



DEMOGRAPHIC RESILIENCE AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT IN GEORGIA

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Georgia, situated at the crossroads of Europe and Asia, is experiencing significant demographic shifts affecting its social and economic development. To address issues like population decline and stagnation, an ageing population, declining birth rates, and increased emigration, the Georgian government must devise and adopt a demographic resilience framework. Taking such an approach will help the country to adapt to demographic changes and cope with unexpected shocks such as natural disasters, economic crises, and pandemics. Ultimately, ensuring demographic resilience is crucial for Georgia to mitigate economic and social risks posed by these demographic trends

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1. INTRODUCTION

Located at the crossroads of Europe and Asia and known for its rich ethnic and cultural diversity, Georgia, like other countries in the region, is undergoing significant demographic changes that impact its social and economic development. Accordingly, the Georgian government would benefit from devising and adopting a demographic resilience framework to navigate these shifts effectively. Taking such an approach would strengthen Georgia's ability to withstand and adapt to challenges such as an ageing population, declining birth rates, and emigration while also enhancing its capacity to manage unexpected shocks such as natural disasters, economic crises, and pandemics. Ensuring demographic resilience is crucial for Georgia to successfully capitalize on these changes and mitigate potential economic and social risks as well as threats to its overall stability.

In addressing these challenges, it is imperative to take a holistic perspective going beyond crisis response, which tends to be short-term. Rather than viewing such demographic changes solely as threats, Georgia can turn these into strategic opportunities for sustainable development by applying a comprehensive, human-rights-based approach. Effective, human-rights-centered, and evidence-based policies will enable Georgia to address its demographic challenges. To create such policies, more and better data are needed to build the 'demographic intelligence' required to fully understand the population's chang-

ing needs, and then address critical factors like birth rates, life expectancy, and migration via thorough and effective policy intervention. Such measures would also underscore the country's firm commitment to implementing policies grounded in human rights, and particularly women's rights.

The United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) launched the Demographic Resilience Programme in 2021 to address challenges by strengthening systems and empowering individuals, communities, and governments to anticipate and respond to demographic changes¹. These efforts are critical to Georgia's sustainable development, social stability, and capacity to thrive in the future.

This paper analyzes Georgia's demographic situation, highlights current and future challenges, and offers guidance on fostering demographic resilience and transforming potential obstacles into sustainable development prospects. That may require measures, for example, to reduce the outflow of people from the country and to make Georgia more attractive (especially for young people) by strengthening human capital and connecting education more closely to labor market needs, thereby avoiding further population decline. Other interventions may demand an increase in women's participation in economic activity by, among other steps, eliminating the barriers associated with their common role as primary providers of unpaid care and domestic work.

¹ The United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) promotes demographic resilience and empowers individuals, communities, and systems to anticipate and respond to demographic changes by promoting reproductive health, youth empowerment, gender equality, and effective migration management. UNFPA provides instruments and support to strengthen capacities in policy development, economic adaptation, and social support systems. The Demographic Resilience Programme, a crucial initiative launched in 2021, considers the complex social, economic, political, and cultural factors affecting demographic change and helps countries to manage these changes to maintain sustainable development. Within its mandate, UNFPA aims to support Georgia in building demographic resilience through the following various strategic interventions: Data Collection and Analysis, Reproductive Health and Rights, Youth Empowerment, Support for Older People, and Gender Equality. See <https://georgia.unfpa.org/en/news/ministerial-conference-chart-paths-societies-thrive-amid-rapid-demographic-change-0>

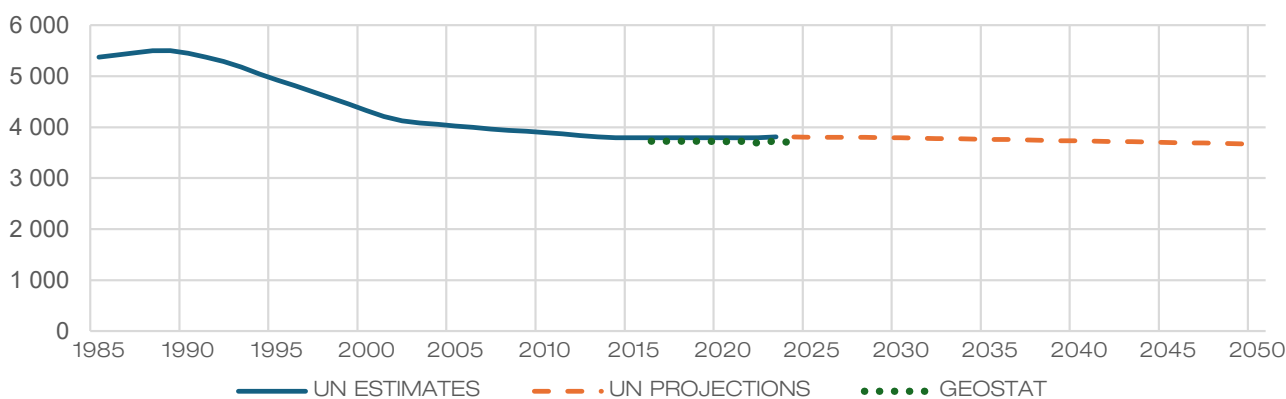
2. MAIN DEMOGRAPHIC TRENDS AND CHALLENGES

Current demographic trends are perceived as challenging Georgia’s social, economic, and political stability. These shifts, including a continuous population decline, rapid ageing of the population, rural depopulation, high youth unemployment, and health and gender disparities, have far-reaching implications for the country’s future. If not addressed, they will become critical challenges. The Georgian government could better navigate these demographic changes by creating a more conducive environment for people to establish their desired family size, managing migration, improving youth conditions and opportunities, and promoting gender equality. Below, each of the key trends are analyzed in detail.

A declining population trending to a possible stabilization

The population of Georgia decreased by almost 1.7 million from 1990 to 2024 (going from 5.48 million to 3.81 million) (Figure 1). More than 75 per cent of this decline occurred between 1990 and 2000. This trend of a reducing population is one of the country’s most significant and most stubborn challenges. United Nations projections² in 2024 estimate that the population will continue to decline if demographic trends continue. On that basis, between 2024 and 2050, the country’s population would drop by 4 per cent to hit 3.66 million by 2050 .

Figure 1: Population Trends in Georgia, 1985-2050



In the context of an ageing population, the number of deaths remains high while the number of births decreases. This initially drives the natural increase in population to turn negative, primarily due to the cohort size of so-called “baby boomers” (Figures 2-4) referring to people born during the post-World War II period. In the subsequent phase, the number of births further decreased due to the small size of the reproductive-age population (i.e. the gen-

eration born in the early 1990s) and the expected decrease in the total fertility rate. Given this situation and bearing in mind a negative migration balance, the population of Georgia is expected to decrease to 3.4 million by 2050. It is important to note that estimating and projecting migration flows is challenging due to various factors, including the unpredictability of the future economic growth and political development of the country.

² United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division, 2024.

Figure 2: Components of Demographic Change

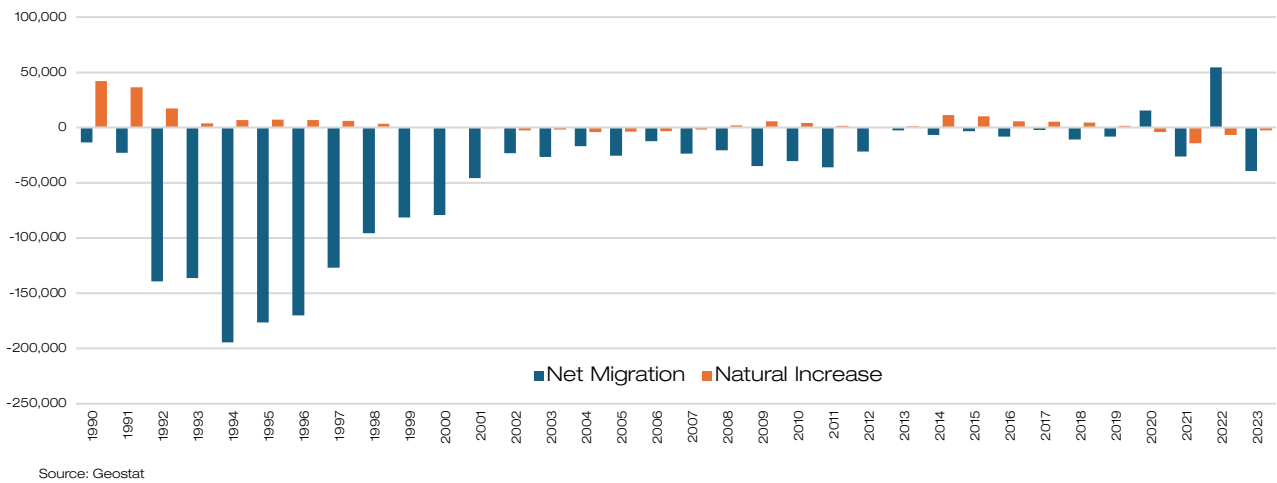


Figure 3: Net Migration by Age Group

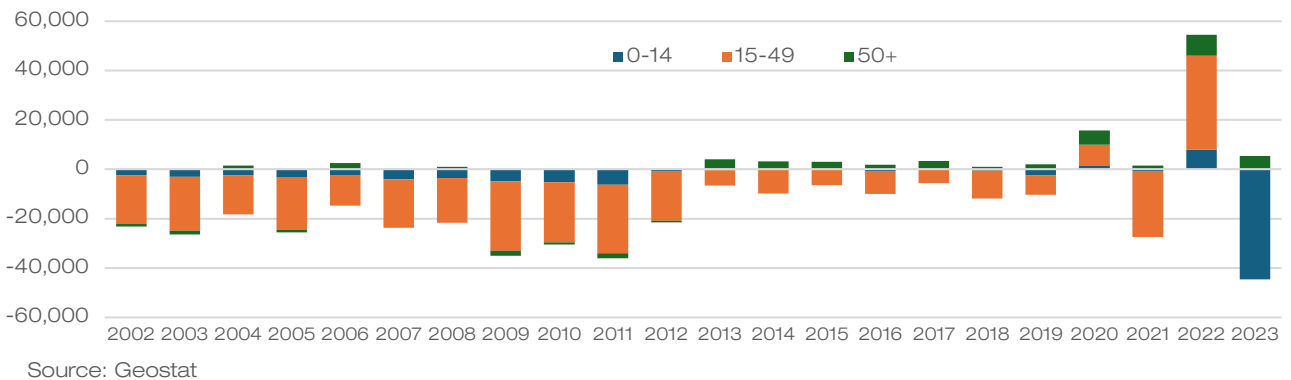
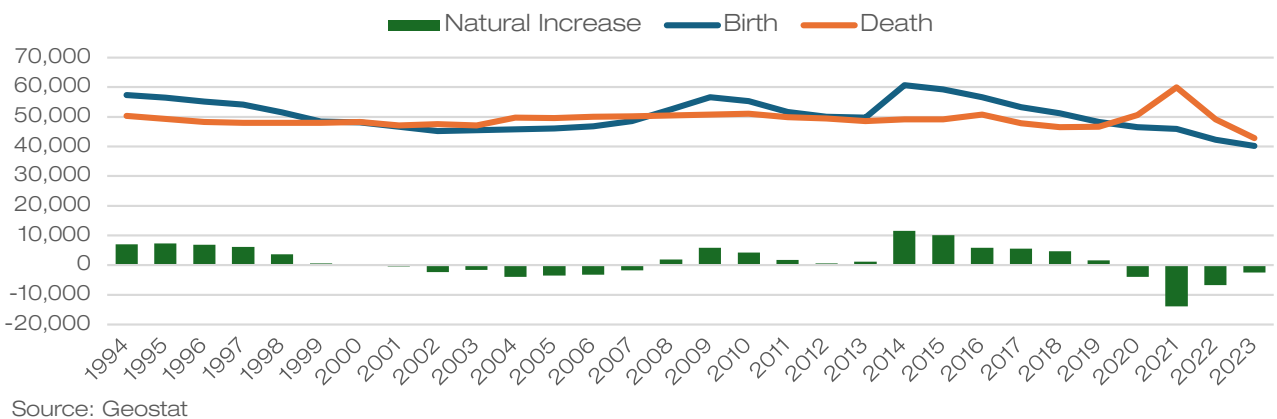


Figure 4: Number of Births and Deaths and the Rate of Natural Increase



Migration has long been a significant driver of demographic changes in Georgia (Figure 2). Since the early 1990s, the country’s migration balance has been negative, with the only exceptions being in 2020 and 2022. The positive migration balance in 2020 was related to mobility restrictions introduced during the COVID-19 pandemic, while in 2022 it was mainly due to increased immigration flows from Russia and Ukraine. In 2022, the total number of immigrants was 179,778, the majority of whom were citizens of Russia (34.7 per cent), Ukraine (11.4 per cent), and Belarus (7.4 per cent). The impact of emigration is more acute among the population aged 15-49, decreasing the country’s reproductive-age population (15-49 years) and depriving it of a more skilled labor force (Figure 3).

A profound transformation in the age structure leading to an ageing population

The population of Georgia has been declining in numbers, while the distribution by age and sex that define the demands for employment, education, and services has also been changing and will change again in the future (Figures 5 and 6). From 1990 to 2024, the population of those aged 0-14 and 15-64 declined, while the proportion of those aged 65+ increased, and this will continue. Given these changes, we must expect a further reduction in the size and distribution of the weight of younger generations and a rapid ageing of the population.

