

GLOBAL PROGRAMME TO PREVENT SON PREFERENCE AND THE UNDERVALUING OF GIRLS

FACTSHEET
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Georgia

1 BACKGROUND

After independence from the Soviet Union, Georgia experienced a significant rise in the number of boys born compared with the number of girls. As of 2004, Georgia had one of the highest sex ratio at birth rates in the world, but by 2016 the ratio was at the biologically normal level. This is a positive direction towards a society of greater gender equality.

Son preference

Georgian society is characterized by strong preference for sons due to its patriarchal structure. Family in Georgia is patrilineal in nature and it is the place where traditions, national values and identities are kept and respected. Patrilineality is a common kinship system in which an individual's family membership derives from and is recorded through his or her father's lineage.

It generally involves the inheritance of property, rights, names, or titles, by persons related through male kin. In such systems, males traditionally have been the main contributors to family subsistence, and the major source of support for their aging parents, while women are stereotypically perceived as natural caretakers, whose core responsibilities involve child care and household duties. Son preference is at the core of gender bias and is one of the most influential demand factors when related to gender-biased sex selection.

In cases where parents have only one child, 46 per cent of respondents prefer a son, 9 per cent a girl, and for 45 per cent it does not matter, according to the Caucasus Barometer 201 survey.

- Boys [have great] responsibilities, they have to support you financially. I am more oriented on boys.
- Adult married woman, Dusheti

Fertility Decline

Low fertility means that families no longer can ensure the birth of a son through repeated pregnancies and, with the increasing availability of sex detection technologies, couples may opt for sex selection to ensure the birth of a son. In Georgia, one of the consequences following the independence was a sharp decline in the fertility rate, as reducing household size was a strategy to cope with severe economic conditions by decreasing pressure on household budgets. Low fertility acted as a "squeeze factor" forcing parents to make choices on the desired gender composition of their family.

Availability of sex detection technologies

The availability of technologies for the early determination of sex is not the root cause of son preference and gender-biased sex selection, but a contributing factor. Without such technology, even if parents have a pronounced preference for boys, they would not be able to resort to gender-biased sex selection as readily without prenatal diagnostics. Following the independence, opening borders made it possible to

import new ultrasound machines and replace old Soviet ones. Georgia now offers high-tech reproductive services that are easily accessible across the country for a low cost. Prenatal diagnostics are highly available and extremely common during pregnancies and, as such, present an easily approachable means of performing gender-biased sex selection.

Trends in Sex Ratio at Birth

Starting in the 1990s, sex ratio at birth began increasing, reaching a high of 115.2 boys per 100 girls in 2004. The biological norm is 104 to 106 boys per 100 girls born. Thereafter, it started to decline, and had returned to a normal level of 105 boys per 100 girls by 2016.

This recent positive trend can be attributed to a number of factors, such as strengthened state institutions and social security, improved economic conditions, increased fertility, economic empowerment of women, and the advancement of gender equality.

Social and family norms, however, are deeply rooted in traditions and national pride and can be staunchly resistant to change. Traditional and cultural aspects of gender discrimination remain at the core of son preference. In addition, the level of public awareness on son preference and gender-biased sex selection is still limited among both citizens and national experts in the country.

Variations in son preference

Disaggregated data reveals that gender-biased sex selection still prevails under certain conditions and/or varies across different groups.

- Son preference becomes more
- visible with higher order births
- and depends on the gender
- composition of the children
- (sex ratio at birth reaches 173.8
- among families without previous
- male births at third and higher
- birth orders.

The urban-rural divide is significant. The sex ratio at birth in 2010-2014 reached a high of 111.8 boys per 100 girls in rural areas, while it was only moderately skewed, with 107.1 boys per girls (close to the natural level) in urban districts. The capital and the largest city in the country, Tbilisi, is characterized by one of the lowest sex ratio at birth (105) in 2010-2014.

Higher levels of son preference are found for Azeri and Armenian families compared with Georgian families. The absence of sons is less important among wealthier families, wage earners and families relying on social assistance.

| Region | Parity (number of births) | | | All births |
|-----------------------------------|---------------------------|-------|-------|------------|
| | 1 | 2 | 3+ | |
| Tbilisi | 104.6 | 104.1 | 109.9 | 105.3 |
| Adjara | 106.2 | 104.4 | 124.9 | 108.0 |
| Guria | 101.7 | 107.8 | 117.0 | 106.5 |
| Imereti | 106.6 | 103.9 | 116.6 | 107.1 |
| Kakheti | 109.8 | 108.7 | 133.6 | 113.2 |
| Mtskheta-Mtianeti | 107.9 | 110.0 | 110.4 | 108.6 |
| Racha-Lechkhumi and Kvemo Svaneti | 103.0 | 111.0 | 109.4 | 106.9 |
| Samegrelo-Zemo Svaneti | 104.0 | 105.7 | 113.5 | 105.9 |
| Samtskhe-Javakheti | 104.7 | 107.6 | 145.9 | 111.6 |
| Kvemo Kartli | 106.0 | 108.4 | 145.5 | 113.2 |
| Shida Kartli | 108.3 | 104.1 | 114.3 | 107.6 |

Source: UNFPA 2017

2 NATIONAL FRAMEWORKS: LAWS, POLICIES AND STRATEGIES

International Commitments

Georgia ratified the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) in 1994. CEDAW clearly defines discrimination and identifies the obligations of state parties to create more balanced individual and civil rights for society. Georgia also signed the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) and as such pledges to eliminate discrimination against the girl child, including son preference.

National Legislation and Frameworks

Georgia also identifies the principal of gender equality at the level of its national Constitution. However, Georgian laws are mainly sex-neutral, and their impact on discrimination still remains unclear. According to a Gender Assessment Report (2010)¹ prepared during the period of the most aggressive reforms of 2002-2007, a great many new laws were passed, but only very few of them were subject to gender analysis.

