



A just world for all women and girls

**Submission to the Group of Experts on Action against Violence  
against Women and Domestic Violence (GREVIO) in the process of  
the first thematic evaluation round for Georgia**

**by Equality Now**

**6 February 2026**

## Table of Contents

<b>About the authors</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Introduction</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Part I: Changes in comprehensive and co-ordinated policies, funding and data collection in the area of violence against women and domestic violence</b>	<b>4</b>
Article 7: Comprehensive and co-ordinated policies	4
Article 8: Funding	8
<b>Part II: Information on the implementation of selected provisions in priority areas in the field of prevention, protection and prosecution</b>	<b>11</b>
Article 12: General obligations	11
Article 25: Support to victims of sexual violence	14
Articles 49 and 50: General obligations and immediate response, prevention and protection	18
Need to Align Sexual Violence Laws with International Human Rights Standards	19
Burdensome Evidence Requirements Preventing Proof of Sexual Violence	20
Removing Gender Stereotyping and Discriminatory Investigation Procedures	21

# About the authors

This submission is prepared by Equality Now in consultation with Georgia-based NGOs and projects. Equality Now is a worldwide human rights organisation dedicated to securing the legal and systemic change needed to end discrimination against all women and girls, everywhere in the world. Since its inception in 1992, it has played a role in reforming 130 discriminatory laws globally, positively impacting the lives of hundreds of millions of women and girls, their communities and nations, both now and for generations to come.

Working with partners at national, regional and global levels, Equality Now draws on deep legal expertise and a diverse range of social, political and cultural perspectives to continue to lead the way in steering, shaping and driving the change needed to achieve enduring gender equality, to the benefit of all.

For more information about Equality Now, please visit [www.equalitynow.org](http://www.equalitynow.org).

# Introduction

Equality Now provides this submission to support the assessment by Council of Europe's Group of Experts on Action against Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (GREVIO) of Georgia's compliance with selected obligations under the Istanbul Convention in the period following GREVIO's 2022 baseline evaluation. It focuses on the rapid deterioration of efforts to prevent and combat gender-based violence against women, including the dismantling or reframing of gender equality structures, the weakening of co-ordination and accountability mechanisms and the absence of transparent continuity in core policies and action planning. It further highlights a funding and resourcing crisis for specialist women's support services and civil society organisations, exacerbated by restrictive "foreign influence/agent" legislative measures and tighter controls on foreign grants. This environment has resulted in organisations working in prevention and protection to experience stigma, operational barriers and a chilling effect, which severely impacts the effectiveness of their work.

The submission also examines the practical consequences of this broader gender backlash for prevention, protection and access to justice. It summarises evidence that harmful gender attitudes and rape myths remain widespread, while State actions and public narratives risk reinforcing

discrimination and normalising violence, undermining systemic, State-led primary prevention required by Article 12. It identifies major gaps in specialist support for survivors of sexual violence under Article 25, including the lack of dedicated rape crisis and referral centres, fragmented pathways and retraumatising forensic practices. Finally, it addresses shortcomings in the investigation and prosecution of sexual violence, noting that earlier capacity-building efforts have been undermined and that survivors continue to face barriers linked to the absence of consent-based legal definitions, overly rigid evidentiary expectations, stereotyping, intrusive procedures, and inconsistent safeguards against secondary victimisation. Each section concludes with key recommendations to restore and strengthen a Convention-compliant framework, rebuild co-ordination and accountability, and ensure effective prevention, protection and survivor-centred justice.

## **Part I: Changes in comprehensive and co-ordinated policies, funding and data collection in the area of violence against women and domestic violence**

### Article 7: Comprehensive and co-ordinated policies

**Despite earlier progress in developing national strategies, action plans and a multi-level gender equality architecture, by 2026 Georgia's gender equality architecture has been dismantled or reframed, with key bodies abolished and core policies left without transparency or continuity. Parliament has removed "gender" and "gender identity" from all Georgian laws (including anti-discrimination and VAW frameworks) negating the gendered dimensions of violence and discrimination against women, abolished gender quotas and put in place other anti-human rights provisions, including the adoption of "family values" restrictions targeting LGBTQI+ people. These regressive changes undermine comprehensive, co-ordinated VAW policies and protection, reduce accountability for implementation, and increase barriers to prevention and access to protection and justice.<sup>1</sup>**

---

<sup>1</sup> In November 2024, after the parliamentary elections, the government of Georgia has made a highly controversial decision to pause its accession to the European Union till 2028. This is after, when due to societal pressure on GD, Georgia has received an EU candidacy status. The decision to cancel the EU accession process resulted in mass protests continuing till today. Civil.ge (2024). GD aborts EU accession. Available at: <https://civil.ge/archives/638801> Also see, Civil.ge (2024). Available at: <https://civil.ge/archives/639311>

1. The government of Georgia, with the close cooperation of civil society organisations, made efforts to adopt national human rights strategies for the periods of 2014-2020, 2022-2030 and human rights action plans for 2014-2015, 2016-2017, 2018-2020 and 2024-2026, adopted the Gender Equality Concept<sup>2</sup> (2022) and Concept on Women’s Economic Empowerment<sup>3</sup> (2023), and established a national gender equality architecture at governmental, parliamentary and municipal levels, including the Inter-Agency Commission on Gender Equality, Violence against Women and Domestic Violence at the governmental level and the permanent Gender Equality Council (GEC) of the Parliament together with Municipal gender equality councils. However, as of January 2026, most of these mechanisms have been abolished, reframed or ceased functioning.
2. In 2022, the Parliament of Georgia adopted the Gender Equality Concept<sup>4</sup> and defined the State priorities in achieving gender equality in Georgia. Priority 3 of the concept specifically refers to the elimination of gender-based violence, domestic violence and violence against women, and set the government’s responsibility to monitor the implementation of those priority areas.<sup>5</sup> Also, in October 2022, the Government of Georgia adopted the Action Plan on measures to be implemented in 2022-2024 to combat violence against women and domestic violence and protect victims.<sup>6</sup> However, the implementation report has not been published and the new action plan for 2025-2026 has yet to be developed. In 2024, Georgia adopted government resolution No.14 regarding national referral procedures for the identification, protection, assistance and rehabilitation of victims of domestic and gender-based violence.<sup>7</sup> This represents a normative step toward operationalising coordinated service pathways across institutions on VAW. However, the referral procedures are rather general and do not set specific obligations for the State institutions in responding to cases of violence.<sup>8</sup> Furthermore, recent developments in the legal and policy areas have been conducted without the participation of independent civil society organisations, experts, and women’s rights organisations.<sup>9</sup>

