

THE PROJECT BENEFITS FROM SUPPORT THROUGH THE EAP CIVIL SOCIETY FORUM RE-GRANTING SCHEME (FSTP) TO MEMBERS AND IS FUNDED BY THE EUROPEAN UNION AS PART OF ITS SUPPORT TO CIVIL SOCIETY IN THE REGION. WITHIN ITS RE-GRANTING SCHEME, THE EASTERN PARTNERSHIP CIVIL SOCIETY FORUM (EAP CSF) SUPPORTS PROJECTS OF ITS MEMBERS THAT CONTRIBUTE TO ACHIEVING THE MISSION AND OBJECTIVES OF THE FORUM.

GRANTS ARE AVAILABLE FOR CSOS FROM THE EASTERN PARTNERSHIP AND EU COUNTRIES. KEY AREAS OF SUPPORT ARE DEMOCRACY AND HUMAN RIGHTS, ECONOMIC INTEGRATION, ENVIRONMENT AND ENERGY, CONTACTS BETWEEN PEOPLE, SOCIAL AND LABOUR POLICIES



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ეს კვლევითი ანგარიში შექმნილია ევროკავშირის ფინანსური მხარდაჭერით. მის შინაარსზე სრულად პასუხისმგებელია "კოალიციისთვის დამოუკიდებელი ცხოვრებისთვის" და შენაძღთან, რომელიც არ ანაზღაურებს ევროკავშირის შეხედულებებს.



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ASSESSMENT OF THE IMPLEMENTATION OF DISABILITY-RELATED LEGISLATION



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Introduction

The "Coalition for Independent Living," in collaboration with the organizations "Unison" in Armenia and the "Association for the Rehabilitation of the Disabled" in Moldova, is currently executing a project titled "Moldovan, Armenian and Georgian DPOs for Inclusion and Cooperation (MAGIC)."

The primary objective of this consortium, consisting of three non-governmental organizations (NGOs), is to assess the efficacy of implementing disability legislation in Armenia, Moldova, and Georgia. Their goals encompass advocacy for disability legislation within these nations and the facilitation of increased cooperation among NGOs dedicated to disability-related issues, both domestically and internationally. Within the project's framework, a comprehensive study has been conducted, resulting in the formulation of recommendations to enhance the implementation of legislation concerning persons with disabilities.

Despite Georgia's willingness to enhance the realization of the rights of persons with disabilities, as manifested in its ratification of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, the fulfilment of obligations stipulated in national laws and international conventions remains insufficient. The principal purpose of this document is to promote the revision, enhancement, and effective implementation of the existing legislative framework while considering the experiences of persons with disabilities to ensure the effective protection of their rights.

The United Nations Convention is a pivotal framework for improving the legal and socio-economic status of persons with disabilities and fostering sustainability. Since the convention's ratification in 2013 (coming into effect in 2014), Georgia has taken important steps toward aligning its national laws with the convention's provisions. A tangible example of this commitment is the adoption of Georgia's Law on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in 2020.

The quantitative survey conducted as part of this study once again underscores that persons with disabilities possess insufficient knowledge regarding international and local legal documents and the mechanisms for their utilization and monitoring. While they possess a basic understanding of the rights of persons with disabilities and the corresponding obligations of the state, there remains a critical need to base this knowledge on facts and to improve access to information.

Focus-group interviews with organizations of persons with disabilities have revealed that their participation in the decision-making process is relatively limited and ineffective since they are not recognized as experts in the field. Additionally, critical issues emerge in terms of law enforcement and monitoring. The opinions expressed in these focus-group discussions indicate that monitoring systems for various services and accessibility standards are not functioning optimally. Furthermore, there is a need to create or enhance unified action plans and strategies addressing diverse issues at the central and municipal levels. In certain instances, the state's approach to persons with disabilities relies on outdated approaches, which require changes.

The analysis underscores a clear need for the state to strengthen its commitment to fulfilling its obligations, particularly through the establishment of vital mechanisms for the promotion, protection, and effective monitoring of convention implementation.

Methodology

The aim of this study is the comprehensive assessment of the implementation quality of legislation concerning disabilities and the identification of obstacles hindering the active involvement of individuals with disabilities and their organizations in the policymaking and implementation processes.

To achieve this objective, our study explored the needs of persons with disabilities related to diverse life domains, including education, employment, political engagement, participation in elections, healthcare access, services, private life, participation in sports and entertainment events, and independent living. Furthermore, we evaluated participants' knowledge levels concerning various local and international policy and legal documents.

Our research did not solely focus on the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and Georgia's Law on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. We also considered other pivotal international and national legal documents that directly or indirectly pertain to persons with disabilities. These documents include:

- Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities;
- Law of Georgia on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination (referred to as antidiscrimination law);
- Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (referred to as Istanbul Convention);
- Decree on National Accessibility Standards
- Decree on the establishment of the interagency coordination committee for the implementation of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and the approval of the statute;
- Decree on the approval of the minimum service standards of the Center for Independent Living of Persons with Disabilities;
- Decree on the approval of standards and procedures for the management of personal assistant services for persons with disabilities

To assess the implementation of legislation on the rights of individuals with disabilities, we adopted a mixed methods approach. This involved a quantitative survey targeting persons with disabilities and a qualitative section conducted through focus group discussions featuring representatives from organizations actively dedicated to the protection of the rights of persons with disabilities.

Based on the perspective of persons with disabilities, a quantitative questionnaire was carefully developed to assess their awareness, understanding, and the impact of legislation designed to address their specific needs. The survey was disseminated through various channels, including online platforms and support networks for persons with disabilities. The questionnaire comprised closed-ended inquiries about awareness and satisfaction with existing laws; however, it also allowed the participants to share their personal experiences, challenges, and awareness on disability issues. In the study's quantitative phase, 128 individuals with diverse disabilities participated from across Georgia, comprising 81 females and 47 males.

Aligned with the study's objectives, specific research topics were delineated:

- Awareness on legislative documents.

- Accessibility to the content of these documents and the mechanisms for their utilization.
- Understanding the rights and state obligations in critical domains such as education, employment, accessibility, healthcare, social services, sports, cultural and recreational events, and independent living.

In order to deepen the understanding of the legislative framework and the practical challenges associated with its implementation, collaboration with organizations dedicated to the rights of persons with disabilities is essential. Consequently, our study engaged with such organizations from different regions of the country. Focus group discussions involved fifteen representatives from eight organizations (six males and nine females). These representatives hold expertise in legislative advocacy, accessibility, employment, education, and healthcare. They are engaged in daily service provision across regions, assisting individuals with disabilities and their family members and providing support in accessing essential information.

Within the scope of this document, we address the challenges regarding awareness raising, fostering inclusivity, and the formulation and execution of policies for persons with disabilities. Furthermore, we offer recommendations for the practical implementation of the protection of the rights of persons with disabilities.

Background Information

In 2014, the ratification of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) marked a significant milestone for Georgia, signaling the country's commitment to protecting and promoting the rights of individuals with disabilities. This can be regarded as a turning point in our nation's pursuit of inclusivity and equality.

However, while the accession to the Convention was a pivotal decision, it is important to acknowledge that addressing the underlying issues and challenges did not begin immediately. Even a decade after its ratification, persons with disabilities frequently find themselves living on an unequal basis with others.

Ensuring the protection of the rights of persons with disabilities goes beyond the mere adoption of legislation; it relies on a comprehensive understanding of those rights and the development of effective mechanisms for their implementation. Access to information on documents and services designed to support these rights remains a challenge for persons with disabilities. This lack of awareness places them in vulnerable positions, undermining the rights to which they are legally entitled.

