



UfU Independent Institute
for Environmental Issues



CIVIC SPACE FOR PARTICIPATION IN CLIMATE POLICIES IN GEORGIA (UPDATE 2023)



Imprint

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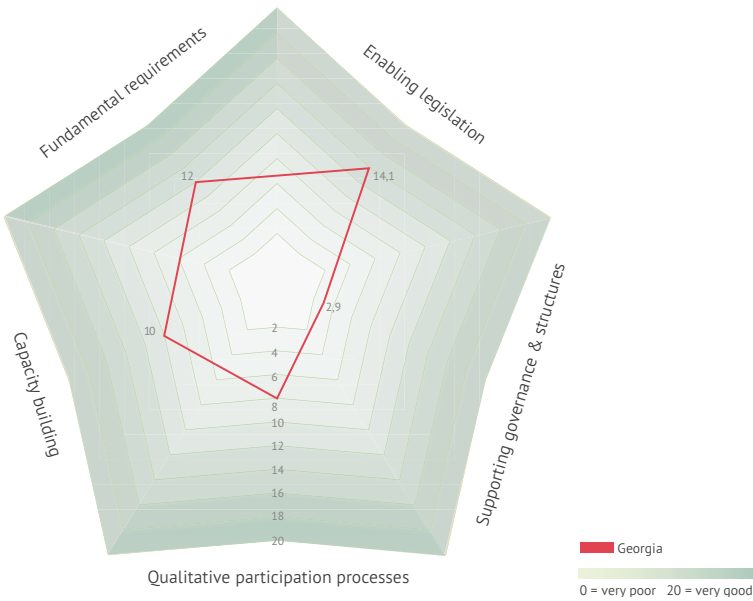
1 Summary

The study examines the status and conditions of climate-related participation and specific examples of participatory policy-making in Georgia. It aims to assess the extent of civil society involvement in national policy processes related to the Paris Agreement, and to identify barriers to meaningful and effective participation. The study also provides recommendations on how to overcome these barriers. Based on a standardised evaluation scheme (Appendix), the civic space for participation in climate policies was assessed as shown in Figure 1.

Georgia, a non-Annex I Party to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) since 1994, ratified the Kyoto Protocol in 1999. In 2017, the country approved the Paris Agreement and acceded to the Doha Amendment to the Kyoto Protocol in 2020. In 2020, Georgia submitted a revised Nationally Determined Contribution (NDC) to the UNFCCC. Despite these commitments, concrete action on climate change mitigation and adaptation in Georgia remains insufficient. The impacts of climate change are already clearly visible in the country. Civil society organisations (CSOs) and other civic actors have a crucial role to play in advocating for ambitious climate goals and pushing for the implementation of effective measures. A strong civil society is a fundamental pillar of a democratic country. The study shows that Georgia has a fairly active civil society, but only a few organisations work on issues such as climate change, emissions reduction and renewable energy. According to the Civicus Monitor, the overall civic space in Georgia can be described as “narrowed”. The study shows that participation rights are enshrined in primary and secondary legislation at the national level. In addition, institutional bodies such as the Environmental Protection and Natural Resources Committee, the Environmental Information and Education Centre (EIEC) or the Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum support dialogue and engagement between civil society and government on environmental and climate policy issues. The government has made efforts to involve civil society actors in key processes, including the development and review of the NDC, the National Energy and Climate Plan and the National Waste Management Strategy. Public and sectoral consultations and stakeholder engagement have taken place. However, there is still a need to improve the involvement of civil society in Georgia. Strengthening civil society participation can increase citizens’ trust in public decision-making processes and improve their legitimacy, fairness, transparency, inclusiveness and responsiveness. It can also provide decision-makers with valuable local expertise and information on people’s preferences, facilitating the reconciliation of conflicting interests. Particular attention should be paid to the participation of youth and women. It is therefore important that the government takes its responsibility seriously and provides appropriate and diverse formats to meaningfully engage civil society in policy processes. Especially for the next update of the NDC in 2025, it is crucial to expand existing formats, develop a detailed engagement plan and timeline and strengthen deliberative democracy. Another key recommendation is to secure and expand funding for civil society organisations. Resources should also be made available to enable CSOs to evaluate the implementation of the strategies and plans developed. Theoretical commitments are one side of the coin, implementation is the other. In addition,

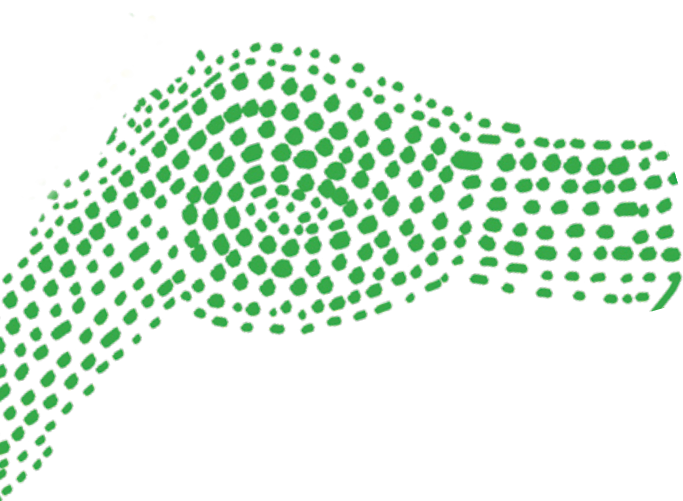
there is a need for further capacity building within the administration and the political sphere on how to successfully implement public participation. Finally, it is also important to strengthen support for and trust in civil society organisations among the society through information and success stories.

Figure 1: Assessment of the civic space for participation in climate policies in Georgia (scaled to a maximum of 20 points per criterion)



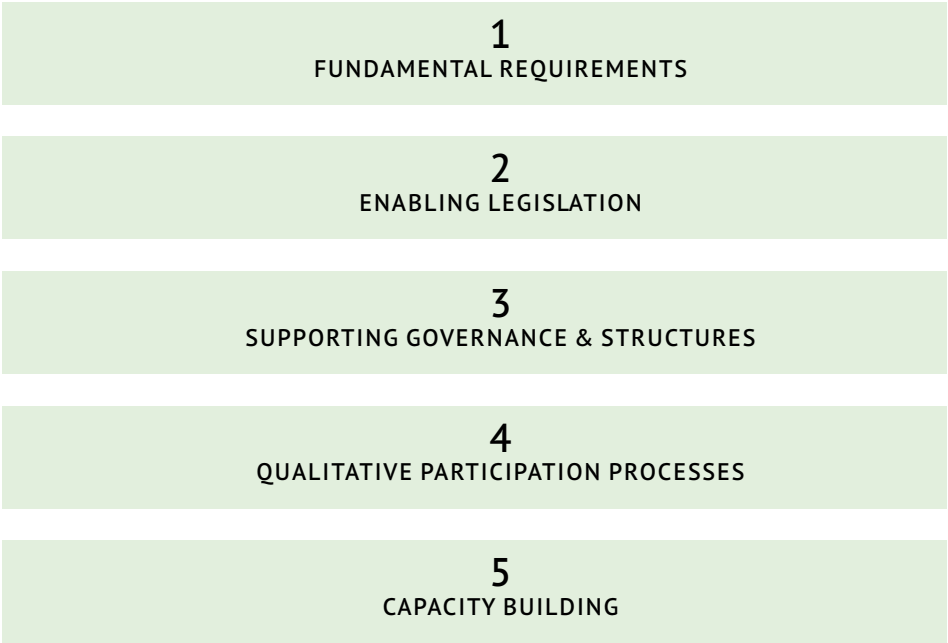
2 Introduction

As party of the Paris Agreement, Georgia has committed itself to take ambitious action to keep the global average temperature rise below 2°C above pre-industrial levels. With the ratification of the Aarhus Convention in 2000, it has also agreed to follow high standards of citizen participation in climate and environmental matters. This study tries to draw a realistic picture of the current situation of civil society participation within Georgian climate policies. For this purpose, the civic space for participation of Georgian civil society organisations (CSOs) working on climate issues was analysed and evaluated. It also examined the social and political environment, legal prerequisites for environmental participation and activism, and framework conditions for climate-related participation. The study looks at selected participatory practices e.g. within policy development processes related to planning and implementation of climate protection and climate change adaptation. The focus is on participatory processes implemented by state bodies, agencies, or CSOs, in which civil society can participate. Based on this status quo analysis, barriers to meaningful, effective and long-term civil society participation in Georgia were identified and recommendations developed on how to overcome them. The civic space for participation in climate policies in Georgia has already been analysed in a comprehensive study published in 2020 (Donges et al. 2020). This report updates these findings and provides insights into recent developments.



3 Methodology

The analysis of the status quo of civic space and the situation of civil society participation in climate issues was based on the research team’s local knowledge, contacts and experience in the country. It included a literature review, analysis of relevant legislation and policy documents, as well as interviews with local experts and stakeholders. For the evaluation of the country’s civic space for participation, the concept of the ‘participation handprint’ (Figure 2) and its associated standardised evaluation scheme (Donges et al., 2020) was used. The evaluation scheme comprises **5 criteria with 25 indicators**:



The indicators have different scoring options and an associated scoring system, where some indicators are weighted higher than others. In total, a maximum score of 59 points can be achieved. By scaling each criterion to a maximum of 20, the criteria are balanced out evenly. In order to answer the questions of the evaluation scheme, information was collected through an CSO and expert focus group workshop, semi-structured interviews and consultations with representatives of CSOs and other key stakeholders conducted between November 2022 and March 2023, either in person or via video call, telephone or email. The experts involved were selected based on their experience with participation processes in the country.

