



THE OBSERVATORY
for the Protection of
Human Rights Defenders

Under Siege: How Georgia Is Dismantling Civil Society

Findings from the Observatory for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders' Field Mission



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Executive Summary and Recommendations

Since 2022, civic space in Georgia has undergone a profound and systematic contraction. Georgian civil society, which was once among the most dynamic in the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) region, is increasingly targeted through a coordinated strategy by the ruling Georgian Dream (GD) party to consolidate political control and neutralise independent oversight. For more than a decade, GD has subordinated the judiciary, weakened institutional checks and balances, and monopolised state power, leaving independent civil society organisations (CSOs), human rights defenders (HRDs) and the independent media as the main sources of accountability, and therefore the primary targets of repression.

GD's strategy combines restrictive legislation, physical assaults, financial suffocation, judicial harassment, smear campaigns and unlawful surveillance, each reinforcing the other to create a self-perpetuating environment of fear and repression. Laws such as the Foreign Agents Registration Act (FARA) and the Law on Grants impose severe restrictions on foreign-funded activities. These laws impose onerous reporting requirements which can expose the sensitive personal data of CSOs staff and beneficiaries. While FARA explicitly provides for criminal liability, the Law on Grants may indirectly result in criminal liability, as organisations can be ordered to disclose information by the courts, with non-compliance constituting a criminal offence. The selective application of defamation and media laws further contributes to a climate of legal uncertainty and may be used to restrict the activities of independent media and civil society actors.

Judicial harassment targets HRDs and journalists, including those monitoring police brutality during protests, and assisting victims of torture and arbitrary detention. These prosecutions, which are often accompanied by arbitrary detention, fines and ill-treatment, have a chilling effect across civil society, fostering self-censorship and discouraging engagement in human rights work. State-affiliated media amplify this repression through sustained smear campaigns, branding defenders as “traitors” or “foreign agents”. In some instances, harassment has extended to their families and communities. Unlawful surveillance and monitoring of private communications further enforce intimidation, limiting freedom of expression, assembly and the right to defend.

The cumulative impact of these measures has been severe. Due to unprecedented repression, CSOs and media outlets have reduced or suspended their operations, decreasing monitoring and reporting of human rights violations and depriving vulnerable populations—including minors, survivors of torture and domestic violence and LGBTQ+ individuals—of essential services. Human resources have diminished due to financial insecurity and fear of prosecution, while sustained intimidation has caused widespread psychological harm among HRDs and journalists. The repressive environment has also affected those seeking refuge in Georgia, once a safe hub for defenders. Exiled defenders from third countries now face additional risks due to the politicisation of asylum procedures and unjustified refusals, the lack of legal safeguards or an independent judicial system, and surveillance, reflecting the broader regional implications of the crackdown on Georgia's civic space.

Recommendations to States and Interstate Organisations:

- Initiate, promote and support an interstate application against Georgia for violations of relevant provisions of the European Convention on Human Rights arising from the Law on Grants, “FARA” and other repressive legislation.
- Initiate and support the launch of the OSCE Moscow Mechanism with a mandate to examine the dismantling of civil society in Georgia.
- Ensure regular and timely responses by international human rights mechanisms and governments to every new attack on civil society, HRDs and journalists.
- Support collective or individual well-being activities for civil society actors both inside Georgia and abroad.
- Ensure a visible diplomatic presence at trials of imprisoned HRDs and journalists, and at prison visits.
- Support media campaigns raising awareness of repression against civil society and reinforcing international solidarity.
- Create a flexible and simple mechanism for granting humanitarian visas and international protection to Georgian HRDs, journalists and their families.
- Expand opportunities for fellowships, internships, training and other educational programmes for Georgian HRDs to strengthen their professional skills.

I. Context

Since 2022, the human rights situation in Georgia has drastically deteriorated. Georgian civil society, which was once regarded as among the most dynamic and diverse in the OSCE region, lately, has undergone state-orchestrated harassment through restrictive legislative initiatives, disinformation campaigns, and the erosion of institutional safeguards.

This policy of harassment has been implemented by the GD party, which has been in power since 2012. For more than a decade, GD has consolidated control over all branches of government, subordinated the judiciary, and weakened checks and balances. This concentration of power has left independent CSOs, HRDs and the media as the main sources of accountability, and thus prime targets of state repression.

Between 2023 and 2025, Georgian authorities initiated or passed more than 25 legislative packages¹ which have had profound implications on civil freedoms and civic space. The most significant include the 2024 Law on Transparency of Foreign Influence, the 2025 Foreign Agents Registration Act (FARA)², and amendments to the Law on Grants. Media freedom has been further restricted through limitations on court coverage³ (amendments to the Organic Law on Common Courts) and expanded defamation provisions (amendments to the Law on Free Speech and Expression⁴). Amendments to the Code on Administrative Offences and the Criminal Code⁵ have increased sanctions for violations of the Law on Assemblies and Demonstrations, in particular, administrative penalties for road blocks and criminal liability for repeat offences, including blocks and insults directed at law enforcement officers. Other measures have excluded CSOs from public decision-making processes⁶ (amendments to the Rules of Procedure of the Parliament of Georgia) and restricted the rights of LGBTQ+ activists, including the prohibition of so-called “LGBT propaganda” and gender-affirming healthcare (Law on Family Values and Protection of Minors⁷).

In addition, existing legislation, such as the Law on Political Associations of Citizens or the Law on Broadcasting, has been applied arbitrarily against NGOs and independent media⁸. These practices have contributed to a climate of legal uncertainty and heightened vulnerability for organisations seeking to operate independently and hold authorities accountable for human rights violations.

These developments have been accompanied by a violent response to the peaceful mass protests opposing the new “foreign agent” legislation and Georgia’s unilateral suspension of the EU accession negotiations, in particular those held in May-June and November-December 2024. The government dispersed these demonstrations with excessive force⁹, carried out arbitrary arrests, torture and ill-treatment of participants, and widespread intimidation of activists, students, journalists, and HRDs.