Article 33 of the Convention underscores that 1. States Parties, in accordance with their system of organization, shall designate one or more focal points within government for matters relating to the implementation of the present Convention and shall give due consideration to the establishment or designation of a coordination mechanism within government to facilitate related action in different sectors and at different levels.¹ 2. States Parties shall, in accordance with their legal and administrative systems, maintain, strengthen, designate or establish within the State Party, a framework, including one or more independent mechanisms, as appropriate, to promote, protect and monitor the implementation

¹ UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD), Article 33, point 1

of the present Convention. When designating or establishing such a mechanism, States Parties shall take into account the principles relating to the status and functioning of national institutions for the protection and promotion of human rights.² 3. Civil society, in particular persons with disabilities and their representative organizations, shall be involved and participate fully in the monitoring process.³

In addition to international obligations, the Law on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, enacted in 2020, should stand as a cornerstone guaranteeing the protection of the rights and dignity of persons with disabilities.

The feedback received on the initial report submitted to the UN Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in March 2023 underscores the positive changes made in implementing the Convention since 2014. These include the adoption of Georgia's Law on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (commonly referred to as the antidiscrimination law) and the establishment of the inter-agency coordination council. Nevertheless, it is also noted that the Convention's implementation remains incomplete. There is a notable absence of a national strategy and action plan for Convention implementation at both the national and local levels. Furthermore, the rights of persons with disabilities find limited representation in the National Strategy for Human Rights Protection (2022-2030) and its corresponding Action Plan.⁴

Moreover, “the unsystematic involvement of organizations of persons with disabilities in measures to implement the Convention and other matters related to persons with disabilities across state entities and at the municipal level and information about recommendations from organizations of persons with disabilities being overlooked during consultations;”

It is worth noting that effective governance necessitates the direct involvement of individuals directly affected by the laws mentioned above in the policy formulation process. Despite disability organizations and networks, the voices of persons with disabilities and organizations of persons with disabilities are frequently ignored in legislation and strategy development.

² Ibid, point 2

³ Ibid, point 3

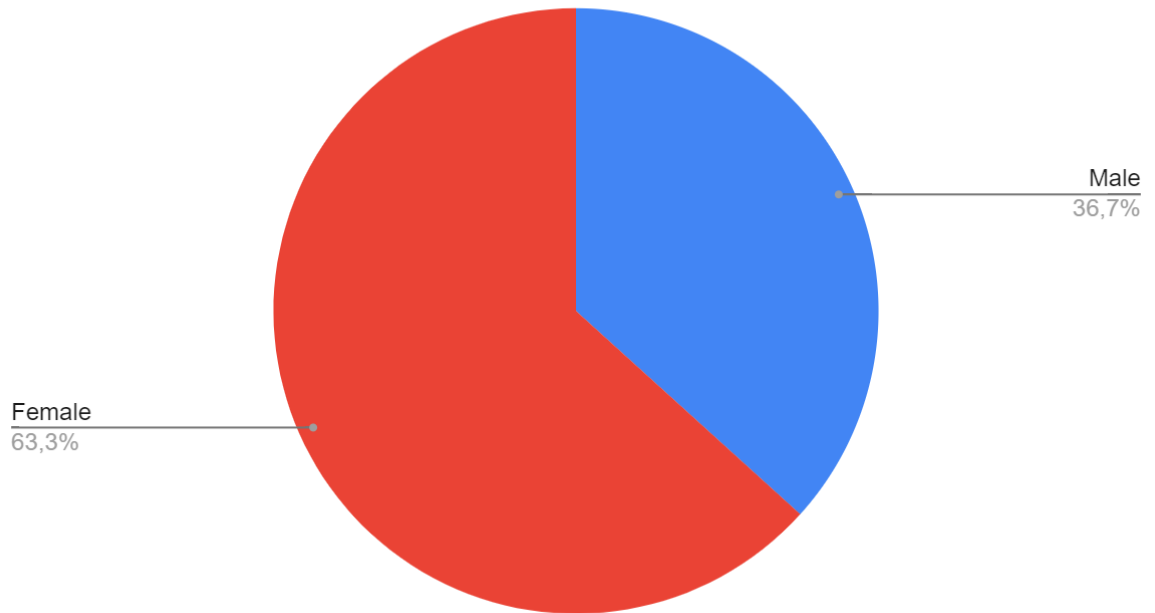
⁴ Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Concluding observations on Georgia's initial report, 2023. <https://disability.ge/ge/saertashoriso-kanonmdebloba/gaeros-shezghuduli-shesadzleblobis-mqone-pirta-uflebebis-komitetis-daskvniti-mosazrebebi-saqartvelos-mier-tsardgenili-pirveladi-angarishis-taobaze>

Study Results and Main Findings

Quantitative Research Findings

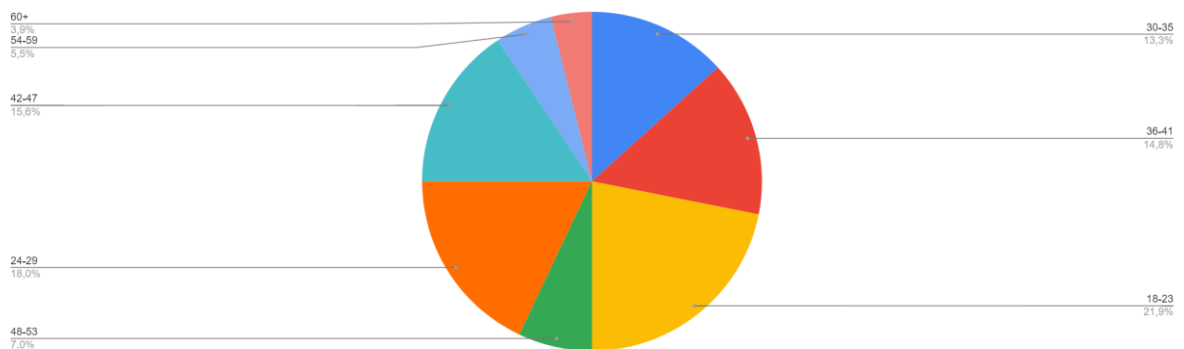
A total of 128 individuals participated in the study, with 63.3% (81 individuals) identifying as female and 36.7% (47 individuals) as male.

Please indicate your gender: Male/Female



- The study included participants from diverse age groups: 21.88% were aged 18-23, 17.88% were in the 24-29 age bracket, 13.28% were between 30-35, and 14.84% fell into the 36-41 range. The 42-47 age group comprised 15.63%, while those aged 48-53 comprised 7.03%. Participants aged 54-59 represented 5.47%, and individuals over 50 accounted for 3.91%.

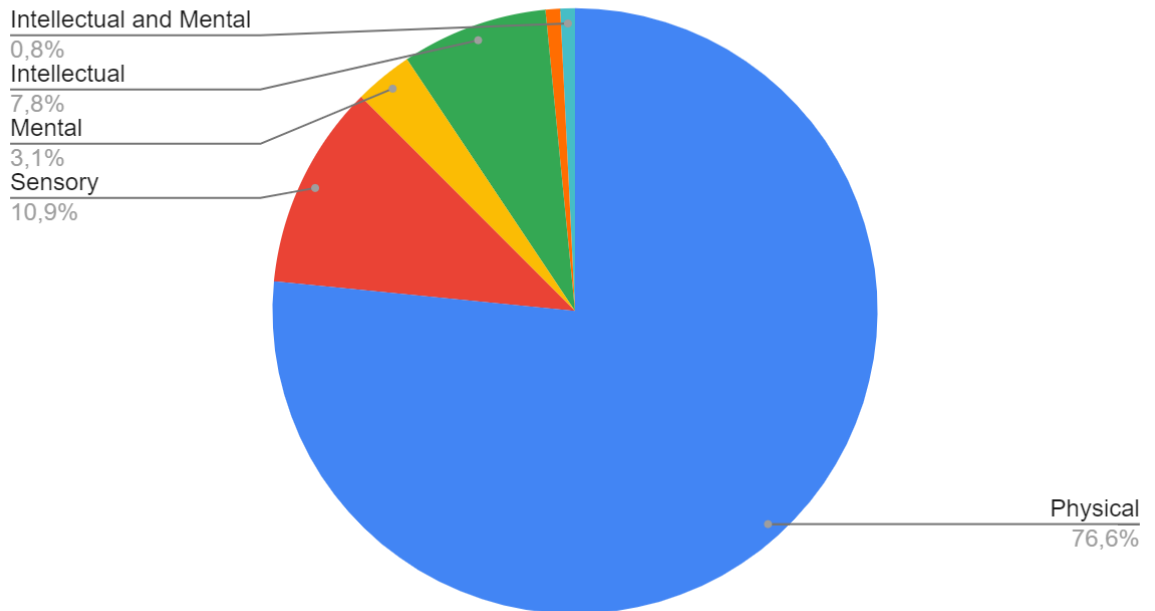
Which age category do you belong?



