



A just world for all women and girls



GEORGIA

Addressing Violence and Discrimination against Women and Girls

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Council

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Summary

Following the last UPR review in 2021, Georgia started to make notable progress in addressing violence and discrimination against women, including increasing justice for sexual violence and advancing gender equality. However, since 2024, significant setbacks have emerged, including in the protection of women's rights and civil society freedoms. The legal definition of rape remains outdated and challenges in accessing justice persist (particularly for women and girls with disabilities), efforts to prevent child and forced marriage are insufficient, and women continue to face serious barriers to justice, which is coupled with the recent removal of references to "gender" from all laws and abolishing of temporary measures to increase women's political participation. Recently introduced regressive laws ("Law on Transparency of Foreign Influence" and the "Foreign Agents Registration Act") target civil society, opposition groups, and the media, severely restricting civil society's work, putting protections for women and marginalized groups at risk, and further eroding human rights standards. These developments threaten the gains made in recent years, including in combating sexual violence, and urgent action is needed to fulfil Georgia's international human rights obligations.

Key Recommendations

- Repeal repressive laws targeting civil society and penalizing human rights defenders, including the "Law on Transparency of Foreign Influence" and the "Foreign Agents Registration Act," to ensure a free and safe environment for civic engagement and human rights advocacy.
- Introduce a consent-based definition of rape by amending Articles 137–139 of the Criminal Code to align with international human rights standards.
- Ensure justice for sexual violence by eliminating burdensome evidentiary requirements in sexual violence cases and removing procedures that discriminate against survivors.
- Guarantee access to justice for women with disabilities who experience

sexual violence by ensuring reasonable and procedural accommodations at every stage of legal proceedings.

- Implement a comprehensive strategy to prevent and respond to child and forced marriage, including multi-sectoral prevention measures, improved criminalization of all forms of forced marriage, accountability for perpetrators, and coordinated support across state and civil society actors.
- Restore gender equality safeguards by reinstating the recently abolished term “gender” in legislation and reintroducing gender quotas for political participation.

Introduction

1. This submission addresses challenges in securing access to justice for sexual violence, and child and forced marriage, and other recent pressing issues affecting women’s rights, gender equality, the work of civil society organizations and human rights defenders. It concludes with key recommendations to advance progress in these areas in Georgia.
2. During the previous UPR cycle (Third Cycle – 37th Session), Georgia received a set of recommendations related to the protection of women’s rights, several of which addressed sexual violence and access to justice. Among these were calls to amend the definition of rape in line with international standards (Rec. 148.201, Denmark), to improve institutional responses to sexual and domestic violence (Rec. 148.206, Philippines), and to establish comprehensive support structures for victims (Rec. 148.213, Germany).¹ Georgia accepted all three recommendations and has taken partial steps in response, including launching training manuals and strengthening select institutional roles to address sexual violence. However, implementation efforts still need to be significantly strengthened by introducing a consent-based definition of rape, expanding access to victim

¹ Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights. *Georgia – Universal Periodic Review (A/HRC/47/15)*. 13 July 2021: <https://www.ohchr.org/en/hr-bodies/upr/ge-index>

support services, and ensuring accountability, including for women and girls with disabilities.

3. This assessment covers developments since Georgia's last UPR review in 2020, focusing on legal, institutional, and procedural matters and draws on a broad base of sources, including: Equality Now's 2023 report *Sexual Violence Laws in Eurasia: Towards a Consent-Based Definition*,² the GREVIO Baseline Evaluation Report on Georgia (2022),³ the CEDAW Committee's Concluding Observations (2023),⁴ Equality Now's 2024 report *Breaking Barriers: Addressing Child, Early And Forced Marriage In Eurasia*,⁵ and the Public Defender's Annual and Thematic Reports (2022–2024), and is broadly informed by civil society organizations and independent lawyers working on women's rights issues in Georgia.