1. OC Media, “Explainer | The 16 legislative changes that have shaped Georgia’s authoritarian slide”, 4 June 2025, <https://oc-media.org/explainer-the-16-legislative-changes-that-have-shaped-georgias-authoritarian-slide/>

2. Venice Commission, Georgia – Opinion on the Law on the Registration of Foreign Agents, the amendments to the Law on Grants and other Laws relating to “foreign influence” (CDL-AD(15)034(2025 October 2025), <https://www.coe.int/en/web/venice-commission/-/cdl-ad-034-2025e>

3. OC Media, “Georgian Dream to restrict media coverage of court trials”, 24 June 2025, <https://oc-media.org/georgian-dream-to-restrict-media-coverage-of-court-trials/>

4. Civil Georgia, “Changes to Defamation Laws Fuel Free Speech Concerns”, 25 June 2025, <https://civil.ge/archives/688298>

5. OC Media, “Georgian Dream passes laws to curb protests, ban individuals from politics”, 16 October 2025, <https://oc-media.org/georgian-dream-passes-laws-to-curb-protests-ban-individuals-from-politics/>

6. Civil Georgia, “GD Parliament to Consider Legislation Removing CSOs from Public Decision-Making,” 28 February 2025, <https://civil.ge/archives/666273>

7. Parliament of Georgia, “Parliament endorsing Bill on the Protection of Family Values and Minors in III Reading”, 17 September 2024, <https://www.parliament.ge/en/media/news/parlamentma-ojakhuri-ghirebulebebisa-da-arasrultslovanis-datsvis-shesakheb-kanonproekti-mesame-mosmenit-miigho>

8. OMCT, FIDH, Georgian Young Lawyers’ Association (GYLA), Human Rights Center (HRC) “Joint Submission to Universal Periodic Review of Georgia”, 17 July 2025, https://www.omct.org/site-resource/s/files/UPR-Report-on-Georgia_OBSERVATORY.pdf

9. OMCT, “Georgia: Stop police brutality and effectively investigate allegations of torture”, 23 May 2024, <https://www.omct.org/en/resources/statements/georgia-stop-police-brutality-and-effectively-investigate-allegations-of-torture>

The majority of Tbilisi-based human rights organisations and independent media outlets have reported incidents, including vandalism of their offices, homes, and neighbourhoods, intimidating and insulting phone calls, and coordinated smear campaigns in state-affiliated media, portraying CSOs and HRDs as “foreign agents” and “enemies of the state.” Between November 2024 and February 2025, a new wave of large-scale harassment was directed against journalists and civil society observers monitoring police conduct in the context of anti-government protests, including targeted violence by the police and arbitrary detention of journalists¹⁰.

II. Mission scope and methodology

In response to the ongoing crisis, the OMCT and FIDH, within the framework of the Observatory for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders, conducted a joint mission to Tbilisi, Georgia, in August 2025. The delegation held more than 30 meetings with relevant stakeholders and conducted 26 in-depth interviews. This included 17 in-depth interviews with Georgian human rights organisations, four interviews with exiled HRDs from other countries, three interviews with media representatives, and two interviews with human rights lawyers. Among those interviewed were organisations working with a wide range of vulnerable groups, including minors, asylum seekers, women, journalists, members of the LGBTQ+ community, victims of torture and ill-treatment, victims of domestic violence, and victims of grave human rights violations in remote rural areas.

The current findings are based on verified information collected during the mission. The report provides an overview of the toolbox used for systematic harassment of civil society by the GD authorities in 2023-2025. The report describes new restrictive legislation, criminal and administrative prosecutions, physical attacks, as well as extensive smear and intimidation campaigns against civil society actors. The findings also review how the implementation of these policies has affected different sectors of civil society, including the media and LGBTQ+ organisations, as well as their beneficiaries. In addition, the report highlights key patterns concerning the situation of exiled HRDs from third countries currently based in Georgia.

10. Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ), “CPJ condemns police brutality against journalists covering Georgian protests”, 4 December 2024, <https://cpj.org/12/2024/cpj-condemns-police-brutality-against-journalists-covering-georgian-protests/>

III. Systematic policy to dismantle civil society in Georgia

In 2025, GD authorities have used a variety of interrelated measures with the aim of dismantling civil society and closing civic space. This toolbox includes:

- **Designation as “foreign agents”:** Organisations have been required to register as “foreign agents”, a process marked by stigmatisation and onerous disclosure requirements regarding financial operations and activities, personal data of staff, contractors and beneficiaries, with criminal sanctions for failure to comply.
- **Restriction of funding:** CSOs and independent media have been deprived of access to international funding, in the absence of other significant sources of financing. Bank accounts of several well-known organisations have been frozen as part of a fabricated criminal investigation for alleged “sabotage”.
- **Judicial harassment:** HRDs, including journalists and monitors of peaceful assemblies, have been subjected to criminal and administrative prosecution.
- **Smear campaigns:** State-affiliated media and officials use extensive defamatory narratives, portraying HRDs as “foreign agents” and “traitors”, enriching themselves against the backdrop of general economic hardship. Such narratives have in some instances been used to justify hostility or violence against them¹¹.
- **Obstruction of media work:** Media outlets are subject to legal constraints exceeding the restrictive measures applied to non-governmental organisations (NGOs). Moreover, journalists are one of the most frequently targeted segments of Georgian civil society and are regularly subjected to physical attacks, fines, and the destruction of their professional equipment.
- **Pressure on family members:** Georgian authorities harass the family members of HRDs, including children, through threatening or insulting phone calls, repeated document checks, and other forms of intimidation.
- **Surveillance:** There use of surveillance practices has been reported, including the monitoring and wiretapping of mobile phone communications, contributing to an atmosphere of fear and intimidation.

