



Preventing and Responding to Child Sexual Abuse in Georgia: Progress, Gaps, and Recommendations

A Qualitative Research and Analysis
Report

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The report was prepared as a part of the project “Combating Violence Against Children in Georgia” (hereafter, *the project*), being implemented from June 2024 to May 2026 in line with the strategic priorities for cooperation of the CoE Action Plan for Georgia 2024-2027. **The findings, interpretations, and conclusions presented in this report are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the official position of the Council of Europe or its partner organisations.**

The report aims to contribute to the ongoing efforts to strengthen the national response to child sexual abuse, including online child sexual exploitation and abuse, in line with the Council of Europe Convention on the Protection of Children against Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse (hereinafter: Lanzarote Convention) and other International Standards, and the recommendations of the Lanzarote Committee. It builds on existing legal and policy frameworks, providing an assessment of achievements, gaps, and barriers, while offering recommendations for further alignment with international standards.

While every effort has been made to ensure accuracy and reliability, the report is based on available data, qualitative research findings, and stakeholder inputs at the time of its preparation. The authors are solely responsible for any errors or omissions.

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Contents

List of Abbreviations	6
Glossary of Key Terms	8
Executive Summary	9
Key Findings	10
Introduction.....	13
Methodology	14
1. Desk review: international, regional and local frameworks addressing child sexual abuse.....	18
1.1. International and regional frameworks on child sexual abuse	18
1.2. Georgia's national framework on child sexual abuse	20
1.3. Georgia's commitment under international and regional instruments	21
1.3.1. Defining child sexual abuse.....	21
1.3.2. Establishing protective rights for children	22
1.3.3. Preventive mechanisms and strategies	23
1.3.4. Liability for committing child sexual abuse	26
1.3.5. Investigation and prosecution of child sexual abuse	27
1.3.6. Access to legal aid and psycho-social support.....	33
1.3.7. Collaborative mechanisms for addressing child sexual abuse.....	34
2. Field research findings.....	36
2.1. Legislative frameworks.....	36
2.2. The best interests of the child as a guiding principle.....	38
2.3. Prevention and awareness-raising.....	40
2.3.1. Prevention and awareness initiatives.....	40
2.3.2. Understanding and attitudes towards child sexual abuse.....	40
2.3.3. Current prevention mechanisms	41
2.4. Identification and reporting	42
2.4.1. Key stakeholders and desired behaviours	42
2.4.2. Reporting system of child sexual abuse	44
2.5. Response to child sexual abuse cases	48
2.5.1. Investigation and prosecution.....	48
2.5.2. Child-friendly trial	50

2.5.3. Key stakeholders and their roles	51
2.5.4. Barriers.....	52
2.6. Rehabilitation and support services.....	53
2.6.1. Overview of current service delivery	53
2.6.2. Existing support structure	54
2.6.3. Existing rehabilitation services	54
2.6.4. The child's journey in the rehabilitation system	55
2.6.5. Barriers to rehabilitation	55
2.6.6. Awareness and engagement.....	56
2.7. Inter-agency coordination on combating child sexual abuse.....	56
2.7.1. Key actors and coordination gaps	57
2.7.2. Existing coordination mechanisms	57
2.7.3. Criteria for effective coordination	58
2.7.4. Barriers to effective coordination.....	58
2.7.5. Lack of a unified national approach.....	59
Recommendations.....	60
References.....	67

List of Abbreviations

Barnahus – Children’s House (child-friendly, multi-agency model for child victims of abuse)
CCG – Criminal Code of Georgia
CEDAW – Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women
CoE – Council of Europe
CPCG – Criminal Procedure Code of Georgia
CRC – Code on the Rights of the Child (Georgia)
CSAM – Child Sexual Abuse Material
CSA – Child Sexual Abuse
ECPAT – End Child Prostitution and Trafficking
FGD – Focus Group Discussion
GCRT – Georgian Centre for Psychosocial and Medical Rehabilitation of Torture Victims
Georgian Bar Association – National professional body for licensed lawyers in Georgia
GDPR – General Data Protection Regulation
Global Partnership – Global Partnership to End Violence Against Children
GREVIO – CoE Group of Experts on Action against Violence against Women and Domestic Violence
ICTs – Information and Communication Technologies
ILO – International Labour Organisation
INTERPOL – International Criminal Police Organisation
JJC – Juvenile Justice Code (Georgia)
KII – Key Informant Interview
LAS – Legal Aid Service (Georgia)
LoGE – Law on General Education (Georgia)
LTD – Limited (Company legal status)
MIA – Ministry of Internal Affairs of Georgia
NGO – Non-Governmental Organisation
NHRAP – National Human Rights Action Plan
OPSC – Optional Protocol to the UNCRC on the Sale of Children, Child Prostitution and Child Pornography
ORO – The Office of School Resource Officers
PDPL – Law on Personal Data Protection (Georgia)
RMP – Referral Mechanism / Referral Procedures for Child Protection (Georgia)
SBC – Social Behaviour Change Model
SCA – State Care Agency of Georgia
SIA – Special Investigation Service (Georgia)
TPDC – Teacher Professional Development Centre
UN – United Nations
UNCRC – United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child
UNICEF – United Nations Children’s Fund

WePROTECT – WePROTECT Global Alliance

WRC – Worst Forms of Child Labour Convention

Glossary of Key Terms

Barnahus (Children's House): A multidisciplinary model that provides child-friendly environments for forensic interviews, psychological support, medical examination, and legal case management under one roof. Its purpose is to minimise trauma and ensure coordinated responses in cases of CSA. Implementation in Georgia starting in Tbilisi.

Best Interests of the Child: A foundational principle in child protection, enshrined in Article 3 of the UNCRC and the Georgian Code on the Rights of the Child. It requires that in all actions concerning children, whether undertaken by public or private institutions, courts, or administrative authorities, the child's well-being, development, safety, and views must be a primary consideration.

Child Sexual Abuse (CSA): Defined under the Council of Europe Lanzarote Convention (Articles 18-23) and Georgian legislation as involving a child in sexual activities they do not fully comprehend, are unable to give informed consent to, or are not developmentally prepared for. This includes contact and non-contact acts such as touching, exploitation, and exposing a child to sexual content, including through digital means.

Child Sexual Abuse Material (CSAM): A term recommended by the Luxembourg Guidelines and the Lanzarote Committee to replace "child pornography." It refers to any visual representation—whether photographs, videos, or digitally altered images—that depicts the sexual abuse or exploitation of a child. Georgia's current legal framework is in the process of aligning with this terminology.

Multidisciplinary Cooperation: A child protection principle requiring joint action and coordinated responses by all relevant institutions (healthcare, education, law enforcement, judiciary, and social services) to ensure safety for the child, as enshrined in the Lanzarote Convention and Georgian Referral Procedures.

Mandatory Reporting: A legal obligation under Georgian law (Referral Procedures 2016) and the Lanzarote Convention requiring professionals (e.g., teachers, doctors, social workers) to report suspected or confirmed cases of child abuse to appropriate authorities, regardless of consent.

Technology-Facilitated Violence / ICT-Facilitated Abuse: Abuse committed or amplified through information and communication technologies (ICTs), including online grooming, sextortion, live-streaming of sexual abuse, and dissemination of CSAM. Recognised under the Budapest Convention and addressed in the Lanzarote Convention Article 23.

Trauma-Informed Approach: A framework that recognises the impact of trauma on children and ensures that services avoid re-traumatisation. This includes child-sensitive interviewing, avoiding repeated questioning, and providing psychological support throughout legal processes.

Secondary Victimization: The additional psychological harm or trauma a child may experience during investigation or trial processes, such as through repeated interviews, facing the perpetrator in court,

or insensitive questioning. Preventing secondary victimisation is a priority under the Lanzarote Convention and Georgian justice reforms.

Early and Forced Marriage (Child Marriage): Defined as any formal or informal union where one or both parties are under 18. Recognised in Georgian law (Criminal Code Article 150¹) and international conventions as a form of child sexual abuse due to the inherent imbalance of power and inability to consent.

Executive Summary

This report presents the findings of a comprehensive assessment of Georgia's legal and institutional response to child sexual abuse (CSA), including sexual abuse facilitated through digital technologies. The study combines an in-depth review of relevant international and national/domestic laws and policies with qualitative field research conducted across several regions of Georgia. By bringing these two components together, the report offers a multi-layered understanding of how child protection standards are applied in practice, and to what extent these efforts contribute to creating safe and supportive environments for children.

Framed within Georgia's international obligations, most notably those outlined in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, the Lanzarote Convention and the Budapest Convention, the desk review examined the country's legal and policy framework across key areas such as prevention, identification, response, investigation, trial, and rehabilitation. This legal analysis was followed by field research aimed at exploring how professionals, children, and families experience the protection system in practice, and how behavioural, procedural, and institutional factors influence its operation at different levels.

As research findings show, Georgia has made notable advancements in its child protection system, particularly in addressing child sexual abuse. Legislative improvements, institutional strengthening, and enhanced service delivery have been critical steps in aligning national frameworks with international standards. While research identified these advancements as significant progress, the study also revealed persistent gaps in implementation, inter-agency coordination, and resource allocation. These challenges arise from inconsistencies in the practical application of laws, limited communication among stakeholders, and unequal access to resources between urban and rural areas. Together, these factors significantly hinder the system's effectiveness in safeguarding children.

The findings from this assessment have informed the development of actionable recommendations for national authorities and relevant stakeholders. These recommendations aim to address identified gaps and suggest targeted actions to enhance both the legislative framework, and the capabilities of institutions involved in preventing and responding to violence

against children. Furthermore, by showcasing effective domestic practices, this assessment supports the wider use of successful approaches to child protection.

The analysis in the document is based on a thematic review of key legal and policy documents and reflects developments from 2015 to 2024. The field work was conducted between November and December 2024, across multiple regions of Georgia.

In summary, the goal of this assessment is to support the ongoing improvement of Georgia's child protection system, ensuring it is fully equipped to combat child sexual violence, including online threats, and to create a safe environment where the rights of every child are respected and upheld.

Key Findings

The findings of this study showcase both progress and persistent challenges in Georgia's child protection system, particularly in addressing child sexual abuse. While legislative advancements and institutional improvements have strengthened protective measures, critical gaps remain in implementation, coordination, and service accessibility. The systemic limitations identified in this assessment underscore the need for a unified, structured response to ensure the effectiveness of child protection mechanisms.

- **Legislative and Policy Frameworks:** Georgia has adopted strong legal instruments, including the Code on the Rights of the Child and the Juvenile Justice Code, which align with the UNCRC and Lanzarote Convention. However, the legal architecture lacks cohesion in practice. The 2016 Referral Procedures have not been updated to reflect the emergence of key actors like municipal social workers, creating confusion in roles and responsibilities. Inconsistent terminology, such as the continued use of "child pornography" instead of "child sexual abuse material (CSAM)", weakens legal precision. Lack of consent-based definitions of sexual violence in the Criminal Code of Georgia is a major legislative issue as well. Most critically, weak enforcement and the absence of accountability mechanisms allow gaps in protection to persist unaddressed.
- **Institutional Coordination:** While a range of actors, including schools, municipalities, NGOs, and national agencies are involved in child protection, collaboration remains fragmented. Institutional mandates often overlap or remain unclear, leading to delays and missed interventions. Coordination depends heavily on individual initiative rather than systemic structures. Local and national agencies often lack shared procedures and tools for collaboration, particularly in rural areas, exacerbating inequality in service delivery.

- **Prevention Efforts:** Although some awareness campaigns and school-based activities are in place, Georgia lacks a comprehensive, nationwide prevention strategy. Initiatives are frequently donor-driven and unsustainable. Schools are largely unequipped to deliver education on body safety, digital risks, or consent, leaving children without foundational knowledge to recognise or prevent abuse. Cultural taboos continue to silence dialogue around sexual abuse, especially in rural areas. While some media reporting is improving, sensationalism still undermines victim dignity and discourages disclosure.
- **Identification and Reporting Mechanisms:** Despite the legal obligation for professionals to report suspected abuse, implementation is weak. Many professionals are either unaware of their duties or fearful of repercussions, especially in small communities. Children themselves often do not know how or where to report abuse, and are held back by fear, shame, or distrust in institutions. Digital abuse remains underreported, as both children and professionals lack the tools and awareness to identify and respond to it. While helplines such as 111 exist, they are underutilised due to low visibility and limited trust in confidentiality.
- **Child-Friendly Justice Principles:** The Barnahus Centre in Tbilisi has set a strong benchmark for trauma-informed justice, providing coordinated investigative, medical, and psychological services in a single child-friendly setting. However, access to Barnahus-based procedures remains uneven. Many children outside Tbilisi continue to participate in investigations within conventional environments that are not yet fully equipped to meet trauma-informed standards. The justice system sometimes continues to rely on plea deals and downgraded charges, which may reduce accountability for perpetrators and leave children feeling unheard.
- **Rehabilitation and Support Services:** Access to psychosocial support and rehabilitation services is primarily limited to Tbilisi. In other regions, services are either minimal or non-existent. Even where services exist, long-term follow-up is rare, and reintegration support is unstructured. Children risk traumatisation due to repeated procedures or lack of continuity in care. There are no structured rehabilitation programmes for offenders, missing a key opportunity to prevent recidivism. Social stigma and family reluctance further discourage access to psychological support.
- **Stakeholder Capacity:** While training initiatives for professionals have increased in recent years, in some cases they remain fragmented, short-term, and often voluntary. There is no national framework for mandatory, ongoing professional development. The specialisation of police officers, prosecutors, judges and lawyers is in force, but the quality of the training varies among the agencies. Many professionals still lack the practical tools and trauma-informed understanding needed to handle cases of child sexual abuse. High staff turnover

and rural-urban disparities further weaken institutional capacity, often leaving professionals ill-prepared and unsupported in confronting complex abuse cases.

Introduction

Background and rationale

Child sexual abuse constitutes a profound violation of children's rights and has lasting consequences for their physical, emotional, and social well-being. Addressing its complex and often hidden nature requires coordinated, multi-sectoral action underpinned by robust legal frameworks and institutional accountability. International instruments such as the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) and the Council of Europe's Lanzarote Convention clearly articulate states' obligations to prevent abuse, protect victims, and ensure access to justice (Council of Europe, 2007; United Nations, 1989).

In recent years, Georgia has taken important steps towards strengthening its child protection system. The adoption of the Code on the Rights of the Child (2019), the Juvenile Justice Code (2015), and the updated Child Abuse Referral Procedures (2016) demonstrates an effort to bring national legislation into closer alignment with international standards. Alongside these legal reforms, various protective mechanisms, institutional mandates, and public awareness efforts have been introduced. However, there remains limited evidence on how these frameworks operate in practice and whether they effectively respond to the needs of children at risk of or affected by sexual abuse.

This study was undertaken in the context of ongoing national efforts to align Georgia's child protection system with international obligations. While legal and institutional reforms have laid the foundation for a stronger response, the persistent occurrence of child sexual abuse, both in offline and digital environments underscores the need for a deeper examination of how protection measures function in practice.

Purpose and objectives of the study

The study was developed to provide a comprehensive understanding of Georgia's efforts to prevent and respond to child sexual abuse. It combines a review of legal and policy frameworks with field-based qualitative research to assess how obligations under international conventions are reflected in practice and what barriers continue to hinder implementation.

The report responds to these concerns by exploring how key actors across the justice, education and social sectors identify, report, and respond to child sexual abuse, and how children and families experience the system as a whole. It goes beyond the review of laws and policies to examine the behavioural, procedural, and institutional dynamics that shape the system's implementation on the ground. Particular attention is given to the gaps between legal commitments and practice, and to whether the existing system is sufficiently equipped to respond

to both traditional and emerging forms of abuse, including those facilitated through digital technologies.

Recognising that a gap often exists between desired and actual behaviours, the research explored the discrepancy between intended and observed behaviours in the current child protection landscape. This involved examining factors such as social norms, community attitudes, and practical barriers that might hinder the translation of policy into practice.

