

Expansion and Improvement of Services for People with Autism Spectrum Disorder in Georgia

The Project aimed at improving early detection of autism spectrum disorder, support rehabilitation and social services for individuals with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) and promote professional development of Georgian specialists working in the field.

The first part of the project was carried out in 2015-2018,
the second part in 2019-2021.

GENERAL IMPACT OF THE PROJECT

THE PROJECT SIGNIFICANTLY STIMULATED THE CREATION OF SUPPORTIVE ENVIRONMENT AND SYSTEMIC APPROACH TOWARDS PEOPLE WITH AUTISM SPECTRUM DISORDER IN GEORGIA.

Results on a Country Level

ADOS-2 diagnostic tool was purchased, translated and provided to five regions of Georgia and 20 specialists were trained accordingly.

A **State Protocol** "Identification, Diagnosis and Management of Autism Spectrum Disorder" was elaborated and later approved by the Ministry of Health of Georgia.

Advocacy meetings were held throughout Georgia, as a result of which in Guria and Samtskhe-Javakheti the municipal budget was allocated for children's involvement in ABA therapies, the funding was increased in Rustavi (Kvemo Kartli). Besides, several local municipalities increased the number of hours needed for children's therapies.

Hundreds of rural doctors throughout Georgia enhanced their knowledge for identifying early ASD risk in children at the PHC level.

Epidemiological research was conducted as a result of which the prevalence of ASD was defined.

Standards for ASD service provision developed and put into practice throughout Georgia.

Diversification of Therapeutic Approaches

Therapy approaches for individuals with ASD have been diversified and improved, specifically:

12 specialists were introduced to the DENVER model.

30 specialists were introduced to the SCERTS model.



Inclusive Education Component

2017-2018

2017

2017-2021

Transitional groups in 3 kindergartens were adapted, equipped and launched for children with ASD in Tbilisi, Zugdidi and Telavi.

10 special specialists were trained to work in transitional groups and all staff of pilot kindergartens in Tbilisi, Zugdidi and Telavi were trained in inclusive education approaches.

2018

2018-2021

Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA)

The quality of Autism services was improved through regular **supervision of local ABA specialists** by experienced supervisors in 8 regions of Georgia.

Capability of **199 specialists** to carry out the assessment and therapy of ASD through modern evidence-based assessment and therapy techniques (**ABLLS-R and EFL**) was enhanced.

2019-2021

2019

The professional development standard of specialists and continuing education requirements for specialists, who provide ABA-based services was developed. The Georgian Association of Behaviour Analysts (GABA) was supported for establishment of all necessary procedures for **national certification and credentialing of ABA specialists.**

2020-2021

2020

15 ABA specialists were prepared on a supervisor's level and financially supported.

KEY FACTS

THE PROJECT WAS FINANCIALLY SUPPORTED BY THE CZECH DEVELOPMENT AGENCY WITH A TOTAL (2015-2021) BUDGET OF 255 000 EUROS

The project targeted hundreds of autism specialists from the capital and regions.



Project partners

- Ministry of Internally Displaced Persons from the Occupied Territories, Labour, Health and Social Affairs of Georgia
- Ilia State University, Child Development Institute
- Georgian Academy of Childhood Disability
- Georgian Association of Behavior Analysts





PROJECT RESULTS BY YEARS

ACHIEVED RESULTS IN 2015-2018

International Conference “Autism: Present Perspectives and Challenges in Georgia” was held, which aimed at introducing the current situation related to autism spectrum disorder in Georgia and demonstrating the model of lifelong care of people with autism in Czech Republic.

22 specialists participated in the training course – “Differential Diagnosis of Autism Spectrum Disorder.” **56 specialists** participated in the training course – “Communication of Children with Autism Spectrum Disorder and Methods for Alternative Communication – the Picture Exchange Communication System (PECS).” Both trainings were delivered by the Czech experts of National Institute of Autism of Czech Republic (NAUTIS).



