

ACCESS TO JUSTICE AND LEGAL  
REMEDIES FOR CHILDREN SUBJECTED  
TO SEXUAL EXPLOITATION IN

# GEORGIA



PUBLIC  
HEALTH  
FOUNDATION  
OF GEORGIA



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# 1

## *Why is access to justice and legal remedies important for children who have been subjected to sexual exploitation?*



Children who have been subjected to sexual exploitation are entitled to rebuild their lives and find a path towards healing. Access to justice and effective remedies is a critical step in that process. Under international law, children have a fundamental right to live free from abuse and exploitation;<sup>1</sup> and when this or any other right is violated, States must provide access to effective remedies and reparations.<sup>2,3,4</sup> Access to justice implies the legal empowerment of survivors and access to fair, timely, and child-sensitive justice mechanisms and remedies, including compensation and support services to aid their recovery and reintegration.<sup>5,6,7</sup>

This is all the more important because, in practice, seeking redress through criminal proceedings is often the only feasible way for survivors to secure damage compensation, as alternative avenues – such as separate civil lawsuits or State-funded compensation schemes – tend to be unavailable, costly, impractical, or exist only on paper.<sup>8</sup>

- 1 UN General Assembly (UNGA). (1989). [Convention on the Rights of the Child](#). Art 34.
- 2 UN General Assembly (UNGA). (1965). [International Convention on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination](#). Art 6; UNGA. (1966). [International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights](#). Art 2(3); UNGA. (1984). [Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment](#). Art 13; UNGA. (2006). [International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance](#). Art 12, 17(2)(f), 20.
- 3 UNGA. (1948). [Universal Declaration of Human Rights](#). Art 8; UNGA. (2005). [UN Basic Principles and Guidelines on the Right to a Remedy and Reparation for Victims of Gross Violations of International Human Rights Law and Serious Violations of International Humanitarian Law](#); UNGA. (1992). [Declaration on the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearances](#). Art 9, 13; UN Economic and Social Council. (1989). [Principles on the Effective Prevention and Investigation of Extra-legal, Arbitrary and Summary Executions](#). Principles 4 and 16; UNGA. (1985). [Declaration of Basic Principles of Justice for Victims of Crime and Abuse of Power](#). Principles 4 to 7; World Conference on Human Rights. (1993). [Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action](#). Art 27; World Conference against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance. (2001). [Durban Declaration and Programme of Action](#). Art 13, 160-162 and 165; UNGA. (1998). [Declaration on Human Rights Defenders](#). Art 9.
- 4 UN Committee on the Rights of the Child. (2003). [General Comment No. 5 on 'General measures of implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child](#). CRC/GC/2003/5. Paragraph 24.
- 5 UN General Assembly (UNGA). (1989). [Convention on the Rights of the Child](#). Art 39.
- 6 Liefwaard, T. (2019). [Access to Justice for Children: Towards a Specific Research and Implementation Agenda](#). *The International Journal of Children's Rights*, Vol. 27(2). 198.
- 7 ECPAT International. (2017). [Through the Eyes of a Child: Barriers to Access to Justice and Remedies for Child Victims of Sexual Exploitation](#).
- 8 ECPAT International. (2017). [Through the Eyes of a Child: Barriers to Access to Justice and Remedies for Child Victims of Sexual Exploitation](#). 17.

# 2

## *Methodology*

The information presented in this paper has been gathered through documentary legal research aimed at determining the extent to which Georgian laws provide access to child-centric justice and protection for children who have been subjected to sexual exploitation. The paper further integrates insights from qualitative semi-structured interviews with ten key informants. These included representatives from the Public Defender's Office, the Agency for State Care and Assistance for the Victims of Human Trafficking, the Legal Aid Service, and the Prosecutor's Office, as well as civil society representatives including lawyers, pedagogues, and psychologists. The purpose of these interviews was to explore informants' perceptions of the practical realities of children's access to justice.

The findings from this research were presented to a group of 18 stakeholders during a national consultation, which took place on 28 April 2025 in Tbilisi. Participants provided feedback on the findings and discussed the way forward to enhance access to justice and effective remedies for children subjected to sexual exploitation in Georgia.



# 3

## *Reporting child sexual exploita- tion and starting legal action*

### **National complaint mechanisms**

The Georgian Juvenile Justice Code aims to protect the best interests of children involved in justice proceedings. However, it does not provide specific guidance on how child victims of crime, including those subjected to sexual exploitation, can file complaints through official reporting mechanisms. General procedural legislation allows victims of crime to apply to a public prosecutor to be recognised as victims.<sup>9</sup> A prosecutor may issue a recognition decree either in response to such application or on their own initiative.<sup>10</sup> If the decree is not issued within 48 hours, the applicant can escalate the request to a higher-ranking prosecutor.<sup>11</sup> The prosecutor's decision can be appealed to the competent district or city court.<sup>12</sup> The law does not specify if foreign citizens are eligible to seek victim recognition.