Reversing progress: recent restrictions against women's rights and civil society organizations

4. Despite significant progress in previous years, human rights protections in Georgia - including those related to women's rights - have experienced major setbacks since 2024. In May 2024, the Parliament of Georgia abolished mandatory gender quotas in the Election Code, which had required parties to include women on their party lists for parliamentary and municipal elections to promote women's political participation.⁶ In March 2025, the Permanent Parliamentary Council for Gender Equality was abolished.⁷ On 2 April, 2025, amendments were introduced in over a dozen laws to remove the terms "gender" and "gender identity" from all laws of Georgia.⁸

² Equality Now. *Sexual Violence Laws in Eurasia: Towards a Consent-Based Definition*. 23 Jan. 2023, <https://equalitynow.org/resource/sexual-violence-laws-in-eurasia-towards-a-consent-based-definition/>

³ Council of Europe's Group of Experts on Action against Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (GREVIO). *Report on Georgia*. Council of Europe, 2022: <https://rm.coe.int/grevio-report-on-georgia-2022/1680a917aa>

⁴ Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women. *Concluding Observations on the Sixth Periodic Report of Georgia (CEDAW/C/GEO/CO/6)*. 2 Mar. 2023.

⁵ Equality Now. *Breaking Barriers: Addressing Child, Early and Forced Marriage in Eurasia*. 10 Oct. 2024: <https://equalitynow.org/resource/breaking-barriers-addressing-child-early-and-forced-marriage-in-eurasia/>

⁶ Article 203 of the Electoral Code of Georgia providing for quotas was removed from the Code: [https://matsne.gov.ge/ka/document/view/6151142?publication=0#DOCUMENT:1](https://matsne.gov.ge/ka/document/view/6151142?publication=0#DOCUMENT:1;);

⁷ Parliament of Georgia. "Parliament Endorsing Amendments to Law on Gender Equality in I Reading." *Parliament of Georgia*, 4 Mar. 2025:

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

⁸ The Law on Gender Equality, for example, was renamed as the Law on Equality Between Woman and Man: <https://matsne.gov.ge/ka/document/view/6460874?publication=0>

5. These developments reflect not only the deprioritization of women's rights and gender equality in government policy but also a broader shift toward anti-equality politics. Removing gender-related terminology and principles of gender equality from laws is likely to weaken protections for women's rights across multiple areas - including effective criminal justice responses to violence against women and sexual violence - which are rooted in gender inequality and harmful stereotypes. Such measures also undermine recognition of the ways women are perceived and treated simply because they are women in a patriarchal society.
6. These developments were preceded by the adoption of the Law 'On Protection of Family Values and Rights of Minors' in December 2024, which fundamentally undermines equality for LGBTQI+ individuals. The law and related legal acts prohibit any positive representation of LGBTQI+ issues in public, educational, and media contexts, severely restricts transgender people's rights to gender identity recognition and access to healthcare services, and even impose criminal sanctions in certain areas.⁹ This is further compounded by the removal of 'gender identity' (in addition to 'gender') from legislation, discriminating against transgender, non-binary, and gender-nonconforming individuals.
7. The deterioration of human rights protections in Georgia has been further exacerbated by the introduction of repressive regulations targeting, among others, civil society organizations. In 2024, despite widespread protests, the Parliament of Georgia adopted the Law "On Transparency of Foreign Influence,"¹⁰ which, while presented as a transparency measure, restricts local CSOs - including those working on women's and girls' rights, violence against women, domestic violence, sexual and reproductive health and rights, and broader human rights issues - by imposing stringent registration and reporting requirements in case of receiving foreign funding. On April 2, 2025, the Parliament also passed the "Foreign Agents Registration Act,"¹¹ requiring individuals or organizations deemed to operate "in the interest of a foreign entity" - such as by receiving foreign funding and advocating to influence local laws and policies - to register as

⁹ See Venice Commission (2024). Georgia - Opinion of The Draft Constitutional Law on Protecting Family Values and Minors. Available at:

[https://www.venice.coe.int/webforms/documents/default.aspx?pdffile=CDL-AD\(2024\)021-e](https://www.venice.coe.int/webforms/documents/default.aspx?pdffile=CDL-AD(2024)021-e)

¹⁰ The Law on Transparency of Foreign Influence is available here:

<https://matsne.gov.ge/ka/document/view/6171895?publication=0> See also Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR). *Urgent Opinion on the Law of Georgia "On Transparency of Foreign Influence"* (Opinion No. NGO-GEO/506/2024). 30 May 2024, Warsaw.

