



CIVIL SOCIETY BRIEF GEORGIA

Civil Society Overview

Georgian civil society dates back to the middle of the 19th century, when it took the form of national movements and educational organizations. Georgia had been annexed at the beginning of the century, so these movements became part of the national liberation struggle. In 1879, prominent public figures of the time established the Georgian Society for Promoting Literacy in the Georgian Nation, which is considered the country's first civil society organization (CSO).¹ Civil society changed form and focus after the Soviet occupation of Georgia in 1921. During this period, various trade unions, sports clubs, and writers' and artists' unions started to appear. However, civil society was largely inactive during the Soviet Era because all these organizations and unions were under Communist Party control.² In the 1980s, initiatives emerged in Georgia, clearing the ground for modern civil society organizations.³

Modern civil society appeared in Georgia in 1991–1995. Political groups and social movements made up civil society during this period, and students and youth played an important role. Civil society was characterized by strong anti-Communist values and liberal principles, and relied on volunteerism.⁴ However, during this period, civil society in Georgia was weak and lacked organizational structure and financial resources. It functioned more as

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Country Context

Georgia is a country in the Caucasus region, which lies at the intersection of Western Asia and Eastern Europe. It is bounded on the north by the Russian Federation, on the west by the Black Sea, on the south by Turkey and Armenia, and on the southeast by Azerbaijan. Georgia has a land area of 69,700 square kilometers,

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▲ Georgia is the birthplace of wine. Georgia has cultivated grapes and produced Neolithic wine for over 8,000 years.

and a population of 3.7 million.^a The median age in Georgia is 37 years.^b In 2018, 19.47% of the population was below the age of 14, 65.38% was between the ages of 15 and 65, and 14.65% was above the age of 65.^c A total of 58.31% of the population lives in urban areas.^d The official languages of Georgia are Georgian and Abkhazian.

Following the collapse of the Soviet Union, the Supreme Council of the Republic of Georgia declared independence on 9 April 1991. On 26 May 1991, Georgia elected its first President, Zviad Gamsakhurdia, who was soon deposed in a coup d'état. In the aftermath, a civil war erupted in the Tskhinvali Region and in the Autonomous Republic of Abkhazia that lasted until 1993. In 1995, President Eduard Shevardnadze was elected, and a new constitution was introduced. In 2003, the peaceful Rose Revolution led to the resignation of Shevardnadze. Mikheil Saakashvili became the third President of Georgia in 2004. The first peaceful transition of power, through parliamentary elections, took place in 2012.

Georgia is a democratic parliamentary republic, with the President as the head of state and the Prime Minister as the head of government. The executive branch is concentrated in the cabinet, which is headed by the Prime Minister and is composed of ministers appointed by the President. The Parliament is the legislative authority in the country. It is unicameral, and the population directly elects its 150 members.



▲ **Georgia has a long history of pottery.** Handmade wine vessels and winemaking equipment bear witness to the skills of traditional artisans in Georgia.

In 1991, Georgia transitioned from a centrally planned socialist system into a free market economy. The transition was difficult, as Georgia was facing economic collapse in the early 1990s. Agriculture and industry had been the base of Georgia's economy during the Soviet era. Since the Rose Revolution of 2003, however, Georgia's economy has become more centered on services. Since 2003, Georgia has carried out efficient reforms in taxation, property rights, the police, and justice. And in 2019, Georgia held 7th place in the World Bank's ease of doing business rankings.

Georgia's gross domestic product (GDP) growth rate increased from 2.8% in 2016 to 4.8% in 2017, as a result of increases in exports and remittances. In 2018, Georgia's main exports were ferroalloys, copper ores, vehicles, fertilizers, wine, and pharmaceuticals.^e Georgia exports most of its commodities to (in order of trade volume) Azerbaijan, the Russian Federation, Armenia, Bulgaria, Turkey, and the People's Republic of China.

^a Government of Georgia, National Statistics Office of Georgia. <https://www.geostat.ge/en>.

^b Government of Georgia, National Statistics Office of Georgia. 2019. Population: Mid-Year Population by Age and Sex. <https://www.geostat.ge/en/modules/categories/41/population> (accessed 30 March 2019).

^c Government of Georgia, National Statistics Office of Georgia. 2019. External Trade. <https://www.geostat.ge/en/modules/categories/35/external-trade> (accessed 30 March 2019).

^d Government of Georgia, National Statistics Office of Georgia. 2019. Population. <https://www.geostat.ge/en/modules/categories/41/population> (accessed 30 March 2019).

^e Footnote c.

an informal sector, playing only a minor role in society, as the country had been devastated by the civil war and had economic problems.⁵ CSOs in Georgia really began to develop once foreign aid started entering the country in 1994.⁶ International foundations established branches in Georgia, providing financial and technical support. Branches of international foundations, such as the Open Society Georgia Foundation (part of the Open Society Foundation's global network), played a crucial role in the development of CSOs during this period.

The CSOs eventually increased in number and started challenging the government, which was considered to be corrupt and inefficient.⁷ For example, a civic youth resistance movement, "Kmara" (Enough), was critical in the events prior to the Rose Revolution of 2003. The political influence of the nongovernment organization (NGO) sector at this time was well reflected in subsequent events, with the ministerial cabinet being formed from a large number of former NGO leaders. Many qualified CSO staff also moved into various government institutions, causing something of a "brain drain" from the CSOs. Civil society entered a new stage of development after the Rose Revolution, as donor priorities shifted toward financing the new government directly, rather than investing in CSOs.⁸ However, after political tensions in 2007 revealed the flaws of the government, donor interest in watchdog and advocacy organizations increased once again, and there was a new influx of young professionals into the civil society sector.⁹ Georgian civil society remains active and resilient. One of the more prominent features of CSOs is the anti-Russian, anti-occupation sentiment that is strongly shared by the Georgian population.¹⁰ That sentiment was manifest, for instance, in the protests that erupted in Georgia during a Russian member of Parliament's visit to the country in June 2019. In the largest demonstrations seen in 7 years, thousands of demonstrators took to the streets of Georgia's capital, Tbilisi, in protest against Russian interference.¹¹