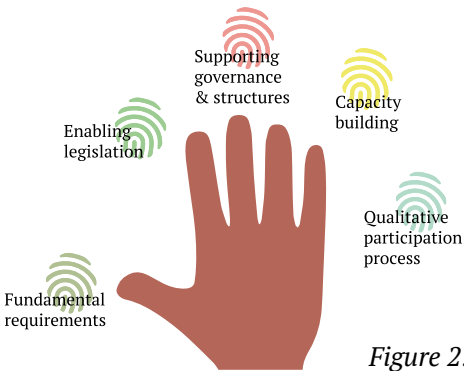
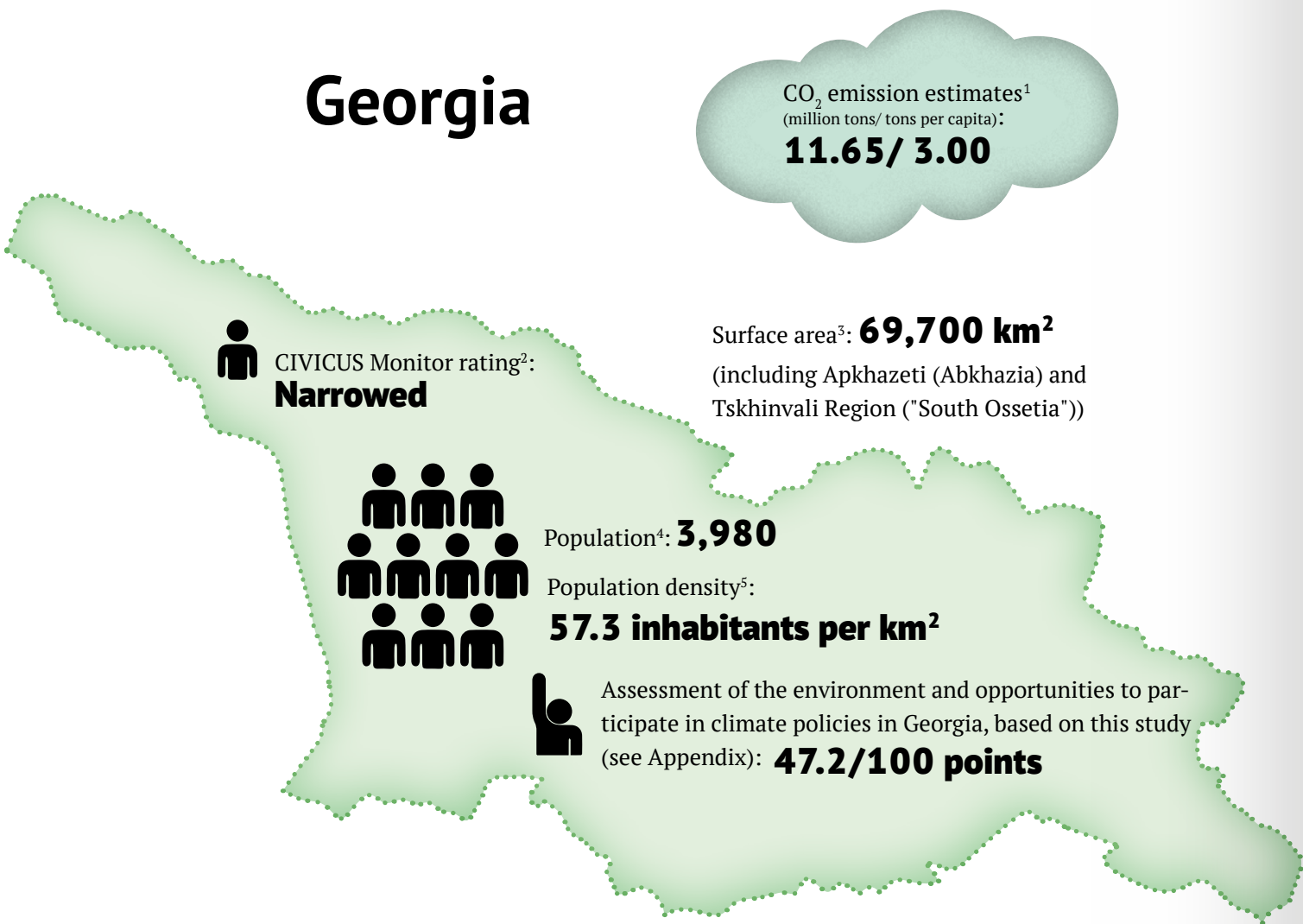


Figure 2: The Participation Handprint



1 https://edgar.jrc.ec.europa.eu/report_2022, accesses 09 June 2023
2 CIVICUS Monitor is a research tool built by civil society that aims to share data on the state of civil society freedoms (civic space) all over the world. It analyses to what extent states fulfill their duty to protect the freedom of association, the freedom of peaceful assembly and the freedom of expression. Each country is assigned a rating of the following categories: open, narrowed, obstructed, repressed or closed. For more information: <https://monitor.civicus.org>, accessed 09 June 2023.
3 https://data.un.org/CountryProfile.aspx/_Docs/CountryProfile.aspx?crName=Georgia, accessed 09 June 2023
4 Ibid.
5 Ibid.

4 Georgia – Country Portrait

Topography

Georgia is located south of the Great Caucasus Range in the south-eastern Europe. The total area of Georgia, including the Tskhinvali region, the Autonomous Republic of Abkhazia is 69,700 square kilometres. Georgia is an extremely mountainous country, with 54% of its total area over 1000 metres in altitude. With its mountains, plateaus, lowlands, glaciers, swamps, deserts, lakes, and rivers, the country’s landscape is very diverse. In terms of land use, agriculture accounts for 15.8% of the total area, while grasslands, bushes and forests make up 70.6% of the total area.

Population

The population of 3,980 people⁶ is divided into 59% urban and 41% rural. It is important to note, that more than 30% of the total population lives in Tbilisi (the capital). Furthermore, the female population makes up 52% of the total population, while the male population makes up 48%.⁷

4.1 Impacts of climate change

Research has revealed significant changes in Georgia’s climatic factors since the turn of the 20th century. Ecosystems are affected by these changes, leading to a decline in their quality and economic value. Extreme weather events such as storms, hurricanes, floods, avalanches, landslides and heat waves have increased in frequency and are linked to the dynamics of climate change both in Georgia and elsewhere in the world.

The process of climate change in Georgia is very strong. In the period 1986-2015, the average annual ground air temperature in the country increased by 0.25-0.580 degrees Celsius essentially everywhere, depending on the location. The average temperature increase in Georgia is 0.470 degrees Celsius.⁸ Annual precipitation in western Georgia has generally increased over the same period, while in some eastern locations it has decreased. There is also a clear trend towards more intense and frequent natural hydrometeorological events. The magnitude and quantitative indicators of landslide-gravity and avalanche processes have expanded dramatically across the country, including the rapid melting of glaciers (Tavadze et al. 2019).

In the coming years, the impacts will continue to worsen. The country’s fundamental objective is to strengthen its capacity for preparedness and adaptation by creating climate-resilient practices that reduce the vulnerability of the most vulnerable groups to climate change.

6 https://data.un.org/CountryProfile.aspx/_Docs/CountryProfile.aspx?crName=Georgia, accessed 09 June 2023
7 National Georgian Statistics (2023), “Population of Georgia”, accessed 21 March 2023.
8 Georgian National Communications to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), https://unfccc.int/sites/default/files/resource/4%20Final%20Report%20-%20English%202020%2030.03_0.pdf, accessed 12 June 2023.

4.2 National climate policy

Georgia has been a non-Annex I Party to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) since 1994. Georgia ratified the Kyoto Protocol in 1999, the Paris Agreement in 2017 and the Doha Amendment to the Kyoto Protocol in 2020. It declared its commitment to international action on climate change and submitted its Intended Nationally Determined Contribution (INDC) to the UNFCCC in 2015.⁹ It declared its commitment to international action on climate change and submitted its Intended Nationally Determined Contribution (INDC) to the UNFCCC in 2015.

To ensure the achievement of its NDC targets, Georgia has developed and adopted its first National Climate Change Strategy 2030 and Action Plan 2021-2023. Derived from the updated NDC document, its long-term vision is to reduce total greenhouse gas emissions by 35% below 1990 levels by 2030 for all key climate relevant sectors of the economy.¹⁰ With international support, Georgia is committed to reducing greenhouse gas emissions by nationally by 50% or 57% by 2030 compared to 1990 levels if global greenhouse gas emissions follow the 2.0°C and 1.50°C scenarios, respectively.

By the end of 2020, Georgia’s Ministry of Environmental Protection and Agriculture (MEPA) submitted a revised NDC to the UNFCCC. The Environment and Climate Change Department and Climate Change Division (CCD) have been established under the MEPA to co-ordinate and implement Georgia’s key climate-related documents, such as the improvement of the NDC, the preparation of a Climate Action Plan, as well as the National Communications (NC) and Biennial Update Reports (BUR) to the UNFCCC.¹¹

Georgia became a full member of the European Energy Union on 1 July 2017. As a result, there is a deadline to bring national legislation into line with EU energy regulations. The country should set targets for the share of renewable energy in total energy consumption for the period 2020-2030, as well as the amount of energy that can be saved through energy efficiency.

In December 2019, the government adopted the “10-year Renewable Energy Development Plan”, which is required by law. According to the draft National Energy and Climate Plan (NECP), Georgia covers the period 2025-2030 (i.e. the timeframe of the Governance Regulation). It addresses five dimensions of the Energy Union (energy security, internal energy market, energy efficiency, decarbonisation and research, innovation and competitiveness) and includes national objectives and targets in each dimension, as well as proposed policies and measures (PaMs) to achieve the defined objectives (including impact assessment).

In terms of concrete commitments, the latest draft of the NECP does not, in principle, set out any new decarbonisation commitments. Instead, the document reiterates the targets from the NDC and national legislation, and identifies adaptation measures. Notable is the increase in the share of renewable energy in final energy consumption (target: 27.4% by 2030).

9 United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC). Georgia, <https://unfccc.int/node/61069>, accessed 22 May 2023.
10 Government of Georgia. (2021). Second Nationally Determined Contribution of Georgia under the Paris Agreement, <https://www4.unfccc.int/sites/NDCCStaging/PublishedDocuments/Georgia%20First/GEO-INDC.pdf>, accessed 21 March 2023.
11 Ibid.

As a Party to the UNFCCC, Georgia is expected to prepare a mid-century Long-Term Strategy (“LTS” or “LT LEDS”)¹² for low GHG emission development. This is enshrined in the Paris Agreement (Article 4(19), Decision 1/CP.21, Para 35) requesting identification of the vision for 2050 based on projected GHG emissions from the climate relevant sectors (energy, industry, industrial processes (IPPU), buildings, transport, agriculture, waste and LULUCF), as defined by the IPCC as GHG sources and sinks, resulting in total national net GHG emissions. Beyond the UNFCCC framework, Georgia is required to submit the LTS according to the Governance Regulation by the time “this Regulation [Governance Regulation] comes into force” (Article 15 (1)). The Regulation entered into force on the day of its adoption at the 19th Ministerial Council. This makes the deadline for the submission of the LTS even more ambitious, to be met by the date of the implementation of the Governance Regulation (i.e., December 2022).

