



COALITION FOR EQUALITY

THE STATE OF RIGHT OF EQUALITY IN GEORGIA



2024

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The research was prepared by the “Coalition for Equality”, with the support of the Civil Society Foundation. The information within the Research and its content only represents the views of the Coalition and does not reflect views or an official policy of the Civil Society Foundation.

The “Coalition for Equality” is non-formal unity, which was formed in 2014 during the adoption of the Law “on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination”, and it aims to strengthen the mandate of anti-discrimination mechanisms and promote effective efforts in combating discrimination.

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Introduction

In 2024, the state of human rights protection in Georgia significantly deteriorated, accompanied by deepening of existing challenges in the area of equality and worsening of the rights of various social groups.

The positive changes and achieved progress over the years at both legislative and institutional levels have become questionable by a sharp shift in the State policy. On the one hand, the exclusion of equality issues from the State policy and, on the other hand, the shift in the course of Euro-Atlantic integration, further aggravated the existing situation.

The steps taken by the Government in 2024 were undermining the idea of equality. With the adoption of discriminatory legislation, the repression of non-governmental and civil society organizations, the persecution of dissenting opinions, and the restriction of freedom of expression, the challenges faced by various social groups in daily life disappeared from the agenda.

With the adoption of the Law of Georgia “on Transparency of Foreign Influence”¹, the functioning of non-governmental organizations in Georgia came under threat, particularly those that have played a significant role in improving the human rights condition in the country for years. The initiation of the Law was accompanied by campaigns aimed at discrediting non-governmental organizations, including the use of pro-governmental media outlets. Taking into consideration the fact that in Georgia most services for vulnerable groups are being provided by non-governmental organizations, the implementation of the Law will have a particularly severe impact on the state of right of equality.

Later, with the Law of Georgia “on the Protection of Family Values and Minors”² and the package of related legislative amendments, political homophobia has been institutionalised and social inequality – deepened. In addition, fundamental rights of the LGBTQI+ community have been restricted, including access to healthcare, employment, education, freedom of information, assembly, and expression. The restrictions imposed in the field of education, particularly the removal of issues related to sexual orientation and gender identity from the educational process, pose a threat to the importance of education for various professional groups, such as doctors, lawyers, and others.

In public discourse, narratives that contribute to the exclusion and stigmatization of different social groups are increasingly prevailing, further damaging the principles of equality, diversity, and tolerance. The hate speech and discriminatory rhetoric, often used by public and political figures, has deepened the hostile environment, particularly for LGBTQI+ individuals, ethnic and religious minorities, and people with disabilities.

The situation is further exacerbated by the failing of the coordination mechanisms between the Government and civil society organizations, which is a result of the State’s repressive policy. Although there has always been criticism of the challenges faced by the State in collaborating with civil society and substantively engaging various groups in the decision-making process, the dissolution of existing dialogue and cooperation mechanisms has shaken trust and undermined the idea of collective effort

¹ *The Law of Georgia “on Transparency of Foreign Influence”*, 2024, available at: <https://matsne.gov.ge/ka/document/view/6171895?publication=0>

² *The Law of Georgia “on the Protection of Family Values and Minors”*, 2024, available at: <https://matsne.gov.ge/ka/document/view/6283110?publication=0>

against systemic discrimination. This, in turn, has halted all significant processes aimed at achieving equality.

This report provides an overview of the state of right of equality in Georgia in 2024, focusing on legislative, institutional, and social challenges. The purpose of the report is to assess the current situation regarding equality in the country and to present effective recommendations for joint efforts to improve the human rights situation and achieve equality.

Legislative and Political Framework

The right to equality is a fundamental principle of the Constitution of Georgia. According to Article 11 of the Constitution of Georgia, all persons are equal before the law and the discrimination is prohibited.³ Although all the grounds for the prohibition of discrimination are not explicitly prescribed by Article 11, the Constitutional Court of Georgia issued significant judgments in 2008⁴ and 2014⁵, clarifying that the list of grounds for prohibiting discrimination in the Constitution is not exhaustive. The Court emphasized that the list should be interpreted dynamically and inclusively, to cover other characteristics and identities, *inter alia*, sexual orientation and gender identity.

In 2014, the Parliament of Georgia adopted the Law “on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination”.⁶ The adoption of this Law was part of Georgia’s fulfilment of the international obligations and efforts towards the integration with the European Union. Particularly, the Association Agreement with the European Union required Georgia to adopt anti-discrimination legislation. Pursuant to the Law, the Public Defender of Georgia was designated as the equality body, and the main procedures for addressing the courts concerning discrimination cases were established.

Following the adoption of the anti-discrimination legislation, several important legislative reforms were implemented. These included the definition of sexual harassment and the establishment of mechanisms for addressing it; the refusal of reasonable adjustments was defined as a form of discrimination; a mechanism for enforcing the recommendations of the Public Defender of Georgia through court procedures was created; references to the needs of the LGBTQI+ community appeared in strategic human rights documents, etc. With regards to a practical level, to ensure effective criminal justice for hate crimes, a special department was established within the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Georgia, prosecutors were specialized, a memorandum of understanding was signed between the agencies involved in the justice process for the collection and publication of statistics, etc.

Unfortunately, during the recent years, with the radical shift in the State policy, not only these processes have been halted, but the State itself has become the main perpetrator of discrimination. With the adoption of discriminatory legislation and the implementation of policies that are devoid of equality in practice, the achieved results have been lost. The public have lost trust in existing

³ *The Constitution of Georgia, 1995, available at:*

<https://matsne.gov.ge/ka/document/view/30346?publication=36>

⁴ *The Constitutional Court of Georgia, Citizen of Georgia Shota Beridze and Others v. the Parliament of Georgia, 2008, available at:* <https://constcourt.ge/en/judicial-acts?legal=304>

⁵ *The Constitutional Court of Georgia, Citizens of Georgia – Levan Asatiani, Irakli Vatcharadze, Levan Berianidze, Beka Buchashvili and Gocha Gabodze v. the Ministry of Labour, Health and Social Affairs of Georgia, 2014, available at:* <https://www.matsne.gov.ge/ka/document/view/2243812?publication=0>

⁶ *The Law of Georgia “on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination”, 2014, available at:* <https://matsne.gov.ge/ka/document/view/2339687?publication=3>

mechanisms, while the activities of the mechanisms themselves have become more disconnected and distant from the people. Consultative and working processes, which were used to systematically address a range of problematic issues through cooperation, have been abolished.

In the beginning, gender issues disappeared from the policy documents of the State. The National Human Rights Protection Strategy⁷, adopted in 2023, does not mention LGBTQI+ issues at all. The matters regarding the state of the LGBTQI+ community have not been reflected in the Human Rights Action Plan 2024 – 2026 either.⁸ In the 2024 EU Enlargement Report on Georgia, the recommendations are outlined for the State Strategy to reflect relevant amendments, so that it is extended to the human rights situation of all groups, including the LGBTQI+ people.⁹ This is particularly important given that the LGBTQI+ community is the most vulnerable group in terms of the exercise of the right to equality. However, these were the first steps toward more repressive approaches, and the State not merely removed these issues from policy documents, but it went as far as prohibiting the exercise of fundamental rights at the legislative level.