The extent of repressive measures applied and resources mobilised by GD authorities suggest that these practices are intended to undermine the capacity of independent organisations, activists and the media to operate legally and effectively. They represent different facets of the same policy. Each repressive tool is detailed below.

11. See post on Dimitri Samkharadze' Facebook account, 31 May 2024: <https://www.facebook.com/dito.samkharadze/videos/423357193946251/>

A. “Foreign agent” designation

The Georgian FARA¹², which came into effect on 31 May 2025, is formally modelled on a similar US law. However, its negative impact on civil society stems from its extremely broad and discretionary interpretation by the Georgian authorities. Under FARA, any organisation or individual engaged in “political activities” for the benefit of a “foreign principal” must register as an agent with the Anti-Corruption Bureau (ACB). Unlike in the United States, where it is necessary to clearly demonstrate that foreign funding has been received and there has been action to influence the political situation under the control and for the benefit of a foreign principal, in Georgia, any activity conducted with a foreign grant or other non-financial foreign support is considered to be in the interest of a foreign principal. As a result, all NGOs, media outlets, and civil society activists are effectively considered as “foreign agents.”

Compliance or non-compliance with this law carries serious consequences¹³. Organisations registered as “foreign agents” must label all their materials and activities, appear in the ACB’s online registry, and submit extensive reports, including financial records, staff and beneficiary data, and information on activities undertaken. Under Article 6 of this law¹⁴, all data submitted, including sensitive personal information, will be made publicly accessible. Under Article 355² of the Criminal Code¹⁵, providing false or incomplete information, or failing to register, can result in fines of up to 10,000 GEL (approximately 3,150 EUR) and imprisonment of up to five years, with a statute of limitations of six years (Article 71.1.b)¹⁶.

Article 7 of the FARA establishes that heads and managers of CSOs are personally liable for failure to register. Registration requirements also formally extend to any natural person, with no explicit exemption for staff members not directly handling foreign funding. The legal experts interviewed note that, in the absence of an impartial and independent judiciary, this creates a substantial risk of arbitrary prosecution of staff alongside leadership for up to six years after their employment, particularly if they participate in activities targeted by GD authorities.

After the law entered into force, all entities were given 10 days to register as “foreign agents” in accordance with the law. Shortly after the 10-day registration deadline, in June 2025, the ACB launched inspections of eight prominent CSOs¹⁷. Based on the ACB’s motion in the framework of this inspection, Tbilisi City Court ordered the CSOs affected by inspection to disclose extensive information, including sensitive personal data of beneficiaries. While the ACB cited four laws—the Law on Combating Corruption inspections, the Law on Political Associations, the Law on Grants, and the FARA—the Court omitted FARA, requiring disclosure under the other three. Banks were also ordered to provide details of all financial transactions during the same period. The targeted organisations publicly refused to provide personal data, citing confidentiality obligations, and partially destroyed sensitive information.

By early October 2025, seven CSOs reported receiving letters notifying them of forthcoming inspections for potential FARA violations, including failure to register as “foreign agents” and the destruction of beneficiary information¹⁸. The exact number of affected organisations is unknown, as fear of reprisals may prevent disclosure.

12. OMCT, Observatory for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders: “Georgia: Adoption of the new Foreign Agents Registration Act”, 30 April 2025, <https://www.omct.org/en/resources/statements/georgia-adoption-of-the-new-foreign-agents-registration-act>

13. OMCT, OMCT, FIDH, Georgian Young Lawyers’ Association (GYLA), Human Rights Center (HRC): “Joint Submission to the Universal Periodic Review of Georgia”, 17 July 2025, https://www.omct.org/site-resources/files/UPR-Report-on-Georgia_OBSERVATORY.pdf

14. International Labour Organization (ILO), “Law of Georgia: Foreign Agents Registration Act” (English translation), 1 April 2025, <https://natlex.ilo.org/dyn/natlex2/natlex2/files/download/117844/GEO28%20%117844-EN29%.pdf>

15. Venice Commission, “Georgia – Law on Foreign Agents Registration, amendments to the Law on Grants and other Laws relating to “foreign influence” (CDL-REF(30 „(027(2025 July 2025, <https://www.venice.coe.int/webforms/documents/?pdf=CDL-REF-29027%282025%e>

16. Legislationline.org, OSCE/ODIHR Database of legal reviews and legislation, *Criminal Code of Georgia*, 22 June 1999 with further amendments, https://legislationline.org/sites/default/files/documents/b7/GEO_CC_July202021%.eng.pdf

17. OMCT, Observatory for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders: “Georgia: Tbilisi City Court freezes bank accounts of seven further leading civil society organisations amid unfounded investigations for ‘sabotage’”, 29 August 2025, <https://www.omct.org/en/resources/urgent-interventions/georgia-tbilisi-city-court-freezes-bank-accounts-of-seven-further-leading-civil-society-organisations-amid-unfounded-investigations-for-sabotage>

18. Social Justice Center, “Georgian Dream continues its persecution of civil society organisations – Social Justice Center publishes the written explanation submitted to the ACB Bureau”, 22 August 2025, <https://socialjustice.org.ge/en/products/kartuli-otsneba-agrdzelebs-samokalako-sazogadoebis-organizatsiebis-devnas-sotsialuri-samartlianobis-tsentri-antikoruftsiul-biuroshi-gagzavnili-tserilobiti-ganmartebis-teksts-akveqnebs>

B. Restriction of funding

The human rights organisations and media representatives we interviewed reported that the amendments to the Law on Grants¹⁹, which came into effect on 12 June 2025, have had the most significant impact on their work. Unlike the previous regulatory framework, the amended law prohibits Georgian NGOs and media outlets from receiving new grants or amending existing agreements after 16 April 2025 without prior government authorisation.

