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The Ethics Project: First Newsletter – 2024

Project Overview

The “Responsible Conduct of Research – Research Integrity and Ethics in Georgian Universities (ETHICS)” project, funded by the European Commission under the Erasmus+ CBHE Programme, is a pioneering national structural reform initiative in Georgia. Coordinated by Ilia State University, the project brings together 10 Georgian universities, 4 European partners, and 3 national stakeholders to enhance research ethics and integrity across the country's higher education landscape. The project commenced on February 01, 2023, and is set to conclude on January 31st, 2027.

ETHICS Project Goals and Outcomes:

The aim of the national structural reform project ‘Responsible Conduct of Research – Research Integrity and Ethics in Georgian Universities (ETHICS)’ is to launch a systemic improvement intervention to improve the quality of University and Research-Performing Organizations (RPOs) research through launching measures to adhere to the foundations of high-quality research and excellence.

Its specific objectives are to introduce mechanisms for ensuring research ethics, research integrity, and ethics for researchers within advanced-level study programs and the accreditation standards of doctoral programs. The aim is to enhance the standards of Responsible Conduct of Research (RCR) – Ethics and Integrity, supported by appropriate national and institutional policies and processes that help prevent cases of scientific work lacking originality. Equally important is the formal introduction and promotion of a culture of research integrity and good research practices. This will better prepare Georgian universities to become more competitive and to offer trustworthy research proposals both domestically and internationally, particularly in response to Horizon Europe and ERC calls, incorporating research integrity and ethics.

The ETHICS Project Objectives:

- Policy and Standard Change in Accreditation of Doctoral Programs/Capacity Building of Accreditation Experts/Development of a MOOC
- Research Integrity Module
- Training of Researchers and Research Support Officers

- University Research Integrity Policies, Ethics, and Resources
- Research Integrity, Ethics & Governance Committee/Board
- Academic Support and Research Integrity Services for Supportive Environment for Researchers/Doctoral Students
- Responsible Science Communication Strategy

Project Coordinator:

Ilia State University

Project EU Partners:

1. Free University Amsterdam/ STICHTING VU
2. Charles University Prague
3. Masaryk University
4. European Network for Academic Integrity

Project Georgian HEIs:

1. Ivane Javakhishvili Tbilisi State University
2. Caucasus University
3. David Tvildiani Medical University
4. Batumi Shota Rustaveli State University
5. Akaki Tsereteli State University
6. Samtskhe-Javakheti State University
7. Iakob Gogebashvili Telavi State University
8. GIPA- Georgian Institute of Public Affairs
9. Apollon Kutateladze Tbilisi State Academy of Art

Project Non – University Partners:

1. Ministry of Education, Science and Youth of Georgia
2. National Center For Educational Quality Enhancement
3. Shota Rustaveli National Science Foundation of Georgia

Highlight events and Key Activities within the first half of the project

1. National Partners’ Launch Meeting (March 1, 2023)

The purpose of the meeting was to discuss the work packages provided by the ETHICS project. The participating partners emphasized the significance of the project, its objectives, and the broader importance of research ethics at the national level.

During the national meeting, the following key issues were discussed:

- Establishing European standards for the responsible conduct of research
- Developing a plan to support research integrity at the institutional level

- Strengthening trust in science within society
- Implementing awareness-raising activities for the scientific community
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Representatives of the Ministry of Education and Science of Georgia, National Center for Education Quality, Shota Rustaveli National Science Foundation of Georgia, and 10 higher educational institutions of Georgia participated in the meeting.

2. Kick-off and Study Visit in Prague (May 2–5, 2023)

Representatives of the Ministry of Education and Science of Georgia, National Center for Education Quality, Shota Rustaveli National Science Foundation of Georgia, and 10 higher educational institutions of Georgia



The project’s kick-off meeting was hosted by the first Faculty of Medicine at Charles University (CUNI), bringing together representatives from EU partner institutions, Georgian universities, and non-university stakeholders. The four-day programme included project meetings, lectures, and a study visit, complemented by a social programme featuring a guided tour of Prague’s historic center and a welcome dinner organized by Charles University

Opening remarks were delivered by Prof. Nino Doborjginidze (Rector, Iliia State University), Prof. Michal Miovský (Vice-Dean, First Faculty of Medicine, CUNI), and Prof. Roman Gabrhelík (Head of R&D, Department of Addictology). During the meetings, participants discussed project objectives, work packages, the timeline, and financial management. As part of the study visit, experts from Charles University, Masaryk University, Netherlands Research Integrity

3. Researcher and Integrity Officer Training (October 11–12, 2023)



Akaki Tsereteli Kutaisi State University recently hosted a three-day intensive training for researchers and research support (INTEGRITY) officers. Organized by Ilia State University and delivered by experts from EU partner institutions of the ETHICS project, the training was part of the EU-funded Erasmus+ CBHE Strand 3 project Responsible Conduct of Research – Research Integrity and Ethics in Georgian Universities (ETHICS).

