

World Report 2023



Georgia

Events of 2022

Georgian opposition protest in Tbilisi in support of media freedom and against the sentencing of Nika Gvaramia, an anchor and owner of the pro-opposition Mtavari TV, on May 18, 2022.

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Freedom of the media suffered setbacks, with numerous attacks against media professionals and the jailing of a critical TV director. Other areas of concern included lack of accountability for law enforcement abuses, illegal surveillance, unfair labor conditions, and violence against women and lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) people.

The European Union stated that it was conditioning Georgia's candidacy for membership on progress on 12 issues, many connected to human rights.

Lack of Accountability for Law Enforcement Abuses

Impunity for abuses by law enforcement persisted. In December 2021, parliament hastily abolished the State Inspector's Service, an independent body investigating abuses by law enforcement, instead establishing two new separate bodies tasked with probing abuse of power by law enforcement and monitoring data privacy, respectively.

The sudden decision followed the opening of an investigation by the state inspector into possible ill-treatment and violations of data protection laws regarding jailed ex-President Mikheil Saakashvili. The Council of Europe commissioner for human

rights, Dunja Mijatović, [called](#) on parliament to reject the bill as it lacked “proper consultation with the relevant stakeholders [and] undermined the independent functioning of the body.”

By October, the Ombudswoman’s Office received 70 complaints of ill-treatment by prison staff or police. The authorities have been investigating 61 of them. The office petitioned the investigative body to launch investigations into the remaining cases. None had resulted in criminal prosecution at time of writing.

In January, local TV networks broadcasted video footage showing a police officer beating a 17-year-old boy with hearing disability in a metro station. One officer slapped and punched the boy several times, while another stood nearby without interfering. The state inspector’s office investigated, and a court sentenced the policeman to five years in prison in July.

In May, Giorgi Mzhavanadze, one of the leaders of Shame Movement, a youth protest group, alleged that policemen at a Tbilisi police station handcuffed and physically and verbally abused him after he arrived to collect a fine notice. The Special Investigation Service, which investigates instances of abuse of office, opened an investigation, while the Interior Ministry claimed it had detained Mzhavanadze for disobedience.

In June, parliament hastily adopted a controversial surveillance bill. Sponsored by the ruling party, the bill authorizes indefinite wiretapping and other surveillance against individuals, without notifying them, in relation to 77 offenses, which now include trafficking, inhuman or degrading treatment and drug-related crimes.

In August, the Venice Commission, an advisory body to the Council of Europe on constitutional matters, urged authorities to re-examine the legislation, stating that “covert surveillance should be seen as an exception” and should be “cautiously worded and narrowly interpreted by the state.” Georgia’s president vetoed the bill, but in September the ruling party overrode the veto.

In September, an opposition-leaning television station, TV Pirveli, published leaked materials allegedly documenting the State Security Service’s massive surveillance of opposition parties for the benefit of the ruling party. The materials show the surveillance of leading politicians in public and private settings.

Freedom of Media

In May, a court sentenced Nika Gvaramia, director of Mtavari Arkhi TV—a leading critical TV channel—

to three years and six months in prison for abuse of power over managerial decisions while he was director of another private TV company. The authorities claimed that his managerial decisions brought less profit to the company. The decision was largely criticized by Georgian civil society as unlawful and politically motivated. Georgia's public defender argued that a decision by the director of an enterprise, even a harmful one, cannot be subject to criminal liability, and called for the case to be dismissed. In November, the appeals court upheld the decision.

There were numerous attacks against journalists and instances of interference in their work. In March, several assailants attacked Ema Gogokhia, a reporter for Mtavari Arkhi, and her cameraman in Zugdidi, as they were filming municipal employees removing a drawing of the Ukrainian flag from the façade of a political party's office. The Special Investigation Service (SIS) launched an investigation into the interference.

In June, two assailants attacked TV Pirveli cameraman Murman Zoidze in Batumi. SIS arrested two people in connection with the incident.

In July, the Prosecutor's Office launched an investigation into an incident in which an MP

allegedly physically attacked TV Pirveli's founder, Vakhtang Tsereteli.

In May, three journalists fired by Georgian Public Broadcasting, the national broadcaster, accused the station's management of censorship and "gross interference" in editorial policy, particularly over materials critical of Russia. Days later, another former journalist from the station made similar accusations.