---

<sup>2</sup> The Concept is adopted by the Resolution of the Parliament of Georgia. Parliament of Georgia (2022). State’s Gender Equality Concept. Available at: <https://info.parliament.ge/file/1/BillReviewContent/317076>

<sup>3</sup> The Concept is adopted by the Resolution of the Parliament of Georgia. Parliament of Georgia (2023). State’s concept of women’s economic empowerment. Available at: <https://faolex.fao.org/docs/pdf/geo216922.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> The Parliament of Georgia (2022). Gender Equality Concept of Georgia. Available at: <https://matsne.gov.ge/ka/document/view/5664358?publication=0>

<sup>5</sup> The Parliament of Georgia (2022). Gender Equality Concept of Georgia. Art. 1. Available at: <https://matsne.gov.ge/ka/document/view/5664358?publication=0>

<sup>6</sup> Parliament of Georgia (2023). State’s concept of women’s economic empowerment. Available at: <https://faolex.fao.org/docs/pdf/geo216922.pdf>

<sup>7</sup> Resolution No. 14 of the Government of Georgia dated January 22, 2024 “On approval of national referral procedures for identification, protection, assistance and rehabilitation of victims of violence against women and/or domestic violence”

<sup>8</sup> GYLA (2024). State Response to Gender-Based Violence in Georgia. Legislation and Practice Analysis. Available at: [https://admin.gyla.ge/uploads\\_script/publications/pdf/gender\\_eng.pdf.crdownload](https://admin.gyla.ge/uploads_script/publications/pdf/gender_eng.pdf.crdownload)

<sup>9</sup> *ibid*

3. In April 2024, the Georgian Parliament abolished mandatory gender quotas from the election Code of Georgia. These changes were made without the active participation of the political parties, women politicians, civil society organisations or other stakeholders. The OSCE/ODIHR highlighted that “the abolition of electoral gender quotas does not appear consistent with the constitutional obligation to adopt special measures to ensure the substantial equality of men and women and to eliminate inequality.”<sup>10</sup>
4. In September 2024, the Parliament of Georgia adopted the Law on Protection of Family Values and Minors.<sup>11</sup> According to the newly adopted law, the “popularisation” of same sex relationships as well as “gender identity” is restricted in every educational setting, including schools and universities.<sup>12</sup> The law fundamentally undermined the principles of equality for LGBTQI+ individuals and severely restricted trans people's access to healthcare services.<sup>13</sup> The Council of Europe’s (CoE) Venice Commission, in its opinion from 26 June 2024, called on the Georgian government to “reconsider this legislative proposal entirely and not proceed with its adoption”.<sup>14</sup>
5. In March 2025, the Permanent Parliamentary Council for Gender Equality was abolished<sup>15</sup> and, already in April, the parliament of Georgia passed a legislative amendment package to remove the words “gender” and “gender equality” from Georgian legislation altogether and to replace them with “woman and man” and “equality between woman and man”, respectively. As a result, 16 laws were amended, including the Law of Georgia on Gender Equality, the Law on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination, the Law on the Elimination and Prevention of Violence against Women and Girls and Domestic Violence, the Criminal Code, the Local Self-Government Code, the Law on Normative Acts, the Law on Broadcasting, the Law on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, the Law on Entrepreneurs, the Law on Public Service, the Law on the Labour Inspection Service, the Rules of Procedure of the Parliament and several others. The explanatory note accompanying the

---

<sup>10</sup> OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (Warsaw, 11 June 2024), Opinion on Two Organic Laws Of Georgia Amending The Election Code And The Law On Political Unions Of Citizens In Relation To Gender Quotas,, Opinion-Nr.: ELE-GEND-GEO/501/2024, available at:

[https://www.osce.org/sites/default/files/f/documents/7/4/571702\\_0.pdf](https://www.osce.org/sites/default/files/f/documents/7/4/571702_0.pdf)

<sup>11</sup> Parliament of Georgia (2024). The Law of Georgia on Protection of Family Values and Minors. <https://matsne.gov.ge/en/document/view/6283110?publication=0>

<sup>12</sup> OC Media (2024). What’s in Georgia’s new anti-queer bill? Available at:

<https://oc-media.org/explainer-whats-in-georgias-new-anti-queer-bill/>

<sup>13</sup> Venice Commission (2024). Georgia – Opinion on the draft constitutional law on protecting family values and minors, Adopted by the Venice Commission at its 139th Plenary Session, Venice, 21-22. Available at: [https://www.venice.coe.int/webforms/documents/default.aspx?pdffile=CDL-AD\(2024\)021-e](https://www.venice.coe.int/webforms/documents/default.aspx?pdffile=CDL-AD(2024)021-e)

<sup>14</sup> ibid

<sup>15</sup> Parliament of Georgia. “Parliament Endorsing Amendments to Law on Gender Equality in I Reading.” Parliament of Georgia, 4 Mar. 2025:

<https://www.parliament.ge/media/news/parlamentma-genderuli-tanastsorobis-shesakheb-kanonshi-tsvlilebebi-pirveli-mosmenit-m-iigho?ref=oc-media.org>

amendments argued that the notion of “gender” had been artificially introduced into Georgian legislation under the pressure of international actors, whose aim was framed not as the protection of human rights but as interference in the country’s internal affairs.<sup>16</sup> As a result of the abovementioned changes, the Law on Gender Equality was renamed as “the law on equality between woman and man.”<sup>17</sup> “The Inter-Agency Commission on Gender Equality, Violence against Women and Domestic Violence Issues” was renamed as the “Inter-Agency Commission on Equality Between Women and Men, Violence against Women and Domestic Violence Issues.” The Permanent Parliamentary Council for Gender Equality was abolished. These changes have also affected the local gender equality councils, replacing them with new entities focused on women’s and children’s issues, thereby weakening the institutional framework for gender equality at the central, national and local levels.

6. Based on the changes concerning the term “gender”, the regressive reform of the legislation also covered Georgia’s Criminal Code and the Law on the Elimination and Prevention of Violence against Women and Girls and Domestic Violence, reframing “gender” as the aggravating circumstance of the crime with the ground of “hatred towards equality between women and men”, while “gender identity” has been removed as a protective ground altogether. As for the “Law on Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination”, “The Law on Gender Equality” and other laws with antidiscrimination provisions, “gender” as a protected ground from discrimination has been removed entirely, as well as “gender identity”, leaving only “sex” and “sexual orientation” among others, as protected grounds from discrimination. These particular changes represent a noticeable regression and a significant step back from gender equality.
7. These developments reflect not only the deprioritisation of women’s rights and gender equality in government policy but also a broader shift toward anti-equality politics. Removing gender-related terminology and principles of gender equality from laws is likely to weaken protections for women’s rights across multiple areas, including effective criminal justice responses to violence against women and sexual violence, which are rooted in gender inequality and harmful stereotypes. Such measures also undermine recognition of the ways women are perceived and treated simply because they are women in a patriarchal society.