Georgia’s Fourth NC was submitted to the UNFCCC Secretariat in 2021, and the Fifth NC is currently under preparation. According to the climate Watch’s NDC Tracker, the NC of Georgia includes targets for transport, buildings, energy generation and transmission, agriculture, industry, waste, and forestry.¹³ The Strategy and Action Plan includes an unconditional commitment and two additional conditional scenarios for further emission reductions, the implementation of which would depend on international support.

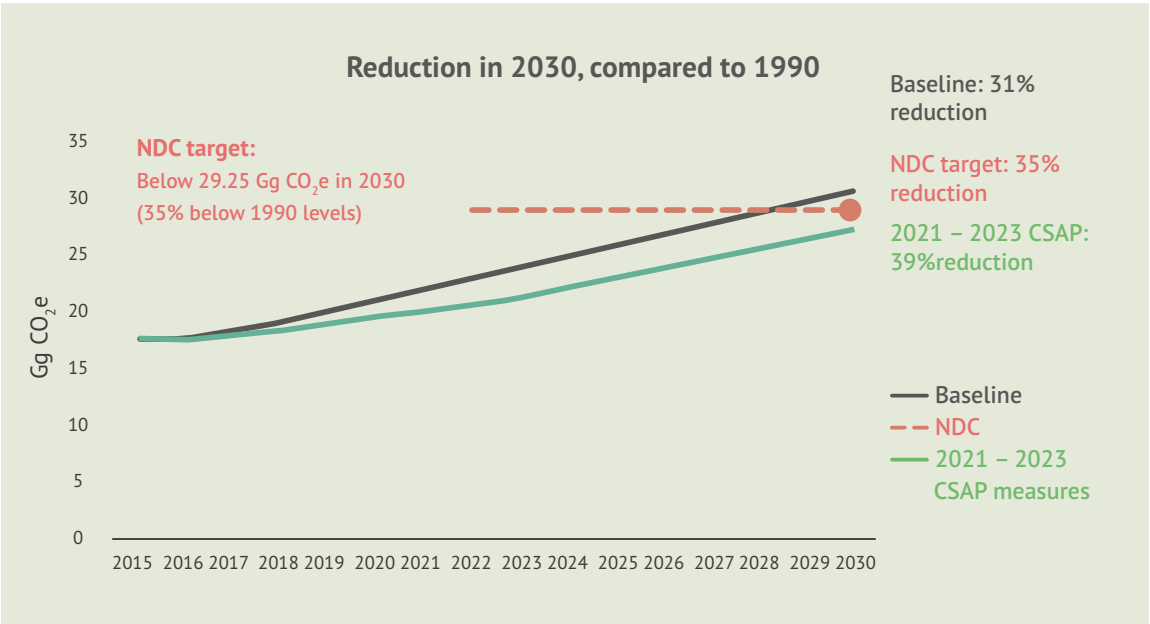


Figure 3: GHG emissions trajectory from all major sectors of the Georgian economy (2015-2030). The figure combines emissions from all the major sectors of the economy, excluding carbon sinks from LULUCF¹⁴

12 Difference between these two abbreviations lies in the two perspectives of UNFCCC Secretariat and EU framework.
13 Country Engagement Update Report for Georgia, August 2022, <https://ndcpartnership.org/countries-map/country?iso=GEO>, accessed 21 March 2023.
14 2030 Climate Change Strategy, <https://mepa.gov.ge/En/Files/ViewFile/50123>, accessed March 21, 2023.

Table 1: Overall comparison with previous NDC¹⁵

Improved	Improved	Improved	Stagnant	Improved	Improved	Improved
Revised from previous submission	Strengthened mitigation (reduced total GHG emissions in 2030)	Strengthened or added GHG target	Strengthened or added sectoral target	Strengthened or added policies and actions	Strengthened adaptation	Provided additional Information for clarity, transparency, and understanding

15 Table 1: green for progress made, red for no progress. Compiled by RECC with data from the NDC Registry: <https://unfccc.int/NDCREG>, accessed March 21, 2023.

5 Climate-engaged civil society and its right to participate

5.1 Fundamental requirements

A democratic system relies on a strong civil society. Civil society participation in the development of public policy promotes pluralism and can lead to more efficient, equitable and sustainable policies. Among other things, civil society acts as a check on government actors, which is particularly critical when a ruling party has a large majority. As a result, participation in and support for civil society in all its diversity is crucial to Georgia’s civic growth.

In early 2020, during the outbreak of Covid 19, civil society organisations (CSOs) demonstrated their ability to adapt quickly to the changing situation and respond to the specific needs of the population by taking on new roles and responsibilities, such as increasing community preparedness and resilience to emergencies, providing first aid and connecting residents to public services. By aggressively holding the government accountable for the emergency response to the epidemic, CSOs and the media strengthened their watchdog role.

There was also progress in the capacity and participation of civil society organisations. For example, numerous political parties and activists, including CSOs, claimed that the October 2020 parliamentary elections failed to meet both domestic legal criteria and OSCE/ODIHR international norms. Allegations of electoral fraud by CSOs led to clashes between protesters and law enforcement. Since then, despite extensive EU mediation, the administration and the opposition have frequently reached a “political impasse” due to divergent positions.

The period from 2021 until today has been a difficult time for Georgian society. A particularly high level of civic participation occurred on 20 February 2022, following Russia’s invasion of Ukraine; on 25 February 2022, Georgians took to the streets to show solidarity with Ukraine, which lasted for weeks. The CIVICUS Monitor continues to rate the civic space in Georgia as “narrowed” – the second-best category after “open”.¹⁶ Civic space in Georgia has remained among the most favourable for civil society participation in the Eastern Partnership region over the past two years. According to the Freedom House Score and status in 2023, Georgia maintains the same score of 58/100 and retains the status of “Partly Free”.¹⁷ Additionally, the Bertelsmann Stiftung’s Transformation Index (BTI) 2022 covers the period from 1 February 2019 to 31 January 2021. The BTI evaluates the quality of governance as well as the transition to democracy and a market economy. Specifically for Georgia, the overall status index is 6 out of 10 and the country ranks 52 out of 137 (political transformation scores: 6.1 and 54 out of 137).¹⁸

Russia’s war against Ukraine is also having a major impact on Georgia, as the conflict between Russia and Georgia has been going on for many years. The HIIK Conflict Barometer rates this conflict as “non-violent crisis” (2).¹⁹ However, after the start of the war against Ukraine, thousands of people poured into the streets of Tbilisi to protest against the Georgian government’s unwillingness to take a firmer stance against the war in Ukraine. These

16 CIVICUS Monitor (2023). Georgia - Latest updates, <https://monitor.civicus.org/country/georgia>, accessed 21 March 2023.
17 Freedom House (2023) Georgia, <https://freedomhouse.org/country/georgia/freedom-world/2023>, accessed 21 March 2023.
18 Bertelsmann Stiftung, BTI 2022, Georgia Country Report, <https://bti-project.org/en/reports/country-report/GEO>, accessed 22 March 2023.
19 Heidelberg Institute for International Conflict Research (HIIK). (2021). Conflict Barometer 2022, https://hiik.de/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/CoBa_2021_03.pdf, accessed 22 March 2023.

protests ultimately turned into rallies against the government authorities. Protesters also demanded the prime minister's resignation and called on the government to take steps to garner support to enable Georgia's integration into the European Union, which is another conflict recognized by the Conflict Barometer by HIIK, which rates the Georgian opposition as "violent crisis" (3).²⁰

On the other hand, Georgian civil society continues to benefit from a supportive climate that is free of legal and regulatory restrictions. The process of registering new CSOs is straightforward, non-bureaucratic, fast and effective. In Georgia, a country of just 3.7 million people, there are more than 26,000 "non-profit, non-commercial" organisations that are officially registered, but far fewer of them are actually active, according to data from the National Agency for Public Registry (NAPR). The majority of well-developed CSOs are concentrated in the capital city, Tbilisi, while the capacity of regional CSOs remains limited. Some watchdog groups have highlighted a sharp increase in the number of CSO registrations in Georgia in 2021.

However, the potential approval of the new "Foreign Agents Act" caused a commotion and dampened the already positive atmosphere towards CSOs.²¹ In March 2023, the controversial Act was on the verge of being passed. The law required individuals or organisations that receive funding or other support from foreign governments or entities to register as "foreign agents" with the Georgian government. The majority of the population, including international figures such as US and EU ambassadors, condemned the law as an attempt to stifle dissent and restrict freedom of expression. The discourse surrounding the Act led to several days of peaceful protests in the capital, which ultimately persuaded the government to withdraw the bill.

According to the portal www.csogeorgia.org, 173 out of 1284 Georgian CSOs deal with ecological topics.²² CSOs and Non-governmental Organisations (NGOs) working on climate issues are a small minority and are not organised in larger networks. Only a few organisations such as Greens Movement of Georgia (GMG), Energy Efficiency Centre (EEC), the Caucasus Environmental NGO Network (CENN), REC Caucasus, Remissia, World Experience for Georgia (WEG), Green Alternative, the City Institute, and EcoVision deal directly with issues such as climate change, emission reduction and renewable energy.

Georgia's climate-engaged civil society is a young movement with few institutional and individual resources. NGOs are mostly involved in initiatives and tasks that directly promote climate change adaptation or mitigation. Together with local partners, they undertake projects such as installing solar panels, promoting community adaptation to climate change, strengthening adaptive capacity in the rural agricultural sector, and engaging heavily in environmental education. They are very willing to advise the government and work with several ministries. They have contributed to national mitigation instruments such as the Nationally Appropriate Mitigation Actions (NAMAs), commented on climate-related draft laws and participated in the NDC review process.

A national survey was commissioned by the Westminster Foundation for Democracy (WFD)²³ in August 2021 to explore the opinions and attitudes of Georgian citizens towards environmental issues and climate change, both nationally and globally. It found that Georgian citizens are very concerned about the consequences of climate change, biodiversi-

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Human Rights Watch, "Georgia: 'Foreign Agents' Bill Tramples Rights", <https://www.hrw.org/news/2023/03/07/georgia-foreign-agents-bill-tramples-rights>, accessed 7 March 2023.

