



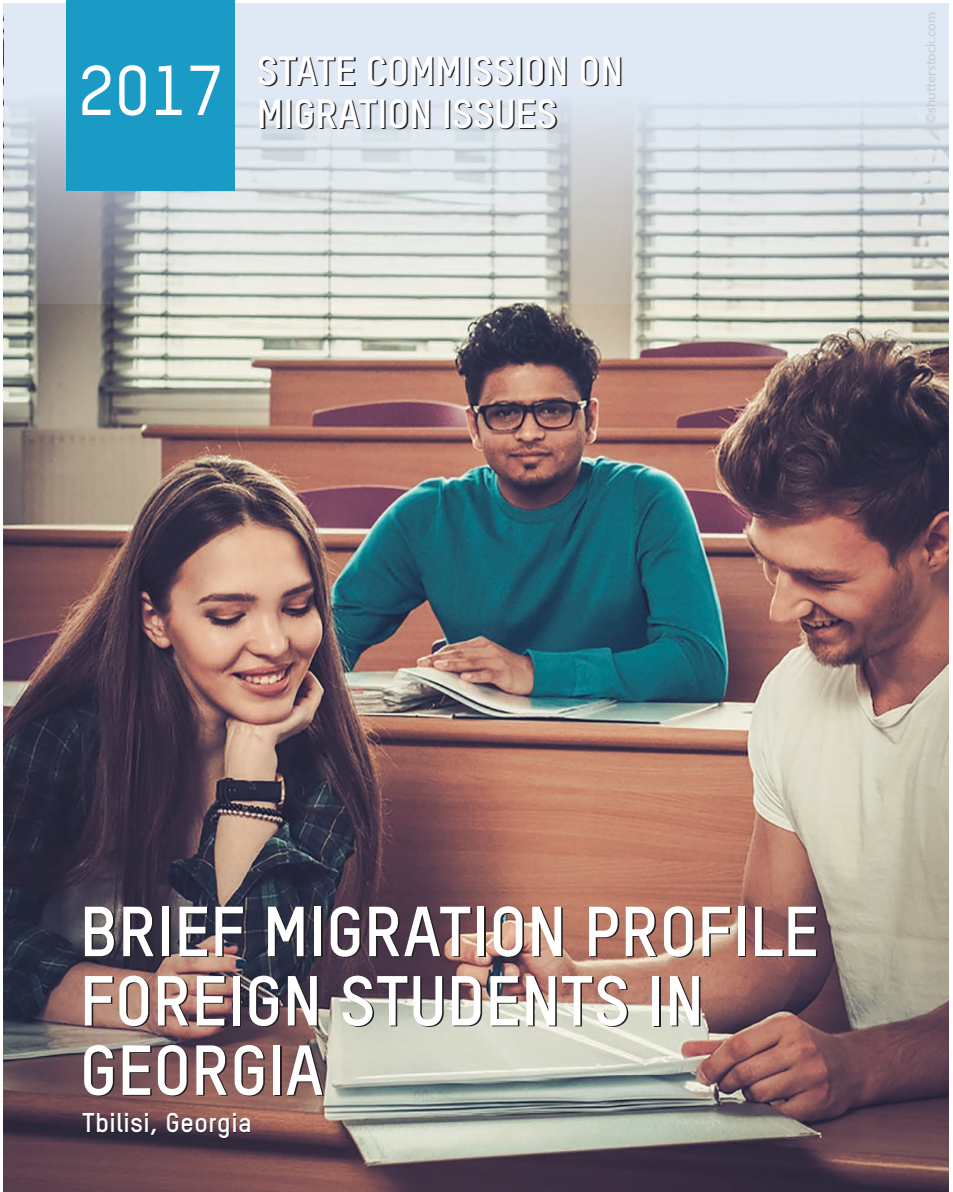
ევროკავშირი  
საქართველოსთვის  
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MIGRATION ISSUES



BRIEF MIGRATION PROFILE  
FOREIGN STUDENTS IN  
GEORGIA

Tbilisi, Georgia

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## Disclaimer

This publication was commissioned by the State Commission on Migration Issues of Georgia and prepared by scholars acting within the European Union-funded 'Enhancing Georgia's Migration Management' project run by the International Centre for Migration Policy Development, and has been produced with the assistance of the European Union. Its contents can in no way be taken to reflect the views of the European Union or International Centre for Migration Policy Development, nor does it necessarily reflect the views of the State Commission on Migration Issues.

