



Educational Inequalities in Transition: The Cases of Russia and Georgia

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Abstract

Whether formal education can equalize life chances of people with different backgrounds, or further exacerbate inequalities that inevitably exist in any society, depends largely on how equally the chances to attain education are distributed among different socio-economic groups. Large-scale political, socio-economic, institutional and structural transformations that newly independent republics underwent in the immediate aftermath of the breakup of the Soviet Union 25 years ago was bound to substantially change the distribution of those chances.

Bridging the post-communist area studies with the social science scholarship on educational inequalities, with this thesis I study how inequalities in educational attainment changed in post-Soviet Russia and Georgia and what were broader implications of any such change.

Using Gender and Generations Survey data from Russia and Georgia I have examined how chances of attaining various levels of education changed for people born to parents with different social status. I have used a merged dataset of repeated cross-sectional national survey from Russia to examine if returns to educational attainment changed during 1990s and 2000s.

I find that while educational inequality has increased in both countries, particularly in attaining secondary education, returns to educational attainment, understandably small in the Soviet Union, did not increase much. This leads me to conclude that increasing educational inequalities did not contribute to the well-documented surge of income inequality.

Finally, I used quasi-experimental approach to estimate the effect of the introduction of standardized university admissions examinations on the chances of access to highly selective universities. I find moderate support for the hypothesis that the standardized exams have equalized chances of students from various backgrounds to be admitted to selective universities.



Jury: Fabrizio Bernardi (EUI, Supervisor), Lela Chakhaia (candidate), Klarita Gërzhani (EUI), Gabriele Ballarino (University of Milan), Irena Kogan (University of Mannheim, by videolink)

Bio

Lela Chakhaia started the Ph.D. programme at the EUI in 2012.

Her research interests include: educational inequalities, social stratification, effect of educational reforms on access to education, post-communist transition.

Prior to coming to the EUI, Lela worked for UNICEF, the World Bank, the Ministry of Education in Georgia and other organisations.

Lela holds Master's degrees from Harvard University and Central European University, and an undergraduate degree from Tbilisi State University.