The concept of civil society in Georgia is primarily associated with NGOs. However, CSOs include formal institutions such as research associations, labor unions, women's rights groups, faith-based organizations, professional associations, and chambers of commerce. CSOs can register as legal entities under the regulatory framework of the Civil Code of Georgia, which then allows them to receive and report on their funds, employ staff, and conduct their activities on an



▲ **Addressing pressing issues.** Civil society organizations have been instrumental in safeguarding and enhancing Georgia's democratic achievements through their advocacy and monitoring efforts.

official basis. But community groups, social movements, and active citizens may function without registration. For example, a number of well-organized but unregistered environmentalist groups have been active in recent years.

There has been an upward trend in the general population's engagement with CSOs and civil society associations, but people in Georgia tend to favor noninstitutional engagement.¹² They generally prefer to work on practical issues such as environmental protection, waste management, food safety, and sanitation than on more abstract issues like democracy, rule of law, or good governance. However, there has been a recent mushrooming of CSOs, especially those concerned with governance and human rights. And this proliferation has led some CSOs to narrow the scope of their activities and focus on more specific issues. These CSOs also seek to engage citizens more proactively in their activities by delivering civic education training and involving minority groups and community-based organizations at the local level in advocacy for changes in various policy processes (for instance, the development of a strategy for minority groups or a self-governance code).¹³ The CSOs working on social issues have been the most active, with citizens' concerns at the core of their efforts. They combine "community work" with advocacy and lobbying activities aimed at public institutions.¹⁴ The frequency of noninstitutional civil engagement varies across different age groups, with the highest rates seen among Georgians in their 30s and above.¹⁵



▲ **Engagement of the general population.** Civil society organizations outside Tbilisi tend to operate across wider range of areas, such as education, health, environment, housing, and civic education.

Georgia does not have a separate law on CSOs and NGOs, so CSOs officially register as Non-Entrepreneurial (Non-Commercial) Legal Entities. By February 2019, 12,861 CSOs had formally entered the business registry of Georgia.¹⁶ However, there are many unregistered informal groups, networks, grassroots organizations, and ad hoc coalitions—the precise number of which is unknown. Even though there are many CSOs in Georgia, only a small portion of them conduct regular and sustained operations. This is due to the limited funding opportunities, lack of human resources, and problems related to management capacity. Staffing remains an especially important issue for CSOs, as competition with other sectors makes it difficult to retain qualified staff, especially during the frequent gaps in projects and funding.¹⁷ This limits organizational capacity and institutional memory.¹⁸ Medium-sized CSOs typically have 5–10 regular employees, whereas small CSOs are often one-person organizations.¹⁹ CSOs based in Tbilisi frequently have more financial and human resources than those based in regional towns. The latter tend to not have full-time staff and are smaller in size.

Currently, the National Agency of Public Registry provides information on the total number of CSOs registered in the country; however, no database exists with detailed information such as names, contact information, place of registry, etc. CSOs in Tbilisi mostly focus on four areas: human rights, good governance, the environment, and capacity building. CSOs in other locales tend to operate

across wider range of areas, such as education, health, environment, housing, and civic education.²⁰ Faith-based organizations operate both in the capital and at the local level. One characteristic of faith-based organizations in Georgia is that they are directly linked to religious institutions. Muslim organizations are the highest in number, with 40 organizations, followed by Orthodox, Catholic, and Baptist organizations.²¹

Aside from officially registered organizations, civil society in Georgia includes social movements, interest groups, student clubs, as well as activist groups that are involved in the decision-making processes of the country. The priorities of these citizen groups and activists vary, but they mainly cover environmental issues, human rights, workers' rights, cultural heritage, and equality. The main instrument of mobilization for this part of Georgian civil society is social media. Many successful campaigns have started as a reaction to certain events through Facebook. For example, in 2018, the White Noise Movement, a social movement advocating reform of the country's harsh drug policy, organized several protests via social media with the demand to abolish criminal punishment for the consumption of illicit drugs. The campaign attracted public and media attention.²² Student leftist movements, such as "Auditorium #115," have also been successful in gathering support from the public for educational reform and workers' rights, not only in the capital, but at the local level as well.²³

Well-established CSOs, as well as local branches of international NGOs, have built ties with the executive and legislative branches of government. Experienced CSOs provide training and capacity-building services for the government, the media, and other CSOs. Government institutions provide grants for CSOs or contract CSOs to deliver niche social services such as the rehabilitation of ex-convicts; management of foster homes; delivery of publicity activities; and the organization of sports, cultural, and educational activities.²⁴ In some instances, CSO-government cooperation has been successful, such as in the co-creation of various transparency and anticorruption tools through the Open Government Partnership (OGP) platform. The CSOs that work with the government place a strong emphasis on the production of policy documents, drafts of laws, research reports, and recommendations regarding government policies.