Therefore, this study aims to:

- Examine the alignment of Georgian legislation and procedures with international and regional child protection standards;
- Analyse the roles and experiences of professionals working across the protection system;
- Identify key achievements, gaps and challenges in prevention, identification, response-investigation, and rehabilitation;
- Offer recommendations for a more integrated, accessible, and child-centred approach to prevention and response.

Structure of the report

The report is structured thematically. Following the **Executive Summary** and this **Introduction**, the **Methodology** chapter outlines the overall research approach, combining desk-based legal and policy analysis with qualitative fieldwork. The **Desk review** assesses the extent to which Georgia's legal and policy framework aligns with international standards. The **Field research findings** bring together the experiences of professionals, children, and caregivers, identifying both areas of progress and persistent gaps across the system. The report concludes with a set of **Recommendations** aimed at strengthening legal clarity, improving access to services, enhancing institutional coordination, and supporting the development of a more child-sensitive and responsive protection system.

Methodology

The following analysis is based on a thematic review of key legal and policy documents and reflects developments from 2015 to 2025. The field work was conducted between November and December 2024, across multiple regions of Georgia.

The research examined the specific behaviours of key stakeholders, including legal professionals, social workers, educators, parents, and children operating within the framework of these laws. The objectives were to: **Analyse legislative and policy frameworks in Georgia** – Assess how Georgia's legislative and policy frameworks align with international child protection standards, particularly the Lanzarote Convention; **Examine the interplay of policy and behaviour** – Evaluate the specific behaviours that Georgian child protection policies intended to encourage,

their presence in practice, and the factors that facilitate or hinder their adoption; **Identify barriers and facilitators to desired behaviours** – Explore the social, cultural, and systemic factors that act as barriers or facilitators to the intended behaviours; **Improve child protection systems** – Provide recommendations for legislative and systemic changes that would better enable the desired behavioural outcomes, ensuring child protection measures are both effective and feasible in practice.

This study employed a **mixed-methods approach**, integrating **desk research** with **qualitative data collection methods** to ensure a comprehensive analysis of both policy frameworks and their real-world implementation:

- **Desk Research** included an in-depth analysis of **Georgian child protection laws, policies, and international frameworks**. The desk review provided a foundation for understanding how policies were designed to function and identifying potential gaps between legislative intentions and practical implementation;
- **Qualitative Data Collection** included **focus group discussions (FGDs)** and **key informant interviews (KIIs)** to explore stakeholders' lived experiences with the child protection system, their perceptions of policy effectiveness, and barriers to implementation. The research approach integrated core principles of **social and behavioural change (SBC)**. The field work was conducted between November and December 2024, across multiple regions of Georgia. Qualitative data were collected through **11 FGDs** and **6 KIIs** with around 100 participants across the justice, education, social, and digital sectors, as well as with parents and children. Selection aimed to ensure regional, urban/rural, and institutional diversity. Groups included professionals involved in prevention, identification, and response to child sexual abuse, alongside caregivers and adolescents from both state care and community-based settings.¹

¹ Qualitative research included 93 FGD participants, and 7 KII participants. **FGDs included:** (1) **Justice sector** with 4 Special Investigation Service investigators, 5 prosecutors, and 6 lawyers from the BAR Association and Legal Aid Service (Group 1-3/17 participants); (2) **Social sector** with 11 representatives from NGOs working in child protection, including service providers, and 10 State Care Agency representatives (Group 4-5/21 participants); (3) **Education sector** with 6 school teachers and 7 kindergarten teachers (from Imereti, Tbilisi, Kakheti, Samtskhe-Javakheti), and 6 educational resource officers (including officers, social workers, and psychologists) (Group 6-7/19 participants); (4) **16 Parents and guardians** from the same regions (group 8-9/16 participants); (5) **Children** aged 14-17 years, 11 females and 9 males (from Imereti, Tbilisi, Kakheti, Samtskhe-Javakheti, and Guria) (Group 10-11/20 participants). **KIIs included:** 2 Personal Data Protection Office representatives, 1 expert from services for victims of abuse, 1 representative from Public Defender's Office (Child Rights Department), 2 judges, and 1 Communications Commission representative. All data collection was conducted online, via Zoom. Data was coded and analysed via the MAXQDA software according to barriers identified at individual, social, and systemic levels.



Figure 1 Shows the Individual Social Material model

Limitations of the Study were identified as follows: **Time constraints** – The data collection period was limited, reducing opportunities for follow-up interviews; **Sensitivity of the topic** – Some participants may have hesitated to share complete information due to the sensitive nature of the subject; **Representativeness** – While efforts were made to include diverse participants, certain groups may have been underrepresented due to logistical challenges; **Stakeholder non-participation** – The Ministry of Internal Affairs (including investigators) and **digital governance representatives** refused to participate in the study. Additionally, large **internet companies** did not respond to requests for engagement; **Scope limitations** – Due to time constraints, the researcher did not include municipal social workers and medical experts in the study. However, forensic examination aspects were partially covered in discussions on investigative procedures; **Exclusion of victim perspectives** – Due to the sensitive nature of the topic, child victims were not invited to participate in the research. Consequently, the study does not directly capture the experiences of victims. Instead, the research covered children’s experiences through parents’ engagement as well as more broadly, focusing on their perspectives regarding child safety, reporting mechanisms, and protection systems.

Given the sensitivity of the subject, ethical safeguards were paramount in respect of the **Research Ethics**. Informed consent was obtained from all participants, and confidentiality was strictly maintained to protect their rights and well-being. Special attention was given to safeguarding vulnerable populations, ensuring that participation did not cause harm. All research team members with access to participants or data adhered to the Council of Europe’s Child Safeguarding Policy.²

² **Safeguarding measures** included the following ethical principles: Informed Consent & Voluntary Participation; Confidentiality & Anonymity; Secure & Ethical Data Handling; and Participant Well-being. Before participation, all individuals received an

The researcher's position and potential influence on the study were critically evaluated throughout the process. The research team maintained objectivity, ensuring that biases did not influence the findings or analysis.

The findings from this assessment have informed the development of actionable recommendations for national authorities and relevant stakeholders. The suggested recommendations will focus on two key areas: (1) **Policy and legislative revisions** – How can policies be revised to better reflect the realities of stakeholder behaviour and address the identified barriers; (2) **Implementation and systemic changes** – What changes are needed to create an environment that better facilitates the desired behaviours.

information sheet and consent form (Annex N4), allowing sufficient time for review. Parental consent was mandatory for child participants.

Preventing and Responding to Child Sexual Abuse in Georgia: Progress, Gaps, and Recommendations

The following chapters—Desk Review and Field Research Findings—offer a comprehensive analysis of Georgia’s legal and practical frameworks for protecting children from sexual abuse.

The desk review examines Georgia’s legal and policy instruments addressing child sexual abuse, with a focus on their alignment with international and regional standards. It covers developments from 2015 to 2025 and explores national legislation relevant to prevention, identification, response, and rehabilitation, including abuse facilitated through digital technologies. The review identifies both progress and gaps in legal clarity, interagency coordination, and child-sensitive implementation.

The field research section presents key findings from interviews and focus groups conducted with children, caregivers, and professionals—including representatives of state institutions, NGOs, educators, legal practitioners, and child protection experts. It offers insights into how child protection measures are implemented in practice and the extent to which they protect child victims and prevent abuse.

While the findings highlight significant progress, they also reveal systemic challenges undermining effective protection—such as enforcement limitations, gaps in service accessibility, resource constraints, and prevailing societal attitudes. These insights provide a critical complement to the desk review by illustrating how the legal and policy frameworks perform in practice.

By identifying both strengths and persistent barriers, the analysis points to key areas for reform and offers actionable recommendations to strengthen Georgia’s child protection system, particularly with regard to preventing, identifying, and responding to child sexual abuse.

1. Desk review: international, regional and local frameworks addressing child sexual abuse

1.1. International and regional frameworks on child sexual abuse

Georgia’s Legal framework for addressing child sexual abuse is shaped by commitments to a range of international and regional conventions and agreements that establish both preventative measures and obligations to protect and support child victims.

At the international level, the ***United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC)***, ratified by Georgia in **1994**, outlines comprehensive protections, requiring countries to ensure children's civil, political, economic, social, and cultural rights. This framework shapes national child protection policies, including measures against abuse and neglect, and reinforces children's right and well-being (United Nations, 1989).

This framework is reinforced by the ***Optional Protocol to the CRC on the Sale of Children, Child Prostitution, and Child Pornography (OPSC)***, ratified by Georgia in **2005**, which introduces targeted obligations against severe forms of exploitation and mandates strict national measures against child trafficking, prostitution, and pornography, (United Nations, 2000).

The ***Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW)***, ratified by Georgia in **1994**, **primarily** focuses on women's rights but addresses trafficking and exploitation of girls as well. CEDAW's obligations support child protection, particularly for girls vulnerable to trafficking and abuse (United Nations, 1979).

The ***International Labour Organisation (ILO) Convention on the Worst Forms of Child Labour***, ratified by Georgia in **2002**, obliges countries to eliminate exploitative child labour practices, including forced and hazardous labour. This convention intersects with protections against child sexual exploitation by addressing the labour conditions that heighten children's risk of abuse (ILO, 1999).

Regionally, the ***Council of Europe Convention on the Protection of Children against Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse (Lanzarote Convention)***, is one of the most comprehensive frameworks specifically addressing child sexual abuse, ratified by Georgia in **2014**. The Convention establishes core obligations on **criminalisation, victim support, protective assistance, preventive measures, monitoring, and international cooperation** (Council of Europe, 2007). Together, these obligations aim to create a cohesive and rigorous response to protect children from exploitation and ensure consistent standards.

The ***Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (Istanbul Convention)***, ratified in **2017**, mandates a multi-sectoral response to gender-based violence, including violence against children in domestic settings (Council of Europe, 2011).

The ***Council of Europe Convention on Cybercrime (Budapest Convention)***, ratified in 2012, provides the legal basis for addressing online-facilitated child sexual abuse, including the possession and distribution of child sexual abuse material and grooming through digital platforms (Council of Europe, 2001).

These instruments collectively inform Georgia's national legislation, which is further detailed in the following section.

1.2. Georgia's national framework on child sexual abuse

Georgia's legal framework addressing child sexual abuse reflects its commitment to the above-listed international and regional instruments, providing a foundation for preventive measures, victim protection, and coordinated responses.

The **Code on the Rights of the Child** (2019) aligns Georgian legislation with the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC). It establishes children's rights and freedoms, mandates the creation of a comprehensive child protection system, and emphasises the best interests of the child. The Code ensures safety, education, and dignity for children and requires state bodies to adhere to its principles in all decisions involving children. Specific provisions address protection from sexual abuse and exploitation and mandate preventive measures, victim support, and awareness-raising initiatives (Code on the Rights of the Child, 2019). The Code offers the key principle in child protection and defines the **best interests of the child** as the welfare, safety, health, educational, developmental, social, moral and other interests of the child, [...] based on the individual needs of the child, with the participation of the child, and giving due account to the opinion of the child (Article 3).

The **Juvenile Justice Code** (2015) focuses on the rights of children in conflict with the law, as well as child victims and witnesses. It mandates special procedures to protect children's dignity and prevent secondary victimisation, ensuring compliance with the UNCRC and international human rights norms. The code specifies the protocols for interviewing and questioning minors (Juvenile Justice Code, 2015). The Code also declares the minor's best interests as the key factor when administering justice on child cases and defines it as the interests of safety, well-being, healthcare, education, development, re-socialisation and rehabilitation and others that are determined in accordance with international standards and the individual characteristics of the minor, taking into account his/her opinion (Article 3).

The **Child Abuse Referral Procedures** provide a coordinated mechanism for responding to violence against children, including sexual abuse. These procedures define the responsibilities of state institutions and municipal bodies in detecting, reporting, and addressing abuse cases. They emphasise timely intervention and interagency cooperation to ensure a child-centred approach (Child Abuse Referral Procedures, 2016).

The **Criminal Code of Georgia**, establishes stringent penalties for crimes against sexual freedom and inviolability, including child sexual abuse, addressing acts such as rape, coercion, and sexual exploitation. Articles in the Code provide a legal framework to prosecute offenders and ensure justice for child victims (Criminal Code of Georgia, 1999). The **Administrative Offences Code of Georgia** establishes administrative liability for the sexual harassment (in public places) committed towards minors.

The **Law of Georgia on Combating Crimes Against Sexual Freedom and Inviolability** is also a key legal instrument aiming to help prevent and combat crimes of sexual abuse, including towards minors, and to ensure public safety and public order (2020).

The **Law on Personal Data Protection** regulates the processing of personal data in Georgia, including special categories of data related to children. Besides, it introduces safeguards to protect data confidentiality (Law on Personal Data Protection, 2023).

1.3. Georgia's commitment under international and regional instruments

1.3.1. Defining child sexual abuse

Internationally, child sexual abuse is addressed through conventions such as the **United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC)**, the **Lanzarote Convention**, and the **Optional Protocol to the CRC on the Sale of Children, Child Prostitution, and Child Pornography (OPSC)**. These frameworks consistently describe child sexual abuse as any exploitative or harmful act directed towards a child, including grooming, sexual acts, trafficking, and the production or dissemination of child sexual abuse material (CSAM) (Council of Europe, 2007; United Nations, 1989, 2000), the inherent imbalance of power and vulnerability of children invalidates any notion of consent (Council of Europe, 2007).

The **UNCRC** obligates member countries to protect children from *"all forms of physical or mental violence, injury or abuse, neglect or negligent treatment, maltreatment or exploitation, including sexual abuse"* (United Nations, 1989, Article 19). The **Lanzarote Convention** requires State Parties to criminalise *"all forms of sexual exploitation and sexual abuse of children," including grooming and crimes facilitated by digital technologies*. Complementing these provisions, the **Budapest Convention on Cybercrime** addresses offences such as the creation, possession, and dissemination of CSAM via digital platforms, thereby targeting technology-facilitated abuse (Council of Europe, 2001).

In the Georgian legal framework, child sexual abuse is comprehensively defined within the **Criminal Code**, the **Child Rights Code**, the **Referral Procedures for Child Protection**, and the **Law of Georgia on Combating Crimes Against Sexual Freedom and Inviolability**. The **CRC** provides an overarching definition, recognising a child's inherent right to protection from any form of violence, exploitation, or harm, whether physical, emotional, or sexual in nature.

The Referral Procedures (2016) defines child sexual abuse as *"sexual intercourse with a child using force, threat of force, or exploitation of the victim's helplessness, as well as non-violent sexual intercourse with a child under 16 years of age with the prior knowledge of an adult, other sexual acts, or lewd acts against a child"*.

Criminal Code of Georgia, as the key legal instrument defining sexual offences in the national context, defines specific criminal offences relating to child sexual abuse, covering a broad spectrum of acts including grooming, direct abuse, and the creation, possession, and distribution of child sexual abuse material (CSAM) (Parliament of Georgia, 1999). Articles 137–141 define sexual violence against minors, including rape (Article 137), another action of a sexual nature that does not include the intent of the intercourse/penetration (Article 138) coercion (Article 139), penetration of a sexual nature into the body of a person below 16 years of age (Article 140), and lewd acts (Article 141). Article 157¹ prohibits the disclosure of secrets of personal life. Additionally, Articles 255-255² prohibit illegal making or sale of a pornographic work or other items containing images of minors, engagement of minors in illegal production and sale of pornographic works or other similar items and offering a meeting of a sexual character to a minor. However, the use of “pornography containing images of minors” fails to align with the internationally accepted terminology of “child sexual abuse material” (Luxembourg Guidelines, 2016), which highlights the exploitative nature of the material and aims to standardise legal definitions globally (Luxembourg Guidelines, 2016; Council of Europe, 2007). Moreover, replacing this outdated term with CSAM to align with international standards and better reflect the severity of such offences is highlighted in Lanzarote Committee’s Implementation Report on Georgia (2023). The **Law of Georgia on Combating Crimes Against Sexual Freedom and Inviolability** complements these definitions of sexual violence in the context of establishing the regulations and the system for preventing repeated sexual violence.