Article 5 of this Law prohibits legal entities and individuals from receiving almost any financial and or non-financial support, such as technical assistance, from international donors without government approval. To obtain such approval, donors must first submit a draft agreement to the Government of Georgia or a person/body designated by it. The Government or designated person/body may request additional details on planned activities and sensitive information about beneficiaries²⁰, and will issue a decision within 10 days. Grounds for refusal are not clearly defined; projects are assessed against “state interests” and government strategies²¹. Appeals are possible, but do not suspend the decision. The ACB is responsible for overseeing and implementing the law.

As a result, foreign-funded training and professional development activities, procurement of services, security equipment or software, and expert, advocacy or legal assistance for independent NGOs and media are effectively outlawed.²² Under the law, any free financial or in-kind support from foreign entities²³, such as private donations from legal entities, is treated as a grant, even if it is not so in nature. Unauthorised recipients may face fines amounting to double the value of the support, while the ACB can freeze bank accounts, demand information, and question beneficiaries.

Given the lack of independence of the ACB and the judiciary, which are both under the control of the ruling GD party, these amendments in practice prevent independent NGOs and media reporting on human rights from lawfully receiving any form of grant or technical assistance.

Accordingly, all the organisations we interviewed reported that they suspended all ongoing negotiations on new grants following the entry into force of these amendments, and were forced to decline grants that had been previously agreed. Reportedly, several international donors also announced the suspension of funding for Georgian NGOs due to the political and financial risks arising from the new procedure. For instance, in July 2025, Georgian Prime Minister Irakli Kobakhidze accused the Embassy of the United Kingdom in Georgia of financing extremism and propaganda²⁴, after it requested approval to make a grant for human rights work and electoral monitoring.

As of early October 2025, the ACB has ordered more than 60 NGOs and media outlets to submit extensive and sensitive information regarding their financial operations, sources of funding, and activities within a three-day timeframe²⁵. Organisations may be ordered by the courts to disclose this information, with non-compliance constituting a criminal offence. The organisations targeted include ones which have not undertaken any projects in recent years, and ones which are not engaged in any politically sensitive activities. This development illustrates the broad and indiscriminate nature of recent administrative measures directed against independent civil society and media actors in Georgia.

19. Venice Commission, CDL-REF(2025)027.

20. Legislative Herald of Georgia, *Resolution No. 250, On approving the rules and conditions for entering into an agreement with the Government of Georgia regarding the issuance of a grant by a foreign donor*, 7 July 2025, <https://matsne.gov.ge/ka/document/view/6563350?publication=0>

21. Resolution No. 250

22. Grants designated for sports and academic research purposes are the only exceptions to the requirement of prior government approval

23. Venice Commission, CDL-REF(2025)027.

24. Georgian News, “Kobakhidze: British Embassy planned to fund extremism, we refused”, 24 July 2025, <https://sakartvelosambebi.ge/en/news/kobakhidze-british-embassy-planned-to-fund-extremism-we-refused>

25. Organised Crime and Corruption Reporting Project (OCCRP), “Georgia Targets Media and NGOs With Donor Disclosure Demands”, 30 September 2025, <https://www.occrp.org/en/news/georgia-targets-media-and-ngos-with-donor-disclosure-demands>

Alongside restrictions on new grants under the Law on Grants, amendments to the Law on Broadcasting²⁶ prohibit Radio and TV broadcasters from receiving foreign funding, ban social advertisements, and bar foreign entities from purchasing broadcasting services.

In another move to restrict funding, in March²⁷ and August²⁸ 2025, Georgian authorities froze the bank accounts of 12 NGOs, including six human rights organisations, as part of a criminal investigation based on fabricated sabotage charges. The affected organisations were the Civil Society Foundation, Sapari, the Social Justice Center, the Institute for the Development of Freedom of Information, Human Rights House Tbilisi, and the Shame Movement.

C. Judicial harassment

The Observatory for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders (The Observatory) documented several cases of criminal prosecution of HRDs and journalists in Georgia. The recent legislative changes create the conditions for massive, politically-motivated prosecutions of civil society representatives. Since many of them have already been called to appear as witnesses in criminal cases, their status can subsequently be changed to accused.

The Observatory has documented three cases of criminal prosecution:

- 1. Mzia Amaglobeli²⁹**, a prominent Georgian journalist, and founder and director of independent Georgian news outlets Batumelebi and Netgazeti, was sentenced to two years' imprisonment under Article 351(1) of the Criminal Code for slapping a police officer.
- 2. Nino Datashvili³⁰**, a grassroots human rights activist, actively participated in monitoring politically-motivated trials. She faces up to seven years in prison for alleged violence against representatives of the authorities under Section 3, Article 353 of the Criminal Code. On 29 October 2025, in light of a marked deterioration in her health, the Tbilisi city court replaced Nino's pre-trial detention with bail, following a four-month period in custody³¹.
- 3. Zviad Tsetskhladze³²**, a founder and leader of the youth pro-European movement, Dafioni, was charged with "participation in violent group activity" under Article 226 of the Criminal Code. On 2 September 2025, the Tbilisi City Court sentenced him to two-and-a-half years' imprisonment³³.

26. 1 TV Georgia, "Georgia Parliament approves Law on Broadcasting banning foreign funding for media outlets", 1 April 2025, <https://1tv.ge/lang/en/news/parliament-approves-law-on-broadcasting-banning-foreign-funding-for-media-outlets>

27. OMCT, Observatory for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders: "Georgia: Bank accounts of several human rights organisations frozen", 28 March 2025, <https://www.omct.org/en/resources/urgent-interventions/georgia-bank-accounts-of-several-human-rights-organisations-frozen>

28. OMCT, Observatory for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders: "Georgia: Tbilisi City Court freezes bank accounts of seven further leading civil society organisations amid unfounded investigations for 'sabotage'", 29 August 2025, <https://www.omct.org/en/resources/urgent-interventions/georgia-tbilisi-city-court-freezes-bank-accounts-of-seven-further-leading-civil-society-organisations-amid-unfounded-investigations-for-sabotage>