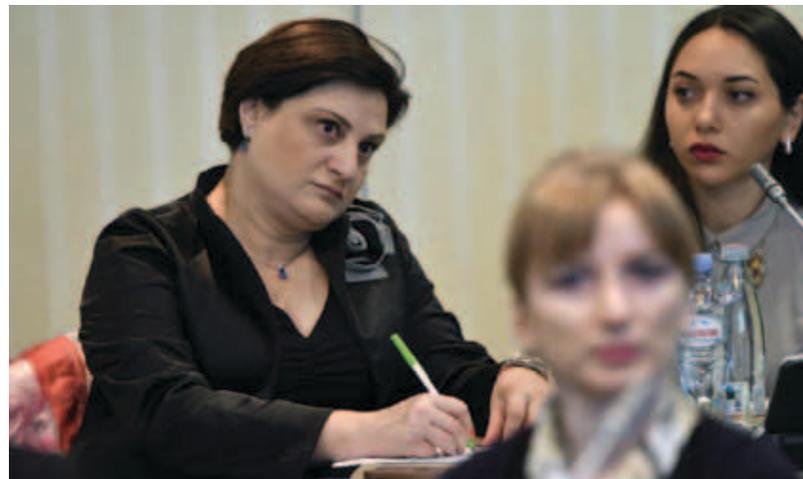
CSOs in general play an important part in the political life of Georgia. A good example is their role in the peaceful transition of power in 2012. CSOs have actively participated in pre- and post-parliamentary election processes, including voter education, exit polls,

nationwide monitoring operations on election days, and international assessments of election results. They have also successfully advocated for positive changes in areas related to justice, the media, elections, and transparency.²⁵ Nevertheless, CSOs have struggled to influence policymaking. There are several formal mechanisms for CSO involvement in policymaking, but they have not resulted in a significant CSO role in the assessment of government performance.

One of the biggest concerns for CSOs in Georgia is their financial stability and sustainability, as the country is still highly dependent on foreign aid. Some 95% of funding for CSOs comes from international donors or development agencies, and NGOs outside the capital sometimes last for only a project or two.²⁶ Although the government has developed grant mechanisms in recent years, these are flawed. In any case, most organizations are reluctant to accept funds from the government because they fear that doing so might jeopardize their independence.²⁷ The current fiscal framework in Georgia does not provide incentives for CSOs, such as income tax deductions in return for charitable activities, so CSOs are taxed like businesses on the income from their economic activities. Such financial uncertainty often forces these organizations to take on projects that may not be relevant to their missions, but nonetheless ensure the continuation of their operations. Another problem for CSOs is the lack of public trust, due to the mismatch between the issues CSOs work on and the issues considered important by the public.²⁸ According to a 2017 public opinion survey, 23% of the Georgian population trusted CSOs, 10% fully distrusted them, and 39% did not express any opinion one way or the other.²⁹ Although the level of trust in NGOs remained relatively low (23% in both 2015 and 2017), it was improving, having risen from 18% in 2011.³⁰ At the same time, according to the National Democratic Institute's opinion survey in 2016, 27% of respondents agreed that NGOs worked on issues that mattered to them,³¹ compared with 24% of respondents surveyed in 2015.³²

Umbrella Networks for Civil Society Organizations

With the rapid proliferation of CSOs after the 2003 Rose Revolution, umbrella networks began to appear. These networks are mainly used by CSOs to share information, implement joint projects, and amplify the voice of civil society vis-à-vis the government. They were established by local or international NGOs, mostly to serve as



▲ Civil Society Organizations and Policy Monitoring.

The civil society sector plays an important role in policy monitoring, especially in the areas of elections, human rights, and corruption.

CSO coalitions. CSO networks are generally informal, and not officially registered, because they are frequently created on an ad hoc basis.

In Tbilisi, the NGO Europe Foundation created a network for human rights-oriented organizations, the Coalition for an Independent Judiciary, as well as a CSO platform, the Partnership for Budget Transparency. Even though most networks are based in Tbilisi, local-level networks exist, as well. The Civil Development Agency (CIDA) is one of the few nonprofit organizations operating at the local level, running a coalition of 55 CSOs located throughout Georgia. Its main aim is to involve regional CSOs in national policymaking processes by sharing information on the latest policy developments, providing additional funding for its member organizations, and ensuring communication between the coalition CSOs and the government.

The biggest CSO network, the Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum Georgian National Platform, was established in 2010. As of early 2020, it unites 185 leading NGOs that work to facilitate Georgia's integration process into the European Union (EU). The network serves as a platform for dialogue between civil society and the government within the framework of the Association Agreement between the EU and Georgia.³³

Below is a list of the principal civil society networks and coalitions that are active in Georgia are listed on the next page.