1.3.2. Establishing protective rights for children

Both international conventions and Georgian legislation highlight the necessity of creating solid legal and institutional mechanisms to uphold children’s rights.

Key international instruments such as the **UNCRC**, **OPSC**, **Lanzarote Convention**, and **Budapest Convention** outline states’ obligations to protect children from abuse. **The UNCRC** (1989, Article 19) mandates comprehensive measures, including prevention, early detection, and rehabilitation. **The Lanzarote Convention** (2007, articles 10–14) expands these requirements, emphasising institutional mechanisms for data collection, child-friendly judicial proceedings, and multidisciplinary cooperation.

These conventions also highlight the importance of protecting children in vulnerable situations, such as those in institutional care or affected by poverty, migration, or disability. Countries are required to adopt child-centred policies that align with principles of non-discrimination, best interests of the child, and participation in decision-making (Council of Europe, 2007; United Nations, 1989; United Nations, 2000).

The **Child Rights Code of Georgia (2019)** states that every child has *“the right to be protected from physical and psychological violence, ... exploitation, child trafficking and any other forms of violence in any ... place or area, including the Internet”* (Article 53(1)). Articles 5 (1) and 6 prioritise the child's best interests in decision-making, emphasising psychological, physical, and social well-being. The Code promotes a child-centred approach and obliges all branches of government to respect and uphold children's rights, aligning Georgia's legal framework with the UNCRC.

Although the **CRC** outlines obligations for government bodies, mechanisms for multidisciplinary collaboration remain underdeveloped, leading to inconsistent implementation. While Article 56(5) mandates measures to protect all children, including those with disabilities, the framework lacks specific preventive and responsive measures for vulnerable groups, such as children with disabilities or in institutional care. The absence of cross-border collaboration further weakens protection. The Lanzarote Committee Implementation Report (2023) calls for strengthened international cooperation to combat child exploitation and support victims effectively.

The **Referral Mechanisms for Child Protection** (2016) provide a structured framework for multi-agency collaboration aimed at detecting and responding to child abuse cases. These mechanisms mandate coordinated actions among social services, healthcare providers, law enforcement agencies, and educational institutions to ensure timely and effective intervention. The overarching goal is to promote the protection of children from all forms of violence in the family and beyond through coordinated and effective systems established across sectors. Despite its comprehensive design, the Referral Mechanism exhibits significant gaps in sectoral coordination and timely and effective reporting, that will be thoroughly discussed below.

In summary, Georgian legislation incorporates principles preserved in the international instruments, by prioritising the best interests of the child, promoting multi-agency collaboration, and addressing violence, exploitation, and abuse. However, important gaps persist in implementing multidisciplinary mechanisms, addressing vulnerabilities, and adapting to institutional changes, highlighting areas where alignment with international frameworks remains incomplete.

1.3.3. Preventive mechanisms and strategies

Prevention is the first line of defence against child sexual abuse, requiring strong legal frameworks, comprehensive, multi-sectoral approach that addresses systemic, social, and cultural factors contributing to abuse. Georgia significantly lacks the on-paper preventive mechanisms, grounded in both international obligations and domestic legislation.

Awareness-raising is essential for preventing child sexual abuse, educating communities, challenging harmful norms, and encouraging proactive measures. Effective campaigns empower individuals to recognise risks, report abuse, and support survivors, addressing both prevention

and protection (Council of Europe, 2007, Article 8). The **Child Rights Code** (2019) reflects this by mandating public awareness initiatives to combat violence against children and involving media and civil society in these efforts (Articles 60(3)(d), 60(3)(g)).

Education plays a crucial role in prevention, equipping children, educators, and communities to recognise and mitigate risks. Article 6 of the **Lanzarote Convention** (2007) obliges member states to provide age-appropriate information on sexual exploitation, abuse, and self-protection strategies to children in primary and secondary education, delivered in collaboration with parents and within broader sexual education programmes. The **Lanzarote Committee Implementation report** (2023) has recommended that Georgia ensures consistent delivery of this information across formal and non-formal educational settings, with a particular focus on the risks of ICT-facilitated abuse. To address these gaps, Georgia must prioritise developing preventive education curricula and training educators to deliver content sensitively. Reaching underserved communities and tailoring content to diverse cultural and linguistic contexts will ensure equitable access. Interactive activities and peer-led initiatives, as recommended by the **Lanzarote Committee Implementation Report** (2023), can further enhance children's engagement and understanding.

Georgia's **Child Rights Code** (2019) mandates educational initiatives to raise awareness about violence, including online abuse, and promote non-violent communication and conflict resolution (Article 60(3)(d)), aiming to foster safe, violence-free educational settings (Article 60(3)(c)). However, existing curricula lack specific modules on personal safety, abuse prevention, or ICT-related risks.³ The **Lanzarote Committee Implementation report** (2023) has urged Georgia to integrate comprehensive safety education into its national curricula, involving parents and caregivers in the process (Recommendation IX-5).

Awareness campaigns play an essential role in breaking the silence surrounding child sexual abuse. They educate the public about prevalence, risks, and consequences while fostering behavioural change and collective action (Global Partnership to End Violence Against Children, 2017). The **Lanzarote Convention** (2007, Article 8) mandates public campaigns to address sexual exploitation, aligning with the **Child Rights Code's** emphasis on promoting protective practices (Article 60(3)(d)).

In Georgia, existing campaigns are often fragmented and lack targeted outreach to rural and underserved areas. The **Public Defender of Georgia** (2021) noted that many initiatives fail to address ICT-facilitated exploitation or provide tools for recognising and reporting abuse. Expanding these campaigns and collaborating with civil society, as recommended by the

³ According to the information provided by the Ministry of Education, Science and Youth, the Technology Standard at the primary level of general education expects students to develop transversal skills for protecting their own and others' rights in the digital space, including confidentiality, safeguarding personal information, secure password management, balancing virtual and real life, following norms of information ethics, exercising social responsibility, and protecting personal space when using online services.

Lanzarote Committee (2023), is essential. The Committee has urged Georgia to promote sustainable partnerships with NGOs, support child-focused projects, and involve children in developing awareness materials (Recommendations VII-3, VII-6).

Educators also play a central role but often lack specialised training to address sensitive topics in classrooms. Professional development programmes are essential to enable teachers to create safe environments and deliver age-appropriate information. Community engagement further strengthens these efforts, building networks of support around children. The **Lanzarote Committee** (2023) has recommended expanding partnerships with local civil society organisations to better address these gaps and ensure sustainable awareness initiatives (Recommendation VII-4).

While the Ministry of Education, Science and Youth emphasises that the National Curriculum addresses general topics such as personal safety, bullying, cyberbullying, and equality through subjects like “Me and Society,” Civic Education, and Technology, these lessons are **broad in scope** and do not provide children with concrete, CSA-specific knowledge or skills. Critical areas such as recognising inappropriate sexual behaviour, understanding body autonomy, and knowing how to report abuse safely are not systematically covered. As a result, children may still lack the foundational understanding and practical tools necessary to prevent, identify, or disclose cases of child sexual abuse.

The media is also a powerful tool for societal change, shaping public perceptions and reducing stigma around child sexual abuse. Article 9 of the **Lanzarote Convention** (2007) highlights the importance of media participation in awareness-raising, emphasising the need for ethical reporting that respects children’s rights and privacy. Article 60(3)(g) of Georgia’s **Child Rights Code** (2019) echoes this and stress the media’s role in ethically addressing exploitation while respecting children’s rights. However, media coverage in Georgia often lacks depth and can unintentionally re-traumatise victims through sensationalism or privacy violations (Public Defender of Georgia, 2021). To enhance the media's role, Georgia must prioritise comprehensive training for journalists on ethical reporting, informed storytelling, and the sensitive handling of child sexual abuse cases. **The Lanzarote Committee** (2023) has recommended coordinated media campaigns to raise awareness of ICT-facilitated abuse and preventive measures, ensuring accessibility for children and individuals with disabilities (Recommendations VIII-3, VIII-4).

Efforts to prevent abuse can be enhanced by aligning strategies with the principles of the **Social Behaviour Change Model (SBC)**, which emphasises addressing individual behaviours, interpersonal relationships, community engagement, and systemic factors.

1.3.4. Liability for committing child sexual abuse

The **Lanzarote Convention** mandates laws to address the recruitment of children for sexual purposes and digital exploitation, enforcing zero tolerance through severe penalties (Articles 18–23). The **Budapest Convention on Cybercrime** (2001) requires states to criminalise CSAM-related offenses, including production, possession, and dissemination, while addressing emerging threats like live-streaming abuse and online grooming (Article 9). Similarly, the **OPSC** mandates the criminalisation of trafficking, child prostitution, and abuse materials, aligning with international standards and emphasising robust investigation and prosecution mechanisms (United Nations, 2000, Articles 1–3).

The **Istanbul Convention** (Article 36) obliges member States to take the necessary legislative or other measures to ensure that the following intentional conducts are criminalised: (a) engaging in non-consensual vaginal, anal or oral penetration of a sexual nature of the body of another person with any bodily part or object; (b) engaging in other non-consensual acts of a sexual nature with a person; and (c) causing another person to engage in non-consensual acts of a sexual nature with a third person.

Georgia’s legal framework demonstrates partial alignment with these international standards. The **Criminal Code of Georgia** (1999), as noted, criminalises a wide range of exploitative behaviours:

- **Articles 137–141** address sexual violence, including rape, coercion, and indecent acts, with harsher penalties, such as 15 to 20 years or life imprisonment, for crimes against individuals under 16 years. These provisions extend protections to vulnerable groups, cases involving abuse of authority. However, the **Public Defender of Georgia** (2023) identifies significant gaps in legal qualifications for offences rely on violence, threats, or the victim’s helplessness, excluding coercive factors like trust, authority, or influence. CEDAW Committee and GREVIO have also criticised the lack of consent-based definitions of sexual violence in the Criminal Code of Georgia and recommended the necessary amendments.⁴ Additionally, Georgian law lacks a minimum age below which a child’s consent is automatically invalid, falling short of international standards that protect all children from exploitation.
- **Article 255** prohibits the production, possession, and dissemination of materials involving minors, but uses terminology “*pornography containing images of minors*” instead of the internationally recognised “child sexual abuse material (CSAM)” (Council of Europe, 2001; Luxembourg Guidelines, 2016). Moreover, **the Lanzarote Committee Implementation Report** (2023) recommends adopting the term “child sexual abuse material” (CSAM), to

⁴ See GREVIO Baseline Evaluation Report Georgia, 2022; CEDAW Committee Concluding observations on the sixth periodic report of Georgia, 2023.

ensure greater clarity and supports stronger legal and policy frameworks since using "child pornography" diminishes the severity of these crimes and weakens prevention and protection efforts.

- Child marriage is criminalised under Article 150¹ of the **Criminal Code** (1999) and Article 1108 of the **Civil Code** (1997), setting the legal minimum age for marriage at 18. These align with international standards like the **Istanbul Convention** (2017), which identifies early marriage as gender-based violence. Child marriage often entails sexual relations with minors, explicitly defined as abuse under Article 140 of the **Criminal Code**, prohibiting "penetration of a sexual nature into the body of a person below 16 years of age." The Referral **Procedures for Child Protection** (2016) further categorise forced marriage as a coercive act violating a child's rights (Article 4.H.e), reinforcing its classification as sexual abuse.
- The **Administrative Offences Code of Georgia** establishes administrative liability for the sexual harassment (in public places) committed towards minors.

Overall, legal definitions exclude coercive factors like trust or authority, and there is no minimum age invalidating a child's consent. The term "child sexual abuse material" is not adopted, weakening clarity and prevention efforts.

1.3.5. Investigation and prosecution of child sexual abuse

Child-centred investigation practices

International standards, including the **Lanzarote Convention** and the **UN Guidelines on Justice in Matters Involving Child Victims and Witnesses of Crime**, establish clear principles for child-friendly investigations. These frameworks emphasise that interviews with child victims must take place in specialised settings, be limited in number, and be recorded to prevent re-traumatisation (Council of Europe, 2007, Articles 30–35; UN Economic and Social Council, 2005, Articles 8–10). The **Optional Protocol to the UNCRC** further requires states to inform victims of their rights and ensure comprehensive support throughout the judicial process (United Nations, 2000, Article 8). Collectively, these instruments underscore the importance of balancing effective legal action with the emotional and psychological well-being of child victims.

In Georgia, the **Juvenile Justice Code (2015)** reflects these principles by mandating the presence of psychologists and legal representatives during interviews and allowing for video-recorded testimonies to minimise repeated questioning (Juvenile Justice Code, Article 52). The establishment of the Barnahus model in Tbilisi in 2022 marked progress in providing child-sensitive environments for interviews and forensic medical examination. While the model primarily operates in the capital, territorial prosecutors or investigators may, in individual cases, utilise the

Barnahus services when on-site investigative or procedural actions cannot be conducted, or when conducting them at the centre is deemed in the best interest of the child (Prosecutor's Office, SOP N36, 2 March 2022). According to these standard operating procedures, various expert examinations, including medical assessments and sample collection, should take place at the centre rather than at separate facilities. Consequently, transporting child victims over long distances from regions to Tbilisi for forensic procedures is not consistent with child-friendly justice principles, as it may increase stress and the risk of re-traumatisation.

Role of law enforcement and judiciary in safeguarding victims

The role of law enforcement and the judiciary in safeguarding victims of child sexual abuse is highlighted in international conventions, which stress trauma-informed, child-centred practices. The **Lanzarote Convention** and the **UN Guidelines on Justice in Matters Involving Child Victims and Witnesses of Crime** advocate that investigations and criminal proceedings must prioritise the child's best interests, ensuring procedures do not aggravate trauma, and require measures such as non-public hearings, protective environments for interviews, and consistent support throughout the legal process (Council of Europe, 2007, Articles 30–31; UN Economic and Social Council, 2005).

In Georgia, the **Juvenile Justice Code (2015)** incorporates these principles by requiring psychologists, legal representatives, and victim-witness coordinators during investigations (Article 52). However, the **Public Defender of Georgia** (2021) has repeatedly noted gaps in implementation, such as the absence of trained psychologists during interviews and the frequent inadmissibility of video-recorded testimonies during the trial due to procedural inconsistencies (Criminal Procedure Code, 2009, Article 113). Moreover, preparation for court proceedings is often left solely to prosecutors, who are hindered by limited, five-day training programmes, insufficient for addressing the complex needs of traumatised children (Public Defender of Georgia, 2021). Police officers' specialisation in juvenile justice also is considered inadequate to equip investigators with the skills to deal with child cases according to the Child's Best Interests principles. According to the information provided by the Ministry of Internal Affairs, since September 2023, the procedure for organising courses to improve the qualifications of investigators has been approved. The courses include training on priority issues such as domestic violence and violence against women, crimes against sexual freedom and inviolability, the peculiarities of conducting individual investigative and procedural actions (including on sexual crimes committed against women and girls with disabilities and minors), etc. The lack of child-friendly spaces further compounds these challenges. Most territorial courts lack such facilities, increasing the risk of secondary victimisation (Public Defender of Georgia, 2021). According to information provided by the Ministry of Internal Affairs, special units for juvenile cases have been operating in the Tbilisi Police Department since 2020 and Adjara Police Department since 2024, which is welcome, and it is recommended that this practice is spread throughout the country.

Comprehensive preparation and nationwide access to child-friendly spaces are crucial to safeguarding child witnesses' rights and well-being.