---

<sup>16</sup> The explanatory note accompanying the amendment package of the law of Georgia on Gender Equality, available in Georgian: <https://info.parliament.ge/file/1/BillReviewContent/381099>

<sup>17</sup> The Law on Equality Between Woman and Man. Available at: <https://matsne.gov.ge/ka/document/view/91624?publication=11>

## 8. Key recommendations:

- a. **Restore and strengthen a gender-based framework in law and policy by reinstating “gender” (as understood in the Convention) in relevant legislation and ensuring that all measures to prevent and combat violence against women and domestic violence are implemented with a gendered perspective and without discrimination.** This is critical to ensuring that policies and responses address the structural drivers of violence against women (including unequal power relations and harmful stereotypes).
- b. **Re-establish and reinforce effective co-ordination mechanisms for comprehensive and co-ordinated policies on violence against women and domestic violence, including at national, parliamentary and municipal levels,** by empowering a co-ordinating body to operate with a clear title and mandate, adequate resources and authority and by ensuring meaningful and systematic participation of independent civil society, in particular women’s rights organisations, in policy design, implementation and monitoring.
- c. **Adopt and implement without delay a renewed, State-wide policy package to coordinate action among Government agencies for the acceleration and fulfilment of institutional responsibilities and binding operational duties (including through detailed referral pathways, measurable indicators and regular public reporting on implementation).** Additionally, secure adequate, sustainable financial and human resources for specialist support services for all women and girls, including those facing intersecting forms of discrimination.

## Article 8: Funding

**Since the adoption of GREVIO’s baseline evaluation report on Georgia in 2022, funding and resourcing for specialist victim support services in Georgia, particularly women’s rights organisations, have significantly deteriorated. From 2023 onwards, the Government introduced a series of restrictive measures, together with amendments tightening control over foreign grants. These frameworks impose stigmatising labelling, onerous registration and reporting requirements, and severe sanctions (including heavy fines and potential imprisonment for non-compliance), creating a chilling effect and enabling arbitrary enforcement. By 2026, the combined financial and political pressure has had a very real**

**impact: many women’s rights organisations have either closed or are at risk of closure, or continue to operate under intensified attacks, stigma and acute resource constraints.**

9. Since 2023, the government of Georgia has adopted a set of repressive laws that violate the basic principles of human rights, specifically limiting and restricting the functioning of human rights organisations in the country. In February 2023, the parliament of Georgia initiated the law on Transparency of Foreign Funding, also known as the “Russian Law”. Due to civil protests, the Georgian Dream party withdrew the bill but reframed, reintroduced and adopted it a year later, in 2024.<sup>18</sup> This law aims to restrict foreign financial support from donor organisations to local civil society groups, including those addressing women's and girls' rights, violence against women, domestic violence, sexual and reproductive health and rights and other universal human rights.<sup>19</sup> The law applies to non-governmental and media organisations that receive more than 20% of their annual funding from foreign sources.<sup>20</sup> According to the law, such organisations must register as “organisations pursuing the interests of a foreign power” and submit relevant declarations. In the event of failure to comply with the obligation to register and submit declarations, the law provides for financial sanctions,<sup>21</sup> which is a heavy burden and would make it impossible for the organisations to function properly.<sup>22</sup>
10. In April 2025, the Parliament adopted the Foreign Agents Registration Act<sup>23</sup> (so called FARA), labeling individuals and organisations as “agents of a foreign power” and obligating them to register with the newly established Anti-Corruption Bureau.<sup>24</sup> In particular, according to the law, any person (including an individual) or organisation that, in accordance with the criteria specified by law, is a ‘foreign agent’ is obliged to register as an agent of a foreign principal.<sup>25</sup> The law

---

<sup>18</sup> Civil.ge (2024). <https://civil.ge/archives/585913>

<sup>19</sup> Parliament of Georgia (2024). The Law of Georgia on Foreign Influence, available at: <https://matsne.gov.ge/en/document/view/6171895?publication=0>

<sup>20</sup> Law of Georgia on Transparency of Foreign Influence, Article 2.1

<sup>21</sup> According to the Law of Georgia “On Transparency of Foreign Influence,” evasion of registration as an organization carrying the interests of a foreign power, or failure to submit a financial declaration within the legally prescribed time limit, shall result in a fine of **25,000 GEL (7,900 EURO)**.

<sup>22</sup> Law of Georgia on Transparency of Foreign Influence, Article 9.

<sup>23</sup> Parliament of Georgia (2025). Law of Georgia Foreign Agents Registration Act. Available at: <https://matsne.gov.ge/en/document/view/6461578?publication=0>

<sup>24</sup> OSCE/ODIHR (2025). Georgia’s foreign agents legislation raises concerns over negative impact on civil society, OSCE human rights office says. Available at: <https://www.osce.org/odihr/588667>

<sup>25</sup> Law of Georgia on Foreign Agents Registration Act, Article 1 (a-d)

establishes sanctions for those who refuse to register or fail to comply with its requirements. In particular, failure to comply with the obligation to register and/or refrain from submitting information is punishable by a fine of 10,000 GEL (3150 EUR) and/or up to five years of imprisonment. Meanwhile, neglecting the obligation to submit financial statements and/or violating the requirements for marking as a “foreign agent” is also punishable by a fine of up to 5,000 GEL (1575 EUR) or up to six months of imprisonment.<sup>26</sup>

11. During the same period, amendments were made to the Georgian Law on Grants,<sup>27</sup> which prohibited organisations from accepting foreign grants without the approval of the government. Accepting a prohibited grant will result in the grantee being fined double the amount of the grant in question.<sup>28</sup> On 29 January 2026 the parliament of Georgia initiated new changes to the Law on Grants, the Criminal Code and the Organic Law on “On Political Unions of Citizens” among others. Proposed changes aim to widen the definition of “grant” and define it as *“any funds transferred in cash or in kind by another state, a citizen of another state or a legal entity to a citizen of Georgia or a person with the right of residence in Georgia, as well as to a legal entity which are used or may be used for activities carried out or to be carried out with the belief or intention of exerting any influence on the Georgian government, state institutions or any part of society, which are aimed at the formation, implementation or change of the domestic or foreign policy of Georgia”*. Any “grant” (transaction of any kind) should be approved by the government of Georgia, failing which will be punishable by 6 years of imprisonment. Furthermore, according to the proposed changes in the Organic Law of Georgia “On Political Unions of Citizens” *“a person who has received income in full or in part on the basis of an employment contract with an organisation representing the interests of a foreign power is prohibited from being a member of a political party for 8 years from the calendar year in which he last received income from an organisation representing the interests of a foreign power”*.<sup>29</sup>