In 2024, the Law “on Transparency of Foreign Influence”¹⁰, an analogue of the Russian Law, was adopted, which requires the registration of non-governmental organizations in a special registry and allows the State to access, *inter alia*, the special categories of personal data¹¹. In addition, the Law poses the risks of interference with the freedom of religion, as its provisions apply to religious organizations with the status of a non-entrepreneurial, non-commercial legal entity, as well as to organizations engaged in charitable and social activities associated with them.¹² The Law was adopted despite the public protest and calls from international organizations. The discussion of the Law was accompanied with a disinformation and discrediting campaign against the non-governmental organizations, with the involvement of politicians and pro-governmental media outlets. This created significant risks, especially for organizations working in the regions. The discrediting campaign included making insulting inscriptions and putting up posters by the group of people orchestrated by the Government on the offices of non-governmental organizations, as well as on the homes of their staff and human rights defenders. No person involved in this process has been identified, and, as of now, they have not faced legal responsibility. Along with these practices, several organizations working on LGBTQI+ topics had to change their addresses.

It is noteworthy that the adoption of the Law was taking place amidst the peaceful protest, however, the Government resorted to violent methods against it. There were multiple cases of physical violence and verbal abuse from the side of the representatives of law enforcement authorities and third parties. Furthermore, the groundless dispersal of the protests, the use of special means in violation of

⁷ *The National Human Rights Protection Strategy of Georgia for 2022-2030*, 2023, available at: <https://matsne.gov.ge/ka/document/view/5757268?publication=0>

⁸ *Human Rights Action Plan 2024 – 2026*, 2023, available at: <https://www.matsne.gov.ge/ka/document/view/6053557?publication=0>

⁹ *The 2024 EU Enlargement Report on Georgia*, 2024, available at: https://neighbourhood-enlargement.ec.europa.eu/document/download/7b6ed47c-ecde-41a2-99ea-41683dc2d1bd_en?filename=Georgia%20Report%202024.pdf

¹⁰ *The Law of Georgia “on Transparency of Foreign Influence”*, 2024, available at: <https://matsne.gov.ge/ka/document/view/6171895?publication=0>

¹¹ *ibid*, Article 4(4).

¹² *Special Statement of Public Defender’s Councils of Religions and Ethnic Minorities*, 2023, available at: <https://www.ombudsman.ge/eng/akhali-ambebi/sakhalkho-damtsveltan-arsebuli-religiata-da-etnikur-umtsiresobata-sabchoebis-sagangebo-gantskhadeba>

the procedures, and the ill-treatment of peaceful demonstrators constitute a non-exhaustive list of these violent actions.¹³

On 21 May 2024, the Venice Commission published its Opinion on the Law, negatively assessing its alignment with international human rights standards. The Venice Commission states that there is no need to adopt such regulations and strictly recommended to refrain from adopting the Law. According to the Opinion of the Venice Commission, the Law creates a chilling effect on the legitimate operation of the non-governmental organizations, particularly those organizations and media outlets, which are critical towards the Government.¹⁴ It is particularly alarming that the Law establishes the involuntary registration of organizations in a specially created registry, and large fines are imposed for non-compliance with the requirement of the Law. As of now, the state has not yet used repressive measures in the form of involuntary registration or fines.

Along with the disappearance of the LGBTQI+ issues from the State policy documents, in 2024 the discussion on the institutionalization of political homophobia was renewed, and the Parliament of Georgia began hearing the so-called Law of Georgia “on the Protection of Family Values and Minors”¹⁵, which was adopted and came into force on 2 December 2024. The Law fundamentally contradicts the Constitution of Georgia and international standards; also, it is in complete contradiction with the 2014 Law “on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination”. The Law imposes severe restrictions on freedom of expression and assembly, the dissemination of information, civil marriage, legal recognition of gender, and healthcare. Additionally, administrative and criminal liability has been defined for discriminatory prohibitions.

The adoption of the similar legislation¹⁶ was negatively assessed by the Venice Commission¹⁷, which emphasized that the draft law contains provisions that contradict international human rights obligations. Specifically, the Venice Commission explicitly states that it is important for laws aimed at protecting family values not to be used as a pretext for restricting the rights of marginalized groups, including LGBTQI+ individuals. Unfortunately, this was interpreted in the opposite way by the Georgian Government, which, under the guise of children’s rights, legalized the restriction of fundamental human rights.

The adoption of the Law was negatively assessed by various international and local organizations; the statement of the Coalition for Equality¹⁸ indicates that one of the most vulnerable and stigmatized groups in Georgia is the LGBTQI+ community, and the Law, based on false and hate-filled narratives, exacerbates hate-motivated violence and contributes to the escalation of hatred against already stigmatized individuals. This is confirmed by the practice of community organizations working on

¹³ *Georgian Young Lawyers’ Association, “Georgia: Human Rights amidst the Russian Law”, 2024, available at: <https://shorturl.at/355EK>*

¹⁴ *The Venice Commission, Urgent Opinion on the Law on Transparency of Foreign Influence, 2024, available at: [https://www.venice.coe.int/webforms/documents/default.aspx?pdffile=CDL-PI\(2024\)013-e](https://www.venice.coe.int/webforms/documents/default.aspx?pdffile=CDL-PI(2024)013-e)*

¹⁵ *The Law of Georgia “on the Protection of Family Values and Minors”, 2024, available at: <https://matsne.gov.ge/ka/document/view/6283110?publication=0>*

¹⁶ *The Opinion of the Venice Commission concerns the legislative package of the Constitutional Amendments, which are substantively similar to the adopted Law.*

¹⁷ *The Venice Commission, Opinion on the Draft Constitutional Law on Protecting Family Values and Minors, 2024, available at: [https://www.venice.coe.int/webforms/documents/?pdf=CDL-AD\(2024\)021-e](https://www.venice.coe.int/webforms/documents/?pdf=CDL-AD(2024)021-e)*

¹⁸ *Statement, available at: <http://equalitycoalition.ge/article/151>*

LGBTQI+ issues, as they report an increase in incidents of violence, discrimination, and harassment against members of the community since the adoption of the Law.¹⁹

Alongside the discussion of the Law, the pre-election period was marked by a political environment filled with hate and discriminatory rhetoric. The ruling party attempted to mobilize voter support by spreading disinformation and engaging in other actions that undermined the state of equality, thereby encouraging discrimination and strengthening the existing stigma in society. Xenophobic, homophobic, and discrimination-promoting narratives were used daily, both against political opponents and to damage Georgia's Euro-Atlantic integration process. Of particular concern is the attempt of political party "Georgian Dream" to declare Orthodoxy as the state religion. Even the Patriarchate of Georgia distanced themselves from this.²⁰

The political processes were practically brought to a deadlock due to the use of administrative resources by the Government, intimidation of society, and various mechanisms of election fraud during the 2024 Parliamentary Elections. The results of the elections are not accepted by the opposition political parties and broad segment of society, whose views are supported by the non-recognition of the legitimacy of the elections by international partners. This was confirmed by the Report of the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights, indicating that pressure on voters and massive violations of vote secrecy, in combination with other practices, deprived voters of the ability to vote without fear on election day. Furthermore, after the elections, complaints were not properly addressed, and legal safeguards were limited. The Report also negatively assessed the detention of peaceful demonstrators and the attempts of Government to forcibly suppress protests.²¹

