



# Georgia

## PUBLIC ACCESS LANDSCAPE STUDY SUMMARY



### Overview

Georgia lags behind the rest of Europe in improving public access to ICT. An aging and war-torn telecommunications infrastructure has left rural areas with low and unreliable levels of Internet connectivity, and a challenging geographic environment makes access difficult even when it's available. While literacy is very high in this country, rural populations and ethnic minorities lack computer skills. Overall, however, Georgia's ICT-related needs are only moderate compared with other countries in this study.

PUBLIC ACCES LANDSCAPE	
Challenges ahead	Slow gains
Needs	Moderate
Needs (rank)	13/25
Readiness	Moderate
Readiness (rank)	13/25

### Findings

In general, Georgia has not kept pace with the rest of the world in developing better access to information. This is particularly true compared to the rest of Europe. One of the reasons is that the country's telecommunication network relies heavily on landline access, which makes it unavailable in many remote regions because the infrastructure has degraded over the years and has not been repaired following the military conflicts of recent years.

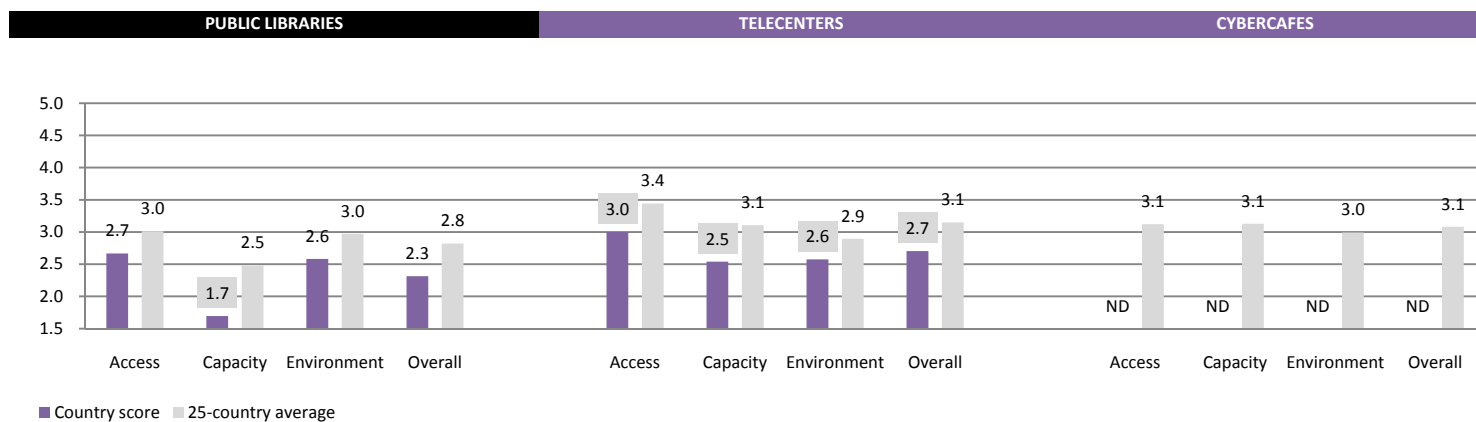
Georgia has 1396 public libraries. Of these, 1218 are located in rural settlements. Still, people in larger communities have better access than those in smaller communities. The limited access in rural areas is often a direct result of the geography, and people living in high mountainous regions and other remote sites are the most underserved groups. Venue location and lack of content in local languages produces inequities for ethnic minorities in particular.

In terms of size and type, public libraries in Georgia can be divided into two groups: (1) central public libraries serving the districts located in urban areas, and (2) smaller libraries the villages and cities that are under the supervision of the central libraries. There are 65 defined districts in Georgia, each of which has a central library, and there are about 123 more libraries that are similar in size to central libraries. These are located in various cities.

The government is working to improve and expand the public library system, but as the program evolved it appeared that the net result would be a reduction in the total number of libraries. The government plan suggested that several small neighboring libraries might be combined to form larger facilities.