This support has enabled children with ASD and their families to benefit from exactly the same approaches used in such developed countries as the United States, the United Kingdom, the Czech Republic, and Poland. By raising the qualification of local specialists, the quality of autism services has been significantly improved and, consequently, the satisfaction of children and parents with the achieved results was increased as well. On behalf of each beneficiary, I would like to express special gratitude to the Czech people for such support.

Rusudan Chkhubianishvili,
Caritas Czech Republic's project manager





One of the main directions of the Caritas Czech Republic (CCR) project was the training of rural doctors. CCR provided them with appropriate screening tests and knowledge on how to use those tests. It was one of the steps forward in the timely detection of children with the risk of autism spectrum disorder.

Maya Gabunia,
Chair of Georgian Academy of
Childhood Disability, project expert

117 specialists of primary health care from Samegrelo, Adjara, Imereti, Kakheti and Kvemo Kartli were trained in Early Identification of Autism and Applying Autism Screening Tool – MCHAT-R.

Autism working group visited Czech Republic and got acquainted with the Czech experience regarding their approach of working with the individuals with autism spectrum disorder, legal side of the subject and aspects of lifetime care in Czech Republic.

The working group developed **a national protocol – “Identification, Diagnosis and Management of Autism Spectrum Disorder”**, which was approved by the ministry in April 2018. This is an official document, which is used by the professionals working with individuals with autism spectrum disorder as an evidence-based manual.



American experts in **Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA)** from the California State University, Fresno, provided a three-day training course in the age-specific behavior of individuals with autism spectrum disorder for the specialists of Child Development Institute of Ilia State University.

Professional Assessment tool – Assessment of Basic Language and Learning Skills of Autism (**ABLLS-R**) was translated into Georgian language and printed. **Two hundred books** were handed over to the autism service providers in Tbilisi and other regions of Georgia, as well as to **34 participants of the training.**

Professional Assessment tool – Essential for Living (**EFL**) was translated and printed out.





20 psychologists and psychiatrists from Tbilisi, Imereti, Samegrelo, Adjara, Kakheti and Samtskhe-Javakheti were trained how **to use in practice autism diagnostic tool ADOS-2**.

In 2018, **105 children were assessed** through ADOS-2 instrument free of charge.

One of the participants of the ADOS training from the Child Development Institute took part in a 3-day advanced training in “ADOS-2 Administration and Coding” held in Great Britain.

Certified Courses “**Preschool Inclusive Education**” and “**Child with Autism Spectrum at Kindergarten**” of Ilia State University was provided to the whole staff of kindergarten #192 in Tbilisi, kindergarten #15 in Zugdidi and Kindergarten #7 in Telavi. Assistants of teachers of all kindergartens of Telavi municipality were trained in the principles of inclusive education. In total, capability of 86 specialists was enhanced regarding the working methods and approaches with children with autism spectrum disorder.



Transitional groups for children with autism spectrum disorder have started operating in three kindergartens of Tbilisi, Zugdidi and Telavi, under the supervision of specially trained specialists of early childhood development.

Local municipal governments took forward funding of positions of special teachers in all **3 pilot kindergartens**. All together 10 new positions of special teachers were created through advocacy efforts.



ACHIEVED RESULTS IN 2019-2021

The National Autism Service Standards was approved by MoIDPLHSA on December 17, 2020. Thus, Georgia got a national standard to ensure the monitoring of the quality of provided autism services.

The National Autism Service Standards was introduced in the regions of Georgia, namely in Racha-Lechkhumi, Samegrelo-Zemo Svaneti, Adjara, Shida Kartli, Kakheti, Imereti and Akahltsikhe have started financing children with ASD since 2020 and 2021. It is expected to start the program in Racha.

The costing model of autism services was designed and introduced to municipal governments of the regions – Guria, Samtskhe-Javakheti, Kvemo Kartli, Racha-Lechkhumi-Kvemo Svaneti, Samegrelo-Zemo Svaneti, Shida Kartli, Adjara, Kakheti, and Imereti regions. Through **CCR advocacy** efforts, the municipalities of Rustavi and Ozurgeti have started financing children with ASD since 2020. It is expected to start the program in Akhaltsikhe and Oni/Ambrolauri.





