# COUNTRY REPORT GEORGIA

## Civil society organisations and human capital development

**When citing this report, please use the following wording:**

European Training Foundation (2025), *Civil Society Organisations and Human Capital Development, - Country Report Georgia*, Turin

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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

# LIST OF FIGURES

# FOREWORD

Georgia stands at a pivotal moment in its development journey. As the country navigates complex social, economic, and political changes, Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) play a crucial role in fostering inclusion, enhancing human capital, and ensuring that the most vulnerable communities have both a voice in shaping policies and the skills necessary to participate meaningfully in society. Yet, in the face of shifting funding, evolving government regulations, and external pressures, CSOs must adapt and innovate to sustain their critical work.

The European Training Foundation (ETF) has recently highlighted the pivotal role of CSOs in skills development and employment support in its thematic paper, 'The Role of Civil Society Organisations in Human Capital Development and Lifelong Learning'[1] The report highlights how CSOs contribute beyond service delivery, shaping policy discussions, driving innovation in education, and bridging gaps in formal learning systems. These insights are particularly relevant to Georgia, where CSOs play a key role in promoting lifelong learning, workforce readiness, and social inclusion.

Recognising the importance of context-specific insights, the ETF, in collaboration with the Policy Management and Consulting Group (PMCG), conducted this study to assess the role of CSOs in Georgia's human capital development. PMCG brought valuable local expertise, effectively tailoring ETF methodologies and tools to the Georgian context, and carried out data collection and analysis in close cooperation with ETF experts.

This report provides an in-depth analysis of the existing challenges and opportunities that lie ahead. While obstacles remain, solutions exist — paths that can only be realised and implemented through stronger collaboration, strategic resource allocation, and a shared commitment to advancing human capital. Georgia's future success hinges on a win-win-win approach — one that unites CSOs, government institutions, and the communities they serve in a common pursuit of sustainable progress.

The ETF and PMCG are proud to have led this effort, ensuring that the findings and recommendations serve as a foundation for strategic action and meaningful change. We extend our gratitude to all the CSOs from Georgia and experts who contributed to this effort, ensuring that it reflects the realities on the ground while offering practical pathways.

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[1] ETF (2024), *The Role Of Civil Society Organisations In Human Capital Development And Lifelong Learning*, available at: https://www.etf.europa.eu/sites/default/files/2025-01/CSO%20HCD%20LLL%20THEMATIC%20PAPER%202024%20FINAL.pdf.

# INTRODUCTION

## Purpose of the study

This report aims to assess the role, capacity, and impact of Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) in Georgia in the field of human capital development (HCD). CSOs play a crucial role in non-formal education, employment support, and social services, contributing to lifelong learning and social inclusion. However, they face significant challenges, including financial instability, policy barriers, and limited public recognition. By mapping the current landscape, this report aims to analyse key strengths and obstacles, and explore ways to enhance CSOs' contributions to Georgia's development.

The report also aims to inform policymakers, donors, and other stakeholders about the potential of CSOs in shaping human capital policies and providing essential services. It highlights areas where greater collaboration and strategic support can enhance the sector, ensuring that CSOs continue to play a meaningful role in Georgia's social and economic development.

## Why CSOs matter in Georgia's development

CSOs play a significant role in Georgia's social and economic development, particularly in HCD. They complement public institutions by facilitating skills development, employment support, and economic inclusion initiatives. Through non-formal education and workforce development programmes, CSOs expand access to learning and professional opportunities for diverse groups, including youth, people with disabilities, internally displaced persons (IDPs), and refugees. Their responsiveness to crises, as demonstrated during the COVID-19 pandemic and the Russia-Ukraine war, highlights their capacity to mobilise resources and provide targeted support to affected communities. In this capacity, CSOs make meaningful contributions to fostering inclusive and sustainable development.

**Skills Development and Employment** are among the priority areas for Georgian CSOs, alongside human rights advocacy, education, and social services. Some organisations work to enhance workforce readiness, reduce youth unemployment, and promote social inclusion. CSOs such as the Education Development and Employment Centre (EDEC), World Vision Georgia, Sunny House, Foundation TASO, and Kakheti Regional Development Foundation (KRDF) provide vocational training, career guidance, and job placement services. The DVV Adult Education Centres play a key role in lifelong learning and adult education, equipping individuals with practical and professional skills. Organisations such as the Charity Humanitarian Centre 'Abkhazeti' (CHCA) and Abkhazintercont (AIC) provide vocational and entrepreneurial training for internally displaced persons (IDPs). At the same time, the Georgian Red Cross Society (GRCS) runs employment and integration programmes for refugees and other vulnerable groups.

As Georgia navigates economic shifts and employment challenges, CSOs continue to play a crucial role in upskilling workers, expanding employment pathways, and addressing labour market disparities. However, over the past few decades donor funding has predominantly targeted areas such as human rights, elections, and the rule of law, leaving sectors like social welfare, economic rights, the environment, health, and education comparatively underserved by CSOs, despite their importance to the Georgian public. (EWMI, 2019) Consequently, many CSOs possess limited experience and capacities in addressing these critical areas.

## Economic development initiatives

CSOs in Georgia play a vital role in fostering economic development, with a strong focus on rural development, entrepreneurship, and support for small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). A key driver in this area has been the EU-led *European Neighbourhood Programme for Agriculture and Rural Development (ENPARD)*, which promotes sustainable agriculture and rural development.

Notable contributions include CENN's integration of green economy principles into economic activities, RDFG's entrepreneurship training and business incubation in rural areas, and GFA's efforts to improve market access, financial inclusion, and agricultural business development.

# Methodology

## Setting up the CSO database

The research began by developing a comprehensive database of active CSOs in Georgia, comprising 60 organisations. The database was initially developed based on publicly available data from csogeorgia.org, which serves as a central hub for civil society organisations in Georgia. To ensure accuracy and relevance, the research team conducted a multi-step verification process. This included cross-checking organisations' recent activities, confirming their engagement in HCD[2] through reviewing recent activities and public records, as well as directly contacting some of the selected CSOs to confirm their engagement in HCD.

Each organisation was selected based on specific criteria, including its alignment with research objectives, target populations (youth, women, IDPs, refugees, ethnic minorities, persons with disabilities), geographic coverage, and recent activities. Only CSOs that had implemented at least one project related to non-formal and informal skills development or employment within the past two years were included. The final database was structured systematically, recording key details such as each organisation's geographical location and comprehensive contact details.

## Data collection and analysis

Data collection involved multiple research methods. A structured questionnaire developed by the ETF was administered to all 60 CSOs listed in the database through a hybrid approach combining a self-administered online survey (via KoboToolbox) and Computer-Assisted Telephone Interviewing (CATI). Ultimately, 34 CSOs responded, ensuring robust representation and data quality. The research team made at least three outreach attempts per organisation to minimise non-response rates.

To complement the quantitative data, seven semi-structured in-depth interviews were conducted with beneficiaries of CSO activities. Participants were selected using purposive sampling to ensure diversity in terms of age, gender, region, and the types of services received. Interviews were conducted remotely (by phone or online platforms), recorded with participants' consent, and systematically analysed.

Additionally, one face-to-face focus group was held with representatives from 12 of the surveyed CSOs, facilitated by the ETF. This session allowed for deeper exploration of initial findings, validation of survey results, and collection of nuanced qualitative insights from CSOs.

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[2] The ETF's approach to Human Capital Development emphasises the advancement of lifelong learning systems that enable individuals to continuously enhance their skills and competences, thereby contributing to employment opportunities and the overall prosperity of societies.

ETF
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European Training Foundation

# CONTEXTUAL OVERVIEW

The operating environment for CSOs in Georgia has become increasingly challenging, particularly following the adoption of the Law on Transparency of Foreign Influence[3] in 2024. The law requires organisations receiving more than 20 % of their funding from foreign sources to register as 'organisations pursuing the interests of a foreign power'.

This has created significant reputational and financial risks for CSOs, as many rely heavily on international donors for funding. The law has also contributed to accelerating public scepticism toward NGOs, fuelled by official narratives questioning their independence and alignment with national interests. Additionally, CSOs face practical funding constraints, as some international donors have become cautious about engaging with organisations subject to this law. The combined effect of these challenges poses a threat to the long-term sustainability and operational effectiveness of the sector.

## Perceptions of Civil Society Organisations within the Georgian public

In recent years, public trust in non-governmental organisations (NGOs) in Georgia has undergone significant changes. Data from the Caucasus Barometer Surveys highlight an increasing scepticism and growing polarisation in public perceptions.

**Rising Distrust**: The proportion of Georgians expressing distrust toward NGOs has risen notably, from 23 % in 2021 to 32 % in 2024.

**Stable Positive Attitudes**: Despite the growing distrust, the percentage of citizens with positive attitudes toward NGOs has remained relatively stable, standing at 22 % in 2024.

**Declining Neutrality**: The share of respondents with neutral views or no opinion about NGOs decreased from 56 % in 2021 to 46 % in 2024, indicating a polarised turn.