In 2015, the Agency for State Care and Assistance for the Victims of Human Trafficking launched a hotline (116 006) for cases of violence against women and domestic violence cases, including those involving children.<sup>13</sup> Another hotline (111), created in 2020 by the State Care Agency under the Ministry of the Internally Displaced Persons from the Occupied Territories, Labour, Health and Social Affairs, operates 24/7 and responds to cases of child abuse, including sexual abuse, exploitation and neglect. This hotline is available in Georgian, English, Russian, Azerbaijani, and Armenian.<sup>14</sup> Since 2012, the police has run the unified emergency assistance number (112), which handles urgent calls, including cases of sexual violence against children, and connects

9 Georgia. (2009). *Criminal Procedure Code*.

10 Ibid. Art 56(5).

11 Ibid.

12 Ibid.

13 PHF. (2025, January). Personal Communication.

14 Ibid.



them to the appropriate services.<sup>15</sup> The Public Health Foundation's hotline (116 111) also receives reports from children,<sup>16</sup> but its services are limited due to resource constraints.<sup>17</sup>

An interviewed prosecutor noted progress in the availability and effectiveness of complaint mechanisms for children over the years, citing as a key example the introduction in 2022 of the Barnahus model in Tbilisi, where professionals are specifically trained to handle child-related cases.<sup>18</sup> Representatives from the Public Defender's Office also highlighted that children can now reach out to them through social media, hotlines, direct contact with staff, and written applications. Reports can be made anonymously, and in cases of sexual violence, psychologists and social workers provide emotional support before police get involved. Staff are trained in child-sensitive communication, and children can request to speak with specific employees if they prefer.

Despite these options, many professionals interviewed felt that the existing reporting system is not designed with children's needs at the centre. A psychologist mentioned that civil society groups are often unaware of these hotlines and reporting methods, highlighting the need for greater awareness and outreach.

Beyond procedural and practical barriers, a major ongoing challenge is that many children have a limited understanding of

what constitutes sexual violence. Sources from the Public Defender's Office identified the lack of awareness as a key issue.

Many children also value their privacy and hesitate to disclose incidents to their families, fearing punishment, blame, or being judged. This reluctance is often made worse by a lack of trust in adults, which makes initial disclosure even more difficult. Indeed, the sources noted that, although the Juvenile Division handles child-related cases and human rights departments exist within the Ministry of Internal Affairs and Prosecutor's Office, law enforcement struggles to address sexual exploitation cases due to children's reluctance to report out of fear and stigma. Limited evidence and inconsistent protocols also complicate investigations.

## Referral procedure

In 2010, Georgia enacted its first child protection referral procedure.<sup>19</sup> In 2016, it was expanded to make local self-governance bodies, ministries, and other state agencies responsible for handling referrals related to violence against children, with the goal of ensuring a coordinated and effective response.<sup>20</sup> Institutions in contact with children—including schools, medical institutions, village doctors, childcare institutions, the Social Service Agency, district offices, and the Patrol Police—have the duty to identify cases of violence against children,<sup>21</sup> assess the validity of

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> PHF. (n.d.). [Services: Child Helpline 116 111](#).

<sup>17</sup> PHF. (2025, January). Personal Communication.

<sup>18</sup> UNICEF Georgia. (2022). [The first ever Center for Psychological and Social Services for Children Victims of Violence launched in Georgia](#).

<sup>19</sup> Georgia. (2010). [On approval of child protection referral procedures](#).

<sup>20</sup> Georgia. (2016). [On approval of child protection referral procedures](#).

<sup>21</sup> Ibid. Art 6; The definition of violence includes the violation of constitutional rights and freedoms, particularly through acts of sexual violence. See Georgia. (2010). [On approval of child protection referral procedures](#). Art 3.

any suspicions,<sup>22</sup> and respond within their authority.<sup>23</sup> Once a suspicion is confirmed, these institutions and individuals must submit a referral form to the Social Service Agency or State Care Agency.<sup>24</sup> If they do not fulfil these obligation of detection and referral, individuals may face a warning or a fine of 50 to 100 GEL, which is increased to 100 to 200 GEL for institutions or legal entities.<sup>25</sup>

A psychologist interviewed mentioned that the referral procedure includes mechanisms for receiving and reviewing applications related to sexual exploitation. However, opinions on how effective and usable the system is for children varied across the interviewed professionals. A former senior official from the Social Service Agency noted that the referral procedure needs to be updated, as it has not been revised since 2016 and does not reflect new developments, such as the creation of child support and protection units at the local level. A lawyer added that child abuse reporting forms are too complex and should be simplified to be less intimidating for children. They also stressed the importance of better distribution and guidance to help children use the forms.

In addition, a lawyer highlighted the lack of public awareness about this system, noting that while detection has improved, its effectiveness largely depends on how well the professionals involved implement existing procedures. Lastly, a former senior official from the Social Service Agency noted that the referral system is also

hindered by the long-standing taboo surrounding sexual violence, with the public often failing to recognise cases involving children as serious and remaining reluctant to discuss them.

## Initiating legal proceedings and collecting evidence

In Georgia, criminal investigations can be initiated based on information provided to investigators or prosecutors, discovered during criminal proceedings, or even reported in the media.<sup>26</sup> Investigators can initiate investigations on their own initiative. Reports of criminal offences can be submitted in writing or orally, and individuals may request written confirmation of their report.<sup>27</sup> Anonymous reporting is allowed,<sup>28</sup> though while it can trigger an investigation, it cannot serve as the sole basis for prosecution.<sup>29</sup>

An interviewed prosecutor explained that Tbilisi Police Department's Juvenile Division, child-friendly rooms in Prosecutor's Office buildings, and a psycho-social centre for children subjected to sexual abuse offer comprehensive investigative and procedural support to children. However, many cases remain unreported for years, complicating evidence collection. A social worker highlighted that poor cooperation between police and social services hampers the creation of supportive environments for survivors. Nevertheless, successful prosecutions do occur.

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22 Georgia. (2010). *On approval of child protection referral procedures*. Art 6(5).