The statement of the Government to suspend the EU Accession Negotiations until 2028 sparked mass protests. The new elections have been the main demand of the protest. The Government resorted to the unprecedented scale of violence against the peaceful participants of the protests. On the one hand, there were instances of the dispersal of protests without legal grounds, using violent methods and, on the other hand, acts of violence, torture, and ill-treatment were carried out by law enforcement representatives against individuals.²² Multiple individuals were detained without grounds, most of whom reported incidents of violence, which should be considered discriminatory offences based on differing opinions. There were instances of verbal sexual harassment and threats of rape directed at those detained. The Public Defender of Georgia started examining the cases of sexual harassment of a woman, who has reported the verbal sexual harassment from the representatives of the police.²³

In addition, the leaders of political party "Georgian Dream" were actively trying to discredit peaceful protests, especially in the context of Christianity, and applied the support of the Patriarchate of

¹⁹ *The Meeting of Focus Group with Community Organizations, 20 December 2024.*

²⁰ *Tolerance and Diversity Institute (TDI), Pre-election environment in terms of freedom of religion or belief, equality and secularism, 2024, available at: <https://shorturl.at/37BNM>*

²¹ *OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights, Georgia Parliamentary Elections, 26 October 2024: Final Report, available at: <https://www.osce.org/odihr/elections/georgia/584029>*

²² *Georgian Young Lawyers' Association, Preliminary Findings on the Investigation of Torture and Ill-Treatment Against Protesters in Georgia, 2024, available: <https://gyla.ge/en/post/tsameba-da-araadamianurimopkroba-saerto-gancxadeba>*

²³ *The Public Defender of Georgia, 2024, information available at: <https://www.ombudsman.ge/eng/190308042016siakhleebi/sakhalkho-damtsvelis-aparatis-gantskhadeba-politsielebis-mkhridan-natia-dzidziguris-savaraudo-seksualur-shevitsroebastan-dakavshirebit>*

Georgia. A clear example of this is the statements made about the protesters, claiming that they disregard faith, as well as the information spread by clergy against the protests.²⁴

On 13 December 2024, the adoption of amendments in expedited manner, in the third reading, to the Law “on Public Service” by Georgia’s illegitimate Parliament shall be assessed as the persecution of differing opinions and the pressure on public servants. The Law weakens the safeguards for public servants, simplifies the procedure for reorganization and prescribes that heads of the first subdivisions and their deputies to be employed on the basis of an agreement under public law, which leads to their discriminatory dismissal, arbitrary appointments, and overall politicization of the process.²⁵ Prior to the discussion of the amendments, politicians made public statements indicating that appropriate measures would be taken against public servants participating in protests. This included the Mayor of Tbilisi, where several employees were either dismissed from their positions or had their employment contracts not renewed in December.

Overall, in 2024, the State’s policy on equality shifted in a negative direction, with the State itself becoming a primary actor and promoter of discrimination. Through the adoption of discriminatory legislation, damaging legitimate processes, and attempting to suppress freedom of expression with violent methods, even the small progress made through years of collaborative work has been lost. There is no platform for cooperation with non-governmental and international organizations, and under the current illegitimate Government, restoring such cooperation in the near future seems like an impossible task.

Equality Body and Institutional Mechanisms

Following the adoption of the Law of Georgia “on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination”, the establishment of a coordinating mechanism on equality issues became a subject of discussion among stakeholders. This mechanism was intended to ensure interagency coordination, the engagement of non-governmental and international organizations, and the development of relevant programmes and interventions with the participation of stakeholders. Unfortunately, such a mechanism has not been established to date.

The effective coordination and communication on the topic of equality remain a challenge within various levels of the Government. Moreover, equality issues are not mainstreamed in the activities of other mechanisms at the Parliament of Georgia or at the level of the Government. In contrast, Government agencies are directly involved in the process of implementing policies that undermine equality. Additionally, within the context of the ongoing political crisis, the activities of existing mechanisms, such as the Gender Equality Council of the Parliament of Georgia and the Government’s Commission on Gender Equality and Domestic Violence, have been suspended. The longstanding issues regarding the formal nature and inefficiency of these mechanisms have been further exacerbated by their direct involvement in the creation of discriminatory legislation and practices. Furthermore, representatives of these coordinating mechanisms themselves have been involved in promoting discrimination and attempting to incite hatred.

²⁴ *Tolerance and Diversity Institute (TDI), Post-Election Environment: Freedom of Religion or Belief, Equality, and Secularity, 2024, available at: <https://shorturl.at/DpxAK>*

²⁵ *Georgian Young Lawyers’ Association, The Assessments of the Amendments to the Law “on Public Service”, 2024, available at: <https://gyla.ge/en/post/sajaro-samsaxuris-shehexebkanoni-cvlilebebi>*

Despite the fact that there is a Consultative Council within the Office of the State Minister for Reconciliation and Civic Equality, it only addresses the issues of ethnic minorities and its activities are not inclusive for organizations or representatives of ethnic groups with differing opinions. There is also criticism regarding its formal character.²⁶ The only independent mechanism for religious issues remains the Public Defender's Council of Religions, however, in 2024, the Head of the Tolerance Center also became the target of the Governmental disinformation.²⁷ The State Agency for Religious Issues has been in the focus of both international and local reports, among other things, due to its bias, controlling behaviour towards the representatives of various religions, and attempts to promote the State policy interests.²⁸

The Government responded to all opportunities for cooperation with NGOs and international organizations with repression and discreditation, which damaged the communication and coordination process. It can be said that in 2024, none of the working groups or consultative mechanisms had any activities. The ongoing political crisis negatively affected the activities of the bodies combating discrimination.

The Public Defender of Georgia, as the equality body, plays a significant role in preventing discrimination and raising public awareness, examining incidents and preparing relevant recommendations or proposals.²⁹ Unfortunately, the activities of the Public Defender show the influence of the State policy, which is reflected in the absence of LGBTQI+ issues in its public positioning. For the first time in the last decade, the Public Defender did not issue a statement on 17 May 2024, the International Day Against Homophobia, Transphobia, and Biphobia. Taking into consideration the vulnerability of the LGBTQI+ community in the context of political homophobia and related practices, the need for such a statement was even more pressing. This is confirmed by individual staff members of the Public Defender's Office on social media, who discussed the importance of this day and overviewed the existing challenges in the country. As of now, the Public Defender of Georgia has not published a position or assessment regarding the anti-LGBTQI+ Law of Georgia on so-called "the Protection of Family Values and Minors", even though the implementation of the Law directly relates to the activities of the Public Defender as an equality body. On this issue, only statements from the staff members of the Public Defender's office have been disseminated.