29. OMCT, Observatory for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders: "Georgia: Continued arbitrary detention of journalist Mzia Amaglobeli", 21 February 2025, <https://www.omct.org/en/resources/urgent-interventions/georgia-continued-arbitrary-detention-of-journalist-mzia-amaglobeli>

30. MCT, Observatory for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders: "Georgia: Arbitrary detention and judicial harassment of pro-democracy activist Nino Datashvili", 2 September 2025, <https://www.omct.org/en/resources/urgent-interventions/georgia-arbitrary-detention-and-judicial-harassment-of-pro-democracy-activist-nino-datashvili>

31. OC Media, Georgian activist freed on bail after deterioration in health, 29 October 2025, <https://oc-media.org/georgian-activist-freed-on-bail-after-deterioration-in-health/>

32. OMCT, Observatory for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders: "Georgia: End the arbitrary detention of human rights defender Zviad Tsetskhladze", 25 July 2025, <https://www.omct.org/en/resources/urgent-interventions/georgia-end-the-arbitrary-detention-of-human-rights-defender-zviad-tsetskhladze>

33. Civil Georgia, "Georgian Dream Parliament approves Mdinardze as Georgia's Security Chief," 2 September 2025, <https://civil.ge/archives/698450>

D. Smear campaigns

All HRDs interviewed emphasised that, alongside restrictive legislation, state-sponsored propaganda and hate speech by state officials and pro-government media constitute some of the most damaging tools against civil society in Georgia.

Senior state officials—including Prime Minister Irakli Kobakhidze, Members of Parliament, and representatives of the executive—have been directly involved in these information attacks. The ruling GD party employs the full spectrum of media platforms, including television, radio, online outlets, and social media, for this purpose.

In May 2023, Meta removed a network of fake social media accounts linked to the Government of Georgia's Department of Strategic Communications⁴¹. According to Meta, the actors behind the network attempted to conceal their identities and coordination. The network was particularly active during protests against the proposed "foreign agents" law, responding in real time to events, including late at night. Approximately 33,500 USD (29,000 EUR) was spent on paid advertising to amplify the operation's reach.

Several HRDs reported that their organisations' social media pages and their personal accounts suffered coordinated bot attacks, which mobilised real supporters of the ruling party to join the harassment. One NGO documented that more than 100 defamatory articles and television segments targeting their organisation were disseminated across major state-controlled media outlets within a single week of August 2025.

The smear narratives⁴² used accuse civil society actors of being "traitors of the state," "neo-fascists"⁴³ and neo-Nazis," "agents of hostile foreign powers undermining Georgia's sovereignty"⁴⁴, "corrupt elites enriching themselves through hostile actions against their own country and people," of "selling their homeland for money," and "destroying traditional values and promoting the moral corruption of youth," etc.

These narratives serve to demonise and delegitimise civil society actors. State propaganda has also openly justified violence and repression against pro-democracy and human rights activists. For example, in May 2024, three waves of coordinated vandalism targeted the offices of multiple human rights organisations and media outlets⁴⁵, as well as the homes and personal vehicles of their staff⁴⁶. Graffiti and posters bearing defamatory and offensive messages were affixed to buildings and vehicles in Tbilisi, and several regional locations. Posters featured photographs of organisation leaders, explicitly naming individual HRDs and accusing them of "selling out" and being "traitors." GD Member of Parliament Dito Samkharadze praised these attacks on his Facebook page, admitting his own involvement⁴⁷. Law enforcement authorities failed to issue a response or launch an investigation.

In Tbilisi, such messaging can be partially countered by independent media sources. However, in the regions—particularly in remote rural areas where access to information is limited and the population relies predominantly on state-controlled media—these campaigns expose civic activists to stigmatisation, social ostracism, and even risks of physical violence. Polling data reflects the consequences: public scepticism of NGOs has increased from approximately 23% in 2021 to 32% in 2024.

41. Meta Platforms, Inc., *Quarterly Adversarial Threat Report, Q2023 1*, <https://about.fb.com/wp-content/uploads/06/2023/Meta-Quarterly-Adversarial-Threat-Report-Q2023-1.pdf>

42. Civic IDEA, "NGO supporting statement: The authorities try to create an 'enemy image' by attacking civil society organisations", 24 January 2024, <https://cividea.ge/en/the-authorities-try-to-create-an-enemy-image-by-attacking-civil-society-organizations/>

43. See post on Facebook account Dimitri Samkharadze, 31 May 2024: <https://www.facebook.com/dito.samkharadze/videos/423357193946251/>

44. Civil Georgia, "Kobakhidze on Protests, 'Failed Maidan' and Hopes for 'Complete Reset' with US", 3 December 2024, <https://civil.ge/archives/641000>

45. Front Line Defenders, "Defamation and Intimidation Attacks against Human Rights Defenders in Georgia must be investigated", 10 May 2024, at <https://www.frontlinedefenders.org/en/statement-report/defamation-and-intimidation-attacks-against-human-rights-defenders-georgia-must-be>

46. Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, "Opponents of Georgia's 'Foreign Agent' Law Accuse Government of Targeting Them in Campaign of Intimidation", 6 June 2024, <https://www.rferl.org/a/georgia-opposition-government-campaign-intimidation/32981730.html>

47. See post on Facebook account Dimitri Samkharadze, 31 May 2024: <https://www.facebook.com/dito.samkharadze/videos/423357193946251/>

E. Obstruction of media work

Media outlets in Georgia are subject to the same restrictive legislative environment as civil society at large. According to interviewed media representatives, the recent amendments to the Law on Freedom of Speech and Expression, which particularly affects media outlets, have had a significant chilling effect on independent journalism. These amendments⁴⁸:

- shift the burden of proof in defamation proceedings from the claimant to the defendant, requiring the media outlet or individual journalist to prove that a contested statement is *not* defamatory;
- redefine defamation so that claimants are no longer required to demonstrate actual harm; and
- abolish several qualified privilege defences, including the public interest defence and the defence of having taken reasonable steps to verify accuracy.

