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**Consideration of reports: reports submitted by States parties
in accordance with articles 16 and 17 of the Covenant**

Replies of Georgia to the list of issues in relation to its third periodic report*, **

[Date received: 26 November 2024]

* The present document is being issued without formal editing.

** The annexes to the present document may be accessed from the web page of the Committee.

Replies to the list of issues (E/C.12/GEO/Q/3)

Reply to paragraph 2

1. The Supreme Court of Georgia, as the highest judicial authority, frequently applies the provisions of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights in its judicial practice.
2. The analysis of the Supreme Court's case law clearly demonstrates that the Court considers the Covenant as "directly applicable law", ensuring individuals' full access to judicial protection of rights outlined in the Covenant, as they possess inherent legal force without necessitating additional legislative clarification and consequently, these rights directly empower individuals with the legal entitlement to demand judicial remedies. Furthermore, the Court explicitly links the rights affirmed by the Covenant to the concept of the social state. The Court actively applies the rights established by the Covenant in various cases, including civil matters such as labour law, issues pertaining to damages and social benefits, as well as disputes concerning real estate in vindication lawsuits. Additionally, these rights are invoked in administrative cases, including disputes arising from legislation on public service, housing provision disputes, and disputes related to pension issuance.
3. To ensure the adequate implementation of Office of the Public Defender (Ombudsman) (PDO) functions assigned by law, sustainable increase of financing is maintained. In 2014, the approved budget of PDO amounted to 2.380 million GEL; in 2015 - 4 million GEL; in 2016 - 4.5 million GEL; in 2017 - 4.8 million GEL; in 2018 - 5.5 million GEL; in 2019 - 6.4 million GEL, in 2020 - 7 million GEL, in 2021 - 8.5 million GEL, in 2022 - 8.869 million GEL, in 2023 - 11,775,000, in 2024 - 11,500,000 million GEL. In addition, building the new office of the PDO is in progress.
4. The constitutional reform, along with the waves of judicial reforms undertaken in the last decade have further enhanced the independence, efficiency, accountability, transparency of the judiciary. To ensure the institutional independence of the judiciary, the High Judicial Council of Justice of Georgia has been transformed into a politically neutral body. The Council is accountable only before the Conference of Judges - a self-governing body, which is composed of all judges in Georgia.
5. As a result of the Constitutional Reform of 2017-2018, solid guarantees were created for the individual independence of judges by introducing the system of lifetime appointment, setting guarantees for irremovability of judges, ensuring their safety and security. Notably, since 1 January 2018, the cases have been assigned to judges through the electronic system, according to the principle of random allocation.
6. The system of appointment of judges had been entirely restructured. As of 2024, Georgia has a competitive, merit-based, objective, and transparent system of selection and appointment of judges of all three instances of the courts. The law now provides for the pre-established and detailed criteria for the evaluation of the judicial candidates; in the course of selection/appointment/nomination of judges, decisions are taken by open ballots and are subject to written substantiation. New regulations provide for the meaningful right to appeal.
7. Recent reforms have created tangible guarantees for the accountability of judges. The system of disciplinary liability of judges has been completely restructured: to ensure an objective and unbiased examination of alleged disciplinary misconducts of judges, the position of an Independent Inspector has been introduced, precise grounds for disciplinary liability have been set forth and the respective legislation has been thoroughly amended ensuring guarantees of the due and fair proceedings.

Reply to paragraph 3

8. On 23 March 2023, the Parliament of Georgia adopted the National Strategy for the Protection of Human Rights in Georgia for 2022-2030. The document was developed by the relevant state institutions, with the coordination of the Government of Georgia (GoG)

Administration. The new comprehensive strategy addresses all fundamental human rights and freedoms and puts a special emphasis on the protection of the rights of vulnerable groups.

9. The 2022-2030 Strategy specifically mentions strengthening the human rights in the business sector as a separate priority goal. On 28 December 2023, the Human Rights Action Plan 2024-2026 was adopted with the aim of implementing the goals and tasks provided by the Human Rights Strategy 2022-2030. Similarly to the previous Action Plan, the new document includes a chapter on business and human rights.

10. The Human Rights Action Plan 2024-2026 envisages establishment of international framework standards for business and human rights, including through harmonization of legislation. Among other activities, it entails developing and promoting a guide and acceleration program for small and medium-sized enterprises on the topic of business and human rights, raising awareness of state-owned enterprises of business and human rights framework and promoting its implementation, organization of events with the participation of citizens and business sector in order to provide information and promote the service of alternative dispute resolution mechanism – mediation.

Reply to paragraph 4

11. To ensure the fulfilment of Georgia's Nationally Determined Contribution (NDC) targets for emissions reduction, the country has developed the Climate Change Strategy 2030 and corresponding Climate Change Action Plans for the periods 2021-2023 and 2024-2025. The Strategy outlines Georgia's vision for achieving its NDC targets, while the action plans include over 100 specific measures aimed at reducing emissions. These measures span seven key sectors: energy generation and transmission, transport, buildings, industry, agriculture, waste management, and forestry.

12. The country is currently in the process of developing its Fifth National Communication to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC). This document will include the national greenhouse gas inventory, and once finalized, Georgia intends to incorporate per capita emissions data.

Reply to paragraph 4 (a)

13. The assessment of climate change impacts within the state is outlined in Georgia's Fourth National Communication¹ to the UNFCCC. The document includes climate change impacts on disadvantaged individuals and groups. Georgia is currently in the process of developing its First Biennial Transparency Report (BTR) and Fifth National Communication. The documents place significant emphasis on the impact of climate change on disadvantaged individuals and groups. Both the BTR and the Fifth National Communication provide information on how climate change challenges the healthcare sector and identify the groups most affected by these challenges. They also offer description of how other sectoral policy documents recognize disadvantaged individuals as vulnerable groups.

Reply to paragraph 4 (b)

14. By preliminary estimation, by the implementation of the Climate Strategy 2030 and its Action Plan for 2021–2023, Georgia reduced GHG emissions by 5-6%.

Reply to paragraph 4 (c)

15. The national agricultural and rural development policy, as outlined in the 2021-2027 Strategy for Agriculture and Rural Development (ARD), has been successfully implemented over the past three years. Under the Action Plan 2021-2023 to the said Strategy, the total budget expenditure amounted to GEL 2.4 billion. In 2023, Georgia adopted the second Action Plan for the ARD Strategy, covering the years 2024-2027 which comprises 88 activities, with implementation responsibilities falling on four ministries: Ministry of Environmental

Protection and Agriculture (MEPA), Ministry of Education, Science, and Youth (MoESY), Ministry of Regional Development and Infrastructure (MRDI), Ministry of Economy and Sustainable Development (MoESD). The budget allocated for the Action Plan 2024-2027 is about GEL 4.3 billion with about GEL 4.2 billion coming from the state budget.

Reply to paragraph 4 (d)

16. Georgia, as a signatory state to three-landmark global agendas, the Paris Agreement, the Sustainable Development Goals, and the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015–2030, aims to transition to climate-resilient societies and economies and recognizes the importance of climate change adaptation with both, sustainable development and disaster risk reduction.