²² <https://csogeorgia.org/en/organizations/ngo?searchQuery=&showCategory=7>, accessed 21 March 2023.

²³ IPM Market Intelligence Caucasus (2022). Climate Change and Environmentally Focused Nationwide Opinion Poll in Georgia. Commissioned by Westminster Foundation for Democracy (WFD) Georgia, <https://www.wfd.org/what-we-do/resources/climate-change-and-environmentally-focused-nationwide-opinion-poll-georgia>, accessed 21 March 2023.

ty loss and environmental degradation, and consider climate change and environmental degradation to be the most serious problem facing the world today. A similar nationwide survey was commissioned by the WFD in November 2022. Most of the respondents consider the problem of climate change to be very important, both globally (73%) and nationally (68%). It is interesting to note that a similar national survey, commissioned by UNDP (Durglishvili, 2021) in August 2020, found that Georgian citizens ranked climate change as the third most important global challenge, ahead of poverty and infectious diseases.

The new Decentralisation Strategy 2020–2025 should help CSOs to obtain additional funding from a wider range of sources. Local governments were not allowed to provide grants; they could only receive national and international funding to carry out their functions. However, local governments could pay CSOs by including their funding requests in municipal budget allocations, a technique known as programmatic support. As the Decentralisation Strategy explicitly states that local governments should have the right to provide grants to CSOs, the implementation of the Strategy should increase the financial opportunities for CSOs at the local/regional level.



5.2 Legal framework for participation

Georgia’s history of engagement with climate issues and international climate negotiations is summarised in the table below:

Table 2: International treaties ratified by Georgia and national development

1994	Georgian Parliament ratified the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change
1999	The country ratified the Kyoto Protocol
2015	In September 2015, Georgia submitted its Intended Nationally Determined Contributions (INDC) to the UNFCCC. Under the INDC Georgia planned to unconditionally reduce its GHG emissions by 15% below the Business-as-Usual scenario (BAU) by 2030, which could be increased up to 25% if the country had access to international financial and technological support.
2017	The country ratified the Paris Agreement on Climate Change
2021	On 8 April 2021, the Government of Georgia developed and adopted the updated NDC and submitted it to UNFCCC on 5 May 2021. Within the updated NDC Georgia reiterated its strong commitment to the 2015 Paris Agreement. Georgia’s National Climate Change Strategy 2030 and Action Plan 2021-2023, adopted by the Government at the same time as the updated NDC, outlined the concrete actions the country will take to implement this ambitious agenda.
2022	Georgia finalised its Long-Term Low Emission Development Strategy, which looks at the country’s climate ambition beyond 2030 and up to 2050, with one of the possible scenarios reaching climate-neutrality by 2050.
2022	Georgia initiates the climate law process

International level

The United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) Convention on Access to Information, Public Participation in Decision-making, and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters (the **Aarhus Convention**) is a fundamental agreement for the development and upholding of environmental rights in signatory countries. The Aarhus Convention entered into force on 5 June 1998, and since then has demonstrated improvements in environmental protection, democratisation, safety and the production of sustainable environmental outcomes. Four international treaties are top priorities for Georgia: the UNFCCC and its **Paris Agreement** on Climate Change, the **EU-Georgia Association Agreement**, the **Accession Protocol to the Energy Community Treaty** and the Aarhus Convention.

Georgia ratified the Aarhus Convention by Resolution N 135 in 2000. During the same period, the country enforced various environmental protection. Among these, three framework laws on Environmental Protection, Environmental Impact Permit and State Ecological Expertise were particularly relevant to the Aarhus Convention.

Moreover, the Aarhus Convention sets the public’s right to participate in environmental decision-making. However legal requirements of the Aarhus Convention are not fully incorporated into national legislation.

A document that has strongly influenced the formal framework for participation in environmental decision-making is the EU-Georgia Association Agreement (AA) of 2014 that fully entered into force in 2016. According to the association agreement (Chapter

3 Environment), access to environmental information and public participation in decision-making are crucial for good environmental governance.

In the case of the EU-Georgia relationship, the AA approximation process highly affects Georgian legislation, so the EU’s climate law and EU Green Deal are expected to have a significant impact on the development of a climate framework in Georgia. The development of such a legal framework is particularly necessary in view of Georgia’s EU membership aspirations. The climate law will be viewed positively by the EU and can play an important role in moving closer to the EU. As a result of the national implementation of the Aarhus convention, Georgia actively tries to promote access to environmental information and provide platforms for public participation, for all interested parties, including women and youth and their specific groups (such as persons with limited abilities, ethnic minorities, sexual minorities, single mothers, internally displaced persons and conflict-affected women and girls etc.). In most cases, participation platforms are part of various project-specific objectives. However, the Ministry of Environmental Protection and Agriculture (MEPA) and various sub-agencies such as the LEPL Environmental Information and Education Centre provide platforms for participation, as does the Ministry’s website, which includes a virtual public forum, newsletters and regional information centres.

The Association Agreement states that the public in Georgia can participate in the decision-making process through legally defined public hearing procedures on activities subject to Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA). The public can also use a hotline to inform the MEPA of any environmental problems. Other IT-based tools have been developed by the Environmental Information and Education Centre (EIEC), such as E-Notice, a notification service that distributes news about environmental legislation and public hearings, as well as notices about individuals who violate Georgian environmental legislation.

Furthermore, Georgia is obliged to transpose **Directive 2003/35/EC of the European Parliament and the Council** providing for public participation in respect to the drawing up of certain plans and programmes related to the environment into national legislation (Margvelashvili et al., 2017).

National level

The **Constitution of Georgia** provides the basis for public participation in environmental decision-making, including on climate-related matters. Article 29 (Right to Environmental Protection) of the constitution states that: “everyone has the right to receive full information about the state of the environment in a timely manner. Everyone has the right to care for the protection of the environment” and the “right to participate in the adoption of decisions related to the environment” shall be guaranteed by law.²⁴

Furthermore, civil society can make use of direct-democratic mechanisms such as referenda, public initiatives and petitions. Non-binding referenda are possible at local and national level, while binding referenda can be held only at the national level. Within the framework of Georgia’s Open Government Partnership (OGP) Action Plan, the Georgian government launched an e-petition platform (ichange.gov.ge) in 2017. Each Georgian citizen can use it to submit and collect online signatures on electronic petitions on issues within the competence of the government.

²⁴ Constitution of Georgia (1995), <https://matsne.gov.ge/en/document/view/30346?publication=36>, accessed 12 June 2023.

The Georgian Parliament's Environmental Protection and Agriculture Committee, in close cooperation with the government, is leading the process to define and create a draft Climate Bill for the Parliament to consider. The law calls for civic engagement through the distribution of questionnaires in order to aid in the creation of a White Paper with concrete ideas for the Climate Bill in the spring of 2023. The Draft Climate Bill will be subject to rigorous and comprehensive impact assessments, including gender-specific needs, regulation and socio-economic.

Primary legislation

The national legislation of Georgia consists of primary (laws) and secondary (sub-laws) legislation. From the primary legislation, the **laws of Georgia on Environmental Protection and on Ambient Air Protection, General Administrative Code, Environmental Assessment Code and Spatial Planning, Architectural and Construction Activities Code** formulate requirements for public participation in environmental and climate-related decision-making.

The **Environmental Assessment Code** (2017)²⁵ introduces the principles harmonised with the EU environmental acquis on the Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) and Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) Directives, as well as the approaches of the Aarhus Convention and the Convention on Environmental Impact Assessment in a Trans-boundary Context (Espoo Convention) including its protocol on SEA. Activities which are likely to have significant impacts on the environment and human health will be subject to an EIA, including public participation during screening and scoping, as well as during the procedure for issuing environmental decisions.

Public participation on plans, programmes and policies in environmental issues (Article 7 of Aarhus Convention) is not required by national legislation. Georgia did not sign the protocol on SEA under the Espoo Convention that ensures that individual parties integrate environmental assessment into their plans and programmes at the earliest stages and promote public participation. Nevertheless, the Environmental Assessment Code can be considered a key step towards the implementation of a functional system for SEA and EIA applications.

The **Law of Georgia on Environment Protection** (1996)²⁶ is a framework law that had been adopted before Georgia ratified the Aarhus Convention. However, the law contains principles that demand participation in environmental decision-making processes and the access to environmental information. The right to access public information is enshrined in the General Administrative Code (1999) in Chapter III. Access to information is the legal right for citizens to request and receive information from the public authority.

The **Spatial Planning, Architectural and Construction Activities Code** (2018)²⁷ establishes a detailed mandatory procedure for public participation in decision-making on city and district spatial plans. According to the code, spatial plans cannot be approved without preliminary disclosure and public hearings.

²⁵ Environmental Assessment Code (2017), <https://matsne.gov.ge/en/document/view/3691981?publication=10>, accessed 12 June 2023.

²⁶ Law of Georgia on Environment Protection (1996), <https://www.matsne.gov.ge/ka/document/download/33340/19/en/pdf#:~:text=This%20Law%20regulates%20legal%20relations,including%20its%20territorial%20waters%2C%20airspace%2C,> accessed 12 June 2023.

²⁷ Spatial Planning, Architectural and Construction Activities Code (2018), <https://leap.unep.org/countries/ge/national-legislation/spatial-planning-architecture-and-construction-code-georgia-no>, accessed 12 June 2023.

Climate change was introduced into the Law on Ambient Air Protection²⁸ through successive amendments. The Law does not mention “climate change” as a key notion, but it provides a definition of “main harmful substances” (sulphur dioxide, nitrogen dioxide, nitrogen oxides, solid particles, lead, benzene, carbon monoxide, ozone, arsenic, cadmium, mercury, nickel, benzopyrene, manganese dioxide) as well as fluorinated gases (these have a direct greenhouse impact). The Law authorises MEPA to coordinate the development and implementation of a climate change national program and the action plan to fulfil commitments of Georgia under the UNFCCC.

Along with the Climate Change Strategy 2030 and its Action Plan 2021-2023²⁹, which are currently the key climate change national level planning documents, climate change related issues also appear in other strategies and programmes. For instance, the latest National Environmental Action Program (NEAP 4)³⁰ includes climate change as one of its strategic directions.