- While distributing the questionnaires, efforts were made to include participants with diverse disabilities. However, the study predominantly involved individuals with physical disabilities, including those using wheelchairs, crutches, or individuals with amputated body parts, constituting 76.6% of the respondents. Additionally, 10.9% reported having sensory

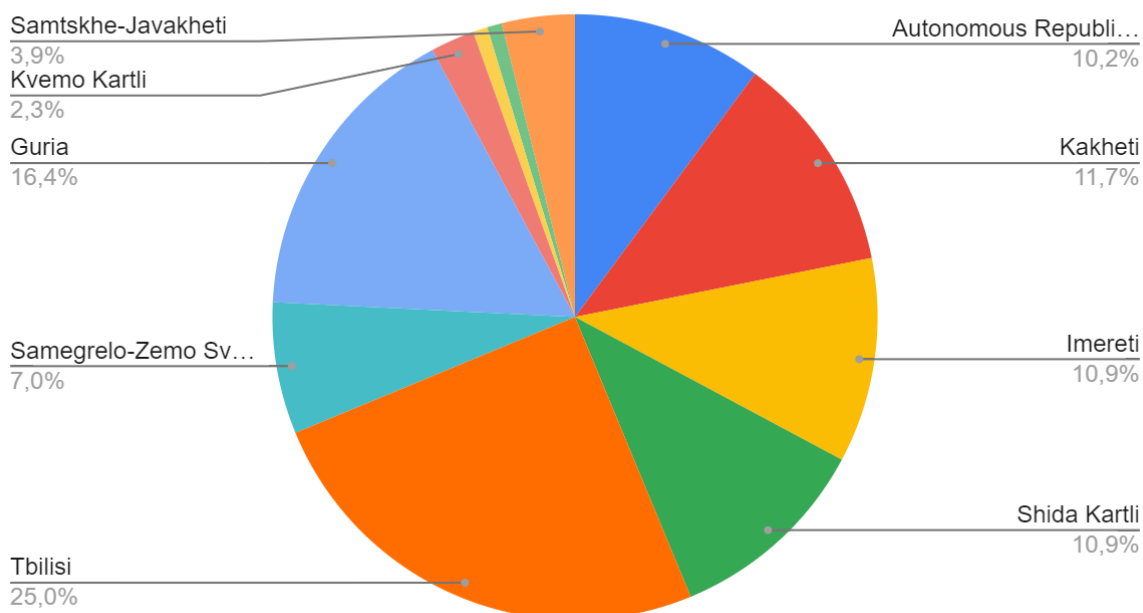
disabilities, 7.8% intellectual disabilities, and 3.1% psychiatric disabilities. It is essential to note that some participants reported having multiple disabilities.

Do you have any of the following disabilities?



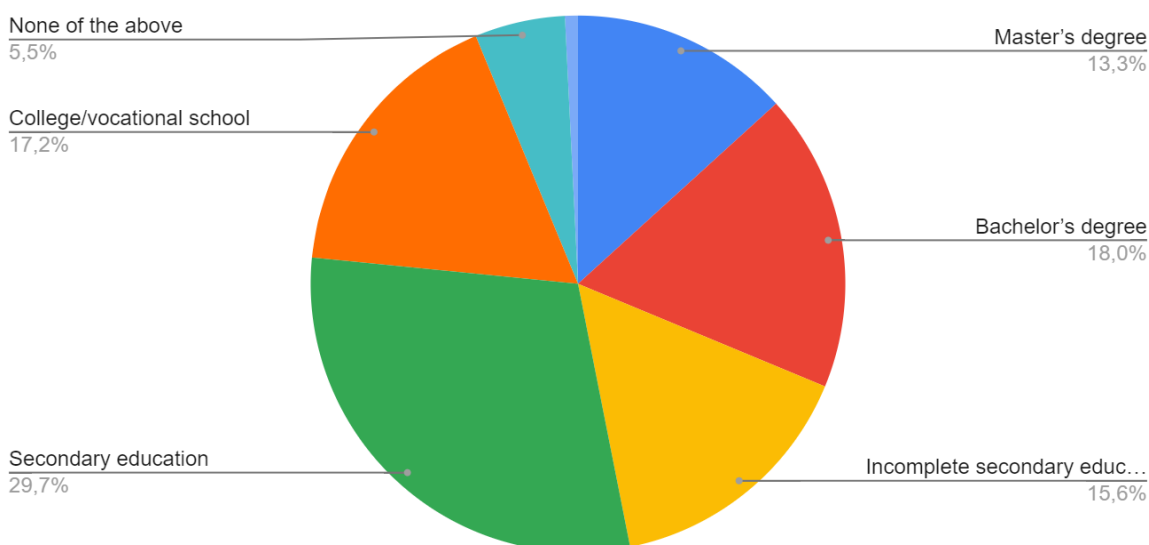
- In terms of regional distribution, the majority of the data was collected from Tbilisi (25% of respondents). The distribution of participants from other regions was as follows: Guria – 16.41%, Kakheti – 11.72%, Imereti – 10.94%, Shida Kartli – 10.94%, Autonomous Republic of Adjara – 10.16%, Samegrelo-Zemo-Svaneti – 7.03%, Samtskhe-Javakheti – 3.91%, Kvemo Kartli – 2.34%, Racha-Lechkhumi and Zemo Svaneti – 0.78%, Autonomous Republic of Abkhazia. – 0.78%

In which municipality do you live



- One of the primary challenges faced by persons with disabilities is accessing education. When participants were asked about their education levels, the results indicated that 29.6% had completed secondary education, while 16% had incomplete secondary education. The percentage of participants with a college education and those with a bachelor's degree were equal at 17.6%. Additionally, 13.6% reported having a master's degree, and only one indicated holding a doctorate.

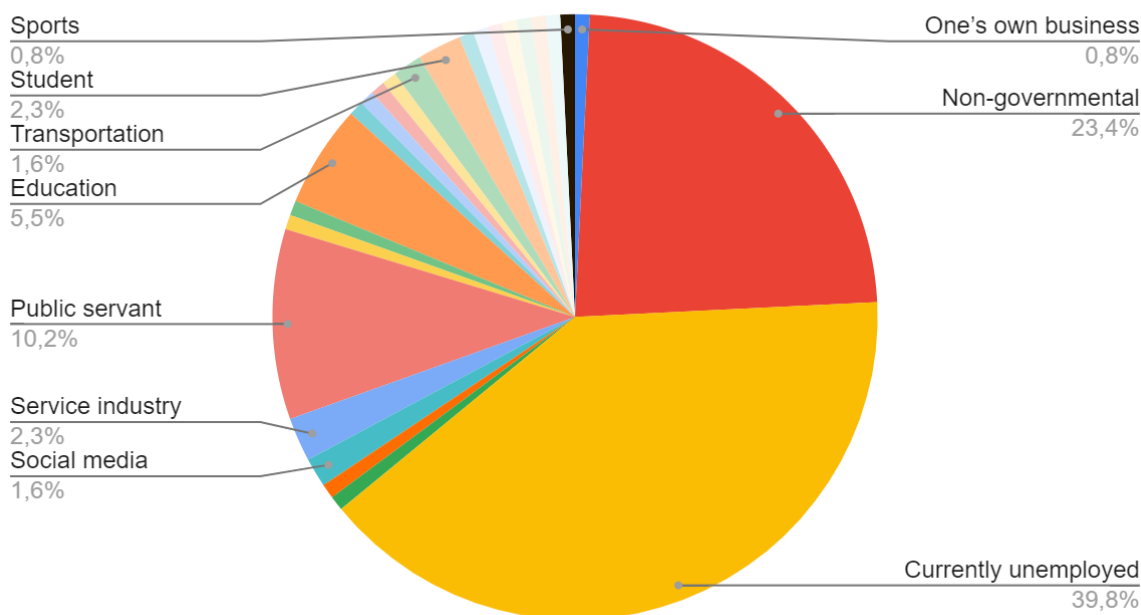
Please specify your highest level of education completed:



