethnic minorities were represented by 11 MPs (7.33% of the total number of seats), whereas following the results of 2020 Parliamentary election, in the Parliament of the tenth convention, ethnic minorities were represented only by 6 MPs<sup>21</sup>. Consequently, compared to previous conventions, the number of ethnic minority representatives in the Parliament of the tenth convention decreased by 3.33%.

**Diagram. Number of ethnic minority MPs in the Parliament of the tenth convention according to the results of 2020 Parliamentary election**



As a result of 2017 election, 165 representatives of ethnic minorities were elected to local election bodies (in 21 municipalities out of 64), minimum one candidate from each municipality. This means that in local self-governing bodies with large ethnic minority population, their representation remains low.

<sup>21</sup> Final Assessment of the Implementation of the State Strategy for Civic Equality and Integration and Action Plan for 2015-2020, [www.smr.gov.ge](http://www.smr.gov.ge)

Namely, in a local representative body – the Sakrebulo, there is one representative for 779 Georgian voters, 1116 ethnic Armenians and 2945 ethnic Azerbaijanis, on average.<sup>22</sup> Consequently, the main barrier for ethnic minority participation in the management and political decision-making is frequently a poor command of the state language and low motivation.

To improve ethnic minority involvement, Public Advisory Councils have been established at the State Representative - Governor's Offices in Kvemo Kartli and Kakheti regions since 2016, which are composed of the representatives from local self-governments, Public Defender's Office and NGOs, as well as ethnic minorities living in these regions. In the past years, the Councils held 19 meetings. The establishment and functioning of Advisory Councils, which implies participation of ethnic minority representatives at a local level is a step forward; however, their activities are partly of a formal character and need to be further developed and improved to deal with various issues. For that purpose, it is important to more actively involve ethnic minority representatives in the process of problem and priorities identification, making an in-depth analysis of the recommendations they submit.

On the initiative of the State Minister's Office, in 2017 ethnic minority representatives, the beneficiaries of so called "1+4 Educational Program", were given the opportunity to undertake internships in public structures within the pilot project with the purpose to involve ethnic minority representatives in public service, enhance their qualifications, improve their competitiveness and ultimately, support their social-economic integration. Institutionalization of the program occurred the same year. Up to 300 young people successfully completed the program.

### **3.5. Access to Media and Information**

Access to media has a special role in the process of political socialization, and in general civic integration of ethnic minorities. In this context, it is important to improve information provision in the languages they understand and support their involvement in a common information space, which acquires great importance in light of disinformation and propaganda. Raising awareness among ethnic minorities and provision with information both in state and their native languages through alternative means became rather urgent due to the challenges caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. It is also important to implement special programs for raising awareness on media literacy, prevention of disinformation, improvement of internet coverage in the regions and access to new technologies.

To spread and strengthen common national and democratic values, provision with information about current social, economic and political processes in the country, media coverage of ethnic minority issues, also promotion of the activities of each ethnic group, support to tolerance and cultural pluralism through relevant media products, are placed on the agenda.

Article 16 of the Law of Georgia "On Public Broadcaster" obliges the Public Broadcaster to "reflect ethnic, cultural, linguistic, religious, age and gender diversity of the society within programs".

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<sup>22</sup> [http://csem.ge/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/Competing-for-Votes-of-Ethnic-Minorities\\_Geo.pdf?fbclid=IwAR1PUZUuszKp7ghbK3KvnhQ-4k\\_SMgik3bWtmFi8uQ55E5KqFzBbB1oWWpDk](http://csem.ge/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/Competing-for-Votes-of-Ethnic-Minorities_Geo.pdf?fbclid=IwAR1PUZUuszKp7ghbK3KvnhQ-4k_SMgik3bWtmFi8uQ55E5KqFzBbB1oWWpDk)

Consequently, the above institution is the leading actor in terms of dissemination of the information, which broadcasts news programs with Georgian, Armenian and Azerbaijani language sound tracks. Also, a seven language (Georgian, Abkhazian, Ossetian, Armenian, Azerbaijani, English and Russian) news web-portal [www.1tv.ge](http://www.1tv.ge) is run by the Public Broadcaster.

To support access of ethnic minorities to media, in 2017, the Public Broadcaster developed a special media strategy with the purpose to provide ethnic minorities with information in the languages they understand, and promote the culture and traditions of ethnic minorities among Georgian-speaking population, stressing the significance of their role and engagement for the country.

With the similar purpose, the state has been supporting print media. Armenian-language newspaper “Vrastan” and Azerbaijani-language newspaper “Gurjistan” are published on a regular basis. They are disseminated in the regions densely populated by ethnic minorities, as well as in penitentiary and probation establishments. In 2015-2019, an Armenian-language newspaper “Vrastan” (in 2016 - 52 issues a year, circulation – 4000 copies, in 2017-2019 – 102 issues a year, circulation - 3500 copies) and an Azerbaijani language “Gurjistan” (in 2016 - 53 issues a year, circulation - 4000 copies; in 2017-2018 - 93 issues, circulation - 2000 copies; in 2019 - 98 issues, circulation - 2000 copies) had been published. According to numbers, newspaper issues are increasing. They receive continued financial support from the state.

Meanwhile, a number of challenges related to the access of ethnic minorities to information still need to be addressed. For instance, the news provided by the Public Broadcaster and other regional TV channels in ethnic minority languages are scarce, and the quality and intensity of the news need further improvement. In the villages far from the municipal centers, the only news are still received from neighboring countries TV broadcasters, as they are struggling with poor signals from the national broadcasters and the programs translated into minority languages do not match their interests and needs. Therefore, they prefer to receive information from the channels of neighboring countries that negatively affects their attitudes toward the ongoing developments in the country, affects the integration process as a whole and creates fruitful ground for disinformation.

Keeping ethnic minorities informed on the issues of human rights and freedoms, European and Euro-Atlantic integration processes, public programs and services, civic equality and integration policy, educational opportunities and programs, gender-based violence and early marriages, disinformation and cyber-security, antidiscrimination mechanisms, etc. - is an important tool for enhancing the efficiency of civic integration.

To improve the access to information, state agencies have been carrying out large-scale information and awareness campaigns on education, agriculture, environmental protection, healthcare and social protection, economy, financial liabilities, Georgia’s European choice and the related benefits, legislation, hate crime, gender equality and other acute issues on a regular basis. However, there is a need for increased involvement from local self-government representatives as well as the necessity of more intensive and efficient provision and dissemination of information and direct communication through new communication technologies.



### **3.6. Social-economic conditions and opportunities**

It is of utmost importance to create equal social-economic opportunities for each citizen. For this purpose, it is key to support social and economic initiatives, as well as improve access to respective state programs and services.