Experts from the University of Amsterdam, Masaryk University, and the European Network of Academic Integrity led the sessions, covering key topics such as:

- Research Ethics and Integrity
- Preventing and Deterring Misconduct
- Managing Allegations of Misconduct
- Ethical Approval Systems
- Authorship & Publication Ethics
- The Role of the Research Integrity Officer
- Challenges of Generative AI for Research Integrity

The training concluded with a call for a national framework/code of conduct on research integrity. The Rustaveli National Science Foundation was assigned a leading role in this initiative

4. Second Consortium Meeting in Amsterdam (April 9–11, 2024)



The second international meeting and study tour of the project took place in Amsterdam. Co-organized by Ilia State University and hosted by Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam.

Participants included representatives from ten Georgian higher education institutions, three European universities, and non-university partner organizations. Also in attendance were representatives from the Ministry of Education and Science of Georgia, the Shota Rustaveli National Science Foundation, and the National Centre for Education Quality Development.

The meeting focused on sharing key project developments and updates. Georgian partners presented insights from the in-house training sessions held at their universities, which followed the Kutaisi Training of Trainers (ToT) programme for Research Support Officers (October 11–13, 2023). EU partners shared outcomes from their working groups, including progress on the Research Integrity Module, standards for PhD programmes, and other essential topics.