**Youth Perspectives**: Changes among younger Georgians (ages 18 to 34) are particularly noticeable, and distrust in NGOs has nearly doubled, increasing from 16 % in 2021 to 31 % in 2024. Positive perceptions in this age group saw a slight rise from 24 % to 26 % over the same period, but neutrality fell from 48 % to 33 %.

Several factors may have contributed to this shift in public perception. Government officials have increasingly criticised NGO activities, portraying them as attempts to undermine traditional Georgian values and impose foreign concepts misaligned with the country's cultural traditions[4]. This narrative has been amplified by the introduction of the Law on Transparency of Foreign Influence in 2024, which has influenced public opinion and deepened scepticism towards NGOs[5]. Trust in NGOs correlates with media consumption. Viewers of pro-government channels like Imedi and Rustavi 2 exhibit higher levels of distrust toward NGOs (39 % and 37 %, respectively) compared to audiences of pro-opposition channels such as Mtavari Arkhi and Formula (19 % and 6 %, respectively).

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[3] https://matsne.gov.ge/en/document/view/6171895?publication=0.
[4] https://eurasianet.org/analysis-georgians-are-growing-more-skeptical-of-ngo-activity.
[5] Ibid.

# Understanding CSO funding in Georgia

In Georgia, CSOs have historically relied heavily on foreign funding, with approximately 95 % of their income derived from international grants — a longstanding characteristic of the sector. The financial viability of CSOs has shown little improvement over the years, as local funding sources such as individual and corporate donations remain minimal. For instance, only about 6 % of the population contributes financially to CSOs, further intensifying the sector's dependence on international donors (CSI, 2018).

Georgian legislation provides an enabling yet limited environment for CSOs. Although the Law on Grants allows government ministries to issue grants, municipal authorities can only offer programmatic funding, which functions similarly but differs nominally. CSOs face additional limitations: they lack a legal status as charitable organisations, restricting their ability to benefit from philanthropic contributions, and Georgian law does not explicitly address anonymous donations, leading CSOs to avoid accepting them due to potential compliance risks (EMWI, 2019).

During the focus group discussion, it was highlighted that under the current legal framework, CSOs in Georgia cannot register as non-profit social enterprises, limiting their ability to engage in sustainable, income-generating activities. This restriction further exacerbates financial instability, as organisations struggle to diversify funding sources. In the context of the Law on Transparency of Foreign Influence, this inability to pursue alternative funding models places CSOs at even greater risk of financial vulnerability. Limited and inconsistent funding remains a key barrier hindering the ability of CSOs in Georgia to engage sustainably and effectively in human capital initiatives.

# Challenges faced by CSOs

CSOs in Georgia are facing an increasingly restrictive political and operational environment characterised by unclear domestic legislation related to CSOs, geopolitical tensions, partial withdrawal of donor funding and rising public mobilisation. In May 2024, despite widespread public opposition, the Georgian Parliament enacted the Law on Transparency of Foreign Influence[6], requiring CSOs receiving more than 20 % of foreign funding to register as 'organisations pursuing the interests of a foreign power'. The adoption of the Law negatively impacts freedom of expression and undermines media independence (EC, 2024).

Further political instability emerged on 28 November 2024, when the Georgian government announced the suspension of EU accession negotiations until 2028, citing alleged pressures from European officials[7]. Coupled with the rejection of EU assistance and the subsequent suspension of the strategic partnership by the United States[8], these decisions have profoundly undermined Georgia's Euro-Atlantic integration process and isolated CSOs from vital international support networks.

In response to these compounded challenges, Georgia has experienced sustained mass protests involving active participation by many CSOs and civic activists[9]. However, these actions have been met with harsh government responses, resulting in arrests, imprisonments, fines, and harassment targeting civil society representatives. This hostile climate further restricts CSOs' ability to advocate for democratic reforms and human rights freely.

Moreover, the global reduction in donor funding has significantly impacted Georgian CSOs, particularly those that rely on U.S. and international grants. While the dismantling of USAID by the U.S. government has had a severe impact, many other donors have also announced funding cuts and reallocation to other global priorities. This broader shift in development assistance strategies has created uncertainty and operational disruptions for numerous organisations limiting their ability to

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[6] https://matsne.gov.ge/en/document/view/6171895?publication=0.
[7] https://apnews.com/article/georgia-cabinet-election-russia-european-union-kobakhidze-1291827f76eac552a2918b4b584fa5a0.
[8] https://www.albawaba.com/business/usaid-suspension-and-its-impact-most-1599332.
[9] https://civil.ge/archives/640196.

sustain essential social, economic, and humanitarian services. As a result, CSOs are facing increased pressure to diversify funding sources and adapt to a rapidly changing donor landscape. Another major concern raised by CSO representatives during the focus group discussion was the unequal distribution of grant funding, which tends to favour larger organisations with established donor relationships and extensive administrative capacity. It was noted that smaller CSOs often struggle to access direct grants and are instead relegated to subcontracting roles, limiting their autonomy and long-term sustainability. This dynamic reinforces power imbalances within the sector, restricting grassroots organisations' autonomy, strategic planning, and capacity to scale their operations.

Recognising these multifaceted challenges, focus group participants emphasised the urgent need to address ongoing legislative and financial pressures. They particularly highlighted the adverse impact of the foreign influence transparency law, the decline in international donor support, and inadequate domestic funding streams. Participants advocated immediate action, including targeted capacity-building and coordinated advocacy efforts, to sustain CSO effectiveness and resilience within this increasingly restrictive context.

# CHAPTER 1. THE LANDSCAPE OF CSOS: PROFILES, FUNCTIONS, AND OUTREACH

The analysis of the geographical distribution of the 34 surveyed organisations reveals a concentration of CSO headquarters in Tbilisi, where 26 % of them are based (see Figure 1). When comparing the territorial distribution of the population, with 34 % of the Georgian population residing in Tbilisi, it is evident that the concentration of CSOs in Tbilisi is relatively balanced.

This centralisation reflects the capital's role as the dominant hub for civil society, primarily driven by better infrastructure, funding opportunities, and proximity to decision-makers. Additionally, urbanisation plays a key role, as many skilled professionals migrate from the regions to Tbilisi in search of education, employment, and career growth, leading to a concentration of expertise and organisational capacity in the capital. While this centralisation can facilitate networking and advocacy, it may also indicate limited regional representation and outreach.

**Figure 1: Distribution of CSO headquarters by region**
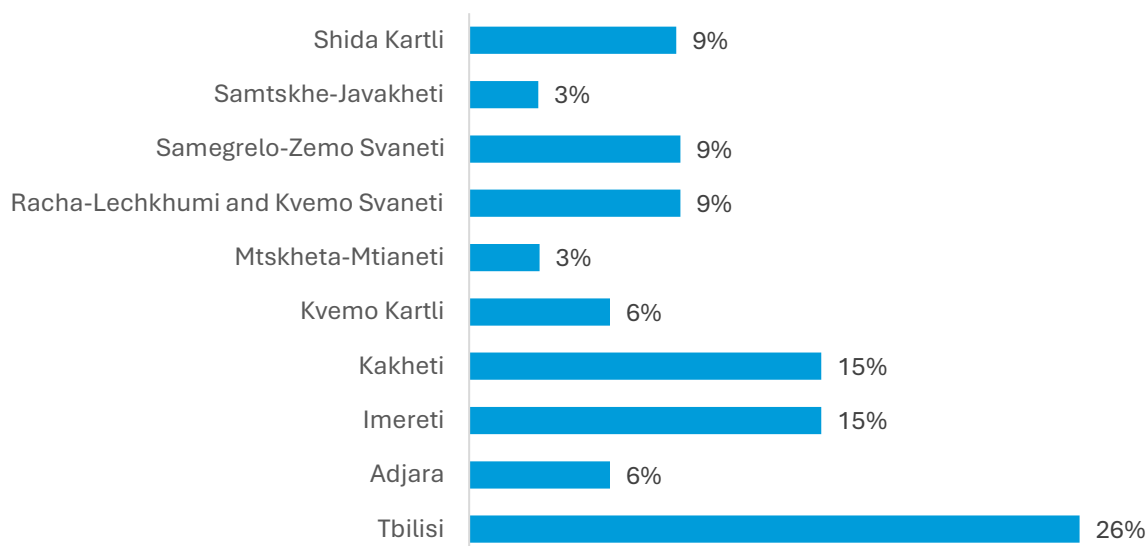


Beyond Tbilisi, Imereti and Kakheti each account for 15 % of the surveyed organisations, establishing them as secondary hubs of civil society activity. Samegrelo-Zemo Svaneti, Racha-Lechkhumi and Kvemo Svaneti and Shida Kartli follow with 9 %, reflecting moderate engagement in these regions. Meanwhile, Kvemo Kartli and Adjara, at 6 %, and Mtskheta-Mtianeti and Samtskhe-Javakheti at just 3 %, show a lower presence, potentially due to fewer resources, logistical challenges, or lower levels of civic engagement.