MAJOR CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANIZATION NETWORKS AND COALITIONS

- **Anti-Corruption Council**—The Council was created in 2008, and includes ministries, government agencies, civil society organizations (CSOs), and international organizations. Its functions are to coordinate anticorruption activities in Georgia and to update and monitor the implementation of the national anticorruption strategy and action plans. The CSOs in the Council also provide feedback regarding the strategy and action plans. <http://www.justice.gov.ge/aboutus/Council/224> (+ 995 32) 2 40 55 05.
- **Coalition for an Independent and Transparent Judiciary**—This coalition was formed in 2011 and includes 40 member CSOs. Its goal is to consolidate the capacity of these CSOs—as well as nongovernment organization (NGOs), legal professional associations, and business associations—to advocate for an independent, transparent, and accountable justice system. http://coalition.ge/index.php?article_id=1&clang=1, (+995 32) 2 50 54 04.
- **Coalition for Euro-Atlantic Georgia**—In 2016, 20 national CSOs launched this coalition, whose mission is to facilitate Georgia’s integration into the European Union (EU) and NATO. <https://www.transparency.ge/en/post/press-release/coalition-euro-atlantic-georgia-launched> (+995 32) 2 92 14 03.
- **Coalition for Independent Living**—Established in 1999, this coalition of 26 organizations aims to create equal opportunities for people with disabilities. http://disability.ge/index.php?option=com_frontpage&Itemid=1&lang=en (+995 32) 35 66 09.
- **Economic Policy Coalition**—An initiative out of Governing for Growth, a United States Agency for International Development (USAID) project, the Economic Policy Advocacy Coalition (EPAC) was born on 15 September 2015. Convening 58 CSOs across Georgia, EPAC comprises business associations, chambers of commerce, strategic research centers, and Georgia-based NGOs. <https://www.facebook.com/EPACGEORGIA/>, (+995 599) 53 22 50.
- **Eastern Partnership Civil Society Georgian National Platform**—The platform was established in 2010 and has 185 member CSOs from around the country. It is the main venue where the EU consults with CSOs in Georgia. Members of the platform share information on the process of Georgia’s integration into the EU, monitor Georgia’s implementation of the association agreement, and propose improvements in the integration process. <http://eap-csf.ge/?lang=en-GB>, (+995 32) 2 93 11 28.
- **Healthcare Advocacy Coalition**—This coalition of 25 national CSOs and educational institutions was established on 6 November 2015. It aims to improve Georgia’s healthcare system by generating policy documents on healthcare. <http://curatiofoundation.org/ge/healthcare-advocacy-coalition/> (in Georgian), (+995 32) 2 25 13 44.
- **Media Advocacy Coalition**—The coalition, established in 2011, safeguards the rights of media owners and journalists toward a positive media environment. <https://www.facebook.com/კოალიცია-მედიის-ადვოკატორებისთვის-892204610887473/> (in Georgian), (+995 32) 2 25 04 63.
- **Open Government Georgia’s Forum**—This organization was created in 2014 within the framework of the Anti-Corruption Interagency Coordination Council. The Forum comprises representatives of CSOs, and of public institutions, NGOs, international organizations, the private sector, and academia. Its aim is to develop recommendations related to open governance at the national level, assist in the preparation of the OGP national action plan, and monitor the plan’s implementation. <http://www.justice.gov.ge/Ministry/Index/348> (in Georgian), (+ 995 32) 2 40 55 05.
- **Open Parliament Georgia Working Group**—This group comprises representatives of national CSOs and international organizations. Its goal is to support the development of an open parliament, and to encourage civic participation in parliamentary activities. <https://idfi.ge/en/open-parliament-georgia-working-group>
- **WWF Caucasus**, which is a part of the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF), has been operating in Georgia and other Caucasus countries since the early 1990s. It has supported a number of projects to stop the degradation of the region’s natural environment and to encourage a future where humans and nature coexist in harmony. WWF Caucasus works in four main directions: addressing deforestation, conserving wildlife, protecting freshwater resources and addressing climate change. WWF Caucasus has also supported a number of local CSOs. <https://wwf.panda.org/caucasus/>, (+995 32) 2 23 75 00.

Women’s Civil Society Organizations in Georgia

Women’s CSOs in Georgia work on a wide range of issues related to women’s empowerment, including the participation of women in politics, the economic empowerment of women, domestic violence, gender equality, and awareness raising on gender-related

issues. These CSOs engage in research, policy analysis, and advocacy to achieve their goals. As well as being strongly represented in the capital, women’s CSOs operate at the local level. Despite being individually strong, however, women’s CSOs in Georgia have experienced difficulties in forming sustainable networks and ad hoc coalitions.³⁴ This problem stems from the different approaches taken by organizations to women’s



▲ **Women’s civil society organizations.** Being strongly represented in the capital, women CSOs also operate on the local level and have promoted women’s political, social, and economic participation.

rights and empowerment. Some women’s CSOs focus more on gender equality issues and use the less controversial methods of activism, whereas others put a stronger emphasis on traditional feminism, which in Georgia is considered unconventional and counterproductive.³⁵

An overwhelming majority of women’s CSOs in Georgia often have disagreements with one of the country’s most influential nongovernment institutions: the Georgian Orthodox Church. This conflict is due to diverging philosophical beliefs. While most women’s CSOs in Georgia promote women’s participation, economic empowerment, and sexual rights (including abortion), the Georgian Orthodox Church interprets these principles as threats to religious principles and to traditional Georgian values.

The United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN Women) is a prominent supporter of women’s CSOs in Georgia. It serves as a bridge between the government and the CSOs, and provides grants for women’s CSOs, both at the local level and in the capital. For example, UN Women leads an Advisory Work Group that shares information on issues related to women and gender with women’s CSOs so they can be more effective advocates vis-à-vis the government. Its support also includes other forms of capacity building for women’s CSOs.

The Women’s Fund in Georgia is the primary local donor to women’s CSOs, which are also funded by various international women’s funds and development organizations. It is one of the oldest women’s rights funds in Georgia, established in 2005. Its goal is to

strengthen women in Georgia and ensure their full participation in social and political life. The fund provides limited, but direct financial and technical support to women’s CSOs outside the capital.

Research Organizations and Think Tanks

Research organizations operate mostly in Tbilisi. They work in such areas as economics, monetary policy, banking and the financial sector, the environment, healthcare, politics, security, foreign policy, and governance. The Curatio International Foundation (CIF) is one of the oldest research organizations in Georgia, established in 1994. CIF generates research materials on ways to create better-functioning health systems. The Economic Policy Research Center (EPRC) is a research organization that generates policy briefs, policy documents, and general studies in the areas of tax policy, trade, monetary policy, and financial markets. The Georgian Foundation for Strategic and International Studies (GFSIS) was established in 1998 by former high-ranking government officials and diplomats. It contributes to Georgia’s democratic development, and to political and economic reforms, through opinion pieces, research publications, and legislative proposals. Some research organizations are affiliated with universities, like the International School of Economics at Tbilisi State University (ISET), while others are independent NGOs, not affiliated with any educational institution. There are also research institutions that operate at the regional level, such as the Caucasus Research Resource Center (CRRC), which collects, analyzes, and publishes policy-relevant data on social, economic, and political trends in the Caucasus.

Professional Associations and Other Professional Organizations

Professional associations and unions specialize in certain sectors, so they can effectively lobby for changes within their areas of expertise. Nevertheless, there are fewer professional associations in comparison with watchdog or human rights organizations. Professional associations mostly operate on a voluntary basis, and are rarely officially registered. They have had success in advocating for the rights of their members. For example, the Infrastructure Construction Companies Association (ICCA) helped draft technical regulations for determining the adequacy of cost estimates in the construction sector, which were adopted on 26 September 2017.³⁶ The Georgian Farmers’ Association (GFA), one of the biggest professional associations in the country, with about 4,000 farmer members, contributed to the preparation of the government’s Rural and Agricultural Development Strategy, 2021–2027.