Figure 5: Population Distribution (%) by Sex and Age, 1994-2024

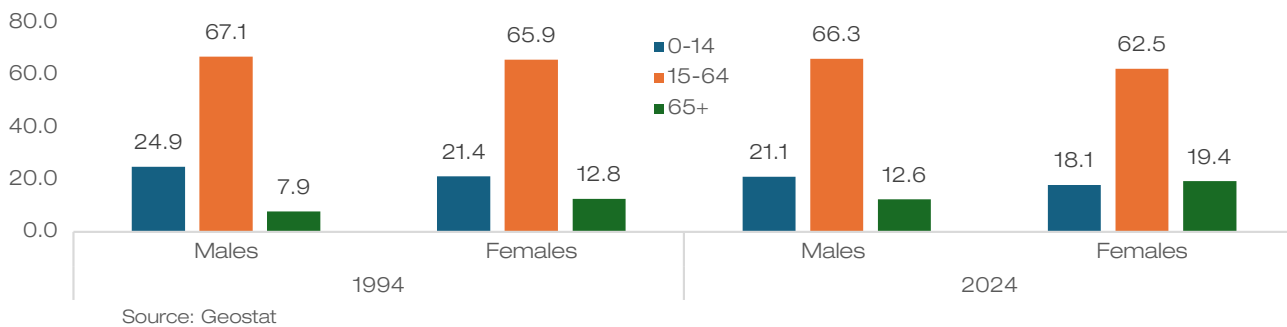
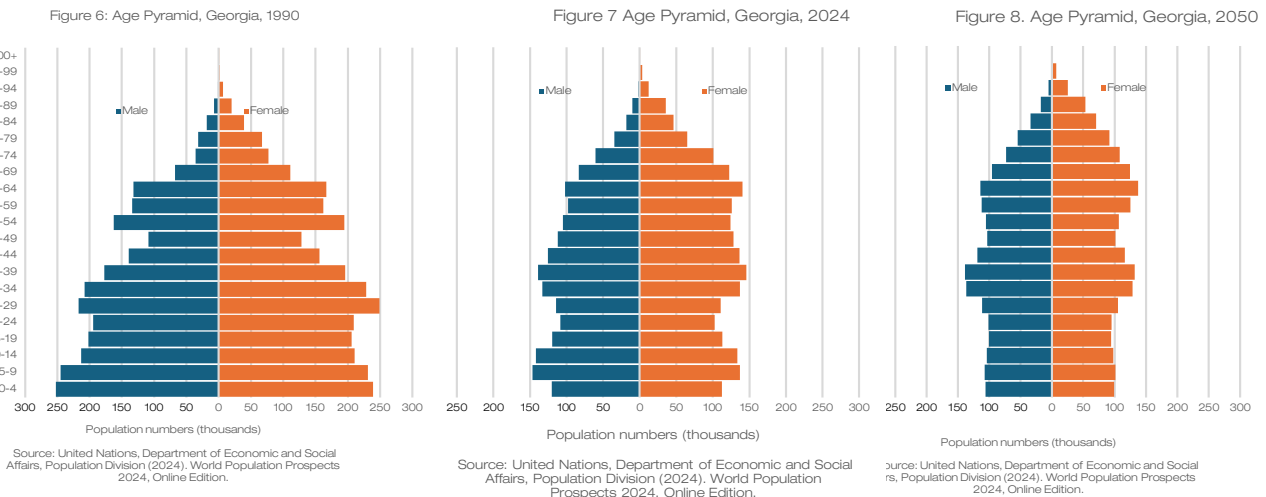


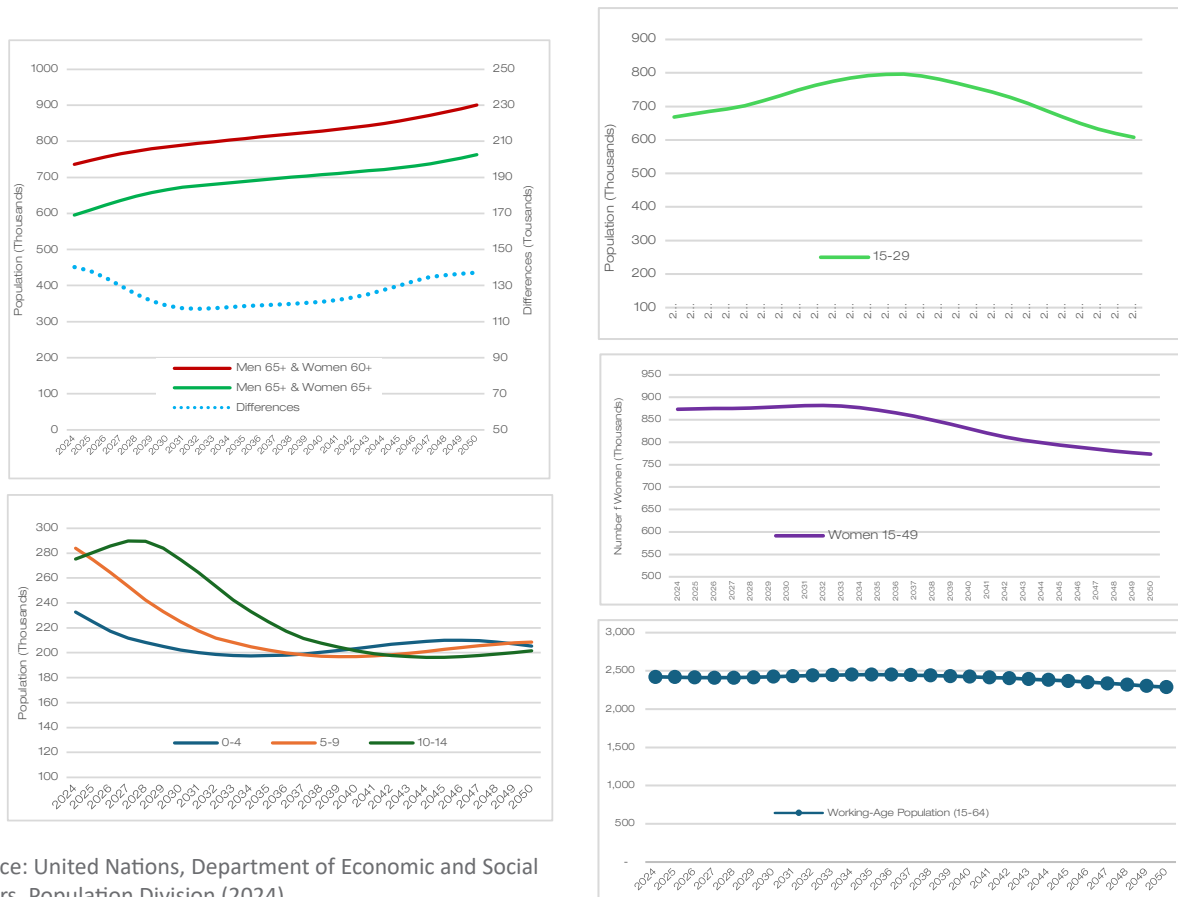
Figure 6: Population Pyramid, 1990, 2024 and 2050



The most significant expected future changes are as follows (Figure 7):

- At least until the end of the 2030s, the number of children aged 0-14 will continue to decrease, thus having an impact on demand for preschool and primary/secondary school services. In the case of children aged 10-14, according to UN projections, the decline in this age group will start in the next few years (Figure 7). This reduction will allow the country to improve the quality of education by the investment per student will increase.
- There will be an increase in the number of young people (15-29) until the middle of the 2030s. This trend underscores the urgent need to invest more in human capital, which is crucial to increase economic opportunities at a moment when some may be considering starting careers and creating their own families.
- Despite the declining population, the number of working-age men and women will remain relatively stable for the next 15 years, which will be an asset in increasing national productivity and bolstering economic strength. However, the median age of the population will increase from 37.3 years in 2025 to 40.4 years in 2050..
- If people continue to live longer, the number and the proportion of older persons (65+) in the population will rise. If the population of retirement is considered (men 65+ and women 60+), the number of persons receiving a pension will increase by about 154,000 by 2050. In addition, there are important gender disparities when it comes to pensions, particularly in retirement savings, with a 46 per cent gap between men and women due to the gender wage gap, differences in retirement age, and variations in life expectancy³. The pension gap is higher in the private sector (54 per cent) compared to the public sector (34 per cent).

Figure 7: Projected Population by Selected Age Groups, 2024-2050



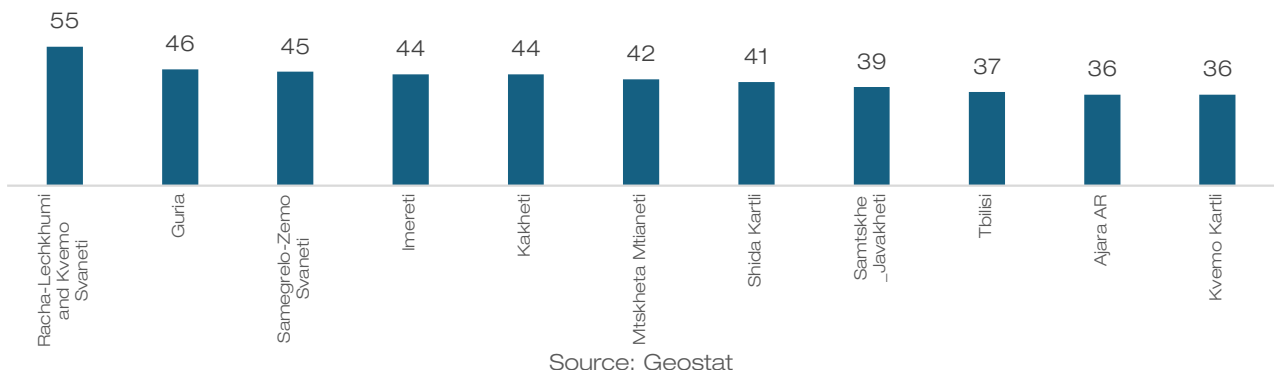
Source: United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division (2024).

³ UNDP (2024) Gender Pension Gap in Georgia: Gender Disparities within Georgia's Funded Pension Scheme <https://www.undp.org/georgia/publications/gender-pension-gap-georgia>

Information on the age-sex structure of the population by region can only be gleaned through population censuses, which limits our ability to conduct more detailed analysis. According to 2014 data, the median age is significantly higher in the regions of Racha-Lechkhumi and Kvemo Svaneti, Guria, and Samegrelo-Zemo Svaneti, indicating a more advanced de-

mographic ageing of the population in these regions (Figure 8). This trend may be due to the outflow of young people to urban centers and abroad for better educational and employment opportunities. The regions of Tbilisi, Adjara AR, and Kvemo Kartli have a relatively lower median age due to greater immigration and comparatively higher birth rates.

Figure 8. Median Age of the Population as of 5 November 2014

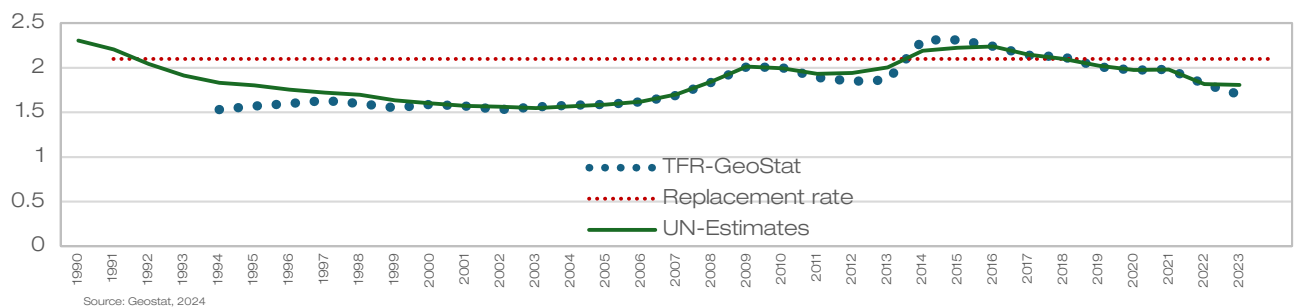


Fertility rate below replacement level

In Georgia, the total fertility rate (TFR) has been below the replacement level since the beginning of the 1990s except for 2014-2017⁴ when it increased to

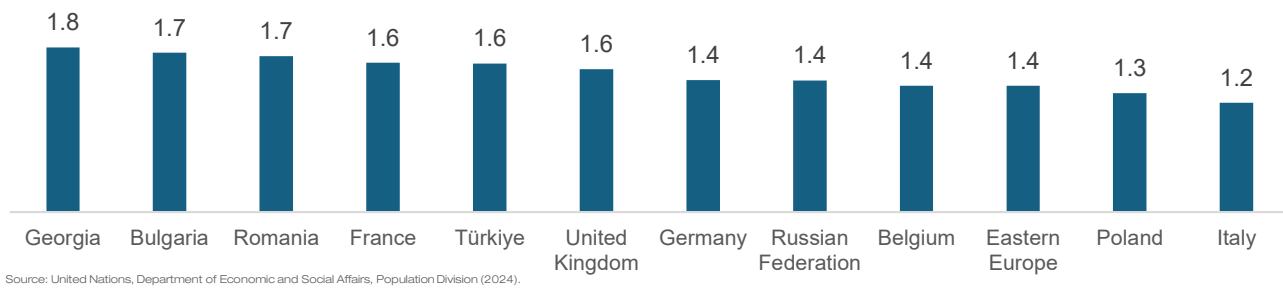
2.1 or slightly higher (Figure 9). According to United Nations Population Prospects⁵, Georgia’s TFR in 2023 was 1.81 children, higher than that of many other European countries (Figure 10).