17. The GoG's commitment to international frameworks is expressed through the adoption of the National Disaster Risk Reduction Strategy (DRR Strategy) and its Action Plan(s), elaborated within the interagency cooperative format and civil society consultations. The document outlines the key DRR policy directions and activities to reduce climate-driven natural and man-made disaster risks and challenges identified within the National Threat Assessment Document. The DRR Strategy, in addition, aims to enhance disaster preparedness and response capabilities at all levels via implementing the Action Plan, which combines activities, projects, and programs, defines deadlines and financial sources for each activity.

18. In order to strengthen preparedness for natural disasters, Georgia is developing a multi-hazard early warning system. This initiative aims to mitigate the exposure of Georgia's communities, livelihoods, and infrastructure to climate change. A flood hazard mapping methodology was developed. An informative geological bulletin is prepared every year which contains information about geological hazards (landslides, mudslides, rock avalanches, rock falls, etc.) processed as a result of geological monitoring and studies conducted during the period of extreme activation of natural disasters.

Reply to paragraphs 5 and 17

19. The Targeted Social Assistance Programme (TSA) is the largest social program in Georgia, after old-age pensions, aimed at reducing poverty and assisting poor households. It uses Proxy Means Testing (PMT) to assess household welfare, such as the quality/condition of housing, the number of family members, their employment status, and considers the health status of household members, real estate ownership, utility bill expenses, etc. Based on these indicators, special software calculates the welfare score, which determines eligibility for cash assistance, ranging from 30 to 60 GEL per person monthly. As of May 2024, 383,049 families (1,237,467 persons) are registered in the socially vulnerable family database, of whom 667,528 receiving subsistence allowances, covering 18% of the population. Beneficiaries also have access to broader health insurance coverage than the general population.

20. Local governments provide additional cash and direct support (e.g., free meals, specific medicines, student grants, firewood, subsidized utility bills, and transport benefits) as well as services for people/children with disabilities and extracurricular activities for children such as day care centres. Municipal subsidies and services that households are eligible for are determined by the welfare score.

21. For targeted social assistance and poverty statistics, see Annex №1.

22. In 2022, the public employment program was launched with the aim of supporting the working-age population receiving targeted social assistance. It allows the target group to choose between options such as joining the public employment program, entering the open employment market, participating in training/retraining programs, or formalizing informal activities. If included in one of these programs, the family will remain in the targeted social assistance program for 4 years, maintain their rating score and cash benefit. Public employment can be full- or part-time, paying a maximum of 300 GEL per month.

23. Directions and schemes that would have been covered under a unified Social Code are being developed individually.

Reply to paragraph 6 (a)

24. The proportion of the population living below the nationally defined poverty line was 11.8% in 2023, which is 3.8 percentage points lower than in 2022. Absolute Poverty rate halved over the 10-year period. For information, see Annex №2.1.

Reply to paragraph 6 (b)

25. The level of inequality in Georgia is measured using Gini coefficients. In 2023, there was a slight increase in some of these coefficients, however in recent years significant reduction of inequality was observed. For information, see Annex №2.2.

Reply to paragraph 6 (c)

26. Georgian economy has displayed remarkable resilience, demonstrating solid growth in the post-pandemic years. Over the last three years, the Georgian economy grew by an average of 9.8%. GDP per capita almost doubled over the 10-year period, reaching USD 8,284 in 2023. Public debt has decreased drastically. For information, see Annex №2.3.

Reply to paragraph 6 (d)

27. For information, see Annex №2.4.

Reply to paragraph 6 (e)

28. For information, see Annex №2.5.

Reply to paragraph 6 (f)

29. For information, see Annex №2.6.

Reply to paragraph 6 (g)

30. Within specified period of time an employer (with some exceptions) was granted the right not pay to the budget its payable income tax deducted from a salary of up to GEL 750 paid to an employee if the salary of the employee received from this employer during one calendar month did not exceed GEL 1 500.

31. The Minister of Finance/Head of the Revenue Service were granted the authority to extend for individual taxpayers the deadline set by the Tax Code of Georgia (TCG) for payment of income tax and/or property tax payable in 2020 until not later than 1 January 2021. In such a case, a taxpayer was not charged with a surcharge provided for by the TCG.

32. Also, the Minister of Finance/Head of the Revenue Service were granted the authority to extend the deadline set by the TCG for payment of income tax payable in November and December of 2020 until not later than 1 July 2021. This concerned taxpayers operating in specifically listed locations in the tourism sector, including accommodation, catering, tour operating, transportation, excursion and conference services, entertainment and other persons providing organized services to tourists. The property used in the above listed activities was exempted from the property tax that was to be declared in the specified period under the TCG.

Reply to paragraph 7

33. The Parliament of Georgia adopted the new Law on Public Procurement in 2023, which will enter into force in 2025. New law ensures gradual approximation with EU public procurement legislation, which provides increased transparency, non-discrimination, conflict of interest and equal treatment of all suppliers.

34. On 30 November 2022, the Anti-Corruption Bureau of Georgia was established following amendments to the Law of Georgia on the Fight against Corruption. This reform consolidated corruption prevention mechanisms under a single independent institution. The capacity of the Bureau was increased through introduction of budgetary independence, personal immunity to the Head of the Bureau together with special administrative proceedings. A key aspect of its work involves setting anti-corruption policies in close coordination with relevant stakeholders, including civil society and academia; overseeing policy implementation; and providing necessary recommendations. The Bureau represents State before the relevant international organizations such as UNODC and GRECO and acts as the national coordinator in implementation of their recommendations. The Bureau also monitors declarations submitted by the public officials as well as political parties. The Bureau operates independently and is accountable to the Parliament of Georgia. The Bureau's mandate has expanded to include enhanced whistle-blower protection. The Law on Fight against Corruption contains dedicated section (Chapter V¹) on whistle-blower protection. Whistle-blowers are now guaranteed anonymity throughout the proceedings and are granted free legal aid and psychological consultation.

35. In the context of criminal proceedings, a whistle-blower is a participant or potential participant of the criminal proceedings in the capacity of witness or victim. Respectively, all protection mechanisms under the criminal legislation with respect to the participant of the criminal proceedings are relevant. They include the application of special protection measures under the Criminal Procedure Code of Georgia and even starting criminal investigation and prosecuting those responsible for exercising the influence over witness or/and victim, pursuant to the Criminal Code of Georgia.

36. The fight against corruption is one of the top priorities under the 2022-2027 Strategy of the Prosecution Service of Georgia (PSG). To combat corruption effectively, the PSG has in place the special Anti-Corruption Unit. All corruption investigators and financial analysts at the PSG Anti-Corruption Unit have full access to the electronic databases, including the public registry (also includes land register), the state procurement database and the tax database. Based on the corruption risk analysis, the level of corruption risks in the public registry and the tax administration is assessed as low, while the level of corruption risk in the state procurement system is assessed as below average. For information, see Annex №3.

37. To combat bid rigging and mitigate corruption risks, State Procurement Agency of Georgia fulfils monitoring and oversight functions with its dedicated Monitoring Department. Monitoring Department elaborated specific monitoring methodologies, relevant risk based factors and adopted appropriate procedure to reveal risky transactions. Risk based approach automatically detects risky tenders, which are subject to comprehensive monitoring. Georgian e-Procurement (Ge-GP) system provides 100% transparency of all transactions. All interested parties can access any procurement related information in the system online. In addition, Ge-GP system provides possibilities to dispute any decision of procuring authority and appeal it electronically to the independent and impartial Dispute Resolution Council.