Georgian legislation guarantees social and economic equality for all Georgian citizens. However, in a number of cases, ethnic minority representatives face greater barriers that hinder the realization of their economic rights and welfare benefits due to the lack of state language knowledge, geographic distance and poor awareness. It is crucial to implement social and economic programs that respond to the needs of ethnic minorities, giving them the opportunity to establish business contacts with Georgian speakers through joint social-economic projects.

In recent years, the number of state projects implemented in regions densely populated by ethnic minorities, as well as the provision of agricultural programs and services to support the development of small and medium businesses increased significantly. The existing problems are solved through the implementation of large-scale infrastructural projects, such as: gas infrastructure development in villages, road constructions, arrangement of irrigation and drinking water systems, rehabilitation of street lighting, etc. Moreover, a number of programs and projects for construction and rehabilitation of preschool establishments, schools, ambulatory clinics were implemented. The number of infrastructural projects funded by the state in regions densely populated by ethnic minorities proves the aspiration of the state to drastically improve and invest in these regions and enhance social and economic opportunities for the local population. In 2015-2020, the total value of the implemented infrastructural projects in Samtskhe-Javakheti region (within the Fund for projects to be implemented in the regions) equaled to GEL 136 929 861, in Kvemo Kartli region – GEL 191 772 326 and in Kakheti region – GEL 46 801 86. In the mountainous villages of the municipalities densely populated by ethnic minorities, within the frames of the Fund for Development of the Highlands of Georgia, the total value of the implemented projects equaled to: GEL 11 050 214 - in Samtskhe-Javakheti region, GEL 3 141 601 - in Kvemo Kartli region, and GEL 1 854 340 - in Kakheti region.

Information and public awareness campaigns on state services and programs have been undertaken on a regular basis. It included door-to-door dialogue and consultations with population. While developing and implementing specific strategies and programs in social and economic sector, state agencies consider the needs of ethnic minorities.

For social and economic strengthening of the local population, development of tourism, support of local production, craftsmanship, festivals and exhibitions are considered important. The above-mentioned activities have become acute in regions densely populated by ethnic minorities in recent years. In 2018, LEPL Innovations and Technology Agency under the Ministry of Economy and Sustainable Development provided internet vouchers within the framework of the program “The Internet for the Development”. In total 126 vouchers (each of GEL 150) were distributed among the population in regions densely populated by ethnic minorities (Samtskhe-Javakheti, Kvemo Kartli and Kakheti regions).

For social-economic empowerment of ethnic minorities, it is essential to use up-to-date statistical data. In regard to evidence-based policy implementation, the methodology of collecting statistical data and the census blanks remain a challenge, as they do not allow to obtain and analyze information on ethnic minorities. Access to objective data is especially important for determining the problems and solutions in employment as well as strategic planning of the regions' economic development. Therefore, appropriate measures are needed to adjust the national statistical system.

### **3.7. Intercultural Dialogue**

Tolerance and respect for different cultures and backgrounds is of great importance in a multiethnic society permanently undergoing transformation. For establishing democratic values oriented to human rights and equality significant steps have been undertaken; however, the studies show that 37.36% of the Georgian citizens do not have positive attitudes toward ethnic diversity due to lack of relevant information.<sup>23</sup> Consequently, awareness-raising is important both in the capital and in regions densely populated by ethnic minorities.

For the purpose of creating equal and tolerant environment, it is necessary to support intercultural dialogue, bring closer ethnic groups living in Georgia and raise civic self-consciousness. Protection and support of the identities and distinctive character of ethnic minorities are an important component in the process of the implementation of the Civic Equality Strategy, since the values determining socio-cultural identities of different ethnic groups, the monuments of tangible and intangible cultural heritage, traditions, create the country's unique cultural diversity, and its promotion largely defines the strengthening of tolerant attitudes and mutual respect in our multiethnic society. For this purpose, the state provides financial support to the theatres, museums, cultural centers, implements such projects as: publishing albums and translations, organizing literary and cultural events, festivals "Diverse Georgia", "Multiethnic Art-Festival under One Sky –Intercultural Dialogue", "All Cultures are Different, but Equal" and many others, directed toward promotion and support of ethnic cultures.

For the purpose of protecting the cultural heritage of ethnic minorities, the state undertakes inventory and rehabilitation activities and grants cultural heritage status to monuments. The state provides financial support to the museums, theatres, libraries and cultural centers of ethnic minorities.

Nevertheless, to encourage intercultural dialogue, it is necessary to intensify activities and ensure joint participation of the representatives of various ethnicities.

### **3.8. Gender Equality**

The fight against gender discrimination, transformation of public opinion, increasing women's participation in decision-making, political or social-economic spheres are the key priority in the

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<sup>23</sup> Caucasus Research Resource Centers (CRRG-Georgia), „Hate Crime, Hate Speech and Discrimination in Georgia, Attitudes and Awareness“, baseline study of the Council of Europe project „Fight Against Discrimination, Hate Crimes and Hate Speech in Georgia“, November 2018

implementation of the state policy for civic equality and integration. Consequently, empowerment of ethnic minority women is one of the important aspects of civic equality and integration.

Gender problems mostly imply barriers to general and higher education opportunities, participation in social and political processes for girls and women, which largely relates to the impact of stereotypes, and the lack of information on human rights and opportunities for development. Based on the levels of education, a changing proportion is observed in Azerbaijani-language schools. If the girls at the basic level of education in Azerbaijani-language schools make up 47,2% of the students, at the secondary level their proportion is reduced to 42.10%.

The schools identified a number of cases when the girls are forced to abandon higher education. However, especially high rate of school dropouts due to early marriages or a family decision is negatively reflected on the girls' health, as well as further education and development, the realization of their capacity and engagement in economic activities.

The majority of ethnic minority women depend on their families in terms of economic resources and property. According to the established tradition, they rarely claim their share or inherit property.

To strengthen political and public participation of ethnic minority women, to make them economically independent, it is of utmost importance to support them through educational opportunities, economic and business activities. Women's economic empowerment will guarantee the protection of their rights, improve their access to finance and resources, help the realization of the right to freedom of choice and development.

In recent years a special attention was given to women empowerment through information and awareness campaigns on acute issues. The Women's Rooms, as a support mechanism, were launched in the municipalities densely populated by ethnic minorities; meetings were held on the topics of women's rights, early marriages, domestic violence and gender equality. About 100 investigators participated in a special training course on domestic violence and effective investigation of domestic crimes in the same municipalities.

To eliminate gender inequality, it is vitally important to support the protection of women's rights, enhance and encourage their participation in economic and social life, develop action plans that are tailored to their needs and implement them efficiently.