- Furthermore, employment emerges as a significant challenge for individuals with disabilities, as highlighted by the responses from our participants. 39.8% reported being unemployed. Among those employed, 23.4% are engaged in the non-government sector, where non-governmental organizations and independent living centers serve as key employers for people

with disabilities. Some respondents also mentioned working in areas such as governmental agencies, the education sector, and service industries.

Please specify your area of employment:



- In line with the study's primary goal, we investigated participants' awareness of policy and legal documents concerning the rights of persons with disabilities. Our quantitative analysis indicates a significant lack of awareness among the respondents:

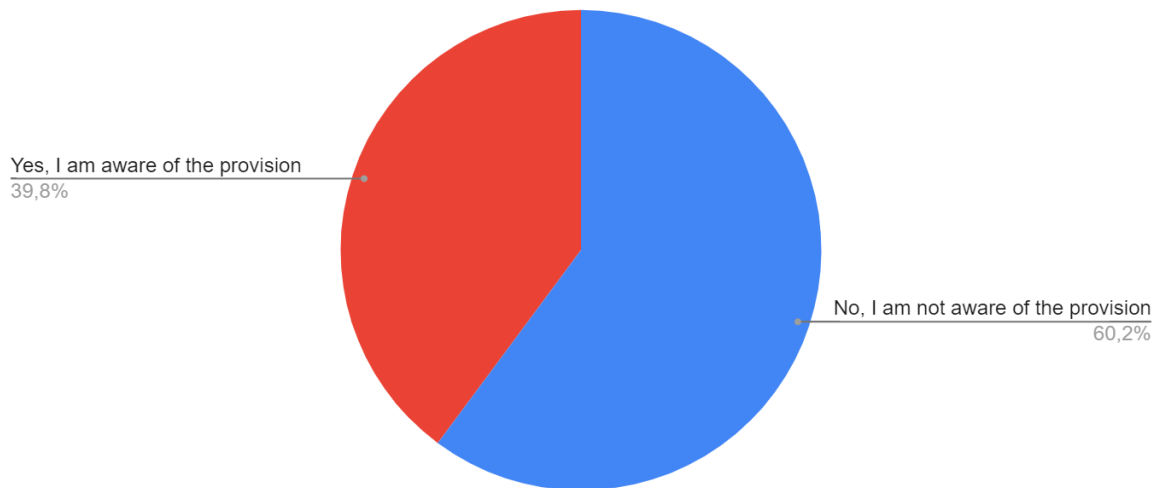
Only 29.7% of participants reported being informed about all the documents mentioned in our survey, while 14.8% were unaware of any of these documents. We further explored whether participants had access to the content of these documents and mechanisms for their practical implementation.

The analysis revealed that only 17.2% had read the abovementioned documents and understood how to apply them in practice. Furthermore, access to the general information and content of these documents was notably low. These findings underscore the urgent need for raising awareness about legal issues related to persons with disabilities.

Given that the survey focused on the convention, Georgian laws, and other relevant documents, it is reasonable to infer that participants' responses were primarily based on secondary rather than primary sources. It is noteworthy that some respondents lacked specific information on certain issues. In some instances, their comprehension of matters concerning persons with disabilities did not align with the provisions outlined in the convention and Georgian laws.

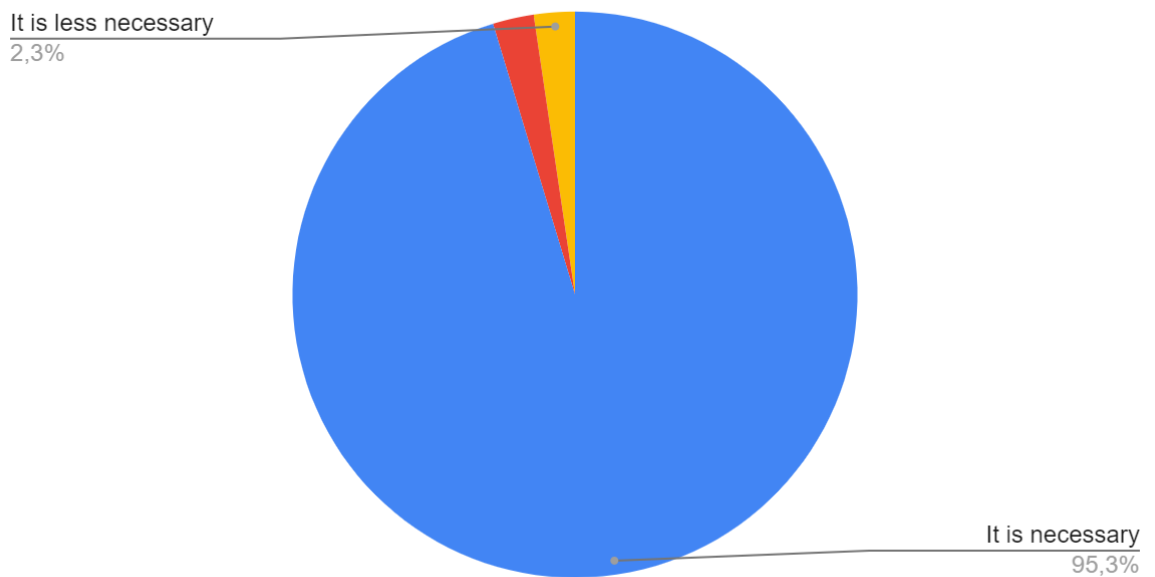
Georgia's Law on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities includes a provision recognizing sign language; however, 60.2% of participants were unaware of this fact.

Are you aware of the provision in Georgia's Law on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities recognizing sign language?



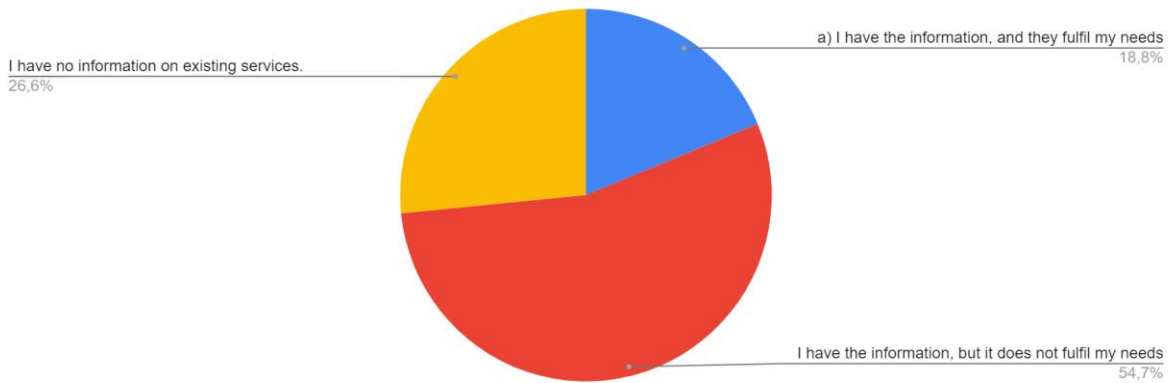
- 95.3% of participants emphasized the importance of involving persons with disabilities in the development of state and municipal programs and considering their opinions in decision-making processes.