According to the Prosecutor's Office, since 2021, a specialised framework has been established for handling sexual offences, with only prosecutors and prosecutorial investigators who have completed dedicated training authorised to work on such cases. A specific manual guides the investigation and prosecution of sexual crimes, including offences against children, aligning with the Istanbul Convention standards and addressing the particularities of cases involving children. The Office monitors sexual offence cases on an ongoing basis and has implemented mechanisms for reviewing cases involving children, including dual-specialised prosecutors in both juvenile justice and sexual offences. Complementing these arrangements, the Barnahus model in Tbilisi, established in 2022, provides child-sensitive psychosocial services, and in 2025 a dedicated Juvenile Cases Division was created to handle offences committed against children and by children.

The Ministry of Internal Affairs also conducts ongoing training and retraining for law enforcement officers, including on topics related to child protection and sexual violence. While these initiatives represent important progress and follow international best practices, mandatory specialisation on sexual violence and child sexual abuse is not yet fully implemented.

Digital crime detection and evidence gathering

The rise of online child sexual exploitation emphasises the urgent need for improved mechanisms to detect digital crimes and gather evidence. The **Budapest Convention on Cybercrime** (2001) provides a comprehensive framework for addressing technology-facilitated offences, mandating the criminalisation of child sexual abuse material (CSAM), including its production, possession, and dissemination (Council of Europe, 2001, Article 9). It also stresses the importance of international cooperation to combat transnational crimes, highlighting the need for collaboration across borders (Council of Europe, 2001, Articles 23–25).

In Georgia, **Article 255 of the Criminal Code (1999)** criminalises offences related to "pornography containing images of a child" but fails to address emerging threats such as live-streaming abuse or the use of encrypted platforms. The **Lanzarote Convention** complements these efforts, emphasising victim-centred approaches that minimise trauma and prioritise the child's best interests during digital investigations (Council of Europe, 2007, Article 30).

The lack of expertise in ICT-facilitated offences is noticeable. Although specialised investigators, prosecutors, and courts handle child-related cases (Public Defender of Georgia, 2021), they sometimes lack targeted training for ICT-related crimes.⁵ The approval of the new National

⁵ As of September 2025, according to information provided by the Prosecutor's Office, 45 staff members participated in 14 training activities focused on online sexual abuse of children conducted between 2021 and 2025. The Prosecutor's Office also reported that

Cybersecurity Strategy (2024–2028) by the Government of Georgia in 2024, which takes into account the issues of proper collection and use of digital evidence, is welcome. It is important that the strategy, as well as the issues envisaged by the Budapest and Lanzarote Conventions, are implemented in practice. **The Lanzarote Committee Implementation Report** (2023) calls for specialised victim identification units, comprehensive training for law enforcement and judiciary, and updated harmonising Georgia’s domestic laws with the Budapest and Lanzarote Conventions, as addressing these gaps would strengthen efforts to combat digital crimes.

Coordinated response and early detection of child sexual abuse

International conventions, including the **Lanzarote Convention** (2007, Article 31 (1e)), **UNCRC General Comment No. 13** (2011), the **Council of Europe Guidelines on Child-Friendly Justice** (2010), the **UN Guidelines on Justice for Child Victims and Witnesses of Crime** (2005), and the **Istanbul Convention** (2011, Article 50), highlight the need for child-centred reporting systems that safeguard children’s privacy, ensure timely and supportive interventions through accessible, confidential, and safe channels, and provide age-appropriate language, trained professionals, and emotional support to prevent re-victimisation and facilitate participation while protecting children’s identities.

International frameworks such as the **Lanzarote Convention** (2007) and **UNCRC General Comment No. 13** (2005) also stress the proactive role of institutions in detecting abuse early, by training professionals in education, healthcare, and social services to recognise and respond to warning signs effectively. Close coordination among institutions ensures seamless information sharing and prioritises the child’s best interests. More recently, the Council of Europe’s Recommendation CM/Rec(2023)8 on strengthening reporting systems on violence against children further emphasises the need for clear, accessible, and well-coordinated reporting mechanisms. In this regard, Georgia’s existing referral procedures provide an important basis, though desk-based review indicates that further alignment with the spirit of this Recommendation could strengthen consistency and inter-agency practice.

By combining child-friendly reporting mechanisms with the proactive engagement of key institutions, these international frameworks outline a comprehensive approach for early detection and effective intervention in cases of child sexual abuse. Mandatory reporting systems, child-centred mechanisms, integrated institutional responses, and specialised training for frontline professionals are critical elements in ensuring timely and effective action to protect children from harm.

it has established a specialised training course on cybercrime and digital evidence, which includes prosecutors working on cases of violence against children. According to MIA, some investigators have been trained in collecting and processing digital evidence.

The **Child Protection Referral Procedures** (2016) provide mechanisms for detecting and reporting violence against children, ensuring a structured multi-agency approach. Article 6 establishes mandatory reporting for professionals working with children, including social workers, educators, healthcare providers, and law enforcement, to report suspicions of abuse, emphasising that all institutions interacting directly with children, or their environments, have a duty to detect and report violence (Article 6.1). Failure to fulfil this obligation results in administrative liability under the Referral Procedures, 2016, Article 20. Failure of an authorised body to perform its duties with respect to detecting child abuse and reporting such facts to authorised bodies is an administrative offence under the Administrative Offences Code of Georgia (Article 172).⁶ Additionally, failure to report crime (child sexual abuse, in this case) also falls under criminal liability (Criminal Code of Georgia, Article 376).

Similarly, the **CRC** (2019) provides a solid legal basis for safeguarding children, mandating states to adopt measures for preventing and responding to violence (Article 53). It mandates mechanisms for detection, reporting, and preventing secondary victimisation of child victims and witnesses (Article 61). The Ministry of Education and Science is tasked with developing school-based violence prevention programmes (Article 38), and hotlines are mandated in schools to report abuse. While the Code reflects significant strengths, notably, Article 99 requires the government to develop a strategy and action plan for preventing violence against children by March 2020, this requirement remains unfulfilled. This omission represents a critical shortfall in ensuring a coordinated national response to child abuse.

The **Juvenile Justice Code** (2015) incorporates child-friendly procedures designed to minimise re-victimisation. Article 23 outlines the role of professionals, including psychologists and victim-witness coordinators, in supporting minor victims during investigative and judicial processes (Juvenile Justice Code, 2015, Article 23). However, the framework is primarily focused on justice-sector interventions and lacks comprehensive guidelines for earlier detection of abuse within schools or healthcare settings.

The **National Human Rights Strategy** and its corresponding **Action Plan** emphasise strengthening mechanisms for detecting and responding to violence against children. These documents include provisions for increasing training of professionals and promoting awareness about child protection (Government of Georgia, 2022; Government of Georgia, 2024). However, their focus on broader human rights issues dilutes attention on sector-specific responsibilities, such as those of schools and healthcare providers in identifying early signs of abuse.

The **Law on General Education** (2005) obliges schools to create safe environments for children and address issues that may hinder their development, including violence. Mandated reporting mechanisms within educational institutions aim to detect abuse early (Article 48.3 (3)). However,

detailed protocols for identifying and addressing sexual abuse cases are lacking, limiting its practical application in this area.

Personal data protection in cases of child sexual abuse

The protection of personal data is a critical component in addressing child sexual abuse, as it safeguards the privacy and dignity of child victims while ensuring accountability in handling sensitive information. International frameworks, including the **General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) of the European Union** (2016), establish benchmarks for handling sensitive information. **GDPR** defines personal data as “any information relating to an identified or identifiable natural person” (Article 4(1)) and mandates lawfulness, transparency, and confidentiality in processing data (Articles 5–6). Similarly, the **Lanzarote Convention** (2007) emphasises the confidentiality of child victims’ information, mandating safeguards to protect their privacy, identity, and image (Article 31(e)). These principles are further reinforced by the **UNCRC** (1989, Article 16) and the **UN Guidelines on Justice in Matters Involving Child Victims and Witnesses of Crime** (2005, Articles 8–10). Lastly, **the Istanbul Convention** (2011) addresses data protection in the context of violence against women and children. Article 28 mandates confidential, safe, and accessible reporting systems, reinforcing the importance of protecting personal information in such cases.

Georgia’s **Law on Personal Data Protection** (2023) aligns with these international standards, defining personal data broadly to include sensitive categories such as health, sexual life, and criminal history (Article 3(1)). It establishes principles for lawful data processing, including transparency, purpose limitation, data minimisation, and confidentiality (Article 4). However, the Law does not explicitly address digital threats, such as grooming or CSAM dissemination, contrasting with Article 23 of the **Lanzarote Convention** (2007), which mandates protections against online exploitation.

The **Child Rights Code** (2019) strengthens data protection by prohibiting the release of information that could identify child victims (Article 71) and requiring unified electronic data systems to enhance child protection mechanisms (Article 83). Yet, it does not specifically address challenges posed by online abuse or the use of digital evidence.

The **Referral Procedures for Child Protection** (2016) and the **Juvenile Justice Code** (2015) further contribute to safeguarding data. While these frameworks emphasise confidentiality and interagency cooperation, they lack detailed protocols for securing digital evidence or addressing cross-border data-sharing in online abuse cases.

Despite important improvements in Georgian legislation, there are still gaps in data protection. The **Public Defender of Georgia** (2021) has highlighted gaps in protecting sensitive information, particularly in cases involving digital exploitation.

Moreover, the **Lanzarote Committee** (2023) has called for Georgia to take necessary legislative or other measures to set up or designate mechanisms for data collection or focal points at the national or local levels, in collaboration with civil society, to observe and evaluate the phenomenon of sexual exploitation and sexual abuse of children.

1.3.6. Access to legal aid and psycho-social support

Comprehensive support for child victims of sexual abuse is fundamental to child protection systems, integrating psycho-social recovery and access to justice (Council of Europe, 2007; United Nations, 1989). Georgia's legal framework, including the **Juvenile Justice Code (2015)** and the **Child Rights Code (2019)**, establishes mechanisms for safeguarding child victims. However, significant gaps in implementation, particularly in psycho-social support and equitable access to legal aid, hinder their effectiveness.

Legal aid for child victims

Legal aid is a critical component of ensuring justice and protection for child victims. In Georgia, the **Legal Aid Service**, a state-funded initiative, guarantees free legal support for all child victims of violence. Services include legal advice, court representation, administrative support, and assistance with drafting legal documents. Article 15(1) of the **Juvenile Justice Code (2015)** further reinforces this right, mandating free legal aid for children involved in criminal proceedings unless independently represented. The **Criminal Procedure Code of Georgia (2009)** extends these protections to child witnesses and interviewees in specific offences.

Legal aid services in Georgia are unevenly distributed, with urban centres like Tbilisi benefiting from better-resourced systems, while rural and underserved areas face shortages of trained professionals and inadequate infrastructure. This disparity leaves many children without timely legal assistance. The **Public Defender of Georgia (2021)** highlights the urgent need to address these gaps by investing in the recruitment and training of legal professionals in rural regions. Strengthening infrastructure and ensuring equitable resource distribution that will ensure to all children, regardless of location, effective access to justice.

Psycho-social support

Psycho-social support is vital for the recovery and rehabilitation of child victims, helping them to navigate the emotional and psychological impacts of abuse. Georgia's adoption of the **Barnahus model** in Tbilisi is a significant step forward, providing integrated, child-friendly care that combines psychological counselling, forensic interviews, forensic medical examinations, and social services in one location. This approach reduces re-traumatisation and ensures coordinated support. However, Barnahus services are currently limited to Tbilisi, leaving children in rural areas without access to this essential resource. The **Public Defender of Georgia (2021)** highlights that

this geographic inequity, coupled with a nationwide shortage of psychologists and social workers, exacerbates disparities in care.

Additionally, although Article 52 of the **Juvenile Justice Code** (2015) mandates psychologists' involvement during child examinations to prevent secondary victimisation, the **Public Defender** (2021) notes their frequent unavailability and limited engagement. These gaps reflect systemic issues such as insufficient training and unclear guidelines on when psychological intervention is required. The **Lanzarote Committee Implementation Report** (2023) has urged Georgia to adopt legislative measures that enhance both immediate and long-term recovery for victims, incorporating the child's views and needs (Recommendation VI-3), while also emphasising the importance of specialised training for professionals handling ICT-facilitated abuse (Recommendation VI-2).

By addressing these gaps and implementing the recommendations of the Lanzarote Committee (2023) and the Public Defender (2021), Georgia can build a comprehensive and inclusive support system, ensuring the rights and well-being of child victims are prioritised.

1.3.7. Collaborative mechanisms for addressing child sexual abuse

Multi-agency cooperation and case management

As already highlighted, international frameworks such as the **Lanzarote Convention** (2007) emphasise the importance of coordinated efforts in addressing child sexual abuse. They mandate mechanisms for collaboration among education, health, social services, law enforcement, and judicial authorities and recommend establishing independent bodies to protect children's rights, supported by civil society and private sector cooperation (Article 10 (2) (a) (3)).

In Georgia, the **CRC** (2019) provides a solid foundation for multi-agency cooperation, mandating multidisciplinary approaches in administrative and judicial proceedings (Article 72) and inter-sectoral coordination across education, healthcare, social care, and justice systems (Article 83). The chapter XII of the **CRC** outlines specific responsibilities to various governmental bodies, including the Parliament for legislative oversight (Article 89), the Government for coordinating state policies (Article 90), and ministries for justice, education, and child welfare programmes (Articles 91–93). Municipalities are also tasked with developing local programmes and social worker networks (Article 96). Together, these institutions form a cohesive, coordinated system to protect children from abuse and uphold their rights.

The **Referral Procedures for Child Protection** (2016) establish a multi-agency framework that mandates institutions such as schools, kindergartens, healthcare providers, and local governments to report suspected cases of child abuse (article 5(10)). These procedures define the responsibilities of key stakeholders including police and social workers, who are responsible for

identifying, reporting, and managing abuse cases, with clear obligations for ensuring child safety and addressing violence.

Despite this well-defined legal framework, implementation challenges persist. The Public Defender of Georgia (2021) highlights weak interagency coordination, limited training for professionals, and gaps in resources and guidelines for social workers and psychologists, often resulting in delays and insufficient victim support. The lack of standardised procedures for consistent involvement of social workers and psychologists in investigations and judicial processes increases the risk of re-traumatisation for child victims, undermining child-friendly justice principles. According to the Ministry of Internal Affairs, Standard Operating Procedures are in place and are intended to ensure coordination with the Barnahus Centre and the involvement of specialists in line with child-friendly interview standards. However, the research findings do not allow for an assessment of how consistently these procedures are implemented in practice across cases and regions.

International and cross-border collaboration in combatting sexual abuse

The transnational nature of child sexual abuse, particularly online exploitation, requires robust international cooperation. The **Budapest Convention on Cybercrime** (2001) and the **Lanzarote Convention** (2007) provide frameworks for collaboration, including mutual legal assistance, digital evidence preservation, coordinated investigations, and joint training initiatives for addressing child sexual abuse crimes internationally, including technology-facilitated crimes (Budapest Convention, Articles 23–25; Lanzarote Convention, Article 38). The **CRC** (2019) complements these efforts by mandating unified electronic systems for data collection and analysis to improve coordination across agencies (Article 83). Georgia's participation in global initiatives such as the **Council of Europe**, **INTERPOL**, the **WePROTECT Global Alliance**, and the **Global Partnership to End Violence Against Children** further demonstrates its commitment to addressing transnational child sexual abuse through evidence-based strategies and international collaboration (WePROTECT, 2014; Global Partnership to End Violence Against Children, 2018). At the same time, the Lanzarote Committee's very recent Implementation Report on protection of children against sexual exploitation and sexual abuse notes that Georgia still follows a fragmented, sector-based approach to data gathering, where different ministries rely on their own statistical classifications and systems, with limited cross-sector comparability. This fragmentation suggests that scattered and non-harmonised data collection frameworks may undermine effective inter-agency communication and coordinated responses in practice.

The **Lanzarote Committee Implementation Report** (2023) commends Georgia's cooperation with organisations like WePROTECT, ECPAT, and End Violence Against Children, but also identifies areas for improvement. Recommendations include enabling victims to file cross-border complaints in their country of residence, expanding collaboration with non-signatory states,

strengthening partnerships with international networks, and addressing challenges in international cooperation through regular assessments.