The project worked intensively with autism service providers from Tbilisi and other regions to help them increase the quality of ASD services:

✚ The training in the use of autism state protocol was delivered to primary healthcare providers and specialists working with people with ASD in Guria, Samtskhe-Javakheti, Kvemo Kartli, Samegrelo, Racha-Lechkhumi-Kvemo Svaneti, Shida Kartli, and Mtskheta-Mtianeti regions.

✚ **541 health professionals** (majority - rural family doctors) and **113 autism specialists** were trained in early detection of ASD and autism diagnostics.

✚ 4 four-day training in the use of professional tools - ABLLS-R and 4 two-day training in EFL were held with the participation of **146 behavior therapists** from all over Georgia. All together 187 specialists were trained in the use of ABLLS-R and EFL during 2018-2021.

✚ 5 ABA training were organized, and **80 specialists** took part.

The project worked on diversification of therapeutic approaches used in the work with people with ASD:

🧩 The Early Start Denver Model and SCERTS model were translated into the Georgian language.

🧩 12 professionals were trained in the introductory level **Early Start Denver Model**. The training in advanced ESDM was held in 2020 where 11 specialists participated.

🧩 30 professionals participated in a two-day training in the use of the **SCERTS** model. The workshop was delivered by Dr. Barry Prizant, a leading scholar in autism spectrum disorders and communication disabilities.



It was very important to introduce alternative approaches in addition to ABA, such as an Early Start DENVER Model (or the ESDM therapy). Caritas Czech Republic has trained several Georgian specialists, including me and my colleague. Afterward, we have trained our behavioral therapists and it has become possible to offer age-appropriate intervention for children with the risk of autism spectrum or with an autism spectrum disorder.

Lika Mkhatvari, Director of Bridge for Social Inclusion





3 new ABA-based autism services started in Ozurgeti, Guria and Akhaltsikhe, Samtskhe-Javakheti in 2020 and in Ambrolauri, Racha in 2021.

The project provides regular **ABA supervision** to local ABA specialists in the regions. The ABA supervision started in Ambrolauri in July 2021. The supervision was provided in Telavi, Zugdidi, Ozurgeti, Gori, Kutaisi, Kobuleti and Akhaltsikhe.

The funding support for ABA therapy has been provided to **17 children** from Kakheti, Samtskhe-Javakheti, Samegrelo, and Racha.





Caritas Czech Republic jointly with the Shota Rustaveli Science Foundation of Georgia supported an **epidemiological study** to assess the prevalence of autism in Georgia. Approximately 16,000 children in the fourth class were screened in 2019. 300 children at risk of ASD were assessed in 2021. The research report with due recommendations will be produced at the end of 2021.

The **certified program for ABA supervisors** has been developed, approved by the academic board of Ilia State University, and launched by ILIAUNI in November 2019. 15 specialists were enrolled in the program, prepared as supervisors by August 2021 and are ready for BCBA exams in 2021-2022.





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The project has achieved long-term results – now the country has accumulated knowledge, a national standard for the provision of services to children with ASD, and trained service providers throughout the country. This will enable the state to establish autism services and quality monitoring mechanisms in all the municipalities of Georgia. This is the human resource that a country must have in order to provide children with ASD with quality services.

Tamila Barkalaia,
Deputy Minister of Health of Georgia

The draft professional development standard and continuing education requirements for specialists, who provide ABA-based services has been developed. Members of the Georgian Association of Behaviour Analysts (GABA) are working towards the establishment of all necessary procedures for national certification and credentialing of ABA specialists. The draft legislative proposal was prepared for submission to the Parliament of Georgia. The ultimate goal is to **make the ABA recognized** as a profession by the Georgian state.

The ASD service development vision for adolescents and adults with ASD has been developed together with the Czech experts of the National Institute of Autism of the Czech Republic.



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