The survey data also shows that only 6 CSOs (18 %) have additional offices beyond their headquarters, while the vast majority, 28 CSOs (82 %), operate from a single location (see Figure 2).

**Figure 2: CSOs with additional offices**



Yes ■ No
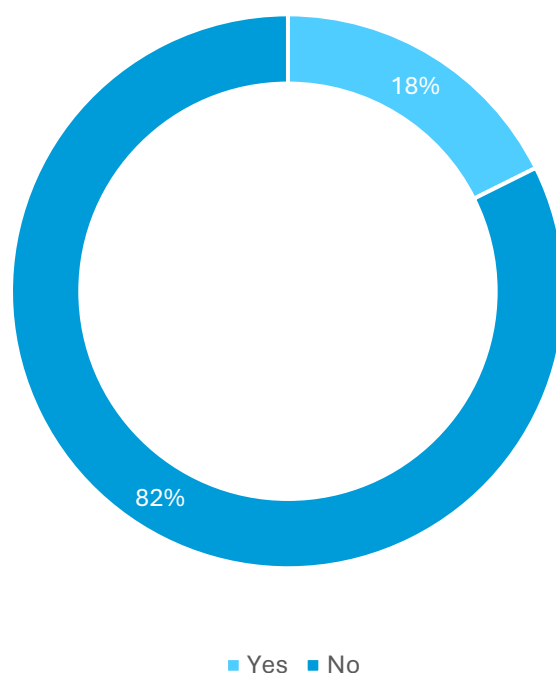
The analysis of the operational levels of the 34 surveyed organisations reveals a strong emphasis on local engagement, with 94 % identifying community and grassroots work as their primary focus (see Figure 3). This suggests that most CSOs have the opportunity to directly interact with the local population, addressing local challenges and fostering community development. Only 3 % consider this level less important, while another 3 % do not engage at this level at all.

**Figure 3: CSOs' level of operations**



■ Don't know/Refuses to answer   ■ Organisation doesn't operate at this level
■ Less important level of operation   ■ Main level of operation
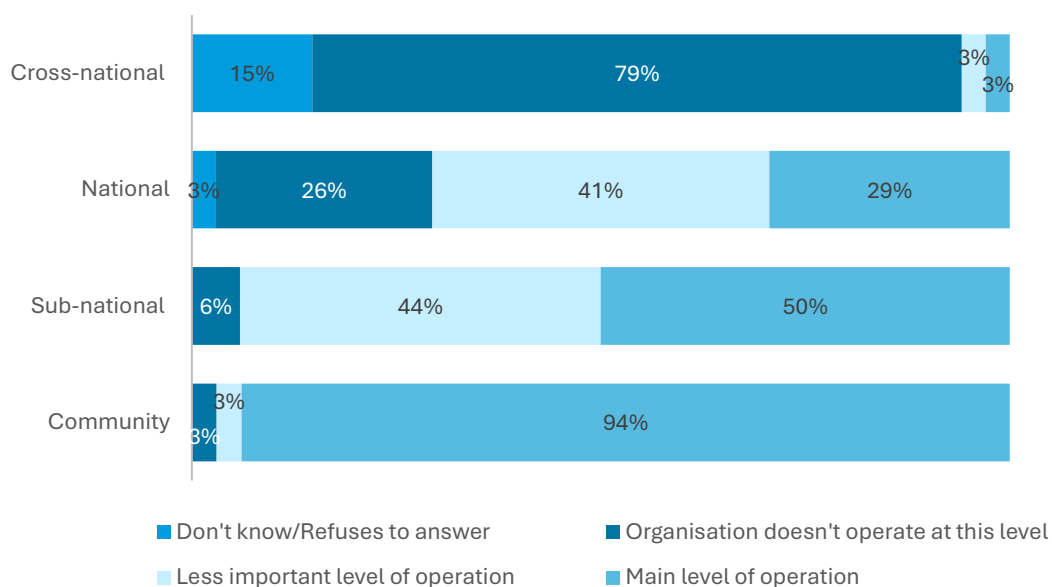
At the sub-national level, which encompasses regional operations within Georgia, 50 % of organisations identify this as their primary operational level, while 44 % consider it somewhat less important. This suggests that while many CSOs engage at the regional level, it is often secondary to

their local work. National-level engagement is relatively rare, with 29 % of organisations considering it their primary level of operation, while 41 % view it as somewhat less important. Notably, 26 % do not operate at the national level, indicating that a significant portion of CSOs remain locally or regionally focused. Cross-national operations are the least common, with 79 % of organisations not engaging beyond Georgia. Only 3 % identify this as their main operational level, while 3 % see it as somewhat important.

## Memberships in networks and associations

Only 6 CSOs (18 %) manage or coordinate a network within the country, while the majority, 28 CSOs (82 %), do not play a leadership role in such collaborations (see Table 1). However, participation in broader networks or associations is significantly more common. 23 CSOs (68 %) are members of at least one network or association, while 11 CSOs (32 %) do not engage in such collaborations. Below is the list of networks and associations surveyed CSOs manage or participate in.

**Table 1: Networks and associations managed or joined by CSOs**

| Networks CSOs Manage | UN Global Compact<br>Caucasus Caregivers' Cooperation Network (CCC Network)<br>National Network of Women with Disabilities<br>Social Entrepreneurship Ecosystem Platform<br>Migration Network<br>Network of Shida Kartli Women Organisation |
|---|---|
| Networks and Associations CSOs participate in | American Trade Chamber, German Chamber<br>Caucasus Care-oriented Network, Local Tourist Network<br>Children and Youth Coalition<br>Children and Youth Coalition, Community Groups for Protecting Children<br>CNC, Network for Protection from Violence, CCC, EASPD, WFOYC<br>Coalition for Independent Living<br>Council of Georgian Youth Organisations<br>DVV international; GAEN<br>DVV, Kvemo Kartli Hub<br>EAP National Platform, PACE Platform in Georgia, SSI<br>Economic Freedom Network, Atlas Network and others<br>GALAG<br>Georgian Adult Education Network<br>IRC Migration Network, Kakheti CSO Network<br>National Association of Local Authorities of Georgia<br>Social Entrepreneurship, IDP Union<br>UN Convention of Rights of Persons with Disabilities, Reproductive Health NGO<br>UN Women Foundation<br>Women's Rights International Organisation, Organisation or Fight Against Weapons |

## Website and social media usage

The in-depth interviews with CSO beneficiaries highlighted CSOs' significant reliance on social media for outreach and communication. All interviewed respondents indicated that initial contact with the organisation was established through social media, whether it was CSO staff reaching out to them or beneficiaries themselves stumbling upon information about HCD activities on the social networks of these organisations.

Among the platforms, Facebook is the most widely used, with 79 % of CSOs maintaining an active presence. However, website ownership is relatively low, with only 47 % of organisations having a dedicated website. Other platforms such as YouTube (21 %), Instagram (26 %), LinkedIn (6 %), and Twitter (3 %) see significantly lower adoption rates, suggesting that CSOs prioritise more mainstream and widely accessible tools. Meanwhile, TikTok, Telegram, and other unspecified platforms are not used at all (see Figure 4).

**Figure 4: Website and social media usage by CSOs**
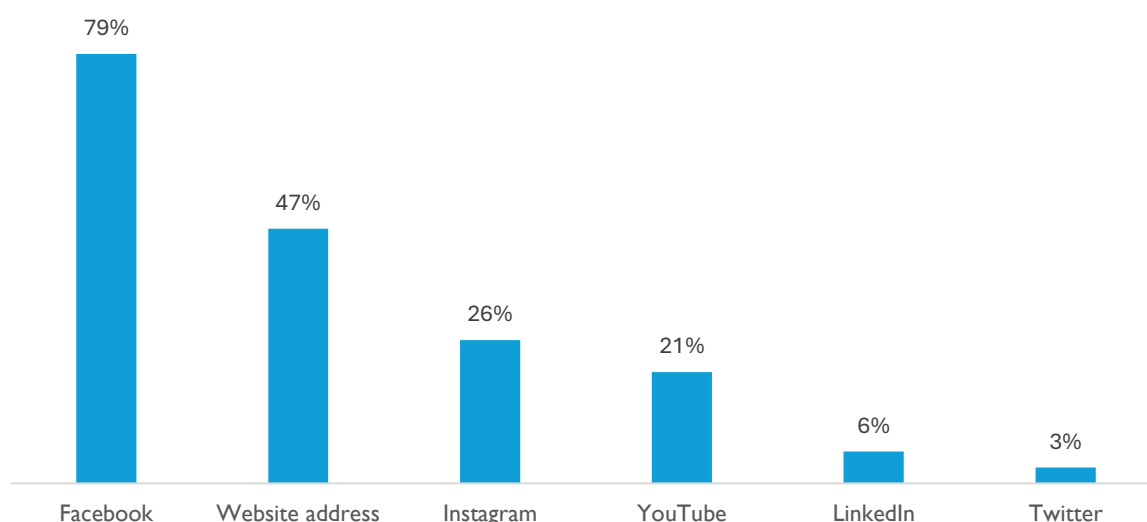


This reliance on social media aligns with findings from the CSO Sustainability Index for Georgia, which identifies social media as the dominant public engagement tool for CSOs due to its affordability and extensive reach. The report also underscores that smaller and regional organisations struggle to maintain official websites due to resources and technical constraints, making social media, particularly Facebook, the preferred alternative (USAID, 2023).