23 Ibid. Art 6(2).

24 Ibid. Art 6(6).

25 Georgia. (2014). *Code of Administrative Offenses*. Art 172(6).

26 Georgia. (2009). *Criminal Procedure Code*. Art 101(1).

27 Ibid. Art 101(2).

28 Ibid. Art 101(3).

29 Ibid.

Additional challenges include as the difficulty of gathering online evidence due to fake profiles and the impact of societal stigma which discourages reporting and complicates investigations. In a 2021 report, the Public Defender's Office indicated that the State does not have a mechanism for maintaining statistics on child sexual exploitation cases.<sup>30</sup> This has made it impossible to determine exactly how many cases were reported to and investigated by law enforcement.<sup>31</sup>

## Time limits for prosecution

There are no statutes of limitations for crimes against children in Georgia.<sup>32</sup> Statutes of limitations are periods during which a person can report a criminal offence it was subjected to; once it expires, prosecution is no longer possible. The removal of this limitation for child sexual exploitation cases is a major step toward enabling survivors to seek remedies and justice. Georgian law also suspends the limitation period for filing civil claims for damages in cases of sexual, economic, domestic, or other forms of violence against children until they reach adulthood or choose to file earlier.<sup>33</sup>

## Protection from intimidation and retaliation

Georgian Law does not specify procedures for survivors, witnesses, or those reporting

crimes of child sexual abuse and exploitation to seek protection from intimidation or retaliation. However, the Code on the Rights of the Child obliges the State to provide protection and support to child victims of crime and violence.<sup>34</sup> Most professional interviewed were unaware of formal victim or witness protection programmes. Still, a lawyer noted that the State Care Agency operates confidential shelters in Eastern and Western Georgia for individuals at risk. Similarly, a prosecutor said the Criminal Procedure Code allows for witness protection measures,<sup>35</sup> and prosecutors can include survivors, informants, and witnesses in a protection programme if their safety is threatened.

## Social and contextual factors impacting reporting

Child protection and juvenile justice laws do not differentiate victims by gender, but it remains unclear whether they protect foreign children subjected to child sexual exploitations. However, the Code on the Rights of the Child requires that all children be treated equally, regardless of race, skin colour, gender, nationality, ethnicity, or social affiliation.<sup>36</sup> Professionals interviewed noted that conservative gender norms hinder reporting, and that greater awareness is needed among community-based professionals who often neglect child protection, mistakenly believing it falls outside their responsibilities. While most

30 UNICEF and Public Defender of Georgia. (2021). *Special Report: The Administration of Justice on Crimes of Sexual Abuse and Sexual Exploitation of Children*.

31 Ibid.

32 Georgia. (1999). *Criminal Code*. Art 71.

33 Georgia. (2019). *Code on the Rights of the Child*. Art 77.

34 Ibid. Art 61. This includes short-term and long-term programmes and services accessible to children who are crime victims and/or victims of violence for their physical and psychological rehabilitation and mechanism for protecting children from humiliation, repeated traumas, and damage and for providing accessibility to justice, appeal and compensate for damage.

35 Georgia. (2009). *Criminal Procedure Code*. Art 49.

36 Georgia. (2019). *Code on the Rights of the Child*. Art 7.



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interviewees did not cite specific examples of discrimination in the justice system, a social worker pointed to a presumption of criminality toward Roma minorities and noted that language barriers limit their access to services. A lawyer added that although some court procedures are translated, proceedings are conducted in Georgian. Several informants, including from the Public Defender's Office, highlighted that interpreters are not properly assessed, underscoring the persistent need for specialised and qualified interpreters in the justice system.

# 4

## Child-centric justice

The main legislation protecting the rights of child victims and witnesses of crime is the Juvenile Justice Code. Only professionals<sup>37</sup> specialised in juvenile justice can lead proceedings involving children.<sup>38</sup> For cases involving child survivors, the panel of judges must include one judge specialised in juvenile justice.<sup>39</sup>

The Code on the Rights of the Child further states that justice must be adapted to the child, including the right to a justice system led by specialised professionals that is accessible, age-appropriate, and easily understandable.<sup>40</sup> If a procedural action is carried out by a person not specialised in juvenile justice, the child can notify a qualified professional who then takes over.<sup>41</sup>

By law, an authorised body should inform children involved in juvenile justice proceedings about their rights, the process, and available support and appeal mechanisms.<sup>42</sup> At all stages, children are entitled to receive information in a developmentally appropriate format, free interpreter services, and consular assistance.<sup>43</sup> Despite these provisions, sources from the Public Defender's Office noted that trial preparation for children varies by judge, affecting the child's comfort and understanding of proceedings.



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- 37 These include police officers, lawyers, social workers, mediators, probation officers, coordinator of a witness and a victim, staff of the juvenile rehabilitation facility and psychologist. Georgia. (2015). [Juvenile Justice Code](#). Art 16.
- 38 Georgia. (2015). [Juvenile Justice Code](#). Art 16.
- 39 Ibid. Art 17 (3).
- 40 Georgia. (2019). [Code on the Rights of the Child](#). Art 69(2).
- 41 Georgia. (2015). [Juvenile Justice Code](#). Art 15 (2).
- 42 Ibid. Art 10(5); Georgia. (2019) [Code on the Rights of the Child](#). Art 70.
- 43 Georgia. (2015). [Juvenile Justice Code](#). Art 15 (2).