5. Fourth International Conference – Sustaining Ethical Practices in Education (October 8, 2024)

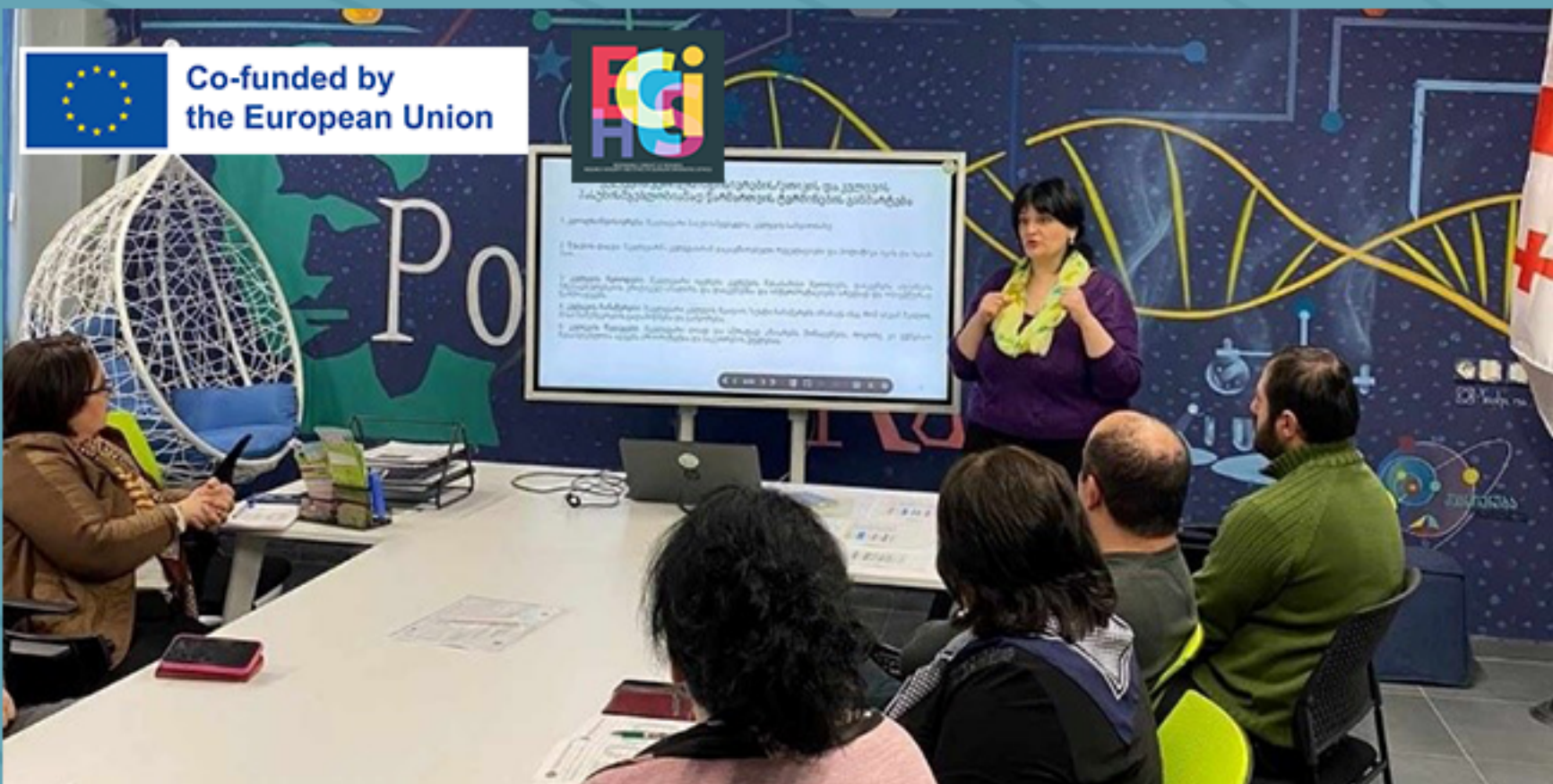


Held in Tbilisi by Ilia State University and hosted by Caucasus University, this international conference focused on integrity, the impact of AI on ethics, and the importance of collaborative efforts in education. The primary aim of the conference was to facilitate the exchange of experiences and case analyses among participants, offering effective solutions to current academic challenges. The conference brought together Georgian partner universities from the Ethics Project.

As the conference was established within the framework of the Erasmus+ CBHE project “Academic Integrity for Quality Teaching and Learning in Georgian Higher Educational Institutions” (INTEGRITY), which previously gathered most of the partners of the current project, the organizers decided to link it with the ongoing project. Information about the ongoing Ethics Project was shared with the participants.

In addition to the conference proceedings, participants also had the opportunity to attend an exclusive online session: the European Network for Academic Integrity’s Panel Discussion on Artificial Intelligence in Higher Education.

6. In-House Trainings at Georgian Partner Universities (2023-2024)



Georgian universities independently conducted a series of online and offline trainings on research integrity, targeting doctoral students, early-career researchers, and academic staff. These sessions were held as a follow-up to the Kutaisi International Training of Trainers (ToT) program, which took place in 2023. In 2024, additional in-house training was conducted to further support academic services on research ethics and integrity. The primary aim of the initiative was to enhance institutional mechanisms, procedures, and services related to research ethics and integrity across universities. The training series focused on four key topics:

- 1. Research Ethics and Integrity: Overview of European and institutional legal frameworks
- 2. Academic Misconduct: Prevention and management strategies in the research field
- 3. Ethics of Publication and Authorship: Policy development and implementation
- 4. Integrity in the Age of AI: Core principles and emerging challenges associated with artificial intelligence in research

This initiative marks a significant step toward fostering a culture of ethical research and academic excellence in Georgian higher education institutions. These efforts demonstrate the growing capacity of Georgian institutions to independently promote a culture of ethical research practices

National Center for Educational Quality Enhancement Initiated Training Series for Accreditation Experts

Meeting

Giga Khositashvili's screen

NCEQE Keti Tshetashvili

Giga Khositashvili

Tamar Kbiladze

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Nino Poplashvili

Ekaterine Natsvishvili

Specific Objectives/Dimensions

1. Policy and Standard Change in Accreditation of Doctoral Programs/Capacity Building of Accreditation Experts/Development of a MOOC

2. Research Integrity & Ethics Module/MOOC

3. Training of Researchers and Research Support [INTEGRITY] Officers

4. University Research Integrity Policies, Ethics, and Resources

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EC

HR

The National Center for Educational Quality Enhancement initiated a training series aimed at strengthening the expertise of higher education programme accreditation experts. This initiative was part of the project. The training focused on enhancing the evaluation of doctoral programmes, with a strong emphasis on integrating research ethics and academic integrity into accreditation processes.

As a key milestone, the Center revised and finalized Georgia’s new doctoral education framework, which was officially approved by the Ministry of Education, Science and Youth on August 30, 2024. Designed to bring Georgian accreditation practices closer to European standards, the training covered the updated framework, shared best practices from European partners, and highlighted ethical standards in research assessment. The first sessions were delivered on October 25 and 28, engaging accreditation experts and staff from the Center’s Higher Education Quality Assurance Department. The training cycle continued through March 1, 2025, ultimately retraining 230 experts.



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