The decision made by the Public Defender of Georgia regarding the discrimination case in the village of Artsivani, in the Tsalka Municipality, should be critically assessed. On 2 February 2024, in a school where the majority of teachers and students are Muslim, classrooms and the teachers' room were blessed by clergy from the Georgian Orthodox Church.³⁰ This was followed by a written warning to the school from the Ministry of Education, Science and Youth of Georgia, which, according to the Muslim teachers, was insufficient to change the discriminatory environment in the school, and they continued to face harassment. Despite these facts having been confirmed, the Public Defender of Georgia

²⁶ *Social Justice Center, Critical Assessment of the Mandate and Activities of the State Minister for Reconciliation and Civic Equality, 2023, available at: <https://shorturl.at/YEgkz>*

²⁷ *Information available at: <https://www.radiotavisupleba.ge/a/32786813.html>*

²⁸ *Social Justice Center, Critical Assessment of the Activities of the State Agency for Religious Issues, 2020, available at: <https://socialjustice.org.ge/ka/products/religiis-sakitkhta-sakhelmtsifo-saagentos-sakmianobis-kritikuli-analizi-1>*

²⁹ *Law of Georgia "on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination", Article 6, available at: <https://matsne.gov.ge/ka/document/view/2339687?publication=3>*

³⁰ *Information available at: <https://batumelebi.netgazeti.ge/news/514108/#gsc.tab=0>*

decided to terminate the examination, as it was considered that the consequences of discrimination had been eliminated and the person responsible for the actions was no longer serving as the principal. Considering that the impact of religious indoctrination or proselytism is strong on the school environment and typically has a structural nature, the removal of just one individual from the school environment does not establish the necessary conditions for eliminating the effects of discrimination. Furthermore, the effectiveness of the actions taken by the Ministry of Education, Science and Youth of Georgia is also questionable.

The above-mentioned cases indicate that the anti-discrimination mandate of the Public Defender of Georgia has been weakened by the influence of current policies, and it no longer encompasses the issues of all social groups. Public positioning and the use of all available tools against discriminatory legislation or practices are essential components of the Public Defender's mandate, and it is likely that the challenges in this area will also affect its internal policies and activities.

A significant challenge has been the alleged restriction of employees' freedom of expression within the LEPL Labour Inspection Office during the 2024 ongoing protests. According to the disseminated information, the media outlets received an anonymous letter, with the author having claimed that the Head of the Labour Inspection Office had been prohibiting employees from participating in the protests; this was shortly followed by the statement of the Labour Inspection Office denying such facts.³¹ Nevertheless, it is noteworthy that individuals employed in other public institutions have also indicated cases of similar harassment and restrictions, which was responded by the Statement of the Public Defender of Georgia.³²

Incitement to Discrimination, Hate Speech and Hate-Motivated Crimes

The practice of inciting discrimination and spreading hate speech in Georgia remains alarmingly high. This is further exacerbated by the promotion of such narratives by the Government officials, politicians, and media outlets. The most significant challenges continue to be political hatred and homophobia, where decision-makers and opinion leaders fuel societal hatred and contribute to discrimination.

With the adoption of the Law of Georgia "on Transparency of Foreign Influence" ("the Russian Law"), discriminatory statements by politicians against representatives of the non-governmental organizations increased, escalating into acts of violence. The call of the Member of the Parliament, Dimitri Samkharadze³³, was followed by offensive inscriptions and drawing on the offices of non-governmental organizations. This incident clearly indicates that violent groups were acting on the orders of the ruling party and are under their command. Furthermore, similar inscriptions appeared near the homes of employees of non-governmental organizations, aiming to instil a sense of insecurity and fear. This issue was particularly problematic for organizations working on LGBTQI+ issues, some of which had to change their office addresses.

³¹ Information available at: <https://tabula.ge/ge/news/727193-shromis-inspektsia-tqulia-rom-tanamshromlebi>

³² The Statement of the Public Defender of Georgia, available at: <https://www.ombudsman.ge/eng/190308042016siakhleebi/sakhalkho-damtsveli-sajaro-mokheleta-shromiti-uflebebis-sakitkhs-ekhmianeba>

³³ Information available at: <https://tabula.ge/ge/news/718849-kartulma-otsnebam-aghiara-rom-partiebtan>

Political homophobia particularly intensified during the discussion of the anti-LGBTQI+ Law, which began with the initiation of constitutional amendments and their subsequent review in various regions. Politicians did not avoid inciting homophobic hatred, often using disinformation examples with the aim to mislead the public. Government-controlled media outlets were actively employed in this process, proactively disseminating false information. It is noteworthy that in 2024, the Public Defender of Georgia issued several statements concerning the incitement to discrimination. However, none of these statements addressed the homophobic rhetoric used by politicians or the incitement to hatred based on sexual orientation and gender identity. The majority of these statements focused on discriminatory remarks related to mental health and persons with disabilities.³⁴

Despite steps taken toward ensuring effective justice and maintaining statistical data on hate-motivated crimes, the legislative amendments introduced this year have had a direct impact on the rise of such incidents. Organizations working on LGBTQI+ issues report that following the adoption of the Law, cases of harassment, bullying, and violence in the streets have increased. Additionally, members of the community lack trust in law enforcement agencies, leading to many such incidents remaining unreported. A particularly concerning issue is that the prevention of these cases is not driven by state efforts but rather by self-censorship among community members, who limit their freedom of movement, assembly, and presence in public spaces. The loss of trust is directly linked to discriminatory statements made by the Government officials, contributing to a sense of vulnerability.

The long-standing hate and political homophobia have had a severe negative impact on the physical safety, health, and right to life of LGBTQI+ community members. The institutionalization of oppressive practices and political homophobia must also be considered in the context of the murder of transgender woman Kesaria Abramidze.³⁵ Additionally, several attacks against transgender women have been recorded, including one incident involving a politician.³⁶ Furthermore, in December, a violent group attacked a bar while using homophobic statements.

During the pre-election period, the ruling party and affiliated media outlets frequently used xenophobic rhetoric and attempted to discredit political opponents based on their ethnic background. One example of this was the campaign against Mamuka Khazaradze, the leader of “Strong Georgia”, in which pro-government media outlets were actively involved.³⁷ Xenophobic sentiments persisted even after the elections, with social media frequently featuring accusations that ethnic Azerbaijanis and Armenians had allegedly manipulated or taken over the election process. Additionally, some people expressed comments regarding the populations of Kvemo Kartli and Samtskhe-Javakheti, claiming that “Armenians and Azerbaijanis decided the future of our country.”³⁸

Taking into account that the politicians and media outlets are the primary actors in the use of hate speech and the incitement to discrimination, it is crucial to establish and ensure the effective functioning of appropriate self-regulation mechanisms. Among these measures, the creation of an Ethics Commission in the Georgian Parliament and the implementation of an Ethics Code following the new elections would enable responses to instances of hate speech used by Members of the

³⁴ *The Public Statements of the Public Defender of Georgia*, available at: <https://www.ombudsman.ge/geo/190308042016siakhleebi>

³⁵ *The Coalition for Equality, Public Statement, 2024*, available at: <http://equalitycoalition.ge/article/149>

³⁶ Information available at: <https://shorturl.at/K9VfC>

³⁷ *Tolerance and Diversity Institute (TDI), Pre-Election Environment: Freedom of Religion or Belief, Equality and Secularism, 2024, p.19*, available at: https://tdi.ge/sites/default/files/preelection_monitoring_forb_equality_and_secularism_25_sept-25_oct_2024.pdf

³⁸ *Tolerance and Diversity Institute (TDI), Post-Election Environment: Freedom of Religion or Belief, Equality, and Secularity, 2024, p. 15*. available at: <https://shorturl.at/aJbE1>

Parliament. As for media outlets, it is particularly important that they refrain from adopting Government propaganda practices and avoid spreading misleading information to the public. Additionally, the Public Defender of Georgia, as an equality body, shall ensure an effective response to all such cases, *inter alia*, issuing public statements, making general recommendations, and informing society about the problem.