PROMINENT CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANIZATIONS

- **Accessible Tourism Center Parsa**—This civil society organization (CSO) carries out a variety of projects to encourage, promote, and develop accessible tourism in Georgia. <http://www.atcp.ge/index.php>, (+995 577) 46 46 25.
- **Caucasus Environmental Nongovernment Organization (NGO) Network**—The Caucasus Environmental NGO Network (CENN) specializes in a number of areas, including climate change, sustainable resource management, waste management, and the development of climate-resilient communities. <http://www.cenn.org/>, (+995 32) 2 75 19 03.
- **Civil Development Agency**—Based in Tbilisi and Rustavi, the Civil Development Agency (CiDA) promotes the social and economic rights of Georgians by working to improve the networking capabilities of interested groups. <http://www.cida.ge/en>, (+995 341) 25 88 22.
- **Civil Society Institute**—One of the oldest CSOs in Georgia, the Civil Society Institute (CSI) has operated since 1994. CSI's mission is to help eradicate inequality, marginalization, and poverty in Georgia in a sustainable manner. <http://www.civilin.org/Eng/index.php>, (+995 32) 2 36 56 75.
- **Economic Policy Research Center**—The Economic Policy Research Center (EPRC) is one of the few organizations that focuses on tax policy, trade, monetary policy, financial markets, investment climate, and social welfare. It has been active since 2002. <http://geclose2eu.info/index.php?m=2&lng=eng> (+995 32) 2 20 73 05.
- **Georgian Center for Strategy and Development**—The Georgian Center for Strategy and Development (GCSD) supports Georgia's national security through educational projects for civil servants, local CSO staff, teachers, and students. <http://gcsd.org.ge/en/>, (+995 32) 2 22 26 67.
- **Georgian Democracy Initiative**—This organization promotes human rights, tolerance, a more inclusive society, and the rule of law. <https://www.gdi.ge/en/>, (+995 32) 2 72 80 08.
- **Georgian Farmers' Association**—The Georgian Farmers' Association (GFA) is one of the most important organizations for farmers in Georgia. The GFA has been helping Georgian farmers to improve their capacity and visibility since 2012. The organization includes more than 4,000 farmers across the country, and acts as a facilitator between the government and farmers on problematic issues. <https://gfa.org.ge/en/>, (+995 32) 2 19 30 03.
- **Georgian Foundation for Strategic and International Studies**—The Georgian Foundation for Strategic and International Studies (GFSIS) is a Tbilisi-based think tank focused on research and training for policy analysts and policymakers with the objective of improving public policy decision-making. It is one of the oldest think tanks in Georgia, operating since 1998, and most of its members are former high-ranking Georgian government officials. There is also a regional branch in the city of Akhalkalaki. <https://www.gfsis.org/>, (+995 32) 2 47 35 55.
- **Georgian Institute of Politics**—The Georgian Institute of Politics (GIP) strives to strengthen democratic institutions and to promote good governance in Georgia through policy research and advocacy. <http://gip.ge/>, (+995 599) 99 02 12.
- **Georgian Young Lawyers' Association**—The Georgian Young Lawyers' Association (GYLA) is one of the oldest CSOs in Georgia, operating since 1994. GYLA offers legal consultations to Georgian citizens free of charge and represents them before the courts and other administrative bodies to help them reclaim their violated rights. Its head office is in Tbilisi, but the organization also has regional offices in eight cities across Georgia—Rustavi, Telavi, Dusheti, Gori, Kutaisi, Zugdidi, Ozurgeti, and Batumi. <https://www.gyla.ge/en>, (+995 32) 2 93 61 01 (head office).
- **Green Alternative**—Established in 2000, this organization's primary mission is to protect the environment, as well as Georgia's cultural and biological heritage, through support for socially acceptable and economically sound environmental policies. <http://greenalt.org/home/>, (+995 32) 2 22 38 74.
- **Institute for Development of Freedom of Information**—The Institute for Development of Freedom of Information (IDFI) is the main CSO involved in advocating for transparency of government institutions and access to information. The IDFI also works on issues related to good governance, anticorruption, and e-governance in Georgia. <https://idfi.ge/en>, (+995 32) 2 92 15 14.
- **International Society for Fair Elections and Democracy**—The International Society for Fair Elections and Democracy (ISFED) has been monitoring elections in Georgia since 1995. ISFED has one of the largest domestic networks in Georgia, covering all the municipalities through 73 regional representatives and four regional offices. <http://old.isfed.ge/main/home/eng/>, (+995 32) 2 37 28 82.
- **Media Development Foundation**—Established in 2008 by a group of journalists, the Media Development Foundation (MDF) aims to protect human rights and the freedom of speech, and to ensure a free media environment in Georgia. <http://www.mdfgeorgia.ge/eng/home>, (+995 32) 2 11 20 26.
- **Open Society Georgia Foundation**—Established in 1994 as a part of the Open Society Foundations' global network, the Open Society Georgia Foundation (OSGF) has been supporting CSO development in Georgia through grants and partnership projects. Since its founding, it has also provided scholarships for Georgian citizens to study in foreign universities, and has financially supported national and local media. <https://osgf.ge/en/>, (+995 32) 2 25 04 63.