Despite progress, challenges persist, including the absence of a centralised, secure database for managing and sharing case information, which obstructs cross-border responses (Lanzarote Convention, 2007, Article 38; Public Defender of Georgia, 2021). Limited coordination between national agencies delays the detection and response to transnational cases (Public Defender of Georgia, 2021). To address this, Georgia must prioritise specialised training for law enforcement and judicial personnel to handle cross-border and ICT-facilitated offences effectively (Lanzarote Committee, 2023).⁶

Developing a secure database for information sharing, in line with the **Budapest Convention** (2001, Articles 23–25) and GDPR standards, is equally essential. Aligning practices with **Lanzarote Convention** recommendations, such as facilitating cross-border complaints and supporting victims locally, will enhance victim-centred approaches (Lanzarote Convention, 2007, Article 30). Strengthening partnerships with international networks, including INTERPOL and WePROTECT, will further improve Georgia’s capacity to prevent, investigate, and prosecute child sexual abuse cases (WePROTECT, 2014; Lanzarote Committee, 2023).⁷

2. Field research findings

2.1. Legislative frameworks

As reflected in the field research findings, many participants considered Georgia’s legislative frameworks, including the Ordinance on the Approval of Child Protection Referral Procedures (hereinafter Referral Procedures), the Code on the Rights of the Child, and the Juvenile Justice Code provide a strong foundation for child protection. These legal instruments mandate preventive measures and establish procedures for appropriate responses to child abuse. According to many participants, these frameworks align closely with international standards, notably the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) and the Lanzarote Convention (SCA Representatives, social workers and psychologists of the Educational Resource Officers’ office).

⁶ In general (and not only concerning ICT-facilitated offences), based on information provided by the Prosecutor’s Office during the feedback process, significant capacity-building efforts have been undertaken in recent years. Prosecutors, prosecutorial investigators, and witness/victim coordinators participated in specialised training activities focused on juvenile justice and sexual violence against children. These initiatives indicate some efforts for progress in strengthening professional training within the justice sector.

⁷ According to the Ministry of Internal Affairs, information exchange on child sexual abuse cases is already conducted through INTERPOL and EUROPOL channels.

As one lawyer noted, *"The Code on the Rights of the Child not only mirrors key principles of the UNCRC but also reflects its specific obligations, such as the right to be heard and the obligation to act in the child's best interests."* Similarly, the Referral Procedures and the Juvenile Justice Code incorporate essential elements of the Lanzarote Convention, particularly regarding mandatory reporting and specialised support for child victims (NGO Representatives, SCA Representatives). Participants frequently cited these developments as evidence of Georgia's commitment to aligning its national legislation with international frameworks. An NGO representative noted: *"The referral document has needed revision for a long time. Since it was adopted, new legislation like the Code on the Rights of the Child has been implemented, bringing numerous changes. The document should reflect these updates"*. This observation echoes concerns also identified in the desk review of the Code on the Rights of the Child and its interaction with earlier secondary legislation,

However, focus group discussions and interviews with practitioners consistently suggested that important implementation challenges remain. Participants repeatedly highlighted the outdated Referral Procedures (last revised in 2016) as a critical barrier to effective protection. Specifically, participants described inconsistencies between the Referral Procedures and the roles of newer child protection actors, such as municipal social workers and institutions established after the adoption of the procedures (NGO representatives, SCA representatives, and Public Defender's Office representatives). As one SCA representative put it, *"the lack of clarity in referral roles leads to miscommunication and delays in addressing abuse cases."* A public defender representative noted, *"Referral procedures need to be more detailed, with clearly defined responsibilities, so institutions understand their roles and can collaborate effectively."* This concern is also reflected in the desk analysis, which emphasises clarity of institutional mandates as a prerequisite for effective coordination.

Participants emphasised the need for more detailed and clearly defined guidelines within the Referral Procedures to specify the responsibilities of each involved institution. This includes municipal-level actors, educational institutions, NGOs, and other entities that work directly with children. The current lack of clarity leads to fragmented responses and weak inter-agency collaboration (NGO representatives, SCA representatives, school and kindergarten teachers, and social workers and psychologists of the Educational Resource Officers' office). One resource officer stated: *"The referral procedures are a very important tool that helps ensure the protection of children. However, it is essential to clarify the responsibilities so that everyone knows exactly what they need to do"*. A State Care Agency representative commented: *"The referral procedures are a good document, but they do not clearly define the roles of all actors. For example, how institutions like law enforcement and social services should coordinate during an intervention is not outlined in detail."* While these perspectives reflect practitioner experience, they also align with international standards referenced in the desk research, including the Lanzarote Convention's emphasis on clearly defined, multidisciplinary cooperation frameworks.

Improved alignment between referral mechanisms and newer child protection policies would enhance coordination among institutions and ensure a shared understanding of roles and responsibilities. As a Public Defender Office representative noted, *“It would be better if the referral document were more comprehensive, detailing the obligations of every institution, including private entities, to ensure accountability and clear pathways for action.”* Such revisions would support effective communication, reduce delays, and promote a more coherent child protection system.

While Georgia’s legislative framework appears strong on paper, interviewees described uneven implementation in practice. As one NGO representative observed: *“Without effective implementation, even the most well-drafted laws are considered ineffective”*. Another recurring concern was the lack of robust accountability mechanisms. Some participants reported that, in the absence of clear follow-up procedures, coordination failures may occur, increasing the risk that cases are not addressed in a timely manner. As one NGO representative stressed, *“the strength of a law lies not just in its drafting but in its ability to compel action and deliver results.”*

These insights underscore the need to bridge the gap between legislative commitments and practical application. Updating legal instruments, clarifying institutional mandates, and strengthening enforcement and monitoring are essential to ensuring the safety and well-being of children in Georgia.

2.2. The best interests of the child as a guiding principle

The best interests of the child, as enshrined in Article 3 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and reinforced by the Lanzarote Convention (Council of Europe, 2007; United Nations, 1989), are recognised in Georgia’s child protection discourse but are described by interviewees as being inconsistently operationalised across institutions. While referenced in legislation, field consultations suggest that the absence of a shared, practical definition leads to varied application across stages of intervention, often depending on the discretion of individual actors. As one lawyer stated, *“there is no exact definition of the best interests of the child in every individual case, nor can there be. Each case is different, influenced by the specific circumstances of the child and their family.”*

Stakeholders across the system emphasised that fulfilling this obligation involves more than protection from harm—it also requires the child’s dignity, developmental needs, and emotional security to be placed at the centre of decision-making. This includes a careful balance between securing justice and safeguarding the child’s psychological well-being, especially in investigative and legal proceedings. This understanding is consistent with international child rights standards reflected in the desk review, yet participants noted challenges in translating these principles into daily practice. As one child protection expert stated, *“true professionalism in child abuse cases means understanding the nuances, when to prioritise securing a conviction and when to focus on the child’s recovery. Achieving justice should never come at the expense of a child’s well-being.”*

A recurring concern raised during interviews and focus group discussions is the risk of re-traumatisation caused by repeated interviews and fragmented investigative procedures. Participants noted that although some efforts have been made to adopt trauma-informed approaches, these are not consistently applied in practice. A prosecutor explained, *“upholding the best interests of the child means that investigative actions must be conducted as quickly and efficiently as possible, so that the child does not have to go through multiple interviews or appear in court several times.”* While the Lanzarote Convention promotes such safeguards, participants reported that, in practice, children are often required to provide testimony at different stages, sometimes without psychological support or in non-adapted settings.

Another concern identified by several participants is the insufficient incorporation of the child’s voice and wishes in determining what is in their best interest. As one representative of the State Care Agency explained, *“we must distinguish between what specialists perceive as the child’s best interest and what the child actually wants.”* Although the child’s right to be heard is firmly established in international and national law, interviewees noted that this gap between institutional assumptions and the child’s views sometimes leads to forced participation or exclusion from decisions that affect their well-being.

In the rehabilitation process, participants described ongoing professional dilemmas between prioritising legal outcomes and safeguarding children’s mental health. *“When the perpetrator is a family member, the instinct is to ensure punishment, but it’s essential to distinguish between the interest of the case and the actual best interest of the child,”* a State Care Agency (SCA) representative reflected. In some cases, professionals respected the child’s right to opt out of certain procedures, recognising that coercive engagement could do more harm: *“Even when we see risks in their refusal, our approach must align with the child’s right to say no,”* another SCA representative noted.

Participants also underlined the need for a dynamic approach to rehabilitation that evolves with the child’s needs. *“The best interests of the child is not static; it must be reassessed continuously to address their changing needs,”* explained an NGO representative. While this principle is reflected in international child protection standards, interviewees reported that the current system lacks mechanisms to ensure this flexibility and child participation on an ongoing basis.

Ultimately, the best interests of the child must be embedded as a cross-cutting standard across all elements of the child protection system, from prevention and identification to investigation, trial, and rehabilitation. As one NGO expert summarised, *“a single organisation or agency cannot fully safeguard the best interest of the child. This is a complex issue that requires collaboration and shared responsibilities.”* The findings underscore the need for national guidance on how to assess and apply this principle in real time, along with multidisciplinary coordination, capacity building, and mechanisms that ensure children’s voices are heard and respected.

2.3. Prevention and awareness-raising

2.3.1. Prevention and awareness initiatives

The study underscores the essential role of prevention and awareness in reducing children's vulnerability to sexual abuse. Institutions like the Communications Commission have contributed to media literacy and online safety efforts, particularly in addressing grooming and cyberbullying. However, these initiatives often lack coordination and reach. While schools and kindergartens conduct training and promote child-friendly spaces, educators report limited guidance for practical implementation.⁸

According to the Ministry of Internal Affairs, law enforcement also contributes to preventive efforts. The Ministry cooperates with schools and communities in delivering informational sessions and has strengthened the role of specialised officers working with children, including through ongoing training and initiatives that enhance digital safety. In 2025 the Ministry launched awareness raising sessions for school children covering sexual violence topics among others. However, it remains unclear to what extent these measures systematically address sexual abuse prevention, as well as the scope and form of the activities.

Study participants highlighted the absence of a national prevention strategy connecting education, health, and protection services. Rural and minority communities often lack access to these campaigns, with cultural and linguistic barriers further widening the gap. Sustainability is also an issue, as many programmes rely on donor funding and lack institutional ownership.

Changing social norms is vital to long-term prevention. Cultural taboos around discussing sexual abuse limit engagement from parents and community leaders. Participants called for inclusive, community-based efforts and systemic investment in prevention to ensure consistent, widespread protection for all children.

2.3.2. Understanding and attitudes towards child sexual abuse

Children: Children often lack the tools to identify abuse, particularly in non-physical or online contexts. They associate abuse primarily with violence, overlooking grooming or manipulation. Key concepts like body autonomy and consent are inconsistently taught, and many children rely on peers rather than trusted adults for information. Online, children may know basic safety tips but are largely unaware of how to report threats. Barriers such as fear of punishment or losing

⁸ According to the Ministry of Education, Science and Youth, the Teacher Professional Development Centres (TPDC) have developed a training module, "Well-being and Protection of Children's Rights in Early Education," covering topics such as children's rights, bullying in kindergarten, social-emotional competence, relevant regulatory documents, advocacy, and the development of a kindergarten strategy framework on the protection of children's rights. It is important to ensure that child sexual abuse prevention and response are included as mandatory topics within this training.

phone privileges discourage disclosure. Some children favour trust-based parental support over strict control and recommend including children's voices in developing digital safety policies.

Parents and Community: Parents influence child protection but often lack awareness of abuse indicators or feel uncomfortable discussing sensitive topics. Some fear reputational damage or struggle with cultural taboos around authority and obedience. Parents of children with disabilities expressed heightened concerns. Many called for more training, especially regarding online safety and parental controls. The findings stress the need for campaigns that address stigma and support parents in having open conversations with children.

Educators: Teachers are on the frontline of child protection but face gaps in training, legal knowledge, and curriculum support. Some educators hold harmful attitudes, including victim-blaming or discomfort discussing boundaries. Misconceptions about legal obligations persist, particularly around age thresholds for mandatory reporting. School resource officers and social workers are important actors but are under-resourced. Positive examples of NGO-led trainings exist, yet awareness gaps remain, especially in schools without dedicated protection staff. Teachers need structured, practical training and institutional support to respond effectively.

2.3.3. Current prevention mechanisms

Educational Institutions: Kindergartens and schools are critical for teaching body safety and boundaries, but prevention content is inconsistently included. Teachers lack standardised guidance, and some avoid reporting to protect the school's reputation.

Resource Officers and School-Based Services: These actors help detect and respond to abuse and deliver awareness sessions. However, coordination challenges and staffing shortages persist, especially in rural areas. Their role in digital safety is growing but needs more training and recognition.⁹

State Care Agency (SCA): While SCA responds to cases and conducts school outreach, its role is often reactive. Municipal-level engagement and timely interventions must be strengthened.

Municipal Child Protection Units: Mandated to prevent abuse locally, but face poor coordination, unclear roles, and limited capacity.

Public Defender's Office: Monitors systemic gaps and raises awareness but lacks enforcement power. Greater public engagement with the office's role could enhance accountability.

⁹ According to the Ministry of Education, Science and Youth, approximately 1,810 Resource Officers are employed, covering around 90% of public-school students. In schools not covered by ORO, safety functions are carried out by staff appointed by school administration. A social work component has been introduced in 91 public schools and is gradually expanding. To address the high volume of referrals, ORO's Psychosocial Service Center has implemented a structured triage system to prioritize cases by urgency and ensure effective allocation of specialists.

Communications Commission: Focuses on media literacy and awareness, not regulation. Its structure limits its authority over digital threats, though its outreach work is valuable.

NGO Sector: Fills institutional gaps by providing training, raising awareness, and supporting referrals. Yet limited funding and weak government coordination reduce long-term effectiveness.

Media: Plays a powerful role in shaping public narratives. Responsible reporting can aid awareness; sensationalism risks further harm.

Special Investigative Service: Collaborates with schools to educate children on their rights and online threats.¹⁰

Overall, prevention efforts require integration, sustainability, and targeted outreach. Stronger partnerships, clear mandates, and cultural sensitivity will ensure that all children, regardless of background, benefit from effective protection measures.

2.4. Identification and reporting

2.4.1. Key stakeholders and desired behaviours

The identification and reporting of child sexual abuse involve multiple actors: children, caregivers, community members, and institutional stakeholders such as educators, health and social workers, and law enforcement. Each has a specific role and faces barriers in ensuring timely reporting. The following summarises key expectations and obstacles as identified by the participants of the research.

Children: Children are expected to recognise abuse, understand reporting pathways, and trust adults enough to disclose. However, fear, shame, and a lack of trusted support often prevent disclosure. Many worry they will not be believed or may be blamed. Negative past experiences with disclosure reduce the likelihood of reporting again. Most children mentioned trusted adults—parents, teachers, social workers—but few knew about child-specific helplines like 111. Girls typically saw parents, especially mothers, as key protectors; boys also noted friends as important support figures. Trust, emotional safety, and confidence that adults will act are crucial factors in children's willingness to report.

Systemic issues, such as the lack of awareness of reporting mechanisms and fear of social judgment, especially in tight-knit communities, further deter children. Fear of punishment, re-traumatisation during investigations, and distrust in institutional responses are key barriers. Boys often show self-reliant attitudes or choose peer support over adults. Some even consider confronting abusers directly, reflecting risky coping mechanisms and a lack of accessible support.

¹⁰ The Service has been abolished since 1 July 2025.

Parents and Caregivers: Ideal behaviours include recognising abuse signs early and acting decisively. In practice, fear of community backlash or social ties to perpetrators often lead to denial or inaction. Some parents even conceal abuse to protect family reputation. Generational attitudes can normalise violence. Despite this, many parents demonstrate strong instincts to act when noticing behavioural changes and proactively seek school or professional help. In online abuse cases, several said they would collect digital evidence and contact the police. Still, stigma around psychological support and lack of knowledge about what constitutes abuse, especially online, limit their effectiveness. Conflicting views between caregivers, denial, and fear of overreaction also obstruct protective action.