Labor Rights

Despite recent legislative improvements, fair labor conditions remain a concern in Georgia. Overtime regulations are weak, social protections are minimal, unions lack legal guarantees that would allow them to effectively bargain for systemic changes, and shortage of resources hamper the Labor Inspectorate's effectiveness.

Wages are effectively unregulated, leaving workers vulnerable to exploitation. The minimum monthly wage of 20 GEL (approximately US\$7) is 12 times lower than the subsistence minimum and has not been updated since 1999. Low wages are compounded by a workplace culture that normalizes wage theft. A [report](#) by the Georgia Fair Labor Platform, a coalition of labor unions and

nongovernmental groups, found that 88 percent of workers had experienced at least one form of wage theft.

Healthcare workers, already overworked due to the Covid-19 pandemic, have been severely impacted by wage theft. In 2022, the Labor Inspectorate found that 86 private clinics that received special funding to supplement nurses' wages had used the funds for other purposes. In a positive move, the government raised the minimum wage for nurses in public clinics.

Workplace safety also remains a problem. According to the Labor Inspectorate, [23 workers died and 230 were injured](#) in work-related accidents from January through September.

Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity

Lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) people in Georgia continue to face harassment, discrimination, and violence. In May, a group of some 30 men attacked five transgender women in their home in Tbilisi. The attackers, armed with stones and bricks, assaulted the women and their landlord, damaged their house, and made death

threats. An investigation was pending at time of writing.

In July, the Tbilisi City Court fined three people for raiding the offices of Tbilisi Pride, an LGBT rights group, during mass anti-LGBT attacks in July 2021 that led to dozens of injuries and cancellation of the Pride March. The court acquitted the defendants on more serious charges of persecution and organized group violence. In total, police detained 31 people over the violence. Courts handed prison sentences to 26 people for violence against journalists covering the events. But they failed to identify and prosecute the organizers of the mass violence.

In December 2021, the European Court of Human Rights found that in 2013, Georgia violated freedom of association and prohibitions on inhuman and degrading treatment and discrimination when authorities failed to protect peaceful demonstrators from homophobic and transphobic violence. Violent mobs attacked a group of activists trying to mark the international day against homophobia on May 17, 2013, injuring dozens.

Women's Rights

The prosecutor's office [reported](#) 13 cases of femicide and 11 attempted murders of women by family

members from January through August. Human Rights Center, a local rights group, said that courts often release on bail abusive partners, who continue to threaten the survivors.

In November 2021, the UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) [found](#) that Georgia breached several articles of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women regarding the case of Khanum Jeiranova. Jeiranova died in 2014 after experiencing public humiliation and violence by her community. CEDAW found that Georgia, *inter alia*, failed to investigate and punish those responsible for Jeiranova's ill-treatment and death, and failed to protect her from gender-based discrimination.

Key International Actors

In June, in response to Georgia's membership application, the European Council [stated](#) its intent to grant candidate status once Georgia fulfills the [12 priorities](#) identified by the European Commission. These include, *inter alia*, addressing political polarization, strengthening independence and accountability of all state institutions, ensuring an independent judiciary, guaranteeing media

independence and pluralism, protecting the rights of vulnerable groups, and enhancing gender equality rights of vulnerable groups, and enhancing gender equality.

In June the European Parliament adopted a [resolution](#) deploring the “significant deterioration” of media freedoms in Georgia, including intimidation, violence, and “politically motivated criminal investigations into media workers and owners,” and condemned Gvaramia’s imprisonment.

Also in June, the International Criminal Court (ICC) [issued](#) three arrests warrants for war crimes committed during the 2008 conflict between Georgia and Russia over South Ossetia. The warrants are against three members of the de facto South Ossetia administration on charges of unlawful confinement, torture and inhuman treatment, outrages upon personal dignity, hostage taking, and unlawful transfer. The suspects have not been apprehended and are [believed](#) to be currently in territory controlled by South Ossetian or Russian authorities. In 2023, the ICC prosecutor’s office anticipates downsizing the investigation in Georgia and focusing efforts on the execution of the three arrest warrants.

In September, the UN Human Rights Committee [urged](#) the government to investigate human rights violations and hold perpetrators accountable, step up

efforts to combat violence against women, and protect people from discrimination and violence based on sexual orientation and gender identity.

In June, US officials [expressed](#) support for the country's democratic aspirations but also "deep concern about Georgia's democratic trajectory."

Following her February visit, Dunja Mijatović, published a [report](#) urging Georgian authorities to ensure effective implementation of the anti-discrimination legislation and better protection of labor and environmental rights.