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- **Sapari**—This is one of the organizations supporting gender equality in Georgia. In 2011, Sapari opened as a rehabilitation center for victims of domestic violence. In 2012, the organization opened a shelter for victims of domestic violence that provides medical and psychosocial assistance. Sapari also organizes training for social workers and police officers related to gender equality and domestic abuse. <https://sapari.ge/en/>, (+995 32) 2 30 76 03 or (+995 599) 40 76 03.
- **Society for Nature Conservation**—The Society for Nature Conservation (SABUKO) is a CSO that focuses on the conservation of wildlife and their habitats, and on the sustainable use of natural resources in Georgia. <https://sabuko.ge/>, (+995 577) 96 05 59.
- **Transparency International Georgia**—Since 2000, this organization has been working to improve the transparency and accountability of state institutions of Georgia. It is one of the oldest watchdog organizations in Georgia and, as of early 2020, it has four offices in major cities: Tbilisi (the head office), Batumi, Kutaisi, and Zugdidi. <https://www.transparency.ge/en/>, (+995 32) 2 92 14 03.
- **United Nations Association of Georgia**—Since 1995, the United Nations Association of Georgia (UNAG) has been working to promote human rights, just and accountable governance, and tolerance, and to stimulate citizen participation in decision-making processes in Georgia. <http://www.una.ge/page/7/eng>, (+995 32) 2 33 25 16 or (+995 32) 2 33 52 16.
- **Women’s Fund in Georgia**—This is one of the oldest women’s rights organizations in Georgia. Established in 2005, it has been directing its resources toward the empowerment of women’s organizations, initiative groups, and activists. <https://www.womenfundgeorgia.org/en/>, (+995 32) 2 39 99 98.
- **Women’s Information Center**—The Women’s Information Center (WIC) is one of the first organizations in Georgia to work on issues related to gender. Its main priority is to provide assistance to women living outside Tbilisi, internally displaced persons, and ethnic minorities in Georgia. <http://www.wicge.org/home.php?cat=7&sub=1&mode=2&lang=en>, (+995 32) 2 95 29 34.
- **World Experience for Georgia**—World Experience for Georgia (WEG) is dedicated to energy security and economic sustainability in Georgia. The think tank supports informed decision-making, based on accurate analysis and knowledge, across all levels of government. <http://weg.ge/en> (+995 32) 2 10 24 52.



▲ **CSOs’ work focus.** In the past decades, CSOs have addressed issues including support to women living outside Tbilisi, internally displaced persons, and ethnic minorities in Georgia.



▲ **Addressing environmental issues.** CSOs have become one of the loudest voices in environmental advocacy in recent years, including around transport projects.



▲ **CSO-government relationship.** CSOs can easily build trust with local administrations due to their existing connections. Local officials are also open to CSO initiatives.

Partnership Between Government and Civil Society

CSOs in Georgia have multiple platforms for engagement with the government. In fact, Georgia has had many success stories of CSO-government cooperation and cocreation. Since the change of government in 2012, the environment has appeared to be favorable for CSO engagement in advocacy, lobbying, and in the improvement of overall governance in Georgia, in partnership with different branches of the government. For example, in December 2013, CSOs signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the Parliament of Georgia to improve CSO-government collaboration. Within the framework of the memorandum, CSI, one of the major advocacy organizations in Georgia, successfully worked for amendments to the tax code in 2013. Despite the fact that CSOs still need more tax incentives and benefits to be truly self-sufficient, these changes represent significant progress toward financial independence. Parliament also introduced an annual “CSO Day,” during which CSO representatives meet with the chair of the Parliament of Georgia.

Anticorruption policymaking in Georgia is based on the principle of collaboration between the government and CSOs. The Anti-Corruption Council is the inter-institutional coordination body responsible for creating Georgia’s anticorruption strategy and action plans; overseeing and reporting on their implementation; leading relevant changes to legislation; and preparing anticorruption recommendations. The Council includes 17 national and international CSOs, all of which contribute to the process of drafting Georgia’s anticorruption strategy and action plans and help monitor their implementation.³⁷

Individual ministries and state agencies also cooperate with CSOs. A good example is the work done by the Ministry of Regional Development and Infrastructure of Georgia (MRDI) in conjunction with a Tbilisi-based CSO, the Institute for Development of Freedom of Information (IDFI). In 2017, Decree No. 69/o of the Minister adopted the 2017–2020 Strategy and 2017–2018 Action Plan for Increasing Integrity at the MDRI. IDI, with financial support from the USAID Good Governance Initiative (GGI), created the policy documents.³⁸ CSOs are also members of the Dispute Resolution Board (DRB), a state agency tasked with resolving procurement disputes between economic operators and the government. Since 2013, the DRB has always had six members—three representing the State Procurement Agency and three representing CSOs.³⁹

One of the most important platforms for CSO-government cooperation is the OGP. Georgia joined the OGP in 2011, and Georgian CSOs were partners from the very beginning. A consultation mechanism for Open Government Georgia, the OGP Georgia Forum, was created to involve CSOs in the process of drafting OGP national action plans. There are good examples of CSO-government cooperation through the OGP. One is the commitment made by the Akhaltsikhe municipality, under the 2016–2017 OGP national action plan, to introduce an electronic system of participatory budget planning on its official website. Within the framework of this plan, the Akhaltsikhe municipality developed a new website in partnership with IDFI. However, since July 2018, when the relationship between the CSOs involved in the OGP Georgia Forum and the government deteriorated, CSO-government cooperation based on this platform has weakened.

The government also provides financial support to CSOs, in the form of public procurement contracts or grants. According to Georgian legislation, grants are targeted resources, in monetary or in-kind contribution, which the donor gives to the grantee without payment, and which are to be used for implementing state programs or specific educational, health, cultural, scientific, athletic, agricultural or environmental projects. In general, grants may not be used to support entrepreneurial endeavors, although exceptions are permitted for such as to support innovative activities, agricultural cooperative, or micro and small enterprises under state programs.⁴⁰ Grants are not issued for entrepreneurial purposes, though, in certain cases, stipulated by the Georgian law, it is possible to issue a grant for some entrepreneurial purposes (e.g., supporting innovative activities; agricultural cooperatives; or, under state programs, micro and small enterprises).⁴¹ Any CSO can register in the central e-procurement system and offer services to public institutions. During 2013–2017, three ministries and four government agencies awarded grants to CSOs totaling \$10,381,796.⁴² The ministries included the Ministry of Justice of Georgia; the Ministry of Internally Displaced Persons from the Occupied Territories, Accommodation and Refugees of Georgia; and the Ministry of Education and Science of Georgia.⁴³ The four government agencies were the Center for Electoral Systems Development, Reforms and Trainings; Agency for Ensuring Livelihood for IDPs (Internally Displaced People); Shota Rustaveli National Science Foundation; and the L. Sakvarelidze National Center for Disease Control and Public Health.