The Agriculture and Rural Development Strategy of Georgia 2021-2027³¹ sets out priorities, strategic goals and objectives for agriculture and rural development. One of its Goals refers to “sustainable usage of natural resources, preservation of ecosystems, adaptation to climate change”. The objectives identified under this goal include among others: dissemination of climate-smart and environmentally adapted agricultural practices, sustainable usage of forest resources, and supporting energy-efficient and renewable energy technologies and practices. With regard to climate change, the strategy focuses mostly on climate change adaptation, however some components of the strategy are relevant to climate change mitigation targets.

²⁸ Law on Ambient Air Protection (1991), [https://leap.unep.org/countries/ge/national-legislation/law-georgia-ambient-air-protection-no-2116-iis-1999#:~:text=2116%2DIIS%20of%201999\),-Country&text=This%20Law%20regulates%20protection%20of,protection%20of%20air%20inside%20buildings,](https://leap.unep.org/countries/ge/national-legislation/law-georgia-ambient-air-protection-no-2116-iis-1999#:~:text=2116%2DIIS%20of%201999),-Country&text=This%20Law%20regulates%20protection%20of,protection%20of%20air%20inside%20buildings,) accessed 12 June 2023.

²⁹ Climate Change Strategy 2030 and its Action Plan 2021-2023, <https://mepa.gov.ge/En/Files/ViewFile/50123>, accessed 12 June 2023.

³⁰ Fourth National Environmental Action Program (2022), <https://mepa.gov.ge/Ge/PublicInformation/34047>, accessed 21 March 2023.

³¹ Agriculture and Rural Development Strategy of Georgia 2021-2027, <https://mepa.gov.ge/Ge/PublicInformation/20395>, accessed 21 March 2023.

Secondary legislation

When it comes to secondary legislation, the following acts have a direct linkage to public participation in environmental and climate-related decision-making:

- _ Rules for Proactive Disclosure of Public Information (Public Records), Standard for Claiming Public Information Electronically and Rules for Access to Environmental Information (2017)
- _ Procedures (Rules) for Public Hearing (2018)
- _ Statute of the Environmental Information and Education Centre (EIEC) of the Ministry of Environmental Protection and Agriculture of Georgia (2018)
- _ Rules for the Development of Spatial and Urban Plans (2019)
- _ Rules of Procedure for the Development, Monitoring and Evaluation of Policy Documents (2020)

5.3 Governance and structures

In Georgia, there are several important institutional bodies at the national level that support dialogue and participation with civil society on environmental/climate policy. Some of these bodies are:

Ministry of Environmental Protection and Agriculture (MEPA): The Ministry of Environment Protection and Agriculture of Georgia is established in accordance with the Constitution of Georgia and the Law of Georgia “On the structure, powers and regulations of the Government of Georgia”. MEPA of Georgia, in its capacity, functions as the main policy-making agency in the environmental field. It also works closely with civil society organisations to promote public participation and dialogue on environmental issues.

Environmental Protection and Natural Resources Committee: This parliamentary committee oversees environmental policy and legislation in Georgia. The Committee’s mission, as defined by its Statute, is to coordinate environmental activities; ensure the sustainable use of natural resources; determine the ecological security policy for the environment and the public; coordinate respective activities and exercise oversight over their implementation. The committee regularly holds public hearings and consultations with civil society organisations to ensure that environmental policies are aligned with public needs and concerns.

Agency of Protected Areas: Managing Georgia’s tight nature reserves, national parks, natural monuments, managed reserves, protected landscapes, biosphere reserves, world heritage sites, and wetland sites of international significance is the Agency’s main duty. The Agency collaborates closely with civil society groups to advance ecotourism and the preservation of natural resources.

Georgian National Energy and Water Supply Regulatory Commission: This regulatory body oversees the energy and water supply sector in Georgia. It regularly engages with civil society organisations to ensure that energy and water policies are aligned with public needs and concerns, and promotes the development of renewable energy sources.

Georgian Foundation for Strategic and International Studies: This independent think tank conducts research and analysis on environmental and climate policy in Georgia. The foundation works closely with civil society organisations to promote evidence-based policy making and public dialogue on environmental issues.

Environmental Information and Education Centre (EIEC): According to the Aarhus Convention, EIEC is a legal institution with the mandate to increase access to justice, facilitate public involvement in decision-making processes, and raise public knowledge about environmental protection. The EIEC website provides access to a wealth of environmental knowledge, a summary of recent legislative developments, and a way for Georgians to report instances of environmental law violations. EIEC encourages the adoption of national climate goals that are in line with the Paris Agreement and supports the creation of a comprehensive and inclusive Climate Action Plan (CAP).

National Vocational Education and Training (VET): The National Vocational Education and Training (VET) Council, the principal advisory body for VET, comprises civil society members. A policy conversation on the VET strategy and action is taking place with CSOs, and a few are monitoring the implementation. CSOs were members of the EVET Council, which was founded to oversee the EU-Georgia Employment and VET (EVET) financial assistance program within the framework of the four grant projects sponsored under the Grant Scheme of the EU-funded EVET Programme.

Open Parliament Partnership (OPP): Another illustration of state-CSO collaboration is the Open Parliament Partnership (OGP), which was introduced in 2011. Government reformers and leaders of the civil society are brought together to advance inclusion and government accountability through specific action plans.

EU accession and Eastern Partnership: The EU has been supporting Georgian civil society since its early development. The aim is to enhance the sustainability and accountability of CSOs as well as to ensure an enabling environment, improved policy dialogue between civil society and public institutions and stronger civic participation in all regions of Georgia.

The Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum (EaP CSF) was established in 2008. The forum, which brings together approximately 800 organisations from the six Eastern Partnership nations and the EU, aims to promote positive interaction between civil society organisations in Eastern Europe and the EU in order to increase the diversity of political debate and decision-making. The Caucasus Environmental NGO Network (CENN), Green Alternative, the Foundation Caucasus Environment, and the Regional Environmental Center for the Caucasus are among the Georgian NGOs that are members of the forum (REC Caucasus). Six national forums were established in order to guarantee the civil society of the partner country’s active participation. Thus, Georgian CSOs can participate through the Georgian National Platform (GNP), which includes 185 organisations and has improved structural engagement between civil society and the government (Georgian National Platform, 2018).

In order to strengthen the dialogue between civil society and public institutions an “EU Roadmap for engagement with civil society in Georgia 2018-2020” was developed. The plan identifies several priority areas, including “connectivity, energy efficiency, environment, and climate change,” which includes priority 4 on assisting “CSOs in promoting energy efficiency, as well as the road safety and air quality, measures, and monitoring their implementation.” Moreover, the Roadmap³² has been updated as of 2021.

³² EU Roadmap for engagement with civil society in Georgia 2018-2020, <https://capacity4dev.europa.eu/library/georgia-eu-roadmap-engagement-civil-society-2021-2024>, accessed 12 June, 2023.

Georgian National Platform: Georgia’s civil society has demonstrated its importance in the growth of the nation’s democracy. There are more and more platforms for civil society, and the Georgian National Platform (GNP) of the Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum is a significant one. Four regional branches were established by the GNP in 2016: Imereti, Samtskhe Javakheti, Shida Kartli, and Samegrelo.

The Georgian Alliance for Agriculture and Rural Development (GAARD), a national civil society platform (created with EU assistance) that aims to empower rural communities, particularly smallholder farmers, and to strengthen their capacities for representing their interests in policy development and its implementation process, includes CSOs working in the agricultural sector as members. GAARD offers a forum for debate and coordination to encourage cooperative action between local government stakeholders and stakeholders from the local community, such as small farmers, vulnerable groups, and local civil society actors. A number of major multinational CSOs frequently form successful relationships with smaller local CSOs, suggesting that the atmosphere is favorable for CSOs in agriculture.

National Mechanisms

The Georgian government recognises the importance of regional and local participation processes in environmental and climate policies, and has established several mechanisms to incorporate the results of these processes at the national level:

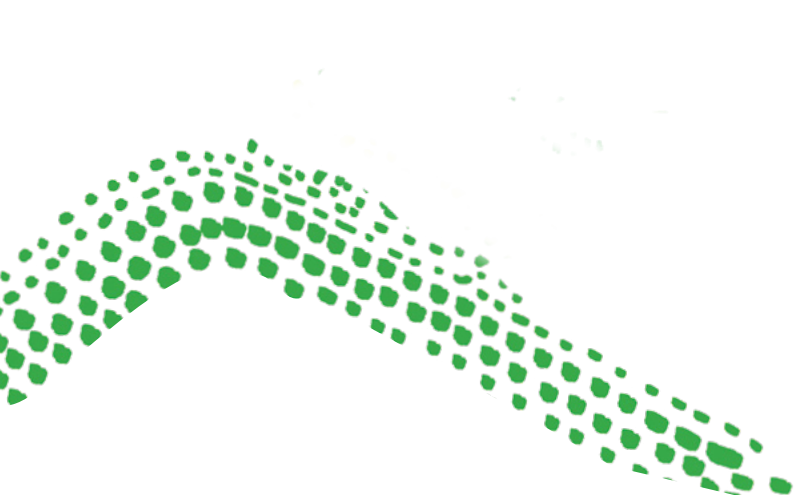


Table 3: National participation mechanisms

Public consultations	The government holds regular public consultations on environmental and climate policies, where representatives from local and regional organisations are invited to provide feedback and input. The results of these consultations are then incorporated into the policy-making process.
Advisory committees	The government has established advisory committees at the national, regional, and local levels to provide input and recommendations on environmental and climate policies. These committees are made up of representatives from a range of sectors, including civil society, government agencies, and the private sector.
Environmental impact assessments (EIAs)	EIAs are required for all major development projects in Georgia, and include a public consultation process. Local and regional organisations have the opportunity to provide input on the potential environmental impacts of proposed projects, and these inputs are taken into account when making decisions on whether or not to approve the projects.
Participatory budgeting	The government has established participatory budgeting processes at the local level, where residents have a direct say in how public funds are allocated. This includes funding for environmental and climate-related projects, and the results of these processes are taken into account when making decisions at the national level.

Collaboration Between Government and Civil Society

In Georgia, CSOs can interact with the government on a variety of channels. For example, CSOs and the Georgian Parliament signed a Memorandum of Understanding in December 2013³³ to further their cooperation. One of Georgia’s leading advocacy groups, CSI, successfully lobbied for changes to the tax code in 2013 within the parameters of the memorandum. These reforms mark a big step toward financial independence, even though CSOs still require greater tax breaks and advantages to be fully self-sufficient. The Georgian Parliament also established an annual “CSO Day” where CSO representatives meet with the speaker.