Discrimination in Social and Labour Relations

Amid ongoing political developments, workplace discrimination has emerged as one of the significant challenges. Public statements made by high-ranking officials, indicating that measures would be taken against employees participating in protests³⁹, have, in practice, resulted in the violation of labour rights based on differing political opinions. In addition, the Parliament adopted the amendments to the Law “on Public Service” in its third reading, increasing the likelihood of discriminatory treatment.

On 2 December 2024, reports were disseminated that the Mayor of Tbilisi, Kakha Kaladze, demanded the resignation of the Director of the “Tbilisi Municipal Multifunctional Library Union”, Ninia Macharashvili, due to her criticism of the “Georgian Dream”. The information was spread by Ninia Macharashvili herself, indicating that she was summoned to the Tbilisi City Hall and was demanded to submit a resignation letter, which she connects to her publicly expressed opinions.⁴⁰ On 27 December, another employee, Nino Kiknadze stated that the Tbilisi City Hall had not prolonged her agreement due to her openly stated political views.⁴¹

On 26 December 2024, the Executive Secretary of the Tbilisi City Hall’s Council on Disability Issues, Giga Sopromadze, was dismissed from his position. The Order of the Dismissal states that the role is no longer necessary; however, the real reason appears to be Giga Sopromadze’s public activism. He had openly expressed his views on ongoing political developments, participated in protests. He was also one of the signatories of a public statement by the City Hall employees regarding the suspension of Georgia’s European integration process.⁴²

Several social workers, psychologists, and mediators have been informed by the LEPL National Agency for Crime Prevention, Enforcement of Non-custodial Sentences and Probation that their contracts would not be prolonged. Given the shortage of social workers in the country, suspicions arise that the real reason for the non-renewal of contracts is the public activism of these individuals.⁴³

Amid the ongoing political crisis and the State’s disregard for social issues, social inequality in Georgia continues to further deepen. In 2024, labour rights of miners remained in a severe state. In September, participants of protests near the Korokhnali mine in the village of Shukruti, Chiatura, were dismissed from their jobs. According to them, their dismissal was directly linked to their participation in demonstrations.⁴⁴ A similar tendency has been observed in other mines, as well. According to the

³⁹ Social Justice Center, “Social Justice Center responds to the announcement of Kakha Kaladze with regards to the political cleansing of the Municipality City Hall“, 2024, available at:

<https://socialjustice.org.ge/ka/products/sotsialuri-samartlianobis-tsentri-kakha-kaladzis-mier-munitsipilitetis-meriashi-politikuri-tsmendis-daanonsebas-ekhmaureba>

⁴⁰ Information available at: <https://shorturl.at/NofVm>

⁴¹ Information available at: <https://www.radiotavisupleba.ge/a/33254801.html>

⁴² Information available at: <https://www.radiotavisupleba.ge/a/33253895.html>

⁴³ Information available at: <https://shorturl.at/CzdaT>

⁴⁴ Information available at: <https://www.radiotavisupleba.ge/a/33109634.html>

online media platform, Mautskebeli, some of the miners in Tkibuli were informed that they had been dismissed from their jobs. The posts are being disseminated in the social media, where the miners link their dismissal to their political views.⁴⁵

Groups Protected from Discrimination

Equality of Women

Systemic challenges in the field of gender equality in Georgia continue to have a negative impact on the rights of specific groups of women. The policy of the State remains weak in addressing obstacles to political participation, economic and social issues, the widespread cases of violence against women, and the prevention and effective response to harmful practices.

Women from vulnerable groups, including women with disabilities, LBT+ women, and ethnic minorities, face daily discrimination and oppression. Along with general challenges, discriminatory practices manifested in various forms, and the lack of sufficient state interventions mostly impacts their rights.

Women's participation in decision-making processes remains a challenge in Georgia. The introduction of a gender quota had improved women's participation in politics in recent years. However, in 2024, the Georgian Parliament unconditionally abolished the gender quota. According to the Venice Commission, there was not an urgent need to abolish gender quotas and the process was conducted without the involvement of the civil society organizations, as well as broader consultations.⁴⁶

As per the Opinion of the OSCE Office of Democratic Institutions and Human Rights,⁴⁷ the lawmakers had not adequately assessed the potential negative impact of abolishing gender quotas and did not identify potential, alternative measures or mechanisms to ensure the continued growth of women's representation in political processes.

Indeed, the use of temporary special measures falls within the margin of appreciation of the State; however, both their introduction and abolition should be justified and accompanied by meaningful engagement of civil society. Unfortunately, this process was conducted without evidence-based reasoning or any genuine effort to involve society in consultations; this once again highlights a shift in State policy and the deliberate removal of gender equality issues from the political agenda.

In addition to this, violence, sexism and discriminatory rhetoric against women in the politics remain a problem. In 2024, a number of sexist remarks were made, including from the politicians at the legislative body.⁴⁸ Parallel to this, the Parliament of Georgia still does not have an operational Ethics Commission, which would serve as a crucial mechanism for studying and responding to such incidents.

⁴⁵ Information available at: <https://www.mautskebeli.ge/shroma?videoId=HZeQpMA500s>

⁴⁶ The Venice Commission, Georgia – Opinion on Amendments to the Election Code which Abolish Gender Quotas, 2024, available at: [https://www.venice.coe.int/webforms/documents/?pdf=CDL-AD\(2024\)023-e](https://www.venice.coe.int/webforms/documents/?pdf=CDL-AD(2024)023-e)

⁴⁷ The OSCE Office of Democratic Institutions and Human Rights, Opinion on Two Organic Laws of Georgia Amending the Election Code and the Law on Political Unions of Citizens in relation to Gender Quotas, available at: <https://www.osce.org/odihr/571702>

⁴⁸ Public Defender's Statement on Obscene and Insulting Remarks Expressed towards Female MPs, available at: <https://www.ombudsman.ge/eng/190308042016siakhleebi/sakhalkho-damtsvelis-gantskhadeba-kali-deputatebis-misamartit-gamotkmul-ukhams-da-sheuratskhmqofel-replikebtan-dakavshirebit>

Sexual harassment remains a significant challenge, both in workplaces and public spaces. In recent years, some state institutions have developed and adopted sexual harassment prevention policies, which is a positive step. However, similar measures shall also be implemented in the private sector. In 2024, the Public Defender of Georgia established sexual harassment in several cases of, including incidents involving a lecturer harassing a student, workplace harassment, and other.⁴⁹

The State of Children's Rights

Numerous challenges persist in ensuring children's equality in Georgia. Severe socio-economic conditions, difficulties in inclusive education, violence, and harmful practices continue to threaten children's well-being daily. Particularly concerning is the situation of children living in poverty, as existing state programmes fail to adequately address families' social needs or enhance their social functioning. The high rate of crimes committed against minors remains a challenge. According to the General Prosecutor's Office of Georgia, from 1 January to 28 November 2024, minors were granted a victim status in 1038 criminal cases.⁵⁰

Various challenges remain in the field of inclusive education. One of the key issues is public awareness and attitudes toward children with disabilities in school environments. In 2024, cases were still reported where parents of other students protested the presence of children with disabilities in schools. Furthermore, systemic issues in inclusive education persist. A lack of adequate resources, staff shortages, and insufficient individualized approaches in the learning process continue to negatively impact the quality of education and the rate of effective inclusion of children with disabilities in school activities.