Figure 9: Total Fertility Rate, 1990-2023



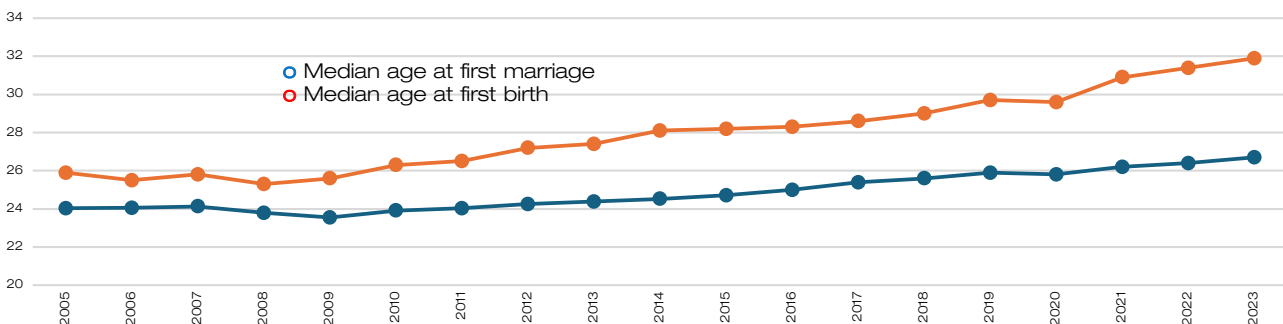
⁴ Between 2014 and 2017, the temporary rise in fertility rates could be due to several factors. First, the Georgian government implemented family support programs and parental leave policies, offering financial incentives encouraging childbearing, particularly among married couples. Second, economic growth and reduced poverty created a more stable environment for raising children. Third, an increase in marriage rates, especially among younger couples, and a possible ‘catch-up effect’—where those who had previously delayed marriage and childbearing due to uncertainties decided to start families. Finally, the return of younger adults to Georgia could have also supported this increase. However, the rise was short-lived, with fertility rates declining again after 2017, indicating these factors were not enough to sustain long-term change.

⁵ United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division (2024).

Figure 10: Total Fertility Rate for Georgia and Other Selected Countries, 2023.

Postponing childbearing to older age contributes to further fertility decline. When women benefit from educational development and new employment opportunities, they may delay starting a family and childbearing. In this regard, Georgia is following the trends of other European countries toward an increase in the median age of mothers at the birth of

their first child, which has increased by almost three years for two decades, together with an increase in the median age at marriage for women in registered marriages (Figure 11)⁶. The absence of family-friendly policies can make it more difficult for women to balance family and childcare responsibilities with their career.

Figure 11: Median Age at First Marriage and First Birth

It is worth noting that data on fertility preferences show that women in Georgia generally want more children than they have. The average desired number of children is 2.8 according to the Georgia MICS 2018⁷, contrasting with the 1.7 TFR. Moreover, the same source shows that the value attached to maternity has remained high, as the proportion of women not desiring to have children at all is minimal. Although among younger generations (15-19 years) it seems that more women want zero children (about 4-5 per cent), the average for all women is still less than 1 per cent.

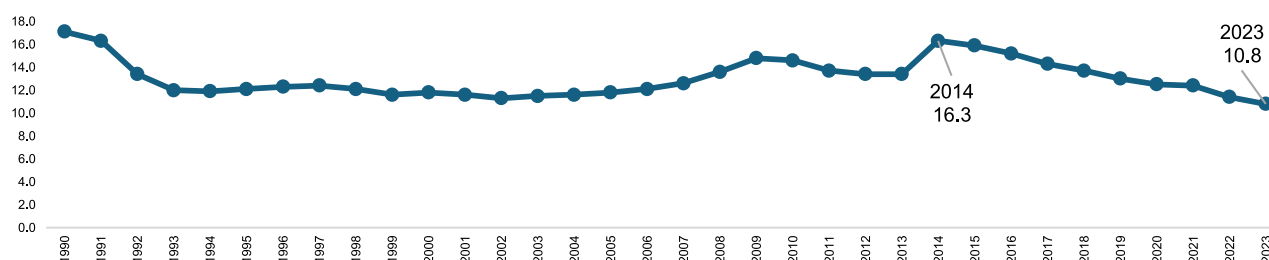
The most recent decline in fertility directly impacts the crude birth rate, which measures the number of live births per 1,000 people (Figure 12). Together with the crude death rate, it determines the rate of natural population increase.

The expected decline in the number of women after 2023, as shown in Figure 7, is attributable to the lagged effects of past fertility decline and the selective emigration of women in these age groups. The migration balance for women aged 15-49 is negative, meaning that more women of reproductive age are leaving the country than entering it (Figure 13).

⁶ Official data provide information only about registered marriages. In Georgia, couples do not always register their marriage; therefore, in-depth research is needed to study the behavior of married individuals, including those in religious marriages and unregistered marriages.

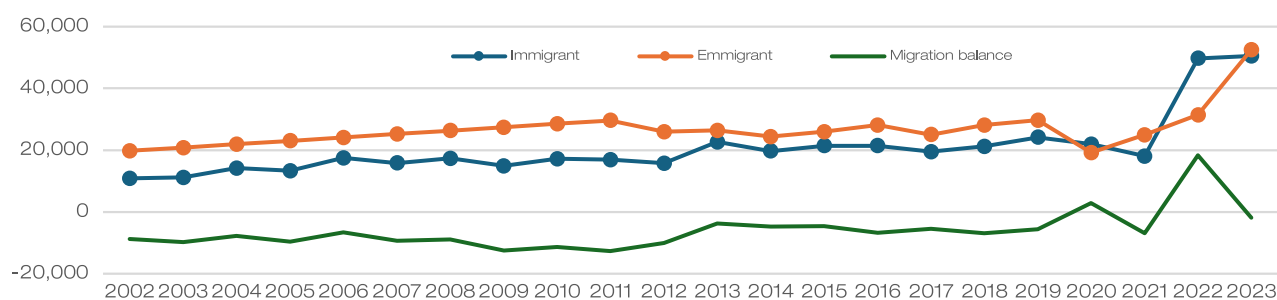
⁷ National Statistics Office of Georgia (2019). Georgia Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey 2018, Survey Findings Report. Tbilisi, Georgia: National Statistics Office of Georgia.

Figure 12: Trends in Crude Birth Rate, 1990-2022.



Source: Geostat

Figure 13: Number of Emigrant and Immigrant Women Aged 15-49, 2002-2023



Source: GeoStat

Improvements in life expectancy but still below European patterns

Life expectancy, a vital indicator of the health and well-being of a population, provides essential insights into the quality of life and healthcare standards within a country. In Georgia, life expectancy at birth has increased in the last 20 years (Figure 14). As of 2023, it is 70.6 years for men and 79.4 years for women. Notably, the difference in life expectancy between men and women is almost nine years, which is one of the highest observed in the region and relatively similar to those observed in Belarus and Moldova⁸. These differences are mainly related to lower-than-expected mortality rates in men,

which calls for the need for targeted health interventions to address the significant gender disparity in life expectancy.

The persistent differences in life expectancy between males and females, which show no signs of being reversed, result from a combination of higher alcohol⁹ and tobacco consumption, poorer diets, greater propensity to engage in risk-taking behavior, limited health-seeking practices, higher socioeconomic stress, and higher exposure to violence in men, all in a context of inadequate health infrastructure and services to deal with a high prevalence of non-communicable diseases¹⁰. Geostat data from 2023 show that 40 per cent of the leading causes of male death stem from diseases of the circulatory

⁸ Idem

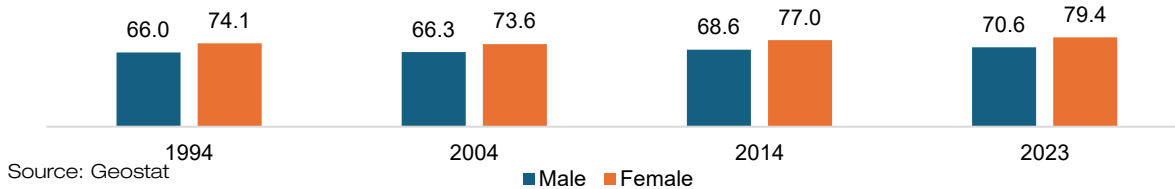
⁹ WHO has estimated that the years of life lost (YLL) due to alcohol consumption was five years in Georgia. These data show that the significant difference in alcohol consumption between sexes largely determines the difference in life expectancy and health-adjusted life expectancy between sexes. (<https://apps.who.int/gho/data/view.main.53660>).

¹⁰ Lomia N, Berdzuli N, Pestvenidze E, Sturua L, Sharashidze N, Kereselidze M, Topuridze M, Antelava T, Stray-Pedersen B, Stray-Pedersen A. Socio-Demographic Determinants of Mortality from Chronic Non-communicable Diseases in Women of Reproductive Age in the Republic of Georgia: Evidence from the National Reproductive Age Mortality Study (2014). *Int J Women's Health*. 2020 Feb 27;12:89-105. doi: 10.2147/IJWH.S235755. PMID: 32161506; PMCID: PMC7051896.

system. Although Georgia has made progress in this direction through healthcare reforms and infrastructure improvements, challenges remain, such as un-

even distribution of healthcare facilities, a shortage of medical personnel, and inequalities in access to healthcare between urban and rural areas.

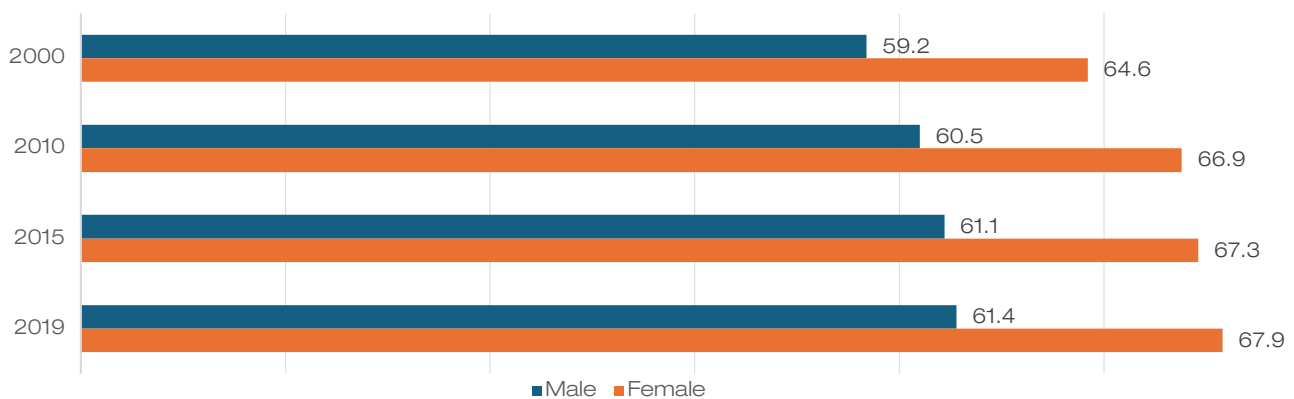
Figure 14: Life Expectancy at Birth by Sex, 1994-2023



The significant difference in life expectancy between sexes is also visible when looking at the health-adjusted life expectancy (HALE), which measures the average number of years in which a person

can live a healthy life (without disease and disability). As shown below (Figure 15), in 2019, the healthy life expectancy in Georgia was 61.4 years for men and 67.9 years for women.

Figure 15: WHO Health-adjusted Life Expectancy at Birth



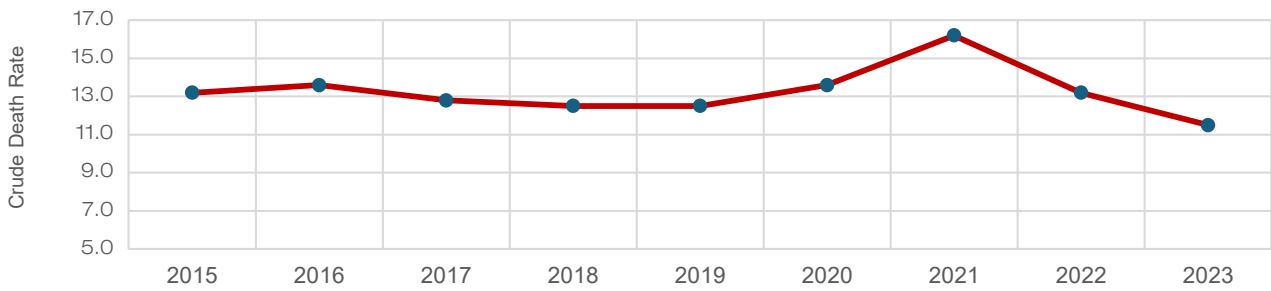
Source: Global Health Observatory data repository. Life expectancy and healthy life expectancy. <https://apps.who.int/gho/data/node.main.688>

The COVID-19 pandemic led to a significant increase in mortality from 2020 to 2022. It is estimated that in 2021, the death rate was 33 per cent higher than would have been expected if COVID-19 had not affected the country. Recent data show that mortality is returning to pre-pandemic levels (Figure 16).