### **3.9. ACCESS TO STATE ADMINISTRATION AND LAW-ENFORCEMENT BODIES AND MECHANISMS**

Access to state administration, law-enforcement bodies and mechanisms for the representatives of ethnic minorities are aimed to create equal and fair environment, increase trust and readiness for cooperation.

With regard to ensuring effective access to state administrative proceedings, investigation and courts, poor command of the state language and problems with translations are often named as barriers in the process of establishing such legal relations with state bodies, as: initiating administrative proceedings, implementation of justice, etc. Consequently, with the aim of improving relations with different state bodies, important activities have been implemented that largely facilitated barrier reduction; however, further efforts are still needed.

Better representation of ethnic minorities in law–enforcement bodies is obvious. Under the Action Plan, the state has undertaken the obligation to attract the representatives of ethnic minorities to law-enforcement bodies.

Participation of the representatives of the self-government bodies of the municipalities from regions densely populated by ethnic minorities, as well as others with different professional background, in the programs of the LEPL Zurab Zhvania School of Public Administration has considerably increased; however, the overall participation indicator is still low.

### **3.10. Participation of Youth**

Young people have an extremely significant role in the development of a country. It is a social segment that builds our future, aspires innovation and development. Therefore, the contribution of the youth to the country’s social-economic development is very important.

It is of necessity to create respective conditions to fully realize the potential of the young, ensure their development, achieve their wellbeing, and better prospects.

In this respect, the following issues remain a challenge: poor involvement of ethnic minority youth in social life and democratization process, unemployment, scarcity of available vocational institutions, poor access to informal education and youth programs, lack of gathering, cultural and sports activities, entertainment and recreational spaces in the regions.

Involvement of young people from various ethnic groups in cultural and sports activities, with the purpose of positive impact on their health and quality of life, favor developing friendship and respect for each other and finally support the civic integration process, is still a challenge.

At the same time, it is necessary to increase the number of programs and their quality to allow the young people develop essential skills, including entrepreneurial competences. For those wishing to achieve success in entrepreneurship, the programs will offer professional trainings and retraining, assistance in implementing agricultural projects, help with business startups, introduce to modern and innovative technologies, and also help to create and promote ethnic and cultural products. In the context of informal education, the program will assist them develop crosscutting skills (leadership, communication, teamwork, critical thinking, problem-solving, etc.).

#### IV. LONG-TERM VISION OF THE STRATEGY, MISSION AND VALUES

The vision of the Government of Georgia, including that of the State Minister's Office, is grounded on the principles of democratic society based on equality. The **long-term vision of this Strategy** is built on the principle of a democratic state implying the rule of law, which recognizes equality and its effective application as primary values of the society, strives to create an environment where identities and culture of each member of ethnically diverse society are protected, where the representatives of ethnic minorities are actively and efficiently engaged in political, economic, social or cultural spheres of life. The vision of the Strategy is based on historical experiences and traditions, political and cultural context, social and economic analysis that is in line with Georgia's democratic development and its European integration.

**The vision of the Strategy** entails strengthening equal-rights, and inclusive society. Elaboration and implementation of effective pragmatic policy stemming from the country's interests and existing needs for the purpose of the full-fledged realization of the capacity of our multiethnic society is pivotal. The future ten-year vision of the Strategy is built on the above-mentioned principle.

#### **The Mission of the Strategy**

The mission of this Strategy is to provide and strengthen equal, tolerant and diverse environment through local and international practices, the existing resources and innovative approaches with the engagement of the society and support of partner organizations. The state policy toward ethnic minorities has been developed and will be implemented from the viewpoint of the principles and perspectives such as human rights protection, equality, inclusion, cultural diversity. The policy envisages active interaction not only with the representatives of ethnic minorities, but the Georgian-speaking population as well.

#### **Fundamental Values and Principles of the Strategy**

The Strategy is based on the fundamental principles of legal, social and political equality and shares the universally recognized values, in particular:

- ❖ The rule of law;
- ❖ Protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms;
- ❖ Equality and equal opportunities;
- ❖ Justice, transparency and coordination;
- ❖ Cultural diversity;
- ❖ Inclusion;
- ❖ Responsibility and accountability;
- ❖ Contributing to the strengthening and development of the country

#### **Target groups of the Strategy**

- ❖ Citizens of Georgia regardless of ethnic origin;
- ❖ Representatives of the relevant agencies; their activities relate to fulfillment of the objectives defined in the Strategy;
- ❖ Representatives of local self-governments;
- ❖ Civil society representatives;
- ❖ International partners;
- ❖ Experts, academia, interested parties.

## V. STRATEGIC PRIORITIES, GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

With the purpose to achieve civic equality and full integration of ethnic minorities, the Strategy goals and objectives were defined in compliance with priorities based on situation analysis.

### STRATEGIC PRIORITY 1 – STATE LANGUAGE TO SUPPORT INTEGRATION

Knowledge of the state language is one of the most important preconditions and a necessary factor for strengthening democratic process in the country and for the full-fledged integration of the multi-ethnic society. Specifically, for active participation of ethnic minorities in the country’s development, human capital development, access to information, political participation, employment, effective participation in state programs and access to services, ensuring communications and sharing culture and traditions among the ethnicities in the country. Therefore, teaching Georgian is considered a top priority in the civic equality policy.

The first priority of this strategy – **State Language to Support Integration**, implies strengthening the status of the state language in regions densely populated by ethnic minorities through advancing state language knowledge and supporting its use in public space. Teaching of the **state language** will be further supported, and following the established practices and current programs, it will be large-scale, pragmatic, continuous, standardized and encouragement-oriented in formal, as well as in adult and informal education.

To improve teaching of the state language, concrete objectives were defined at each level of education (preschool, general, vocational and higher educational institutions) as well as in the adult and informal educational programs with the aim to introduce new approaches. Each objective identified in the Strategy serves the teaching of the state language from integration perspective.

A 2019 study findings<sup>24</sup> suggest that the basic communication competences in state language are not sufficient for substantial changes and for the full integration of ethnic minorities in a unified public sphere. To this end,

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<sup>24</sup> Study on the Efficiency of State Language Teaching Program, Zhvania School, 2019.

The Strategy of Georgia for Education and Science for 2022-2030 will take into consideration a large-scale, consolidated and comprehensive conceptual vision of educational policy toward ethnic minorities, which implies the implementation of a common, complex policy and creating a continuous chain of education - from preschool education, through general, vocational, higher education to adult education. Complex activities were planned to start teaching the state language according to respective methodology and advanced approaches at preschool and general education levels; along with the improvement of the provision of curricula, the quality of the materials (among them the textbooks of Georgian as a Second Language), teachers with needed qualification and teaching methodology, the **integration component** as a crosscutting topic as well as further strengthening of spoken component in the Georgian language teaching programs are envisaged.