Legal and Regulatory Frameworks

The Constitution of Georgia (1995), the Civil Code of Georgia (1999), the Law on Entrepreneurs (1994), and the Tax Code of Georgia (2010) are the primary laws that apply to CSOs. According to the Civil Code of Georgia, a legal entity whose aim is not entrepreneurial, and whose focus is not material gain, is a nonentrepreneurial legal entity. Although a nonentrepreneurial legal entity cannot be commercially oriented, it is entitled to engage in entrepreneurial activities.⁴⁴ However, the profits derived from such activities may only be used for achieving the declared mission of the nonentrepreneurial legal entity. According to Georgian law, if a nonprofit legal entity or charity carries out subsidiary economic (i.e., entrepreneurial) activities, it will, for this part of its activities, be subject to the same taxation regime as that imposed on businesses.



▲ **Government financial support to civil society organizations (CSOs).** Government institutions provide grants for CSOs or contract CSOs to deliver niche social services, such as the rehabilitation of ex-convicts, management of foster homes, delivery of publicity activities, and organizing sports, cultural and educational activities.

A nonentrepreneurial legal entity is officially recognized as such from the moment it enters into the Register of Entrepreneurial and Non-Entrepreneurial (Non-Commercial) Legal Entities. CSO registration in Georgia is simple and inexpensive. The fee is \$37 and the registration procedure only takes one full working day.⁴⁵

Other laws that relate to CSOs and their activities include: the Law on Public Registry (2008), Law on Assemblies and Demonstrations (1997), Law on Public Procurement (2005), Organic Law on Local Self-Government (2014), Rule on Value Added Tax Calculation (2015), and the Law on State Grants (1996).

CSOs in Georgia are treated as regular taxpayers, as the Tax Code adopts a similar approach toward nonprofit and for-profit legal entities. CSOs have to file annual reports and tax returns to the Revenue Service, which is under the Ministry of Finance of Georgia. The process is fully digitalized at the Revenue Service website, ensuring that all entities pay their taxes according to the Tax Code of Georgia.

The Capacity of Civil Society Organizations

CSOs are capable of providing valuable assistance to public institutions; in fact, the government often seeks advice from major CSOs. Many ministries and agencies establish CSO–government thematic working groups, where strategies, legislative proposals, and policies are discussed together.⁴⁶ Sometimes government agencies and businesses hire CSOs to provide awareness-raising activities or trainings in human resources management, team building, anticorruption, and work ethics. CSOs also have a productive relationship with the media, utilizing TV channels, radio stations, or newspapers as essential elements of their advocacy efforts.⁴⁷ And CSOs work with each other, efficiently pooling their resources to raise their voices, increase their influence, and reach common goals. There are multiple long-term CSO networks that use various platforms for engaging with the government. The CSOs belonging to these networks have also been successful in creating ad hoc coalitions to pursue specific causes.⁴⁸



▲ **Civil Society Organization engagement in social issues.** Although CSOs have limited capacity and expertise in social issues that are considered as top priorities by the general public, such as social welfare and health education, the recent rise of new organizations and grassroots civil movements give room for optimism.

One major challenge for CSOs in Georgia is that international donors and foreign governments remain the main sources of their financial stability. Another challenge is the fact that, despite the presence of international donors, financial resources are often scarce, especially for women’s CSOs, grassroots organizations, and CSOs based outside the capital. The amount of access to financial support influences CSO organizational structure, administrative and technical capacities, and the quality of personnel. The mobility of personnel is a problem for CSOs, and only larger organizations can maintain highly qualified employees. Moreover, financially strong CSOs have advanced financial accounting systems, whereas smaller CSOs still have difficulty with accounting and financial transparency. The majority of CSOs, especially in the municipalities, need to improve their organizational capacity, as well as their ability to develop clear missions, visions, and strategic plans. Small- and medium-sized CSOs need to establish their basic internal administrative systems, personnel policies, financial and accounting systems, and resource-mobilization strategies.

The current fiscal framework provides few incentives for CSOs to raise funds from different sources. Incentives in terms of income tax deductions for contributions to charities, within the framework of corporate social responsibility in the private sector, remain underdeveloped in Georgia. And the current fiscal laws do not encourage individual donations, as individual contributions to CSOs are taxable. Although CSOs are allowed to engage in business activities, these activities are considered part of the private sector and, therefore, subject to taxation. These and other types of fundraising activities thus become costly for CSOs, as well as for Georgian citizens.⁴⁹

The culture of volunteerism is underdeveloped in Georgia, thus presenting another challenge for CSOs. Volunteerism in Georgia is still associated with the forced labor days of the Soviet period known as *subbotniks* (days of service),⁵⁰ during which school children, university students, and other groups were compelled to do community work. Considering the unpopularity of institutionalized civic engagement and volunteerism in Georgia, in addition to the low trust felt toward CSOs by the public, Georgia’s CSOs struggle to attract volunteers.⁵¹



▲ **CSOs and opinion formation.** CSOs play a significant role in opinion formation as civil society leaders frequently feature on television broadcasts, which is the most important source of information about ongoing affairs in Georgia.