Enhancing life expectancy and investing in the health and education of young people is crucial to slowing down the ageing of the population and fostering sustainable development. The country can ensure people live healthier, longer lives by improving

access to healthcare, promoting healthier lifestyles, and reducing non-communicable diseases, thereby lowering age-related healthcare costs. In addition, supporting young people's education and health equips them for the labor market and encourages a more resilient workforce, mitigating the effects of an ageing population. Evidence-based policies highlighting such investments' long-term benefits can boost economic growth, social cohesion, and a more balanced demographic structure, contributing to a healthier and more productive workforce.

Figure 16: Death Rate (per thousand), 2015-2023



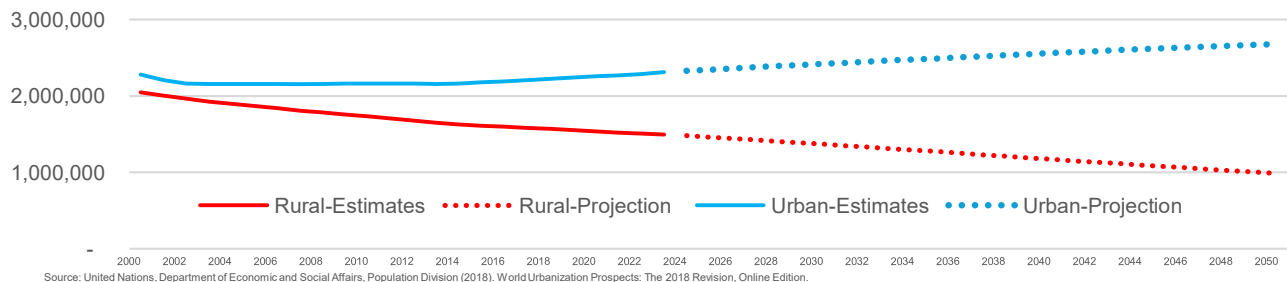
Source: Geostat

A more urbanized country

According to Geostat data, as of 1 January 2024, 61 per cent of the population of Georgia live in urban settlements, marking a significant increase compared to previous decades. Data from the United Nations¹¹ show that between 2000 and 2023, while the urban population increased by about 50,000, the rural population dropped by more than 500,000 people (almost 30 per cent). It is projected that the

urban population will continue to increase, although at a slower rate, while the population living in rural areas will continue to decline, losing one-third of its population between 2024 and 2050 (Figure 17). These changes result from people migrating from rural settlements to cities in search of improved living standards, such as better economic opportunities and greater access to educational institutions and services.

Figure 17: Urban and Rural Population, 2000-2050



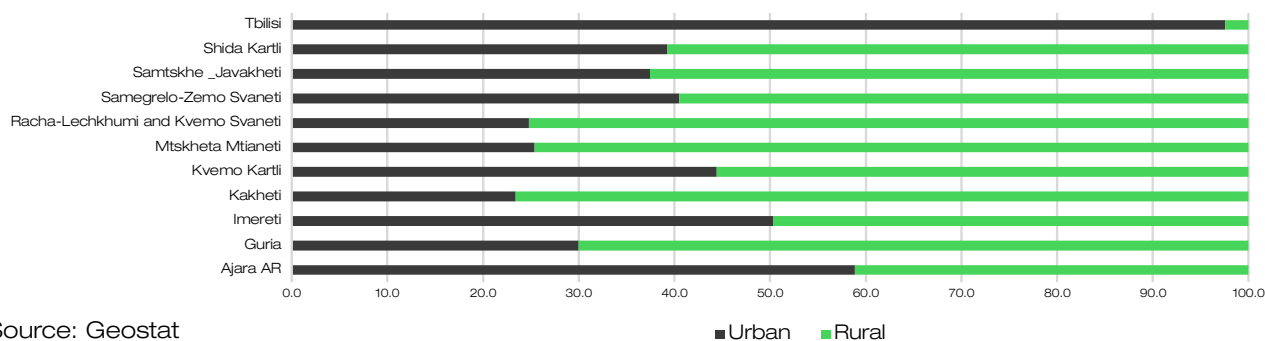
Source: United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division (2018). World Urbanization Prospects: The 2018 Revision, Online Edition.

The urban population is mainly concentrated in large cities, particularly Tbilisi, where almost one-third of the total population of Georgia lives. Other important urban centers are Batumi, Kutaisi, and Rustavi. Other regions are mainly rural (Figure 18).

Currently, one of Georgia’s biggest challenges is the uneven distribution of economic development across regions (Table 1). A significant difference in

GDP per capita between Tbilisi and other regions indicates the concentration of economic activities and wealth in the capital. The regions of Adjara AR and Mtskheta-Mtianeti have relatively high economic indicators compared to other regions, which can be explained by tourism and, in the case of Mtskheta-Mtianeti, proximity to Tbilisi.

¹¹ See <https://population.un.org/wup/> United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division (2018). World Urbanization Prospects: The 2018 Revision, Online Edition.

Figure 18: Proportion of the Population Living in Urban Areas (%) by Region, 2024

Source: Geostat

The uneven economic distribution at the regional level affects access to essential services such as health-care, education, and infrastructure. The population in the Imereti and Kvemo Kartli regions face significant

unemployment challenges and GDP per capita is relatively low in these regions, indicating weak economic conditions. Regional inequality is also reflected in the demand for targeted social assistance.

Table 1: Selected Socio-economic Indicators by Region, 2022

Region	GDP per capita (At current prices)	Unemployment rate (%)	Percentage of targeted applicants of social vulnerability registry assistance (TSVR) in the total population
Tbilisi	26,770	19.5	18.4%
Adjara AR	16,853	18.4	41.4%
Guria	10,176	12.3	55.5%
Imereti	12,224	19.4	40.5%
Kakheti	10,594	9.0	41.9%
Mtskheta-Mtianeti	17,139	8.6	37.1%
Racha-Lechkhumi and Kvemo Svaneti	13,834	24.9	77.3%
Samegrelo-Zemo Svaneti	11,060	11.0	45.8%
Samtskhe-Javakheti	12,799	12.7	37.1%
Kvemo Kartli	12,627	22.9	33.6%
Shida Kartli	10,167	17.0	44.4%

Source: Calculations based on Geostat and Social Service Agency data.

According to the Social Service Agency data, approximately 1.24 million people applied for social assistance and were registered in the database, about one-third of the total population. The number of applicants of social assistance varies significantly by region. According to the information in Table 1, in 2024, a relatively low proportion of applicants for social aid was recorded in Tbilisi (18.4 per cent

of the total population), while the most significant proportion was in Racha-Lechkhumi (77.3 per cent), followed by Guria (56 per cent). Despite some possible errors in the calculated proportions, which are related to differences between the actual and registered number of the population, the data provide a valuable picture of regional inequalities.

3. UNADDRESSED CHALLENGES IN REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH

Fertility is one of the three main dimensions affecting population change, along with migration and mortality. Thus, understanding demographic shifts and how to manage them requires a thorough understanding of fertility within the broader domain of reproductive health. Despite significant advances in reproductive healthcare, many women continue to be exposed to unnecessary risks.

Levels of maternal and infant mortality still high compared to European standards

In 2022, Georgia’s maternal mortality ratio (MMR) was 35.4 maternal deaths per 100,000 live births,

which is relatively high compared to other European countries¹² (Table 2). Although this ratio marks an improvement from the early 1990s (55.1 in 1995¹³), the risk of dying during pregnancy, delivery, or postpartum remains higher than in 2018-2019, when the ratio was around 29 per 100,000 live births. Maternal mortality in the country peaked in 2021, and this was associated with the COVID-19 pandemic¹⁴. The most recent data show a notable reduction in the MMR (22.4 in 2023). In Eastern Europe and Central Asia, Georgia still exceeds the regional maternal mortality average.¹⁵

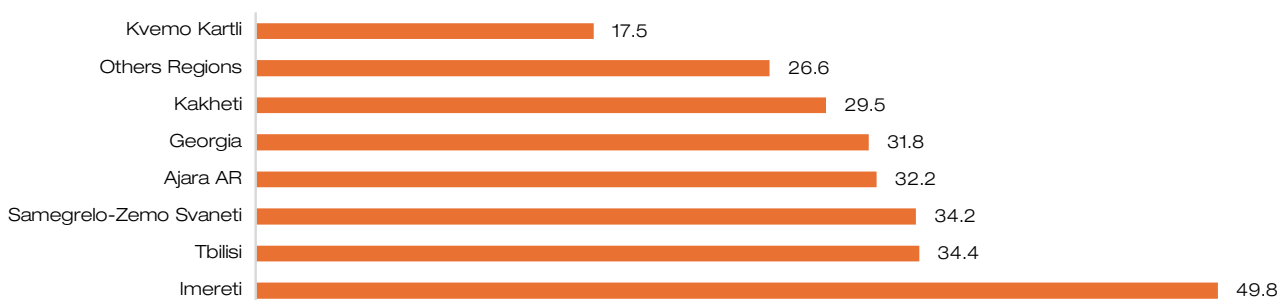
Table 2: Maternal Mortality Ratio, 2012-2023

2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
26	32.2	34.6	33.8	21.2	13.1	27.4	29	30.1	71.8	35.4	22.4

Source: Geostat

Very high MMRs are observed in Imereti (50 maternal deaths per 100,000 births), while far fewer are recorded in Kvemo Kartli (less than 20 maternal deaths per 100,000 births) (Figure 19).

Figure 19: Maternal Mortality Ratio by Region, 2012-2022 (per 100,000 live births)



Source: Geostat

¹² Georgia is far behind Western European countries’ standards, where the maternal mortality ratio (MMR) is below 10. However, it must be considered that the number of maternal deaths is very small, so yearly estimates may be affected by variability thereof. In 2021, 2022, and 2023, the number of maternal deaths was 33, 15, and 9, respectively.

¹³ Women’s Reproductive Health in Georgia, p. 102.

¹⁴ Out of 34 maternal deaths in 2021, 24 were caused by COVID-19-related conditions.

¹⁵ UNFPA EECARO, Lifetime Risk of Maternal Death in Eastern Europe and Central Asia (2020). Available at [chrome-extension://efaid-nbmnnnibpcajpgclcfndmkaj/https://eeca.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/pub-pdf/LIFETIME-RISK-MMR-WEB.pdf](https://eeca.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/pub-pdf/LIFETIME-RISK-MMR-WEB.pdf)

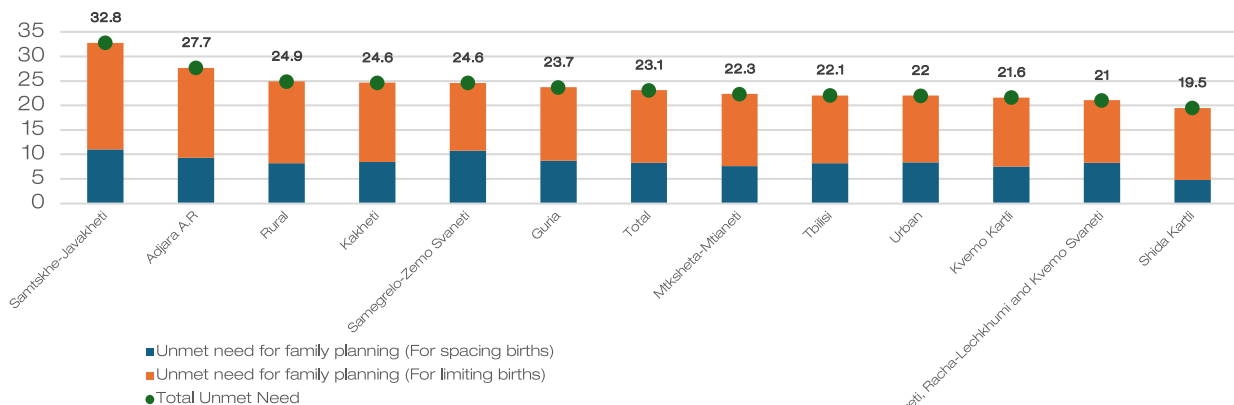
On the broader issue of maternal health, there have been some successes albeit challenges persist. In November 2023, the expansion of Georgia's Universal HealthCare (UHC) to comprehensively cover all child-births and cesarean sections marked a significant step toward improving access to maternal health services, particularly benefiting low-income families by removing financial barriers. The concurrent introduction of a DRG-based payment system aims to enhance cost efficiency and standardize hospital reimbursements by offering fixed payments for treatments based on diagnoses. However, anecdotal reports indicate challenges have emerged in aligning DRG tariffs with the actual costs of complex maternal and neonatal cases, potentially leading to underfunding for high-risk deliveries. Detailed evaluations of the system's impact on maternal health outcomes are still to be completed.

Although the infant mortality rate has significantly declined, it remains high (8.2 per thousand in 2023), almost double the European average.

High amount of family planning needs going unmet

Data from the Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS) conducted in 2018 shows that 23 per cent of married women were considered as having unmet family planning needs (15 per cent for limiting births and 8 per cent for spacing births). These figures vary by region, with Samtskhe-Javakheti having the highest percentage of unmet needs (33 per cent) and Shida Kartli having the lowest (20 per cent) (Figure 20).