## Legal aid and support

Child victims of crimes are entitled to free legal aid at all stages of criminal proceedings.<sup>44</sup> The State must provide this service if the child does not have a lawyer,<sup>45</sup> and a permanent group of lawyers specialised in juvenile justice is available to respond promptly in such cases.<sup>46</sup> Children have the right to consistent, qualified legal aid in a language and format they understand, at the State's expense.<sup>47</sup> The Legal Aid Service must ensure that parents or caregivers receive legal advice on the child's rights via phone, adapted websites, printed materials, and other formats.<sup>48</sup> Children under 14 may only be interrogated with the consent and presence of their legal representative,<sup>49</sup> who can seek clarification of questions on their behalf.<sup>50</sup> While few interviewees commented on the availability of free legal services for children subjected to sexual abuse and exploitation, one of them confirmed that State-appointed lawyers are mandatory unless a private one is chosen. However, children are often unaware of their right to free legal aid, making it crucial that they are informed about it and assigned a defence lawyer from the outset.

## Interview protocols

Judges may, on their own or at the child's request, apply protective interrogation techniques,<sup>51</sup> such as image or voice

distortion, privacy screen, video recordings, or closed hearings.<sup>52</sup> They may also order the defendant's temporary removal from the courtroom if their presence could retraumatise the child or affect their ability to testify or tell the truth.<sup>53</sup> Interrogations/interviews should be conducted in the presence of the child's legal representative and lawyer. In cases related to child sexual violence, interrogations/interviews can be audio- or video-recorded for later use in court.<sup>54</sup> Interviewees expressed varying opinions on how survivors of child sexual exploitation are interrogated. A psychologist said that despite the existence of remote interrogation methods, only some judges accept recorded interviews as evidence. In addition, according to the informant, the use of these methods remains uncommon and controversial. A lawyer also noted that only Rustavi Court has a remote connection mechanism that is considered effective.

It is important to recognize that children who have experienced technology-facilitated sexual exploitation and abuse may be particularly sensitive to being recorded by an adult. For some, the presence of a camera can trigger feelings of vulnerability, shame, or fear of further exposure. Further research is needed to ensure that video recording of interviews adheres to trauma-informed principles, carefully balancing the need for reliable evidence with the psychological well-being of each survivor on a case-by-case basis.

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44 Ibid. Art 15.

45 Georgia. (2019). [Code on the Rights of the Child](#). Art 74.

46 Georgia. (2015). [Juvenile Justice Code](#). Art 20.

47 Georgia. (2019). [Code on the Rights of the Child](#). Art 79.

48 Ibid.

49 Georgia. (2015). [Juvenile Justice Code](#). Art 52(4).

50 Ibid.

51 Ibid. Art 24.

52 Ibid.

53 Ibid.

54 Ibid. Art 52(3).

Multiple interviewees confirmed that hearings involving survivors are held *in camera*, but a lawyer stressed the importance of tailoring the process to the child's needs, including preventing contact with the accused. Sources from the Public Defender's Office identified several challenges, including the lack of child-friendly spaces in courtrooms equipped for remote testimony and direct communication with judges. In addition, defence lawyers sometimes ask questions that are not child-friendly, potentially causing emotional harm.

## Psychological support and involvement of civil society organisations

The Code on the Rights of the Child States that administrative and judicial proceedings involving children should follow a multidisciplinary approach to assess their psychological, social, emotional and physical health.<sup>55</sup> This should also apply to child survivors and witnesses, with the joint participation of social workers, forensic and medical experts, psychologists, paediatricians, police officers, prosecutors, and lawyers.<sup>56</sup>

Children also have the right to the presence of a psychologist during interrogations and other procedural actions to assess their needs and provide adequate support.<sup>57</sup> However, national legislation does not guarantee that non-governmental organisations may accompany, assist, and support survivors during investigations and judicial proceeding; though witness

coordinators, parents, and guardians can. An informant shared that in practice psychologists commonly support survivors during court hearings, though procedural improvements are still needed. Most interviewees also acknowledged the potential for increased involvement by civil society groups, particularly those offering legal assistance. Still, access to psychosocial services from these organisations depends on the availability of active projects.

Many interviewees stressed the importance of providing legal and psychosocial support to children, emphasising the need to adequately train professionals interacting with them, given their age and trauma. Sources from the Public Defender's Office recalled the importance for standardised guidelines on involving psychologists and social workers in judicial proceedings to ensure consistent, effective support. They identified challenges such as inconsistent practices in preparing children for trials, varying quality in lawyers' approaches that may cause emotional harm, and the need for broader adoption of Barnahus models, which prioritise psychological well-being and safe disclosure.

## Right to privacy

The privacy of children subjected to criminal offences is protected throughout all stages of proceedings.<sup>58</sup> Their personal data cannot be disclosed or published, except for reasons such as state security, public safety, or crime investigation and prevention.<sup>59</sup> This includes any form of disclosure, including by media, that could

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55 Georgia. (2019). [Code on the Rights of the Child](#). Art 72.