Adult population, who due to objective reasons could not learn Georgian within formal education and now are interested in acquiring the state language, LEPL Zurab Zhvania School of Public Administration provides state language teaching programs in classes, as well as in distance and hybrid formats, also deploys mobile groups of teachers at educational centers and places of residence, if necessary. As a result of modification of the state language teaching program, school will prepare and introduce the integration component, namely, the programs that contribute to the integration and activities that enable people of different ages learn the state language, improve professional terminology, use Georgian outside the classroom, integrate themselves within a professional environment, implement joint projects.

At the same time, the efforts will be made to initiate and implement programs that **support popularization of the state language and its use** in regions densely populated by ethnic minorities through implementation of targeted activities: competitions, summer/winter camps, exchange programs and other events to enhance state language competence among non-Georgian speakers. Use of the state language in administrative proceedings in public sector will be also addressed. Advertising banners, buildings and retail outlets will be monitored. Relevant state language programs will be developed and implemented for those employed in public sector. To increase motivation for learning Georgian, the following activities will be conducted in several directions: awareness-raising campaigns about the importance of knowledge of the state language and its importance for employment, establishing professional links, disseminating information about the opportunities of the state language learning, etc.

Monitoring actions will be taken to ensure public service delivery in the state language and its use in advertising banners, building sign boards, traffic and road signs in the municipalities densely populated by ethnic minorities. After the evaluation, the State Language Department will carry out activities to support a full-fledged functioning of the state language based upon international best practice.

It is noteworthy that in regions densely populated by ethnic minorities, along with further strengthening of the state language teaching, the quality of minority language teaching will be improved, and the employment of bilingual personnel and application of translation will be supported as required.

## Goal 1. Strengthening the state language teaching for the representatives of ethnic minorities

**Objective 1.1** Strengthening and popularization of the state language in formal education (preschool, general, vocational and higher education)

**Objective 1.2** Strengthening of the state language knowledge in adults and informal education

## Goal 2. Popularization of the state language in the regions densely populated by ethnic minorities

**Objective 2.1.** Popularization of the state language, supporting its functioning and monitoring its application in the regions densely populated by the representatives of ethnic minorities.

### STRATEGIC PRIORITY 2 – ACCESS TO QUALITY EDUCATION

Education is one of the key instruments of integration largely defining national values among the representatives of various ethnic groups and the quality of their socialization, which considerably facilitates the increase of civic equality culture in the country. Education enables each citizen to receive the necessary knowledge and information, develop attitudes and skills that contribute to the realization of their personal capacity, achieve economic welfare, and fully participate in the ongoing processes. Therefore, ensuring access to and improving the quality of education at each stage – preschool, general, vocational and higher, adult and informal, is the priority of this Strategy.

To ensure **access to quality education** and to overcome the existing challenges, the development of a common policy of education for ethnic minorities in Georgia is the most important precondition, which primarily, implies provision of human resources for the implementation of the reforms – the preparation of future non-Georgian school teachers at a university level, elaboration of the existing teachers' professional development policy based on their needs and interests, and their support in the improvement of state language competencies.

Enhancement of opportunities and access to preschool education in regions densely populated by ethnic minorities require **relevant infrastructure**, adequate conditions for quality preschool education and mobilization of the resources. Preschool education contributes to the development of adolescents' cognitive, social and linguistic skills and competences and to a greater extent, determines their readiness for school. Therefore, to ensure preschool education, complex measures are needed to introduce supporting activities at preschool level to shift from preschool care approach to early years care and education approach, and to introduce mandatory school readiness programs in all preschool institutions.

In non-Georgian schools of the regions densely populated by ethnic minorities a new model of bilingual education will be developed based on the principles of the New School model within the framework of the third generation national curriculum. Considering specific character of bilingual education and the integrated teaching methodology of subject and language, teachers should be retrained in Georgian



language skills (to improve language competence) as well as in school subjects, and in teaching school subjects in Georgian to overcome the existing challenges. Significant efforts should be directed toward high quality textbooks development, among them in Georgian as a second language, as well as the native language.

To achieve integration goals, it is important that school textbooks **reflect the diversity in Georgia** and do not contain stereotypes or discriminatory terminology.<sup>25</sup> Meantime, it is necessary to raise teachers' awareness about these problems.

The Strategy attaches great importance to high-quality teaching of the **state language** as well as to the **native language** teaching; it ensures improved native language learning for both large and smaller ethnic minority groups that will contribute to the preservation and development of these languages. For this we need to develop teaching standards for minority languages, raise the level of professional qualification of those teaching native languages at schools, train new teachers, introduce teachers' evaluation system and create relevant teaching resources. In order to improve the quality of teaching and learning, it is important to apply comprehensive mechanisms for teachers' training, evaluation and motivation to improve their qualifications at preschool and general school levels. For efficient implementation of the ongoing educational reforms, an intensive professional development of school administration, administrative and technical staff is necessary.

The objective of engaging the representatives of ethnic minority groups that are left behind - among them the persons with special needs, Roma, those who dropped out as a result of early marriage or labor activities - into learning spaces needs to be addressed.

Popularization and support of civic equality and cultural diversity is primarily considered in formal and informal education. It is important to ensure tolerant and inclusive environment in preschool, general school, institutions of vocational and higher education, as well as to include cultural diversity issues in the textbooks, implement relevant projects, among them those aimed at raising awareness of school administration and teachers, organize and implement various cultural, educational, sports programs and activities jointly with the involvement of majority and minority representatives.

To improve ethnic minorities' access to higher education, it is necessary to transform the Georgian Language Educational Training Program (so called 1+4 educational program) and adapt it to new challenges.

### **Goal 3. Ensuring access to high quality education ethnic minority groups at every level of education**

**Objective 3.1** Increasing access to preschool education and ensure quality;

**Objective 3.2** Ensuring access to quality general education;

**Objective 3.3** Supporting ethnic minorities to obtain vocational and higher education

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<sup>25</sup> Third Opinion on Georgia, p. 17, <https://rm.coe.int/3rd-op-georgia-en/1680969b56>

#### Goal 4. Promoting tolerant and inclusive educational environment

**Objective 4.1** Supporting the representatives of ethnic minorities who are left behind educational opportunities (including persons with disabilities and Roma)

**Objective 4.2** Supporting civic equality and cultural diversity in formal and informal education.

### STRATEGIC PRIORITY 3 - EQUALITY, CIVIC AND POLITICAL PARTICIPATION

Further enhancement of the achieved progress in civic equality is a priority direction of this Strategy. The goal of the state is to protect the identity of ethnic minorities, support the development of their civic attitudes and views toward aspects of political and public life, ensure **efficient realization of the principles of equality**, strengthen trust, cooperation, tolerance, acceptance and respect to diversity in a multiethnic society.

