Georgia Country Brief
Connectivity in Education

A Crisis of Learning in Education...

In Georgia, there exists a crisis of learning in education. This is exemplified by out-of-school rates in the country, as well as those not achieving minimum proficiency. While 599,471 children and adolescents are enrolled in primary and secondary schools, **9,355 between the age of 6 and 17 are out-of-school**. Additionally, approximately **52% of children and young people do not achieve minimum proficiency** in foundational skills needed for further learning and skills development.[1,2]

... becomes acute.

When the COVID-19 pandemic disrupted in-person learning in Georgia starting in March 2020, the importance of devices and connectivity for the education system was placed in stark relief — as were the inequitable access to such crucial tools.

Increasing Importance of ICTs for Education

All strategies for continuing education during COVID-19 depended on ICTs as a medium for delivery. But **unequal preexisting infrastructure** in households and schools is also a major driver of the longer-term crisis of learning. Access to **connectivity** and **devices** is a **crucial enabler** of the learning process, particularly in:

1. allowing a more effective administration of education systems, and
2. developing digital skills to prepare students for the future workforce

What's been done?

COVID-19: Strategies for Distance Learning[3]

- **iSchool Project**
- **MoU with Khan Academy**
- **"Teleskola" TV Broadcasted Lessons**

414,000 students reached with MoE, UNICEF, and Education for All Coalition (EFA) teacher training

Government Strategies Addressing Challenges

In 2018, the Ministry of Education announced a comprehensive reform of general education with the goal of introducing digital education to all public schools in the country.[4] The main objective of the program included:

1. **implementing more diverse digital initiatives in public schools;**
2. **guaranteeing continued, high-quality education to all students; and**
3. **boosting student creativity by making learning fun, exciting, and engaging.**

The **National Broadband Network Development Strategy for 2020-2025** mandates that schools, highways and public facilities must be provided with Internet access at a **download speed of 1 Gbps** by 2025, aligned with both EU plans and plans for 5G development in the country. The strategy aims not only to create infrastructure, but also to establish Georgia as a digital and information hub in the region between Europe and Asia, while also upgrading knowledge and skills, leading to employment growth.[5]

In 2012, the government passed a public law to overhaul the national **Education Management Information System (EMIS).** An OECD-led assessment has characterized Georgia's information systems for education as **modern**, **widely used** and **highly trusted**.

Many solutions involve digital technology.

This, in turn, requires both **connectivity** and **devices**.

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What Gaps Remain?

Connectivity and Devices at Home[6]

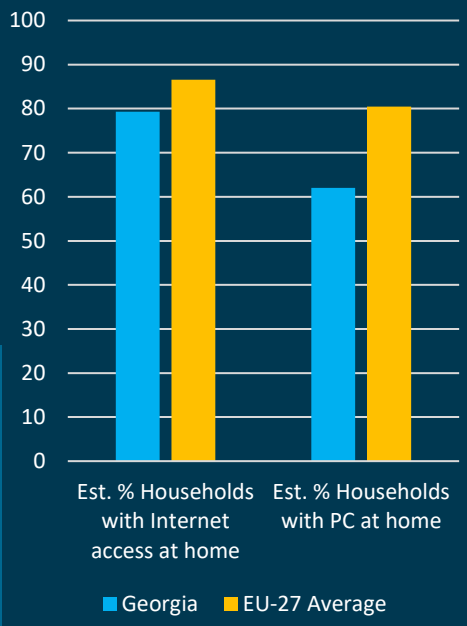
366,215
Georgian households are not in possession of a PC

199,491
Georgian households do not have access to the Internet

Exacerbating pre-existing inequalities:

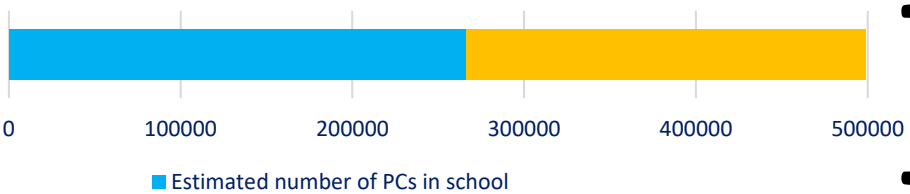
The persistent lack of PCs in households is particularly significant when lockdowns triggered by COVID-19 facilitated the transition of economic activity to the digital sphere and transferred both educational and work activities to the household. According to a 2020 report by Georgia's Institute for Development of Freedom of Information (IDFI), there are about **78,000 vulnerable students do not have access to the Internet** —95% of them living in an area that may have coverage, but without the financial viability to afford it.[7]

Contextualizing the Gaps



Connectivity and Devices at School

Computers per Student in School[8]



232,872
computers are needed in Georgia to reach the OECD average of 0.83 PCs per student.

Mapping School Connectivity…

Assessing the level and quality of broadband in schools, and proactively addressing infrastructure gaps, is increasingly important as students return to the classroom. This will ensure that connectivity is leveraged to deliver educational content and to manage the education system in an efficient manner, and that digital skills development is thoroughly included in curricula.

… Remains Imperfect.

