



მოვეუწოდებთ სახელმწიფოსა და მედიებს, საინფორმაციო პოლიტიკაში უმცირესობების ენები გაითვალისწინონ

Public organizations urge Government and Media to consider ethnic minority languages in their information policies

The signatory organizations address the Government of Georgia, Georgian Public Broadcaster and private media organizations to facilitate dissemination of information on Azerbaijani and Armenian languages on the COVID-19 virus and its prevention. We also call on them to take affirmative measures to prevent the spreading of hate motivated and discriminatory speeches and approaches.

On March 21, state of emergency was announced in Georgia for the prevention of COVID 19 virus extension and for protection of public health. Due to the identification of the last infection incident in the Marneuli Municipality on the 22nd of March, the government has to take more restrictive measures and declared a quarantine regime in the Marneuli and Bolnisi Municipalities.

51.3% of the population in Kvemo Kartli is ethnic Georgians, 41.8% is Azerbaijanis and

5.1% ethnic Armenian. 57.7% of the total population lives in villages and 42.3% in the urban areas of Kvemo Kartli.

The majority of the Marneuli population – 85% is ethnic Azerbaijanis. As for Bolnisi, 63.4% is Azerbaijanis, 30.9% is Georgian and 5% is Armenian. In Samtskhe Javakheti, 50.5% of the total population is Armenian and 48.3% is Georgian. 34.1% of the population lives in urban areas and 65.9% in the rural area. As for the Kakheti region, 10.2% of the population is Azerbaijanis. Ethnic Azerbaijani population densely reside in Gurjaani, Lagodekhi, and Telavi.

Due to the fundamental failure of the state education system, knowledge of state language is considerably low in the regions densely populated with ethnic minorities. According to the various data, this rate reaches 65% on average. Clearly, after the adoption of positive measures in the higher education system, the reality is changing and specifically in the youth, state language knowledge practice is positively developing. However, overall, state language knowledge is seriously challenging.

In such condition, unfortunately, the local municipalities in these regions and state agencies, in contradiction with the Law on State Language [1] and the obligations under international conventions, [2] over the years, has not provided administrative proceedings in a language understood by ethnic minorities and translation of political and public platforms (city council meetings, public meetings in the city hall, official website and social network content)[3]. Adequate translation resources for minorities are not provided on the online platforms of the service provider authorities (112, 15 05, etc.).

Notably, the information disseminated by the Georgian Public Broadcaster as well as private broadcasters is less accessible for ethnic minorities. Public broadcaster translates the information accessible only at internet platforms, however, as the internet is not available in the majority of regions, only a very small segment of the population uses this resource. Private broadcasters do not have the positive practice of providing information on minority languages. The coverage of local and regional public and private media is also weak. According to the 2019 research of Social Research and Analysis Institute only 21% of the Armenian Community and 13% of the Azerbaijani community daily receives information on the events occurring in Georgian. Remarkably, the information obtaining rates lessens in the older age groups. It should be also noted, that only 29% of Armenian and Azerbaijani communities receive

information on the Georgian language on the events occurring in Georgia. [4]

The restrictiveness of the information in ethnic minority regions and obstacles in communication with state authorities as well as in administrative proceedings prevents political participation and deepens their social and cultural isolation, alienation and social vulnerability. For years, Human Rights Organizations critically point to the local governments and state's territorial authorities to create effective translation resources for administrative proceedings and service provision. However, the state has not taken radical positive steps.

The restrictive access to the information and social services for the minority communities in these regions appeared critically due to the virus situation. Unfortunately, the state did not take active positive measures in these regions for information dissemination and popularization of social distancing. The created critical situation requires additional positive measures and changes in attitudes.

Also, the problem of discriminatory and hate-motivated statements in social media related to the last incident of virus infection should be highlighted. These statements connote virus extension to the culture of a specific community and clearly express hate and intolerance towards a specific ethnic group. Considering the highly xenophobic attitudes in our society, politicians, and the media should facilitate equality supporting rhetoric.

Bearing in mind abovementioned, **signatory organizations urge:**

Government of Georgia

- Provide a well-organized informative campaign on the virus situation and its prevention on the minority languages, which will be disseminated via public broadcaster and also will be supported by private broadcasters.
- Provide translation services on minority languages in all relevant service provider state agencies and online platforms (112, 1505, Stopcov.ge, 116 001, etc.) and add Armenian and Azerbaijani language consultants.
- All the important statements by the government and other state authorities on a virus, its prevention, and the emergency situation should be translated in

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Azerbaijani and Armenian languages, as it was organized after the last briefing by Prime Minister.

- Clearly support equality rhetoric in the statements by Government members and state representatives.

Marneuli and Bolnisi Local Self Governments

- Explore the needs in their municipalities and especially in the rural areas in terms of access to health and social care services, identify informational needs and gaps, and enhance coordination of informative and educational policies.

Georgian Public Broadcaster

- Provide translation and disseminate social advertisements on the virus, its prevention and other important content via TV broadcasting (and not only on Internet platforms);
- Take positive measures to support equality ideas and prevent virus-related discriminatory and hate-motivated statements and attitudes.

Private Broadcasters

- Considering the coverage, influence and social responsibility of private media organizations, disseminate virus-related and prevention information, that is already created/will be created on Azerbaijani and Armenian languages.

Signatory Organizations:

1. Human Rights Education and Monitoring Center (EMC)
2. Platform Salam
3. Community Center in the village Kasumlo
4. Community Center in the village Aghmamedlo
5. New thinking Institute

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6. Civil Engagement and Activism Center
7. Georgian Young Lawyers Association
8. Partnership for Human Rights (PHR)
9. Equality Movement
10. Tolerance and Diversity Institute (TDI)
11. [Women's Initiatives Supporting Group \(WISG\)](#)
12. Human Rights Center
13. Union Sapari
14. Marneuli Civil Engagement Center
15. Article 42 of the Constitution
16. Open Society Foundation Georgia