Law on Gender Equality: Passed in March 2010, its main purpose is to ensure that there is no discrimination in any aspect of public life.²

Law on Domestic Violence: *The Law of Georgia On Elimination of Domestic Violence, Protection and Support of Victims of Domestic Violence* was adopted in 2006 and since then several times amended and refined; it also currently covers Violence against Women.

Antidiscrimination Law: *The Law of Georgia on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination* was passed in 2014. The intent is to eliminate all forms of discrimination and ensure equal rights for every person. The law clearly defines notions of direct and indirect discrimination and determines the scope of regulation.

However, laws are not always fully enforced. For example, though heirs have equal rights to inherit the property of a descendant according to the Civic Code of Georgia, there is a widely recognized custom that gives priority to sons.

There is no separate law that regulates sex-selective abortions (only orders and protocols). The main legislative act that addresses this issue is the Protocol of Safe Termination of Pregnancy (July 2014) by the Ministry of Labour, Health and Social Affairs that determines the official procedures and system of rules applied for legal abortions. According to this protocol, terminating pregnancy on the ground of the fetus's sex is not permitted unless it is necessary to avoid sex-linked hereditary diseases.

The 2014-2020 Human Rights Strategy and the periodic Action Plans for its implementation have been adopted. These are the key policy documents of Georgia involving diverse areas of human rights and a variety of stakeholders.

National Action Plan on Gender Equality and Prevention and Combatting Violence Against Women: The newly established Inter-Agency Commission on Gender Equality, Violence Against Women and Domestic Violence is mandated to elaborate these periodic three-year plans. The Action Plan for the period 2018-2020 was developed through a participatory process with United Nations support and adopted by the Government in 2018.

Challenges to be addressed

While the sex ratio at birth has stabilized close to the biological norm, in Georgia. Several challenges must be addressed to fully prevent the harmful practice of gender-biased sex selection:

- Son preference and the importance of male lineage remain significant characteristics of Georgian society. The strong patrilineal arrangement of families enforces the greater value of sons over daughters, leading to gender discriminatory behaviour and attitudes.
- Gender discrimination practices are often attributed to Georgian/local traditions and perceived as normal, or part of the culture, which makes tackling gender-biased sex selection even more challenging.
- National legislation and policies provide a framework in line with international commitments, yet the challenge of full implementation of these laws and policies still exists due to the lack of resources and capacities.
- In certain rural areas the sex ratio at birth is extremely skewed compared with urban areas, and it will be important to close the gap between urban-rural divide.
- Low awareness of GBSS among public and government officials is another challenge. GBSS practice is not perceived as a discriminatory attitude towards girls and awareness of its harmful socio-demographic impact is still very low.

¹ Gender Assessment Report (2010), provided by USAID Georgia.

² In labour relations, education and science, health care and social security, and family relations.

3 OPPORTUNITIES AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Expanding the knowledge base

- Conduct national socio-economic policy impact analyses on son preference and gender equality;
- Conduct comprehensive analyses of cultural and traditional aspects of gender inequality, for identifying those factors and addressing them with the concrete policy measures;
- Support socio-economic, demographic and ethnographic research on understanding family dynamics, patrilineal structure and son preference;
- Identify the needs of ethnic minorities in Georgia and analyse the factors that hinder their socio-economic integration, including access to information, public health care, social and legal services;
- Support research aimed at understanding women's awareness of their rights;
- Strengthen efforts for adequate monitoring of the sex ratio at birth.

Legislative and policy measures

- Strengthen enforcement of existing laws and address factors hindering women's full enjoyment of their rights, especially in rural parts of the country;
- Implement policy measures aimed at advancing gender equality and eliminating harmful gender stereotypes and practices, specifically targeting rural areas and ethnic minority communities;
- Address cultural stereotypes that capture daughters as less valuable or less beneficial compared with sons, which are often at the root of gender discriminatory attitudes and practices;
- Ensure girls' and women's universal access to information, education and services on sexual and reproductive health and rights;
- Challenge the traditional roles of men as breadwinner and women as caretaker through initiatives to increase men's

participation in domestic life, and lessen women's "double burden" of work, e.g. with parental/paternal leave for fathers;

- Implement policy measures that support elimination of gender stereotypes in employment and professions.

Advocacy, communication and community mobilization measures

- Increase awareness of policy makers and planners, as well as civil society on gender equality and sustainable development;
- Integrate the curricula on gender equality issues and sexual and reproductive health in the formal education system;
- Implement communication campaigns to strengthen awareness of women's rights among women and the general population;
- Showcase success stories about girls and women who provide positive role models and challenge existing stereotypes;
- Implement strategies, including communication campaigns, to address integration of ethnic minorities and their access to resources;
- Advocate the ethical use of sex detection technologies through engaging relevant professional associations and support the elaboration of guidelines and recommendations.

Partnership

Ending son preference and gender-biased sex selection and fostering gender equality in Georgia and throughout the region requires partnership. It will be important to build partnership and the exchange of knowledge and experience between the countries of the South Caucasus that face the same harmful practices of gender-biased sex selection. Also, partnerships can be developed with international organizations and think tanks for joint research and the generation of new knowledge products to strengthen evidence-based advocacy and policy formulation

UNFPA Global Programme to Prevent Son Preference and Gender-biased Sex Selection

The programme will contribute to addressing the imbalance in sex ratio via strengthening evidence-based national policies and programmes to tackle son preference, low value of girls and gender inequalities resulting in gender-biased sex selection in identified countries of prevalence in Asia (Bangladesh, Nepal and Viet Nam) and the Caucasus (Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia).

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