The government also provides financial support to CSOs, in the form of public procurement. CSOs also receive financial support from the government in the form of grants or contracts for public works projects. Any CSO can register in the central e-procurement system and offer services to public institutions.

³³ Memorandum of Understanding (2013), <https://web-api.parliament.ge/storage/files/shares/aparati/memorandumi/tbilisi-memorandumi.pdf>, accessed 12 June 2023.

5.4 In Practice: participation processes

Georgia is actively working to minimise the impacts of climate change by meeting its commitments under the Paris Agreement (PA), which requires countries to limit global warming to well below 2°C above pre-industrial levels. For example, Georgia has updated its Nationally Determined Contribution (NDC), developed a draft National Energy and Climate Plan (NECP), prepared its Fourth National Communication (NC) and the National Waste Management Strategy 2016-2030 and Action Plan 2022-2026. In these processes, there are various opportunities for civil society actors and other stakeholders to participate and shape the plans and strategies:

The NDC and current national and sectoral targets

Under the PA, Georgia updated its NDC and officially communicated it to the UNFCCC in May 2021. Currently, the updated NDC is the key document defining the international commitments of Georgia in the field of climate change. Its goal is stated as: *“to support the sustainable and balanced development of the country, equally taking into consideration climate change, environmental and socio-economic challenges.”*³⁴ The NDC covers the period from 1 January 2021 to 31 December 2030. The updated baseline takes into account the level of anthropogenic emissions by sources of greenhouse gases estimated for the year of 1990.

The commitments in the NDC of Georgia are as follows:

1. Georgia is fully committed to an unconditional target of emissions 35% below the 1990 level of its domestic total greenhouse gas emissions by 2030 (approximately equals to reducing the aggregate GHG emissions by 16% per capita);
2. Georgia is committed to a target of 50-57% of its total greenhouse gas emissions by 2030 compared to 1990, in the case of international support;
3. Elaboration of a Climate Change Strategy for 2030 and its Action Plan for 2021-2023 with outlined mitigation measures contributing to the achievement of unconditional and conditional commitments and mitigation targets;
4. Georgia is committed to continue to study its adaptive capacity of different economic sectors and to plan and implement the respective adaptation measures.

In addition, the development/updating of the Georgian NDC was a collaborative effort involving a wide range of stakeholders. The aim was to ensure that all stakeholders felt a sense of responsibility and ownership of the NDC, and that it was feasible and relevant. The participation processes included:

○ **Public consultation and stakeholder engagement:** The Ministry of Environmental Protection and Agriculture organised meetings with people from CSOs and associations such as Rural Development for Future Georgia (RDFG); Georgian Alliance for Agriculture and Rural Development (GAARD); Greens Movement, Green Alternative or the Environmental Protection and Research Center (EPRC), the private sector, academia, and others to get feedback and suggestions on the NDC.

○ **Sectoral consultations:** The Ministry also consulted with relevant government ministries to ensure that the priorities of each sector were reflected in the NDC. This helped to identify key priorities and challenges, and to develop sector-specific policies and strategies.

³⁴ Georgia's Updated NDC, https://unfccc.int/sites/default/files/NDC/2022-06/NDC%20Georgia_ENG%20WEB-approved.pdf, accessed 21 March 2023.

○ **Peer review and validation:** International experts, as well as the public and stakeholders in Georgia, reviewed and validated the NDC. This made sure it aligned with international best practices and was relevant to the Georgian context.

○ **Capacity building:** The Ministry provided capacity building to stakeholders to improve their knowledge and skills related to climate change, NDC development, and implementation. This helped to ensure that all stakeholders had the necessary skills and knowledge to participate in the development and implementation of the NDC.

The National Energy and Climate Plan

The National Energy and Climate Plans (NECPs) are key planning documents required by the European Union (EU) as part of their Clean Energy for all Europeans package. Georgia's NECP must be finalised and submitted to the Energy Community Secretariat by June 2024, with the draft due by June 2023. Various Georgian stakeholders, including members of the public sector, internal governmental organisations, civil society, and specific groups of women and youths, are currently reviewing the draft NECP.

Under the draft NECP, Georgia covers the period of 2025-2030 (i.e. the Governance Regulation timeline). It addresses five dimensions (energy security, internal energy market, energy efficiency; decarbonisation and research, innovation and competitiveness) of the Energy Union and includes national objectives and targets in each dimension as well as proposing policies and measures (PaMs) to achieve the defined objectives (including impact assessment).

Biennial Update Report (BUR) and National Communication (NC)

Regarding UNFCCC reporting, Georgia submitted its Second Biennial Update Report (BUR) and prepared its Fourth National Communication (NC) through the Global Environment Fund (GEF) project “Development of Georgia’s Fourth NC and Second BUR to the UNFCCC”, which incorporates the GHG inventory component and is being implemented by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP).

BURs are reports to be submitted by non-Annex I Parties, containing updates of national GHG inventories, including a national inventory report and information on mitigation actions, needs and support received. The First and Second BURs were drafted with joint effort of governmental and non-governmental bodies, with substantial parts of the reports written by experts from NGOs. During the preparation of the BURs, regular stakeholder consultations were held, and interim reports and findings were shared with government and NGO representatives. Accordingly, their opinions and comments were taken into account in the final report.

National Waste Management Strategy 2016-2030 and Action Plan 2022-2026

The National Waste Management Strategy 2016-2030 and Action Plan 2022-2026 developed by REC Caucasus in cooperation with the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) with the support of EU-funded “EU4 Environment” regional programme was presented to international donors and important stakeholders in 2022³⁵. Moreover, the updated Strategy and Action Plan have been approved by the Parliament and become part of the Waste Management Code.

³⁵ National Waste Management Strategy 2016-2030 and Action Plan 2022-2026, <https://rec-caucasus.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/12/National-Waste-Management.pdf>, accessed 12 June 2023.

Up to 40 participants gathered to discuss the harmonisation of foreign aid in accordance with the priorities of the revised National Waste Management Strategy 2016-2030 and the Action Plan 2022-2026, to ensure coordination and avoid overlap between donor areas of assistance, and to further develop existing cooperation and tailored fundraising. The National Waste Management Action Plan 2022-2026, prepared in consultation with regional authorities, industry associations, civil society organisations and others, includes relevant measures to be taken to implement the highest level of the waste management hierarchy.

5.5 Capacity Building

Environmental and climate change education is essential for society as it enables individuals to investigate environmental issues, understand problems, take action to protect the environment and hold governments accountable for environmental issues. People have a greater grasp of environmental concerns as a result, and they are more equipped to make sustainable choices and recognise environmental issues as a crucial societal topic. Georgia has several formal and non-formal environmental and climate education programmes available to the public, which are listed in the table below.

Table 4: Formal and non-formal environmental and climate education programmes

National Curriculum	Environmental education is a cross-cutting topic in the national curriculum that the Georgian Ministry of Education and Science has created. The curriculum covers a variety of environmental and climate change-related subjects, such as sustainable development, biodiversity preservation, and the causes and effects of environmental challenges. Teacher and students are trained on various subjects related to the environment. For examples, in certain school teachers assigned projects regarding water treatment, plastic, and more.
Eco-Schools Program	A global effort termed Eco-Schools seeks to encourage students to assume responsibility for environmental problems. The initiative is run in schools all over Georgia and administered by the Caucasus Environmental NGO Network (CENN). For schools to create and carry out environmental action plans in order to receive a Green Flag accreditation, the program offers a structure. Another CENN initiative includes establishment of ECO-clubs in schools across the nation.
Environmental NGOs	The public can participate in informal environmental and climate education initiatives provided by a number of environmental NGOs in Georgia. For instance, the Greens Movement of Georgia conducts educational campaigns on topics such as waste reduction and environmentally friendly transportation, while the Institute for Development of Freedom of Information (IDFI) offers workshops and training sessions on environmental policy and advocacy. Additionally, the Georgian Young Lawyers' Association (GYLA) has run campaigns on air pollution, while the Environmental Protection and Research Center (EPRC) has run campaigns on biodiversity conservation.

In addition to national formal and non-formal environmental education programmes, the Georgian government has sought to ensure public access to information about the rights and opportunities for public participation. One method used to ensure public participation in environmental decision-making is the Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) process. The MEPA website provides information on the EIA process and opportunities for public participation. Public meetings and hearings are often held as part of the EIA process and other environmental decision-making processes. In addition to government initiatives, a number of environmental NGOs in Georgia work to promote public participation in environmental decision-making and to educate the public about their rights and opportunities. For example, the Institute for Development of Freedom of Information (IDFI) has developed a guide to public participation in environmental decision-making, which is available on their website. It is important to highlight social media platforms as they are the most widely used by the public to obtain information and to promote and participate in opportunities. Social media platforms are often used to raise awareness and mobilise society for peaceful protests, campaigns, surveys, etc.

CSOs can also provide valuable support to public institutions. The government often seeks advice from large CSOs. Many ministries and agencies set up CSO-government thematic working groups to discuss strategies, legislative proposals, policies, public participation rights and opportunities. Sometimes government agencies and companies hire CSOs to provide awareness-raising activities or training in human resource management, team building, anti-corruption and work ethics. CSOs also have a productive relationship with the media, using TV channels, radio stations or newspapers as essential elements of their advocacy work. And CSOs work togeth-

er, effectively pooling their resources to raise their voices, increase their influence and achieve common goals. There are several long-standing CSO networks that use different platforms to engage with government. CSOs in these networks have also been successful in forming ad hoc coalitions to pursue specific issues, such as climate policy and political advocacy.

CSOs in Georgia face a number of challenges that hinder the process of developing and strengthening the skills, processes and resources that these organisations need to thrive. The existing tax structure in Georgia does not provide many incentives for CSOs to raise funds from a variety of sources, thus limiting opportunities for capacity development. There are few income tax deductions for charitable contributions in the private sector as part of corporate social responsibility. Individual donations are also taxed, which discourages individuals from donating to CSOs. Although CSOs are allowed to engage in commercial activities, they are classified as part of the private sector and taxed accordingly. This makes fundraising activities prohibitively expensive for both CSOs and Georgian citizens. Georgia also lacks a strong volunteer culture, which poses an additional problem for CSOs. Volunteering was once associated with the Soviet era's compulsory work days, known as 'subbotniks'. Given the unpopularity of institutionalised civic engagement and volunteering in Georgia, as well as the public's low level of trust in CSOs, Georgian CSOs struggle to attract volunteers.