12. The regressive and restrictive legislation adopted in recent years is in complete contradiction to international human rights standards and constitutes a violation of the rights to freedom of association, freedom of expression and respect for private life. It is also incompatible with the

---

<sup>26</sup> Law of Georgia on Foreign Agents Registration Act, Article 8.1. Criminal Code of Georgia, Article 355<sup>2</sup>

<sup>27</sup> Parliament of Georgia (2025). Changes in Law of Georgia on Grants. Available at: <https://www.matsne.gov.ge/ka/document/view/6475816?publication=0>

<sup>28</sup> Law on Grants, Article 6<sup>4</sup>.1

<sup>29</sup> The Parliament of Georgia (2026) initiated changes in Law on Grants and other legislative acts. available only in Georgian:

[https://web-api.parliament.ge/storage/files/shares/media-33/january/29.01.2026/N252.3-XI%E1%83%9B%E1%83%9Egrantebis.pdf?fbclid=IwZnRzaAPoig5leHRuA2FibQIxMQBzcnRjBmFwcF9pZAo2Njl4NTY4Mzc5AAEe4ElnsuUO3tvIAYHHM\\_k01\\_k144RLLqceeag4mL1HLqBt4zzNncg5-e4MUdw\\_aem\\_R0fyZ0uIA-zSt7nwKFldAQ](https://web-api.parliament.ge/storage/files/shares/media-33/january/29.01.2026/N252.3-XI%E1%83%9B%E1%83%9Egrantebis.pdf?fbclid=IwZnRzaAPoig5leHRuA2FibQIxMQBzcnRjBmFwcF9pZAo2Njl4NTY4Mzc5AAEe4ElnsuUO3tvIAYHHM_k01_k144RLLqceeag4mL1HLqBt4zzNncg5-e4MUdw_aem_R0fyZ0uIA-zSt7nwKFldAQ)

principle of non-discrimination. The ambiguity of the legislation, as well as its possible arbitrary interpretations in practice given the political context in which they were adopted, may lead to the discrediting of civil society and the persecution of groups critical of the ruling power, which puts them at risk of legal sanctions and stigmatisation, being labeled as “agents”, silenced and ultimately, abolished.

13. As of 2026, these laws have already had a critical negative impact on the work of non-governmental organisations, including women's rights organisations. Due to financial and political pressure, some organisations have closed (including two foundations working on women's rights), some are on the verge of closing, and some, while at the moment continuing to operate, face severe attacks, a lack of financial and human resources, and stigma.

#### **14. Key recommendations:**

- a. **Ensure compliance with Arts. 8–9 by:**
  - i. **(i) removing and amending legal provisions that restrict or chill the funding and operation of human rights organisations, including specialist women’s NGOs (including the requirement of registration as a control mechanism and sanctions);**
  - ii. **(iii) institutionalising regular consultation and cooperation with specialist NGOs on funding, service continuity and risk mitigation.**

## **Part II: Information on the implementation of selected provisions in priority areas in the field of prevention, protection and prosecution**

### Article 12: General obligations

**15. Key summary of the section: existing data indicate that harmful gender attitudes (including rape myths) remain widespread in Georgia, while recent State actions and public narratives reinforce discrimination and risk normalising violence. Prevention obligations to change social/cultural patterns and counter stereotypes are not being met in a systemic, State-led way.**

16. Data from 2024 indicate that the perceptions and attitudes on violence against women and domestic violence in Georgia show a highly problematic picture, specifically among men, which

appears to normalise some forms of abuse and violent behaviours. Based on the UNDP/UNFPA report (2024), one fifth (22.2 per cent) of men asserted that women should tolerate violence to keep their family together and that, in some cases, women deserve to be beaten (19.8 per cent). Almost half of the men believe that violence between a husband and wife is a private matter and that others should not interfere. The latter view is shared by 37.4 per cent of women.<sup>30</sup>

17. Perceived social norms regarding violence against women are more permissive than individual attitudes. According to a UN Women study (2024), while 91 per cent of Georgia's population believes that there are no acceptable circumstances for hitting one's partner, only 78 per cent think that their community shares this view. Similarly, 74 per cent of individuals disagree that violence between a husband and wife is a private matter that others should not intervene in, but only 59 per cent believe that their community holds the same opinion. This gap between personal attitudes and perceived social norms is significant, as it can greatly influence the likelihood of reporting VAW.<sup>31</sup>
18. Rape myths are also prevalent in society. However, men are more likely than women to believe in them. Based on the 2024 study, 43.5% of men and 23.9% of women believe that a woman should not refuse to have intercourse with their husband. According to about 20% of men and 10% of women, when a woman is raped, it generally means that she did something to cause it.<sup>32</sup> Furthermore, 17.1% of men and 14.2% of women believe that if a woman has certain psychosocial needs, the incident cannot truly be considered a rape. Likewise, 35.1% of men agree that if a woman does not physically fight back, it cannot be considered rape, although this is an improvement on 2019 data where this view was shared by 50.4 per cent of men.<sup>33</sup>
19. Discriminatory gender beliefs and attitudes are deeply embedded in the societal fabric of Georgia, requiring large-scale targeted interventions to transform beliefs that disadvantage women. A significant number of prevention measures aimed at changing attitudes in relation to violence against women and ensure prevention were implemented by civil society organisations, women's rights defenders and experts through national and international cooperation in Georgia. Since 2023, the targeted hostility towards human rights organisations and women's rights defenders has made it impossible to conduct meaningful cooperation with State institutions to address harmful

---

<sup>30</sup>UNDP and UNFPA. 2024. Men, Women, and Gender Relations in Georgia: Public Perceptions and Attitudes. [https://georgia.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/pub-pdf/2025-04/ENG\\_Communication%20Report%20IMAGES\\_2024\\_0.pdf](https://georgia.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/pub-pdf/2025-04/ENG_Communication%20Report%20IMAGES_2024_0.pdf).

<sup>31</sup> UN Women Georgia. 2024. Gender Equality Attitudes Study in Georgia. <https://georgia.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2025/03/gender-equality-attitudes-study-in-georgia>.

<sup>32</sup> UNDP and UNFPA. 2024. Men, Women, and Gender Relations in Georgia: Public Perceptions and Attitudes. [https://georgia.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/pub-pdf/2025-04/ENG\\_Communication%20Report%20IMAGES\\_2024\\_0.pdf](https://georgia.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/pub-pdf/2025-04/ENG_Communication%20Report%20IMAGES_2024_0.pdf).

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

gender stereotypes and prejudices, as well as develop other measures to prevent and address violence against women.