Stakeholders stressed that these changes make it much easier for public officials to bring defamation suits against media actors and are already contributing to a climate of heightened self-censorship.

Another concerning measure is the June 2025 amendment to the Organic Law on Common Courts, which prohibits all video and audio-recording as well as photography on court premises. Credible reports indicate that in some instances security guards have prevented independent journalists from accessing court buildings and courtyards on the basis that they were in possession of video cameras. Independent media consider the public scrutiny of politically sensitive trials to be one of their core functions; the ban therefore, undermines transparent reporting on judicial proceedings.

Between January 2024 and October 2025, at least 542 cases⁴⁹ of harassment and intimidation targeting journalists and media outlets were documented by the Center for Media, Information and Social Research (CMIS), including incidents affecting at least 177 women working in the media sector. These incidents included a minimum of 154 cases of physical violence, as well as systematic practices such as the damage of professional equipment, verbal abuse, threats, and unlawful interference with journalistic activities. Some journalists were reportedly subjected to attacks on multiple occasions. During the first half of September 2025 alone, at least six journalists⁵⁰ were attacked by police officers or by supporters of the ruling GD party—encouraged by government propaganda—while covering anti-government protests. These journalists were clearly identified as members of the press, wearing badges and presenting press credentials. One journalist required hospital treatment for injuries sustained.

Several media workers reported that some colleagues are unwilling to continue on-site coverage of demonstrations, following injuries and psychological trauma experienced during the November–December 2024 protests. In addition, at least nine foreign journalists were denied entry to Georgia between October 2024 and mid-September 2025, reportedly because of their previous reporting on anti-government protests.

48. The Committee to Protect Journalists, *Joint Submission by the Committee to Protect Journalists and Media Advocacy Coalition (Georgia) for the 51st Session of the Universal Periodic Review Working Group, January–February 17, 2026* July 2025: <https://cpj.org/wp-content/uploads/07/2025/Georgia-UPR-joint-submission-CPJ-MAC.pdf>

49. The Center for Media, Information and Social Research, "Violations of Female Journalists' Rights", 29 October 2025. <https://cmis.ge/en/violations-of-female-journalists-rights/>

50. The Committee to Protect Journalists, "In Georgia, 6 journalists attacked, robbed while covering protests", 10 September 2025. <https://cpj.org/09/2025/in-georgia-6-journalists-attacked-robbed-while-covering-protests/>

F. Other forms of intimidation and harassment

Interviews conducted for this report reveal a marked escalation in intimidation of HRDs and their relatives since May 2024. These practices go beyond ordinary public criticism and raise serious concerns about the security and well-being of HRDs.

Several defenders reported receiving numerous anonymous threats of murder, rape and physical assault by telephone and through social media during 2024 and 2025. Interviewees consistently reported the harassment of their relatives, including children. One HRD stated that between 2024 and 2025, police officers stopped his underage son on five or six occasions to check his identity documents and photograph him. During the same period, the defender's elderly parents received anonymous telephone calls in which the callers, using aggressive language, accused their son of being a "traitor". In June 2025, the United Nations Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders noted that the Government of Georgia had not responded to her formal communication concerning threatening telephone calls made in 2024 to the relatives of another female HRD.

Defenders described long-standing and continuing practices of unlawful surveillance by Georgian security services, including the interception of telephone communications and unauthorised access to private messaging platforms such as Facebook Messenger and WhatsApp. Confirmed large-scale incidents of wiretapping were documented back in 2021 and 2022⁵¹. A journalist interviewed for this report stated that in May 2024, representatives of a state-controlled media outlet telephoned her and accurately repeated the content of a recent private conversation between her two colleagues. In another incident, state-aligned journalists arrived at the venue of a planned meeting of independent media representatives, which had been mentioned only during an internal phone call before. These incidents indicate that information obtained through unlawful interception was subsequently used to exert psychological pressure on civil society and independent media actors.

IV. Situation of exiled HRDs from third countries

For decades, Georgia was widely recognised as a regional leader in democratisation and the protection of human rights. It became an important hub and transit point for hundreds of HRDs from across Eastern Europe and Central Asia, including Belarus, Azerbaijan, Russia, Uzbekistan and Tajikistan. However, the country's deepening political and human rights crisis has significantly weakened a safe and reliable situation for those fleeing persecution.

Interviews conducted for this report suggest that Georgian authorities do not typically target defenders from other countries, unless they participate in anti-government protests or report on such events as journalists. Yet the erosion of the rule of law, the weakening of judicial independence, the rise of radical anti-European rhetoric and a prevailing climate of impunity for serious human rights violations have created an environment that is increasingly unpredictable and inhospitable for exiled defenders.

Azerbaijani HRDs are particularly exposed owing to close cooperation between the security services of Georgia and Azerbaijan. Several well-documented cases underscore this vulnerability: the abduction

⁵¹. Media Advocacy Coalition (MAC), "Illegal surveillance of media representatives in Georgia", 10 April 2023, <https://mediacoalition.ge/en/illegal-surveillance-of-media-representatives-in-georgia/>.

and forcible return of journalist **Afgan Mukhtarli**⁵² to Azerbaijan in 2017; reports of surveillance and threats directed at journalists at the Institute for the Protection of Rights and Freedoms in 2023; and the detention of journalist **Afgan Sadigov**⁵³ at Azerbaijan's request in 2024. Sadigov was released only after the European Court of Human Rights ordered interim measures, eight months after his arrest.