Similarly, the UN WOMEN report 2024 highlights that while CSOs widely use Facebook for advocacy and community engagement, other platforms such as Instagram and Twitter remain underutilised. This is partly due to perceptions that these platforms attract narrower or less relevant audiences, as well as limited digital literacy and financial constraints that prevent CSOs from diversifying their online presence. As a result, Facebook serves as a practical default for CSO communication, reflecting both strategic choices and operational limitations.

## 1.2   Human resource capacities

A significant proportion, 31 % of CSOs, operate with a very small teams of 2 to 4 people, and 9 % with just one paid staff member, underscoring the resource constraints many face. The largest subgroup, comprising 38 %, employs between 5 and 14 paid employees and collaborators, highlighting that most organisations manage to function effectively with modest staff sizes (see Figure 5).

In contrast, larger organisations are less prevalent; only 16 % have a workforce ranging from 15 to 49 people, and a mere 6 % have staff numbers exceeding 50, indicating that CSOs with substantial resources and significant operational capacity are distinctly rare. Overall, this distribution reflects the diverse organisational sizes within the CSO sector, with a clear predominance of smaller, resource-constrained entities.

**Figure 5: Number of paid employees and collaborators in CSOs**



| Category | Percentage |
|---|---|
| 50 and more | 6% |
| Between 15 and 49 | 16% |
| Between 5 and 14 | 38% |
| Between 2 and 4 | 31% |
| Only 1 | 9% |
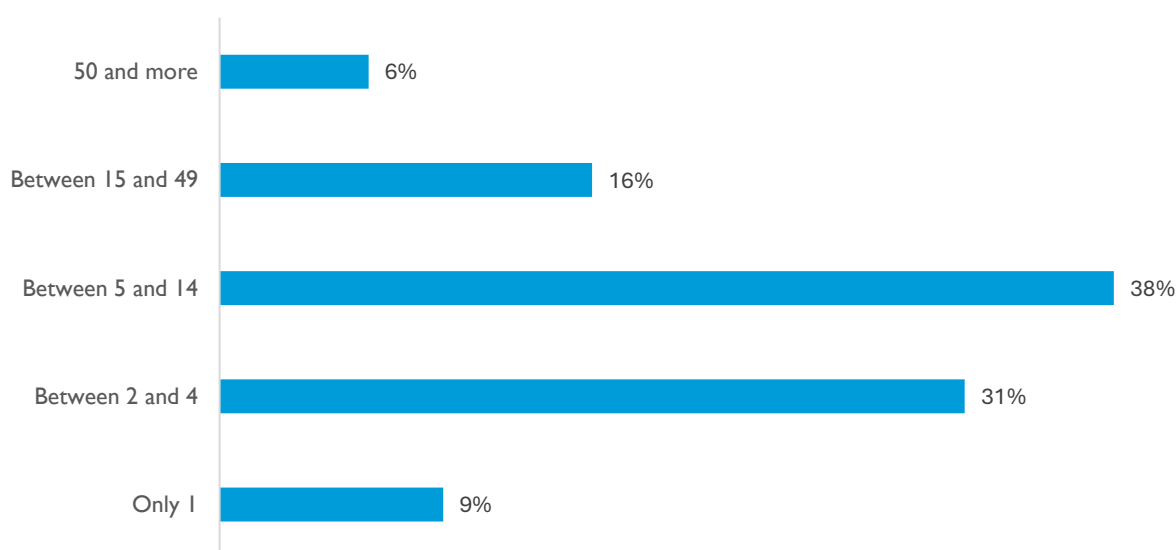
The Georgian CSOs often operate with minimal staffing due to limited funding and resource constraints. The Index specifically notes that smaller organisations frequently rely on volunteers or short-term, project-based employment, leading to difficulties in retaining experienced staff and maintaining institutional memory. This trend can hamper organisational development, long-term planning, and effectiveness (USAID, 2023).

The UN WOMEN report 2024 further highlights staffing challenges, reporting that most CSOs in Georgia function with limited permanent staff and depend heavily on short-term consultants, interns and volunteers. It emphasises that limited and unpredictable funding sources contribute significantly to this issue, restricting the ability of CSOs to grow their core teams and develop long-term strategic capabilities. This precarious staffing situation poses substantial obstacles to the sustainability and impact of Georgian CSOs.

## 1.3   Financial capacities

The analysis of funding sources among surveyed organisations highlights a strong dependence on donor funds, with 91 % of CSOs identifying them as their main source of funding (see Figure 6). This heavy reliance on external funding underscores the vulnerability of the sector to shifts in donor priorities and the need for diversification to ensure long-term sustainability.

## Figure 6: Funding sources and their importance for CSOs

| Category | Don't know/Refuse to answer | Not a source of funding | Minor source of funding | Main source of funding |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Other | | 35% | 62% | 3% |
| Governmental funds | 6% | 38% | 38% | 18% |
| Donor funds | | | 9% | 91% |
| Private donations | 9% | 38% | 44% | 9% |
| Self-financed | 6% | 11% | 39% | 44% |

■ Don't know/ Refuse to answer ■ Not a source of funding ■ Minor source of funding ■ Main source of funding
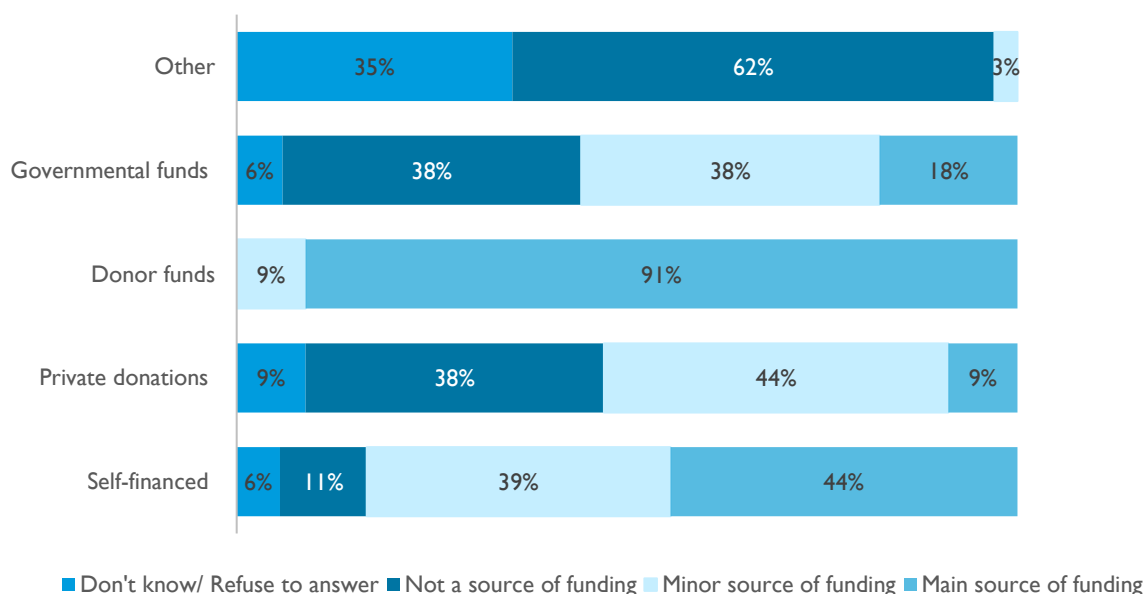
Governmental funds play a less prominent role, with 38 % of organisations considering them a minor source and 18 % relying on them as a main source, while 38 % do not have access to this type of funding at all. This suggests that while some CSOs successfully tap into public funding opportunities, a significant portion either lacks access or does not prioritise governmental support.

Self-financing, including income-generating activities such as project-based fundraising, shop sales, or service provision, is an essential model for some organisations, with 44 % using it as a primary source of funding. However, 39 % consider it a minor source, and 11 % do not engage in self-financing activities, highlighting the varying capacities of CSOs to generate independent revenue.

Private donations, such as crowdfunding and individual contributions, serve as a funding source for some organisations but are not widely adopted, with 44 % of CSOs considering them a minor source, and only 9 % relying on them as their main source of funding. Notably, 38 % of CSOs do not receive private donations at all, indicating that fundraising from individuals is underdeveloped in the sector.