20. The abolition of mandatory gender quotas in the Election Code by the parliament of Georgia in May 2024 are expected to hinder women's civil and political participation and contribute to the reinforcement of negative gendered roles and stereotypes. Mandatory gender quotas adopted in 2020 required parties to include women on their party lists for parliamentary and municipal elections to promote women's political participation.<sup>34</sup> Regressive changes in the election code were made with procedural deficiency, without credible evidence to justify the need for abolition and without the participation of interested parties. As indicated by OSCE/ODIHR, "the abolition of electoral gender quotas does not appear consistent with the constitutional obligation to adopt special measures to ensure the substantive equality of men and women and to eliminate inequality."<sup>35</sup>
21. In recent years, instead of taking measures to prevent and combat gender-based violence and discrimination, State and law enforcement agencies appear to have exacerbated inequality as a mechanism for oppression and contributed to its normalisation. This was particularly suggested in the management of the 2024 and 2025 pro-EU protests, where practice of ill-treatment and the unlawful use of excessive force by police and masked security forces against women, including women human rights defenders was documented, through deliberate and particularly misogynistic violence, both physical and psychological.<sup>36</sup> The analysis of the cases shows that during the arbitrary arrests and searches, as well as in police cars and at police stations, police officers and masked security forces were assaulting activists using sexist and coercive language. Observed gender-based violence during actions by police special forces demonstrates that law enforcement structures have actively been using misogyny as an instrument for punishment and intimidation.<sup>37</sup>

---

<sup>34</sup> Article 203 of the Electoral Code of Georgia providing for quotas was removed from the Code: <https://matsne.gov.ge/ka/document/view/6151142?publication=0#DOCUMENT:1>

<sup>35</sup> OSCE/ODIHR (2024). Opinion on Two Organic Laws of Georgia Amending the Election Code and the Law on Political Unions of Citizens in Relation to Gender Quotas, Warsaw, 11 June 2024, Opinion-Nr.: ELE-GEND-GEO/501/2024 [ELD/NS]. [https://www.osce.org/files/f/documents/7/4/571702\\_0.pdf](https://www.osce.org/files/f/documents/7/4/571702_0.pdf)

<sup>36</sup> GYLA, DRI (Democracy Research Institute), GDI (Georgian Democracy Initiative) et al. 2025. Human Rights Crisis in Georgia Following the 2024 Parliamentary Elections: 28 November 2024 – 28 February 2025. Tbilisi: GYLA. [https://admin.gyla.ge/uploads\\_script/publications/pdf/HUMAN%20RIGHTS%20CRISIS%20IN%20GEORGIA%20-%20final.pdf](https://admin.gyla.ge/uploads_script/publications/pdf/HUMAN%20RIGHTS%20CRISIS%20IN%20GEORGIA%20-%20final.pdf).

<sup>37</sup> Social Justice Centre. 2025. "Misogynistic and Sexist Culture and Language Surging in the Police." 11 February. <https://socialjustice.org.ge/en/products/politsiashi-gazrdilia-mizoginiuri-da-seksisturi-kultura-da-ena>.

## 22. Key recommendations:

- a. **Adopt and adequately resource a State-led primary prevention strategy under Article 12, aimed at changing harmful social norms and stereotypes that underpin violence against women. This should include sustained nationwide awareness campaigns, comprehensive sexuality/consent education and targeted programmes engaging men and boys, with measurable indicators and periodic evaluation of impact (including on rape myths and tolerance of domestic violence).**
- b. **Ensure meaningful, structured co-operation with independent civil society (in particular women’s rights organisations and survivor-led services) in the design and delivery of prevention measures.**
- c. **Effectively investigate and punish all instances of violence against women, including those allegedly committed by law enforcement.**

## Article 25: Support to victims of sexual violence

**Under Article 25 of the Istanbul Convention, Georgia should provide specialist, accessible support services for survivors of sexual violence, including dedicated rape crisis and referral centres offering immediate medical care, forensic examination and trauma-informed crisis support. In practice, Georgia has no separate rape crisis/referral centres: survivors rely mainly on general shelter and crisis-centre services and forensic examinations are conducted at the National Forensic Bureau, often in ways that can be retraumatising. Support pathways remain fragmented and, in some cases, access to care depends on reporting to law enforcement; major gaps also persist in long-term, geographically accessible rehabilitation for survivors and in access to abortion after rape beyond 12 weeks.**

23. In Georgia, the only specialised support services available to survivors of sexual violence are integrated into shelters and crisis centres operating under the State Care Agency. Despite the requirements of the Istanbul Convention, there are no separate rape crisis centers and/or specialised referral centres for survivors of sexual violence functioning in the country.<sup>38</sup>

---

<sup>38</sup> This was noted in GREVIO Baseline Evaluation Report Georgia, 2022, para. 195 and situation as of now is the same.

Accordingly, survivors of sexual violence rely on the same general support services that are provided to survivors of other forms of violence, with the distinction that survivors of sexual exploitation (trafficking) and sexual violence undergo medical examinations for sexually transmitted infections within 48 hours of admission to a shelter.<sup>39</sup> It should be positively noted that medical examinations are also conducted for beneficiaries who disclose experiences of sexual violence after a certain period following their placement in a shelter.<sup>40</sup>

24. Due to the absence of referral centres for survivors of sexual violence that would provide emergency medical care, high-quality forensic medical examinations and crisis intervention, survivors of sexual violence undergo forensic examinations at the National Forensic Bureau. In addition, access to medical care and forensic medical examinations for survivors of sexual violence depends on whether they report the incident of violence to law enforcement authorities.<sup>41</sup>
25. For survivors of sexual violence, undergoing a forensic medical examination is often a traumatic procedure. In a number of cases, survivors have reported insensitive, degrading, and gender stereotyped approaches, which hinder their participation in the justice process and significantly increase the risks of secondary victimisation.<sup>42</sup> Given that survivors of sexual violence do not have the opportunity to choose the sex of the forensic expert and that in some cases an examination conducted by an expert of the opposite sex causes additional stress, survivors often feel reluctant to undergo the examination or find the procedure traumatising.<sup>43</sup> The shortage of medical experts, particularly female forensic experts, is due to the extreme lack of qualified personnel in the field of forensic medicine and the overall low level of qualification in the labour market.<sup>44</sup> Moreover, in the majority of criminal cases in which the survivor indicates that sexual intercourse occurred, it remains problematic that forensic examinations are ordered to determine the integrity of the hymen, which has often played a decisive evidentiary role, especially for minors.<sup>45</sup> It should also be noted that forensic examinations to determine the condition of the hymen are conducted even in

---

<sup>39</sup> Monitoring Report on Service Institutions for Victims of Violence and Trafficking, Public Defender of Georgia, 2024, p. 13.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid, p. 10, footnote 17.