38. After the adoption of 2020 mutual evaluation report of Georgia by MONEYVAL committee, Georgia further strengthened its National AML/CFT framework by amending relevant laws. Progress has been acknowledged by MONEYVAL in the 1st and 2nd follow-up reports of Georgia. As a result of amendments introduced to AML/CFT law in 2022, the Financial Monitoring Service of Georgia has been further empowered (Recommendation 29). 2023 amendments fully aligned Political Exposed Person's definition (Recommendation 12) to what has been recommended by MONEYVAL and FATF. On 31 May 2022, the Standing Interagency Commission was established to handle AML/CFT measures. On 4 April 2023, the GoG adopted National Strategy and Action plan for 2023-2026 years. Georgia also upgraded National Risk Assessment Report in 2023.

Reply to paragraph 8

39. The GoG pays special attention to the advancement of the rights of persons with disabilities. According to the Law of Georgia on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, ministries, state agencies, local self-governments and administrative bodies have an obligation to ensure the elaboration and approval of annual action plans on the rights of persons with disabilities, whereas the GoG Administration is responsible for overseeing the process.

40. In order to align the national legislation with the Marrakesh Treaty to Facilitate Access to Published Works for Persons Who Are Blind, Visually Impaired or Otherwise Print Disabled (Marrakesh Treaty), the Parliament of Georgia elaborated the draft package of laws and adopted the amendments on 15 December 2023. The adopted legislation regulates the certain permitted uses of certain works and other subject matter protected by copyright and related rights for the benefit of persons who are blind, visually impaired or otherwise print-disabled. Special legal grounds have been set for beneficiaries, so that they can easily obtain works in an accessible format. On 17 September 2024, Georgia acceded to the Marrakesh Treaty.

41. On 21 February 2024, the Parliament of Georgia adopted the draft law that repealed those provisions from the Criminal Procedure Code and the Civil Procedure Code that limited the right of certain persons with disabilities to participate in administrative and judicial proceedings on an equal basis with others.

42. The third priority of the Human Rights Strategy 2022-2030 is dedicated towards ensuring the protection of human rights and freedoms without discrimination. The document includes continuous improvement of equality and anti-discrimination legislation, protection of the rights of vulnerable groups and improvement of victim-oriented response to crimes committed on grounds of discrimination.

43. The GoG is actively engaged in efforts to combat ethnic and religious discrimination through various initiatives. In this regard, the Human Rights Strategy 2022-2030 and the Human Rights Action Plan 2024-2026 place significant emphasis on establishing robust standards for freedom of religion and belief, ensuring the free operation of religious associations, and reinforcing secularism within the state through appropriate measures.

44. The Human Rights Strategy 2022-2030 aims to effectively protect and promote the rights of the elderly and envisages taking a number of steps in this direction, including creation of an appropriate legal framework, development and approval of the National Action Plan on Aging for the years 2024-2025.

45. One of the key mechanisms is the State Strategy for Civic Equality and Integration for 2021-2030 and the respective Action Plans, which aim to create equal opportunities for all citizens regardless of their ethnicity, for full participation in all spheres of public life, and further strengthen intercultural dialogue. Currently, implementation of the Action Plan for 2023-2024 of the Strategy is in progress.

46. The Civic Equality and Integration Strategy addresses priorities for ethnic minorities through comprehensive measures. These includes improving access to quality education for ethnic minorities, enhancing state language competence and increasing participation in civic, political, socio-economic and cultural processes. Key initiatives include free Georgian language courses through the Zurab Zhvania School of Public Administration and its 12 Training Centers, access to special vocational programs and a simplified enrolment program for ethnic minorities ("1+4 Program") in higher education programs. Additionally, professional skills programs have been introduced in 49 schools in the regions densely populated by ethnic minorities, and languages of smaller minority groups are taught upon request.

47. The fight against discrimination and hate crime is one of the PSG priorities. Following the dedicated measures, including the specialization of prosecutors and the PSG investigators, their continuous training and the issuance of prosecutorial guidelines, there has been a growing trend in hate crime prosecutions since 2020.

48. In the District (City) Courts of Georgia, the number of individuals convicted for crimes committed on the grounds of intolerance based on discrimination has been increasing annually. Specifically, with respect to the crime committed on this ground, 98 people were convicted in 2020, 321 in 2021, 585 in 2022, 756 in 2023, and 176 in the first three months of 2024.

49. For the statistics on hate crime prosecutions, convictions, and the number of persons granted a victim status, see Annex №4.

50. Since 2020, only specialized prosecutors and PSG investigators are authorized to handle hate crime cases. The PSG puts the special emphasis on the monitoring of hate crime cases. The Department of Human Rights Protection of the Office of the Prosecutor General monitors criminal cases on hate crime with particular attention to the interests of victims and improving access to justice. The Department analyses these cases and publishes annual reports, including in English, on the website of the PSG.

51. Combatting crimes against Persons with Disabilities (PWDs) and ensuring their access to justice without discrimination are among the key priorities under the PSG 2022-2027 Strategy. To achieve these goals and uphold the principles of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and the Law of Georgia on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, the PSG has been developing annual Action Plans on Protecting the Rights of Persons with Disabilities since 2021. These action plans are created with the involvement of PWDs and supporting organisations.

52. The Special Investigation Service develops guidelines aimed at identifying discriminatory motives and obtaining necessary evidence in cases involving hate crimes, particularly those rooted in religious intolerance or discrimination. The Ministry of Internal Affairs (MIA) is actively training its employees in the methods of conducting effective investigations in crimes committed with the motive of national and ethnic intolerance, as well as conducting a public awareness campaigns.

53. The Legal Aid Service (LAS) provides free legal aid to vulnerable groups, including women victims of violence, minors, and asylum seekers. Beneficiaries can receive legal advice through in-person, telephone, or online consultations, as well as court representation. Following the expansion of its legislative mandate, free legal services are now available to all minors, regardless of financial status. Additionally, the LAS offers free legal advice and court representation to asylum seekers, including those denied international protection, ensuring their rights are protected, regardless of their financial situation.

Reply to paragraph 9

54. On 15 December 2022, the Parliament of Georgia adopted amendments to the Law of Georgia on Gender Equality, which determined that the state ensures real and effective equality between women and men and eliminates actual inequality. These amendments support implementation of Article 11(3) of the Constitution of Georgia by ensuring that state policies not only uphold de jure equality between men and women, but also to eliminate de facto inequality.

55. In November 2022, to harmonize the legislation with the Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (“Istanbul Convention”), the GoG approved the rules and amount of compensation for victims of violence against women and/or domestic violence. As a result, a victim/survivor of violence is authorized to receive compensation from the state. The amount of the compensation is determined in accordance with the decision issued by the court. Another important achievement is the elimination of the “status of the victim”. The so-called existence of “victim status” used to be the prerequisite for using state services, which, in many cases, was a significant barrier for a person exposed to violence.