Do you agree that the active involvement of persons with disabilities and the consideration of their opinions are necess...



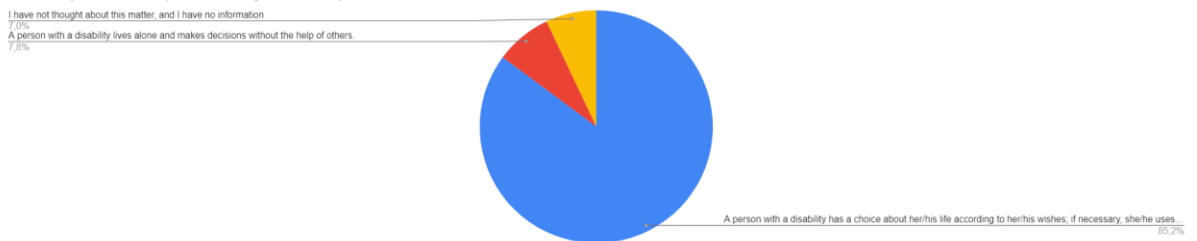
- 54.7% of respondents are aware of services specifically designed for persons with disabilities but express dissatisfaction as these services do not adequately meet their needs. In contrast, 26.6% of respondents have no information about the existing services.

Do you have information about State or municipal services that can be used by persons with disabilities, and do they fulfil your needs?



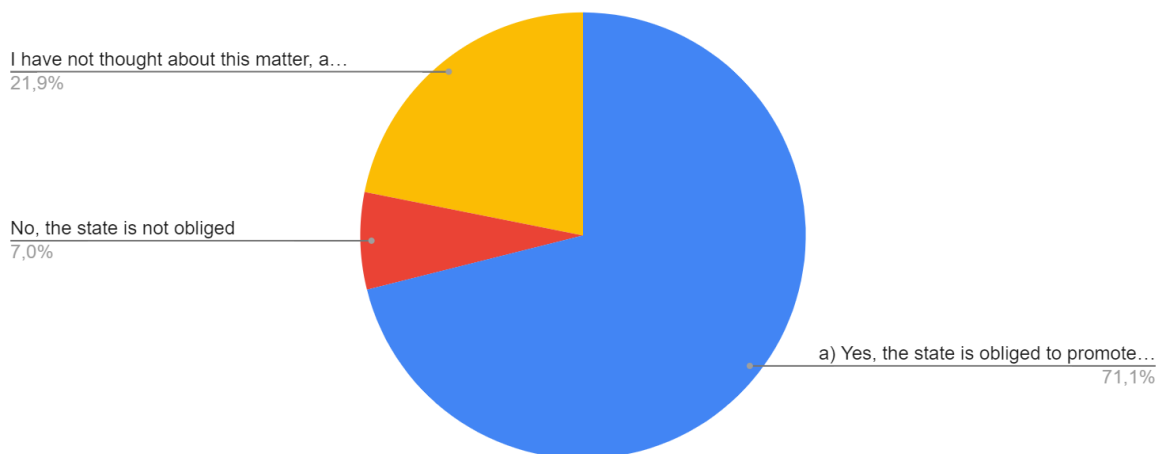
- The majority of respondents (85.2%) are familiar with the concept of independent living for persons with disabilities. However, the remaining respondents either lack information or do not have an adequate understanding of the concept.

What do you think independent living means for persons with disabilities?



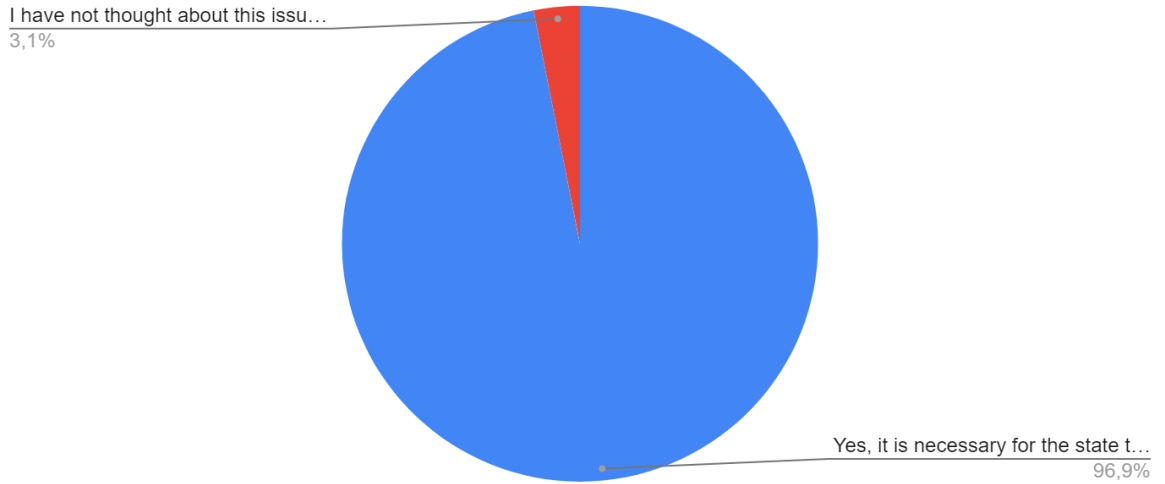
- Approximately 71.1% of respondents believe that the state is responsible for supporting awareness-raising initiatives for persons with disabilities regarding marriage and personal life.

In your opinion, is the State obliged to provide information on family creation and reproductive issues to a person with disability of marriageable age?



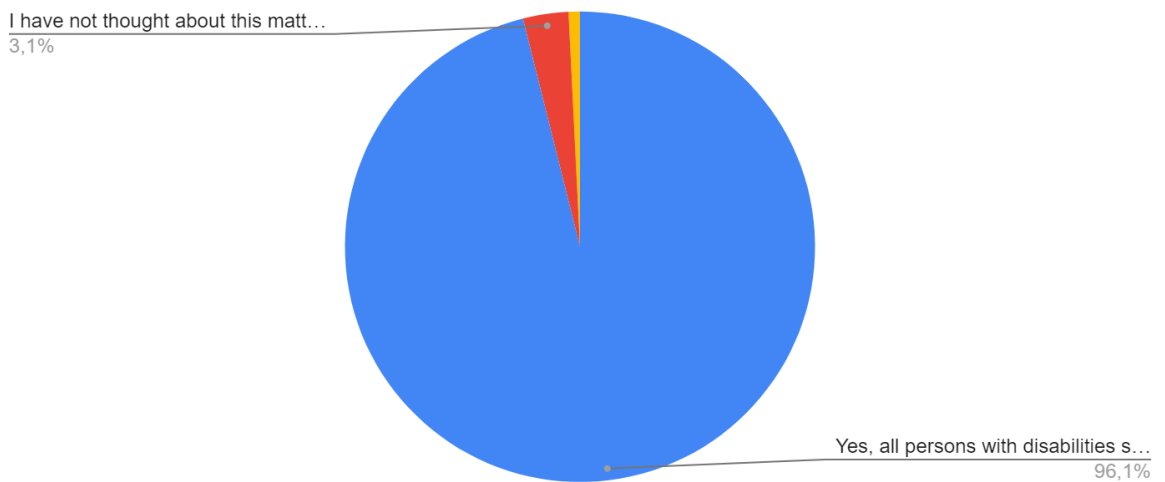
- 96.9% of respondents agree that the state bears the responsibility to protect the rights of persons with disabilities to participate in elections and ensure required conditions for voting. The rest of the respondents lack information on these matters.

In your opinion, is the State obliged to protect the right of a person with disability to participate in elections and to create appropriate conditions fo...