Community Members: Communities are expected to be vigilant, report concerns, and support victims. However, cultural stigma, fear of judgment, and taboos around discussing sexual abuse often prevent disclosure. Victim-blaming attitudes, particularly towards adolescent girls, reinforce silence. Abuse is frequently treated as a private family matter. Despite this, many participants noted increased community awareness and engagement in recent years, with neighbours and acquaintances more willing to report or intervene discreetly. Solidarity and awareness-raising are key to shifting harmful norms.

Institutional Barriers: Across all groups, barriers include victim-blaming, lack of trust in institutions, and limited knowledge of referral mechanisms. Fear of retaliation, both social and physical, and a perceived lack of personal responsibility to act are prevalent. While challenges remain, growing awareness and a willingness to speak out are encouraging signs of progress.

Educational Institutions (Schools, Kindergartens, and Non-Formal Education Centres): Educators often detect abuse through behavioural changes but lack consistent guidance on referral procedures. Kindergarten staff in particular report being unaware of standardised reporting forms. Concerns about reputational harm deter reporting, especially in smaller communities. Teachers emphasise the need for more practical training and institutional protection when acting on suspected abuse. According to the Ministry of Education, Science and Youth, the Teacher Professional Development Centres provide training modules that include information on referral mechanisms, ensuring educators are aware of proper procedures for reporting suspected cases of abuse.

Office of Resource Officers and Psychosocial Services: Resource officers and school social workers enhance early detection and referral, including in cases of online abuse. They conduct awareness activities in collaboration with the Special Investigation Service. However, coordination with municipal social workers and law enforcement is weak, and staffing shortages—especially in rural areas—limit coverage. Officers also report insufficient training in addressing digital abuse and note that many parents are unaware of their role.

Municipal Social Workers: Positioned to act locally, these professionals face challenges including unclear mandates, lack of coordination, limited training, and stigma from families. Referral procedures are outdated, making it difficult for them to act decisively or collaborate effectively with other actors.

State Care Agency (SCA): The SCA oversees case management and is generally recognised for prompt action. Still, high caseloads, limited follow-up, poor inter-agency coordination, and unclear procedures hinder its effectiveness. Participants criticised inconsistent responses and staff indifference in some cases, undermining trust and continuity.

Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs): NGOs are critical in training teachers, supporting referrals, and raising awareness—especially in underserved areas. However, their involvement is often temporary and donor dependent. Coordination with state actors is fragmented, limiting systemic impact. NGOs also face community distrust and logistical challenges in rural outreach.

Health Workers: Although well-placed to identify physical signs of abuse, health professionals often lack training or awareness of their legal responsibilities to report. Their role remains underutilised due to poor integration into the referral system.

Police Officers and Investigators: Law enforcement is often the first to respond to abuse reports. While prompt action is acknowledged, coordination with other actors is weak. Families described investigative processes as emotionally detached. Calls for more sensitivity and collaboration were frequent.

Public Defender: The Public Defender's Office is known for handling child reports sensitively and ensuring anonymity through digital platforms. However, without the power to enforce its recommendations and limited rural outreach, its impact remains constrained.

This chapter underscores the multi-layered nature of identification and reporting. While notable progress has been made through institutional presence, legal mechanisms, and community engagement, substantial work remains to build trust, improve coordination, and reduce stigma across all levels.

2.4.2. Reporting system of child sexual abuse

Referral procedures for the protection of children from violence

Most of the stakeholders involved in the study reflect that existing frameworks have formalised the roles of key institutions such as schools, kindergartens, social workers, and law enforcement, mandating their proactive involvement in identifying and referring cases of abuse. At the same time, participants frequently identified that the outdated nature of the Referral Procedures poses a practical challenge to Georgia's child protection system. While the document has historically

played an important role in formalising mandatory reporting and guiding institutional responses, participants noted that its lack of alignment with current legislative frameworks and emerging challenges limits its effectiveness. For example, one resource officer stated: *"The referral procedures are a very important tool that helps ensure the protection of children. However, it is essential to clarify the responsibilities so that everyone knows exactly what they need to do"*.

Based on their professional experience, participants also pointed out gaps in the practical implementation of these frameworks. One of the key issues raised during interviews and focus group discussions is the inconsistency in outlining responsibilities among different actors. While the document mandates institutions to report cases, many professionals reported difficulties in practice when interpreting their responsibilities due to a lack of clarity in the documents. According to participants, this lack of clarity undermines confidence and can contribute to inaction. *"The referral document states that institutions are obligated to report, but it does not detail the exact steps required, which creates confusion. The referral document should probably outline in more details about the responsibilities of each institution so that these institutions have more comprehensive information about one another"* mentioned the Public Defender's Office representative. It also appears to lack, according to participants, specific guidance on the steps required or the coordination mechanisms between agencies. A State Care Agency representative commented: *"The referral procedures are a good document, but they do not clearly define the roles of all actors. For example, how institutions like law enforcement and social services should coordinate during an intervention is not outlined in detail."* One State Care Agency representative explained: *"The roles of all actors must be clarified in the referral document. Without this clarity, interventions can become fragmented, delaying the response to cases of abuse"*.

Drawing on their professional experience, some participants noted that existing referral procedures may not fully reflect more recent legislative developments. Moreover, participants emphasised that the Referral Procedures, introduced before significant legislative reforms, are perceived as not fully addressing the complexities of today's child protection landscape. An NGO representative noted: *"The referral document has needed revision for a long time. Since it was adopted, new legislation like the Code on the Rights of the Child has been implemented, bringing numerous changes. The document should reflect these updates"*.

Additionally, participants pointed out that the referral procedures do not sufficiently account, in their view, for new actors, such as municipal child protection units, which should play a crucial role in the identification and reporting process. As one NGO representative explained: *"Many new actors, such as municipal services, have emerged. The referral document must be revised to integrate their roles and ensure it aligns with current realities"*

Participants also noted an increase in cases involving digital abuse and the growing need for remote interventions, particularly in light of broader digitalisation trends. However, according to

them, the referral procedures do not guide on these emerging issues. A participant from an NGO stated: " *Digitalisation brought new challenges, such as increased risks of violence in digital spaces. The referral document does not reflect these realities, and it is critical to address them in the revision process*"

Helplines to identify cases

Helplines such as **111**, **112**, and the **Public Defender's Hotline** (1481) are intended to serve as key components of Georgia's child protection framework, offering multiple avenues for reporting abuse and seeking assistance. While each service has a distinct mandate, its potential lies in enabling timely interventions and increasing accessibility. However, study findings and stakeholder reflections suggest that their current utilisation remains limited, and further efforts are needed to strengthen public trust, visibility, and responsiveness to ensure these mechanisms effectively contribute to child safeguarding.

111: The Child Protection Helpline – As the study shows, **111** serves as the primary helpline dedicated explicitly to child protection, providing 24/7 access to consultation, guidance, and referrals (SCA representatives). Children and families can report any form of abuse, including sexual violence, in a confidential and supportive environment. Operators are trained to ensure the child's voice is heard and appropriately guided. As an SCA representative stated: "*Our hotline ensures that any child can ask questions and receive support at any time of the day. Children's voices must be heard and addressed appropriately.*" Information Campaigns conducted by SCA representatives in schools and youth centres promote awareness of **111**, though they require further expansion. "*Whenever we have the opportunity to communicate with groups or institutions, we emphasise the importance of 111. It's the first thing we promote, even before discussing violence or other issues*" (SCA representative). **111** also collaborates with other agencies to provide timely and appropriate support. "*Our operators provide the first response, ensuring that the child is guided in the right direction. This way, the child's concerns are not left unaddressed*" (SCA representative).

Challenges: Knowledge about **111** remains inadequate, as reported by participants in children's and parents' focus groups, none of the children's and parents group participants had and information about 111. "*Outreach requires significant resources and ongoing work. Promotion of the hotline should extend to schools, kindergartens, and youth centres to make it accessible to everyone*" (Expert on Child Protection).

112: The Universal Emergency Helpline – As a universal helpline, **112** provides a broader range of emergency services, including police and patrol intervention, and often serves as the first point of contact for cases of child abuse. While not exclusively child-focused, **112** plays a critical role in ensuring immediate responses in emergencies. **112** mobilises police and emergency services efficiently in critical situations. "*When it comes to sexual abuse cases, we've had positive experiences with 112. Their immediate involvement often includes connecting with the State Care Agency,*

ensuring a coordinated response" (Resource Office Social Worker). "When a case of abuse is reported through 112, it's typically referred to other relevant agencies, such as the State Care Agency or the police" (Public Defender Representative).

Challenges: 112 Some participants highlighted that 112 operators require additional training to handle sensitive child abuse cases effectively. *"Operators require further training to handle sensitive child abuse cases effectively and ensure trauma-informed care during the process" (Public Defender Representative).* There is also a need for disaggregated statistics on cases referred through 112, particularly those involving child abuse. *"The statistics need improvement. We should disaggregate cases of violence against children within the 112 system to better understand the scale of the problem" (Public Defender Representative).*

Public Defender's Hotline – The Public Defender's Hotline provides another avenue for reporting child rights violations, including sexual abuse. It supports anonymous reporting and is accessible through calls, emails, and social media platforms. *"Children can report through calls, texts, or even messages on Instagram. We try to make the process as simple and accessible as possible" (Public Defender Representative).* Public Defender representatives actively promote the hotline during school visits and public awareness campaigns. *"When we conduct outreach in schools, we emphasise that speaking to the Public Defender's Office is a safe and confidential way to report any rights violations" (Public Defender Representative).* The hotline prioritises anonymity, which reduces fears of stigma or retaliation: *"Children and families often fear their identities won't be protected, but we assure them of anonymity. Building trust in this system is critical" (Public Defender Representative).*

Challenges: Despite its flexibility, participants noted that many families, especially in rural areas, are unaware of the Public Defender's Hotline. *"Despite its flexibility, many families, especially in rural areas, remain unaware of the Public Defender's Hotline and its services" (Public Defender Representative).* There are also the occasional concerns raised by participants about delays in processing reports or taking follow-up action. *"There are occasional delays in processing reports. Addressing this requires better coordination and capacity-building within the system" (Public Defender Representative).*

As the Public Defender's Office further clarifies, limited awareness in some rural areas reflects a broader societal challenge rather than a lack of outreach by the PDO. The Office actively addresses this through its 11 regional offices, thematic departments, and regular informational meetings with children, families, and professionals.

Additionally, based at the Psychosocial Services Centre of the Office of School Resource Officers (ORO), a 24-hour hotline is available (08 00 00 00 88). An online portal, befriend.mes.gov.ge, also provides qualified psychological counselling via a confidential consultation chat for school students and other individuals involved in school life.

By enhancing the visibility, accessibility, and coordination of **111**, **112**, and the **Public Defender's Hotline**, Georgia can create a more inclusive¹¹ and effective child protection framework. As one participant noted, *"Promoting these services isn't just about raising awareness; it's about giving children and families the confidence to speak out without fear"* (Expert on Child Protection).

2.5. Response to child sexual abuse cases

Responding to child sexual abuse (CSA) requires a coordinated, trauma-informed, and child-centred justice system. Georgia has made notable progress, including the introduction of Barnahus centres and specialised professionals. However, field research findings suggest that significant challenges remain in ensuring timely, sensitive, and accessible justice for all child victims, particularly those outside urban areas.

2.5.1. Investigation and prosecution

The investigation of CSA begins with the report of abuse and involves multiple actors—law enforcement, prosecutors, social workers, and forensic experts. The Barnahus model, available in Tbilisi, enables children to give testimony, receive medical exams, and access psychosocial support in one child-friendly setting, reflecting standards promoted by the Lanzarote Convention and the Juvenile Justice Code. As one prosecutor shared, *"Barnahus is a space where children feel safer, reducing the risk of re-traumatisation."*

Despite its effectiveness, Barnahus remains geographically limited. According to participants outside Tbilisi, most professionals in rural areas are unfamiliar with its referral procedures or reluctant to use it. *"Families struggle to reach Tbilisi for forensic exams, which delays processing and increases trauma,"* a Public Defender representative explained. Even in Tbilisi, some professionals noted delays in psychologist availability sometimes result in children waiting for hours. It should be noted as progress that the Ministry of Internal Affairs has developed specialised interview rooms¹² and training initiatives in several regions. However, in regions without access to Barnahus or specialised interview rooms, participants reported that children are still interviewed in formal, intimidating environments like police stations. In some cases, due to the lack of appropriate space, heads of police stations dedicate their own office, in order to interview the victim in a separate space (Public Defender's Report on Justice for Crimes of Sexual Violence against Women in Georgia, 2022).

Forensic medical exams face further delays due to court authorisation requirements and a lack of specialists in rural areas. As reflected in interviews with prosecutors, these legal bottlenecks compromise evidence collection and the child's wellbeing. Forensic interviews, ideally conducted

¹¹ The Ministry of Internal Affairs highlights that the 112 service is already adapted to the needs of persons with disabilities.

¹² The Ministry of Internal Affairs has dedicated child-friendly rooms in Tbilisi, Kutaisi, Pankisi, Rustavi, and Batumi territorial units.

once and recorded via audio-video, are permitted under the Juvenile Justice Code. However, courts often demand written transcripts as per the Criminal Procedure Code. *"Even when we record all interviews, transcripts are still required, and children wait for hours,"* an SCA representative said.

Interview environments outside Barnahus were described by several participants as unsuitable for children, often featuring intimidating settings and an overwhelming number of adults. *"Children sometimes face up to seven adults during one interview. Instead of helping, it creates more stress,"* said an NGO representative.

Children with disabilities face additional barriers, as some professionals acknowledged limitations in tools and training for adapted communication. *"Prosecutors struggle to communicate with children with disabilities, often leading to failed testimonies,"* one prosecutor acknowledged. These concerns are consistent with gaps identified in the desk research on accessibility and reasonable accommodation standards.

Online CSA investigations are hampered by long delays in accessing digital evidence from international platforms. While formal mechanisms now exist for data requests, responses can take months. *"We wait 4–5 months for Facebook, and sometimes Google takes up to five years,"* noted a Special Investigation Service representative. As also highlighted in the desk research related to the Budapest Convention, legal cooperation across borders is slow, making it difficult to prevent further harm.

While some professionals have improved their child-sensitive approaches, participants raised concerns about the depth and consistency of training. *"Specialisation often means a two-day course with no exam. What values are we assessing?"* a judge questioned.

It is noteworthy that the Ministry of Internal Affairs has been systematically implementing a specialisation programme for police officers and investigators since 2015, which also involves the use of the NICHD protocol in the process of interviewing children and adolescents. The introduction of a capacity-building course for investigators on "Legal and Psychological Aspects of Questioning Minors" in 2024 is considered a positive step. NGOs and legal experts note a positive shift since 2015. *"Today, we see more sensitive investigators who strive to adapt to children's needs,"* one NGO representative observed.

Municipal social workers and school representatives play key roles but participants reported ongoing challenges related to clarity of mandates and coordination. *"In regions, collaboration is virtually non-existent. Even in clear cases, responsibilities are unclear,"* said an NGO representative. Limited resources and high caseloads make it difficult for these professionals to fulfil their mandates, a concern also reflected in broader child protection system assessments.

CSA investigations often present a conflict between legal procedures and psychological well-being. *"If we delay, the images may spread. Even if the setting is not ideal, we have to act,"* an

investigator explained. In other cases, procedures are stopped due to the child's distress. *"The victim became hysterical when presented with the images,"* recalled another.

2.5.2. Child-friendly trial

Georgia's Juvenile Justice Code aligns with European standards and is strengthened by the Child Rights Code. As also noted in desk research, the legislative framework reflects key child-friendly justice principles. However, participants consistently observed that implementation remains uneven. *"The legal framework is progressive, but practice lags behind,"* said a judge.