Internet cafes are located in many communities and the research team was unable to locate definitive estimates of the total number of these small public venues. Most are located in urban areas. A recent settlement infrastructure survey showed that out of a proportionally selected group of 52 small cities, 35 have at least one Internet cafe. The survey also showed that of the 667 surveyed villages, only four appeared to have Internet cafes; however, each of the largest cities, without exception, has several Internet cafes.

## ACE Scores



ND=No data  
 Shaded data points are outside standard deviation for 25-country set  
 See the last page for country-specific definitions of these venues  
 See the last page for a definition of the ACE scoring framework

## Venue Distributions

	ALL PUBLIC ACCESS			PUBLIC LIBRARIES			TELECENTERS			CYBERCAFES			OTHER VENUES*		
	Total urban & non-urban	25-country average	25-country median	Total urban & non-urban	25-country average	25-country median	Total urban & non-urban	25-country average	25-country median	Total urban & non-urban	25-country average	25-country median	Total urban & non-urban	25-country average	25-country median
<b>VENUES</b>	1,397	10,017	5,489	1,396	1,111	1,062	ND	1,273	366	ND	8,693	3,225	1	398	46
number with ICT	280	9,802	5,122	279	349	96	ND	1,149	257	ND	8,507	3,251	1	146	13
% with ICT	20%	98%	87%	20%	31%	20%	ND	90%	100%	ND	98%	100%	100%	37%	92%
<b>% OF PUBLIC VENUES</b>	100%	100%	100%	100%	11%	20%	ND	12%	11%	ND	73%	67%	0%	4%	1%
<b>POP. PER VENUE ('000)</b>	3	8	5	3	93	37	ND	205	68	ND	52	9	4,430	419	103
with ICT ('000)	16	15	6	16	2,093	208	ND	242	119	ND	62	10	4,430	1,354	198

ND=No data  
 \*See the last page for country-specific definitions of these venues. For this country, "other venues" refers to the National Library.  
 Data points are missing for some measures in some countries, which can result in oddities when comparing rows of data (for instance, the average number of venues with ICT appears high compared to the average number of venues). For a complete overview of comparative country data, please see the summary paper for this study.

## User Profiles

		PUBLIC LIBRARIES				TELECENTERS				CYBERCAFES			
		Urban	25-country average	Non-urban	25-country average	Urban	25-country average	Non-urban	25-country average	Urban	25-country average	Non-urban	25-country average
<b>INCOME</b>	Low income	66%	28%	74%	35%	ND	26%	ND	24%	40%	26%	69%	24%
	Medium income	28%	54%	21%	46%	ND	56%	ND	45%	35%	56%	22%	45%
	High income	0%	7%	1%	6%	ND	9%	ND	4%	2%	9%	2%	4%
<b>EDUCATION</b>	No formal education	1%	3%	2%	2%	ND	5%	ND	6%	0%	5%	1%	6%
	Only elementary	12%	16%	27%	21%	ND	14%	ND	13%	30%	14%	8%	13%
	Up to high school	27%	50%	40%	36%	ND	37%	ND	32%	37%	37%	30%	32%
	College or university	60%	28%	31%	19%	ND	40%	ND	28%	33%	40%	61%	28%
<b>AGE</b>	14 and under	9%	12%	21%	15%	ND	9%	ND	14%	16%	9%	12%	14%
	15-35	47%	72%	39%	51%	ND	74%	ND	57%	70%	74%	52%	57%
	36-60	31%	12%	37%	23%	ND	12%	ND	8%	13%	12%	35%	8%
	61 and over	13%	2%	3%	2%	ND	0%	ND	1%	1%	0%	1%	1%
<b>GENDER</b>	% female	78%	53%	68%	49%	ND	39%	55%	39%	29%	39%	ND	39%

ND=No data  
 Percentages may not add up to 100% in all cases  
 See the last page for country-specific definitions of these venues  
 Data collected through interviews conducted by research teams. See country reports for details with regard to methodology, locations, timing, and data collection issues.