56 Ibid.

57 Ibid. Art 23.

58 Georgia. (2015). [Juvenile Justice Code](#). Art 13.

59 Georgia. (2011). [Law on Personal Data Protection](#). Art 24; Georgia. (2019). [Code on the Rights of the Child](#). Art 69.

directly or indirectly reveal the child's identity, such as images, descriptions of the child or their relatives, names, addresses, or audio/video recordings.<sup>60</sup> Disclosing documents or records containing a child's personal data related to acts of violence against them is also prohibited.<sup>61</sup>

## Training and capacity enhancement opportunities for professionals working with children

The State must conduct background checks on professionals working with children in education, healthcare, social protection, law, and law enforcement to prevent risks of harm to the child.<sup>62</sup> They should also undergo interdisciplinary training in child rights, age-specific needs, child-centric justice, and communication methods appropriate for all developmental levels and children in a situation of vulnerability.<sup>63</sup> The institutional system for professional specialisation must ensure quality control and uphold ethical standards in the selection, training, and activities of these professionals.<sup>64</sup> The corresponding development standards are to be crafted by the State.<sup>65</sup>

Regarding capacity-building programmes for justice and police professionals working with children, a social worker highlighted the need for multisectoral cooperation training focused on case management and evaluating current practices. A prosecutor noted that current training modules prioritise handling survivors in line with international standards. However, a lawyer called for more extensive training in international standards, child psychology, and developmental needs, including retraining on child interrogation protocols. The lawyer expressed concern that current 10-day programmes are insufficient and require expansion. Another lawyer stressed the need for continuous, in-depth training and noted a shortage of specialists who can teach child interview techniques. He mentioned the vital role of specialised psychologists and called for the creation of an organisation dedicated to this work. Similarly, Public Defender's Office staff recommended training focused on working with survivors, including guidelines for effective intervention.

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60 Georgia. (2019). [Code on the Rights of the Child](#). Art 71.

61 Ibid.

62 Ibid. Art 73.

63 Ibid.

64 Ibid.

65 Ibid. Art 88.

# 5

## Access to recovery and reintegration

By law, the State must provide both short-term and long-term programmes and services to support the physical and psychosocial rehabilitation of children victims of crimes. This includes implementing mechanisms to protect them from humiliation, repeated trauma, and harm.<sup>66</sup> At every stage of legal proceedings, the State must safeguard children's rights and prevent secondary victimisation.<sup>67</sup>

The child protection referral system allows for the placement of a child in appropriate service institutions to support their recovery.<sup>68</sup> When necessary, children may be relocated to safe environments, such as specialised childcare institutions or shelters, as a last resort.<sup>69</sup> Children have been subjected to violence also have the right to accommodation and recovery support in these institutions,<sup>70</sup> and the State must ensure they receive physical and mental healthcare services.<sup>71</sup>

The Social Service Agency/State Care Agency is responsible for regularly monitoring rehabilitation processes.<sup>72</sup> If a child's individual development plan requires revision, the Agency should update it, suspend ongoing services, and ensure the child is either placed in a more suitable institution or tenured home when appropriate.<sup>73</sup> Interviewed professionals confirmed that the Barnahus centre supports investigative actions while also offering psychological rehabilitation services to survivors and their families during and after judicial proceedings. Children can access support services up to one year following the conclusion of legal processes.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid. Art 43, 46.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid. Art 61.

<sup>68</sup> Georgia. (2010). *On approval of child protection referral procedures*. Art 4(3).

<sup>69</sup> Ibid. Art 9.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid.

<sup>71</sup> Georgia. (2010). *On approval of child protection referral procedures*. Art 43.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid. Art 15.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid.



Participation in such services is voluntary and accessible through referrals from various organisations. Each child receives an individual plan, typically lasting up to nine months and extendable if needed. The Barnahus centre operates under the State Care Agency, which also oversees reintegration processes. It collaborates with guardianship authorities and social workers by sharing relevant information and conducting assessments. However, several challenges remain. These include a shortage of qualified psychologists and the geographical limitation of services to Tbilisi.

Most interviewees agreed on the need to strengthen family support. Enhancing effectiveness requires bolstering social services, the development of comprehensive child protection services, and increased availability of psychological services, currently limited in number,

day care and crisis centres. Coordination among various service providers is also essential for achieving more sustainable and effective outcomes. A former Social Service Agency senior official remarked that comprehensive recovery services have long been lacking in Georgia. Although the Barnahus model was introduced to minimise the retraumatisation of children subjected to sexual abuse by reducing the number of interviews, in practice children are still interviewed 7-8 times. While Barnahus marks progress, several interviewees agree that improvements are still needed, including from a budgetary perspective, with recovery efforts largely dependent on a 130 GEL cash allowance—an amount regarded as insufficient given the country's cost of living.

# 6

## Access to compensation

The Juvenile Justice Code provides that, following a judgement, a child subjected to a criminal offence can claim compensation for injury and damage as prescribed by law.<sup>74</sup> Under the Civil Procedure Code, victims can seek compensation from the convicted offender.<sup>75</sup> Criminal convictions must include a decision on the forfeiture and confiscation of the offender's property, so it is inferred that such assets may be used to compensate the victim.<sup>76</sup> An interviewed prosecutor confirmed that compensation claims must be initiated separately through civil proceedings.

In 2022, the government adopted a regulation on issuing compensation to persons subjected to violence against women and domestic violence.<sup>77</sup> These are entitled to State compensation if the harm to their health resulting from the offence has not been compensated by the perpetrator.<sup>78</sup> The amount is determined by a court, and compensation is issued by the Agency for State Care and Assistance for the Statutory Victims of Human trafficking.<sup>79</sup> Upon a child's first contact with the criminal justice system, an authorised body must inform and support them regarding the possibility of obtaining compensation in court or through alternative mechanisms.<sup>80</sup> In trafficking cases, legislation allows law enforcement to freeze and forfeit the offenders' assets to secure victim compensation, provided the offender is a Georgian national with registered

<sup>74</sup> Georgia. (2015). *Juvenile Justice Code*. Art 25.

<sup>75</sup> Georgia. (1997). *Civil Procedure Code*. Art 46(1) (c)

<sup>76</sup> Georgia. (2009). *Criminal Procedure Code*. Art 274.

<sup>77</sup> UN Women. (2022). *Victims/survivors of violence against women and domestic violence in Georgia to receive compensation*.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid.