The European Commission 2024 report highlights that the financial sustainability of CSOs is threatened by the recently introduced Law on Transparency of Foreign Influence. Since many CSOs, especially at the local level, rely heavily on foreign funding and lack alternative revenue sources, this legislation poses serious financial risks. Its stringent requirements could particularly impact smaller organisations and discourage them from accepting international funds, including from the EU.

In line with this concern, participants of the focus group meeting further noted that Georgian CSOs traditionally depended heavily on funding from two primary international sources: USAID and the EU. While USAID previously allowed flexibility for funding enterprises, the EU's regulations restrict support solely to non-profit organisations. With the recent closure of USAID operations, EU funding remains the only major external source, limiting the options for organisations now forced to alter their operational models due to the constraints imposed by the Transparency of Foreign Influence law. This shift has left critical funding gaps for affected organisations.

## 1.4 Support for the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

The analysis of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) supported by the surveyed organisation highlights strong engagement in key areas such as education, employment, and poverty reduction, while showing lower involvement in environmental and infrastructure-related SDGS (see Figure 7).

**Figure 7: Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) supported by CSOs[10]**
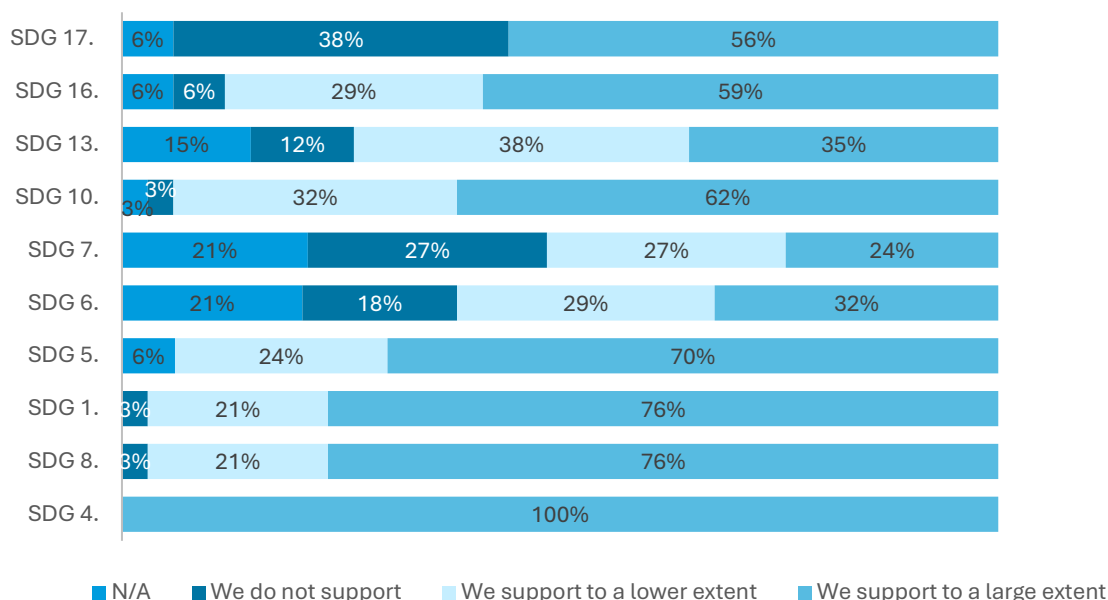


CSOs reported high support for SDG 4 (Quality Education for All, 100 %), SDG 8 (Good Jobs and Economic Growth, 76 %), and SDG 1 (No Poverty, 76 %). This suggests that the majority of CSOs are primarily focused on social and economic development, with a particular emphasis on enhancing education, improving employment opportunities, and alleviating poverty.

A moderate level of support was observed for SDG 10 (Reducing Inequality) and SDG 16 (Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions), with 62 % and 59 % of CSOs reporting high engagement, respectively.

SDGs related to environmental sustainability and infrastructure received lower levels of support. Only 35 % of CSOs actively supported SDG 13 (Climate Action), while SDG 7 (Renewable Energy) and SDG 6 (Clean Water and Sanitation) saw even lower engagement at 24 % and 32 %, respectively. This indicates that environmental and infrastructure-related initiatives are not a primary focus for most organisations, potentially due to funding constraints or a stronger emphasis on immediate social issues.

However, some CSOs have implemented projects aligned with those SDGs, as presented during focus group discussions:

- CENN implemented a project promoting municipal waste management and circular economy principles. The initiative included the development of a waste management plan and training for

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[10] The results related to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) reflect the focus and priorities of the Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) included in the sample. As such, the selection of SDGs is shaped by the characteristics and thematic engagement of the CSOs surveyed, and does not imply a comprehensive representation of all SDG-related activities of CSOs in Georgia. On the other hand, support for Human Capital Development (HCD) can also contribute to the achievement of other Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs); for example, enhancing the skills of municipal representatives can lead to more effective waste management practices, thereby supporting environmental sustainability objectives.

representatives from 14 municipalities. Additionally, lecturers were trained in circular economy principles, leading to the integration of a new academic module into university curricula[11].

- RDFG, under a USAID-funded initiative, supported 17 municipalities in strengthening their private and service sectors within municipal structures. A key component focused on preparing municipal representatives for disaster planning, addressing a critical gap in government preparedness. However, certain project components were discontinued due to new legislation, reflecting the challenges posed by evolving policy restrictions[12].

A significant portion of CSOs (56 %) did not support 'Other SDGs', and 38 % did not actively engage in SDG 17 (Partnerships for the Goals). This suggests that while organisations are committed to specific priority areas, broader collaborative efforts and multi-sectoral approaches might be underutilised.

These findings align partially with insights from the UN Women report 2024, which similarly underscores the strong engagement of CSOs in social issues like poverty alleviation, employment, and education. The report explicitly highlights that many CSOs are primarily focused on addressing immediate social and economic concerns rather than engaging extensively in environmental or infrastructural challenges. It notes specifically that organisations prioritise areas where they perceive the greatest immediate impact or where donor funding is readily available, often leaving environmental sustainability issues underrepresented.

## 1.5    The beneficiaries of CSOs in HCD

The analysis of the beneficiaries of CSO activities among the surveyed organisations reveals that the most commonly served groups are young people (83 %) and adults (74 %), who are identified as the primary beneficiaries of CSO activities. Vulnerable youth (65 %) and vulnerable adults (47 %) are also key beneficiaries, indicating a substantial commitment to supporting at-risk populations. Similarly, disabled youth (41 %) and disabled adults (32 %) receive targeted support, though there is still room for expanding these services (see Figure 8).

### Figure 8: Beneficiaries of CSO activities

| | Not beneficiaries of our activities | Secondary beneficiaries | Main beneficiaries |
|---|---|---|---|
| Other groups | 79% | 6% | 15% |
| IDPs | 32% | 29% | 38% |
| Men with special needs | 38% | 38% | 24% |
| Women with special needs | 21% | 30% | 48% |
| Asylum seekers | 59% | 29% | 12% |
| Refugees | 47% | 32% | 21% |
| Migrants | 44% | 29% | 26% |
| Disabled adults | 24% | 44% | 32% |
| Vulnerable adults | 12% | 41% | 47% |
| Disabled youth | 18% | 41% | 41% |
| Vulnerable youth | 12% | 24% | 65% |
| Adults | 3% | 24% | 74% |
| Youth | | 17% | 83% |
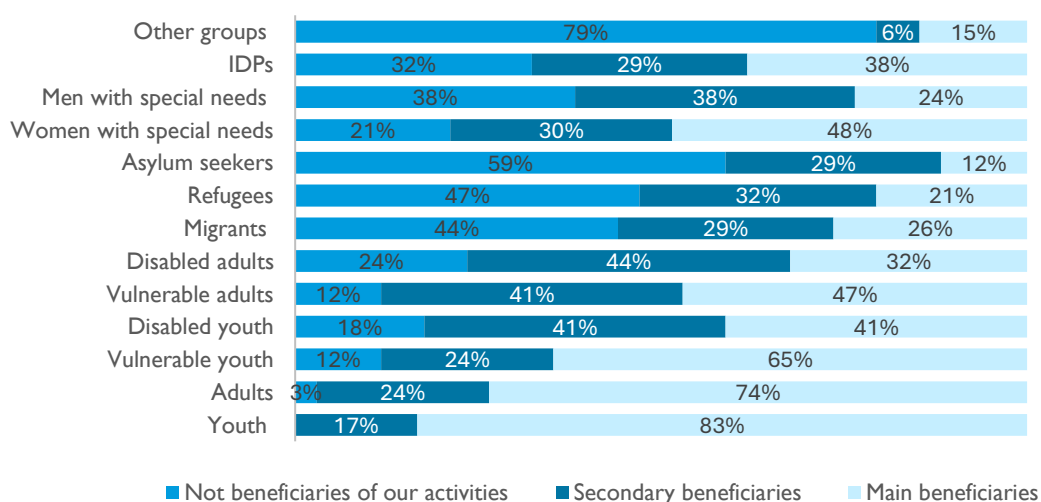
Support for migrants (26 %), refugees (21 %), and asylum seekers (12 %) was indicated less frequently, with a large proportion of CSOs (44-59 %) reporting that these groups were not among their beneficiaries. Gender-based support showed some variation, with women with special needs (48 %) being better served compared to men with special needs (24 %), reflecting a possible

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[11] https://www.cenn.org/circular-cities-and-regions-in-georgia/.
[12] https://cnfa.org/program/usaid-resilient-communities-program/.

prioritisation of gender-related vulnerabilities. Among other beneficiary groups, the surveyed CSOs indicated vulnerable children, ethnic minorities and prisoners and probationers.