The fees at Internet cafes are often too high for most people, especially among the lowest levels of the economic scale, but Internet cafes are perceived to be an important source of the most current information and content produced in foreign countries.

## Recommendations

Using and developing contemporary ICT-based applications, services, and technological advancements is one of the conditions necessary for the successful development of an information-based society in Georgia. Despite claims by the government that it recognizes the importance of creating and supporting an information-based society by introducing modern technologies, the rather precarious status of the country's economic condition has caused Georgia to fail to reach its technological goals. As a result, Georgia remains below the technological levels achieved by most other European countries.

The study results provided a detailed analysis of key public access venues in Georgia, the strengths, weaknesses, and opportunities in these venues, and the information needs of the population, with a focus on underserved groups. A subsequent national representative survey would serve to validate the findings of this research and provide more precise quantitative results on project issues. Such a survey is highly recommended.

The introduction of ICTs in all libraries would be a good investment, would increase the public's access to information, and would improve the quality of life. In addition, the advantages of access to ICTs would be especially helpful to people in underserved communities and rural areas. The rural population, and especially the ethnic minorities who are considered to be the most underserved large groups, lack computer skills. Therefore, to enable them take advantage of ICTs, it is appropriate to raise their ICT literacy level through computer training.

To improve the ability to access public information and increase the overall level of computer literacy, the following issues must be successfully addressed:

- Renovate and provide consistent ongoing support at all levels to public libraries. Equip all public libraries with ICT-based technological services and infrastructure.
- Create relevant content in the languages appropriate to the individual libraries, especially in the underserved communities.
- Train the public to understand and use computers.
- Establish and adequately fund and support venues offering ICTs in rural areas.
- Establish reasonable pricing and fee structures to enable a much greater percentage of the public to access ICTs in the public venues.
- Develop a practical and useful legislative basis for ICTs that will encourage ongoing technological development. Improve the legislative basis for the public library operational functions.
- Provide high-speed Internet connectivity nationwide.
- Provide capacity building programs and training on information gathering techniques for venue operators.

The following specific key recommendations emerged from this study:

- Update and increase the locally relevant content in the public libraries, especially in those libraries located in underserved communities, and provide more new materials and materials in languages appropriate to the locality.
- Introduce ICTs into public libraries in underserved communities.
- Conduct ICT-based capacity building programs and training courses for underserved communities.
- Develop and expand the ICT infrastructure in rural settlements and provide high-speed Internet connectivity nationwide.
- Improve the legislative basis both for ICTs and the public library network.

## Geography & Economy

Georgia sits between Western Asia and Eastern Europe, bounded to the west by the Black Sea, the north by Russia, Turkey and Armenia to the south, and Azerbaijan to the east. Its population of 4.7 million is comprised largely of ethnic Georgians (about 84%). Georgian is the country's official language—spoken by 71% of the population—while 9% speak Russian, 7% Armenian, 6% Azeri, and 7% other languages. Georgia's literacy rate is claimed to be close to 100 percent.

Georgia became part of the Russian Empire at the start of the 19th century. After a brief period of independence following the Russian Revolution of 1917, independence was restored during the Rose Revolution of 1991. In August 2008, Georgia engaged in an armed conflict with Russia and separatist groups from South Ossetia and Abkhazia after which Russia recognized these regions as independent states.

Mountains and forests are the dominant geographic features of Georgia. The country's northern border with Russia roughly runs along the crest of the Greater Caucasus mountain range and forests cover around 40% of the country. The landscape is quite varied, however, ranging from lowland swamps to rain forests to semi-arid plains.