56. On 22 January 2024, the GoG Administration adopted the National Referral Procedures (National Referral Mechanism) for Identification, Protection, Support and Rehabilitation of Victims of Violence against Women and/or Domestic Violence. The

primary objective of the document is to establish a coordinated, prompt, and efficient communication system among relevant state agencies

57. Gender equality is an important part of the National Human Rights Strategy 2022-2030. Gender equality and women's rights is mainstreamed through the whole document, as well as the Human Rights Action Plan 2024-2026.

58. For more than a decade, the GoG has been adopting two stand-alone action plans: National Action Plan on the Implementation of the UN Resolutions 1325 on Women, Peace and Security and the National Action Plan for the Elimination of Violence against Women and Domestic Violence. On 26 October 2022, both action plans for 2022-2024 were elaborated in close cooperation with civil sector and Public Defender's Office. According to the 2023 report on the implementation of the mentioned action plans, around 70% of all the activities have already been executed by the responsible agencies.

59. On 22 December 2022, the Parliament of Georgia adopted New State Concept on Gender Equality. This document represents the country's vision for eliminating all forms of gender discrimination and ensuring gender equality in the civil, political, economic, social and cultural spheres, both in public and private relations.

60. On 23 March 2023, the Parliament of Georgia adopted State Concept on Women's Economic Empowerment, which reviews the positive commitment of the state to the economic empowerment of women in a long-term perspective and the necessary steps to be taken. The document proposes seven directions, including acknowledging, reducing, and distributing unpaid and care work; equal access to economic resources; improving public sector procurement and employment practices; improving employment practices in the private sector; reducing shadow economy and supporting a smooth transfer in the formal sector; strengthening the gender-sensitive legal framework and combating contradictory social norms.

61. The Gender Equality Council has conducted several thematic inquiries. The inquiry on mainstreaming gender equality in government policy resulted in 10 recommendations to relevant agencies, each with specific deadlines. The inquiry on access to financial resources for women and girls produced 35 recommendations, while the study on access to infrastructure (roads, transport, internet, water) for women and girls led to 46 recommendations, all with set deadlines for implementation.

62. Since 2017, municipalities started to form the relevant institutional framework in the direction of gender equality and mainstreaming, in particular, implementation of gender equality councils and the appointment of persons responsible for gender equality issues. Currently, municipal gender equality councils operate in all 64 municipalities to ensure localization of national human rights policy.

63. The municipal budget, socio-economic development priorities, and municipal programs and plans should be developed to exclude any form of discrimination. Gender equality and gender budgeting are integrated into the municipal budgeting process to ensure that gender equality is reflected in policies, programs, and priorities at the municipal level.

64. Women's representation has increased in both local and central levels. In the Parliament of the 10th convocation, 27 women were elected, up from 9 in 2008-2012. At the municipal level, women's representation rose from 19.59% (190 women) to 31.41% (441 women) after the 2021 elections.

65. As a result of the 2020 Georgian parliamentary elections, 120 members were elected via a proportional system (75% men, 25% women), and 30 via a majority system (96.67% men, 3.33% women). In the 2021 Sakrebulo elections, 1404 local council members were elected by proportional system (68.59% men, 31.41% women), and 664 by majority system (92.47% men, 7.53% women).

66. According to the Geostat data of 2023, the gender pay gap was 22.76%, which is quite a high indicator, but it is worth emphasizing the positive trend that has appeared in recent years regarding the reduction of the gender pay gap as follows: 2018 - 37.50%; 2019 - 34.72%; 2020 - 30.80%; 2021 - 25.91%; 2022 - 25.12%; 2023 - 22.76%.

Reply to paragraph 10

67. To mitigate the damage caused by the global pandemic, the GoG developed an anti-crisis plan implemented in two stages, covering a significant portion of the population with various targeted benefits and assistance. Compensation was provided to vulnerable families (rating score from 65,001 to 100,001), families (rating score up to 100,001) with 3 or more children, including those aged 16, and to people with profound disabilities/children with disabilities. Universal benefits were granted to all children, while socially vulnerable students of higher education institutions (up to rating score 150,001) received funding for one semester's tuition fees.

68. The Anti-Crisis Plan provided direct financial support to various groups, including employees, the self-employed, and vulnerable populations. Employees who lost their jobs or were on unpaid leave received 200 GEL per month for six months, while self-employed individuals received a one-time payment of 300 GEL.

69. Promoting employment and active labor market policies (ALMP) is a top priority for the GoG. Since 2015, ALMP has supported job seekers through short-term vocational training, internships, career guidance, and intermediary services, with a focus on people with disabilities. In March 2022, the Public Works Program was introduced to boost the economic inclusion of socially vulnerable groups. It offers options such as public work, open labor market employment, formalization of informal jobs, and short-term training. By the end of 2023, 39,999 socially vulnerable job seekers had found employment.

Reply to paragraph 11

70. The implementation of the National Strategy of Labour and Employment Policy for 2019–2023 was completed by the end of 2023. As a result of the implementation of strategic measures and employment programs in 2021–2023, 32,311 job seekers were registered in the labor market information system (worknet.gov.ge), including 19,421 women. Individual consultations were held for 17,078 job seekers, including 11,342 women. Additionally, during the COVID-19 pandemic in 2021, more than 10,000 people received consultations by phone. Within the framework of state programs, 32,356 job seekers were employed, including 16,939 women.

Reply to paragraph 12

71. With a view to addressing the informal economy in a holistic, government-wide manner, encompassing tax, labour, social and financial policies, the GoG is committed to undertake steps towards preparing a policy plan, by establishing a dedicated inter-ministerial working group and elaborating sectoral and risk assessment.

72. Informal employment is the most prevalent in agriculture that is dominated by subsistence and semi-subsistence farming. In other sectors of the economy (excluding agriculture), share of informal employment in non-agriculture employment amounts to 27.6%, for females 21.7% and for males 32.6%, in rural areas 32.7% and in urban areas 25.4%.

Reply to paragraph 13

73. Georgia established a fully-fledged Labour Inspection Office (LIO) as of 1 January 2021. Since its establishment, institutional development of the LIO has been ongoing, gradually expanding its mandate, opening two regional offices, increasing the budget and number of inspectors, and providing training and retraining for labour inspectors.

74. The LIO operates a hotline (1575) and an email (info@moh.gov.ge) through which complaints/statements can be appropriately received and registered.

75. From 2021 to 2023, the LIO conducted over 11800 initial and follow-up inspections, covering more than 6700 workplaces. They organized over 200 informative meetings to raise

awareness among employees and employers. The LIO's Hot Line (1575) received more than 18,000 calls, and over 1,400 written consultations were provided.

76. The number of inspected facilities has increased by 23% compared to 2021, leading to full correction of violations identified during the first re-inspection. Specifically, inspections related to labor rights saw a fivefold increase in the number of inspections and a sixfold rise in inspected workplaces. Additionally, applications tripled, and unscheduled inspections based on complaints increased ninefold.

Reply to paragraph 14

77. Throughout the reporting period, there were no recorded cases concerning pay discrimination.

78. The Labour Code of Georgia, as well as all major legislative acts in Georgia, including the specific Law on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination, prohibit all forms of discrimination.