The Civic Equality and Integration Strategy is directed, on the one hand, toward formal and quantitative improvement of ethnic minority representation and participation in political life and, on the other hand, strengthening legal and professional development of ethnic minority communities and the society in general, as an essential precondition for successful civic integration policy.

The realization of the above-mentioned goal includes the following spheres: awareness-raising on ethnic minority rights, enhanced ethnic minority participation in political and public life, increased access to media and information.

The Strategy objectives that are oriented toward further strengthening of civic participation imply the establishment of tolerant and equal environment through the implementation of relevant activities. Therefore, one of the significant objectives is to **develop equal electoral environment**, which will enable ethnic minority representatives to make better informed and therefore free choices.

The above-mentioned covers each citizen of the country, regardless of their ethnic or cultural differences, including the representatives of smaller and dispersed ethnic minorities. It is also envisaged to establish the principles of gender equality in ethnic minority communities in the process of civic integration.

To support gender equality and strengthen tolerant attitudes, the Strategy aims to raise awareness of our citizens, regardless of their ethnic belonging, that enables the representatives of the multiethnic society to understand the essence of their rights and to realize them in the existing legal and institutional framework for their wellbeing and dignified life. The state will support the implementation of the activities related to information delivery, so that every person is able to exercise their rights without violating the rights of others and is unwilling to tolerate infringement of such rights. It is important that

they have a good understanding of their role in a democratic society that relates to the realization of their own rights, as well as the fulfillment of their obligations.

**To improve the involvement** of ethnic minority representatives, it is important to introduce and implement new and complementary results-oriented mechanisms, as well as improve the existing ones. The professional empowerment of the public servants at self-government bodies in regions densely populated by ethnic minorities, the development and enhancement of their professional skills is also significant.

The Strategy envisages to further strengthen and coordinate the work of state agencies. For this purpose, it is necessary to **intensify activities of the Government Commission and inter-agency working groups** and deepen the cooperation with the Council of National Minorities at the Public Defender's Office. Within the framework of the government commission, thematic working groups will work more intensively; it implies the involvement of NGOs, experts and other interested parties when discussing various issues. The working format will be enhanced and include the representatives of the Administrations of the State Representative in Kvemo Kartli, Samtskhe-Javakheti and Kakheti regions, also, the Georgian Public Broadcaster and the Central Election Commission of Georgia.

To improve ethnic minority participation in the decision-making process at local level, the activities of the Advisory Councils at the Administrations of the State Representative in Kvemo Kartli and Kakheti regions will have a regular character. It is important to establish similar councils in Samtskhe-Javakheti region and also at the municipal level in regions densely populated by ethnic minorities to ensure wider participation and intensive communication.

**Promoting gender equality**, combatting gender-based discrimination, transforming public opinion, boosting women's participation in decision-making processes and political or social-economic spheres will be a key crosscutting priority within the scope of the state policy on civic equality and integration. Raising awareness on women's rights and opportunities and supporting initiated activities will considerably increase their role in public life. Also, **political participation of youth and the development of relevant supporting mechanisms** will be facilitated. With the purpose of **enhancing youth participation in political and economic processes**, invigorating their leadership and more active involvement in public life, the **Youth Engagement Centers** will be established in the regions densely populated by ethnic minorities. The Centers will offer young people different cultural and sports programs aimed at awareness-raising, educational activities, and counseling services. At the same time, they will have the opportunity to use computers and Internet, social networks, e-libraries and will be able to receive online education. It will also create the opportunity for the young people from ethnic minority groups to implement joint programs on pressing issues (with donors' support), which will contribute to intercultural dialogue and the implementation of sustainable integration processes.

Coordinated and **proactive strategic communications** on minority issues delivered by the state and civil society are gaining special importance in recent years against the backdrop of increased disinformation as ethnic minorities are one of the main target segments for disinformation and information manipulations. Consequently, it is important to carry out preventive targeted activities. In this respect, the role of **media** is essential for covering ethnic minority issues and ensuring their engagement, as well

as their representation in social and political life in order to promote equality and ethnic group identities. Traditional and digital media has a vital role in shaping public opinions, identifying wrong stereotypes and offering accurate information to further strengthen tolerant attitudes. Also, media gives unique opportunities to ethnic minorities to follow the news reflecting their lives, discuss the existing challenges, express their opinion in regard to problem-solving and get information on the issues of their interest. Therefore, while respecting media independence, the state will take measures to increase the sensitivity of media coverage toward ethnic minorities, identity and diversity issues.

In this context, the state will collaborate with media organizations to jointly support the **promotion of equality and tolerance**. In the process of political socialization of ethnic minorities and their civic integration in general, the improved access to information in their native language/the language they understand and their inclusion in common information space is of great significance. The Public Broadcaster has the leading role in the access to media and information, which should facilitate the provision of information on current social, economic and political processes to ethnic minorities, as well as dissemination and strengthening of common national, democratic values, raising public awareness on ethnic minority issues, establishing high professional standards while covering ethnic minority issues.

It is also important to prepare programs, which will educate on Georgia's ethnic diversity, and on the traditions and culture of ethnic minorities. It is necessary to support the development of regional media in municipalities densely populated by ethnic minorities, to plan and implement professional training of journalists and the representatives of media institutions, as well as conduct awareness-raising campaigns about cultural diversity issues.

Improved access of ethnic minorities to information and media in their native languages is linked to the issue of enhanced broadcasting in minority languages, and increased access to electronic and print media. There is an urgent need to improve information delivery, expand the coverage of national broadcasting channels, develop regional television products in ethnic minority languages, support joint production of media programs by Armenian and Azerbaijani journalists together with their Georgian colleagues.

The state will further support the **enhancement of information provision**, ensure availability of programming in minority languages, including: translation of web portals and information into native language, projects and support for non-Georgian language media, capacity building trainings for media professionals; also door-to-door campaigns on human rights, public services, as well as on the benefits of Georgia's European and Euro-Atlantic integration process.

The publishing of non-Georgian language newspapers "Vrastan" and "Gurjistan" will be continued and their dissemination area will be expanded.

For effective policy, it is important to raise awareness on the main principles of civic equality and integration among both majority and minority population, so that they realize the necessity of integration, its positive effects for the country and each of its citizens, and become aware of its national and public importance. For that purpose, the Strategy defines the goals toward ensuring access to

information and awareness-raising for both majority and ethnic minorities. All relevant areas and directions will be included in these activities, such as education, culture, media, etc.