Among the interviewed CSO beneficiaries, the majority were women, some of whom exhibited certain levels of vulnerability, including an IDP woman, a single mother, and a woman over 55 who was trying to acquire skills to stay competitive on the job market. For more information, see the Annexes.

## 1.6   Activities of CSOs in the HCD sector

Organisations most frequently indicated non-formal learning for young people (89 % very often) and adults (65 % very often) as their main activity, highlighting the central role of CSOs in non-formal and informal education. Advocacy efforts are also a priority, with 56 % of organisations very often engaging in advocacy for communities, groups, and sectors, while 47 % focus on advocacy for adults and young people (see Figure 9).

Self-employment support (41 % very often) and employment facilitation (29 % very often) were conducted by a smaller subset of organisations, indicating that while CSOs contribute to workforce readiness, direct economic empowerment activities may not be their primary focus.

**Figure 9: Frequency of CSO activities related to skills development**
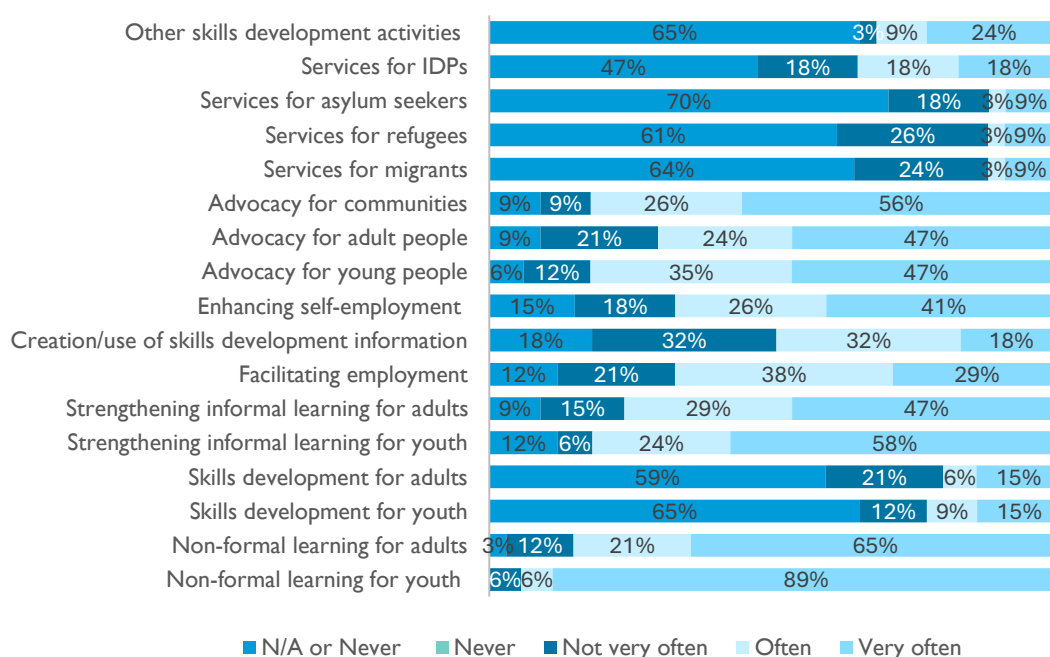


The analysis of skills development activities shows a strong focus on competency-building and advocacy, while involvement in services for marginalised populations remains limited. Interestingly, the content of the activities that organisations implement in terms of skills development through non-formal learning and informal learning, and services to employment most frequently focuses on key competencies (56 % very often) and technical competencies (39 % very often). These competencies usually cover areas such as digital skills, job-related training, and soft skills necessary for employment and social participation (see Figure 10).

**Figure 10: Content frequency in CSOs' skills development and employment service activities**



| | N/A | Never | Not very often | Often | Very often |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Other | 38% | 44% | 3% 3% | 12% | |
| Services for IDPs | 21% | 26% | 21% | 9% | 24% |
| Services for asylum seekers | 21% | 50% | 18% | 6% | 6% |
| Services for refugees | 24% | 38% | 24% | 3% | 12% |
| Services for migrants | 24% | 47% | 21% | 3% | 6% |
| Advocacy for communities | 6% | 9% | 15% | 32% | 38% |
| Advocacy for adults | 6% | 6% | 21% | 41% | 26% |
| Advocacy for youth | 6% | 6% | 12% | 50% | 26% |
| Informal economy enhancement | 6% | 12% | 24% | 38% | 21% |
| Research and analysis | 9% | 9% | 32% | 32% | 18% |
| Skills needs analyses | 6% | 6% | 29% | 32% | 26% |
| Communication with public sector | 3% | 6% | 32% | 32% | 26% |
| Key competences | 3% | 6% | 35% | 56% | |
| Technical competences | | 17% | 44% | 39% | |

■ N/A  ■ Never  ■ Not very often  ■ Often  ■ Very often

Advocacy is a key focus for CSOs, with 76 % engaging in advocacy for young people either often (50 %) or very often (26 %), adults (41 % often, 26 % very often), and communities (32 % often, 38 % very often). This indicates that many organisations actively engage in influencing policies and programmes related to skills development, employment, and social inclusion.

Research and analytical activities, such as skills needs analysis (26 % very often) and micro and small enterprise support through research (18 % very often), are also present but not as widely practiced. This suggests that while some CSOs contribute to evidence-based policymaking and workforce analysis, these efforts are not universally adopted.

## 1.7   Effectiveness of activities and learning environment

The opinions of respondents on the effectiveness of different approaches to skills development and employment services vary significantly among CSOs. According to respondents, the most effective methods include engaging and participatory learning styles (71 % very effective), supporting informal learning (68 % very effective), and non-formal training courses (67 % very effective) (see Figure 11).

Methods such as using only digital or only traditional training aids were rated as less effective, with a preference for blended approaches like a mix of traditional and digital training aids (56 % very effective, 29 % effective). Motivational and interactive strategies, such as coaching and counselling (50 % effective, 24 % very effective) and motivating people to learn (52 % very effective, 39 % effective), also ranked high.

Data sources play a crucial role in programme implementation, with independent sources (45 % effective, 27 % very effective) and official sources (47 % effective, 24 % very effective) being rated similarly. This highlights the need for a combination of diverse and credible information sources to support effective decision-making in CSO activities.

**Figure 11: Effectiveness of learning methods in activities for skills development and employment services.**
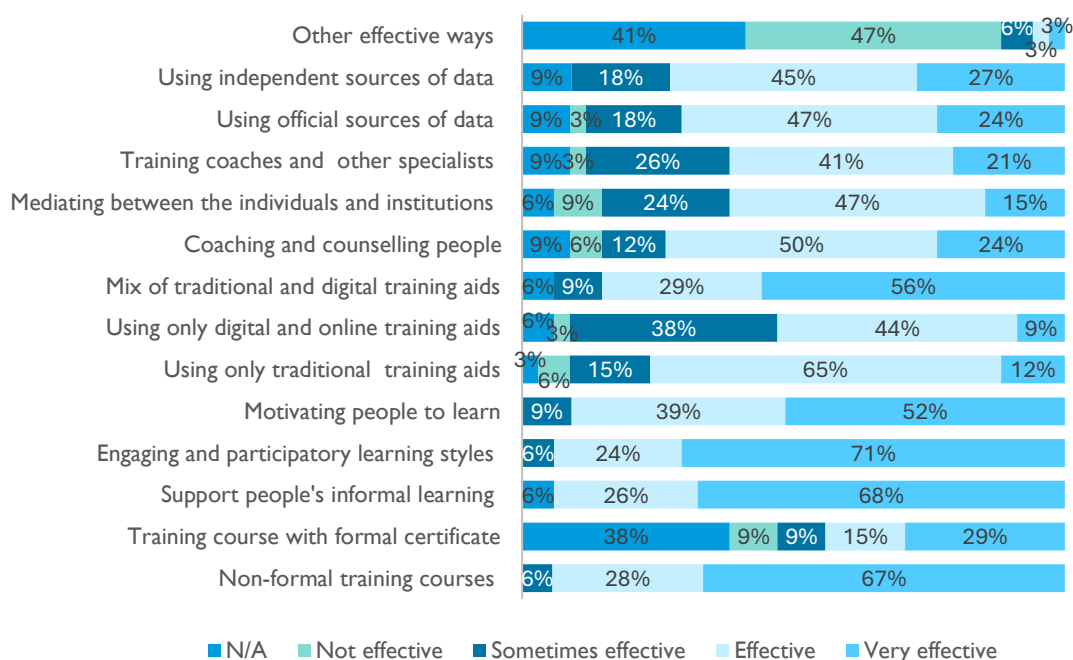


The findings underscore the importance of interactive, participatory learning, non-formal and informal learning support, while also pointing to the need for adaptable training models that combine traditional and digital approaches.