<https://legislationline.org/sites/default/files/2024-05/30-05-2024%20Final%20ODIHR%20Urgent%20Opinion%20on%20Law%20on%20Transparency%20of%20Georgia.pdf>

¹¹ Available at: <https://matsne.gov.ge/document/view/6461578?publication=0>

foreign agents, and imposing broad rules of Government surveillance of their work. The law, among others, imposes sanctions for non-compliance, including criminal penalties and prison terms of up to five years. Giving grants to civil society organizations now also requires Government approval.¹²

8. These laws erode Georgia's binding international human rights obligations.

2. Addressing Sexual Violence

2.1. Measures taken

9. Sexual violence in Georgia remains widespread and underreported. According to UN Women (2022),¹³ 8.5% of women in Georgia reported having experienced child sexual abuse, 1.5% non-partner sexual violence, 3.5% intimate partner sexual violence, and 24.5% sexual harassment. Many survivors experienced multiple forms of violence, often beginning in childhood, yet few pursue legal redress.
10. Over the past years, Georgia has undertaken a series of reforms to combat sexual violence, which significantly increased access to justice and accountability. In 2021, a first-of-its-kind manual – *Effectively Investigating, Prosecuting and Adjudicating Sexual Violence Cases: A Manual for Practitioners in Georgia* was launched by Equality Now, the Council of Europe and UN Women,¹⁴ in collaboration with the Ministry of Internal Affairs, the Prosecutor's Office, and the judiciary. The manual has since served as a practical guide for all justice actors and supported the large-scale training of over 600 investigators, prosecutors, judges, court officials and lawyers, led by Government authorities. Prosecutors were granted specialization in sexual violence as a result of the training, and trainers were also trained from all sectors to ensure continuity of the training.

¹² Law on Grants, Article 51: <https://matsne.gov.ge/document/view/31510?publication=34>

¹³ UN Women. *National Study on Violence Against Women in Georgia*. 2022, pp. 54–55, 73.

¹⁴ UN Women; Council of Europe; Equality Now. *Effectively Investigating, Prosecuting and Adjudicating Sexual Violence Cases: A Manual for Practitioners in Georgia*. 2021: <https://rm.coe.int/investigation-manual-eng/1680a3e8e4>

11. These efforts have led to significant improvements in access to justice for survivors of sexual violence in Georgia. For example, the number of criminal prosecutions for sexual violence increased by 76% in 2021, with 252 prosecutions initiated compared to 143 in 2020. During the same period, convictions for sexual violence rose by 44%, demonstrating the justice system's growing capacity to address these crimes. While the Ministry of Internal Affairs recorded a slight decline in registered sexual violence crimes - from 568 cases in 2023 to 544 in 2024 (Criminal Code Articles 137–141)¹⁵ - and prosecutions decreased from 296 to 254,¹⁶ these figures still reflect continued institutional engagement. To maintain and build on the progress and ensure sustained impact, it remains essential to strengthen political commitment and continue support for access to justice.

2.2. Need to Align Sexual Violence Laws with International Human Rights Standards

12. Georgia's legal framework on sexual violence: the current definitions of rape and other forms of sexual violence in the Georgian Criminal Code – Articles 137 (rape), 138 (another act of a sexual nature), and 139 (coercion into sexual acts) – do not align with international human rights standards, including those set out in the Istanbul Convention (Art. 36), affirmed at the European Court of Human Rights, by the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), and other regional and international mechanisms. These provisions in Georgian law are not based on the absence of free and voluntary consent but instead require proof of physical force, threats, or the victim's helpless condition.¹⁷

13. As a result, Georgian law fails to capture a wide range of coercive circumstances under which victims cannot freely consent, including threats of non-physical harm, socio-economic dependency, coercive control, and structural power imbalances (e.g., in relationships, workplaces, detention, or healthcare settings). Moreover, Georgian legislation does not criminalise as rape “causing another person to engage in non-consensual

¹⁵ Ministry of Internal Affairs of Georgia, Statistics of Registered Crime 2024:

<https://info.police.ge/uploads/679cbdae5ecd.pdf>

¹⁶ Prosecutor's Office of Georgia, [2024 Statistical Data on Crimes Against Sexual Freedom and Inviolability](https://pog.gov.ge/uploads_script/resources/tmp/php8ogplm.pdf).