Figure 20: Unmet Family Planning Needs (of those currently married/cohabiting), 2018



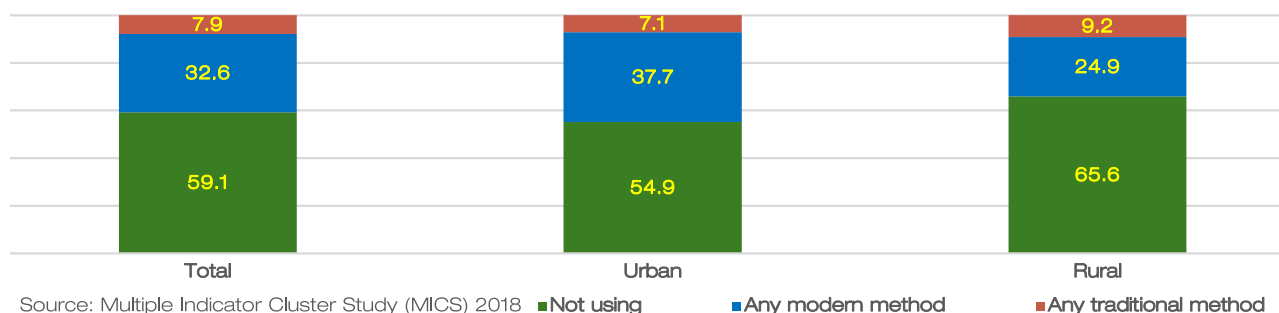
Source: National Statistics Office of Georgia, 2019. Georgia Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey 2018, Survey Findings Report. Tbilisi, Georgia: National Statistics Office of Georgia

Inadequate access to and use of family planning methods

Despite recent improvements, Georgia faces significant challenges in family planning, mainly due to cultural attitudes and limited awareness of contraception and reproductive health. The 2018 MICS revealed that only 41 per cent of married or cohabiting women used contraception, marking a decline from

53.4 per cent in 2010 (Figure 21). Modern contraceptive use was just 32.6 per cent, with 7.9 per cent relying on less reliable traditional methods, thereby contributing to a high rate of unintended pregnancies and abortions. The discontinuation of free contraceptive supplies from international organizations has likely exacerbated this issue. For those in rural areas, access to, and use of, contraceptives is lower compared to their urban counterparts.

Figure 21: Percentage of married or cohabiting women who use (or whose partners use) contraceptives, 2018



In addition, misinformation about contraceptive effectiveness and the cost of modern methods contribute to contraception needs going unmet. There is a lack of youth-friendly sexual and reproductive health services, leaving adolescents and young people without adequate access to suitable information and care. Public health campaigns have been launched to raise awareness, reduce stigma, and improve reproductive health services.

Georgia continues to face significant challenges in family planning, due in large part to the unequal distribution of services between urban and rural areas. While residents in cities like Tbilisi have relatively good access to healthcare, those in rural regions often lack resources and trained professionals, limiting the effectiveness of family planning programs. The National Maternal & Newborn Health Strategy 2017-2030 mandates free contraceptives for young people and social assistance beneficiaries, but this

commitment has not been fully realized. Cultural stigmas around contraception persist, making public awareness and education (including school programs) crucial. Historical legacies of the Soviet era, when abortion was the primary form of birth control, continue to affect the country's reproductive health landscape.

Reduction in abortion rates

In the early 1990s, Georgia experienced socio-economic upheavals that severely impacted its public health system, including family planning services¹⁶. Economic instability and the absence of a universal healthcare policy reduced access to contraception, contributing to abortion becoming the primary method of birth control. While the abortion rate has decreased significantly since 1999¹⁷, it remains high by international standards, particularly in rural areas (Figure 22).

Figure 22: Total Abortion Rate (number of abortions per woman), 1999-2018



Sources: Women's Reproductive Health Survey in Georgia (1999, 2005, 2010); Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (2018)

¹⁶ Gigauri, I., Djakeli, K. (2021) National health reforms in Georgia during 1994-2021 and their success, *Holistica Journal of Business and Public Administration*, Vol. 12, Iss. 2, pp.102-108

¹⁷ As of 2018, the average number of abortions per woman was 0.9, decreasing from 3.7 in 1999.

The 2018 MICS¹⁸ showed a decline in the abortion rate, but concerns remain regarding unregistered and unsafe abortions¹⁹. Legal abortion in Georgia is permitted within the first 12 weeks of pregnancy, with stricter regulations introduced in recent years, including mandatory waiting periods and counseling requirements. Georgia's abortion regulations have become more stringent, which may push some women to seek unsafe and illegal abortions. These restrictions create significant barriers to safe abortion access and may contribute to delayed or unsafe procedures.

Despite a decline in abortion numbers, Georgia's birth rate is falling. In addition, contraceptive use remains low, which may raise questions about the accuracy of registered abortion figures. Any discrepancy here may be due to incomplete reporting by health facilities, an increase in the number of abortions conducted without medical consultation, and/or women choosing not to report abortions.

Reduced access to infertility treatments

Infertility is a significant issue in Georgia, affecting approximately 35,000 couples officially, although the actual number is likely higher²⁰. The causes of infertility are multifaceted, involving both male and female factors, and are influenced by environmental and lifestyle factors such as pollution, stress, and substance use²¹. Social stigma around infertility, particularly in rural areas, heaps psychological stress onto affected couples. While Georgia has made advances in assisted reproductive technologies like IVF and surrogacy, high treatment costs remain a barrier. Addressing infertility requires improved access to reproductive health services, awareness-raising campaigns on preventive measures, and the inclusion of fertility treatments in insurance schemes to support couples facing infertility.

An imbalanced sex ratio

According to a 2014 national survey (UNFPA, 2015²²), the number of girls born in Georgia has significantly decreased since the 1990s due to gender-biased sex selection. The sex ratio at birth has historically exceeded the biological norm of 104-106 male births per 100 female births, reaching a peak of 115 boys per 100 girls in 2004-2005²³. While efforts to improve gender equality, women's economic empowerment, and social protection systems have somewhat reduced this imbalance, the sex ratio at birth in 2023 remained at 109.4, which is above the norm.

According to the UNFPA study, a preference for sons in Georgia is influenced by socio-economic and gender norms whereby boys are favored compared to girls due to patrilineal traditions, conventional economic roles, and caregiving expectations. Following the collapse of the Soviet Union, economic hardship reinforced these traditional values, emphasizing the role of sons as primary breadwinners and bearers of the family name. Son preference is further facilitated by access to sex-determination technologies and is particularly prevalent in rural areas, where traditional views dominate, and for families having a third child²⁴. Despite the increasing economic empowerment of women, the sex ratio at birth remains skewed, indicating that cultural expectations continue to drive son preference.

Addressing this challenge requires ongoing awareness-raising campaigns, educational initiatives, and a cultural shift toward valuing daughters more. Healthcare professionals should not disclose the sex of the fetus before 14-16 weeks to prevent sex-selective abortions²⁵. Meanwhile, international and non-governmental organizations continue to promote gender equality, and addressing these issues is essential to building a fairer and more sustainable society.

¹⁸ UNICEF, Government of Georgia, National Statistics Office of Georgia and National Center for Disease Control and Public Health United Nations Children's Fund (2019). 2018 Georgia MICS (Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey). November 2019.

¹⁹ Nearly 37% of women who underwent abortion reported receiving no post-abortion family planning counselling, and only 46% were provided contraceptives or prescriptions following their last abortion.

²⁰ T. Verulava, M. Khabesashvili, "Infertility Treatment in Georgia," Health Policy, Economics, and Sociology, 2015; 1(1) <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/329027388-Infertility-treatment-in-Georgia---ushvilobis-mkurnaloba-sakartveloshi>

²¹ U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. NIH (2024). EB Research: Longitudinal Investigation of Fertility and the Environment (LIFE) Study. Epidemiology Branch. Last reviewed 2/21/2023.

²² Guilмото, C.Z., (2015). Gender-biased Sex Selection in Georgia: Context, Evidence and Implications. UNFPA, Tbilisi, Georgia.

²³ This analysis is based on calculations of the trends in the sex ratio at birth. For the period 1995-2013, these ratios have been estimated and since 2014, registered data were used.

²⁴ Son preference is particularly strong for third-born children, with the ratio exceeding 114, and is more pronounced in rural areas such as Samtskhe-Javakheti, Kakheti, and Kvemo Kartli, where traditional values and economic concerns persist.

²⁵ See ISET-PI, UNFPA. (2020), Social-Economic Policy Analysis with Regards to Son Preference and Gender-biased Sex Selection in Georgia, Tbilisi, Georgia.

4. PERSISTENT ECONOMIC GROWTH CHALLENGES BUT GOOD PROSPECTS

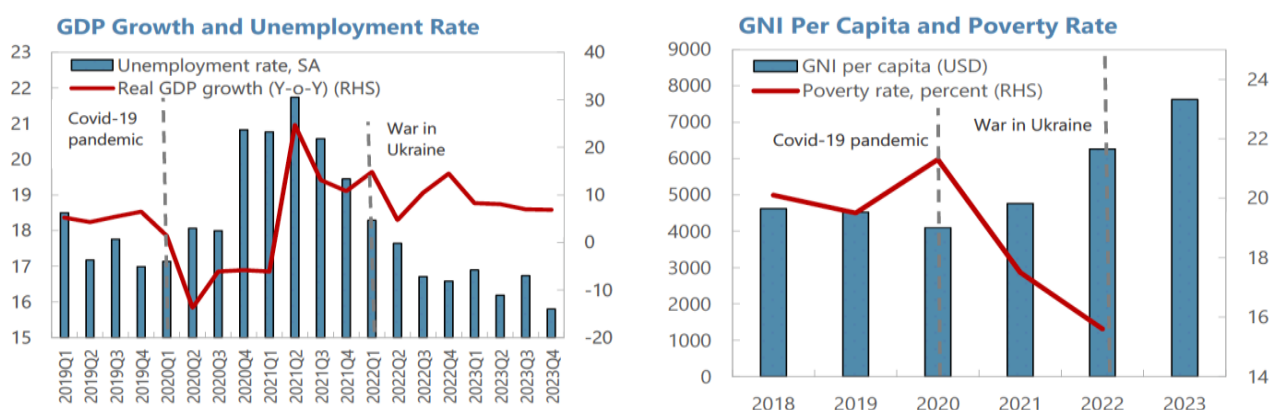
Macroeconomic trends

According to the International Monetary Fund (IMF)²⁶, Georgia’s economic growth averaged 5.6 per cent from 2003 to 2023, driven by investment and productivity improvements, particularly through a transition from agriculture to higher productivity sectors. GNI per capita has increased, and poverty rates have declined (Figure 23). The same IMF report concludes that about one-third of output growth per worker is attributed to labor moving out of agriculture. However, close to 400,000 subsistence farmers

remain, signaling the potential for further labor reallocation. The IMF expects that recent growth spikes, driven by financial inflows from Russia’s war on Ukraine, are expected to primarily raise GDP levels, with limited long-term impact on growth.

The IMF report considers that to sustain growth, Georgia needs to improve agricultural productivity through better irrigation and land management, enhance access to finance for SMEs, promote competition in financial services, and address structural unemployment through education and labor reforms.

Figure 23: Macroeconomic Indicators, 2018-2023



Source: Taken from IMF Country Report No. 24/135, <https://www.imf.org/-/media/Files/Publications/CR/2024/English/1GEOEA2024001.ashx>

A reinforced artery of the economy: remittances

Migration significantly impacts Georgia’s population, with remittances from abroad playing a crucial role in the economy. From 2012 to 2023, remittances nearly tripled, rising from US\$1.33 billion in 2012 to US\$4.12 billion in 2023, with these coming mainly from Russia, Italy, Greece, and the United States. In 2023, it accounted for 13.5 per cent of the country’s GDP²⁷. These funds help to alleviate poverty, improve living standards, and cover essential needs such as

healthcare, education, and housing. Remittances have also fostered financial inclusion, with many recipients using formal banking systems, thereby increasing their engagement with financial institutions. The other side of the equation is that the recent emigration of at least 932,352 individuals between 2016 and 2023²⁸, among other implications, has reduced Georgia’s skilled workforce and this potentially hinders long-term economic productivity. For the time being, remittances continue to be a stabilizing force, providing a sense of security for many Georgian households.

²⁶ IMF Country Report No. 24/135, <https://www.imf.org/-/media/Files/Publications/CR/2024/English/1GEOEA2024001.ashx>

²⁷ IOM. Migration Data Portal. Accessed 9/27/2024.