<sup>80</sup> Georgia. (2019). *Code on the Rights of the Child*. Art 70.



assets.<sup>81</sup> However, according to existing reports, in practice, trafficking victims do not receive compensation from their traffickers due to law enforcement's failure to seize criminal assets.<sup>82</sup> An additional obstacle arises when traffickers are foreigners without assets in Georgia.<sup>83</sup>

A child victim of crime is entitled to State compensation, including for financial loss, through expedited procedures when compensation from the offender is not possible.<sup>84</sup> The State Fund is the primary entity administering compensation for persons subjected to trafficking and other forms of sexual violence, which includes monetary payments.<sup>85</sup> While survivors of child sexual exploitation can seek

compensation through State-managed funds,<sup>86</sup> it remains unclear to what extent they are able to access it.<sup>87</sup> An interviewed informant confirmed that survivors can seek compensation directly from convicted offenders, with no legal limit on the amount, including for non-material harm such as emotional distress. Enforcement can involve securing property through court orders or seeking payment from the State budget. However, this research found no information on how many survivors of child sexual exploitation received compensation or the amounts disbursed.

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81 ECPAT International. (2018). [ECPAT Country Overview: Georgia](#); PHF Georgia. (2024, July). Personal Communication.

82 US Department of State. (2024). [2024 Trafficking in Persons Report: Georgia](#).

83 Ibid.

84 Georgia. (2019). [Code on the Rights of the Child](#). Art 61.

85 Ibid.

86 PHF Georgia. (2024, April). Personal Communication.

87 Ibid.

## **ACCESS TO JUSTICE:**

*Ensuring the rights of survivors of child sexual exploitation to access child-centric services is upheld in Georgia*

### **Advocacy Roadmap**

# ADVOCACY ROADMAP

## 1

### *Summary of main gaps identified/ conclusions*



#### **Lack of Child-Centric Reporting Systems:**

Existing referral and reporting mechanisms are not sufficiently child-centric, creating barriers for children who have been subjected to sexual exploitation to safely and confidently report abuse or initiate legal action. The current systems may be perceived as intimidating, complex, or inaccessible to children. Additionally, there is limited awareness and understanding among children and caregivers about how and where to access these mechanisms.

#### **Limited Child-Friendly Infrastructure and Weak Interagency Coordination:**

There is a lack of adequately equipped, child-friendly facilities within police departments and prosecutor's offices across Georgia, which hinders the provision of appropriate support to children who have been subjected to sexual exploitation. Coordination between law enforcement and social service systems remains weak, contributing to underreporting and insufficient follow-up on cases. Furthermore, existing legislation does not fully support the effective operation of the Barnahus model (Centre for Psychological and Social Services for Child Victims of Violence), and similar multidisciplinary facilities are absent in regional centres.

### **Insufficient Capacity and Standardisation in Trauma-Informed Support for Child Victims:**

There is a lack of consistent, specialised training for professionals on trauma-informed care and effective communication with children who have been subjected to abuse and exploitation. Judicial and investigative settings often lack standardised protocols to ensure child-friendly environments, and the presence of psychologists or social workers is not systematically guaranteed. Limited collaboration between the legal and psycho-social sectors further weakens the holistic support system needed to protect and assist survivors.

### **Limited Awareness and Preventive Education on Child Sexual Exploitation:**

There is a lack of comprehensive, coordinated efforts to raise awareness among children and parents about the risks of child sexual exploitation and abuse. Schools rarely integrate prevention content into the curriculum and educational materials are often not accessible or age-appropriate. Parents are not systematically equipped with the knowledge or tools to identify risks or communicate effectively with their children. Public awareness campaigns remain limited in scope and reach, and collaboration among key stakeholders is often fragmented.

Furthermore, existing prevention efforts rarely address the needs of marginalised groups, who face additional barriers in accessing information and support. Safe and accessible reporting channels are also not widely known or promoted.

### **Discriminatory Practices and Limited Language Accessibility in Legal Proceedings:**

Legal proceedings often lack qualified translators and interpreters, leading to communication barriers for non-Georgian-speaking or marginalised communities, including Roma minorities. There is no systematic evaluation of translators' qualifications, and multilingual support remains insufficient across court processes. Additionally, justice professionals often lack training in cultural sensitivity, contributing to biased attitudes and unequal treatment of minority groups within the justice system.

# ADVOCACY ROADMAP

## 2

### Advocacy Roadmap Objectives

This advocacy roadmap aims to:

*Objective*

1

Strengthen  
Child-Centric and  
Accessible Protection  
and Reporting  
Mechanisms

*Objective*

2

Improve Institutional  
Capacity and  
Intersectoral  
Coordination for  
Child Protection from  
Sexual Exploitation

*Objective*

3

Promote Preventive  
Education and  
Community  
Awareness on Child  
Sexual Exploitation



## Objective

# 1

### Strengthen Child-Centric and Accessible Protection and Reporting Mechanisms

#### Brief Rationale

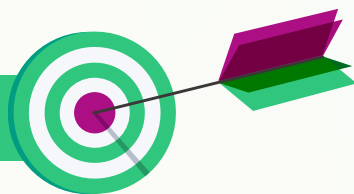
*In Georgia, existing referral and reporting mechanisms are not sufficiently child-centric, creating significant barriers for children to disclose abuse and seek justice. Marginalised groups, including ethnic minorities and non-Georgian speakers, face additional obstacles due to a lack of qualified interpreters and culturally appropriate support. Strengthening child-centric and accessible mechanisms is essential not only to ensure children's right to protection and redress but also to increase trust in the child protection system, improve case detection, and comply with international child rights standards. By making these systems more approachable, inclusive, and visible, Georgia can significantly improve its national response to child sexual exploitation.*