- 96.1% of respondents strongly believe that the state should guarantee access to education for persons with disabilities, whether in schools, universities, or vocational institutions. Only a minimal 0.8% expressed that separate institutions for persons with disabilities are necessary, while 3.1% of respondents indicated a lack of information on this matter.

In your opinion, should the State support all persons with disabilities in getting an education in any school, university, vocational college?

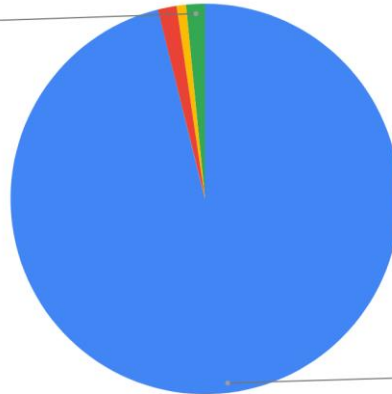


- An overwhelming 96.1% of respondents endorse both propositions: that the state should facilitate suitable conditions for persons with disabilities to receive proper education and employment, and secondly, that employers should consider the educational level of persons with disabilities and refrain from refusing employment based on disabilities. Only 1.6% of

respondents agree solely with the first proposition, and an equal percentage agree exclusively with the second proposition.

Do you agree with the following statements: 1. The state should create suitable conditions for persons with disabilities to access education and employment.
2. Employers should take into account the education of persons with disabilities and should refrain from

I agree only with the first part.
1,6%

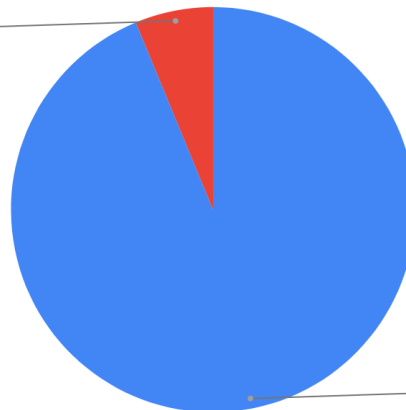


Yes, I agree with both
96,1%

- 93.8% of respondents agree that the state should offer appropriate services and measures to address the needs of persons with hearing and visual impairments, enabling them to communicate and move without barriers. Conversely, 6.3% of respondents lack information about the specific needs of different groups.

Do you agree that the State is obliged to create such services and measures for deaf and blind people that they can communicate and move in the environment without obstacles?

Yes, I agree. However, I am not aware of wha...
6,3%

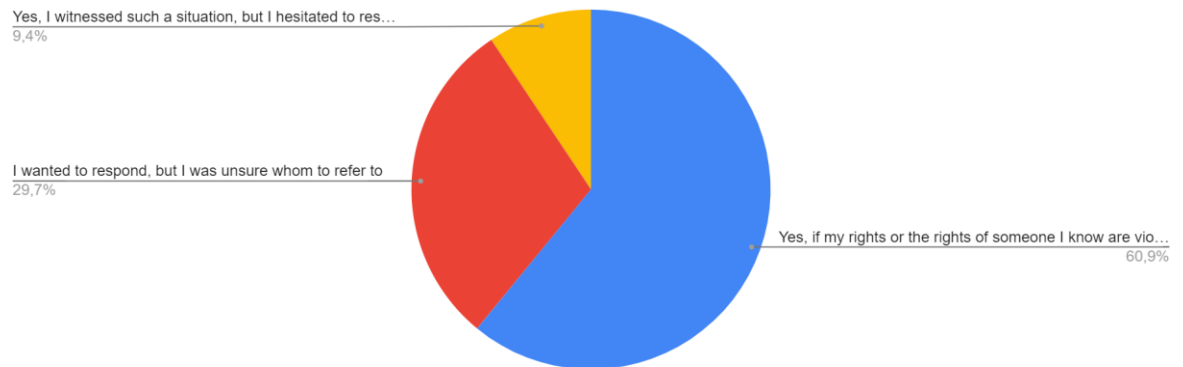


Yes, I agree
93,8%

- 66.4% of respondents are aware of the specific needs of women with disabilities and believe that their interests should be taken into account. Within this group, 43.75% are female respondents, and 22.66% are male respondents.
- 10.2% of males and females have not considered this matter. Moreover, 0.78% of females and 1.56% of males believe there is no need to separate women's rights.
- Within the female participants, 10.16% were unaware of the specific needs of women with disabilities. However, they expressed the view that it is important to consider these needs. Similarly, 4.69% of male participants shared this perspective.

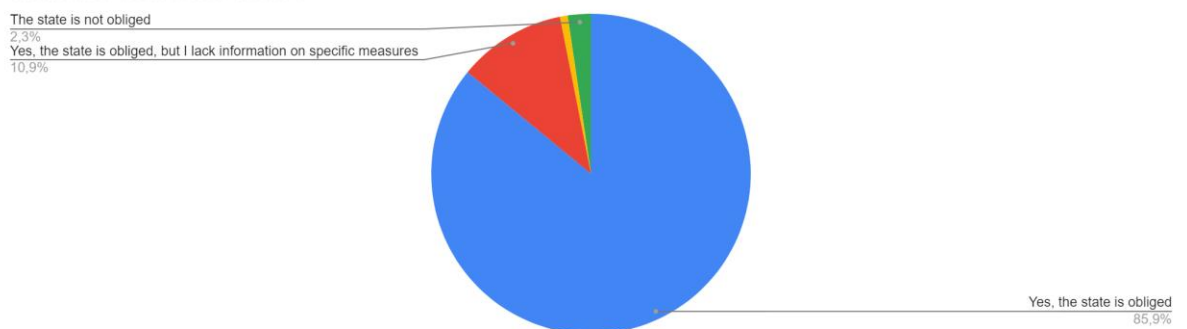
- 60.9% of the respondents reported witnessing discriminatory incidents and knowing whom to refer in such situations. Meanwhile, 29.7% experienced such instances but were unaware of whom to refer. The remaining respondents expressed no inclination to respond to such incidents.

Have you or someone you know experienced a situation where your rights were violated? If yes, did you respond, and do you know whom to refer to in such situations?



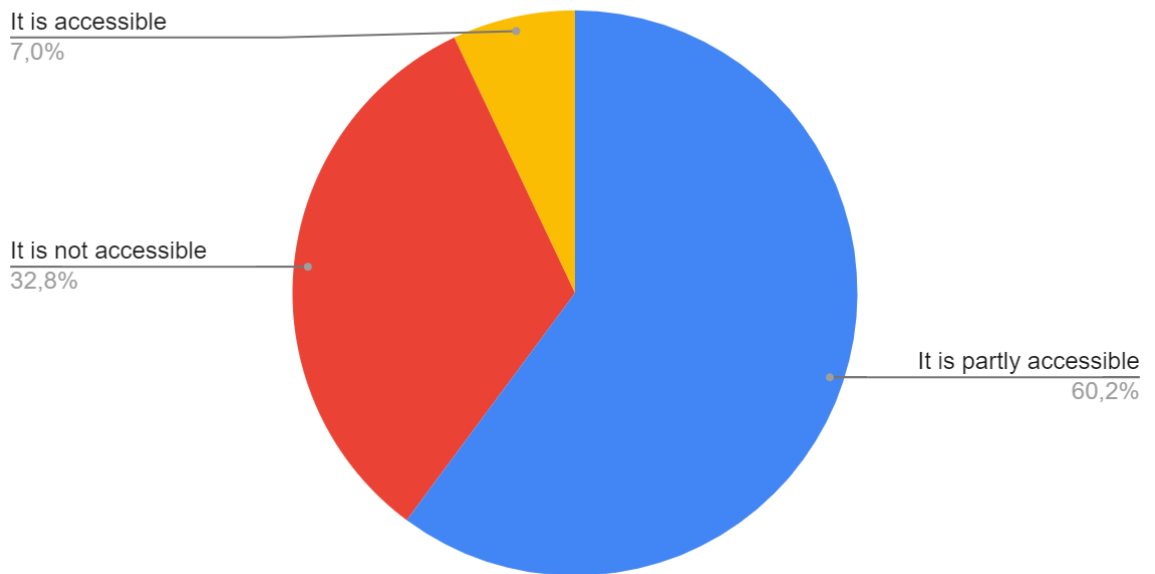
- 85.9% of respondents emphasize the state's responsibility to guarantee the full participation of persons with disabilities in all aspects of life. Another 10.9% acknowledge the state's responsibility but require more information about the specific measures to be taken. The rest of the participants do not perceive the state as having a role in this matter.