The digital safety of children remains a serious problem in Georgia. Cases of online violence and harassment are increasing daily, negatively impacting psychological well-being of children. The lack of coordination between the State and society, as well as insufficient preventive mechanisms, further complicates efforts to address the issue. Particularly alarming are cases involving sexual harassment, as many children lack adequate information about available protection mechanisms.

In 2024, the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child concluded the consideration of the case related to the violations of children's rights in Ninotsminda Orphanage. According to the Views adopted by the Committee, the State Party is obliged to ensure effective reparation to the child victims, including by: a) providing adequate, comprehensive and timely compensation and rehabilitation for the violations suffered; b) issuing a public apology to the victims; c) reassessing the situation of those still under State care in line with the Convention; d) conducting an effective, independent and prompt investigation of all criminal cases and prosecuting those found responsible. Reparation measures should be determined in coordination with the victims to ensure that their views and opinions are taken into consideration.⁵¹ As of now, it is not known what steps the State has taken to fulfil the recommendations of the Committee.

⁴⁹ *The Decisions of the Public Defender of Georgia, available at:*

<https://www.ombudsman.ge/geo/191127024229seksualuri-shevitsroeba>

⁵⁰ *The Correspondence of the General Prosecutor's Office of Georgia, 6 December 2024, N13/79443.*

⁵¹ *The Views adopted by the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child, №CRC/C/96/D/144/2021, 24 May 2024, available at: <https://matsne.gov.ge/ka/document/view/6264060?publication=0>*

The State of the Rights of the Persons with Disabilities

In Georgia, the process of granting the status of a person with disabilities is primarily based on a medical model, which in the evaluation process often excludes the consideration of social and environmental factors. This approach limits the comprehensive assessment of the needs of persons with disabilities and restricts their opportunities for full integration into society. It is essential to establish a biopsychosocial model, which offers a more inclusive and multidimensional approach; however, it has not been comprehensively adopted in Georgia yet.

Accessibility to public spaces and transportation remains a serious challenge for persons with disabilities. In cities, infrastructure such as intersections, pavements, and public transport is often not adapted. The majority of public and private buildings remain inaccessible for persons with disabilities.

The participation of persons with disabilities in decision-making processes remains minimal. They are rarely involved in policy development or decisions that directly affect them. This is further compounded by a lack of information, which again became evident during the 2024 Parliamentary Elections. It is usual that they are not aware of why and how they should participate in the electoral process, hindering the full realization of their rights.

Persons with disabilities constitute one of the most vulnerable social and economic groups. Many live in poverty with limited access to basic resources. Social assistance programmes are often insufficient to address their needs. This is further problematic as employment remains one of the most significant challenges. Workplace discrimination and the lack of an inclusive environment severely restrict their opportunities for employment and economic empowerment.

During the ongoing political developments, multiple violations of the rights of persons with disabilities have been reported. The young participant of the protest with a hearing impairment was subjected to violence, and his mobile phone was taken away, which is essential for communication.⁵² Furthermore, activist woman with disability Tatia Datashvili faced threats and harassment due to her activism⁵³, a person with a disability, Giga Sopromadze, was dismissed from the Tbilisi City Hall due to his civic activism.⁵⁴

The State of Rights of the LGBTQI+ Persons

The LGBTQI+ community remains one of the most vulnerable groups in Georgia. In addition to shortcomings in State policies and the absence of targeted measures, social attitudes and prejudices continue to pose significant challenges, while the Government does not allocate resources for change. In recent years, openly homophobic policies were fuelled with the enactment of the Law “on the Protection of Family Values and Minors” on 2 December 2024, which imposes discriminatory and disproportionate restrictions on LGBTQI+ individuals.

With the exclusion of LGBTQI+ issues from State policy documents and the introduction of discriminatory legislation, the challenges faced by the community have escalated into a practice of state-orchestrated violence. The impact of the anti-LGBTQI+ Law extends across multiple fields and

⁵² Information available at: <https://tabula.ge/ge/news/726892-rogor-acama-ivanishvilis-rezhimma-demonstrantebi>

⁵³ Information available at: <https://publika.ge/phr-aqtivizmis-gamo-tatia-datashvils-sheurackhmyofeli-damuqaris-shetvobinebebi-gaugzavnes/>

⁵⁴ Information available at: <https://www.radiotavisupleba.ge/a/33253895.html>

aspects of life for community members. On the one hand, the Law contradicts the principle of equality enshrined in the Constitution of Georgia, and, on the other hand, it violates international standards and obligations that the country has committed to uphold. Beyond the risks of censorship, healthcare, employment, and education, the Law imposes restrictions on fundamental rights, threatening freedom of expression and assembly while exposing the entire community to discrimination.

The Law introduces a prohibition for the **marriage and civil union** between representatives of the same sex. It shall be outlined that following the 2018 Constitutional Amendments, marriage in Georgia was explicitly defined as a “union between a man and a woman”, however, the anti-LGBTQI+ Law additionally prohibits all forms of civil union. Furthermore, such regulation affects the rights of people married abroad who wish to live in Georgia and have their union legally recognized. For example, in order to receive a residence permit, same-sex spouses cannot apply under the family reunification provision.

According to the Law, **the gender recognition is also prohibited**. Despite the fact that the European Court of Human Rights, in its recent judgment, requested Georgia to establish legislative and administrative mechanisms for the legal recognition of gender of transgender persons and to ensure the protection of their right to privacy, the Law has completely prohibited change of sex marker in the documents issued by the State.⁵⁵ This threatens the State’s compliance with these obligations, as well as eliminates any possibility for transgender individuals to have their gender legally marked in civil documents. The change is also blanket in nature, excluding the possibility of recognition of gender regardless surgical or social affirmation. Prior to the adoption of the Law, the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe expressed grave concerns and called on Georgia not to adopt this Law. At the same time, the Committee requested the adoption of quick and transparent procedures for changing gender markers in line with the Convention, and outlined that before the adoption of new regulations, the national authorities shall directly apply the relevant Convention standards.⁵⁶

The Law prohibits to perform **surgery or use any other type of medical manipulation** and prescribes the criminal responsibility for medical personnel for violating this. This provision will have a disproportionate impact on individuals’ health and right to life, as certain medical procedures are necessary for medical purposes. Moreover, individuals who require hormone therapy or other trans-specific medical support are now denied access to any services in a blanket nature. Even before the adoption of this Law, adequate healthcare accessibility was a major challenge for LGBTQI+ individuals, primarily due to financial barriers, the lack of national standards, and discrimination within the healthcare system. Years of effort in this direction have now been entirely lost due to these legislative amendments.

According to the Law, severe restrictions have been applied in the field of **preschool and early learning, general, vocational and higher education institutions**. The Law prohibits the inclusion of sexual orientation and gender identity-related topics in educational curriculum. Additionally, it criminalizes the dissemination of such information within educational institutions or on their premises. This restriction practically halts any discussion on sexual orientation and gender identity, negatively impacting not only the LGBTQI+ community but also professionals who require this knowledge for their work. Furthermore, the restrictions within the educational field pose significant

⁵⁵ *The Law of Georgia “on the Protection of Family Values and Minors“*, Article 7, 2024, available at: <https://matsne.gov.ge/ka/document/view/6283110?publication=0>

⁵⁶ Information available at: [https://hudoc.exec.coe.int/#{%22exceidentifier%22:\[%22004-62861%22\]}](https://hudoc.exec.coe.int/#{%22exceidentifier%22:[%22004-62861%22]})

challenges for LGBTQI+ individuals, as they already face exclusion and bullying within the educational system.