#### Outcome 1.1:

##### **Improved accessibility and child-centricity of referral and reporting mechanisms**

*Reporting procedures, physical spaces (e.g., police stations, service centres), and materials are adapted to be age-appropriate, non-intimidating, and inclusive for all children, including those with disabilities and from minority communities.*

# TARGETS



## TARGET 1.1.1

(Medium term)

Child protection institutions of Georgia (e.g., police departments, prosecutor's offices, courts, Legal Aid Service, State Care Agency at the central and municipal levels) adapt their physical spaces and procedures to be child-centric and inclusive for children, including those with disabilities and from minority communities, by the end of 2026 (in line with the National Human Rights Action Plan of Georgia 2024-2026 timeframe).

## TARGET 1.1.2

(Medium term)

Develop and disseminate multilingual, child-friendly informational materials – such as brochures, short videos, or digital media content – detailing procedures and channels for reporting cases of concern by the end of 2026. Ensure that these materials are available in Georgian, Armenian, Azerbaijani, and other widely spoken minority languages, and disseminated through social media platforms and additional accessible channels to effectively reach children, youth, parents, and caregivers from ethnic minorities.

## TARGET 1.1.3

(Medium term)

Provide training for frontline professionals (e.g., law enforcement, social workers, hotline staff, etc.) on child-sensitive communication and referral procedures related to the sexual exploitation of children by the end of 2026.

## TARGET 1.1.4

(Long term)

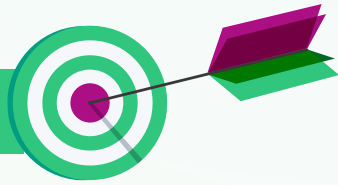
Training on child-sensitive communication and referral procedures is institutionalised through its integration into the mandatory pre-service and in-service training curricula of relevant frontline professionals (e.g., law enforcement, social workers, hotline staff, etc.).

## Outcome 1.2:

### *Increased reporting of child sexual exploitation cases by children and caregivers*

*As a result of strengthened systems and increased public awareness, more children and families are informed about their rights and available mechanisms and feel empowered to report cases of sexual exploitation in a safe and timely manner.*

## TARGETS



### **TARGET 1.2.1**

**(Short and medium term)**

Conduct community awareness sessions for parents and children on recognising sexual exploitation and abuse and using reporting mechanisms by the end of 2026.

### **TARGET 1.2.2**

**(Medium term)**

Ensure that all referral services and national child helplines have trained staff and language support for non-Georgian-speaking users by the end of 2026.

### **TARGET 1.2.3**

**(Medium and long term)**

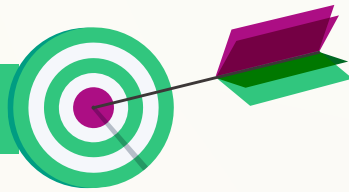
Achieve a 20% increase in reports of suspected child sexual exploitation and abuse cases made by children or caregivers through official channels, compared to official data from previous years (as reported by the State Care Agency).

## Outcome 1.3:

### Strengthened Institutional Commitment to Sexual Exploitation of Children through Advocacy with Key Stakeholders

*Targeted advocacy efforts with key stakeholders lead to greater institutional awareness, buy-in, and commitment to improving child protection systems, particularly referral and reporting mechanisms for victims of sexual exploitation. Regular dialogue, evidence-based recommendations, and cross-sectoral coordination contribute to concrete improvements in policy, practice, and resourcing at both national and municipal levels.*

## TARGETS



#### TARGET 1.3.1

(Short term)

Organise at least six advocacy meetings or roundtable discussions with key state and non-state stakeholders (e.g., Ministry of Internal Affairs, Prosecutor's Office, Ministry of Education and Science, State Care Agency, Legal Aid Service, High School of Justice, Public Defender's Office, Local Government, Parliament) to present gaps in the child protection referral and reporting systems and propose child-centric improvements by the end of 2025.

#### TARGET 1.3.2

(Short term)

Develop and disseminate **policy briefs or position papers** containing practical, evidence-based recommendations for improving accessibility, child-centricity, and inclusiveness of protection mechanisms by the end of 2025.

## Objective

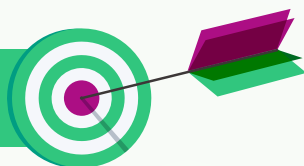
# 2

## Improve Institutional Capacity and Intersectoral Coordination for Child Protection from Sexual Exploitation

### Brief Rationale

*In Georgia, institutional responses to child sexual exploitation remain fragmented and inconsistently applied across regions. Law enforcement, judicial, and social service professionals often lack the training and tools necessary to deliver trauma-informed and child-sensitive support. The absence of standardised interagency protocols results in poor coordination, delays in case management, and additional stress for child victims. Moreover, integrated service models such as Barnahus—which provide a safe, multidisciplinary environment for children—are either underdeveloped or absent in most regions. Strengthening institutional capacity through training, legal reform, and the operationalisation of coordinated service centres is essential to ensure that every child victim receives timely, effective, and compassionate care and justice.*

## TARGETS



### TARGET 2.1.1

(Medium term)

Develop and implement standardised protocols and training modules on trauma-informed care and effective communication with survivors across judicial and law enforcement institutions (law enforcement officers, judges, prosecutors, social workers, psychologists, etc.).