Do you think the state is obliged to take appropriate measures to ensure the full participation of persons with disabilities in all areas of life?



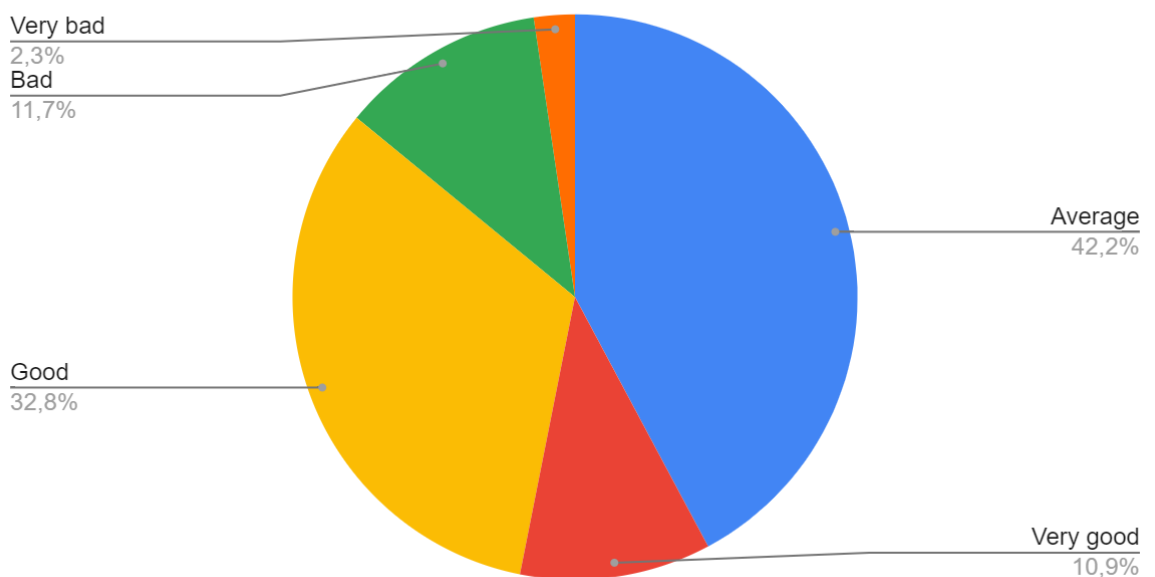
- 60.2% of respondents feel that individuals with disabilities have limited access to sports, cultural, and recreational events. In contrast, 32.8% believe they have no access, while the remaining 7% consider these events fully accessible.

How accessible are sports, cultural, and recreational events for people with disabilities to attend and participate in?



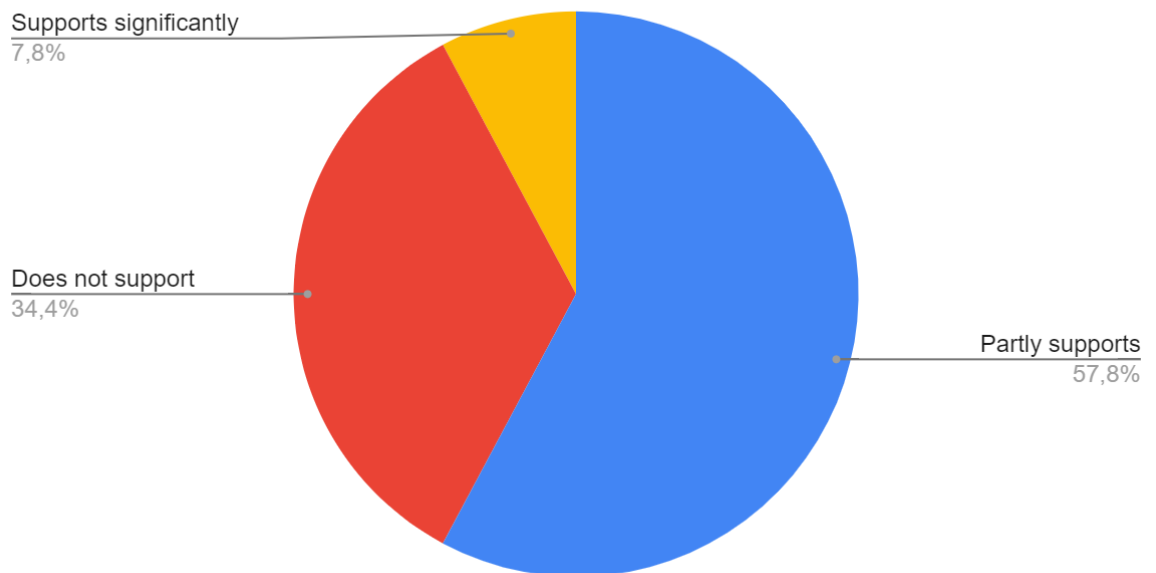
- When assessing their knowledge of disability-related issues and rights, 42.2% of respondents rated their understanding as 'average,' 32.8% as 'good,' 10.9% as 'very good,' and 11.7% as 'bad.' A small minority, 2.3%, rated their knowledge in this area as 'very bad.'

How would you rate your knowledge regarding disability issues and rights?



- Among the participants, 57.8% feel that the current conditions only partially support them in living on an equal basis with others. In contrast, 34.4% believe that existing conditions do not support them in this regard. A smaller group, 7.8%, feels that the current conditions fully support their ability to live on an equal basis with others.

To what extent does the current environment support your equal participation in society?



As a result of quantitative research analysis, several key issues and trends have surfaced:

- Existing services do not adequately address the needs of individuals with disabilities. Furthermore, there is a scarcity of accessible information regarding these services.
- The respondents' opinions were divided regarding the needs of women with disabilities. While some participants acknowledged the importance of addressing these needs separately, others did not consider it necessary.
- It was found that the provided information was not founded on primary sources. Moreover, only a small segment of the community had direct access to authentic legal or policy documents.

Qualitative Research Findings

In addition to quantitative research, the study incorporated qualitative research methods. As a part of the study, the focus group was conducted with organizations representing persons with disabilities. This approach aimed to delve deeper into the barriers identified in their work and assess the awareness levels regarding disability issues. The analysis of the focus group discussions revealed several key findings.

Findings Regarding Monitoring System:

The monitoring mechanism for the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities is active in the country. On October 27, 2014, during the #6 meeting of the Coordination Council addressing disability issues, the Public Defender of Georgia was designated as the entity responsible for promoting, protecting, and implementing the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.⁵ This monitoring mechanism, in collaboration with the Department of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, comprises the Advisory Council for Monitoring the Promotion, Protection, and Implementation of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. However, during the focus group discussions, participants did not mention the council, or specifics of its work, suggesting that information about the monitoring system is unclear and needs improvement.