Interestingly, the survey findings regarding the effectiveness of the learning environments offered for delivering skills development activities and employment services highlight that structured, in-person learning remains the most effective method. Classroom-based learning received the highest rating, with 78 % of respondents considering it 'very effective', emphasising its continued relevance in delivering structured and interactive training (see Figure 12).

Informal learning environments, such as community spaces, also ranked highly, with 53 % of CSOs rating them 'very effective' and 32 % as 'effective'. This suggests that flexible, community-driven approaches are widely utilised and appreciated for their accessibility and engagement.

**Figure 12: Effectiveness of learning environment in activities for skills development and employment services**
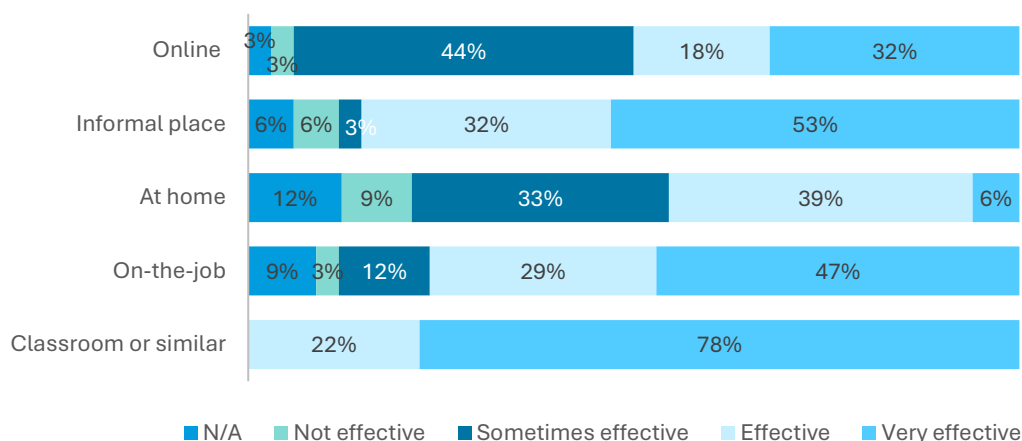
On-the-job training was also recognised as a valuable approach, with 47 % rating it 'very effective' and 29 % as 'effective'. These findings indicate that workplace-based learning offers practical skill-building opportunities, making it an essential component of CSO training strategies. Online learning, however, yielded mixed results. While 32 % rated it 'very effective', a significant 44 % found it only 'sometimes effective', suggesting challenges in engagement, accessibility, or technological infrastructure. Despite its growing importance, online learning may require further adaptation and support to enhance its impact.

The least effective approach was at-home learning, with only 6 % of respondents rating it as 'very effective', while 33 % found it 'sometimes effective' and 9 % considered it 'not effective'. The relatively low effectiveness of home-based learning suggests challenges in self-directed education, possibly due to limited structure, motivation, or accessibility issues.

# CHAPTER 2. BRIDGING GAPS: CSOS' RESPONSE TO THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC EFFECTS

The COVID-19 pandemic had a profound impact on CSOs in Georgia, disrupting their operations, funding sources, and engagement with communities, like elsewhere in the world. Despite these challenges, the crisis also pushed CSOs to adapt. Organisations that previously relied on in-person engagement had to quickly develop digital strategies, expanding their reach through online training. The pandemic also underscored the crucial role of CSOs in bridging the gap between citizens and the government, advocating for social protection, and ensuring that marginalised groups were not left behind. The European Commission's Association Implementation Report on Georgia 2021, highlighted the significant role of civil society during the COVID-19 crisis, stating, 'against the backdrop of the COVID-19 pandemic, civil society played a more important role than ever in supporting those in need.' Providing specific examples, the Civil Society Organisations Sustainability Index (2023) emphasises the critical role played by CSOs in supporting vulnerable populations and complementing state assistance. It further notes an increased collaboration between CSOs and the business sector in response to the COVID-19 pandemic and the war in Ukraine (USAID, 2023). However, the long-term sustainability of these adaptations remains uncertain, as many CSOs continue to struggle with resource constraints and the need for stronger collaboration with public institutions.

## 2.1   Shift in beneficiary groups

The analysis of CSO responses to the COVID-19 pandemic shows that 36 % of organisations shifted their priorities in terms of beneficiary groups, while 64 % continued serving the same population. However, when it comes to actual changes made in terms of prioritising beneficiaries, the following changes are noted (see Figure 13).

**Figure 13: Shift in priorities of beneficiary groups during the COVID-19 pandemic compared to previous years**



Legend: ■ Benefited/not benefited as before=no change   ■ Benefited less   ■ Benefited more
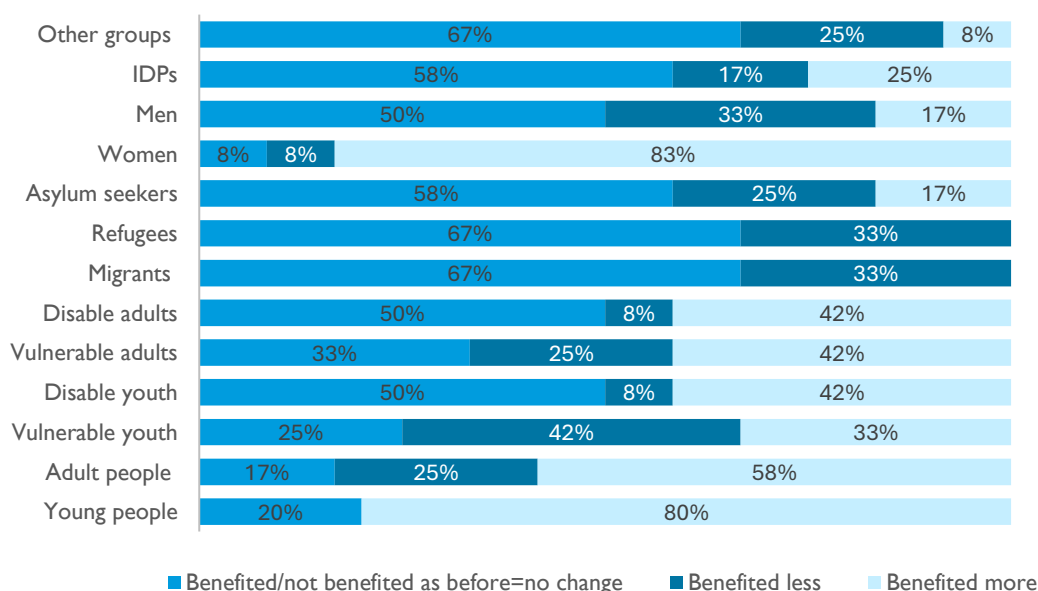
Young people (80 %) and the adult population (58 %) were the primary beneficiaries who received increased support during the pandemic. Disabled adults (42 %), disabled youth (42 %), and vulnerable adults (42 %) also benefited more, reflecting targeted efforts to support individuals with higher risks of exclusion.

Women stand out as the most significantly supported group, with 83 % benefiting more compared to pre-pandemic years. This likely reflects an increased emphasis on gender-sensitive interventions, as women faced unique challenges such as caregiving burdens, and heightened risks of domestic violence during the crisis.

Interestingly, among other groups which hasn't been originally listed in the questionnaire emerged children (including homeless children and children with disabilities), mothers of children with disabilities and women in conflict with law.

The findings indicate that the vast majority of CSOs in Georgia were already focused on serving the most vulnerable populations, including youth, women, IDPs, refugees, ethnic minorities, and persons with disabilities, even before the COVID-19 pandemic. The crisis exacerbated these groups' challenges, deepening social inequalities and increasing demand for targeted support. Given this context, it is logical that CSOs remained committed to these populations, as their needs intensified rather than diminished.

The analysis of reasons behind changes in CSO beneficiary group priorities during the COVID-19 pandemic highlights that beneficiary needs and internal assessments played the most significant roles, while external directives had a mixed impact (see Figure 14).