# Introduction

In December 2015 the State Commission on Migration Issues (SCMI) adopted a Medium Migration Profile (MMP).<sup>1</sup> The MMP was elaborated with the active participation of all its member state agencies and the support of a project funded by the European Union (EU), 'Enhancing Migration Management in Georgia' (ENIGMMA), implemented by the International Centre for Migration Policy Development (ICMPD). The goal of the MMP is to foster evidence-based policy-making in the country and it covers all major aspects of migratory processes as well as its impact on Georgia's demography, economy and social cohesion. Since its elaboration, the MMP has proved a valuable source of migration-related data and analysis both for local and international institutions and researchers.

To further improve migration policy development and management in the country, in May 2016 the SCMI elaborated guidelines for the development of Medium and Brief Migration Profiles<sup>2</sup> that provide advice on how to structure the working process as well as data sources, structure and content of the migration profiles.

A Brief Migration Profile (BMP) is a logical extension of an MMP, but unlike an MMP, it is devoted to exploration of only one migration-related aspect, using data visualisations and infographics. The first BMP<sup>3</sup> focused on the dynamics and an impact analysis of incoming remittances.

The present BMP is the second publication and is devoted to the study of the impact of foreign students on the Georgian economy. It analyses the dynamics of the number of foreign students in Georgia and the major causes for the increase in the numbers. It also assesses the current financial benefit and future prospects of foreign students in Georgia.

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<sup>1</sup> 2015 Migration Profile of Georgia, 2015. State Commission on Migration Issues. Accessed on 14 November 2016.

[http://migration.commission.ge/files/migration\\_profile\\_2015\\_30.11.15.pdf](http://migration.commission.ge/files/migration_profile_2015_30.11.15.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> Development Guidelines: Medium Migration Profile and Brief Migration Profile, 2016. State Commission on Migration Issues. Accessed on 14 November 2016.

[http://migration.commission.ge/files/mp\\_guidelines\\_01\\_06\\_16.pdf](http://migration.commission.ge/files/mp_guidelines_01_06_16.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> Short Migration Profile: Remittances, 2016. State Commission on Migration Issues. Accessed on 19 March 2017.

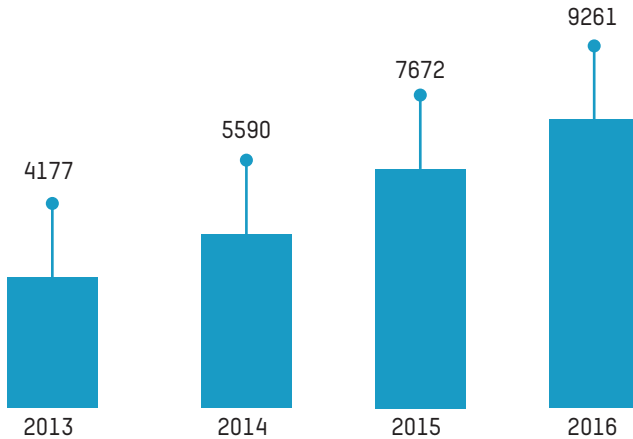
[http://migration.commission.ge/files/geo\\_\\_1\\_.pdf](http://migration.commission.ge/files/geo__1_.pdf) (in Georgian)

# Foreign student statistics in Georgia

According to UNESCO's Institute for Statistics,<sup>4</sup> international student mobility worldwide has increased by almost 70% in the past 10 years and has exceeded 4.5 million in 2015. Along with the stable increase of foreign students, the internationalisation of education plays a key role in modern education systems.