<sup>41</sup> This was noted in GREVIO Baseline Evaluation Report Georgia, 2022, para. 197 and situation as of now is the same.

<sup>42</sup> Administration of Justice in Cases of Sexual Violence against Women in Georgia, Special Report of the Public Defender of Georgia, 2020, p. 39.

<sup>43</sup> Administration of Justice in Cases of Sexual Violence against Women in Georgia, Special Report of the Public Defender of Georgia, 2020, p.30-31.

<sup>44</sup> Thematic Inquiry Report on the Reflection of the Obligations of the Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (Istanbul Convention) in Legislation and the Effectiveness of Their Implementation, Parliament of Georgia, 2022, pp. 31–32; Administration of Justice in Cases of Sexual Violence against Women in Georgia, Special Report of the Public Defender of Georgia, 2020, p. 40.

<sup>45</sup> Harmful Practices of Early/Child Marriage in Georgia - Existing Challenges and Ways Forward, Special Report of the Public Defender of Georgia, 2022, pp. 8, 30; Administration of Justice in Cases of Sexual Violence against Women in Georgia, Special Report of the Public Defender of Georgia, 2020, pp. 39-40.

cases where there is no indication of sexual intercourse and the child does not allege sexual penetration.<sup>46</sup>

26. It should be positively noted that legislative amendments entered into force on 1 July 2023, mean that whereas previously the granting of victim status was a prerequisite for accessing shelter and crisis centre services, obtaining such status is no longer a precondition. The shelter/crisis centre service provider now independently determines the criteria and/or develops special tools (for example, risk and needs assessment tools) on the basis of which it decides whether to provide services or to refuse service provision.<sup>47</sup>
27. Following the legislative amendments, a standardised questionnaire was developed to assess the risks of violence against women, domestic violence and sexual violence, as well as to identify survivors' needs and the services to be provided. However, its effectiveness has been challenged. In particular, due to the extensive nature of the questionnaire, completing it has often been reported as being exhausting for survivors and, in some cases, the questions are formulated in such a manner that is difficult to understand, requiring simplification.<sup>48</sup>
28. In July 2020, the Minister of Internally Displaced Persons from the Occupied Territories, Labour, Health and Social Affairs of Georgia approved the Standard Clinical Management Protocol for Survivors of Rape, pursuant to which the State covers the main costs for survivors of rape, including emergency contraception, medical treatment, testing for sexually transmitted infections and, where necessary, safe abortion. However, there is no publicly available information on the implementation of this Protocol, including with regard to strengthening the capacities of service providers supporting survivors of sexual violence.<sup>49</sup>
29. Women survivors of sexual violence continue to face legislative barriers to the termination of pregnancies resulting from sexual violence.<sup>50</sup> Specifically, after 12 weeks of pregnancy, the termination of a pregnancy resulting from violence is permitted only after a court has issued a conviction.<sup>51</sup> Since criminal proceedings often extend far beyond the duration of pregnancy,

---

<sup>46</sup> Harmful Practice of Early/Child Marriage in Georgia - Existing Challenges and Ways Forward, Special Report of the Public Defender of Georgia, 2022, p. 30; Administration of Justice in Cases of Sexual Violence and Sexual Exploitation of Children, Special Report of the Public Defender of Georgia, 2021, p. 59.

<sup>47</sup> Law of Georgia "On the Elimination of Violence against Women and/or Domestic Violence, and the Protection and Support of Victims of Violence," Articles 18 and 18<sup>1</sup>.

<sup>48</sup> Monitoring Report on Service Institutions for Victims of Violence and Trafficking, Public Defender of Georgia, 2024, p. 9; footnote 6.

<sup>49</sup> This was noted in GREVIO Baseline Evaluation Report Georgia, 2022, para. 199 and situation as of now is the same.

<sup>50</sup> Written Submission for 84th session of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) by the Public Defender of Georgia, 2023, para. 23.

<sup>51</sup> Report of the Public Defender of Georgia "On the State of Protection of Human Rights and Freedoms in Georgia," 2024, p. 243.

refusing access to termination in such situations may become a source of psycho-emotional distress and social stigma for the affected woman,<sup>52</sup> where she either has to have the baby or find an illegal abortion.

30. Georgia still lacks services focusing on the long-term rehabilitation of child survivors of sexual violence and on supporting their families. To date, only one psychosocial service centre for child survivors of violence is provided by authorities and it is located in Tbilisi, which does not ensure the geographical accessibility of rehabilitation services. In addition, when a child survivor of sexual violence requires a forensic medical examination, access to this service is still only possible in Tbilisi, which not only contradicts a child-friendly approach to the administration of justice but also clearly creates additional risks of traumatising children in the process.<sup>53</sup>
31. In light of the above, referral centres for survivors of sexual violence, rape crisis centres, and other specialised services are not effectively available to survivors. Although services for victims of violence do exist, they are unable to comprehensively address the specific needs of survivors of sexual violence. This indicates that services available to survivors of sexual violence are neither organised nor systematised, resulting in survivors being forced to approach different institutions and services separately. Furthermore, there are no centres that specifically focus on providing support services to victims of sexual violence.

### **32. Key recommendations:**

- a. **Establish appropriate, easily accessible rape crisis centres and/or sexual violence referral centres in sufficient numbers across the country, ensuring they provide the full package of Article 25 services (immediate medical care, trauma support/counselling and access to forensic examination), including geographic coverage beyond Tbilisi.**
- b. **Ensure survivor-centred, trauma-informed forensic and medical pathways that do not depend on reporting to law enforcement.**
- c. **Put in place measures to ensure proper recovery and access to services for survivors of sexual violence and remove undue legislative barriers to pregnancy termination following rape.**

---

<sup>52</sup> Special Report of the Public Defender of Georgia on Combating Discrimination, Preventing Discrimination and the State of Equality, 2021, pp. 13–14.

<sup>53</sup> Report of the Public Defender of Georgia “On the State of Protection of Human Rights and Freedoms in Georgia,” 2024, p. 328.

Articles 49 and 50: General obligations and immediate response, prevention and protection

**Earlier practitioner guidance and large-scale trainings strengthened institutional capacity and increased access to justice for survivors. However, the backlash against gender equality and women’s rights protection described above has put these gains at risk, weakening political commitment and institutional safeguards and risking further regression. Sexual violence remains widespread and underreported and survivors continue to face significant barriers to justice. Key shortcomings include the ongoing absence of a consent-based legal definition of rape in line with international standards, overly rigid evidentiary expectations that privilege physical injury and forensic proof, and persistent stereotyping and retraumatising investigative and forensic practices (including intrusive procedures), together with inconsistent safeguards to prevent secondary victimisation.**

33. Sexual violence in Georgia remains widespread and underreported. According to UN Women (2022),<sup>54</sup> 8.5% of women in Georgia reported having experienced child sexual abuse, 1.5% non-partner sexual violence, 3.5% intimate partner sexual violence and 24.5% sexual harassment. Many survivors experienced multiple forms of violence, often beginning in childhood, yet few pursue legal redress.