79. Recent amendments to labour legislation notably strengthened the legal framework for protecting the labour rights of Georgian workers. These amendments include adopting the principle of equal pay for equal work, defining harassment in the workplace (including sexual harassment) as a form of discrimination, and specifying that discrimination in employment and pre-contractual relations (including when posting job vacancies and during the selection process) is prohibited.

Reply to paragraph 15

80. Collective bargaining is regulated by Georgian labour legislation, specifically the Labour Code of Georgia. This Code grants employers and employees the right to utilize a collective labour dispute mediation mechanism facilitated by independent, neutral, and qualified labour mediators.

81. Under Georgia's Organic Law on Trade Unions, the state protects trade union rights in accordance with national legislation, and violations of these rights are subject to judicial review.

82. Under Georgia's legislation, trade unions, federations (associations) of trade unions, trade union committees, and trade union members have the right to hold officials accountable or file complaints with a court against officials who violate Organic Law on Trade Unions, other legal and regulatory acts on trade unions, or fail to fulfil obligations set out in general, sectoral (tariff) or collective agreements.

83. For information on measures taken, and their impact, to ensure the functioning of the Labour Inspection Office (LIO), please see Reply to Paragraph 13 above.

Reply to paragraph 16

84. The state pension provision program is the largest program in the country in terms of beneficiaries and expenses. The introduction of state pension indexation regulation is a key component of pension system reform, ensuring fiscal sustainability for elderly individuals, taking into account economic parameters. State pensions increase annually in line with indexation. Currently, over 848,000 individuals receive state pensions, with the 2024 state budget allocating 3.9 billion GEL for pension provision. Nearly 70% of pensioners are women. See Annex №7.

85. Detailed statistical information about pension recipients, including geographical distribution, age, and gender, is available on the website: www.ssa.moh.gov.ge.

86. As of November 2024, the Funded Pension scheme had 1,385,877 participants (787,909 male and 597,968 female).

Reply to paragraph 18

87. Georgia is implementing the National Action Plan for 2023-2024 on Combatting Trafficking in Human Beings (NAP 2023-2024), approved by the A-THB Council on 21 December 2022. During the drafting process THB Council took into consideration the implementation report of the previous NAP 2021-2022, recommendations of the Public Defender, NGOs and relevant international organizations (COE GRETA, EU, UN, OSCE) as well as the recommendations given to Georgia by the US State Department under its TIP reports.

88. The implementation of the activities outlined in NAP 2023-2024 is supported by both administrative resources (state budget) and donor support received from international and NGOs. The THB NAPs are based on 4P principles. The Secretariat of the Inter-Agency Council permanently (in every six months) monitors the implementation of the NAPs and elaborates the progress reports.

89. As for the preliminary findings of the current NAP 2023-2024, most of the activities out of 50 actions have already been implemented and the rest is being implemented or is planned to be implemented by the end of 2024. Final two-year report will be published at the official website of the Ministry of Justice of Georgia. The new action plan will be approved at the end of 2024 and will cover the next 2 years – 2025-2026.

90. In order to protect children living and/or working on the street from all kinds of violence, including trafficking, a unified draft state strategy for 2025–2030 was elaborated within the A-THB Council. Draft strategy will be enacted in the nearest future.

91. Combatting gender-based violence against women and domestic violence continues to be among the top PSG priorities which is enshrined in the PSG 2022-2027 Strategy. In line with the strategic priority, the PSG has a strict criminal policy regarding gender-based violence and domestic violence. This includes refraining from applying discretionary prosecution and plea agreements.

92. Combatting violence against women and domestic violence remains a priority for MIA. Ministry implements measures necessary for the prevention of such crimes and provide effective response thereof. Since May 2023, System of electronic surveillance (electronic bracelet) and restraining orders established within the MIA, has been functioning in an updated manner. In particular, with the updated risk assessment tool, the standard for applying electronic surveillance has been changed, allowing more victims to use the violence prevention mechanism. After the introduction of the updated form of the risk assessment tool, the statistics of applying Electronic surveillance has increased approximately 4 times: from 1 May 2023 to 2 October 2024, a decision to apply electronic monitoring of the perpetrator with the consent of the victim was made in 170 cases, while from 2020 up to May 2023 – it was applied in 44 cases.

93. Since 2023, MIA introduced a new form of statistical data production, according to which Ministry published registered crime statistics quarterly, as well as statistical data on restraining orders issued on cases of domestic violence and violence against women. The published information is publicly available at <https://info.police.ge/page?id=102>.

94. In 2022, prosecutions for gender-based discrimination, including intersectional cases, increased by 46% compared to 2021 and by 128.9% compared to 2016-2020. In 2023, the PSG efforts led to a further increase in prosecutions for crimes motivated by gender-based intolerance, with a 9.3% rise compared to the previous year. For the statistics on prosecutions gender-based discrimination and victims, see Annex №4.

95. In 2024, the PSG issued the new guideline on Eliminating Shortcomings Identified in Femicide Cases for prosecutors and the PSG investigators, which includes appropriate terminology, gender-sensitive approaches, and best practices.

96. The PSG's robust criminal policy against domestic crimes has resulted in a high number of criminal prosecutions. For the statistics, see Annex №5.

97. In March 2022, the Center for Psychological and Social Services for Children Victims of Violence (Barnahus) was launched in Tbilisi under the Agency for State Care, with the

substantial involvement of the PSG. This Center aims to prevent secondary victimization of sexually abused children during investigations while providing psychological and social rehabilitation in a child-friendly environment. Designed with the best interests of the child in mind, the Center operates on a pilot basis according to the “one window principle” (Barnahus model) and serves child victims of sexual violence. The Center ensures that all investigative and procedural actions involving child victims occur in a child-friendly environment. It includes an initial psychological assessment by a psychologist to plan actions that prioritize the child’s well-being. Additionally, it facilitates remote participation of minors in court proceedings to reduce stress and provide psychosocial rehabilitation.

98. The PSG also has a strict criminal policy against forced marriage. Since October 2020, the prosecutors have not been using diversion as an alternative to criminal prosecution in this category of cases. For the statistics on prosecution of forced marriage, bride kidnapping, crimes committed in the context of child marriage and number of victims, see Annex №5.

99. In order to eliminate the crime of child (minor) marriage and raise public awareness, MIA annually participates in the information campaign “Do not deprive childhood”. The purpose of the meetings is to raise awareness about the harmful consequences of child marriage, the existing legal regulations and the measures implemented by MIA to eliminate child marriage. Furthermore, more than 4,000,000 text messages were sent to more than 2,000,000 users about the criminal nature of child marriage and how to contact the police in such case.

100. Social workers play a crucial role in addressing child and early marriage, often linked to domestic violence and violations of rights. In 2024, a Practical Guide for Social Workers on Child and Early Marriage Management was approved, covering the causes and consequences of such marriages, the significance of social workers’ involvement, legal guarantees, communication strategies, prevention, risk assessment, and family engagement. Training for professionals based on this guide has already begun.

101. The deinstitutionalization of large children’s institutions and the development of alternative forms of care have been a priority direction for the state for years. As of the end of 2021, the Kojori orphanage for children with disabilities was closed, and minors were transferred to small family-type houses. In 2022, the orphanage was fully deinstitutionalized, with three small family-type houses created for this purpose to house the minors. At this stage, none of the large institutions under the Agency’s administration are operational anymore.