The lack of a legal requirement for video testimony leads to children being summoned multiple times. While some judges remove the accused during testimony or allow remote appearances, others do not. *"Despite legal alignment, many courts rarely apply these principles in practice,"* one judge observed. Courtrooms generally lack child-friendly facilities.

As the High Council of Justice further clarifies, significant efforts have been made in recent years to create child-friendly environments in Georgian courts. Specially adapted rooms for children are currently available not only in Rustavi City Court, but in six courts in general, including the Supreme Court of Georgia, and similar facilities are planned in new buildings for Khulo, Baghdati, and Lagodekhi Magistrate Courts. The High Council of Justice and the Department of Common Courts are actively working to gradually improve infrastructure and ensure child-friendly spaces across all courts. Judicial specialization standards, approved in 2020, require annual continuous training for judges handling cases involving children, covering communication and interviewing techniques, including the NICHD protocol. In 2023, a new module on "Handling Cases with Child Victims and Witnesses of Crime and Violence in Court" was added to ongoing judicial training programs.

Training for judges and prosecutors is inconsistent and lacks follow-up, according to several interviewees. Stereotypes still influence case outcomes. *"Sometimes I have to fight for the judge to understand why the victim should enter the courtroom through a separate door,"* a lawyer noted. Participants also observed that few judicial decisions reference international conventions such as the Lanzarote Convention.

The child's journey through trial includes preparation, testimony, and post-trial support. While Barnahus helps ensure readiness, field research indicate that in practice, outside of Tbilisi, gaps in coordination and late engagement by professionals are common. Delays in proceedings, often due to high caseloads, further traumatise children. *"By the time the child is asked to testify, years may have passed,"* a lawyer noted.

Some judges and lawyers apply trauma-informed approaches, but participants reported instances of inappropriate questioning. *"The lawyer suggested that the child provoked the abuse—I had to*

intervene," a judge recalled. A lack of formal guidelines and specialised personnel exacerbates the issue.

Post-trial, support services are inconsistent. In Tbilisi, some children continue psychological care, but elsewhere services are lacking. *"The trial may end, but the child's trauma does not,"* said a judge. Without mandatory monitoring, children can remain in unsafe environments. *"Protective measures should not end with the trial,"* a prosecutor emphasised. There is also no platform to evaluate outcomes and learn from past cases. *"We need feedback tools to continuously improve,"* said an NGO representative.

2.5.3. Key stakeholders and their roles

Children: Must be treated as rights-holders. With psychologist support, some children feel empowered to participate, but many are still unprepared and intimidated. Children with disabilities face further challenges due to lack of adapted communication, as noted by both practitioners and desk research sources.

Parents and Caregivers: While some provide essential support, others—particularly in intra-familial abuse cases—discourage participation. *"Families tried to stop the investigation to protect their name,"* said a lawyer.

Investigators: Those using Barnahus and trauma-informed methods show good practice. But elsewhere, participants reported that traditional methods persist, leading to repeated questioning and long waits. *"This is not how a child-friendly system should function,"* said an investigator.

Prosecutors: Some promote protective measures and challenge harmful practices, while others strictly follow formal procedures. *"It would be difficult for me to assess the child's emotions remotely,"* one prosecutor noted.

Judges: Some demonstrate best practices, such as allowing remote testimony and intervening against inappropriate questioning. But participants highlighted limited preparation time or training. *"I often find out just 15 minutes before a hearing that I have a child victim's case,"* one judge stated.

Victim Lawyers: Important in securing protective conditions and representation, but often involved too late, as per field research insights: *"Many families don't even know they can request legal representation during investigation,"* a lawyer noted.

Social Workers & Psychologists: When engaged early, they provide crucial support. But late involvement, staff turnover, and high caseloads limit their impact. *"Today, one social worker represents the child, tomorrow someone else. This is not enough,"* said a social worker.

Victim/Witness Coordinators: Emerging as effective facilitators of protective measures, but not yet widely institutionalised. Since 2024, their involvement (prosecutorial coordinators) in cases of sexual offences against minors has become mandatory (General Prosecutor's Office, Order №217, 16 September 2024). According to the Office, their engagement has increased in recent years, highlighting the value of systematically involving coordinators in child sexual abuse cases. It remains preferable to continue expanding their role on a practical level and to assess the meaningfulness of their involvement in practice.

Schools & Communities: Some schools offer informal support, but many lack training. *"Teachers are hesitant to follow up, fearing legal consequences,"* said an NGO representative.

2.5.4. Barriers

The effectiveness of Georgia's child-friendly justice system is significantly compromised by persistent institutional and individual-level barriers. These obstacles can re-traumatise victims, reduce their access to support, and ultimately undermine trust in the justice system. While positive reforms and dedicated professionals have helped build a foundation for child-sensitive justice, the gaps in implementation remain wide.

Institutionally, the absence of mandatory procedures such as video-recorded testimony, limited child-friendly infrastructure, and legal contradictions between key codes contribute to inconsistent and often harmful practices. At the individual level, harmful stereotypes, lack of professional continuity, and parental resistance add further layers of difficulty for children navigating the justice system. Addressing these complex challenges requires not only legal reform but a systemic commitment to trauma-informed, rights-based practice at every stage of the process.

Institutional:

- Lack of mandatory video testimony and inconsistent application of child-friendly procedures
- Limited infrastructure (six Courts have adapted rooms)
- Legal contradictions between the Juvenile and Criminal Procedure Codes
- Weak inter-agency coordination
- Overstretched social workers and psychologists
- No post-trial monitoring system or national database for case review

Individual:

- Retraumatizing questioning by legal professionals
- Persistent stereotypes and bias, especially against vulnerable children
- Lack of continuity in professional support

- Parents' resistance due to stigma or emotional pressure
- Children's mistrust of institutions post-trial

Without structural reforms, sustained training, and better coordination, the justice system risks undermining children's trust and well-being. Despite progress, ensuring a trauma-informed, consistent, and rights-based approach to child sexual abuse remains an urgent priority.

2.6. Rehabilitation and support services

2.6.1. Overview of current service delivery

Georgia has made meaningful strides in developing services for child abuse victims through initiatives like Child Helpline 111, crisis centres, shelters, and NGO-run programmes. These mechanisms offer essential legal, psychological, and social support, reflecting growing trust and awareness in the system (NGO representatives, SCA Representatives, Lawyers). As one SCA representative noted, *"The growing use of services like Child Helpline 111 reflects increased public awareness and trust in the system."*

Despite these gains, field research suggests that rural communities face critical disparities. Services remain concentrated in cities, leaving rural areas with limited access and deepening vulnerabilities. *"There is a clear disparity in service availability between urban and rural areas, which needs urgent attention,"* one NGO representative said. Rural municipalities often lack psychologists, legal experts, and social workers. Overburdened professionals struggle to meet demand. *"They try their best, but with limited staff and resources, it is impossible to cover every case thoroughly,"* said an NGO representative.

Transportation and logistical barriers may further complicate access to services like Barnahus and crisis centres. *"The physical distance between services and those who need them creates a significant gap,"* noted a child protection expert. Additionally, overreliance on short-term donor funding compromises service continuity. *"We need stable, long-term funding to ensure that these services are available to all children,"* stressed one NGO participant.

Coordination remains a major challenge. Fragmented responsibilities among SCA, NGOs, and municipalities is detected through field research, often leading to inefficiencies: *"Without stronger collaboration and clearer guidelines on roles, it is difficult to ensure comprehensive support,"* one NGO expert remarked.

Even in cities, crisis centres and shelters frequently operate at full capacity, resulting in delays for psychological or legal support. A strategic approach is needed—expanding infrastructure, addressing regional inequity, and ensuring consistent funding and collaboration—to guarantee that all children can access timely and effective rehabilitation support.

2.6.2. Existing support structure

Effective rehabilitation must be trauma-informed, child-centred, and continuous—from initial disclosure to long-term well-being (Expert on Child Protection, SCA representatives, NGO representatives). It should integrate psychological, legal, and social support under one coordinated system.

Stakeholders emphasised that rehabilitation is not just clinical; it relies on a supportive behavioural ecosystem. Six actors shape this process: children, caregivers, SCA, service providers, NGOs, and communities.

Child Victims must feel heard and supported. *“A child’s first conversation with a professional can determine whether they trust the system,”* said one psychologist. When empowered, children engage more actively in services (children’s group, Public Defender).

Parents and Caregivers can enable or hinder recovery. Some offer emotional support; others, particularly in intra-familial cases, deny abuse or block participation. *“Some parents refuse to acknowledge abuse because it would mean confronting painful realities,”* a social worker noted.

The State Care Agency (SCA) plays a coordinating role, assigning social workers, ensuring access to services, and facilitating trauma-informed intervention. While supported by professional supervision, high caseloads challenge service delivery. *“With so many cases, it’s difficult to provide each child the attention they need,”* a social worker stated.

Service Providers such as psychologists, shelter staff, and educational officers deliver direct care. Continuity and local availability remain key challenges. *“We try our best, but with so many cases, it’s difficult to provide each child with the level of attention they truly need,”* noted one professional.

NGOs like GCRT and Sinergia provide specialised care in underserved areas. Their work complements state services but remains vulnerable to unstable funding. *“Without stable funding, these services are always at risk,”* said an expert.

Community Members, including teachers and neighbours, influence children’s environments. Awareness and stigma reduction campaigns are essential to strengthen community support.

Office of Educational Resource Officers and Child Helpline 111 serve as critical entry points, especially in underserved areas. *“The helpline is the first responder and protector of the child’s voice,”* one SCA representative explained.

2.6.3. Existing rehabilitation services

Child Helpline 111 operates 24/7, offering guidance on abuse and health. *“Children often don’t know how to articulate their concerns—our consultants guide them,”* said a helpline operator.

Barnahus provides legal, medical, and psychological support in a unified, child-friendly space. *"Barnahus enables us to simultaneously provide rehabilitation and conduct investigative procedures,"* said an SCA representative. Though effective, it currently operates only in Tbilisi.

Crisis Centres and Shelters offer day and 24-hour services, respectively. *"The centres are designed to be accessible and meet each child's needs,"* said one SCA representative. Still, their reach is limited.

Educational Resource Officers' Psychosocial Services provide vital care where no other supports exist. *"It is the only psychosocial service available in some regions,"* noted an SCA staff member.

NGOs like GCRT, Sinergia, and the Public Health Foundation fill critical gaps by offering trauma-informed, community-based care. *"Their expertise strengthens the overall system,"* acknowledged an SCA representative.

2.6.4. The child's journey in the rehabilitation system

Child rehabilitation is a continuum—beginning with recognition and referral, followed by service contact, engagement in care, and long-term support. Recognition and referral rely on early identification, professional awareness, and safe disclosure environments. *"Many children remain silent because they fear being blamed,"* explained a child protection expert.

Initial Contact shapes trust. Child-friendly spaces like Barnahus foster openness. Yet access outside Tbilisi is limited, hindering children in remote areas.

Engagement in rehabilitation must be individualised and holistic. Barnahus and shelters offer integrated care, while educational offices fill regional gaps. However, high caseloads and limited training impede quality. Sustained support involves ongoing therapy, reintegration, and follow-up. *"Healing is not a single event—it's a long-term process,"* said one psychologist. Yet only 38 of 100 children at Barnahus completed therapy in 2024. This dropout highlights the need for flexible, long-term engagement.

2.6.5. Barriers to rehabilitation

Rehabilitation is undermined by both institutional and individual barriers. Unequal service distribution leaves rural children disadvantaged. *"It becomes an additional burden just to access basic support,"* said one child protection expert. High caseloads, limited specialists, and poor coordination delay support according to field research participants. *"There are still cases where children are referred without a clear plan,"* said an NGO representative. Many professionals lack up-to-date training. *"New professionals often don't know our services,"* said a Barnahus staff member.

No structured rehabilitation exists for perpetrators, and NGO reliance on short-term funding threatens sustainability.

At the individual level, fear, shame, and stigma could prevent engagement. *"Sometimes you feel embarrassed to talk about your problem,"* a child in the focus group said. Parental denial, unrealistic expectations, poverty, and lack of follow-up exacerbate dropout rates. Children with disabilities and those reintegrating into school face additional hurdles due to untrained staff and bullying. *"Once formal rehab ends, maintaining structured follow-up is extremely difficult,"* reported an SCA supervisor.¹³

2.6.6. Awareness and engagement

Awareness of services is alarmingly low. Even some professionals are unfamiliar with key mechanisms, as participants suggest. *"Sometimes even investigators in Tbilisi don't know about centres like ours,"* said an SCA representative. Targeted campaigns must inform children, families, and professionals about services like Barnahus and Child Helpline 111. *"With psychological preparation, children can share traumatic experiences without secondary victimisation,"* one SCA expert explained.

Awareness among law enforcement and schools is essential to improve early response and referral. Staff turnover erodes institutional knowledge. Raising awareness ensures timely help and reduces harm. To maximise impact, awareness must be a national priority—backed by education, visibility, and sustained outreach across all levels of society.

2.7. Inter-agency coordination on combating child sexual abuse

Effective inter-agency coordination is widely recognised as essential for an effective child protection response. Despite progress with models like Barnahus and multi-sectoral platforms, Georgia's coordination efforts remain fragmented, reactive, and overly dependent on temporary projects. The lack of a dedicated national strategy specific to child sexual abuse contributes to overlapping mandates, weak referral systems, and delays in case management (SCA representatives, NGOs, law enforcement, educators).

¹³ According to the Ministry of Education, Science and Youth, Teacher Professional Development Center (TPDC) and the Inclusive and Special Education Support Center of ORO provide training, practical study visits, and consulting services for teachers and specialists. These initiatives aim to enhance competencies in inclusive education, support students with disabilities and special educational needs, and promote safe, supportive learning environments.

2.7.1. Key actors and coordination gaps

Government of Georgia – Expected to lead a unified response through a national action plan for child sexual abuse. Currently, coordination is inconsistent and not embedded in broader human rights strategies.

State Care Agency (SCA) – Mandated to coordinate protection efforts but often involved too late. Collaboration with law enforcement and education sectors remains inconsistent.

Municipal Social Workers – Crucial for identifying and referring cases, yet often disconnected from other institutions.

Educational Institutions – Key for early identification but often lack clarity on when and how to refer. Coordination with social services is weak.¹⁴

Office of Resource Officers – Play a referral role but rarely collaborate systematically with other services.¹⁵

Law Enforcement and Judiciary – While some progress is seen in professional specialisation, communication remains siloed, and joint planning is rare. However, the Prosecutor's Office emphasised that between 2022–2024 multiple interagency working meetings were held with the Ministry of Internal Affairs and the judiciary, specifically focused on juvenile justice and sexual offences. Although periodic inter-agency meetings are very important, constant coordination and joint planning between agencies on individual cases often remains problematic.

NGOs – Provide critical services but are often excluded from strategy development. Their role is increasingly limited to service provision, with less influence in policy discussions.

2.7.2. Existing coordination mechanisms

Barnahus remains the most successful coordination model but is only available in Tbilisi. Regional professionals often don't use it due to limited awareness. **However, according to information provided by the Prosecutor's Office, Barnahus services are formally accessible to investigative units in all regions, and prosecutors have been informed of this possibility through the Standard Operating Procedures.** Therefore, the identified challenges relate

¹⁴ According to the Ministry of Education, Science and Youth, all school employees are required to be familiar with and implement referral procedures (Resolution N437). Resource Officers, social workers, and psychologists receive initial and continuous training on these procedures. Additionally, the 2019 document "Rules and Conditions for Ensuring Safety and Public Order in General Education Institutions" provides a framework for coordinated prevention and response activities across the education system.

¹⁵ Also, according to the Ministry, ORO cooperates purposefully and systematically with other agencies, including the State Care Agency, Juvenile Referral Centre, and Ministry of Internal Affairs, following Resolution N437. Multi-agency case management is practiced to ensure coordinated responses to referrals.

primarily to practical uptake and operational accessibility rather than the absence of a formal referral mechanism.