34. Over the past years, Georgia has undertaken a series of reforms to combat sexual violence, which significantly increased access to justice and accountability. In 2021, a first-of-its-kind manual – *Effectively Investigating, Prosecuting and Adjudicating Sexual Violence Cases: A Manual for Practitioners in Georgia* - was launched by Equality Now, the Council of Europe and UN Women,<sup>55</sup> in collaboration with the Ministry of Internal Affairs, the Prosecutor’s Office and the judiciary. The manual has since served as a practical guide for all justice actors and supported the large-scale training of over 600 investigators, prosecutors, judges, court officials and lawyers, led by Government authorities with the support of UN Women, the Council of Europe and Equality Now. Prosecutors were granted specialisation in sexual violence as a result of the training and trainers were also trained from all sectors to ensure continuity of the training.

<sup>54</sup> UN Women. National Study on Violence Against Women in Georgia. 2022, pp. 54–55, 73.

<sup>55</sup> UN Women; Council of Europe; Equality Now. Effectively Investigating, Prosecuting and Adjudicating Sexual Violence Cases: A Manual for Practitioners in Georgia. 2021: <https://rm.coe.int/investigation-manual-eng/1680a3e8e4>

35. These efforts have led to significant improvements in access to justice for survivors of sexual violence in Georgia. For example, the number of criminal prosecutions for sexual violence increased by 76% in 2021, with 252 prosecutions initiated compared to 143 in 2020. During the same period, convictions for sexual violence rose by 44%, demonstrating the justice system's growing capacity to address these crimes. While the Ministry of Internal Affairs recorded a slight decline in registered sexual violence crimes - from 568 cases in 2023 to 544 in 2024 (Criminal Code Articles 137–141)<sup>56</sup> - and prosecutions decreased from 296 to 254,<sup>57</sup> these figures still reflect continued institutional engagement. To maintain and build on the progress and ensure sustained impact, it remains essential to strengthen political commitment and continue support for access to justice.

## **Need to Align Sexual Violence Laws with International Human Rights Standards**

36. Georgia's legal framework on sexual violence: the current definitions of rape and other forms of sexual violence in the Georgian Criminal Code – Articles 137 (rape), 138 (another act of a sexual nature), and 139 (coercion into sexual acts) – do not align with international human rights standards, including those set out in the Istanbul Convention (Art. 36), affirmed by the European Court of Human Rights, the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and other regional and international mechanisms. These provisions in Georgian law are not based on the absence of free and voluntary consent but instead require proof of force, threats or the victim's helpless condition.<sup>58</sup>

37. As a result, Georgian law fails to capture a wide range of coercive circumstances under which victims cannot freely consent, including threats of non-physical harm, socio-economic dependency, coercive control and structural power imbalances (eg in relationships, workplaces, detention or healthcare settings). Moreover, Georgian legislation does not criminalise as rape “causing another person to engage in non-consensual acts of a sexual nature with a third person”, as required by Article 36(1)(c) of the Istanbul Convention.<sup>59</sup>

---

<sup>56</sup> Ministry of Internal Affairs of Georgia, Statistics of Registered Crime 2024: <https://info.police.ge/uploads/679cbdaee5ecd.pdf>

<sup>57</sup> Prosecutor's Office of Georgia, [2024 Statistical Data on Crimes Against Sexual Freedom and Inviolability](https://pog.gov.ge/uploads_script/resources/tmp/php8ogplm.pdf). [https://pog.gov.ge/uploads\\_script/resources/tmp/php8ogplm.pdf](https://pog.gov.ge/uploads_script/resources/tmp/php8ogplm.pdf)

<sup>58</sup> GREVIO. Baseline Evaluation Report: Georgia. Council of Europe, adopted 13 Oct. 2022, paras. 252–257; CEDAW. Concluding Observations on the Sixth Periodic Report of Georgia (CEDAW/C/GEO/CO/6). 2 Mar. 2023, para. 26(a).

<sup>59</sup> GREVIO Baseline Evaluation Report Georgia, para. 259; Equality Now. Sexual Violence in Eurasia: Moving Towards a Consent-Based Definition. 2023, p. 15.

38. Particularly problematic is Article 139 of the Criminal Code, which addresses coerced sexual acts through threats (eg blackmail, property damage or abuse of authority). While these acts meet the definition of rape under international human rights and criminal law, Georgian law does not classify them as rape and treats them as a “less serious crime”, punishable by a fine or up to five years’ imprisonment. This legislative framing, as GREVIO notes, creates a hierarchy of rape victims, where violations not involving physical violence are not adequately punished and can be resolved through plea deals or conditional sentences.<sup>60</sup>
39. Notably, some recent court judgments have begun referencing the absence of consent as central to defining rape, an encouraging development toward harmonisation with international standards. However, such case law is still insufficient to establish nationwide, consistent, consent-based jurisprudence. Ultimately, court rulings cannot substitute for legislative reform; only changes in the law can create a comprehensive and uniform framework.
40. As of January 2026 therefore, Georgia has not yet amended its legislation to bring the definitions of rape and related offences in line with consent-based standards. The continued absence of reform risks survivors’ access to justice, promotes impunity for many acts of sexual violence and reinforces harmful and outdated assumptions about the nature and seriousness of sexual violence.

## **Burdensome Evidence Requirements Preventing Proof of Sexual Violence**

41. Although the Criminal Procedure Code of Georgia (Art. 82) allows for flexible evidentiary assessment, in practice prosecutors and judges often apply overly rigid and burdensome standards in sexual violence cases. Prosecutions and judges frequently depend on the presence of direct physical evidence, such as visible injuries, biological traces or forensic confirmation and typically require at least two pieces of direct evidence to proceed with charges or secure a conviction. GREVIO has previously expressed its concern that this may result in high evidentiary requirements for rape, as this rule is not only applied for a conviction but also for an indictment.<sup>61</sup>
42. In Georgia, most prosecutions that result in a conviction under Articles 137–140 of the Criminal Code still involve cases where the victim physically resisted, resulting in visible injuries or where there is forensic evidence. As highlighted by the Public Defender’s Office of Georgia and GREVIO,

---

<sup>60</sup> GREVIO Baseline Evaluation Report Georgia, para. 257; Public Defender of Georgia. Report on the Situation of Protection of Human Rights and Freedoms in Georgia in 2024. Public Defender’s Office of Georgia, 2025, p.244, <https://ombudsman.ge/res/docs/2025040121291438156.pdf>. Equality Now, Sexual Violence in Eurasia: Moving Towards a Consent-Based Definition, 2023, pp. 14-15.