In recent years, the number of foreign students has increased in Georgia as well. While in 2013 Georgia hosted a little over four thousand foreign students, according to 2016 statistics, the number of foreign students in Georgia exceeded nine thousand, coming from 87 different countries.

Diagram 1. Number of Foreign Students in Georgian Higher Education Institutions

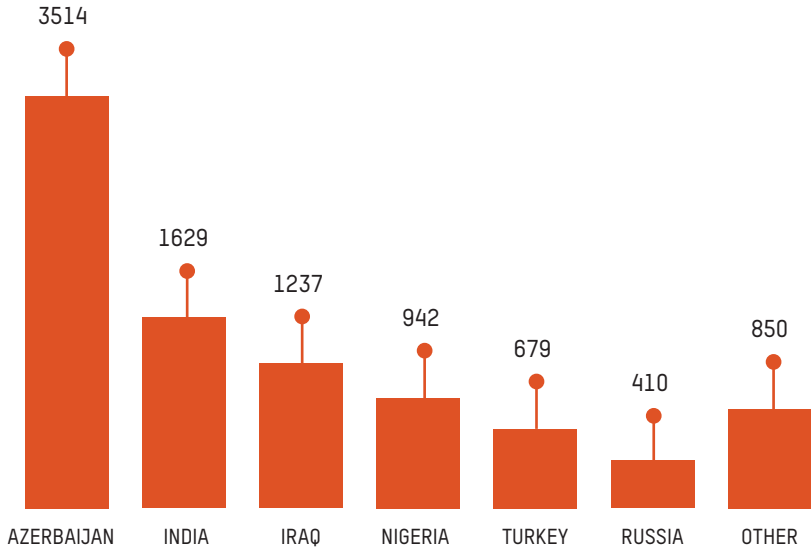


Source: Ministry of Education and Science of Georgia

Ninety percent of foreign students studying in Georgia are citizens of Azerbaijan, India, Iraq, Nigeria, Turkey or the Russian Federation. Moreover, the number of students who are citizens of Azerbaijan, Iraq, India or Nigeria has increased significantly in recent years, while the number of students from Turkey and Russia has remained relatively stable.

<sup>4</sup> UNESCO Institute for Statistics. Accessed on 20 January 2017. <http://uis.unesco.org/indicator/edu-mobility-in-country>

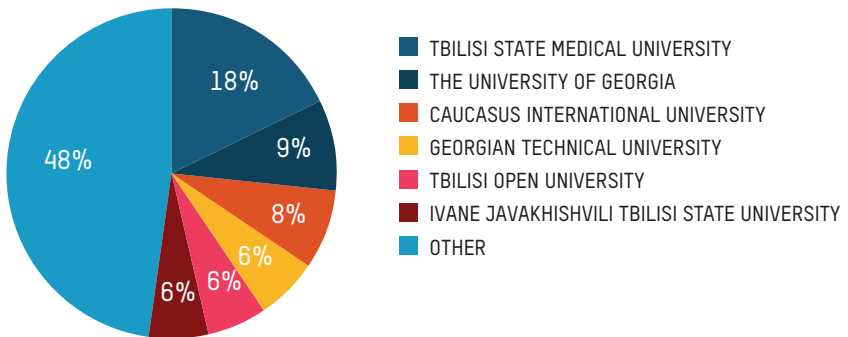
Diagram 2. Foreign Students by Country of Origin in 2016



Source: Ministry of Education and Science of Georgia

For the last several years, Tbilisi State Medical University has led the way in terms of number of foreign students hosted; although in recent years the number of foreign students has also increased at the University of Georgia and Caucasus International University.