102. Foster care, as the preferred form of care, plays a crucial role in providing a family-like environment for children. Social workers make monthly visits to foster families to assess the children’s situations, including potential risks of abuse or neglect within the foster family.

Reply to paragraph 19

103. National Human Rights Strategy 2022-2030, as an overarching and general document, does not specifically address housing satisfaction at the operational level. Nevertheless, the Human Rights Action Plan 2024-2026, which emanates from and builds upon this Strategy, incorporates targeted measures to enhance housing satisfaction. It outlines initiatives to provide housing for homeless, socially vulnerable families with three or more children under the age of 18. Furthermore, it stipulates the acquisition of new residential properties for the resettlement of eco-migrants and displaced families.

104. Georgia faces one of the highest per capita rates of internally displaced persons (IDPs) in the world due to the illegal occupation of 20% of its territory by the Russian Federation. The government has implemented several state programs to address accommodation challenges for IDP families, including large-scale construction projects, purchasing apartments in new buildings and from private owners, building houses on IDP-owned land, a veteran IDPs Accommodation Program, and the privatization of state-owned living areas inhabited by IDPs for an extended period.

105. Houses acquired under these programs are transferred to private co-ownership of all members of the IDP families. The accommodation needs of persons with disabilities are also

taken into account under these programs. In addition to ensuring durable housing, IDP families receive annual monetary assistance for temporary housing.

106. Alongside the accommodation of IDPs, the GoG launched a new program for homeless families with three or more children. The program aims to provide housing for around 1,000 families between 2024 and 2025.

107. To improve housing policy and create safe and affordable housing in municipalities, several social programs and sub-programs have been initiated and continue to operate. These programs provide for homeless individuals, large families, families left homeless due to natural disasters, victims of violence, and those affected by fires, earthquakes, and other emergencies. They offer temporary housing and/or rental assistance to families affected by special accidents, owners of emergency houses, and those whose lives are threatened by unsafe living conditions.

108. Municipalities, based on their capacity and needs, offer social housing and/or municipality-owned housing units to beneficiaries who meet established criteria. To reduce the number of homeless citizens, some municipalities have introduced programs that involve the construction and/or purchase of individual houses for socially vulnerable and homeless families living within their jurisdiction.

109. To implement the right to adequate housing, Tbilisi Municipality runs a project registering homeless individuals/families and providing shelter. Guided by the Tbilisi City Council's Resolution N25-28 (19 May 2023), the Municipality sets criteria and procedures for registration and housing allocation. Additional initiatives include subprogram for those needing palliative care or experiencing alcohol issues. Rental compensation is provided for residents of destroyed or uninhabitable houses and for citizens who are homeless due to social-economic conditions. Also, unsafe buildings are replaced and apartments are legalized for long-term occupants without documents. To increase shelter access for vulnerable groups, Tbilisi Municipality built social housing in Varketili (53 apartments), Didi Digomi (24), and Orkhevi (75). A 240-person shelter in Lilo district provides residents with meals, medical care, and essentials. Since 2022, 117 additional apartments have been purchased for homeless families with vulnerability scores.

Reply to paragraph 20

110. Supportive programs are available to families, such as day-care centers and emergency subprogram services for families facing crises, which redirect them to municipal services as needed.

111. The Emergency subprogram services for families in crisis aim to support impoverished families with children in meeting their basic needs by providing food vouchers, including those for phenylketonuria and celiac. In 2022, 6,382 families received services under this program, a number that decreased to 4,182 beneficiary families in 2023.

112. Additionally, Georgia operates 24 shelters for mothers and their children, providing a safe environment along with professional and informal education, access to healthcare services, psychological support, and basic needs for beneficiaries.

113. Children (under 16) from socially vulnerable households with a rating score below 120,001 are eligible for the child benefit, which is currently defined as 200 GEL and is gradually increasing. Annex №8.

Reply to paragraph 21

114. To achieve universal access to medical services, state funding for healthcare has steadily increased, growing fivefold since 2012. As a result, the universal healthcare program now covers 95% of the population. Since its inception, the program has financed more than 11 million medical cases for 3 million citizens, totalling over 7 billion GEL. In 2023 alone, medical services for 1,158,000 people were financed, amounting to 1 billion GEL.

115. Increased public funding and effective service planning have significantly reduced financial barriers to healthcare access. Out-of-pocket payments by the population decreased from 73.4% in 2012 to 41% in 2022. The 2024 healthcare budget is set at 1,607,335,000 GEL, further enhancing the financing of medical needs.

116. The introduction of the diagnosis-related groups (DRG) methodology for reimbursing medical services has been a key reform, optimizing the program budget allocation, ensuring financial protection for patients, and increasing system transparency. This is confirmed by the fact that after the implementation of the DRG model, patient co-payments for medical services decreased from an average of 27% to 10%.

117. To alleviate the financial burden of co-payments for the population, from April 2023, the universal healthcare program established maximum upper limits for hospital service co-payments. For instance, co-payments for retirees do not exceed 500 GEL, while for children aged 0-5 years, disabled children, severely disabled persons, and students, it does not exceed 1000 GEL. For other users, the limit is set at 1500 GEL. Consequently, clinics are no longer permitted to charge additional fees.

118. Ensuring universal access to medical services for oncology patients is a priority for Georgia. Measures include raising the oncotherapy limit from 12,000 to 25,000 GEL and eliminating co-payments. In addition, services such as chemo, hormone and radiation therapy, and oncosurgery are fully financed for all citizens.

119. Special mention should be made of the current year's program for the treatment of children diagnosed with oncology abroad, which finances high-quality and high-tech services for children in partner clinics in Spain, Israel and Turkey. Since the launch of the program (1 August 2024), services worth more than 778,000 GEL for 20 patients have been financed.

120. The referral assistance program has also played a crucial role, financing 28,000 cases since 1 January 2023, with over 58 million GEL allocated, including support for patients residing in the Russia-occupied territories, amounting to more than 3 million GEL.

121. Georgia implements 23 targeted state programs with a combined budget of 592 million GEL, financing essential services such as diabetes, tuberculosis, hepatitis C management and others for the population.

122. Under the state diabetes management program, the latest continuous blood glucose monitoring systems (CGM) are now available for patients under 18 years of age. Additionally, the program finances smartphones required for full CGM system utilization, with equipment purchases exceeding 4 million GEL, provided free of charge to children with diabetes.

123. The state program for organ transplantation, covering liver and bone marrow transplants, both domestically and abroad, was launched in 2022 and continues to operate fully. In 2023, the program financed 34 bone marrow and 2 liver transplant operations.

124. Recognizing that a significant portion of healthcare expenses is attributable to medicine costs, Georgia implemented historic regulation of medicine prices in 2023. The setting of reference prices for over 3,200 chronic and oncological medicines had a decisively positive impact, lowering costs for the population and fostering competition within the pharmaceutical sector. This enabled the purchase of medicines at a 45% lower price. According to the National Statistics Agency, in 2024 prices in the direction of health care decreased by 7.3%, compared to 2023, including medical products and devices.