Another difficulty is that they are largely dependent on international donors and foreign governments for financial stability. Despite the presence of international donors, financial resources are often limited, particularly for women's CSOs, grassroots groups and CSOs based outside the capital, which hinders their development. A CSO's financial support has an impact on its organisational structure, administrative and technical capacity and the quality of its staff. Mobility issues can make it difficult for CSOs to retain staff, and only larger organisations are able to retain highly qualified professionals. In addition, larger CSOs have advanced financial accounting systems, but smaller CSOs struggle with accounting and financial transparency. The majority of CSOs, especially those in municipalities, need to strengthen their organisational structure and capacity to develop clear missions, visions and strategic goals in order to strengthen their further development. Small and medium-sized NGOs need to develop their core internal management systems, human resources policies, financial and accounting systems and resource mobilisation methods.

Nevertheless, there are some opportunities to improve CSO capacity building through training programmes that are part of various national and international projects related to climate change adaptation and mitigation for CSOs and local governments. In addition, several workshops and conferences are organised by IDFI, RECC, CENN with the latest experts and information available for CSOs. More specifically, UNDP and the European Commission have supported the Government of Georgia in developing a National Strategy for Public Administration Reform, which includes a focus on stakeholder engagement and participation.

6 Recommendations how to strengthen civil society's participation in climate policies and improve upcoming NDC revisions

Effective and inclusive participation

There is a need to improve civic participation in Georgia. It is the responsibility of the government to ensure that the necessary measures are in place for effective and inclusive participation. Therefore, it is recommended to use bottom-up mechanisms for citizen participation.

Bottom-up mechanisms for citizen participation in climate change governance are highly desirable because, as noted above, the wide range of changes needed to transition to a low-carbon or carbon-neutral society affect multiple spheres of human activity, including economic activity and lifestyle choices, and the scale and pace of change can sometimes make smooth, incremental transitions difficult and generate distributional conflicts. Participation is therefore an indispensable element of a democratic country strategy and climate governance that promotes gender equity and the protection of vulnerable groups.

Participatory mechanisms involving citizens in decision-making are not new in Georgia, as local authorities have created participatory bodies to channel citizens' input into decision-making, for example through the appointment of "civic advisors", citizen monitoring of officials' performance, and local budgeting.³⁶ More recently, the Ministry of Finance has launched efforts to introduce public engagement in the budget process, including the presentation of the Budget Transparency and Engagement System³⁷, the electronic platform that enables all interested parties to get acquainted with information on state budget, the country's main priorities, state budget programmes, and to plan their own budgets. Through this system, the input provided by the users goes directly to the public officials of the Budget department.³⁸

Enhanced participation can increase citizens' trust in public decision-making, as well as its legitimacy, fairness, transparency, inclusiveness and responsiveness, and provide decision-makers with local expertise and information on people's preferences, as well as guidance on how to reconcile a variety of conflicting interests. In order to successfully update the NDCs, it is recommended to continue and improve cooperation between CSOs and different stakeholders through regular consultations and various engagement mechanisms. Furthermore, it is essential to provide capacity building support to CSOs, in particular to promote individual participation, monitoring and funding. Finally, as it is known that the public uses social media platforms to find information, it is recommended to use such platforms as well as online forums to engage and reach out to civil society and increase their participation in the NDC update process.

³⁶ Council of Europe (2017) Handbook on Transparency and Participation in Georgia, p. 36 <https://rm.coe.int/georgia-handbook-on-transparency-and-citizen-participation-en/168078938d>, accessed 21 March 2023.

³⁷ <https://ebtps.mof.ge>, accessed 09 June 2023.

³⁸ <https://fiscaltransparency.net/creating-public-participation-opportunities-in-georgia>, accessed 21 March 2023.

Funding

Although Georgia's civil society is generally extremely engaged, it would benefit from additional support and efficient management of financial resources to continue to participate in policy-making and to act as a watchdog, particularly in the reform of the public administration and security sectors.

Civil society organisations would benefit from capacity-building activities carried out by MEPA and its foreign allies, as well as from being informed about possible calls for proposals, since accessing climate funds is not an easy task. A formalised platform for these efforts would be beneficial, especially if it is jointly run by the government and civil society.

Improving financial sustainability models for regional CSOs requires innovative initiatives from MEPA, the Ministry of Finance and funders. Financial sustainability for CSOs is a cross-sectoral issue. In particular, as the focal point for climate change, MEPA will need to develop streamlined processes for financing climate action that are effective, open and impact-driven.

Grants should be made available to civil society actors to conduct research, raise awareness, advocate for policy change or provide services to the population on environmental issues. These grants should be used to monitor and evaluate the implementation of relevant security sector policies, strategies and action plans.

Capacity

In order to involve civil society in policy debates at an organised and functional level, state institutions such as parliament and local governments need to have stronger institutional and functional capacities. The authorities can be contacted on this issue, but often through informal rather than official channels. In addition, some government ministries have yet to recognise the benefits of involving civil society in policy dialogue. This is particularly evident in highly technical ministries such as the Ministry of Finance, which sometimes claims that civil society lacks the expertise to engage in meaningful discussions on complicated issues. In other cases, insufficiently advanced planning hampers the consultation process, leaving too little time for CSOs to make qualified contributions to policy debates.

While larger EU initiatives are often implemented by multinational CSOs with the necessary resources, it is important to continue to encourage cooperation between these organisations and to provide specific opportunities for local CSOs to develop their capacities. To encourage the growth of local CSOs and the formation of regional networks, EU calls for proposals often require co-applicants, including local actors, to submit proposals. The Georgian National Platform and other regional hubs are two examples of networks that have received concurrent EU support.

Calls for proposals often include the requirement to set up sub-granting programmes to support and develop smaller and local CSOs that cannot benefit from direct grants due to a lack of administrative capacity. Various forms of networking and cooperation between CSOs should be encouraged in order to facilitate greater transfer of knowledge, skills and know-how accumulated by experienced CSOs in Tbilisi to local and regional CSOs. Partnership projects, as well as those with large sub-granting components, need to be encour-

aged, and both need to include rigorous mentoring and training for less experienced partners. Institutional strengthening of umbrella groups such as social enterprise alliances and community engagement coalitions can also be prioritised.

Youth and women engagement

CSOs have been key collaborators in Georgia's capacity-building and knowledge-sharing initiatives. CSOs should focus on monitoring and implementing youth and gender policies and advocating for initiatives to increase youth and gender participation. Targeting the most vulnerable children and NEETs (not in education, employment or training) should remain a key focus as it increases the overall impact of the intervention. Due to frequent changes in government interlocutors, it is still difficult to establish an effective policy dialogue on youth and gender, so the involvement of CSOs is essential.

Some examples of CSO involvement include working with the Caucasus Environmental NGO Network. This network enables women-focused campaigns on natural resource management, particularly water management; capacity building of vulnerable young women and girls through the Young Women's Leadership School; knowledge sharing on gender and development; and International Women's Day events promoting the role of women in economic development and entrepreneurship.

Strengthening the support of civil society actors among the population

A barrier for the wider Georgian population is a lack of understanding and interest in climate issues and policy. This may be related to the fact that the views of civil society and CSOs are often ignored, not taken seriously by decision-makers or have little impact on policy decisions. The ability of CSOs to participate in meetings, discussions and workshops is often hampered by a lack of financial and time resources. Although various CSOs are involved in climate issues, they do not adequately pool and exchange knowledge, experience and current activities.

Civil society would benefit from a more positive perception of its efforts. The CSO sector should be properly reflected in national statistics to ensure that the function of CSOs is visible. Capacity building, the development of cross-sectoral relationships and the stimulation of creative ideas, as described above, could contribute to a better image of and trust in civil society.

7 Conclusion

This report analyses the status and conditions of climate-related participation and specific examples of participatory policy-making in Georgia. It examines how national civil society participates in national policy processes related to the Paris Agreement. The civic space for participation in climate policy in Georgia has already been analysed by UfU and its partners in a comprehensive study published in 2020. This report updates those findings, provides insights into recent developments and offers recommendations for overcoming existing barriers.

Looking at the scores of the assessment along the five criteria “fundamental requirements”, “enabling legislation”, “supporting governance and structures”, “qualitative participation process” and “capacity building”, there are no serious differences or striking changes at first glance. The study shows that Georgia still has a fairly active civil society, but only a few organisations work on issues such as climate change, emissions reduction and renewable energy. According to the Civicus Monitor, the overall civic space in Georgia can be described as “narrowed”. The study shows that participation rights are enshrined in primary and secondary legislation at the national level. In addition, institutional bodies such as the Environmental Protection and Natural Resources Committee, the Environmental Information and Education Centre (EIEC) or the Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum support dialogue and engagement between civil society and government on environmental and climate policy issues. The government has made efforts to involve civil society actors in key processes, including the development and review of the NDC, the National Energy and Climate Plan and the National Waste Management Strategy. Public and sectoral consultations and stakeholder engagement have taken place. However, there is still a need to improve the involvement of civil society in Georgia.

The Corona pandemic also had an impact on participation processes, especially in the years 2020 to 2022. Many formats that had previously enabled exchange between politics and civil society were no longer possible or were restricted. On the other hand, new digital formats for exchange and participation emerged. In addition, Russia’s war against Ukraine has had an impact on Georgia. It poses a number of challenges and creates a lot of uncertainty among the population. Amidst the political landscape in Georgia, characterized by the ruling party “Georgian Dream” being perceived as pro-Russian, a significant proportion of the population has aspirations to align with the European Union. As a result, since the start of the war, there have been repeated demonstrations in favour of European integration. Unfortunately, these demonstrations have been met with violent repression. In particular, civil society showed remarkable activism during the prospective implementation of the “Foreign Agents Act” in early March 2023, modelled on Russian legislation. Ultimately, the intensity of the protests prevented such a law from being passed. However, the prevailing conditions in Georgia remain highly precarious, and the parliamentary elections in 2024 are of great importance for future developments, particularly with regard to the country’s aspirations to join the EU. Given these circumstances, the existence of frameworks such as the Eastern Partnership, the NDC Partnership and civil society networks takes on greater importance, serving to strengthen democratic institutions and encourage citizen participation, particularly in the context of climate-related issues and the upcoming NDC review in 2025.