Diagram 3. Foreign student distribution across Georgian universities in 2016 (%)

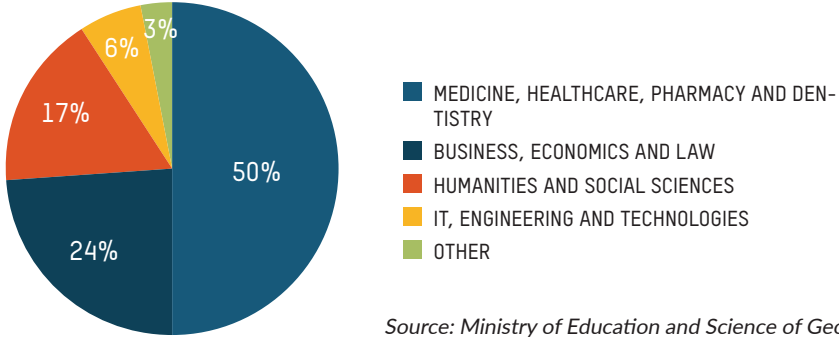


Source: Ministry of Education and Science of Georgia

According to the statistics of the Ministry of Education and Science, the absolute majority of foreign students in Georgia (95%) study in Tbilisi, with 2.2% doing so in Kutaisi and 1.8% in Batumi.

Medicine, which is the most expensive field of education, is also the most popular, with 50% of foreign students in Georgia studying medicine, healthcare, pharmacy or dentistry; while approximately a quarter of foreign students choose the departments of business, economics or law.

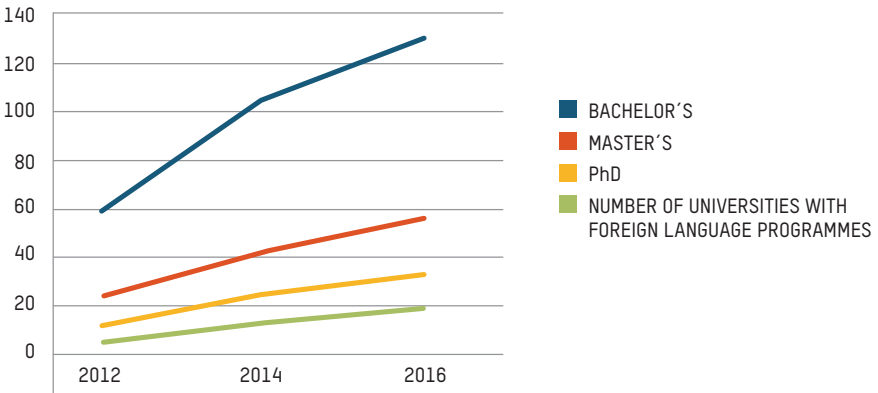
Diagram 4. Foreign student distribution by specialisation in 2016 (%)



Source: Ministry of Education and Science of Georgia

In line with the rise in the number of foreign students, the number of foreign language Bachelor’s, Master’s and PhD programmes in Georgian higher education institutions has also been steadily increasing in recent years. This points to the growing attention of the universities towards attracting and satisfying the demands of foreign students. According to statistics from the Ministry of Education and Science, in 2012 there were 88 foreign language educational programmes in Georgia, in 2014 the number reached 160, and by 2016 it had grown to 205. Moreover, the number of educational institutions which are introducing foreign language educational programmes is also progressively increasing from year to year.

Diagram 5. Foreign Language Educational Programmes



Source: Ministry of Education and Science of Georgia

# The impact of foreign students on the Georgian economy

The International School of Economics at Tbilisi State University (ISET), at the request of the SCMI and within the framework of the EU-funded ENIGMMA project implemented by the ICMPD, carried out a survey<sup>5</sup> of foreign students, which aimed to assess the impact of foreign students on the Georgian economy. During the research, a total of 277 foreign students were surveyed, all of whom were at that time studying at Georgian universities; furthermore, in-depth interviews were conducted with 12 representatives from the administrations of ten universities.<sup>6</sup> The students who participated in the online survey came from eight universities, which currently host 60% of all foreign students in Georgia (see the list of universities in Table 4). Moreover, the administrators who took part in the in-depth interviews represent universities which currently host 64% of all foreign students.