Roughly 80 Belarusian HRDs and grassroots activists, who fled to Georgia, face other challenging obstacles. Experts interviewed for this report were not aware of a single positive decision on asylum applications submitted by Belarusian human rights or political activists. Unable to obtain asylum, many depend on Georgia's visa-free regime. It permits a stay of up to one year but requires individuals to leave and re-enter the country to maintain legal residence. This practice has become increasingly difficult since Belarusian authorities stopped issuing or renewing passports through their consulates abroad, leaving many activists with expired documents, preventing them from crossing borders to extend their legal stay in Georgia. The situation is further complicated by widespread refusals of visas by European Union Member States, particularly Poland and Lithuania, which severely limit opportunities for onward relocation. As a result, many Belarusian HRDs are effectively trapped in Georgia with an irregular status that carries a high risk of deportation and denies them access to basic services, such as banking and healthcare. Interviewees emphasised the heavy psychological toll of this uncertainty; in one documented case, the combination of an asylum refusal and the impossibility of securing a European visa triggered a serious relapse of post-traumatic stress disorder, driven by fear of forced return to Belarus.

Concerns about access and re-entry extend beyond Belarusian defenders. Interviewed civil society experts indicated that high-profile defenders and journalists residing in Georgia face an ongoing risk of being denied re-entry, a concern echoed by the United Nations Special Rapporteur on the situation of HRDs following her 2023 visit⁵⁴. In August 2025, Georgian border authorities refused entry to prominent Uzbek blogger **Miraziz Bazarov**⁵⁵ and members of his family, who had fled persecution in Uzbekistan and were living in Georgia. In September 2024, Belarusian journalist **Andrei Mialeshka** and Armenian journalist **Arsen Kharatyan** were similarly denied entry without proper grounds⁵⁶. One female Belarusian human rights defender reported being subjected to increasingly lengthy and intrusive questioning each time she crosses the Georgian border; by 2025, the interrogations had become so detailed that she cancelled several important advocacy trips abroad for fear of being refused re-entry.

52. Human Rights Watch (HRW), "Georgia/Azerbaijan: Journalist Kidnapped Across Border", 31 May 2017, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2017/05/31/georgia/azerbaijan-journalist-kidnapped-across-border>

53. European Human Rights Advocacy Centre (EHRAC), "Azerbaijan/Georgia: Afgan Sadigov released after ECHR interim measures", 16 April 2025, https://ehrac.org.uk/en_gb/azerbaijan-georgia-afgan-sadigov-released-interim-measures-press-freedom/?fbclid=IwY2xjawMxGDNleHRuA2FibQlxMABicmlkETfYRHFaZzhrODhLRHhwNnp5AR4WiJkjc2O4A_tadw9qRPcpl3qlFeilF9U24zHm1EksmLsGSftz0vvgPQ8Q_aem_4RrotFOTI-8ie7tV8QWhQ

54. United Nations, "Preliminary Observations and Recommendations of the Special Rapporteur on the Situation of Human Rights Defenders – Visit to Georgia, 30 October–7 November 2023", 2023 November 2023, https://georgia.un.org/sites/default/files/11-2023/Statement_Eng.pdf?fbclid=IwAR19wpBBvsVY4viSp_iztEfEV6eyC33BCHZticZqOMl6lST0ryDTSctqOoY

55. Mapping Media Freedom (MMF), "Uzbek blogger and activist barred from entering Georgia", 27 July 2025, <https://www.mapmf.org/alert/33672>

56. International Federation of Journalists (IFJ), "Georgia: Exiled Belarusian journalist and Armenian journalist denied entry without explanation", 17 September 2024, <https://www.ifj.org/media-centre/news/detail/category/press-releases/article/georgia-exiled-belarusian-journalist-and-armenian-journalist-denied-entry-without-explanation>

V. Impact on civil society and its beneficiaries

This ongoing crisis is having a profound, multifaceted impact on the institutional capacity of Georgian civil society, the well-being of HRDs, and the thousands of people who depend on their services. Severe financial constraints, combined with the impossibility of operating lawfully within the current legal framework, have forced many CSOs and independent media to lose highly qualified staff. One organisation reported a reduction of approximately 40% of its personnel. This outflow is driven not only by the inability to pay salaries but also by the very real risk of criminal prosecution for carrying out legitimate professional duties.

All the organisations we interviewed confirmed they had been forced to cancel previously planned activities. These included advocacy initiatives aimed at strengthening state policies for the protection of vulnerable groups, legal counselling for victims of human rights violations, fact-checking work, and human rights monitoring across multiple sectors. Several groups also reported cancelling training programmes for civic activists and human rights education activities in universities. This has weakened both the preparation of new, skilled personnel for the sector and public awareness of human rights among the broader population and government officials.

The situation in the Georgia's regions has become even more dire. The cumulative impact of the aforementioned challenges has led the majority of regional CSOs to suspend their activities, including those documenting human rights violations and delivering services to victims. National CSOs operating regional branches have likewise been forced to close them. One organisation interviewed, which provides essential services to vulnerable groups, reported having to shut down offices in five regions of Georgia, including remote areas that remain unserved by other human rights groups.

The crisis has likewise taken a severe toll on the personal well-being of HRDs and journalists. Several interviewees explained that, in the face of possible criminal charges, their organisations had suspended all financial operations, including the payment of salaries. Given that salaries in Georgia's civil society sector have always been low, most interviewees stated that they have little or no savings. Defenders from socially vulnerable groups, such as single parents, parents of children with disabilities and individuals with serious health conditions, are at greater risk. In one documented case, a female journalist who is a single mother reported that she could no longer afford to provide food for her underage daughter.

Beyond financial hardship, aggressive smear campaigns accompanied by threats, intimidation, and systematic efforts to delegitimise defenders within their own communities, have caused severe emotional distress and, in some cases, post-traumatic stress disorder and secondary trauma diagnosed by qualified medical personnel. One defender suffered a heart attack after posters with stigmatising messaging were placed near his home and office, and his relatives were intimidated by police. Many others described persistent anxiety, physical and emotional exhaustion, difficulty concentrating, disturbed sleep and appetite, hand tremors, hypervigilance when receiving calls from unknown numbers, and a daily fear of arrest or of security forces raiding their offices or homes. Prolonged exposure to this level of pressure risks creating a form of collective trauma within Georgia's human rights community.