<sup>61</sup> GREVIO Baseline Evaluation Report Georgia, para. 310.

this evidentiary approach in Georgia fails to account for coercive circumstances, such as psychological intimidation, intoxication, or the victim's helplessness, which are common in many sexual violence cases.<sup>62</sup>

43. Even though, in recent years, judges in some cases have begun to incorporate consent-based definitions of rape into their judgments and prosecutors have applied a broader interpretation of coercive circumstances (despite the absence of a consent-based definition in domestic law and while drawing on interpretations based on the Istanbul Convention and CEDAW), much more needs to be done to move away from narrow interpretations that reinforce the harmful stereotype that only physically violent or visibly injurious forms of rape are legally actionable. This excludes a wide range of non-consensual acts from legal protection, contributes to high attrition rates in sexual violence cases and discourages survivors, especially those without physical injuries, which would include many historical cases, including those of childhood rape, from reporting in the first place.

### **Removing Gender Stereotyping and Discriminatory Investigation Procedures**

44. Despite certain improvements made to ensure gender-sensitive and survivor-centred proceedings, lawyers working with survivors of sexual violence in Georgia still report that survivors face stereotyping and discriminatory practices throughout criminal proceedings, from the initial report to the courtroom. These patterns remain a serious barrier to justice, highlighting the State's failure to ensure the investigation and prosecution of gender-based violence. Common issues include requiring survivors to repeat traumatic accounts multiple times, questioning their sexual history or behaviour and even probing their mental health to assess credibility. Interviews and court proceedings frequently lack gender-sensitive language and trauma-informed procedures. According to lawyers and civil society actors, victims sometimes encounter dismissive or humiliating attitudes from law enforcement officers, especially in settings where privacy and psychological support are lacking.
45. One criticised practice is the so-called "investigative experiment" (provided by Articles 129 and 130 of the Criminal Procedure Code), which requires victims to reenact the assault by returning to the crime scene, indicating where events occurred and being photographed in the process. Survivors and experts consulted during the preparation of this report have described this as retraumatising, degrading and incompatible with the principles of dignity and psychological

---

<sup>62</sup> GREVIO Baseline Evaluation Report Georgia, paras. 310-312; Report of the Public Defender of Georgia on the Situation of Protection of Human Rights and Freedoms in Georgia in 2024, p. 245.

safety. Victims are also often made to interact with multiple law enforcement officers, frequently of the opposite sex, who are not directly involved in their case. In some instances, efforts have been made to assign the same investigator to all stages of the case, which is a welcome practice, although this is not consistently applied. As a result, survivors may still face repeated and unnecessary interactions with unfamiliar officers in emotionally distressing environments. Additionally, victims are sometimes required to remain at investigative facilities for unreasonably long periods, with little attention paid to their psychological well-being or immediate needs.

46. During investigations, survivors are often interviewed in shared or non-private areas within police stations, where unrelated staff or bystanders may be present. This lack of privacy leaves victims feeling exposed, overheard and judged, further compounding their trauma. Investigators have also been documented using suggestive or judgmental language that implies victim-blaming, such as remarks about the survivor's clothing, sexual behaviour, or choices prior to the incident. The prevalence of such attitudes appears to have decreased in recent years, however, and survivors have reported better investigation practices.
47. Forensic medical examinations remain especially problematic. They are conducted exclusively at the Levan Samkharauli National Forensic Bureau and only the Tbilisi regional office has female forensic experts available - other regional branches lack female staff. Examinations often place unnecessary emphasis on the condition of the hymen or presence of genital injuries, reinforcing outdated myths about rape and virginity. Additionally, psychological forensic assessments lack standardised, gender-sensitive protocols. In some instances, prosecutors have requested evaluations to determine whether a victim is "prone to lying", a practice strongly suggesting rape myths and stereotypes are still prevalent among criminal justice actors.
48. During the trial stage, procedural protections for survivors are inconsistently applied. Victims are generally required to face the defendant in court and are sometimes subjected to direct questioning by the defendant. Defence lawyers frequently conduct hostile or humiliating cross-examinations, with judges rarely intervening to prevent such treatment. Measures designed to prevent secondary victimisation, such as remote testimony, the use of protective screens in the courtroom, or limiting irrelevant and intrusive personal questions, are not often applied.
49. The criminal justice system in Georgia often treats sexual violence as an ordinary, gender-neutral crime, rather than recognising its inherently gendered nature - that is, violence committed against women because they are women and which disproportionately affects them. As a result, the discriminatory motives and sexist dimensions of sexual violence are frequently overlooked in the criminal justice process, which in turn affects how survivors are treated and how evidence is assessed. Encouragingly, the Prosecutor's Office has started to reference gender bias as a motive in

some indictments and a small number of court decisions now include gender-based reasoning in their analysis. However, courts still generally refrain from explicitly acknowledging this and there remains no systematic approach to identifying or addressing gender bias in sexual violence cases. The recent removal of the term ‘gender’ from all legislation, including the Criminal Code, risks further deepening this problem.

#### **50. Key recommendations:**

- a. **Bring the definitions of rape and other sexual offences fully in line with Article 36 of the Convention by adopting a consent-based definition** (freely given voluntary consent assessed in the context of the surrounding circumstances), including ensuring that “causing another person to engage in non-consensual acts of a sexual nature with a third person” (currently Article 139 of the Criminal Code) is criminalised as rape.
- b. **Ensure investigation, prosecution and adjudication are prompt, effective and victim-centred and not dependent on physical resistance or injury**, including by strengthening prosecutorial/judicial guidance and training on evidence assessment in sexual violence cases, prohibiting reliance on “corroboration-like” expectations in practice and preventing attrition driven by stereotypes about “real rape”.
- c. **Eliminate retraumatising and discriminatory investigative practices and ensure trauma-informed procedures from first contact**, including ensuring privacy at police stations, reducing repeated interviewing, avoiding irrelevant questioning about sexual history or “credibility”, discontinuing practices such as survivor re-enactment (“investigative experiments”) where they undermine dignity and psychological safety and making protective measures (remote testimony, screens, closed hearings where appropriate) available and applied in practice.
- d. **Improve forensic and medical practice in sexual violence cases to ensure dignity and quality**, increasing the number of female forensic experts (allowing survivor’s choice where possible) and standardising protocols for psychological assessments to prevent stereotype-driven requests (eg assessing whether a victim is “prone to lying”).
- e. **Ensure ongoing specialist training in sexual violence based on the Istanbul Convention for police, prosecutors and judges to sustain earlier capacity gains despite the current challenging context.**