For establishing equal and tolerant environment, it is especially important to effectively **implement antidiscrimination legislation and ensure effective functioning of antidiscrimination mechanisms**. The studies and monitoring reports in recent years have clearly demonstrated that insufficient information about antidiscrimination legislation and the relevant mechanisms is a challenge. According to these studies, only every fifth person in Georgia has the information about the Law on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination adopted by the Government, and the respective mechanisms for its implementation.

It is also important to increase the efficiency and support the antidiscrimination mechanisms, enhance the sensitivity of the judges, prosecutors, the representatives of law-enforcement system and lawyers on ethnic minority issues, ensuring compliance with the improvement of standards and international approaches.

Taking into consideration that the ethnic minority representatives in some cases may be deprived of the opportunity to use antidiscrimination mechanisms to defend their rights, the state provides quality and timely **legal assistance**. Ethnic minorities will be provided with legal and judicial advice in the languages they understand through legal assistance bureaus and counseling centers nationwide. Therefore, legal assistance services will include qualified bilingual personnel, as required. In parallel, the awareness-raising campaigns/activities on the above-mentioned organizations and services will be conducted.

To achieve the above-mentioned, the following goals have been identified:

#### **Goal 5. Improving participation at all levels of civic, political and public governance**

**Objective 5.1** Supporting the engagement of ethnic minority representatives in government and self-government activities;

**Objective 5.2** Developing mechanisms for effective realization of active and passive electoral rights of ethnic minorities

#### **Goal 6. Improving access to media and information**

**Objective 6.1** Improving the quality of media products in ethnic minority languages;

**Objective 6.2** Supporting the development of media literacy

#### **Goal 7. Strengthening environment based on equality**

**Objective 7.1** Raising public awareness on the issues of human rights, civic equality and integration policy, antidiscrimination and gender equality;

**Objective 7.2** Improving access to the mechanisms of justice and law-enforcement, and quality legal assistance.

#### STRATEGIC PRIORITY 4 –SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC INTEGRATION

Efficient participation of ethnic minorities in **social-economic life** is one of the most important preconditions for the successful implementation of the civic equality and integration policy. Due to the challenges that still exist in civic integration, the representatives of ethnic minorities often do not have comprehensive information about such opportunities in the country. Therefore, special efforts will be devoted to study the needs of ethnic minorities in order to ensure more timely and efficient response, develop programs and services related to their healthcare, social welfare, employment, vocational retraining, participation in entrepreneurial activities, and effective self-employment. In this regard, a special attention will be given to improved access to information on social-economic benefits, relevant programs and public services, counseling and educational activities as well as to vocational training/retraining, employment opportunities, job-creation and local business development.

**Inclusive economic policy will be strengthened**, which implies overall inclusion of population in the process of economic development and aims at ensuring wellbeing of each member of the society, their social equality and the improvement of living conditions of the population.

The Government of Georgia devotes great attention, among others, to the needs of ethnic minorities when planning its medium and long-term policy in the light of the challenges brought by COVID-19 pandemic in 2020. Great efforts will be directed toward the provision of information to ethnic minorities in the state language, as well as in their native languages, and the support of their social-economic rights; with the purpose to prevent the spread of the virus, information meetings and door-to-door campaigns will be carried out; the dissemination of information materials through alternative means responding to new needs will continue; different socially vulnerable groups will be provided with food and hygienic products for the purpose of social-economic assistance.

The Strategy is based on the Association Agreement between Georgia and the European Union, the main direction of which - “employment, social policy and equal opportunities” - envisages inclusive policy with regard to labor market, **social security system**, social welfare, social inclusion, and antidiscrimination for various groups, including ethnic minorities. The objectives defined within the scope of the Strategy goals require the implementation of social-economic programs, which will increase ethnic minority communication with a Georgian-speaking majority and state institutions, improve access to services offered by the state, create opportunities for environmental protection and reduce the risks of ecosystem degradation. When developing sectoral strategies and **social-economic programs** or providing services, the state agencies will take into consideration the needs of ethnic minorities and particularities of the settlements. Proactive approaches will be strengthened, among them **economic empowerment of women and young people**, their participation in different spheres of social life.

Improving full and equal access of ethnic minorities to **vocational education** through the enhancement of the network of vocational institution, teaching the Georgian language in vocational institutions, offering vocational educational programs tailored to the needs of the labor market, arranging student dormitories, offering vocational retraining courses to adults to equip them with necessary skills needed in the labor market – all the above will significantly increase local employment opportunities and reduce labor migration across the countries regions and main cities and the neighboring countries.

The Strategy takes into consideration the need for **development of infrastructure** (roads, water supply systems, gas supply) and the means of communication (Internet coverage) in municipalities densely populated by ethnic minorities. Considering local needs, the state will undertake substantial investments to create relevant new infrastructure and rehabilitate the existing one. Building/rehabilitating the infrastructure and communications will contribute to the development of different types of tourism in regions densely populated by ethnic minorities.

For comprehensive identification of the needs of ethnic minorities and for the implementation of the objectives envisaged in the Strategy, it is necessary to improve the quality of data **collection and processing**, access to **statistical data** on large and smaller ethnic groups. The state takes into consideration the recommendations of the Advisory Committee on the Framework Convention for the Protection of Ethnic Minorities of the Council of Europe to provide a possibility of self-identification of ethnic minority representatives when establishing their belonging to a particular ethnic group, according to which the census forms should provide accurate and effective options for self-identification. In this regard, concrete steps will be taken to ensure the rights to free self-identification in the process of establishing the belonging to a particular ethnic group during general population census.

The quantitative or qualitative data collected on the basis of applicable personal data protection regulations, clearly indicated that the successes and challenges in the implementation of ethnic minority policies, and gives a possibility to instantly reveal the problems and plan/revise/implement relevant activities; also, assess the efficiency of implemented activities/measures and update those identified in the Action Plan. Therefore, the state will pay due attention to collecting and processing **quantitative and qualitative data** on ethnic minorities in various spheres of social life, develop/implement/assess the needs and evidence-based approaches.

For the purpose of empowering ethnic minority **youth** and for the effective use of their capacity in the process of integration, the state has defined the goal to increase the level of education of the young people, develop statesmanship qualities, social, leadership and creative skills. Also, special emphasis is given to proactive delivery of information on public social programs to empower **women** and encourage their participation in various programs. In this context, it is extremely important that women acquire more social function to increase the level of their competitiveness in labor market, to enable them to take part in political and social processes, to realize their own capacity and achieve wellbeing.

Within the scope of this Strategy, women's economic empowerment encompasses protection of women's economic rights, among them, equal access to land, property, assets or other resources, as well as development of entrepreneurial skills. It is planned to carry out activities that will enable women to take active part in the protection of their economic rights, so that they make their contribution to the

development of democracy. Women's economic empowerment acquires great importance in the process of achieving gender equality as well.