As prescribed by the Law, any part of an obligation or instruction imposed within the framework of **labour relations**, including any agreement concluded between an employer and employee, shall be void, if it aims to disregard or promote biological sex. Although the specific scope of the provision on “disregarding biological sex” remains vague, it poses significant challenges for LGBTQI+ individuals in the workplace. This could lead to discriminatory practices, restricting their ability to be employed freely. Additionally, it creates further barriers to equality mechanisms, including the Public Defender of Georgia and the LEPL Labor Inspection Office, making it more difficult to identify and address workplace discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity.

According to the Law, “broadcasters shall be forbidden to **disseminate information**, aimed at popularising an intimate relationship between representatives of the same biological sex or that expresses signs of sexual orientation”. This ban specifically applies to „scenes depicting intimate relationships,” and broadcasters are held liable if they “fail to prove that they did not control the dissemination of such content.” In addition, “it shall be forbidden to provide such information or provide access to creative work with this content **through direct communication with a minor**”. This provision also prohibits any form of access to such information for minors. Additionally, it “bans the **dissemination of advertisements** that promote intimate relationships between individuals of the same biological sex by expressing signs of sexual orientation”.

These restrictions create significant challenges to freedom of expression, particularly in media and creative works that depict diverse sexual orientations and gender identities. By limiting the dissemination of such information, the law restricts individuals’ ability to express themselves and effectively silences discussions about LGBTQI+ identities in society. Moreover, the vague language used in the Law raises concerns about potential censorship and arbitrary enforcement.

As prescribed by the Law, **public assemblies and demonstrations** are prohibited from referencing a person’s biological sex or sexual orientation “for the purposes of promoting intimate relationships”. This restriction imposes significant limitations on the organization of peaceful assemblies in public spaces. This restriction not only violates the freedom of expression and assembly, which are protected under international human rights standards, but also prevents LGBTQI+ individuals from advocating and disseminating information regarding the challenges they are facing.

The Law of Georgia “on the Protection of Family Values and Minors” contradicts almost every aspect of the State’s existing anti-discrimination legislation, which prohibits discrimination based on sexual orientation, gender identity and expression. LGBTQI+ community organizations reckon that the Law uses scientifically unsubstantiated terminology and relies on homophobic and transphobic assumptions, leading to legal uncertainty – it is impossible to determine in advance which actions or expressions might be considered violations of the Law; instead, it allows for the retroactive criminalization of any conduct, which contradicts the fundamental principles of the legal state and creates a high risk of its discriminatory implementation against any individuals.⁵⁷

⁵⁷ *Women’s Initiatives Supporting Group, 2024, available at: <https://www.wisg.org/en/news/detail/445>*

The State of Rights of Religious Minorities

The state of religious minorities in Georgia has been gradually deteriorating in recent years. Tendencies of isolation are becoming more intensified both at the social and institutional levels. The controlling role of the State Agency for Religious Issues has a particularly negative impact on the freedom of religion in Georgia. This issue is further exacerbated by the threat of discriminatory legislation, which contributes to restrictions on the freedom of religion.

In this regard, the focus shall be emphasized on the new Defence Code⁵⁸, which is discriminatory towards religious communities. The code no longer grants clergy members the right to defer military service, a provision that was equal to an exemption from military obligations in practice. Additionally, the alternative non-military labour service is now only available to the clergy of the Orthodox Church, placing all other religious communities in unequal position. The authority to collect special categories of personal data is particularly alarming, namely, according to Article 97 of the Code, information about a person's religious affiliation will be entered into the mobilization reserve's electronic data system to record the composition of the mobilization reserve.⁵⁹

In 2024, the information related to several legislative initiatives were disseminated that raise concerns about restrictions on both freedom of religion and freedom of expression. In the beginning of 2024, the Chairperson of the Legal Issues Committee of the Parliament of Georgia, announced legislative amendments on the criminalization of desecration of religious buildings and objects.⁶⁰ While, during the pre-election period, the "Georgian Dream" party proposed to declare Orthodox Christianity the religion of the State.

Additionally, it is noteworthy that the Government allocated 35 million GEL to educational institutions operated by the Georgian Orthodox Church. This decision contradicts the principle of equality and reinforces existing discriminatory practices. Furthermore, the decision made several months prior to the elections was assessed as an intent to politically leverage the Church.⁶¹ In 2024, the European Court of Human Rights communicated the case regarding the alleged discriminatory funding of religious organizations from the Marneuli budget. The case concerns the funding of only one religious organization, placing other religious unities in a discriminatory position.⁶²

The rendering of justice in the case of alleged mass illegal surveillance by the State Security Service remains a significant challenge. The ongoing investigation has been still ineffective, and as of today, no individuals have been identified for the dissemination of files containing details of private life of

⁵⁸ *The Defence Code, 2023*, available at: <https://matsne.gov.ge/ka/document/view/5916285?publication=3>

⁵⁹ *Tolerance and Diversity Institute, Freedom of Religion and Belief in Georgia, 2024*, p. 8, available at: https://tdi.ge/sites/default/files/forb_in_georgia_2023_tdi.pdf

⁶⁰ *The Public Statement of the Social Justice Center, 2024*, available at: <https://socialjustice.org.ge/en/products/sotsialuri-samartlianobis-tsentri-religiuri-nagebobebisa-da-nivtebis-sheuratskhqofis-kriminalizebis-initsiativas-ekhmianeba>

⁶¹ *The Public Statement of the Social Justice Center, 2024*, available at: <https://socialjustice.org.ge/en/products/archevnebamde-ramdenime-tvit-adre-sapatriarkos-dafinansebis-radikaluri-zrda-eklesiis-politikuri-gamoqenebis-mizans-atarebs>

⁶² *The Public Statement of the Social Justice Center, 2024*, available at: <https://socialjustice.org.ge/en/products/strasburgis-sasamartlom-marneulis-biujetidan-religiuri-organizatsiebis-savaraudo-diskriminatsiuli-dafinansebis-sakmeze-arsebity-gankhilya-daitsqo>

religious figures, their associates, and individuals working on religious issues. Regarding this, the Social Justice Center addressed the European Court of Human Rights in 2024.⁶³

With regards to equality of religious minorities, determination of public holidays remains a concern. A clear example is the case of MP Tariel Nakaidze, who was marked as absent at the Parliament without excuse on a religious holiday. This is closely linked to the fact that in Georgia, public holidays are exclusively tied to celebrations of Orthodox Christianity and do not take into account religious diversity.⁶⁴

The practice of conducting religious rituals in schools remains a pressing issue. Although schools should be secular spaces, religious rituals are frequently integrated into the educational process, undermining religious neutrality and fostering negative attitudes within the school environment. In 2024, at the public school in village Artsivani, Tsalka Municipality, where the majority of teacher and students are Muslim, the clergy blessed the building of the school at the initiative of the acting principal.⁶⁵ This fact, which caused significant harm to Muslim students and teachers, was ineffectively addressed by the Ministry of Education, Science and Youth of Georgia, while the Public Defender of Georgia closed the case without establishing discrimination.⁶⁶

The ongoing persecution of Muslims in Adigeni Municipality remains alarming. In 2023-2024, multiple incidents of attacks, harassment, and violence against the Muslim community were recorded. On 8 March 2024, the abbot of Zarzma Monastery, along with dozens of local residents, again attacked the Muslims gathered for Friday prayer in Adigeni. The latter were issued threats of health injury and physical retaliation.⁶⁷ Furthermore, on 5 April 2024, Orthodox Christian clergy together with a group that they mobilized once again approached a private residence organized by the Muslim community for praying and demanded with threats and insult that religious leaders leave the building.⁶⁸ No legal step has been taken against any of the perpetrators in these cases, indicating that the State lacks the political will to protect the freedom of religion and equality of the Muslim community.