Cooperation with Other Development Organizations

International donors and foreign government aid agencies have played a notable role in the development of civil society in Georgia. Donor organizations such as USAID, the European Commission, Konrad Adenauer Stiftung, Heinrich Böll Stiftung, Open Society Foundations, Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ), Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida), International Visegrad Fund, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), World Bank, Asian Development Bank (ADB), and the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD) have all made important contributions to the country's democratic, social, and economic development through their engagement with civil society. Their activities have been diverse, based on their areas of expertise. For example, GIZ has been operating in Georgia since 1992, funding projects related to democracy, civil society, and public administration. UNDP has been financially supporting both the government and CSOs in areas such as access to justice, transparency, gender, and equality. Meanwhile, Heinrich Böll Stiftung has been working on issues related to the protection of the environment, conflict resolution, and democracy since around 2005.

CSOs actively cooperate with development partners and donors such as UNDP, the European Commission, Sida, the Council of Europe, World Bank, etc. For example, UNDP funded the Strengthening the System of Parliamentary Democracy in Georgia Project, which aimed to enhance parliamentary openness and citizen engagement in Georgia. Sida has financially supported multiple projects that assist Georgian CSOs in providing free legal aid. In addition to

project support for CSOs, donor organizations also provide funding for CSO–government cooperation and the creation of various platforms for strengthening their collaboration. One such high-level platform, the Open Government Partnership Georgia Forum, would not exist without their financial and technical support.

Civil Society Participation in ADB Operations in Georgia

ADB recognizes that CSOs have valuable expertise and skills that can add significant value to its country strategy and project planning, and that they can contribute to project implementation, monitoring, and evaluation. Adopting best practices in consultations with CSOs and encouraging their participation in ADB-financed projects and operations can guarantee a better degree of success for ADB projects, and thereby improve overall effectiveness.

There are a number of ways in which ADB can work with civil society in Georgia. ADB does not provide core funding or capacity-building support to civil society groups through grants. Instead, it primarily seeks to engage with CSOs by (i) encouraging dialogue and information sharing and (ii) contracting them as consultants on ADB projects or on particular components of larger programs.

Drawing on the priority areas of the ADB Country Partnership Strategy: Georgia, 2014–2018 (including transport, water-management systems and other urban infrastructure and services),⁵² some of the important highlights of CSO participation in ADB's operations have involved universal accessibility, road safety, gender inclusion, and water supply and sanitation. In particular:

- **Women CSO engagement supported by technical assistance.** CSOs have been important partners in carrying out capacity building and knowledge-sharing activities in Georgia. Regular consultations began with the participation of women and gender focused NGOs. Some examples of CSO participation include cooperation with the Caucasus Environmental NGO Network that enable women targeted campaigns in natural resource management, in particular water management; capacity building of vulnerable young women and girls through the Young Women's Leadership School; knowledge-sharing on gender and development; and events dedicated to International Women's Day, which promote women's roles in economic development and entrepreneurship.

- **Integrating specific measures to advance universal accessibility.** The ADB contracted Accessible Tourism Center Parsa to support the MRDI and Tbilisi City Hall in their efforts to develop a special set of requirements and guidelines for companies seeking to participate in tourism infrastructure projects. These efforts are intended to ensure universal design and accessibility for disabled people and to encourage their social and economic inclusion.
- **Improving gender mainstreaming in ADB-financed projects.** Under the Strengthening Gender-Inclusive Growth in Central and West Asia project, ADB carried out a number of activities to enhance gender mainstreaming in ADB-financed projects with CSOs. The initiatives supported training on gender mainstreaming for government officials and capacity building for government agencies on gender. The initiative targeted senior officials from the Ministry of Regional Development and Infrastructure.
- **Road safety and accessibility.** Another Georgian NGO, the Partnership for Road Safety, and the Ministry of Economy and Sustainable Development, jointly implemented a project to develop brochures and video materials to increase road safety awareness and inform the general public about the recently adopted regulations on the testing of vehicle safety, roadworthiness, and exhaust emissions. In addition, the Partnership for Road Safety has supported the MRDI's efforts to deliver trainings to its Road Department staff and to municipalities to increase road safety awareness.
- **Women-targeted awareness campaigns on water use and better sanitation.** The United Water Supply company of Georgia (UWSCG) implemented an ADB-financed water and sanitation project to provide

training in efficient water use and sanitation for targeted communities, including minority women. With the support of the Women's Information Center, the UWSCG developed informational materials and training sessions on water, hygiene, and sanitation practices; customer rights; and complaint mechanisms. After piloting gender sensitive public awareness campaigns in two locations, UWSCG rolled it out across the project towns. The campaign included door-to-door visits, workshops, distribution of brochures and use of other visual materials, and youth and community leader involvement.

The country partnership strategy (CPS) is the primary planning instrument guiding ADB operations in its member countries. The CPS is prepared through extensive consultations with various stakeholders, including the government, private sector, and civil society. As part of the preparation of the proposed CPS, 2019–2023 for Georgia, the resident mission ensured a substantially higher level of civil society participation, in order to foster ownership, improve the processing of projects and their implementation, and further strengthen the sustainability of the development results of ADB projects in Georgia.

ADB has been supporting awareness-raising activities and training sessions in its various priority areas. It generally works with local CSOs encouraging their engagement in awareness raising in other communities that have not yet been reached. In addition, ADB and CSOs collaborate in a knowledge-sharing arrangement in which they co-organize a series of lectures and workshops for government agencies. These are held at the International School of Economics at Tbilisi State University (ISET), the Georgian Institute of Public Affairs (GIPA), and other universities.



▲ **Road safety and accessibility.** A Georgian NGO, the Partnership for Road Safety, was contracted by ADB to increase road safety awareness and inform the general public in Georgia.



▲ **Enhancing water use, hygiene, and sanitation practices.** A local CSO, the Caucasus Environmental NGO Network, assisted the United Water Supply Company of Georgia to improve sustainable water use and improve sanitation through women-targeted awareness campaigns.

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