In addition, special attention is given to the improvement of ethnic minority access to the employment in public service.

In order to engage the representatives of ethnic minority youth in **public service**, develop their business skills and better their qualifications, 1+4 Internship Program will be enhanced.

### **Goal 8. Improving social-economic conditions and opportunities**

**Objective 8.1** Increasing the participation of ethnic minorities in social-economic programs;

**Objective 8.2** Developing infrastructure in regions densely populated by ethnic minorities;

**Objective 8.3.** Supporting social-economic empowerment of women and youth;

**Objective 8.4** Improving collection, processing and access to statistical data on the basis of data protection regulations and self-identification of ethnic minorities, including those from smaller ethnic groups.

## **STRATEGIC PRIORITY 5 – INTER-CULTURAL DIALOGUE**

The Strategy considers social and cultural integration as an effective mechanism to develop national values and principles which will positively affect democratic and integration processes taking place in the country.

Preservation of cultural values and identities regardless of ethnic belonging, promotion and respect of cultural diversity are significant preconditions for effective civic integration. Providing support to the development of a diverse and pluralistic society, largely defines the quality of democracy and its strength. The enhancement of multicultural and tolerant environment is determined by the effective inter-cultural dialogue that involves the demonstration and popularization of the constituent elements of ethnic minorities' cultural identity – the language, cultural and religious traditions, cultural heritage, as well as communication among various ethnic cultures. To ensure the preservation and support of cultural diversity and identity, it is necessary to master the objectives of policy implementation based on research findings and the analysis of current needs of the ethnic groups.

Information provision and awareness-raising starting from adolescence as well as on the issues related to their ethnic identities: languages of ethnic groups, religion and traditions will contribute to the development of tolerance, respect for diversity, which serve as a precondition for harmonious coexistence between different ethnic groups living in the country. The above-mentioned process, also implies to provide the representatives of ethnic minorities with information on cultures and traditions



of ethnic majorities and other ethnicities. The Strategy envisages carrying out various activities that aim at awareness-raising in regard to cultural identities and traditions, also joint cultural and social activities with the participation of various ethnic groups.

Development of inter-cultural dialogue in a multiethnic society will encourage building trust, cooperation, tolerance, respect for diversity, and acceptance. A complex policy aimed at fostering tolerance within the society implies raising awareness about cultural diversity of Georgia, implementing various cultural, cognitive, educational, entertainment, sports activities, protection and promotion of ethnic minorities' tangible and intangible cultural heritage. The Strategy envisages promotion of intercultural educational activities, familiarizing ethnic minorities, especially young people, with the Georgian culture, as well as carrying out joint cultural-educational and traditional sports activities for ethnic groups.

The objectives within the framework of the intercultural dialogue direction were defined with the purpose of supporting further deepening of positive communication between various ethnic groups and overcoming the barriers that still exist. Promoting exchange between the representatives of different cultures will create connecting bridges. The state puts efforts in strengthening intercultural dialogue and multiethnic cooperation. Supporting cultural traditions of ethnic minorities is not limited to their preservation but it will spur their development and rapprochement with modern cultural achievements. Carrying out regular joint sports and culture activities will help to bring various ethnic group and majority representatives together to share values, knowledge, experiences, knowledge in customs and specific characteristics of different ethnicities, strengthen self-expression and tolerance to strengthen result in stronger intercultural communication, integration and harmonious coexistence.

For the purpose of protection and promotion of cultural heritage, registration and inventory of ethnic minorities' tangible and intangible cultural heritage, conservation and restoration of cultural monuments, as well as support of theatres, museums, libraries and other cultural events will continue intensively.

In order to strengthen the dialogue and solidarity between ethnic groups, the state will support the creation of **common spaces for culture and sports, and the development of necessary infrastructure.**

The objective of protection and development of cultural identities also encompasses the following activities: promotion of literature, folklore, and music; financial assistance for Armenian, Azerbaijani and Russian theatres and museums, cultural events, including exhibitions/publications. To achieve the above-mentioned goal, it is important to promote the development of the infrastructure for sports and cultural events, support the functioning and development of libraries, clubs, sports spaces and cultural houses/centers, multicultural and intercultural activities, organizing performing arts and sports events, promoting ethnic folklore, traditions and customs in regions densely populated by ethnic minorities.

## **Goal 9. Supporting cultural diversity and intercultural dialogue**

**Objective 9.1** Supporting and promoting the preservation of cultural heritage of ethnic minorities;

**Objective 9.2** Raising awareness on cultural diversity and supporting intercultural dialogue;

**Objective 9.3** Supporting intercultural sports and multiculturalism, developing relevant spaces/ infrastructure.

## VI. STRATEGY IMPLEMENTATION, MONITORING AND ASSESSMENT

### 6.1. Implementation of the Strategy and the Action Plan

For the purpose of effective implementation of the State Strategy for Civic Equality and Integration 2021-2030 a Government Commission was established. It aims at ensuring coordination among the state agencies in regard to civic equality and integration. The Commission meets twice a year on a regular basis. It organizes working sessions, meetings, and consultations as required. The Commission will convene meetings of thematic working groups to gather the representatives of state agencies, as well as civil society and persons interested in the issue.

The Commission is composed of: the State Minister for Reconciliation and Civic Equality of Georgia (chairperson), Deputy State Minister for Reconciliation and Civic Equality of Georgia (vice-chairperson), Prime Minister's Advisor on Human Rights and Gender Equality Issues (member of the Commission), Deputy Minister of Internally Displaced Persons from the Occupied Territories, Labor, Health and Social Protection of Georgia (member of the Commission), Deputy Minister of Culture, Sport and Youth Affairs of Georgia (member of the Commission), Deputy Minister of Regional Development and Infrastructure of Georgia (member of the Commission), Deputy Minister of Justice of Georgia (member of the Commission), Deputy Minister of Internal Affairs of Georgia (member of the Commission), Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs of Georgia (member of the Commission), Deputy Minister of Environmental Protection and Agriculture of Georgia (member of the Commission), Deputy Minister of Economy and Sustainable Development of Georgia (member of the Commission), Deputy Minister of Defence of Georgia (member of the Commission), State Representative of Adigeni, Aspindza, Akhaltsikhe, Akhalkalaki, Borjomi and Ninotsminda municipalities (member of the Commission), State Representative of Bolnisi, Gardabani, Dmanisi, Tetritskaro, Marneuli, Tsalka municipalities and Rustavi municipality (member of the Commission), State Representative of Akhmeta, Gurjaani, Dedoplistskaro, Telavi, Lagodekhi, Sagarejo, Sighnaghi and Kvareli municipalities (member of the Commission).