The issue concerning religious places of worship remains problematic. Many religious buildings and spaces that have been declared cultural heritage monuments are unprotected and do not receive adequate attention. For example, mosques, which hold significant cultural importance, do not receive proper protection or restoration efforts. The issue of the Batumi Mosque also remains unresolved and problematic. Even though the legal dispute has been ongoing in the courts for years, to this date, a final decision has not been reached, leaving the Muslim community with no designated space of worship, making them practice their religion outdoors. Furthermore, the judgment of the Supreme

⁶³ *The Public Statement of the Social Justice Center, 2024, available at:*

<https://socialjustice.org.ge/ka/products/sotsialuri-samartlianobis-tsentrma-masobrivi-mosmenebis-sakmeze-strasburgs-mimarta>

⁶⁴ *The Statement of Tolerance and Diversity Institute, available at:* <https://tdi.ge/en/news/1097-discrimination-case-against-mp-tariel-nakaidze>

⁶⁵ Information available at: <https://batumelebi.netgazeti.ge/news/514108/#gsc.tab=0>

⁶⁶ *The detailed information is provided on page 9.*

⁶⁷ *Tolerance and Diversity Institute, Freedom of Religion and Belief in Georgia, 2024, p. 22, available at:* https://tdi.ge/sites/default/files/forb_in_georgia_2023_tdi.pdf

⁶⁸ *The Public Statement of the Social Justice Center, 2024, available at:* <https://socialjustice.org.ge/en/products/sotsialuri-samartlianobis-tsentri-moutsodebs-khelisuflebas-daitsvas-sotsialuri-mshvidoba-da-religiuri-tanastoroba-adigenshi>

Court of Georgia delivered on 25 May 2023, was critically assessed both for its problematic reasoning and for further prolonging the legal proceedings.⁶⁹

The State of Rights of Ethnic Minorities

The civic integration of ethnic minorities and the reflection of their needs in the political agenda remain significant challenges. A major issue is the low participation of ethnic minorities in State policy processes, including at the local self-government level. Due to the lack of knowledge of the state language, social isolation, and exclusion practices, ethnic minorities do not have information about social and healthcare services. They do not benefit from state programmes, including those related to persons with disabilities, child welfare, and social assistance.

In 2024, the Advisory Committee on the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities published its Fourth Opinion on Georgia.⁷⁰ The opinion outlines that access to Georgian citizenship remains an issue for persons belonging to some national minorities, due in most cases to strict language requirements and other practical barriers. In addition, the Committee emphasizes the necessity of implementing civil integration measures. Specifically, the state must make every effort to raise public awareness about ethnic minorities and ensure that they are perceived as an integral and valuable part of the Georgian society.

In the 2024 Parliamentary Elections, the representation of ethnic minorities in the candidate lists of political parties remained critically low. According to the Social Justice Center⁷¹, among the five major electoral entities, only the Coalition for Change included an ethnic minority representative within the first 20 positions on its list. In Georgian Dream's first 60 candidates, only two ethnic minority representatives were included, while United National Movement's top 40 candidates featured only one. Other major opposition coalitions and parties did not allocate "electable" positions to ethnic minority representatives.

Conclusion

The ongoing political crisis in the country presents significant human rights challenges and has a disproportionate impact on the state of right of equality. In this context, the years of progress achieved through the efforts of state institutions, civil society, and international organizations in promoting equality are being severely undermined.

The State policy with intentional steps against equality is aimed at inciting discrimination and violence within society. With the removal of equality issues from the State policy documents, 2024 was marked with the adoption of discriminatory legislation. The targeting of civil society organizations and the introduction of laws against LGBTQI+ individuals have placed specific groups in a continuous state of discrimination.

Through confronting differing opinions with violence, an unprecedented practice of harassment, persecution, and ill-treatment has emerged against individuals exercising their freedom of expression.

⁶⁹ *The Public Statement of Tolerance and Diversity Institute*, available at: <https://tdi.ge/en/news/1071-case-batumi-new-mosque>

⁷⁰ *The Fourth Opinion on Georgia of the Advisory Committee on the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities*, available at: <https://www.coe.int/en/web/minorities/georgia>

⁷¹ *Social Justice Center*, 2024, available at: <https://shorturl.at/Xn5d5>

Beyond the disproportionate use of force against protest participants, the practices of harassment and dismissal of public sector employees due to their political views remain a significant issue.

The repression of freedom of expression serves as a tool for strengthening authoritarianism, where diversity, tolerance, and respect for differences are entirely lost. The declared political course of the State is increasingly distancing the country from Euro-Atlantic processes, while the fulfilment of internationally recognized obligations remains in question.

In this context, the situation is particularly troubling for groups whose equality had already been facing significant challenges even before the adoption of discriminatory legislation. Today, one of the most vulnerable groups in Georgia is the LGBTQI+ community, against whom the State uses disproportionate repressive measures. This includes their exclusion from public spaces, the neglect of their needs and challenges, and the restriction of their fundamental rights.

The persons with disabilities, children and women continue to face systemic inequality. Amid the political crisis, no reforms are being implemented, and no improvements are observed in any area of life. The commenced processes are also at risk, as numerous international support programmes have been suspended due to the Georgian Government's widespread human rights violations. In many cases, these programmes were the only source of essential services for vulnerable groups.

More active engagement and involvement are required from the Public Defender of Georgia, as it holds a crucial role, as an equality body, in addressing the State's discriminatory policies with evidence-based assessments. This is especially important in the context of the discreditation and harassment of civil society organizations, when many issues related to discrimination might be left without attention.

Recommendations

- To bring the State policy back to the legal framework, it is crucial to call new elections and ensure their conduct without the misuse of administrative resources, intimidation, or violence while fully guaranteeing the vote secrecy, with the involvement of the international and local observers;
- Immediately repeal the Law “on Transparency of Foreign Influence” due to its incompatibility with international human rights standards and negative impact on civil society and democratic processes in Georgia;
- Immediately repeal the Law “on the Protection of Family Values and Minors” and related legislative amendments, due to their discriminatory nature and incompatibility with national standards. Ensure the alignment of all newly adopted laws with fundamental principles of equality in the future;
- Study the impact of discriminatory Law on the rights of the LGBTQI+ persons, and implement appropriate interventions to restore their rights, and reduce and eliminate the harm caused by the Law, *inter alia*, in the direction of strengthening and supporting community organizations.



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