In conclusion, this study highlights the importance of civil society engagement in climate-related policy-making in Georgia. By fostering a robust and inclusive participatory environment, Georgia can harness the potential of civil society to drive ambitious climate action and achieve sustainable outcomes.

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Appendix

Assessment of the environment and opportunities to participate

Criterion 1 Fundamental requirements

Indicators	Scores	Score
a. Stability and peace (What is the intensity of ongoing conflicts?) ³⁹	0 = high intensity of conflict (limited war or war going on) 1 = medium (violent crisis going on) 2 = low intensity of conflict (non-violent crisis or dispute going on) 3 = very low intensity of conflict (no dispute, crisis or war going on)	1
b. Anti-corruption and transparency (What is the perceived level of corruption?) ⁴⁰	0 = highly corrupted, CPI of 0 1 = corrupt, CPI equal to or under 50 2 = clean, CPI higher than 50 3 = very clean, CPI of 100	2
c. Security of environmental defenders (Are environmental defenders secure from threats?) ⁴¹	0 = alarmingly weak security for environmental defenders (more than one murder documented) 1 = weak security for env. defenders (one murder documented) 2 = Environmental defenders are somewhat secure (no murders documented)	2
d. Political commitment (Is political participation of civil society related to the environment and climate backed by high-level political bodies and decision makers?)	0 = no 1 = yes, to some extent 2 = yes, fully	1
	Max. score: 10	6

³⁹ This indicator and related scoring is based on the Conflict Barometer 2022 by HIIK (<https://hiik.de/conflict-barometer/current-version/?lang=en>, accessed 24 May 2023). The Conflict Barometer uses a five-level model, defining disputes and non-violent crises as non-violent conflicts with a low conflict intensity, violent crises as violent conflicts with medium conflict intensity and limited wars and wars as violent conflicts with high conflict intensity.

⁴⁰ This indicator and related scoring is based on the Corruption Perception Index 2022 by Transparency International (<https://www.transparency.org/en/cpi/2022>, accessed 24 May 2022). According to Transparency International a scoring of zero means “highly corrupt” and 100 is “very clean”. The scoring “1=corrupt” and 2=clean” was set by UfU. Transparency International defines corruption as the “abuse of entrusted power for private gain”, whereas “transparency is about shedding light on rules, plans, processes and actions. (...) “It is the surest way of guarding against corruption, and helps increase trust in the people and institutions on which our futures depend.” (www.transparency.org/what-is-corruption, accessed 24 May 2023).

⁴¹ If possible, this indicator and related scoring is based on the Global Witness Report “Decade of defiance” which documents the murder of land and environmental activists in 2021 (<https://www.globalwitness.org/en/campaigns/environmental-activists/decade-defiance>, accessed 24 May 2023). It is important to note that the absence of murder does not mean that there are no other threats, attacks or harassments of environmental defenders and activists.

Criterion 2 Enabling legislation

Indicators	Scores	Score
a. Commitment to international conventions and agreements (Did the country sign and ratify (accept, approve, accede to) the Aarhus Convention or the Escazú Agreement, requiring civil society participation related to the environment and climate?)	0 = no, neither signed, nor ratified (accepted, approved, acceded to) 1 = signed, but not ratified (accepted, approved, acceded to) 2 = ratified (accepted, approved, acceded to)	2
b. National laws requiring the proactive participation of civil society (To what extent does/do <ul style="list-style-type: none">the constitution,national framework laws regarding environment and climate,strategic environmental assessment laws,or climate-related sectoral laws (regarding energy, industry, transport, forest or land use) obligate the state or state agencies at national level to proactively seek the participation of civil society in decision-making related to the environment and climate, going beyond the official notification of participatory events?)	0 = no, neither signed, nor ratified (accepted, approved, acceded to) 1 = signed, but not ratified (accepted, approved, acceded to) 2 = ratified (accepted, approved, acceded to)	2
c. National laws requiring timely participation (To what extent does/do <ul style="list-style-type: none">the constitution,national framework laws regarding environment and climate,strategic environmental assessment laws,or climate-related sectoral laws (regarding energy, industry, transport, forest or land use) require timely participation (before a decision is made and so that there is enough time for a public authority to consider the public comments) of civil society in decision-making related to the environment and climate?)	0 = none of the laws assessed 1 = a few of the laws assessed 2 = most of the laws assessed 3 = all laws assessed	2

<p>d. National laws requiring information regarding the participation process (To what extent does/do</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">the constitution,national framework laws regarding environment and climate,strategic environmental assessment laws,or climate-related sectoral laws (regarding energy, industry, transport, forest or land use) <p>require all information relevant to decision-making processes relating to the environment and climate to be made available to civil society, without civil society having to make an official information request?)</p>	<p>0 = none of the laws assessed 1 = a few of the laws assessed 2 = most of the laws assessed 3 = all laws assessed</p>	<p>2</p>
<p>e. National laws requiring the consideration of civil society's comments (To what extent does/do</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">the constitution,national framework laws regarding environment and climate,strategic environmental assessment laws,or climate-related sectoral laws (regarding energy, industry, transport, forest or land use) <p>require the state or state agencies at the national level to take due account of civil society's comments in decision-making relating to the environment and climate?)</p>	<p>0 = none of the laws assessed 1 = a few of the laws assessed 2 = most of the laws assessed 3 = all laws assessed</p>	<p>2</p>
<p>f. National laws requiring notification of civil society on the decision made along with the reasons and considerations on which the decision is based (To what extent does/do</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">the constitution,national framework laws regarding environment and climate,strategic environmental assessment laws,or climate-related sectoral laws (regarding energy, industry, transport, forest or land use) <p>require the state or state agencies at the national level to promptly inform civil society about the decision and provide a written response explaining which comments were taken into account as well as giving reasons for dismissing others?)</p>	<p>0 = none of the laws assessed 1 = a few of the laws assessed 2 = most of the laws assessed 3 = all laws assessed</p>	<p>2</p>
	<p>Max. score: 17</p>	<p>12</p>

Criterion 3 Supporting governance & structures

Indicators	Scores	Score
<p>a. Governance structure (Is there an institutional body or mechanism, such as a committee, division or centre, supporting and coordinating participation processes relating to the environment and climate?)</p>	<p>0 = no 2 = yes</p>	<p>0</p>
<p>b. Institutional coordination & cooperation (Are national participation processes relating to the environment and climate coordinated across different vertical and horizontal political levels?)</p>	<p>0 = no 1 = there is weak coordination and cooperation 2 = there is good coordination and cooperation 3 = there is very good coordination and cooperation</p>	<p>1</p>
<p>c. Financial resources (Are civil society actors financially supported to participate in environmental/climate policy, e.g. through an allowance, reimbursement of travel costs or funding of staff members?)</p>	<p>0 = no 1 = yes, to some extent 2 = yes, fully</p>	<p>0</p>
	<p>Max. score: 7</p>	<p>1</p>

Criterion 4 Qualitative participation processes

Indicators	Scores	Score
<p>a. Early participation (At what stage was civil society involved in the process?)</p>	<p>0 = only after most of the decisions have been made 1 = after the first draft of the document/plan/strategy 2 = directly from the beginning</p>	<p>1</p>
<p>b. Broad, inclusive invitation (Was a wide variety of representatives of civil society (CSOs and wider public) invited to participate, including for instance those representing youth, gender, indigenous groups, and minority ethnic groups?)</p>	<p>0 = no civil society representatives invited 1 = not a wide variety invited, just a few selected CSOs 2 = either just CSOs or just the wider public invited 3 = yes, a wide variety invited</p>	<p>2</p>
<p>c. Timely invitation (Was civil society invited early enough to participate?)</p>	<p>0 = some days in advance 1 = less than one month in advance 2 = more than one month in advance</p>	<p>1</p>

d. Adequate participation formats (How was civil society involved in the process?)	0 = through information 1 = through consultation 2 = through several interactive formats, fostering dialogue and collaboration	1
e. Transparency and information (Was information about the technical background and the participation process available to civil society?)	0 = no 1 = yes, to some extent 2 = yes, a lot of information	1
f. Available documentation (Was documentation about the discussions and results available to civil society?)	0 = no 1 = yes, to some extent 2 = yes, fully	1
g. Transparent review of recommendations (Were recommendations and views from civil society reviewed in a transparent manner?)	0 = no 1 = yes, to some extent 2 = yes, fully	0
h. Evaluation and feedback process (Was there an evaluation and feedback process regarding the participation procedure?)	0 = no 1 = yes	0
	Max. score: 16	7

Criterion 5 Capacity building

Indicators	Scores	Score
a. Environmental education (Is national formal and non-formal environmental and climate education offered to the public?)	0 = no 1 = yes, some education on offer 2 = yes, a lot of education on offer	1
b. Public awareness raising on participation rights and opportunities (Is information about public participation rights and opportunities available to the public?)	0 = no 1 = yes, to some extent 2 = yes, fully	1
c. CSO capacity building on climate change, climate policy, policy dialogue, organisational development, cooperation and networking (Is there capacity building on topics such as climate change, climate policy, policy dialogue, organisational development, cooperation or networking for CSOs?)	0 = no 1 = yes, some capacity building available 2 = yes, a lot of capacity building available	1

d. Capacity building on participation and stakeholder engagement for governments (Is there capacity building on participation and stakeholder engagement for national governments and state officials?)	0 = no 1 = yes, some capacity building available 2 = yes, a lot of capacity building available	1
	Max. score: 8	4
Max. total score		59
		30

In 2015, Georgia and many other countries around the world adopted the Paris Agreement to limit global warming and its impacts. However, current national commitments (Nationally Determined Contributions – NDCs) are insufficient to keep the global average temperature rise this century below 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels. Time is running out and rapid and far-reaching changes are needed across all sectors.

Civil society actors play a crucial role in developing and implementing climate policies, as they act as nature's advocate and voice, driven by the desire to protect the environment and preserve healthy living conditions for human beings.

The publications “**Civic space for participation in climate policy**” aim to analyse the status and conditions of climate-related participation and concrete examples of participatory policy-making in different countries. The analyses examine how national civil society participates in national policy processes related to the Paris Agreement. The studies also identify country-specific barriers to meaningful, effective and long-term participation, and provide recommendations for overcoming these barriers. The civic space for participation in climate policies in Georgia has already been analysed in a comprehensive study published in 2020. This report updates these findings and provides insights into recent developments.

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