According to the ISET study, a majority of Georgian higher education institutions use recruitment agencies located in Georgia and abroad to attract foreign students. The online survey conducted among foreign students confirms this information: 30% of respondents claimed they received information about prospects for higher education in Georgia from such agencies. It is noteworthy that according to the university representatives, the commission of such recruitment agencies has increased significantly in recent years and nowadays can be as high as 1,000 USD per student recruited. The results of the ISET research demonstrate that the reputation of Georgia as a safe country with low tuition fees plays a decisive role in attracting foreign students. Regarding selection of a specific university in Georgia, the foreign students surveyed tended to pay attention to the availability of courses in English, the qualification of academic staff and tuition fees. Tables 1 and 2 show the average scores for different factors, which students assessed on a scale of 1 to 5, ranked according to their importance.

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<sup>5</sup> The survey was conducted through an online questionnaire from 8 December 2016 to 22 January 2017.

<sup>6</sup> Tbilisi State Medical University, Ivane Javakishvili Tbilisi State University, the University of Georgia, Caucasus International University, Tbilisi Open University, New Vision University, Black Sea International University, European University, David Tvildiani Medical University and Akaki Tsereteli State University.

Table 1.

Please indicate how important were the following factors in your decision to study in Georgia?	
Safety	4.23
Cost of tuition	4.00
Recognition of Georgian educational credentials	3.90
Cost of living	3.89
Good reputation of Georgia's educational system	3.77
Visa regulations	3.61
Climate	3.32
Network/Friends	3.30

Table 2.

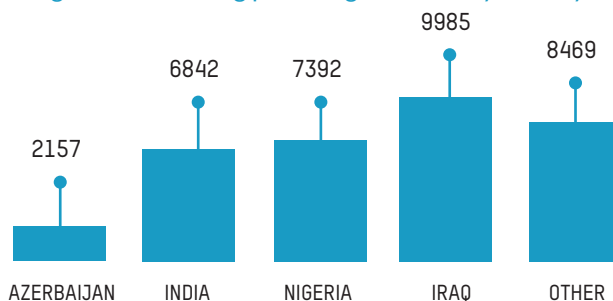
Please indicate how important were the following factors in your choice of academic institution in Georgia?	
Availability of courses taught in English	4.10
Qualified academic personnel	4.08
Cost of tuition	4.01
Language of instruction	3.94
Technological capabilities of the institution	3.80
Competitive programme	3.70
Location of the university in Georgia	3.65
Social environment	3.61
Friends/Acquaintances at the university	3.29

*Source: ISET Online Questionnaire, 2016*

The majority of respondents (89%) were financially dependent on family members, who remained in their home countries. Average annual funding per student was 7,733 USD. Students who are citizens of Azerbaijan receive the smallest amount of funding, students from Iraq the largest.



Diagram 6. Average annual funding per foreign student by country of origin (USD)



Source: ISET Online Questionnaire, 2016

Remark: Out of 277 respondents, 20 failed to specify the amount of funding or indicated unrealistic figures, which were excluded from calculation of the average. The diagram summarises the statistics from the remaining 257 respondents.

For the students surveyed, expenditure on tuition fees and accommodation comprised over 60% of total expenditure. Table 3 shows average expenditure by different categories. The table also indicates the number of respondents who provided information on their incurring each particular type of expenditure.

Table 3.