Moreover, challenges related to monitoring, service accessibility, and law enforcement at the municipal level emerged as the central concerns. This was supported by the viewpoints expressed in the focus group discussion concerning monitoring and different councils:

Challenges in Monitoring and Enforcement:

- Monitoring and enforcement remain significant challenges in every area.
- Monitoring national accessibility standards poses a significant problem due to the absence of strict control and practical implementation.
- Jurists possess knowledge about the issuance of construction permits, whereas citizens often struggle to navigate these procedures and lack information on where to report violations.
- Organizations representing persons with disabilities frequently report cases where buildings are constructed based on outdated standards despite official permissions. The inspection services conduct formal inspections, and even if violations are identified, no corrections are made.
- There is a shortage of human resources with expertise in standards. Additionally, specific guidelines for particular areas are lacking. For instance, during the monitoring of medical institutions, organizations of persons with disabilities discovered that detailed instructions on the arrangement of hospitals or specific rooms were absent from the documentation.
- Municipal-level monitoring mechanisms are not effectively implemented. Non-governmental organizations make efforts to monitor access to social and health services, but due to their project-based funding, there are insufficient resources for continuous monitoring.

⁵ <https://ombudsman.ge/geo/mekanizmis-shesakheb>

Findings Regarding Awareness of Legal and Policy Documents:

- Participants demonstrated varying understanding of Georgia's laws and conventions concerning persons with disabilities. Individuals with legal backgrounds demonstrated a more comprehensive knowledge of policy documents.
- Limited awareness was observed among participants concerning other policy documents examined in this study. This lack of knowledge can be attributed to some participants' lack of formal education in social sciences or law. Their understanding of rights and documents primarily stems from personal experiences or training programs.

Findings on Challenges in Municipalities:

- Communication with local government entities is often complicated and time-consuming. Connecting with the municipality's hotline can be problematic, hindering timely information flow to disability organizations, including crucial budgeting details.
- Most municipalities lack specific action plans addressing disability issues. Where plans exist, they are often identical across municipalities, neglecting the unique needs of persons with disabilities.
- Municipal councils, primarily initiated by persons with disabilities, function formally and lack effectiveness. Some councils hold meetings only once a year.
- Councils typically include individuals lacking expertise in disability matters, with limited inclusion of persons with disabilities. Financial support is insufficient, and the councils lack consistency, systematic operation, and transparency in their proceedings.
- Concerns raised by organizations of persons with disabilities during council meetings often go unaddressed.
- In some cases, some municipalities still approach disability issues based on the charity model.
- In certain regions, referrals are problematic due to the absence of adapted transport in municipalities (in some instances, no transport service exists at all, or it operates just once a week), interfering with the mobility of persons with disabilities and their right to effectively communicate their needs.
- Municipal employees require retraining in disability-related matters.
- In most regions, cooperation between organizations of persons with disabilities and municipalities is at the initial stage and is developing slowly.
- Cooperation between organizations of persons with disabilities and local municipalities is in the early stages, progressing slowly across most regions.
- In some cases, organizations of persons with disabilities largely depend on outdated approaches and require awareness-raising initiatives. Active involvement primarily

comes from older, familiar faces, with less participation from the younger generation.

The analysis of opinions shared during the focus group sessions led to several key findings:

- Improvement is needed in the activities of the Interagency Coordination Committee for the Implementation of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. Participants noted that the committee did not fully consider the community's recommendations during its formation, leading to a lack of thorough fulfillment of the responsibilities outlined in Article 33 of the Convention. Specifically, the community's suggestions regarding the committee's composition were dismissed. Additionally, participants found the methods of disseminating information about the committee's activities within the community of persons with disabilities inappropriate. Many felt that their involvement in the Council was merely formal, lacking opportunities for active participation in decision-making or topic selection. Frequently, decisions were already formulated, and their opinions were not further considered.
- Discriminatory provisions and terms, particularly concerning individuals with psychosocial needs, are still present in legislation.
- The needs of persons with intersecting identities (such as ethnic minorities, diverse gender identities, or sexual orientations) are not adequately considered, leading to limited access to services for these groups.
- Certain social and medical services operate exclusively in specific municipalities rather than centrally, hindering people with disabilities in different regions from accessing necessary services. To address this issue, coordinating services and developing a unified action plan are essential.
- People with disabilities living in regions are excluded from strategic decision-making processes.
- Persons with disabilities and disability organizations are often consulted after decisions have been made rather than being involved in the decision-making process itself.

Conclusion

This document aims to highlight critical factors and challenges that impede protecting the rights of persons with disabilities. Despite the state's efforts and the legal obligations outlined in Georgia's laws and international conventions, ensuring the full protection of the rights of persons with disabilities remains a challenge.

The main issues revolve around enforcement of the law and monitoring, which are hindered by ineffective planning and strategy development. This interrupts the creation of accessible environments and services for persons with disabilities.

In addition, a significant obstacle lies in the lack of qualified personnel at both central and municipal levels. Additionally, the perspectives and opinions of persons with disabilities are often disregarded by the state, leading to ineffective outcomes.

Furthermore, engaging persons with disabilities in decision-making poses another crucial challenge. This is especially problematic for individuals with intersectional identities, as their needs are not prioritized.

Another fundamental challenge is the cooperation between the state and persons with disabilities. It is imperative to take collective actions towards establishing an inclusive and equal environment. This necessitates changing existing perspectives and paradigms through which persons with disabilities are viewed.

We hope that the insights and recommendations provided by this study will be seriously considered at the local and national levels by relevant authorities. We hope that proactive and effective measures will be implemented to realize the rights of persons with disabilities.

Recommendations

Based on the study findings and input from round table discussions with various stakeholders, the following recommendations have been outlined:

- The state must demonstrate greater responsibility in fulfilling the obligations stipulated by the law.
- A systematic shift in the approach to persons with disabilities is essential, with their needs prioritized in all initiatives.
- Planning targeted awareness campaigns focusing on disability-related laws and international agreements is important. It is crucial to enhance the disabled community's understanding of the legislative framework. It is necessary to develop accessible and simplified informational materials explaining key provisions of laws and conventions. These campaigns should be conducted through workshops, online platforms, and in collaboration with organizations of persons with disabilities.
- The state must fulfill its obligation to provide accessible information, ensuring equal conditions for individuals with various disabilities.
- People with diverse disabilities should be actively involved in significant strategic decision-making processes.
- It is essential to improve the national accessibility standards monitoring mechanism under implementation deadlines, allocated budget, and designated responsible bodies at both central and municipal levels. While the Law on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in Georgia mandates the adaptation of existing buildings to universal design by 2035, the lack of a monitoring mechanism and action plans impedes progress. Thus, speeding up the process is necessary.
- Develop detailed guidelines for national accessibility standards. Additionally, provide training to personnel involved in the field, ensuring they are acquainted with updated standards.
- Accelerate the development of a unified standard and action plan at the central level. The absence of a unified state vision regarding disability issues slows progress across all sectors, hindering the achievement of anticipated results outlined by the law.
- Strengthening the protection of the rights of persons with disabilities at the municipal level is crucial. Municipality personnel directly involved in disability matters should undergo training to enhance their expertise.
- Municipalities must actively plan events to disseminate information about social and healthcare services tailored to the specific needs of persons with disabilities.
- Establishing electronic and telephone communication channels in municipalities is essential to provide information about services to persons with disabilities who cannot visit in person.
- It is crucial to recognize the pivotal role of both the central-level inter-agency coordination council and the local councils of persons with disabilities within municipalities as crucial mechanisms and to enhance their effectiveness.

- Selecting council members should be based on competition rather than specific criteria. Adequate budgets should be allocated to these councils to enhance their performance.
- The state must take proactive measures to improve the situation of persons with intersecting identities, such as women with disabilities and members of ethnic minorities, and to provide them with equal rights.
- The state must prioritize fulfilling its obligations concerning the protection of the rights of women with disabilities. The challenges faced by women with disabilities are often overlooked, underscoring the need for raising awareness and taking proactive measures.
- The state must ensure the active involvement of persons with disabilities in the decision-making process, recognize their expertise and viewpoints, and revise its approach to view the disability community as an equal and accountable force.
- Encourage the inclusion of new members in discussions and meetings. Widely disseminate information about these events. Government agencies should coordinate with independent activists and organizations of persons with disabilities, especially in regions where persons with disabilities have limited access to necessary information.