Despite the wide variety of indicators available on the National Statistics Office of Georgia website, some of the ICT-related data points are outdated, with the latest indicators being from the 2009-2010 period.[9]

Filling the Device Gap in Schools

Low-Range Estimate[10]

$17.1 million
to reach the OECD average of 0.83 PCs per student.

High-Range Estimate[11]

$198 million
to reach the OECD average of 0.83 PCs per student.

To bridge learning gaps, devices are only as important as the connection that supports them and the access to high quality content and learning they enable. Investment in school and household connectivity as well as content development and robust digital education is vital and must be considered alongside device provision.

Funding as a Challenge

Public spending on education and training was **3.5%** of the country's GDP in 2018, while the European Union countries' average for 2017 was **4.7%**.[12]

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Looking Ahead

Georgia has a successful history of leveraging innovative financing mechanisms and multistakeholder partnerships toward achieving appropriate levels of devices and connectivity in education. Three key examples are outlined below.

Log-In Georgia Project

The World Bank is currently working in the development of broadband through the **Log-in Georgia Project**, a **32.7 EUR million** support package with the goal of expanding access to affordable broadband in rural settlements and of supporting the development of Georgia's digital economy. The project expects to connect up to **1,000 villages** and **500,000 people** to high-quality and affordable broadband service.[13]

In 2019 alone, private stakeholders such as UGT, Green Systems, and Orient Logic provided **220 schools** with local wireless (Wi-Fi) connections.

As of 2019, GiveInternet.org, a start-up and local partner of the Alliance for Affordable Internet in Georgia, provided PCs and internet access to 300 underprivileged families.[14]

ITU and UNICEF are committed to helping the Government of Georgia and other stakeholders achieve national objectives. School connectivity is widely recognized as a means to a more efficient administration of educational systems, a building block in supporting innovative ways to distribute education content and increase access, and — most importantly — a fundamental prerequisite to endow pupils with the digital skills necessary to thrive in the job market. The achievement of appropriate device and connectivity levels, both at school and in the home, thus remain priorities of both the ITU Office for Europe and UNICEF Regional Office for Europe and Central Asia. Both offices cherish the opportunity to engage with partners and provide support through **technical assistance**, **capacity building** and **research**, as well as **knowledge exchange**.

International Telecommunication Union
Telecommunication Development Bureau (BDT)
ITU Office for Europe
Place des Nations 1211
Geneva 20
Switzerland

By phone:
+41 22 730 5111

By email:
eurregion@itu.int

UNICEF
Regional Office for Europe and Central Asia
Palais des Nations
CH-1211 Geneva 10
Switzerland

By phone:
+41 22 909 5111

By email:
ecaro@unicef.org

Endnotes

[1] Data from UNESCO UIS Database. http://data.uis.unesco.org
[2] UNICEF calculation of the number of students in primary, lower and upper secondary not achieving minimum proficiency in math; Data for Georgia is calculated using the latest figures available from UIS and PISA.
[3] See: https://www.unicef.org/media/93756/file/ECAR%20COVID-19%20Situation%20Report%20No.%2016%20End%20of%20year%202020.pdf
[4] See: https://ms-f7-sites-01-cdn.azureedge.net/docs/stories/836788-ministry-emis-national-government-azure-en-georgia/resources/0063b436-199d-4f3e-bf4b-a20148f25674/ministry_of_education-_science-_culture_and_sport_of_georgia_with_emis_summary_slide
[5] See: http://www.economy.ge/uploads/files/2017/legislation/sainformacio_teqnologiebi/fartozolovani_qselebis_ganvitarebis_strategia_da_misi_ganxorcielebis_gegma.pdf ; See: https://comcom.ge/uploads/other/3/3939.pdf ; See: https://eufordigital.eu/georgia-approves-broadband-development-strategy-2020-2025/
[6] ITU WTID Database.
[7] See: https://idfi.ge/ge/Internet _access_and_use_in_georgia
[8] PISA 2018 Results (Volume V); OECD 2020 (Figure V.5.4 School computers per student, school characteristics and reading performance)
[9] See: https://geostat.ge/media/35088/Availability-of-computers-in-Schools.xls
[10] This estimate is calculated using the cheapest smartphone available in the region, at $73.60 per device. Price estimate is taken from A4AI price data, averaging the cost of the cheapest smartphones available in Georgia, Turkey and Ukraine. Although Smartphones are used as a proxy for the cheapest way to access online educational content and represent a baseline cost, they are not ideal for sustained learning nor comparable to PCs for educational purposes.
[11] This estimate is calculated using using a price of $850 per computer and monitor, which is a UNICEF price estimation of a high-end computer and monitor more suitable for learning. It thus represents the most expensive end of the spectrum.
[12] See: https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SE.XPD.SECO.PC.ZS?locations=EU

[13] See: https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/press-release/2020/08/28/1000-villages-to-get-better-Internet -connectivity-as-part-of-world-bank-support-to-georgia-digital-transformation ; See: http://www.opennet.ge/eng/list/show/50-World-Bank-will-co-finance-the-State-Program-of-the-broadband-infrastructure-development ; See: http://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/316241571855041161/pdf/Concept-Project-Information-Document-PID-Log-In-Georgia-P169698.pdf
[14] See: https://forbes.ge/news/6009/Closing-the-digital-divide-online