https://pog.gov.ge/uploads_script/resources/tmp/php8ogplm.pdf

¹⁷ GREVIO. *Baseline Evaluation Report: Georgia*. Council of Europe, adopted 13 Oct. 2022, paras. 252–257; CEDAW. *Concluding Observations on the Sixth Periodic Report of Georgia (CEDAW/C/GEO/CO/6)*. 2 Mar. 2023, para. 26(a).

acts of a sexual nature with a third person”, as required by Article 36(1)(c) of the Istanbul Convention.¹⁸

14. Particularly problematic is Article 139 of the Criminal Code, which addresses coerced sexual acts through threats (e.g., blackmail, property damage, or abuse of authority). While these acts meet the definition of rape under international human rights and criminal law, Georgian law does not classify them as rape, and treats them as a “less serious crime,” punishable by a fine or up to five years’ imprisonment. This legislative framing, as GREVIO notes, creates a hierarchy of rape victims, where violations not involving physical violence are not adequately punished and can be resolved through plea deals or conditional sentences.¹⁹
15. Notably, some recent court judgments have begun referencing the absence of consent as central to defining rape – an encouraging development toward harmonisation with international standards. However, such case law is still insufficient to establish a consistent, consent-based jurisprudence nationwide. Ultimately, court rulings cannot substitute for legislative reform; only changes in the law can create a comprehensive and uniform framework.
16. Therefore, as of mid-2025, Georgia has not yet amended its legislation to bring the definitions of rape and related offences into line with consent-based standards – despite its support for relevant UPR recommendations (Rec. 148.201). The continued absence of reform hinders survivors’ access to justice, promotes impunity, and reinforces harmful and outdated assumptions about the nature and seriousness of sexual violence.

2.3. Burdensome Evidence Requirements Preventing Proof of Sexual Violence

17. Although the Criminal Procedure Code of Georgia (Art. 82) allows for flexible evidentiary assessment, in practice, prosecutors and judges often

¹⁸ GREVIO Baseline Evaluation Report Georgia, para. 259; Equality Now. *Sexual Violence in Eurasia: Moving Towards a Consent-Based Definition*. 2023, p. 15.

¹⁹ GREVIO Baseline Evaluation Report Georgia, para. 257; Public Defender of Georgia. *Report on the Situation of Protection of Human Rights and Freedoms in Georgia in 2024*. Public Defender’s Office of Georgia, 2025, p. 244, <https://ombudsman.ge/res/docs/2025040121291438156.pdf>. Equality Now, *Sexual Violence in Eurasia: Moving Towards a Consent-Based Definition*, 2023, pp. 14-15.

apply overly rigid and burdensome standards in sexual violence cases. Prosecutions and judges frequently depend on the presence of direct physical evidence - such as visible injuries, biological traces, or forensic confirmation - and typically require at least two pieces of direct evidence to proceed with charges or secure a conviction. GREVIO is concerned that this may result in high evidentiary requirements for rape, as this rule is not only applied for a conviction but also for an indictment.²⁰

18. In Georgia, most prosecutions that result in conviction under Articles 137–140 of the Criminal Code still involve cases where the victim physically resisted, resulting in visible injuries or where there is forensic evidence. As highlighted by the Public Defender’s Office of Georgia and GREVIO, this evidentiary approach in Georgia fails to account for coercive circumstances - such as psychological intimidation, intoxication, or the victim’s helplessness - which are common in many sexual violence cases.²¹
19. Even though, in recent years, judges have increasingly begun to incorporate consent-based definitions of rape into their judgments and prosecutors have applied broader interpretation of coercive circumstances, much more needs to be done to move away from narrow interpretations that reinforce the harmful stereotype that only physically violent or visibly injurious forms of rape are legally actionable. This excludes a wide range of non-consensual acts from legal protection, contributes to high attrition rates in sexual violence cases, and discourages survivors - especially those without physical injuries, which would include many historical cases, including of childhood rape - from reporting in the first place.

2.4. Removing Gender Stereotyping and Discriminatory Investigation Procedures

20. Despite certain improvements made to ensure gender-sensitive and survivor-centered proceedings, survivors of sexual violence in Georgia continue to face stereotyping and discriminatory practices throughout criminal proceedings, from the initial report to the courtroom. These

²⁰ GREVIO Baseline Evaluation Report Georgia, para. 310.