²⁸ Geostat data: <https://www.geostat.ge/en/modules/categories/316/population-and-demography>

Persistent poverty affects human capital formation

In 2020, the International Labour Organization (ILO) conducted the comprehensive Assessment of the Social Protection System in Georgia²⁹, showing that, despite being one of the key areas in strengthening human capital, children in Georgia are disproportionately affected by poverty compared to other age groups. Between 2016 and 2017, the proportion of children living in poverty rose from 26.8 per cent to 31.6 per cent, with extreme poverty rates increasing significantly in both urban and rural areas. By 2018, around 12 per cent of children lived below 40 per cent of median consumption, while nearly 30 per cent were below 60 per cent, and significantly worse than working-age adults and older persons. The report also shows that Georgia's Targeted Social Assistance (TSA) program, launched in 2006, provides cash assistance to poor households³⁰. However, the persistence of high rates of child poverty in Georgia can be partly attributed to the country's low investment in family allowances. While OECD countries spend an average of 1.1 per cent of GDP on cash benefits for families with children, Georgia's spending on the Child Benefit Program (CBP) in 2019 was only about 0.17 per cent. Even when including other per-child transfers and private-sector maternity benefits, the total spending only reaches 0.41 per cent of GDP, which is still significantly below the OECD average. Despite being relatively effective, the TSA program has an exclusion error of around 58 per cent, meaning it fails to reach a substantial portion of the poorest households, especially those with children.

Employment and labor market mismatch

Recent data from Geostat³¹ shows that Georgia faces high unemployment, with an official rate of 16.4 per cent in 2023 (18.3 per cent of men and 14 per

cent of women). There are also disparities between urban areas (17.6 per cent) and rural areas (14.6 per cent), mainly due to relatively high employment in agriculture. Youth unemployment is particularly acute, reaching 45 per cent in the 15-19 age group and 32 per cent in the 20-24 age group. Meanwhile, the share of youth not in employment, education, or training (NEET) rose to 26.9 per cent in 2019³². In a more recent study, this figure rose to 31 per cent³³. Informal employment is prevalent, with over one-third of non-agricultural workers employed informally, and women being especially vulnerable as they earn 42 per cent less than those in formal employment and are often engaged in unpaid care work. The country's labor market also suffers from skills-labor market mismatches, leading to increased emigration as workers seek formal employment opportunities abroad.

Better pension coverage but challenges remain³⁴

Georgia's universal old-age pension, introduced in 2006, has been crucial in reducing poverty among older people by providing a guaranteed income to nearly all individuals over 60 or 65. The program has achieved near-universal coverage, with more than 95 per cent of older adults receiving pensions, significantly improving financial security for this group. However, around 9 per cent of older persons still require additional support through TSA, indicating that while pensions have been effective in poverty reduction, they may need to be increased to meet the needs of vulnerable elderly populations fully.

The country's fiscal constraints and ageing population raise concerns about the system's long-term sustainability³⁵. Policy reforms under consideration include raising the statutory retirement age and introducing means testing to ensure the system's viability.

²⁹ <https://www.developmentpathways.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/ILO-Georgia.pdf>

³⁰ In 2015, the World Bank said in a report that "the TSA program generates work disincentives around the eligibility threshold, with these disincentives concentrated among women. Disincentive effects are larger for younger women, and for women who are married and have children,". *The Impact of Targeted Social Assistance on Labour Market in Georgia: A Regression Discontinuity Approach*. Social Protection and Labour Global Practice. World Bank, 2015.

³¹ Geostat (2024). Data on Employment and Unemployment.

³² <https://www.developmentpathways.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/ILO-Georgia.pdf>

³³ 2023 Youth study generation of independent. Georgia: In between hopes and uncertainties. Friedrich-Ebert Stiftung (2023).

³⁴ See these reports: (1) World Bank and ILO (2015). Universal Social Protection. Universal old age pensions in Georgia. (2) ILO, UN-WOMEN (2020). Assessment of the Social Protection System in Georgia Final Report.

³⁵ Nutsubidze, Tamila & Nutsubidze, Khatuna. (2017). The challenge of pension reform in Georgia: Non-contributory pensions and elderly poverty - the challenge of pension reform in Georgia. *International Social Security Review*. 70. 79-108. 10.1111/issr.12129.

Relatively high educational attainment but ongoing challenges to improve human capital

Georgia's education system has undergone extensive reforms³⁶ and improved enrollment and learning outcomes across all levels, yet significant challenges persist³⁷. Although early childhood education has expanded, with enrollment rising to 70% in 2018, access for disadvantaged groups and quality issues remain, as many children lack adequate cognitive and social skills. In primary and lower secondary education, near-universal enrollment has been achieved although rural-urban disparities in terms of resources and teaching quality are significant. Upper secondary education faces high dropout rates after ninth grade, partly due to a lack of developed vocational programs, which currently enroll only 2% of students and are widely seen as a "dead-end" without any pathways to higher education, particularly for the poorest families and ethnic minority groups such as the ethnic Azerbaijani population (33% completion). Tertiary education has rapidly expanded, with gross enrollment reaching 57%, but quality shortcomings and a mismatch between academic preparation and labor market needs leave many graduates unemployed. In Georgia, gender disparities in education are most apparent in higher education participation and labor market outcomes rather than in enrollment or completion rates at primary and secondary levels³⁸. Girls are almost universally enrolled in primary and secondary education and tend to outper-

form boys in enrollment, learning, and health outcomes. In addition, more women than men attend colleges and universities, and women with tertiary degrees have better employment rates than those with lower levels of educational attainment. However, despite these gains, women only achieve 61% of their human capital potential by the age of 18³⁹. Men with a bachelor's degree have a higher unemployment rate compared to those with a master's or PhD, highlighting a disparity in employment outcomes based on education level. Regional, socio-economic, and ethnic factors also significantly influence educational access and outcomes, often outweighing gender-based differences.

Georgia's Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) results⁴⁰ indicate that the average scores in mathematics, reading, and science in 2022 were similar to those in 2018, but have declined since 2015. Students in Georgia performed below the OECD average in 2022, with a smaller proportion achieving high proficiency and a more significant share scoring below the baseline proficiency level compared to OECD countries.

Reforms aimed at modernizing teaching, improving competencies, and aligning education with market demands have shown some success, yet equity challenges persist. Disparities in outcomes between regions, socio-economic groups, and ethnic minorities, exacerbated by low funding, insufficient support for teachers, and outdated practices, persist.

³⁶ Educational Reforms in Georgia: Past Progress and Future Directions, Yasmine Mitaishvili-Rayyis, Georgian Foundation for Strategic and International Studies, 28 June 2023.

³⁷ Li, R. et al. (2019), OECD Reviews of Evaluation and Assessment in Education: Georgia, OECD Reviews of Evaluation and Assessment in Education, OECD Publishing, Paris <https://doi.org/10.1787/94dc370e-en>.

³⁸ Educational Reforms in Georgia: Past Progress and Future Directions, Yasmine Mitaishvili-Rayyis, Georgian Foundation for Strategic and International Studies, 28 June 2023

³⁹ See World Bank data: https://databankfiles.worldbank.org/public/ddpext_download/hci/HCI_2pager_GEO.pdf?cid=GGH_e_hcpexternal_en_ext

⁴⁰ PISA 2022 Results (Volume I and II) - Country Notes: Georgia. OECD Publication. December 2023.

5. GENDER GAPS PERSIST AND IMPACT DEMOGRAPHIC RESILIENCE

Gender aspects have a fundamental influence on the well-being of the population. Thus, the urgent need to implement gender-responsive policies and measures that address gender inequalities is based on data production and the analysis of indicators included in the international legal framework (e.g., ICPD, Beijing Platform for Action, Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW)). The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) include 84 gender-specific indicators (equating to a quarter of the list), of which Georgia has nationalized 75. Numerous studies confirm that when women are economically empowered (i.e. earning and managing their income from labor and/or assets), this translates into higher school attendance rates, better academic performance among children, healthier families, and faster improvement in family well-being. Thus, women’s economic participation and entrepreneurship directly impact demographic resilience: it improves family well-being, increases life expectancy and quality of life, and reduces emigration.

Gender gaps in employment undermine economic development

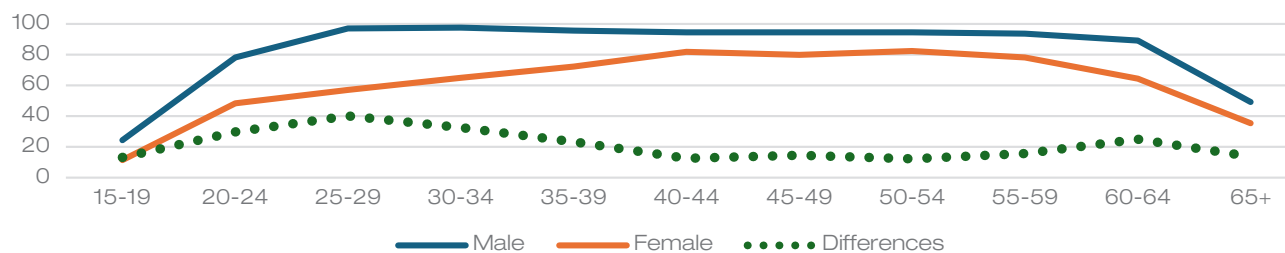
The economic participation rate for men in 2023 was 65.1 per cent, compared to 43.1 per cent for

women⁴¹. Women’s participation in the labor market lagged men’s by an average of 20.8 percentage points, meaning the situation has not changed significantly since 2010. Unemployment rates in 2023 were lower for women (14.0 per cent) than for men (18.3 per cent). This could indicate that many women leave the labor market when they become unemployed. Contrary to the participation rates that do not show any apparent trends, unemployment rates for both sexes show a clear declining trend. Male unemployment has steadily decreased from 28.9 per cent in 2010 to 17.8 per cent in 2023, while female unemployment has dropped even more sharply from 25.0 per cent in 2010 to 14.0 per cent in 2023.

When analyzed data from the ILO (Figure 24) by age, the differences between men and women in their economic participation show that the gap is more significant in younger women (20-34). This may indicate a trend among younger women to stay outside of the market either due to pursuing studies or the burden of unpaid domestic work.

Although women’s retirement age in Georgia is five years lower than that of men (60 versus 65 years) and, at the same time, a woman’s average lifespan is about nine years longer, it is not unknown for women to continue participating in the labor force after 65, and even at a rate not too different from that of men of the same ages group (Figure 25).

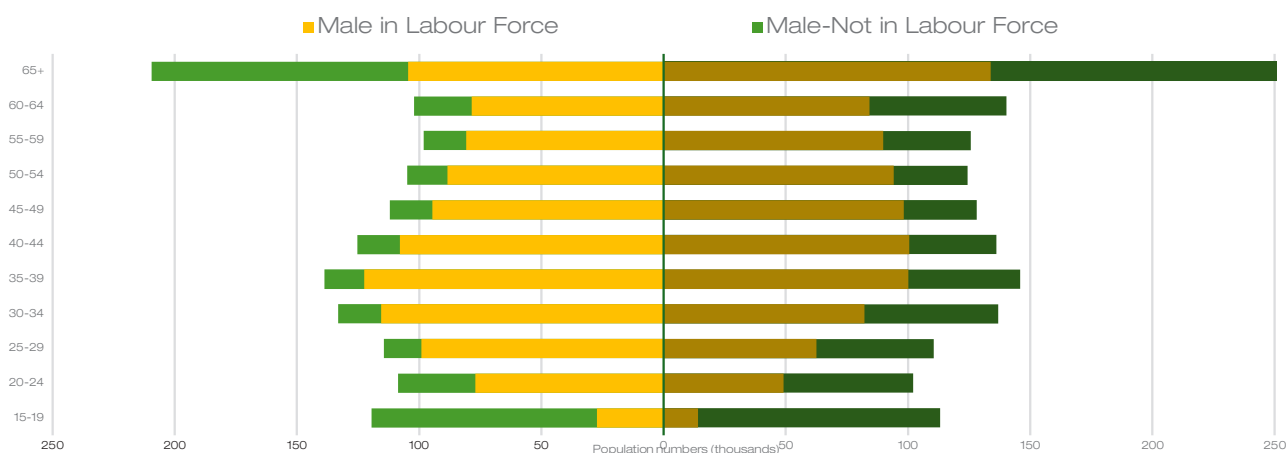
Figure 24: Economic Participation Rates, 2020



Source: ILO, 2024. <https://ilostat.ilo.org/data/>

⁴¹ These data for 2016 come from the Integrated Survey of Households, and since 2017 from the Labour Force Survey.

Figure 25: Age Pyramid, Georgia, 2024



Sources: United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division (2024). World Population Prospects 2024, Online Edition. ILO (2024). ILOSTAT, https://rshiny.ilo.org/dataexplorer25/?lang=en&id=EAP_DWAP

The gender gap in labor market participation in Georgia is responsible for an estimated loss of 11.3% of GDP⁴², highlighting the significant economic potential that would be unleashed if women participated to the same degree as men. Indeed, this impact could be reduced by launching initiatives to increase labor force participation rates among women and reduce unemployment. Using data from the UN's Population Projection as well as data on participation and unemployment from the ILO, and assuming an increase in labor force participation among women and the halving of youth unemployment, the total number of employed people would increase by nearly 300,000 by 2050. Without those changes, however, more than 14,000 potential employees would be lost to the labor force during the same period.

Gender pay gap persists⁴³

The wage disparity between men and women in Georgia remains a pertinent issue, with women earning, on average, 36.2% less than their male counterparts. Despite Georgia having ratified the ILO Equal Remuneration Convention in 1993, progress toward wage equality was stagnant up until 2012. The disparity stems from various factors, including gen-

der-based discrimination, occupational segregation, and restricted access to better-paid positions. While the gap narrowed by 2016, it has since widened again. Significant disparities are especially apparent in sectors like finance and insurance, where men's wages have grown significantly faster than those of women. For instance, in 2019, men's salaries in the financial industry dropped by 20.9%, but the gap persisted due to women's earnings increasing only slightly. Recommendations to address this issue include legislative reform, raising public awareness, ensuring equal pay for work of equal value, and improving women's access to leadership positions and higher-paid roles.