125. Wages for healthcare workers are steadily increasing since 2023. Additional funding from the budget amounted to 3,424,800 GEL, resulting in village doctors earning 1,162 GEL per month and nurses 918 GEL per month. Monthly salary supplements are also provided to 1,037 doctors and nurses in mountainous regions.

Reply to paragraph 22

126. Georgia is actively promoting the proper implementation of international treaties aimed at eliminating illicit drug usage and trafficking. National policy in this regards is human-centered and evidence based (the National Drug Observatory (NDO) remains the

main institutional guarantee for evidence-based drug policy in country). The central body in this regard is the Inter-Agency Coordinating Council on Combating Drug Abuse (Council), chaired by the Ministry of Justice of Georgia. It is mandated to develop strategic and policy approaches and documents.

127. Latest strategic document, developed and adopted by the Council, is the second National Drug Strategy 2023–2030 and its respective Action Plan 2023–2024. These documents are in line with the EU strategic dimensions and meet the priorities of international obligations. Also, a separate Drug Abuse Strategy 2021–2026 is in place. The respective Action Plan is also being developed for 2025–2026.

128. In addition, the Council and the National Drug Observatory have been actively working on the implementation of a National Early Warning System (NEWS) on New Psychoactive Substances (NPS) since 2022. The system aims to timely provide precise and detailed information about NPS to the relevant authorities, to minimize threats coming from drug consumption and fighting against NPS.

129. The state program for the treating drug addiction provides for: 1) inpatient detoxification and primary rehabilitation for mental and behavioural disorders due to opioids, stimulants, and other psychoactive substances; 2) replacement therapy, including provision of psycho-social rehabilitation; 3) inpatient services for alcohol-related mental and behavioural disorders. Under the country's universal health care program, which benefits 95% of the population, drug addicts have full access to emergency health services.

130. Georgia's Mental Health Strategy 2022-2030, approved in 2022, aims to reduce the burden of illness and disability for individuals with mental health issues. The strategy outlines seven priorities: 1) Supporting the mental health of children, adolescents and their families; 2) Protecting the rights of individuals with mental health problems and reducing stigma; 3) Delivering quality mental health services close to home; 4) Integrating addiction treatment within the mental health system; 5) Developing human resources in mental health system; 6) Regulating and managing the mental health system; and 7) Provision financial resources.

131. Half of the activities of the Action Plan 2022-2024 for the implementation of the Mental Health Strategy have been completed so far.

Reply to paragraph 23

132. Within the framework of the state program of maternal and child health, the treatment of mother-to-foetus syphilis has started since 2017. In November 2021, the action plan to improve the health of mothers and newborns for 2021–2023 was approved. Within the framework of the State program of HIV infection, the treatment of mother-to-fetus HIV infection has started since 2003. A draft strategy to eliminate the transmission of sexually transmitted diseases from mother to foetus has been prepared. In addition, the State provides prevention of 13 diseases as per the national vaccination calendar.

133. Issues related to gender equality and sexual and reproductive health and rights are reflected in the National Curriculum of Georgia. The standards for subject "Me and Society", Biology and Civics were revised according to the UNESCO technical guidelines. Therefore, the teaching of personal space, issues related to personal safety, bullying, cyberbullying starts already in III grade "Me and society". The topic of early/childhood marriage and the risks related to it, challenges related to the transition age are offered to students in the biology subject of grades VII-IX. Besides, in the subject of the same classes - "Citizenship" - early/childhood marriage is considered as the basis and reason for a possible violation of human rights, which implies the limitation of education, employment and, therefore, personal and financial independence.

134. Apart from the mandatory subjects, in 2021-2022 academic year, the Ministry started to pilot "Doctor's Hour" at elementary level of general education. For I-VI graders "Doctor's Hour" covers the following topics: gender equality, gender stereotypes, conflict resolution, feelings and emotion, healthy life-style, healthy nutrition, hygiene, elements of reproductive health, cyberbullying, violence, sexual violence (how to identify it), personal space, and personal information.

135. The Order of 7 October 2014 on “Approval of the Procedures for Artificial Termination of Pregnancy” of the Minister of Internally Displaced Persons from the Occupied Territories, Health, Labour and Social Affairs of Georgia defines the procedure for pre-abortion consultation/interview, which serves to fully inform a patient about the complications expected due to abortion. The provision on prohibiting sex-selective abortion is included in the same ordinance: “Artificial termination of pregnancy for the purpose of sex selection is prohibited except for the cases when it is necessary to avoid a sex-linked hereditary disease.”

136. The human rights in Abkhazia and Tskhinvali regions of Georgia are grossly violated due to the illegal occupation by the Russian Federation as confirmed by the numerous international courts (ECHR; ICC) decisions. People living in occupied regions are deprived of their fundamental rights and freedoms, including, but not limited to the rights to life, freedom of movement, right to property, education in native language. Russian Federation and its occupation regimes are creating physical barriers by erecting barbed-wire fences and artificial barriers along the occupation line as well as lengthy and arbitrary closure of the occupation line and other various impediments restricts people from access to healthcare and emergency services among others. Dozens of people have died due to refusing or delaying the patients to get emergency treatment on the GoG controlled territory.

137. Georgia is committed to the comprehensive peaceful conflict resolution policy that lies upon two main pillars – de-occupation of Georgian territories and reconciliation and engagement between societies divided by the occupation line.

138. Within the reconciliation and engagement policy, Georgia facilitates confidence building and people-to-people contacts as well as implements programmes aiming at improving humanitarian and socio-economic conditions of people in the occupied territories.

139. Within this framework in 2023, the GoG, within the special State Referral Healthcare Programme, provided free quality medical services to the residents of occupied regions in medical institutions located on the territory controlled by the GoG to a total of 1,453 patients, with 1,160 patients from Abkhazia region and 293 from Tskhinvali region; in the first quarter of 2024 - additionally 399 patients received treatment (318 patients from Abkhazia region, 81 patients from Tskhinvali region).

140. The relevant legal changes were also introduced in 2023 that enabled the residents of the occupied regions to benefit from free treatment within all state healthcare programmes beyond the State Referral Healthcare Programme, merely with a simplified (online) registration and receipt of a status-neutral personal number introduced within the Peace Initiative “A Step to a Better Future” in 2019.

141. Furthermore, in 2023, the GoG continued to provide essential medical equipment, various immunization and flu vaccines, and pharmaceuticals for diabetes, tuberculosis, and HIV/AIDS, amounting to approximately 1.5 million GEL, to Abkhazia region through the Status-Neutral Liaison Mechanism operating in the frames of GoG’s Action Plan for Engagement.

142. In 2023, the total amount spent by the GoG on healthcare dimension with regard to occupied regions exceeded 7 million GEL.

Reply to paragraph 24

143. In 2020, amendments were made to the Law on General Education which recognized distance learning as a form of education.

144. In 2020, then the Ministry of Education and Science immediately shifted to distance learning mode, offering schools various distance learning platforms, including Microsoft Teams and Feedc Edu, virtual classrooms for all public school classes and subjects. More than 580,000 Microsoft Office 365 user profiles for teachers and students were created; a complex digital task bank was created and published on the el.ge portal, teacher webinars were held, a multidisciplinary team, psychologists and a special school Teachers offered counselling services to parents.