²¹ GREVIO Baseline Evaluation Report Georgia, paras. 310-312; Report of the Public Defender of Georgia on the Situation of Protection of Human Rights and Freedoms in Georgia in 2024, p. 245.

patterns remain a serious barrier to justice, highlighting the state's failure to fully implement UPR Rec. 148.206 on improving the investigation and prosecution of gender-based violence. Common issues include requiring survivors to repeat traumatic accounts multiple times, questioning their sexual history or behaviour, and even probing their mental health to assess credibility. Interviews and court proceedings frequently lack gender-sensitive language and trauma-informed procedures. According to lawyers and civil society actors, victims sometimes encounter dismissive or humiliating attitudes from law enforcement officers, especially in settings where privacy and psychological support are lacking.

21. One criticized practice is the so-called “investigative experiment,” (provided by Articles 129 and 130 of the Criminal Procedure Code) which in practice requires victims to re-enact the assault by returning to the crime scene, indicating where events occurred, and being photographed in the process. Survivors and experts have described this as retraumatizing, degrading, and incompatible with the principles of dignity and psychological safety. Victims are also often made to interact with multiple law enforcement officers - frequently of the opposite sex - who are not directly involved in their case. In some instances, efforts have been made to assign the same investigator to all stages of the case, which is a welcome practice, though this is not consistently applied. As a result, survivors may still face repeated and unnecessary interactions with unfamiliar officers in emotionally distressing environments. Additionally, victims are sometimes required to remain at investigative facilities for unreasonably long periods, with little attention paid to their psychological well-being or immediate needs.
22. During investigations, survivors are often interviewed in shared or non-private areas within police stations, where unrelated staff or bystanders may be present. This lack of privacy leaves victims feeling exposed, overheard, and judged, further compounding their trauma. Investigators have also been documented using suggestive or judgmental language that implies victim-blaming - such as remarks about the survivor's clothing, sexual behavior, or choices prior to the incident. The prevalence of such attitudes appears to have decreased in recent years, however, and survivors have reported better investigation practices.

23. Forensic medical examinations remain especially problematic. They are conducted exclusively at the Levan Samkharauli National Forensic Bureau, and only the Tbilisi regional office has female forensic experts available - other regional branches lack female staff. Examinations often place unnecessary emphasis on the condition of the hymen or presence of genital injuries, reinforcing outdated myths about rape and virginity. Additionally, psychological forensic assessments lack standardized, gender-sensitive protocols. In some instances, prosecutors have requested evaluations to determine whether a victim is "prone to lying" - a practice strongly suggesting rape myths and stereotypes are still prevalent among criminal justice actors.
24. During the trial stage, procedural protections for survivors are inconsistently applied. Victims are generally required to face the defendant in court and are sometimes subjected to direct questioning by the defendant. Defence lawyers frequently conduct hostile or humiliating cross-examinations, with judges rarely intervening to prevent such treatment. Measures designed to prevent secondary victimization - such as remote testimony, the use of protective screens in the courtroom, or limiting irrelevant and intrusive personal questions - are not often applied.
25. The criminal justice system in Georgia often treats sexual violence as an ordinary, gender-neutral crime, rather than recognizing its inherently gendered nature - that is, violence committed against women because they are women, and which disproportionately affects them. As a result, the discriminatory motives and sexist dimensions of sexual violence are frequently overlooked in the criminal justice process, which in turn affects how survivors are treated and how evidence is assessed. Encouragingly, the Prosecutor's Office has started to reference gender bias as a motive in some indictments, and a small number of court decisions now include gender-based reasoning in their analysis. However, courts still generally refrain from explicitly acknowledging this, and there remains no systematic approach to identifying or addressing gender bias in sexual violence cases. The recent removal of the term 'gender' from all legislation, including the Criminal Code, risks further deepening this problem.
26. Another critical concern is the limited access to abortion services for survivors of sexual violence. Under Georgian law, abortion after 12 weeks of

pregnancy is permitted in limited circumstances, including if a person is a victim of rape, as proved by the judgment of conviction.²² This makes the provision nearly impossible to implement, as securing a conviction often takes months or even years - if the case is reported or prosecution is initiated at all. This legislative barrier was challenged by the Public Defender of Georgia before the Constitutional Court in 2023, citing its incompatibility with the rights and health needs of survivors.²³ The case remains pending²⁴.