### TARGET 2.1.2

(Medium and long term)

Develop and implement standardised training modules and operational protocols on intersectoral response to child sexual exploitation, endorsed by relevant state institutions.

### TARGET 2.1.3

(Short and medium term)

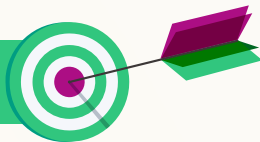
Create a referral toolkit/manual for practitioners, outlining clear roles and procedures for responding to cases of child sexual exploitation.

## Outcome 2.2:

### **Strengthened interagency coordination and infrastructure for child-centred case management in cases of sexual exploitation of children**

*A coordinated, multi-sectoral response system is in place to ensure effective, child-centred case management for children who have been subjected to sexual exploitation. Clear roles and procedures are established among law enforcement, social services, judiciary, education, and health sectors, supported by appropriate infrastructure and legal frameworks. Multidisciplinary cooperation improves the quality, efficiency, and continuity of services provided to survivors, reducing institutional gaps and delays in protection and justice*

## TARGETS



### **TARGET 2.2.1**

(Medium term)

Establish or upgrade at least 2 multidisciplinary child-centric centers (e.g., Barnahus-type facilities) in target regions to provide integrated legal, psychological, and social services.

### **TARGET 2.2.2**

(Medium and long term)

Facilitate quarterly coordination meetings between law enforcement, social services, health professionals, and judiciary actors in each target region.

### **TARGET 2.2.3**

(Long term)

Propose and support legal amendments to institutionalise interagency cooperation and enable full-scale implementation of multidisciplinary child protection models.

## Objective

# 3

## Promote Preventive Education and Community Awareness on Child Sexual Exploitation

### Brief Rationale

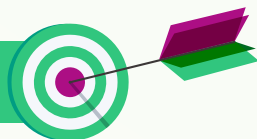
Child sexual exploitation often goes undetected in Georgia due to limited awareness, stigma, and silence surrounding the issue. Many children and parents lack the knowledge to recognise grooming behaviours or understand how to respond to abuse. Schools rarely provide structured prevention education, and public campaigns on this topic remain sparse and inaccessible to minority or vulnerable groups. Without widespread, inclusive awareness efforts, prevention remains weak, and children continue to face risks in both online and offline environments. Promoting community-wide understanding through education, media, and targeted outreach—especially to marginalised populations—is essential to empower children, engage parents, and build a protective environment that can prevent exploitation before it occurs.

### Outcome 3.1:

#### **Increased knowledge and awareness among children and parents about child sexual exploitation and prevention measures**

Children and their parents or caregivers have improved understanding of the risks, signs, and consequences of child sexual exploitation, as well as strategies for prevention and reporting. Through structured educational interventions and community engagement, families are better equipped to recognise grooming and abuse, establish open communication, and access support services when needed. This contributes to an environment that prioritises prevention and early disclosure.

## TARGETS



### TARGET 3.1.1

(Short and medium term)

Conduct community-based awareness sessions for children and parents in urban and rural areas on recognising and preventing sexual exploitation.

### TARGET 3.1.2

(Short and medium term)

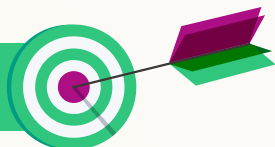
Develop and distribute child- and parent-friendly informational materials (e.g., booklets, posters, videos) in at least three languages (Georgian, Armenian, Azerbaijani), and reach at least 5,000 children and caregivers through in-person or digital awareness campaigns.

## Outcome 3.2:

### *Age-appropriate, inclusive prevention education is integrated into school curricula and extracurricular programs*

*Prevention of child sexual exploitation is systematically addressed within the formal education system through the integration of age-appropriate, inclusive content into national curricula and extracurricular activities. Children receive structured education on body autonomy, personal safety, and recognising abuse, with materials and teaching methods adapted to their age, developmental stage, and specific needs, including those of children with disabilities and minority backgrounds.*

## TARGETS



### **TARGET 3.2.1**

(Medium term)

Work with the Ministry of Education and local schools to integrate basic prevention modules into the national curriculum for grades 1–9.

### **TARGET 3.2.2**

(Medium term)

Train teachers on how to deliver child-friendly and culturally sensitive prevention education.

### **TARGET 3.2.3**

(Medium term)

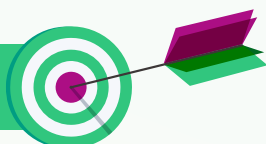
Pilot child safety education programs in at least 10 schools across different regions, including high-risk and minority-populated areas.

## Outcome 3.3:

### **Expanded outreach and access to culturally and linguistically appropriate prevention resources for vulnerable and marginalised communities**

*Children and caregivers from vulnerable and marginalised groups—including ethnic minorities, internally displaced persons, refugees, children with disabilities, and rural communities—have improved access to culturally and linguistically appropriate information and resources for the prevention of child sexual exploitation. Awareness-raising content and delivery methods are adapted to reflect community needs, promote inclusivity, and ensure equal protection for all children, regardless of language, background, or location.*

## TARGETS



### **TARGET 3.3.1**

**(Short and medium term)**

Develop tailored awareness materials and sessions for at least three marginalised groups (e.g., ethnic minorities, children with disabilities, rural communities), ensuring all materials are produced in accessible formats, including Braille, easy-to-read versions, and sign language interpretation where applicable.

### **TARGET 3.3.2**

**(Medium term)**

Provide advocacy forums to bring attention to the lack of services and information in marginalised communities, inviting local decision-makers, non-governmental organisations, and community leaders.



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