Unpaid care and domestic work need to be understood to improve gender equity

Unpaid care and domestic work significantly affects the gender disparity in economic activity participation. According to a time-use survey conducted in Georgia in 2020-2021⁴⁴, there is a stark difference between women (88.3 per cent) and men (39.6 per cent) regarding participation in care and unpaid domestic work. Women on average spend 3.6 hours per day on unpaid care and domestic work, which is five times more than the 0.7 hours spent by men (Table 6).

⁴² World Bank (2016). Georgia Country Gender Assessment. Poverty and Equity Global Practice. 2016 Public

⁴³ For more details see: ILO (2022). Gender wage gap in Georgia: Research on the reasons for the significant gender pay gap and development of a methodology of labour cost assessment and policy recommendations to improve compliance with the Equal Remuneration Convention, 1951, No. 100. International Labour Organization 2022.

⁴⁴ <https://www.geostat.ge/ka/modules/categories/783/drois-gamoqenebis-gamokvleva>

Table 6: Amount of time (number of hours) spent on unpaid work, by sex and SDG Indicator 5.4.1

Unpaid work	Female	Male
Unpaid domestic work serving household and family members	3.4 hours per day	0.7 hours per day
Unpaid care work serving household and family members	0.9 hours per day	0.2 hours per day
SDG Indicator 5.4.1: Proportion of time spent on unpaid domestic and care work	17.8%	4.4%

Source: Geostat

Meanwhile, women spend 4.5 times more of their time on unpaid care work than men (0.9 hours versus 0.2 daily). Consequently, SDG Indicator 5.4.1 (proportion of time spent on unpaid domestic and care work) is 17.8 per cent for women and 4.4 per cent for men⁴⁵. In Georgia, 49 per cent of women not in the labor force cited unpaid care work as the main reason for not entering the labor force, and this was exacerbated during the COVID-19 pandemic⁴⁶. The unequal distribution of unpaid work has a significant impact on women's labor force participation, poverty, and access to resources and opportunities, especially in their critical reproductive years.

Asset ownership and entrepreneurship in women is still lacking

Assessing gender differences in asset ownership in Georgia is challenging because household surveys typically focus on total household assets without considering intra-household dynamics. A 2018 UN-coordinated survey addressed the challenge of measuring asset ownership and entrepreneurship from a gender perspective⁴⁷. It revealed that while ownership of consumer durables was nearly equal between men and women, significant gender dis-

parities favoring men were evident in the ownership of substantial assets like real estate and agricultural land, particularly in rural areas. The survey also showed that disparities were more pronounced in documented ownership, and that men were more likely than women to have an exclusive right to sell or bequeath assets.

In addition, data from Geostat showed that men significantly outnumbered women in entrepreneurship, with male ownership of newly registered enterprises more than double that of female ownership. The 2021 Gender in Trade Assessment Report⁴⁸, which analyzed approximately 60,000 trading companies engaged in export and import operations from 2016 to 2020, showed that the number of male owners of companies engaged in both exports and imports exceeded female owners ninefold, while for exporter companies it was fivefold, and for importer companies it was threefold. Gender disparities in company ownership are even more pronounced when differences in company size are considered (male owners generally hold large shares in large enterprises). Ultimately, there is potential for additional gender-focused analysis of ownership of trading companies.

⁴⁵ <https://georgia.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/2022-12/GTUS%20Report%20ENG%20WEB%20%281%29.pdf>

⁴⁶ <https://georgia.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/2022-09/Unpaid-Care-Work%20V2%20env>

⁴⁷ <https://www.geostat.ge/ka/single-categories/120/piloturi-kvleva-genderulad-diferentsirebuli-monatsemebis-shegrovebaze-aktivebis-flobasa-da-metsarmeobaze>

⁴⁸ <https://gender.geostat.ge/gender/doc/GenderTradeAssessmentInGeorgia-en.pdf>

6. LAGS IN THE AVAILABILITY OF DEMOGRAPHIC DATA

Demographic data are an integral part of effective policy development and implementation. They provide the empirical basis on which population dynamics can be understood, help to predict future trends, and assist in addressing socio-economic challenges. By using accurate and comprehensive demographic data, policymakers can design targeted interventions that promote sustainable development, enhance public well-being, and improve quality of life. This data-driven approach ensures that policies not only address current needs but also help to prepare for future demographic changes.

The most important data source here is the population census. The next census in Georgia is scheduled for November-December 2024. The results thereof will be published in June 2026. Between censuses, administrative data are a significant source of current demographic statistics. The population size is calculated by taking into account the data of the previous year, as well as natural increase and migration balance figures.

The Public Service Development Agency of the Ministry of Justice of Georgia registers births, deaths, marriages, and divorces. While the coverage of registered data has significantly improved, it is still important to note that annual data on marriages and divorces are based only on registered acts, which may not accurately reflect the actual marriage figures for the population. To address this shortcoming and monitor the dynamics of marriage and divorce more effectively, it is crucial to conduct regular surveys or include relevant modules in ex-

isting surveys that study the population's marriage pattern and to amend existing legislation and registration procedures to account for various types of cohabitation.

The National Centre for Disease Control collects data on medical records of births and deaths, including causes of death. Despite significant improvements in registered data coverage and Georgia being one of the leading countries in this direction, data quality on causes of death remains a major challenge. In 2022, ill-defined and unknown causes of death accounted for 28.6% of all registered deaths. This may be due to omissions of relevant information in death certificates or inadequate data entry. Therefore, it is important to train physicians on the International Classification of Diseases, 11th Revision (ICD11).

Notably, the available figures on the sex-age distribution of the population by region and municipality are only based on the results of the population censuses and these need to be updated annually. There should also be in place an administrative source that collects information on internal migration in the country. Furthermore, information on international (out) migration is only available at the national level, hindering the assessment of population numbers at regional and municipal levels. To overcome this challenge, it is crucial to take steps to implement a population register in the country. Although population projections are vital for accurate policy planning, only UN projections are currently available at the national level.

7. POPULATION, FAMILY, AND OTHER RELATED POLICIES

Fertility-related policies exist but lack focus

State policy plays a vital role in influencing birth trends in Georgia, with the Government implementing various measures to encourage people to have children and support families. These initiatives include financial incentives, such as maternity benefits and financial assistance programs for families with children under certain conditions. Georgian legislation also provides for parental leave. The Labor Code stipulates two different types of leave. Maternity leave is the exclusive right of a woman, but the father can also take their days if the mother does not fully use their allocated days (126 remunerable days in total). Parental leave (also known as childcare leave) can be used fully or partially either by the mother or the father.

In addition, since 2014, Georgia has implemented financial assistance programs and subsidies for low-income and large families, ensuring the provision of essential healthcare services and supporting early childhood education through state-subsidized nursery schools and kindergartens.

To enhance the effectiveness of these policies, Georgia could consider following the best practices of other countries, incorporating a family-friendly and gender-responsive approach that supports both parents in their caregiving roles. The country has also implemented the State Universal Healthcare Program, offering all citizens access to vital healthcare services including antenatal, perinatal, and postnatal care, and free medical services for children, such as check-ups, treatments, and vaccinations. The Georgian government promotes higher education by offering state grants and scholarships, making primary and secondary education accessible and mandatory. Furthermore, the Subsidized Mortgage Loan Program assists young and large families in obtaining affordable housing, by subsidizing interest rates on mortgage loans for five years. However, the existing measures are insufficient, and a more thorough assessment of their impact and further research into reproductive health attitudes as well as the barriers preventing individuals from achieving their fertility goals is needed.

Support for older persons is still not sufficiently articulated

Addressing the older-age demographic is another focus of state policy. The age-sex structure of the population significantly impacts upon various socio-economic issues such as healthcare, education, the labor market, and social services. The Government has adopted several measures to address the challenges of an ageing demographic, including implementing the State Universal Healthcare Program and establishing an accumulated pension system to ensure basic income for older citizens.

While these efforts have reduced poverty rates among older people, the pension is often insufficient to maintain pre-retirement living standards, meaning a more comprehensive framework is required. Around 5 per cent of older people (65+) still live in poverty, and 15 per cent remain at risk. Nearly 40 per cent of individuals aged 60-64 are unemployed or have left the labor market. Meanwhile, the provision of a universal pension and health insurance for everyone aged 65 and above has effectively lowered poverty. However, the absence of a survivor's pension can leave widows exposed to significant income drops, with women representing 86 per cent of the widowed population.

Georgia's ageing population (over one-quarter of the population are above 60) requires ongoing investment in the pension system. Although the universal pension covers nearly 100 per cent of eligible citizens, its adequacy is questionable. The newly introduced contributory pension system in 2018 aims to provide supplementary support but may disadvantage lower earners and women due to its contribution structure. Moreover, the pension's nominal value has increased but lacks an indexation mechanism to guard against inflation, and while nearly all elderly Georgians receive a pension, disparities exist based on ethnicity, gender, and marital status.

According to a detailed study⁴⁹, the gender gap in pensions in Georgia is driven by multiple factors, including the wage gap between men and women, differences in retirement age, and variations in life expectancy. Women often have shorter careers due

⁴⁹ UNDP(2024). Gender Pension Gap in Georgia: Gender Disparities within Georgia's Funded Pension Scheme. 2024

to caregiving responsibilities or part-time work, reducing their overall pension contributions and savings. This compounds other factors, such as wage disparities. In addition, women tend to retire earlier and live longer, leading to a longer distribution period for their pensions and thus lower monthly payouts. A financial literacy disparity between genders also impacts retirement planning and savings. That particular gap is more pronounced in the private sector (54%) due to a larger wage gap, and less significant in the public sector (34%). Combined, these factors result in women accumulating significantly lower pensions over their lifetime, underscoring the urgent need for targeted interventions.

The new supplementary accumulated pension scheme aims to improve future retirees' situation, completely covering the population mandatorily enrolling them in the scheme. However, it mainly benefits those formally employed, and thus covering only about half of the labor force. Global evidence suggests that funded pension schemes by design may exacerbate inequalities, particularly for those with lower earnings and shorter work histories. Georgia must continue to monitor and adjust these systems to ensure effectiveness and address existing gaps.

Investing in young people requires leapfrog investments

Policies for young people play a crucial role in demographic resilience by encouraging their active participation as fully fledged members of society⁵⁰. The State Youth Strategy outlines goals to provide young people with equal access to employment, health, and development opportunities. Despite some positive trends in recent years here, challenges remain such as a high NEET rate and a gender disparity in labor force participation. Despite a significant decrease in childbearing among adolescents over the past four years, the country is not investing enough to maximize the potential of younger generations.

With an ageing population and high emigration improving youth's education, skills, and health outcomes would ensure a more productive and sustainable workforce. By focusing on quality early childhood development, equitable access to education, and closing gender gaps, particularly by empower-

ing young women in high-demand fields like STEM, Georgia can boost its productivity and innovation. Such investments would also help to manage demographic challenges, reduce inequalities, and create better employment opportunities in the country, thereby increasing labor force participation and lowering the unemployment rate among young people and contributing to sustainable economic growth. Prioritizing the human capital of young people will be essential for Georgia to achieve sustained, inclusive growth and long-term demographic and economic resilience.

Migration and remittances: two sides of the same equation

The Government recognizes the importance of migration and remittances and is implementing policies to manage and utilize their benefits. Efforts are ongoing to facilitate safer and more effective remittance channels and to engage the Georgian diaspora in national development initiatives. There are also programs aimed at encouraging return migration and the reintegration of returnees. Through strategic policies and economic reforms, Georgia can harness the benefits of migration while at the same time mitigating its adverse effects, ultimately contributing to the development of a more resilient and sustainable society. Migration policies must be part of a broader demographic resilience strategy that focuses on managing population inflows and outflows and addresses the reasons behind migration, such as economic disparities, lack of opportunities, and social inequalities.

Moreover, integrating migration management strategies into a comprehensive demographic resilience framework could help Georgia to navigate the complexities of migration dynamics. This includes managing remittances, engaging the diaspora, facilitating attractive conditions for return migration, and retaining talent. By doing so, Georgia can turn migration from a demographic challenge into a sustainable development opportunity. Accordingly, a more stable economic environment must be established through increasing economic stability, creating jobs, and investing in an education that matches the labor market needs as well as funding healthcare to reduce the weight of the factors driving emigration.