3. Additional gaps in protecting minors against sexual violence

27. Sexual violence against minors remains a serious concern due to underreporting, challenges in prevention and criminal justice response, and limited availability of support services. Child and adolescent survivors in rural areas are especially vulnerable, as specialized facilities - such as the Barnahus Centre in Tbilisi - are geographically out of reach. Outside the capital, interview rooms are rarely child-friendly, and trauma-sensitive practices are applied inconsistently.

28. Law enforcement and prosecutors routinely qualify sexual violence against minors under 16 years committed by an adult under Article 140 (statutory rape), rather than recognising them as rape. This approach diminishes the gravity of the offence, reinforces harmful stereotypes, and shifts blame onto the child, particularly when the case involves informal or so-called “voluntary” relationships or de facto marriages. Criminal justice practice continues to reflect high evidentiary thresholds, often requiring proof of physical resistance or injuries to qualify the act as rape (as compared to Art.140), which fails to align with international standards.²⁵ Article 137(4)(d) of the Criminal Code that provides for aggravated rape of minors was

²² Public Defender of Georgia. *Report on the Situation of Protection of Human Rights and Freedoms in Georgia in 2022*. 2023, p. 157.

²³ Public Defender’s Office of Georgia. *Annual Report 2023*. p. 159.

²⁴ Public Defender of Georgia v. Parliament of Georgia, Recording Notice № 2/15/1802. Constitutional Court of Georgia.

²⁵ GREVIO Baseline Evaluation Report Georgia, para. 288; Public Defender’s Office of Georgia; UNFPA; Democracy and Governance Center. *Harmful Practices of Early/Childhood Marriage in Georgia: Challenges and Solutions – Special Report*. 2022, pp. 7–8.

amended in 2020 to introduce life imprisonment as one of the applicable sanctions. However, without accompanying comprehensive measures, this amendment alone is unlikely to have a significant impact.

29. In cases of statutory rape occurring within the context of child marriage, criminal sanctions are often inadequately applied. Although Article 140 of the Criminal Code prescribes a prison sentence of 7 to 9 years, courts frequently impose fines or conditional (non-custodial) sentences, typically following plea bargains initiated by the Prosecutor's Office - particularly when the perpetrator claims to be in a "marital" relationship with the minor. In 2022 study, 74% of the examined cases (under Article 140) were resolved through plea bargains, most resulting in non-custodial sentences.²⁶

3. Intersecting Discrimination against Women with Disabilities Survivors of Sexual Violence

30. Women and girls with disabilities - particularly those with psychosocial or intellectual disabilities - face systemic and procedural barriers throughout the justice process. These include the absence of reasonable and procedural accommodations, a lack of standardized protocols for interviewing survivors with disabilities, a shortage of trained interpreters and support staff, and inadequate physical and technological accessibility in police stations and court facilities. Although the Prosecutor's Office has introduced a disability-responsive interview planning tool in recent years, its implementation is reported to be inconsistent. Survivors and their legal representatives continue to report that the justice system often questions the credibility of testimonies from women with disabilities, reinforcing harmful stereotypes that they are "prone to lying" or incapable of providing reliable testimony.
31. Until 2024, Article 50(2) of the Criminal Procedure Code explicitly prohibited individuals with certain psycho-social disabilities from testifying in court, on the grounds that they could not perceive or recall facts accurately. This provision was strongly criticised by the UN

²⁶ Public Defender's Office of Georgia; UNFPA; Democracy and Governance Center. *Harmful Practices of Early/Childhood Marriage in Georgia: Challenges and Solutions – Special Report*. 2022, p. 9.

Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities,²⁷ which urged Georgia to remove all legal barriers to the participation of persons with disabilities in judicial proceedings. Following these recommendations, the article was repealed in 2024.²⁸ While this is a positive step forward, its full practical impact on access to justice for women with disabilities remains to be seen - but it offers an encouraging foundation for further progress.