COUNTRY PROFILE	
Total population* (millions)	4.4
Urban population* (millions)	2.3
Literacy (%)	99
E-readiness	ND
Gini coefficient	0.40

\*World Bank 2006 data  
ND=No data

## Research Team

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## About this study

CIS's Public Access Landscape Study examined how people around the world access and use information and computers in public settings such as libraries, telecenters, and cybercafes. Understanding public access is particularly important in developing countries where there is often limited private access to information and communication technologies (ICTs).

This study covered a carefully-selected sample of 25 developing countries containing over 250,000 public access settings. Local research teams surveyed over 25,000 people and conducted interviews and focus groups in order to develop a detailed picture of the public access ICT landscape in each country. CIS collected, interpreted, and analyzed these detailed county-level results, and also conducted cross-country comparative analyses to uncover common themes, challenges and opportunities.

The goal of this work is to help strengthen public access to information and ICTs around the world.

This project was conducted in two phases. During the first phase, country-based research teams prepared draft reports describing the information access landscape, presented a national assessment, and compiled a preliminary set of recommendations. In the second phase, teams identified the principal locations where people seek information: public libraries, cybercafés, telecenters, and other locations (such as private and religious libraries).

Local research teams used a combination of research methods to: (1) observe how people access information; (2) conduct surveys in information venues where they interviewed operators and users; and (3) perform secondary research and analysis of existing reports and documents using both local and international sources. Teams combined site visits and interviews to review the physical infrastructure and human resources of a variety of venues, and to determine the information content, service usage patterns, communication, and knowledge development. Additionally, teams examined the effects of environmental factors such as government policies, geography, and ethnic and linguistic differences.

## Definitions

**ACE scoring framework:** Developed by CIS based on a modified bridges.org Real Access framework. The scale goes from zero to five, with 5 being the best possible score. ACE scores are calculated by evaluating dozens of variables having to do with ICT access, capacity and environment in public access ICT venues. "Access" includes variables such as accessibility, suitability, affordability, and the availability of technology; "capacity" includes training, relevant content and services, social appropriation, and collaboration capacity; and "environment" includes socio-cultural factors, popular support, political will, and a country's legal and regulatory framework.

**Challenges ahead** (from table on front page): Estimates based on combinations of ACE scores indicating difficulty in improving country's public access to ICT. From the fewest challenges to most, categories are: quick wins, steady gains, slow gains, and significant.

**CIS:** University of Washington Center for Information & Society (CIS)

**Cybercafés/Internet cafes:** Privately owned and not organized into any kind of network

**E-readiness:** The ability to use ICT for economic development, as determined by measures of connectivity and technology infrastructure, business environment, social and cultural environment, legal environment, government policy and vision, and consumer and business adoption. E-readiness is scored on a scale from 1 to 10. In 2008, the global e-readiness score was 6.4, with the highest levels in North America and the lowest in Africa and Asia.

**Gini coefficient:** Measures the inequality of income distribution. A low coefficient indicates more equal income distribution, while a high Gini coefficient indicates more unequal distribution. The global average is around 0.6; the US Gini is around 0.45.

**ICTs:** Information and communication technologies (especially computers and the Internet)

**National Library:** The most important free venue, providing information access to thousands of people in the capital city of T'bilisi

**Needs & Readiness indexes** (from table on front page): The needs index is comprised of three indicators: inequality, ICT usage and ICT cost. The readiness index is also comprised of three indicators: politics, skills and ICT infrastructure. Proxies are used for all indicators. See "Information Needs & Watering Holes" on the CIS Landscape Study website ([www.cis.washington.edu/landscape](http://www.cis.washington.edu/landscape)) for a more detailed discussion of these indexes and proxies.

**NGO:** Non-governmental organization

**Non-urban:** Commonly labeled a rural area, but definitions of rural or periurban vary by country

**Public libraries:** Most public libraries are organized into one institutional structure

Front photo: During the recent conflict between Russia and Georgia, musicians from both countries—aided by an Internet "bridge"—performed on the popular show "National Interest" on Russia's largest national TV channel. Photo courtesy of Alexander Minza.