For the purpose of coordination of the implementation of the State Strategy for Civic Equality and Integration and the Action Plan, the Commission has the authority to: a) request and obtain the information from state agencies and organizations needed for the Commission activities; b) invite the representatives of state agencies and institutions to attend the Commission meetings (including, with a right to vote); c) create working groups and thematic consulting groups with the participation of the representatives of state agencies, organizations and independent experts, to study issues within the competence of the Commission and develop relevant recommendations; d) prepare proposals on the changes in the composition of the Commission.

The major tool for the implementation of the Strategy is the Annual Action Plans designed by sector-specific agencies. The Strategy will be implemented within the budget, as well as financial support of donor organizations and partner countries. To ensure compatibility of the resources of the responsible agencies with Strategy implementation, its goals and objectives are of general character, that allows the participant parties to schedule the implementation of activities within the timeframe of the Action Plan and the afforded state resources and the donors' aid. Under the initiative of the Commission member agency, it is possible to make changes to the Strategy in accordance with the legislation.

In case of the responsible institution's (agency's) re-structuring, closing down and/or merging with other institution (agency) or division into other institutions, the objectives will be implemented by its successor entity (agency).

## **6.2. Monitoring and Assessment of the Strategy and Action Plan**

Information about the effective implementation of the Strategy and Action Plan and the opportunity for timely intervention and assessment will be ensured through **strategy monitoring and assessment process** which will collect information about the progress achieved and the implementation of the activities defined in the Action Plan on a regular basis.

The established **monitoring system** ensures a high level of accountability and effectiveness of the implementation process by the responsible agencies. In regard to the logical framework of the Strategy, it introduces the impact and outcome indicators for each strategic goal and objective based on verifiable sources. The data obtained in the process of monitoring will be processed and reflected in respect to the implemented activities and the outcome indicators.

The monitoring process implies consideration of the information submitted by the state agencies, as well as monitoring results, studies and analysis of recommendations prepared by the Council of National Minorities and other civil society actors on the implementation of the Strategy/Action Plan.

The monitoring process, which will be conducted in parallel to the implementation of the Action Plan, will be coordinated by the State Minister's Office.

The agencies and entities in charge of the implementation of the Action Plan will ensure to obtain information and accurate data, their classification and categorization, and based on that they will prepare status-reports on the implementation of the activities defined in the Action Plan, every six months.

Based on the consolidation of the status-reports by the responsible agencies, under the coordination of the State Minister's Office, two documents will be prepared, namely: a progress report on outcome and impact indicators and an annual report on the implementation of the Action Plan, which will be submitted to the Government Commission for review and will be published; it will be uploaded on the web-site of the State Minister's Office - [www.smr.gov.ge](http://www.smr.gov.ge). The report will also be presented to the

Council of National Minorities at the Public Defender's Office and other interested parties. The annual monitoring report is also an important instrument to get information on the effectiveness and efficiency of specific state agencies, the main challenges and the need for intervention in the process.

**The Strategy Assessment** will be conducted at the level of outcome and impact indicators. Since the Strategy covers a 10 year period, it will have two interim assessments to take place in 2024 and 2027, while the final assessment is planned for the end of its implementation period – in 2030. The assessments will be conducted in an external assessment form by independent experts and expert/research organizations, as well as local NGOs, international organizations, experts, and with active participation of ethnic minority representatives.

The Government Commission is entitled to decide which priorities/goals will be assessed within the interim assessment process. The Commission will take the above-mentioned decision after reviewing annual reports, considering particular challenges revealed within specific dimensions or based on high public interest.

During each interim assessment, along with studying the dynamics of achievements, it is important to assess the relevance of the objectives and vision considering the changed circumstances and the context. In the process of preparation of interim and final assessments, the criteria will be developed and applied in compliance with the goals and objectives. In the process of report preparation, the time, focus, relevance-based and reader-oriented approaches will be considered. Information on the impact and the results of the Strategy implementation will be available for all interested persons, among them NGOs, international organizations, research institutions and academia, private sector and the field experts.

Comparative analysis of reciprocal influence of the results achieved within the objectives and activities under the Strategy and Action Plan will be based on the information obtained from annual and interim monitoring assessments, which will enable to observe the dynamics of the Strategy implementation and identify the existing challenges. For policy development, its effective implementation and revision of the existing approaches, with the purpose to initiate new decisions, the State Minister's Office will develop the relevant recommendations for the agencies involved in the Strategy implementation process.

The aim of the final assessment of the Strategy is to measure the achieved results, ensure accountability and create a ground for the Strategy development in the next years.

Based on the annual reports of the implementation and assessment of the Action Plans, the State Minister's Office will prepare the interim and final assessment documents on Strategy implementation, which will be available on the official web-site of the State Minister's Office: [www.smr.gov.ge](http://www.smr.gov.ge).

### 6.3. Monitoring and Assessment Calendar

Monitoring and Assessment Matrix	Period (preparation of reports)	Implementing Agency (assessment/data collection)	Responsible Agency
Annual Report	2022 1 <sup>st</sup> quarter 2023 1 <sup>st</sup> quarter 2024 1 <sup>st</sup> quarter 2025 1 <sup>st</sup> quarter 2026 1 <sup>st</sup> quarter 2027 1 <sup>st</sup> quarter 2028 1 <sup>st</sup> quarter 2029 1 <sup>st</sup> quarter 2030 1 <sup>st</sup> quarter	Government Commission  Office of the State Minister of Georgia for Reconciliation and Civic Equality	Government Commission
Interim Assessment	2024 1 <sup>st</sup> quarter 2027 1 <sup>st</sup> quarter	Independent experts	Government Commission
Final Assessment	2031 1 <sup>st</sup> quarter	Independent experts	Government Commission

### 6.4. Risk-factors for the implementation of the Strategy

The following can be considered as the **risk-factors** impeding the implementation of the Strategy: international/regional political and economic instability and other *force-majeure* circumstances, which will have a negative impact on the financial and economic situation in the country. However, the negative events/processes developed in the country or outside of its borders over the past period could not hinder or threaten the implementation of the State Policy for Civic Equality and Integration.

A similar risk-factor that needs to be emphasized is the grave epidemiological situation caused by the COVID-19 pandemic and the restrictions imposed for its prevention, as well as the negative economic and social consequences of the pandemic.

Based on the risk analysis, the Action Plan includes core activities as well as the activities aimed at awareness-rising and social-economic support of the population to be carried out in response to the pessimistic scenario of economic development. Consequently, the state budget proposal will be developed in compliance with the Action Plan and the activities will be carried out without impediment.

With the purpose to reduce and ensure effective management, the activities aimed at raising qualification, including analytical skills development of the agency representatives engaged in the Strategy implementation and assessment, will be carried out on a regular basis.