4. Combatting Child and Forced Marriage

32. Although Georgia set the minimum legal age of marriage at 18 with no exceptions in 2017, child and forced marriages, including abductions for forced marriage (so-called “bride kidnappings”) persist, particularly in rural areas and ethnic minority communities.²⁹ These cases often involve informal unions with girls aged 13 to 17. In 2024 alone, 427 underage pregnancies and 365 underage parents were recorded - numbers that have decreased compared to 2023, but still remain a concern.³⁰ According to official data, in 2023–2024, law enforcement-initiated investigations into over 336 suspected child marriage cases, and 123 children were recognised as victims,³¹ yet many perpetrators received conditional sentences or plea agreements.

33. Moreover, there is no specific provision in the Criminal Code addressing abductions for forced marriage. When prosecutions are initiated, they are pursued under general criminal law provisions on illegal deprivation of liberty, which fails to capture the specific nature, gravity and gendered dimensions of the crime and prevents collection of disaggregated data on this abuse.

²⁷ Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. *Concluding Observations on the Initial Report of Georgia (CRPD/C/GEO/CO/1)*. 18 Apr. 2023. Para. 28(a).

²⁸ A new provision was added (Article 75(1¹)) stating that “when assessing the credibility of a witness, their ability to perceive, remember and recount relevant facts shall be taken into consideration among other factors.”

²⁹ For overview of the countries of the region, including Georgia, Equality Now. *Breaking Barriers: Addressing Child, Early and Forced Marriage in Eurasia*. 10 Oct. 2024,

³⁰ Public Defender’s Office of Georgia. *Report on the Situation of Protection of Human Rights and Freedoms in Georgia in 2023*. 2024, p. 161. Public Defender’s Office of Georgia. *Report on the Situation of Protection of Human Rights and Freedoms in Georgia in 2024*. 2025, p. 249.

³¹ Public Defender’s Office of Georgia. *Report on the Situation of Protection of Human Rights and Freedoms in Georgia in 2024*. 2025, p. 249.

34. While criminal justice cannot and should not be the only response to abuses arising from child and forced marriages, an urgent, comprehensive, and multi-sectoral approach is needed — one that combines prosecution with prevention through public awareness campaigns, education, and targeted socio-economic support for girls and their families. Current policy frameworks lack coherence and coordination, and the prevailing inadequate criminal justice response fails to uphold the best interests of the child, reinforcing systemic tolerance for harmful practices and sexual violence.

Recommendations:³²

Abolishing recently adopted laws restricting civil society and human rights defenders:

- Repeal the “Law on Transparency of Foreign Influence,” the “Foreign Agents Registration Act,” and all related criminal and other penalties to ensure that human rights organizations and activists can operate freely and without repression, coercion, or intimidation.

Abolishing recently adopted laws restricting women’s rights and gender equality:

- Reinstate the recently abolished term “gender” in Georgian legislation to ensure effective protection of women and girls from violence and discrimination.
- Restore the recently abolished gender quotas to support women’s political participation.
- Repeal all recently adopted laws denying basic rights of LGBTQI+ persons.

Addressing sexual violence:

- Maintain and strengthen political will to address sexual violence, building on progress made in recent years to enhance accountability and avoid regression.

³²

- Amend Articles 137–139 of the Criminal Code to introduce a consent-based definition of rape, in line with international human rights standards.
- Eliminate overly burdensome evidentiary requirements in sexual violence cases, and adopt procedures that minimize retraumatization and ensure survivors' access to justice.
- Ensure ongoing training for investigators, prosecutors, judges, and lawyers on sexual violence and access to justice, in line with international human rights standards.
- Ensure that persons with disabilities receive all necessary reasonable and procedural accommodations to fully access justice in cases of sexual violence.

Addressing child and forced marriage

- Develop and implement a comprehensive strategy to prevent and address child and forced marriage, ensuring coordinated efforts among government institutions, agencies, and civil society, supported by educational, economic, and social assistance measures.
- Ensure that all forms of forced marriage - including abductions for the purpose of forced marriage - are explicitly criminalized, treated with appropriate severity, and effectively enforced.
- Hold perpetrators of sexual violence resulting from child and forced marriages accountable through appropriate legal sanctions.