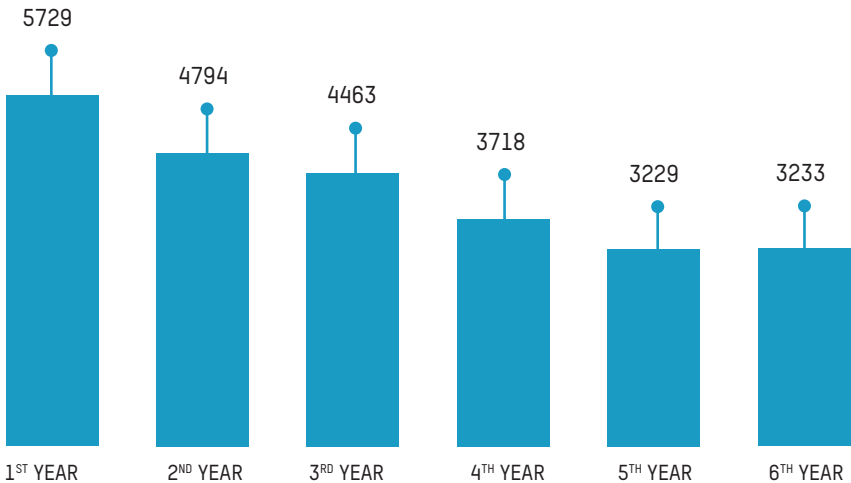
Type of Expenditure	Average	Number of respondents who answered this question
Tuition 2016/2017 (USD)	4,777	277
Tuition in the first year of studies (USD)	4,902	277
Annual spending on books (GEL)	365	254
Monthly rent (USD)	232	277
Annual spending by visitors of the students (GEL)	2,889	52
Monthly spending on:		
Utilities (GEL)	117	259
Cell phone service (GEL)	25	271
Groceries and food (GEL)	281	271
Dining and drinking out (GEL)	108	231
Entertainment (GEL)	54	184
Clothing, accessories, shoes (GEL)	114	244
Transportation (GEL)	102	274
Childcare (GEL)	838	5
Total spending on:		
Car purchase (USD)	4,440	39
Other durable goods (GEL)	1,412	153
Travel/Tourism (GEL)	351	180

Source: ISET Online Questionnaire, 2016

Tuition fees made up the largest share of total student expenditure. There is a maximum limit of 2,250 GEL that Georgian students (citizens of Georgia) can be required to pay annually as tuition at the state universities. However, rates established for foreign students exceed the fees paid by Georgian students several times over. By comparison, according to the ISET study, the average tuition fee for a foreign student at Tbilisi State Medical University is 6,222 USD.

After beginning of his/her studies at a university, as a rule, tuition fees do not change considerably over the years for that particular student. However, a majority of universities increase tuition fees for new entrants from year to year. The results of the ISET online survey show that students who started their studies later pay higher tuition.

Diagram 7. Average Tuition by Year of Programme (USD)



Source: ISET Online Questionnaire, 2016

According to the ISET online study, the highest tuition fees are charged by Tbilisi State Medical University, while the lowest tuition fees are paid at Tbilisi Open University.

Table 4.

University	Average Annual Tuition (USD)
Tbilisi Open University	1,480
The University of Georgia	3,462
Ivane Javakhishvili Tbilisi State University	3,518
Caucasus International University	3,870
New Vision University	4,449
European University	4,574
Akaki Tsereteli State University	4,938
Tbilisi State Medical University	6,222
Unidentified	3,715
Average for all universities	4,777

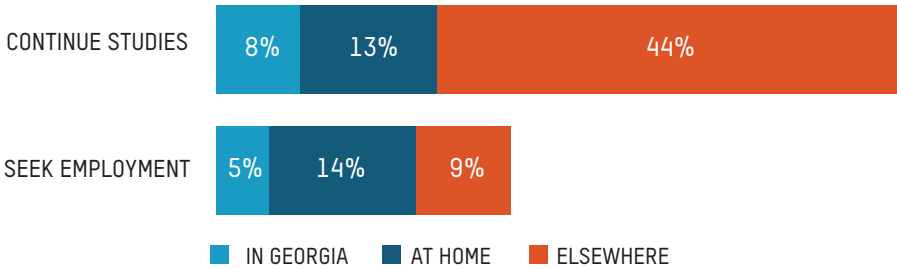
*Source: ISET Online Questionnaire, 2016*

According to the ISET study, low tuition fees for foreign students are charged by higher education institutions which focus on Azeri students and tailor their academic programmes to their needs; for instance they have academic programmes in Russian or offer dual-language programmes in Georgian and Azeri.