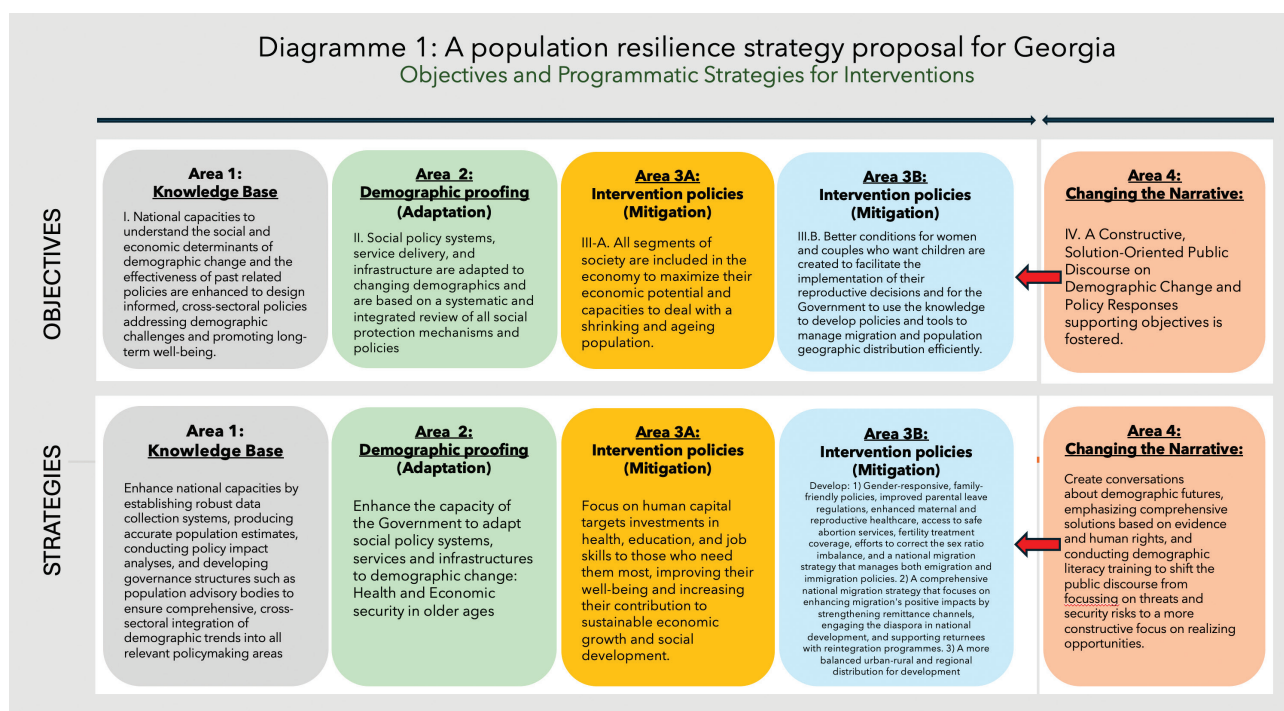
⁵⁰ https://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/099435008172221325/pdf/P1735300c417d2026096d50dd8d8218cd90.pdf?_gl=1*103ed42*_gcl_au*MTIwMDEyNjE3Ni4xNz11OTY5NDM0

8. A POPULATION RESILIENCE STRATEGY PROPOSAL

Seeking to attain demographic resilience, Georgia has already taken several relevant steps. Georgia’s approach to families, an ageing population, youth, and gender inequalities indicate comprehensive effort to tackle the country’s demographic challenges. However, for these policies to be effective, they require more precise objectives, a more coherent approach to coordination and integration, and continuous evaluation and adjustment to address evolving demographic trends and to ensure equitable participation of all population segments.

The proposal below (Diagram 1) is anchored in UNFPA’s conceptualization of demographic re-

silience, which is understood as the capacity of a society to thrive amidst demographic changes by proactively anticipating, planning, and shaping the demographic future, allowing governments to mitigate negative impacts for individuals, the economy, and the environment, while harnessing emerging opportunities⁵¹. Four specific areas are identified here, for each of which objectives and strategies have been defined. What follows is a detailed list of policy areas and recommended interventions based on the analysis laid out in previous chapters in line with the demographic resilience framework.



⁵¹ Demographic Resilience Programme for Europe & Central Asia. UNFPA, July 2020.

9. POLICY AREAS FOR INTERVENTION TO ENSURE DEMOGRAPHIC RESILIENCE

POLICY AREAS FOR INTERVENTION TO ENSURE DEMOGRAPHIC RESILIENCE		
Policy Area	Policy Strategy	Intervention Strategy
<p>I. National capacity to understand the social and economic determinants of demographic change and the effectiveness of related past policies is enhanced to design informed, cross-sectoral policies addressing demographic challenges, promoting long-term well-being.</p>	<p>Enhance national capacity by establishing robust data collection systems, producing accurate population estimates, conducting policy impact analyses, and developing governance structures such as population advisory bodies to ensure comprehensive, cross-sectoral integration of demographic trends into all relevant policymaking areas.</p>	<p>Strengthen national capacities for data collection and demographic analysis.</p>
		<p>Conduct regular demographic and health surveys with a focus on marginalized groups.</p>
		<p>Utilize data for 'demography-proofing' of social systems, service delivery, infrastructure, and other public goods and services.</p>
		<p>Advocate for harmonizing administrative data and the conducting of research on birth rates and sexual and reproductive health to ensure internationally comparable data.</p>
		<p>Utilize GIS technologies to monitor demographic trends and regional disparities.</p>
		<p>Conduct regular monitoring and evaluation with a focus on demographic resilience.</p>
		<p>Use feedback mechanisms to refine policies based on demographic dynamics.</p>
		<p>Foster solution-oriented public discourse around demographic change.</p>
<p>Health - Enhance the capacity of the Government to adapt social policy systems, services, and infrastructure to accommodate demographic change.</p>	<p>Health - Enhance the capacity of the Government to adapt social policy systems, services, and infrastructure to accommodate demographic change.</p>	<p>Invest in strengthening healthcare infrastructure, particularly in rural areas, focusing on universal coverage.</p>
		<p>Invest in facilities and medical equipment to improve accessibility to quality services.</p>
		<p>Develop educational and public-awareness-raising campaigns to promote healthy practices and encourage regular maternal health and other necessary check-ups.</p>
		<p>Develop policies and awareness-raising campaigns to prevent a high circulatory system and other NCD prevalence.</p>
		<p>Strengthen healthcare services tailored to older people, including long-term and home-based care. Reduce out-of-pocket expenses for people with chronic diseases and make pharmaceutical products more affordable.</p>

<p>II. Adaptation of social policy systems, service delivery, and infrastructure to accommodate changing demographics based on a systematic and integrated review of all social protection mechanisms and policies.</p>		<p>Develop community centers that offer social activities and educational programs for older people. Encourage volunteering opportunities that keep older people socially active and promote their participation in physical activities through age-appropriate exercise programs.</p>
		<p>Reinforce programs that contribute to fully including older people in society through community engagement, educational opportunities, and activities that maintain their physical and mental health, and encourage lifelong learning and volunteering for older adults.</p>
		<p>Adjust healthcare and pension systems to address the needs of the ageing population by ensuring that pension amounts allow older adults to maintain a pre-retirement standard of living and by enhancing healthcare access, particularly for those suffering from chronic illnesses.</p>
	<p>Economic Security - Enhance the capacity of the Government to adapt social policy systems, services, and infrastructure to accommodate demographic change.</p>	<p>Foster intergenerational cooperation through public campaigns that challenge stereotypes and encourage the sharing of caregiving responsibilities among men, women, and young people. Support intergenerational programs that enhance interaction between and among different age groups.</p>
		<p>Promote intergenerational solidarity through public discourse.</p>
		<p>Capitalize on the so-called “silver economy” by developing industries that cater to the needs of older adults, such as healthcare and wellness services, and expand the care economy by supporting caregiving jobs and home-based care services, which address the growing demand for elderly care while creating employment opportunities at the same time.</p>
		<p>According to inflation, adjust the pension amount to ensure that it is sufficient to maintain a standard of living comparable to a pre-retirement level.</p>
		<p>Introduce a survivor’s pension to support adults who lose a spouse or partner, particularly benefiting women who are far more likely to be widowed.</p>
		<p>Extend the new contributory pension system to cover a larger portion of the labor force, including informal workers, to ensure that future pensioners can access additional financial support beyond the basic pension.</p>

		Reinforce targeted measures such as additional financial assistance for older persons with vulnerabilities, such as disabilities, to ensure that the social protection system meets the needs of all elderly citizens.
		Develop targeted support programs for older women, including a survivor's pension, to address their vulnerabilities.
		Promote intergenerational programs that support interaction between and among different age groups.
		Implement youth employment programs focused on inclusion.
		Revise career planning and curricula to match labor market demands for young people.
III.A. The inclusion of all segments of society in the economy to maximize their economic potential and capacity to deal with a shrinking and ageing population.	Focus on human capital targets, as well as investments in health, education, and job skills for those who need them the most, improving their well-being and increasing their contribution to sustainable economic growth and social development.	Promote lifelong learning and skills development.
		Encourage youth participation in policymaking to shape the demographic future.
		Engage youth in policymaking processes to shape the demographic future and create tailored programs to boost youth economic opportunities and employment.
		Expand healthcare services to address adolescent and youth needs, ensuring universal access to reproductive health-related services, information, and education.
		Address youth unemployment, low labor force participation, and mismatches between education and the labor market.
		Identify the causes of women's low participation rate in economic activities and develop measures that contribute to a more equal distribution of household and care activities.
		Introduce mandatory paid paternity benefits for both parents to promote equitable caregiving responsibilities and gender equality in the labor market.
		Implement risk-pooling in the pension system to recognize caregiving periods, ensuring fairer pension outcomes for women.
		Increase women's awareness and access to social protection benefits, particularly in the informal sector.
		Regularly assess and adjust social protection policies to reduce gender disparities and enhance economic growth.
		Implement gender-responsive, family-friendly policies focusing on human rights and gender equality.

<p>III.B. Improved conditions for women and couples who want children are created to facilitate their reproductive decisions and equipping the Government with the knowledge to develop policies and tools to manage migration and geographical population distribution efficiently.</p>	<p>Develop gender-responsive, family-friendly policies, improved parental leave regulations, enhanced maternal and reproductive health-care, better access to safe abortion services, broader fertility treatment coverage, and stronger efforts to correct the sex ratio imbalance, and devise a national migration strategy that steers both emigration and immigration policies.</p>	<p>Establish working groups involving policymakers, business representatives, and civil society to review family policies and encourage the private sector to adopt parent-friendly practices.</p>
		<p>Strengthen science-policy links to base interventions on evidence.</p>
		<p>Improve access to quality maternal and infant health-care, particularly in rural areas, expanding access to modern contraceptives, providing comprehensive reproductive health education, and promoting youth-friendly services.</p>
		<p>Ensure widespread access to safe abortion services while simultaneously promoting contraceptive use and reproductive health awareness.</p>
		<p>Address infertility by including fertility treatments in national health insurance schemes.</p>
		<p>Counter the sex ratio imbalance by promoting gender equality and women's economic empowerment.</p>
		<p>Integrate migration management strategies to retain talent and bring skilled migrants in areas of high productivity.</p>
		<p>Address the root causes of emigration through economic stability, job creation, and improved access to education and healthcare.</p>
	<p>Develop a comprehensive national migration strategy that focuses on harnessing migration's positive impacts by strengthening remittance channels, engaging the diaspora in national development, and supporting returnees through reintegration programs.</p>	<p>Mitigate the population outflow from the country and make Georgia more attractive, especially for young people.</p>
		<p>Enhance rural attractiveness and support agriculture.</p>
		<p>Design strategic urban planning and sustainable development practices to manage the challenges of urbanization and leverage the benefits of urban growth pursuant to the country's overall development.</p>
	<p>Develop a more balanced urban-rural and regional distribution pursuant to development.</p>	<p>In response to economic challenges, implement targeted economic policies, focusing on regions with high unemployment rates.</p>
		<p>Invest in rural infrastructure and services with a human capital approach to promote inclusive development in rural areas and support youth and marginalized groups.</p>
		<p>Promote investments in rural development by improving rural infrastructure and services and supporting sustainable agricultural practices.</p>

		Plan for rapid urbanization, particularly in Tbilisi, to address challenges in infrastructure, a housing shortage, insufficient transportation, and air pollution.
		Implement the Tbilisi Urban Development Plan, which aims to address the city's infrastructure-related and environmental challenges.
		Ensure the establishment of Kutaisi International University is part of the effort to develop Kutaisi as the second-largest urban center in the country and reduce the concentration of the population and economic activity in Tbilisi.
		Advocate for gender equality through legislative reforms and awareness-raising campaigns.
		Shift public discourse towards equal opportunities and shared responsibilities.
IV.A. Fostering constructive, solution-oriented public discourse on demographic change and policy responses supporting the achievement of objectives.	Start conversations about the demographic future, emphasizing comprehensive solutions based on evidence and human rights, and conducting demographic literacy training to shift the public discourse from threats and security risks to a more constructive focus on grasping opportunities.	Improve laws and systems to combat gender-based violence and ensure a safe environment for all citizens.
		Promote awareness-raising and norm transformation through public awareness-raising campaigns to change gender perceptions.
		Advocate for gender equality through legislative reforms and awareness-raising campaigns.
		Shift the public discourse towards equal opportunities and shared responsibilities.
		Improve laws and systems to combat gender-based violence and harmful practices, and ensure a safe environment for all citizens.
		Promote awareness-raising and norm transformation through public campaigns to change gender perceptions.
		Facilitate partnerships between the Government, civil society, academia, and the private sector to co-create policies and solutions that holistically address demographic and gender equality challenges.
		Ensure that public discourse and campaigns are informed by demographic data, helping the public to better understand the impacts of demographic change, including an ageing population, migration, and gender disparities.
		Develop programs that focus on the economic empowerment of marginalized groups, especially women, youth, and minority populations, to address gender gaps in employment, education, and access to resources.