Resource Officers' Office – Operates psychosocial support centres but lacks structured collaboration with municipalities.

Multi-Sectoral Platforms – Meetings for the field research participants are infrequent and largely symbolic. Coordination lapses after donor-funded projects end, as emphasized. *"After the EU-funded judiciary initiative, we lost that momentum,"* noted one judge.

Digital Governance – Although formally responsible for online child protection, it seems to lack clear coordination roles. *"Consultations were held only twice this year with no follow-up,"* stated a Communication Commission representative.

Referral Pathways – The system exists on paper but is inconsistently applied. Many professionals are unaware of their roles, and a lack of cross-agency databases limits efficiency.

2.7.3. Criteria for effective coordination

Timely Response – Bureaucratic delays appear to compromise child safety. *"Procedures are needed but should not delay urgent actions,"* said a legal expert.

Holistic Case Management – Without coordinated planning, participants fear that children could miss critical services like therapy or shelter. *"SCA was unaware of high-risk cases for months,"* shared one social worker.

Minimising Retraumatization – Disjointed approaches seem to be a cause of repeated interviews. *"Professionals skip Barnahus due to lack of familiarity,"* explained a lawyer.

Information Sharing – Confidentiality is critical but shouldn't prevent safe data exchange. *"Lack of structured data-sharing causes duplication and missed opportunities,"* said a public defender.

Cross-Sector Collaboration – School staff often don't understand when to involve social services. *"There's no common platform,"* noted a resource officer.

2.7.4. Barriers to effective coordination

Despite efforts to strengthen Georgia's child protection framework, numerous institutional and individual barriers continue to hinder effective inter-agency coordination. These challenges arise across sectors and levels, limiting timely interventions and undermining systemic trust. Participants consistently stressed that coordination remains inconsistent, siloed, and overly reliant on individual initiative rather than structured protocols.

Institutional barriers include unclear mandates, fragmented communication, lack of dedicated strategy, and inadequate integration of digital child protection into broader frameworks. These issues are exacerbated by the absence of a functional, cross-sectoral case management system. On the individual level, professionals often lack awareness of their roles or fear the repercussions of reporting, further delaying critical responses. The barriers outlined below reflect the urgent need for institutionalised collaboration grounded in shared accountability and proactive engagement.

Institutional Barriers:

- Lack of structured communication between agencies (SCA, law enforcement, schools).
- Reduced access for NGOs to policy spaces and data.
- Bureaucratic delays due to overly formal communication.
- Fragmentation among state agencies with no clear division of responsibilities.
- No targeted strategy within the National Human Rights Action Plan.
- Digital child protection lacks clarity and leadership.
- No unified child protection case management system.

Individual Barriers:

- Low awareness among teachers and social workers on referral processes.
- Institutional silos and reluctance to collaborate.
- Fear of consequences for reporting abuse (especially in schools).
- Coordination depends on individual initiative, not mandated practice.

2.7.5. Lack of a unified national approach

Most participants emphasised that without a clear action plan or permanent coordination structure, institutions operate in isolation. *"We meet at conferences, but no changes follow,"* said one NGO representative. Existing referral procedures are vague, and rural coordination is especially weak.

Digital threats like online grooming are perceived to be addressed sporadically. *"Consultations happened twice this year—no follow-up, no strategy,"* a Communications Commission member confirmed.

To overcome fragmentation, some participants recommend permanent, multi-sectoral platforms for joint planning. *"If prosecutors, judges, social workers, and interpreters could meet regularly, outcomes would improve,"* said a public defender.

Without a unified strategy and ongoing collaboration, Georgia's response to child sexual abuse risks remaining partial, often delayed, and disjointed.

Recommendations¹⁶

Parliament of Georgia

- Amend relevant legislation to replace outdated terms such as “child pornography” with the internationally accepted term “child sexual abuse material (CSAM)”, in accordance with the Lanzarote Committee’s recommendations and the Luxembourg Guidelines;
- Introduce consent-based definitions of sexual violence within the Criminal Code, in line with GREVIO baseline recommendations and concluding observations of the CEDAW Committee, moving away from definitions reliant solely on force, threat, or helplessness of the victim;
- Amend the Code on the Rights of the Child and Criminal Procedure Code to ensure Barnahus-recorded child interviews are recognised as admissible evidence, minimising repeated questioning and trauma;
- Strengthen mandatory reporting obligations under the Law on the Rights of the Child and Referral Procedures by introducing clear legal sanctions for professionals who fail to report suspected child sexual abuse or exploitation;
- In cooperation with the Ministry of Finances, ensure allocation of targeted budget lines within the annual state budget to support child protection infrastructure, including expansion of Barnahus centres, hiring of municipal social workers, and psychological support services in rural and underserved municipalities.

Government of Georgia

- Develop a dedicated National Strategy on Preventing and Responding to Child Sexual Abuse, ensuring it includes measurable indicators, timelines, and annual public reporting mechanisms. This strategy should be adopted as a government resolution and implementation should be coordinated by the Administration of the Government;
- Ensure sustainable and institutionalised funding for child protection by mainstreaming CSA prevention and response activities into the annual budgets of the Ministry of Justice, Ministry of Health and Social Affairs, Ministry of Education, Science and Youth, Ministry of Internal Affairs, and the State Care Agency, with earmarked resources for regional implementation;
- Establish an independent child protection oversight mechanism with a legal mandate to monitor, evaluate, and report on national responses, including compliance with the Code

¹⁶ Following the completion of the research phase of this report, the Lanzarote Committee published the [implementation report](https://rm.coe.int/legal-frameworks-executive-summary-recomm-implementation-report-georgi/488028e4f8) *Protecting Children Against Sexual Abuse in the Circle of Trust*. The report’s findings and recommendations are available in Georgian at the following link: <https://rm.coe.int/legal-frameworks-executive-summary-recomm-implementation-report-georgi/488028e4f8>.

on the Rights of the Child and international obligations (e.g. Lanzarote and Istanbul Conventions);

- Coordinate the development of a national, certified specialisation programme for all justice sector and child protection professionals (including but not limited to prosecutors, investigators, social workers, and psychologists), ensuring that it is standardised, competency-based, and includes modules on trauma-informed practices, ICT-facilitated abuse, and child-sensitive justice;
- Lead the revision and update of the 2016 Child Protection Referral Procedures, ensuring alignment with the Code on the Rights of the Child and institutional reforms introduced since 2016. The revised procedures should:
 - Clearly define the roles and responsibilities of newly established actors such as municipal child protection units, school social workers, and educational resource officers;
 - Include detailed protocols for responding to ICT-facilitated abuse, such as online grooming, sextortion, and exposure to harmful content, in line with the Lanzarote and Budapest Conventions.
- Initiate and oversee the development of an integrated digital case management and referral system, in cooperation with the State Care Agency, Ministry of Internal Affairs, and other relevant bodies. This system should:
 - Enable real-time tracking of cases, from identification to rehabilitation;
 - Support secure data-sharing protocols between agencies involved in child protection;
 - Include audit and accountability mechanisms to monitor institutional performance in responding to suspected abuse.

High Council of Justice and Judiciary

- Keep establishing specialised, child-sensitive courtrooms in central and regional courts, ensuring they are equipped with child-friendly infrastructure (e.g., separate entrances/exits, waiting areas, and interview rooms) and staffed by professionals trained in handling child witnesses. Begin with pilot courts outside of Tbilisi, prioritising regions with high case volume and limited access to adapted spaces;
- Introduce the mandatory and continuous specialisation of judges in cases of child sexual abuse, to ensure consistent, trauma-informed, and rights-based adjudication. Provide targeted training and establish criteria for assigning such cases exclusively to specialised judges;
- Introduce and operationalize remote testimony mechanisms, such as video-link systems, to allow child victims and witnesses to participate in proceedings without being physically present in court. Ensure these tools are secure, uphold the child's right to privacy, and comply with procedural standards under the Criminal Procedure Code;

- Mandate trauma-informed certification and continuing professional development for judges, and court staff involved in child-related cases.

Ministry of Internal Affairs

- Ensure that child victims of sexual abuse are consistently interviewed in child-friendly spaces. Expand access to adapted interview rooms beyond the currently available locations, and maintain privacy, psychological support, and child-sensitive procedures;
- Continue and strengthen mandatory CSA-specific training for investigators, patrol officers, and administrative staff, including trauma-informed investigation, child communication, and evidence collection. Monitor the quality and practical application of training, particularly in regions with fewer specialized personnel;
- Maintain structured inter-agency cooperation with relevant domestic and international partners for ICT-facilitated crimes against children, ensuring timely victim identification and coordinated response; Sustain and assess the impact of ongoing prevention and awareness measures, including community outreach, digital safety programmes, and collaboration with schools, parents, and civil society, to ensure these initiatives meaningfully address CSA and ICT-facilitated offences.

Prosecutor's Office

- Strengthen structured coordination with Barnahus centres in all individual CSA cases, including early involvement of psychological support staff and case-specific briefings with participation of all relevant professionals (including investigators, social workers, psychologists);

State Care Agency (SCA)

- Expand and adequately staff municipal-level social worker units by adopting a national standard on maximum caseloads, especially in rural and high-risk areas. Ensure each team is equipped with transportation, private interviewing spaces, and child-friendly materials to facilitate effective case management;
- Institutionalize regular multidisciplinary case conferences at the municipal level (quarterly at minimum), with the mandatory participation of representatives from law enforcement, schools, healthcare providers, shelters, and NGOs. Standardize meeting procedures and documentation to ensure joint planning, information-sharing, and follow-up on complex child protection cases.

Ministry of Education, Science, and Youth

- Revise the national curriculum to integrate age-appropriate education on bodily autonomy, consent, personal safety, and digital literacy across all educational levels—from preschool to secondary school. Ensure alignment with the Lanzarote Convention and CDENF guidance on sexual education and abuse prevention;
- Develop and operationalise, in partnership with the Ministry of Health and State Care Agency a national Early Risk Detection and Response Protocol that should include routine screening procedures in schools, preschools, and healthcare institutions to identify children at risk of abuse or neglect and ensure timely referrals to child protection services;
- Ensure the appointment of well-trained resource officers and school psychologists in every public school, with a minimum staffing ratio established nationally. Ensure these specialists are included in school safety teams and coordinate directly with the State Care Agency and law enforcement in case management;
- Enhance a nationwide, structured in-service training programme for all teachers, school principals, and administrative staff on identifying signs of child sexual abuse, responding to disclosures, and understanding reporting obligations. This should include mandatory refresher modules and be delivered through certified training providers.

Ministry of Internally Displaced Persons from the Occupied Territories, Labour, Health and Social Affairs of Georgia

- Expand trauma-informed psychosocial support infrastructure by establishing regional counselling centres and deploying mobile mental health units to underserved and rural areas. Ensure these services are accessible to children and their families, and coordinated with municipal child protection services and schools;
- Develop and operationalise, in partnership with the Ministry of Education a national Early Risk Detection and Response Protocol that should include routine screening procedures in schools, preschools, and healthcare institutions to identify children at risk of abuse or neglect and ensure timely referrals to child protection services;
- Establish a national accreditation and licensing system for psychologists and social workers, including a specialisation track in child sexual abuse (CSA). Ensure continuous professional development and supervision mechanisms, in line with trauma-informed care standards;
- Design and implement structured reintegration and follow-up programmes for children post-rehabilitation, including case-based support plans, family counselling, and community-based reintegration activities;
- Lead the geographic expansion of Barnahus centres beyond Tbilisi, ensuring close coordination with relevant state agencies. Ensure financial and staffing sustainability through long-term budget allocations.

Communications Commission

- Mandate age verification and content moderation standards for digital platforms operating in Georgia, by integrating child protection protocols into licensing and regulatory compliance mechanisms;
- Coordinate national digital literacy and online safety campaigns through partnerships with internet service providers (ISPs), mobile operators, and social media companies, focusing on rural outreach and minority language inclusion in line with Georgia's Media Literacy Development Strategy;
- Introduce a digital child protection audit mechanism that reviews platforms' compliance with CSAM (child sexual abuse material) takedown obligations and their cooperation with law enforcement, based on periodic assessments led in cooperation with the State Inspector's Service or the Personal Data Protection Office.

Digital Governance Agency

- Develop and implement a real-time child abuse flagging mechanism, integrated into existing state-managed digital platforms (e.g., school portals, communication apps, or national service websites), ensuring a direct referral path to law enforcement and the State Care Agency.

Local Governments and Municipalities

- Establish inter-sectoral child safety committees at the municipal level, bringing together representatives from schools, healthcare facilities, police, and social services. These committees should meet quarterly to review high-risk cases, assess service gaps, and coordinate local prevention efforts;
- Lead local awareness-raising and prevention initiatives by organising regular educational workshops in schools, kindergartens, clinics, and community centres. Topics should include child rights, body autonomy, digital safety, and reporting mechanisms. Ensure inclusion of ethnic minorities and children with disabilities through linguistically and culturally adapted content;
- Allocate dedicated municipal budgets to support child protection outreach teams, educational materials, training sessions for local professionals, and procurement of child-friendly equipment (e.g., for interview rooms, mobile outreach kits, etc.). Establish co-funding mechanisms with central authorities or NGOs where necessary.

Public Defender's Office

- Keep integrating CSA-specific monitoring into PDO's annual audits of state and municipal agencies and produce periodic thematic report on CSA. Track and report the number of

CSA-related incidents identified, actions taken by institutions, and follow-up measures implemented. Include CSA-specific findings in annual reports to Parliament, alongside clear, actionable recommendations for systemic improvements;

- Keep conducting CSA-focused awareness sessions per year, targeting children, parents, and professionals, using existing PDO outreach channels. Track the number of participants and regions covered, and include CSA-specific topics in all campaigns to ensure consistent messaging on prevention, reporting, and support mechanisms;
- Ensure that child-friendly materials regarding CSA prevention, reporting, and support guidance are widely distributed. Track the number of materials distributed annually and monitor feedback from children and parents to ensure clarity and effectiveness.

Legal Aid Service and Georgian Bar Association

- Establish an official child protection legal specialist certification, with mandatory specialisation in child-friendly justice, trauma-informed approaches, and specific procedures for CSA cases. Ensure continuing education requirements are in place for certification renewal;
- Guarantee immediate access to qualified legal aid for all child victims of sexual abuse, including free representation in criminal, administrative, and civil proceedings. Ensure availability in all regions, including rural and underserved areas, through dedicated child protection legal teams.

NGOs and Civil Society Organisations

- Establish structured child and youth advisory groups to ensure children's views, especially those from vulnerable communities, are meaningfully integrated into the design, implementation, and evaluation of state child protection programmes;
- Fill critical service gaps in remote and underserved areas by offering psychosocial rehabilitation, legal assistance, and informal education programmes, particularly where state resources or access are limited.

Media Regulatory Bodies and Journalists

- Enforce compliance with ethical standards (as outlined by the Code of Conduct for Broadcasters and Journalists' Ethics Charter) to protect child victims' privacy and dignity in reporting on CSA cases. Apply sanctions in cases of violations;
- Provide mandatory, continuous training for journalists, editors, and media producers on trauma-informed, respectful reporting of child sexual abuse, in cooperation with the Charter of Journalistic Ethics and media training institutions;

- Promote public awareness campaigns and educational content in collaboration with state agencies and civil society, focusing on prevention of child sexual abuse, reducing stigma, and encouraging safe reporting.

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The report aims to contribute to the ongoing efforts to strengthen the national response to child sexual abuse, including online child sexual exploitation and abuse, in line with the Council of Europe Convention on the Protection of Children against Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse (hereinafter: Lanzarote Convention) and other International Standards, and the recommendations of the Lanzarote Committee. It builds on existing legal and policy frameworks, providing an assessment of achievements, gaps, and barriers, while offering recommendations for further alignment with international standards.

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