Some 78% of respondents mentioned that they would recommend their university to others. This positive assessment is mainly based on low tuition fees and qualified academic personnel. Students who indicated that they would not give their university a positive recommendation explained their evaluation by citing a low quality of teaching, an inability to provide opportunities to gain practical experience and dissatisfaction with university administration and staff.

It is noteworthy that the majority of foreign students planned to leave Georgia after completion of their studies, which makes their future influence on the Georgian labour market insignificant. Sixty-five percent of foreign students surveyed planned to continue their studies at the next (higher) level after graduation, out of which 8% planned to do so in Georgia. Less than 30% indicated that they would be seeking employment after graduation, out of which only 5% intended to seek a job in Georgia.

Diagram 8. Plans after Graduation



Source: ISET Online Questionnaire, 2016

According to the ISET study, the largest expenditures for students are: 28 million USD for tuition fees and 16.7 million USD for rent of accommodation. Total annual expenditure of foreign students in Georgia is 195 million Georgian lari<sup>7</sup> (GEL), which amounts to 0.6% of Georgia's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and 6% of its export of services (a detailed breakdown of expenditure is given in table 5). Since only a very small share of foreign students plan to stay in Georgia after graduation, their contribution to the local job market is insignificant.

Table 5.

Type of Expenditure	Expenditure (GEL)	Share of Total Expenditure
Tuition	75,928,318	38.88%
Rent	45,017,544	23.05%
Groceries and food	23,584,199	12.08%
Transportation	10,114,029	5.18%
Utilities	8,769,560	4.49%
Clothing, shoes, accessories	7,497,323	3.84%
Eating and drinking out	7,482,191	3.83%
Entertainment	3,409,920	1.75%
Books	3,381,639	1.73%
Cell phone communication	2,439,394	1.25%
Car purchase	3,500,008	1.79%
Other durable goods	2,273,243	1.16%
Travel/Tourism	842,892	0.43%
Childcare	1,063,218	0.54%
Total annual personal expenditure	195,303,478	100%

Source: ISET Online Questionnaire, 2016

<sup>7</sup> 1 USD to 2.7 GEL was the exchange rate used for conversion, the rate current at the time the survey was implemented.

The influence of foreign students on the country's economy has also been examined in a study by Ana Zhvania (2016).<sup>8</sup> According to the study, a rough and conservative lower estimate for the amount of total expenditure incurred by all foreign students in Georgia annually is 40 million USD. The estimate has been produced based on two parameters: 1) Average tuition fee and 2) Average expenditure on accommodation. It is noteworthy that calculations made on the basis of these two parameters in the ISET study correspond to the estimates produced by the Zhvania study, and as mentioned above, amount to approximately 45 million USD.

As the study shows, foreign student interest in studying at Georgian higher education institutions is increasing. Foreign students play a major role in both the economic advancement and the development of the universities. According to the university representatives surveyed, tuition fees paid by foreign students enable Georgian universities to invest in infrastructure and technologies as well as to develop new educational programmes.

The results of the study demonstrate that currently the impact of foreign students on the Georgian economy is short-term and limited to the student's period of study in Georgia. The majority of students are not interested in staying in Georgia to continue their studies or seek employment, which reduces the potential long-term effect of foreign students on the country's economy. The data also shows that economic benefit gained from foreign students will expand if the universities increase the quality of teaching and services and provide opportunities for foreign students to gain practical experience in Georgia.

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<sup>8</sup> A. Zhvania. PMC Research Center, 2016. 'Study in Georgia: Prospects of Internationalization of Higher Education' p. 17. Accessed on 22 March 2017.  
[http://www.research.pmcg-i.com/media/k2/attachments/Georgia\\_HE\\_Internationalization\\_Report.pdf](http://www.research.pmcg-i.com/media/k2/attachments/Georgia_HE_Internationalization_Report.pdf)