The repercussions are equally serious for beneficiaries of CSO programmes. Thousands of individuals who previously relied on CSOs for legal, psychosocial, rehabilitation, educational and other essential services now face heightened risks. A particular concern is the possible disclosure of sensitive personal, medical or financial data, including information about protesters, survivors of domestic or sexual violence, minors, people with mental health conditions and LGBTQ+ individuals. One organisation reported that the ACB had requested the personal data of participants in training sessions for HRDs and journalists from neighbouring authoritarian states—information that, if made

public, would likely expose those participants to persecution, including possible detention and torture, in their home countries. Similarly, disclosing the identities of survivors of torture or domestic violence who have received legal assistance could place them at risk of reprisals and renewed abuse. Another organisation documented a case where, even before the adoption of FARA, the authorities had demanded beneficiary data, resulting in the exposure of an individual receiving support for a mental health condition.

Beyond the danger of disclosing sensitive data, beneficiaries risk losing access to essential services traditionally provided by CSOs, for which there are often no viable alternatives. One organisation reported a surge in requests for assistance following the adoption of the FARA, as other groups were forced to suspend their work. Conversely, another organisation observed a decline in requests, noting that many people are now reluctant to approach CSOs because of the growing stigmatisation of civil society actors.

Establishing the facts Investigative and trial observation missions – Through activities ranging from sending trial observers to organising international investigative missions, FIDH has developed rigorous and impartial procedures to establish facts and responsibility.

Experts sent to the field give their time to FIDH on a voluntary basis.

FIDH has conducted more than 1,500 missions in over 100 countries in the past 25 years. These activities reinforce FIDH's alert and advocacy campaigns.

Supporting civil society Training and exchanges – FIDH organises numerous activities in partnership with its member organisations, in the countries in which they are based. The core aim is to strengthen the influence and capacity of human rights activists to boost changes at the local level. Mobilising the international community

Permanent lobbying before intergovernmental bodies – FIDH supports its member organisations and local partners in their efforts before intergovernmental organisations. FIDH alerts international bodies to violations of human rights and refers individual cases to them. FIDH also takes part in the development of international legal instruments.

Informing and reporting Mobilising public opinion – FIDH informs and mobilises public opinion. Press releases, press conferences, open letters to authorities, mission reports, urgent appeals, petitions, campaigns, website... FIDH makes full use of all means of communication to raise awareness of human rights violations.

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Created in 1985, the World Organisation Against Torture (OMCT) works for, with and through an international coalition of over 200 non-governmental organisations - the SOS-Torture Network - fighting torture, summary executions, enforced disappearances, arbitrary detentions, and all other cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment or punishment in the world and fighting for the protection of human rights defenders.

Assisting and supporting victims

OMCT supports victims of torture to obtain justice and reparation, including rehabilitation. This support takes the form of legal, medical and social emergency assistance, submitting complaints to regional and international human rights mechanisms and urgent interventions. OMCT pays particular attention to certain categories of victims, such as women and children.

Preventing torture and fighting against impunity

Together with its local partners, OMCT advocates for the effective implementation, on the ground, of international standards against torture. OMCT is also working for the optimal use of international human rights mechanisms, in particular the United Nations Committee Against Torture, so that it can become more effective.

Protecting human rights defenders

Often those who defend human rights and fight against torture are threatened. That is why OMCT places their protection at the heart of its mission, through alerts, activities of prevention, advocacy and awareness raising as well as direct support.

Accompanying and strengthening organisations in the field

OMCT provides its members with the tools and services that enable them to carry out their work and strengthen their capacity and effectiveness in the fight against torture. OMCT presence in Tunisia is part of its commitment to supporting civil society in the process of transition to the rule of law and respect for the absolute prohibition of torture.

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THE OBSERVATORY

Activities of the Observatory

The Observatory is an action programme based on the belief that strengthened cooperation and solidarity among human rights defenders and their organisations will contribute to break the isolation they are faced with. It is also based on the absolute necessity to establish a systematic response from NGOs and the international community to the repression of which defenders are victims.

With this aim, the Observatory seeks to establish:

- > A mechanism of systematic alert of the international community on cases of harassment and repression of defenders of human rights and fundamental freedoms, particularly when they require urgent intervention;
- > The observation of judicial proceedings, and whenever necessary, direct legal assistance;
- > International missions of investigation and solidarity;
- > A personalised assistance as concrete as possible, including material support, with the aim of ensuring the security of the defenders victims of serious violations;
- > The preparation, publication and world-wide dissemination of reports on violations of the rights and freedoms of individuals or organisations working for human rights around the world;
- > Sustained action with the United Nations and more particularly the Special Rapporteur on Human Rights Defenders, and when necessary with geographic and thematic Special Rapporteurs and Working Groups;
- > Sustained lobbying with various regional and international intergovernmental institutions, especially the Organisation of American States (OAS), the African Union (AU), the European Union (EU), the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), the Council of Europe, the International Organisation of the Francophonie (OIF), the Commonwealth, the League of Arab States, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and the International Labour Organisation (ILO).

The Observatory's activities are based on consultation and co-operation with national, regional, and international non-governmental organisations.

With efficiency as its primary objective, the Observatory has adopted flexible criteria to examine the admissibility of cases that are communicated to it, based on the "operational definition" of human rights defenders adopted by FIDH and OMCT: "Each person victim or at risk of being the victim of reprisals, harassment or violations, due to his or her commitment, exercised individually or in association with others, in conformity with international instruments of protection of human rights, to the promotion and realisation of the rights recognised by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and guaranteed by the different international instruments".

To ensure its activities of alert and mobilisation, the Observatory has established a system of communication devoted to defenders in danger.

This system, called Emergency Line, can be reached through:

E-MAIL: alert@observatoryfordefenders.org

FIDH TEL: + 33 1 43 55 25 18

OMCT TEL: + 41 22 809 49 39



More meetings