145. An important joint project of the Public Broadcaster and the Ministry of Education and Science - “Teleskola” (TV school) was launched from March 2020. Within the framework of the project, experienced teachers provided TV lessons in all subjects envisaged by the National Curriculum.

146. In addition, a separate grid of lessons for national minority students (Armenian and Azerbaijani) were developed, all lessons for students with hearing impairment were adapted to sign language.

147. The 2020 Unified National Exams were conducted without any disruption in coordination with other agencies, with full protection of the health and safety of each participant.

148. From the very start of the Covid-19 pandemic, higher educational institutions (HEIs) started carrying out the educational process remotely, except for the practical/laboratory/clinical components of medical educational programs.

149. The Ministry of Education and Science distributed various distance learning applications and online platforms to the Universities. Curricula and the assessment system were modified according to the e-learning format.

150. Universities were advised to apply a tuition fee exemption policy - tuition fees were deferred, or a flexible individual payment schedules were offered.

Reply to paragraph 25

151. Due to the Russian Federation’s continuing illegal occupation and military presence in both Abkhazia and Tskhinvali regions of Georgia, and its daily-based destructive activities conflict-affected youth are impeded from the access to the very basic necessities including education in native language. Georgian language has been completely rooted out as the language of instruction from both occupied regions that restricts more than 4,000 school and 600 kindergarten children from access to the education in their native language each year in both occupied regions. Schoolchildren are strictly forbidden to use books and note-books containing a flag of Georgia. Children in kindergartens and schools are victims of Russian propaganda and its occupation regimes. They are subjected to false historical narratives and compelled to participate in purely propagandistic events and celebrations, facing punishment if they refuse. Due to lengthy and artificial closure of the occupation line, Georgian youth living in the occupied region are prevented from studying in the territory controlled by the GoG.

152. Despite the destructive activities and various artificial barriers created by the Russian Federation and its occupation regimes, the GoG is making every effort to provide young people living in the occupied regions of Georgia with various educational opportunities and privileged services within the GoG’s reconciliation and engagement policy, inter alia, provided by Peace Initiative “A Step to a Better Future” – “Enhancing Educational Opportunities for the residents of Abkhazia and Tskhinvali Region/South Ossetia”.

153. In 2023, 235 students from occupied regions were admitted to Georgian HEIs without exams; 4 students from Tskhinvali region also enrolled through the “1+4 programme” enabling simplified access through one exam (instead of 4) in their native (Abkhazian/Ossetian) language; additionally 6 students chose to enrol via unified national exams (total 245 students).

154. Moreover, the Post-secondary Education Preparation Programme launched in 2019 under the Peace Initiative in pilot manner (temporarily inactive due to the COVID-19 pandemic) became fully operational for 2024-2025 academic year, enabling additional one year needs-based training opportunities in various subjects to youth from the occupied regions, as well as scholarships and accommodation. The programme aims to overcome the low quality education that the youth receive within these regions and facilitate continuing of their studies in higher and vocational educational institutions in the rest of Georgia.

Reply to paragraph 26

155. To implement the Culture Strategy 2025, the Ministry of Culture of Georgia adopted Action Plan 2017-2018. Since 2018, due to the several changes in the Ministry's status and within the government structure, the activities of the Culture Strategy 2025 were subsequently integrated into other State strategy documents such as the State Strategy for Civic Equality and Integration and Action Plan and the Government Vision 2030. These changes have not hindered the development of activities aiming at improving access to culture for different members of society and vulnerable groups such as minorities, women, IDPs, children, people with disability.

156. To foster cultural diversity and self-expression, the Ministry of Culture and Sport of Georgia is financing more than 80 cultural organizations (theatres, museums, art schools and universities) from which 3 theaters and 3 museums belong to ethnic minority representatives. Allocation of funds for all these legal entities of public law is automatically guaranteed every year. For information on funding of minorities' organizations in 2017-2022, see Annex №6.

157. Pursuant to Article 16, paragraphs g) and m) of the Law of Georgia on Broadcasting, the Public Broadcaster shall reflect the cultural (including linguistic) diversity of the society in its programs and broadcast a number of programs in certain proportions prepared in the languages of minorities, about minority groups and elaborated by the minorities themselves.

158. Since 2019, the Ministry has introduced a new funding model of cultural sphere, which implies the promotion of cultural-creative activities in thematic and sectoral areas through competitions. During the evaluation of the competition candidates, the Ministry prioritizes those projects that consider the needs of vulnerable social groups.

159. In 2019-2022, the funding of the sub-program named "Access to Culture and Cultural Diversity" was as follows:

<i>Sub-program</i>	<i>2019</i>	<i>2020</i>	<i>2021</i>	<i>2022</i>
Access to Culture and Cultural Diversity	1 047 363 GEL	765 753 GEL	1 060 000 GEL	1 027 552 GEL

160. The GoG continues to execute various activities outlined in the implementation plan of the National Broadband Development Strategy of Georgia 2020-2025 (NBDS). These activities are designed to address digital inequality and foster the digital economy in Georgia.

161. For the implementation of the NBDS, the GoG started the Log-in Georgia Project. The Project has three components: 1) increasing access to affordable broadband internet; 2) promoting the use of broadband-enabled digital services; and 3) project implementation support.

162. Under the Log-in Georgia Project, which supports the construction and activation of the fiber networks, up to 1050 km of middle mile network have already been constructed. In total, the volume of ongoing and constructed projects consists 2400 km.

163. The state programme will facilitate to increase the coverage of high-speed broadband internet services in rural settlements "white zones" of Georgia, where the population is greater than or equal to 200 and the operators do not plan to build broadband infrastructure in the next 3 years.

164. On June 14, 2023, the Parliament of Georgia adopted the Law of Georgia on Personal Data Protection. The new Law establishes internationally recognized standards for the protection of personal data, which is a significant stride to harmonization with European legislation. It defines the institutional independence of the Personal Data Protection Service of Georgia (Service) as a state authority and introduces several new institutions and legislative innovations.

165. To effectively manage the implementation of the new Law, the Service has developed a Strategy and Action Plan aiming at facilitating the compliance by data controllers/processors with the new Law. By 1 March 2024, the Service enacted regulations

on data breaches, exemptions from appointing a Data Protection Officer, data protection impact assessments, and registration of Special Representatives.

166. The Strengthening Media Freedom, Internet Governance and Personal Data Protection project achieved the several milestones. Amendments to the Law on Broadcasting in 2022, further revised in 2023, aligned Georgian law with the Council of Europe standards and EU Audio-Visual Media Services Directive. The new Personal Data Protection Law of 2023 marked significant progress. In 2020, the Communications Commission adopted regulations on online content harmful to children, mandating age-based content marking. It also applied a media monitoring methodology for the 2020 parliamentary and 2021 municipal elections. Also, the CoE study was prepared, reviewing Georgia's framework on protections for journalists. In 2023, the Charter of Journalistic Ethics (self-regulatory body) launched a reform-oriented two-year institutional strategy to enhance media accountability. The CoE supported the Georgian Internet Governance Forum which convenes stakeholders to discuss internet infrastructure and security, media literacy, and users' rights.