**Figure14: Reasons for priority shift in beneficiary groups**
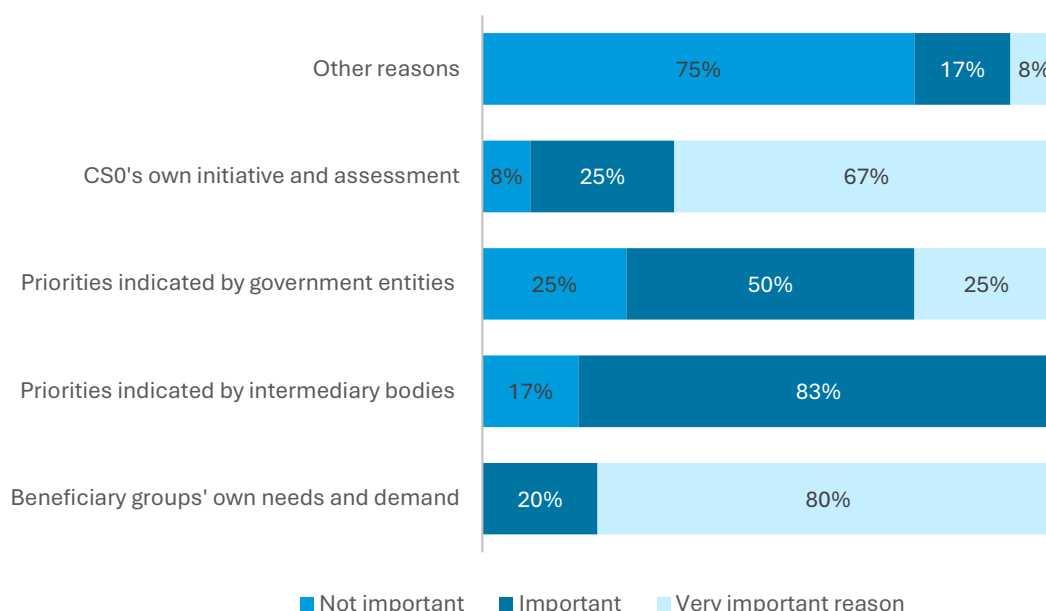


Beneficiary groups' own needs and demand (80 % very important) were the primary drivers of change, suggesting that CSOs adapted their services based on direct community feedback and urgent needs rather than following predefined strategies. Similarly, internal assessments and initiatives (67 % very important) played a crucial role, indicating that many organisations proactively adjusted their focus based on their understanding of emerging challenges.

Governmental entities had a moderate influence, with 50 % of CSOs considering their priorities important and 25 % seeing them as very important. This suggests that while some CSOs aligned their work with government directives, many continued to operate independently. Intermediary bodies (83 % important) were acknowledged as influencing decisions, but they were rarely considered a very important factor, implying that coordination efforts may not have been as strong as direct governmental guidance or CSO-driven decision-making. Interestingly, among the other reasons for the change in priorities was the altered focus of partner organisations, which suggests that shifts in priorities for donor organisations and international agencies might have influenced the priorities of CSOs.

## 2.2 Shift in HCD activities

The analysis of CSO activity adjustments during the COVID-19 pandemic shows that 69 % of organisations made some level of change in their HCD activities, with 42 % adjusting to some extent and 27 % making significant changes (See Figure 14). This indicates that while the pandemic disrupted operations, many CSOs adapted their approaches to meet emerging needs.

However, 30 % of organisations did not change their priorities, suggesting that their existing programmes were already aligned with the needs of their beneficiaries or that they faced constraints preventing adaptation. The fact that most CSOs adjusted their activities — either partially or fully — highlights the sector's flexibility and responsiveness, though the extent of change varies based on available resources, capacity, and external support.

**Figure 14: Change of priorities in HCD activities**



| | |
|---|---|
| No | 30% |
| Up to some extent | 42% |
| Yes | 27% |

Interestingly, among CSOs that changed their activities fully or to a certain extent, a significant portion of organisations expanded their advocacy efforts. Specifically, 52 % increased advocacy for communities, adult populations, and young people. Non-formal learning activities saw a major shift, particularly for young people, where 70 % of CSOs increased their involvement. Similarly, 48 % strengthened non-formal learning for adults, highlighting the sector's response to educational disruptions caused by the pandemic. However, 17 % of organisations cancelled self-employment support initiatives, while up to 35 % scaled down other economic support services (See Figure 15).

## Figure 15: Trends in priority changes for specific HCD activities



Legend:
- No answer
- Activity cancelled
- Activity implemented less
- Activity implemented more
- As a newly introduced activity

| Activity | No answer | Activity cancelled | Activity implemented less | Activity implemented more | As a newly introduced activity |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Other activities | 65% | 17% | 4% | 13% | |
| Services for IDPs | 57% | 9% | 9% | 26% | |
| Services for asylum seekers | 74% | 13% | 13% | | |
| Services for refugees | 70% | 13% | 13% | 4% | |
| Services for migrants | 74% | 13% | 13% | | |
| Advocacy for communities | 9% | 4% | 26% | 52% | 9% |
| Advocacy for adult people | 22% | 4% | 22% | 52% | |
| Advocacy for young people | 17% | 4% | 26% | 52% | |
| Enhance self-employment | 35% | 17% | 22% | 26% | |
| Creation or use of data for skills development | 35% | | 26% | 39% | |
| Facilitating employment | 35% | 9% | 35% | 13% | 9% |
| Strengthening informal learning for adults | 30% | 4% | 26% | 17% | 22% |
| Strengthening informal learning for youth | 17% | 13% | 22% | 35% | 13% |
| Skills development for adults | 65% | 9% | 17% | 9% | |
| Skills development for youth | 65% | 9% | 17% | 9% | |
| Non-formal learning for adults | 13% | | 30% | 48% | 9% |
| Non-formal learning for youth | 20% | | | 70% | 10% |

Service provision for refugees (13 % cancelled), migrants (13 % cancelled), and asylum seekers (13 % cancelled) was deprioritised, with a majority of CSOs (70 % or more) not reporting engagement in these areas. This aligns with previous findings showing a reduced focus on displaced populations during the pandemic. Employment-related activities experienced mixed trends, with 35 % implementing them less, 13 % increasing them, and 9 % introducing new initiatives. This suggests that while some organisations adapted to changing labour market needs, others faced setbacks in delivering job-related programmes.

Overall, the findings indicate that CSOs in Georgia responded to the COVID-19 crisis by amplifying advocacy, expanding non-formal learning, and selectively maintaining employment and economic initiatives.

It is important to note that shifts in CSOs' activity priorities were influenced by various external and internal factors (see Figure 16). The most significant driver of change was direct demand from beneficiaries, with 60 % of organisations identifying it as a very important reason, while an additional 40 % considered it important. This underscores CSOs' strong responsiveness to the evolving needs of their target groups.

## Figure 16: Factors influencing changes in CSOs' activity priorities



| Factor | No answer | Not important | Important | Very important reason |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Other reasons | 50% | 45% | 5% | |
| CSOs' assessment and initiative | 13% | 4% | 22% | 61% |
| New demand from governmental entities | 26% | 57% | 9% | 9% |
| New demand from intermediary bodies | 17% | 43% | 35% | 4% |
| New demand from beneficiaries | | | 40% | 60% |

Legend:
- No answer
- Not important
- Important
- Very important reason
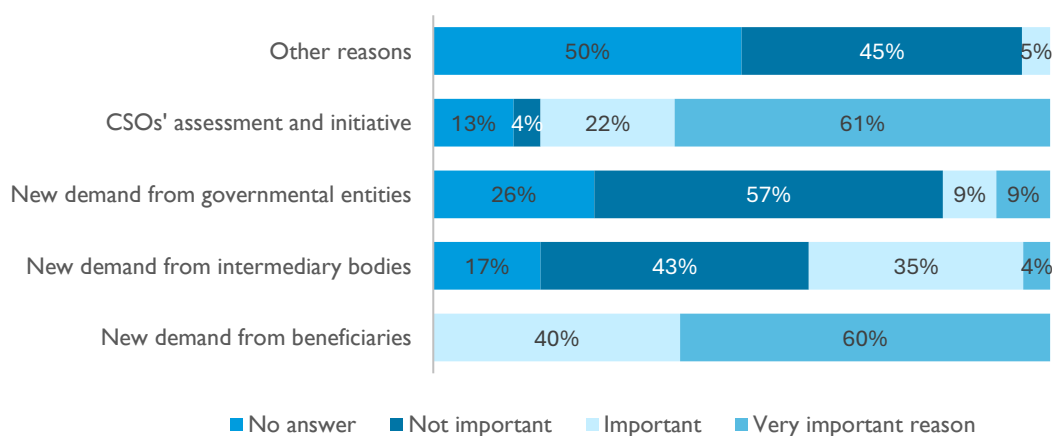
Another key driver was CSOs' own assessments and initiatives, with 61 % rating it as a very important reason and 22 % as important. This indicates that many organisations adapted their activities proactively, rather than solely in response to external influences.

In contrast, governmental entities played a lesser role in influencing CSO priorities. Only 9 % of organisations rated governmental demand as very important, while 57 % considered it not important. Similarly, requests from intermediary bodies were less impactful, with 43 % of CSOs deeming them unimportant and only 4 % rating them as very important.

These findings highlight that CSO activity changes were primarily driven by direct community needs and internal strategic assessments, while governmental or intermediary pressures played a limited role in shaping organisational priorities.

## 2.3 Changes in the usage of online tools for HCD activities

The analysis of digital learning tool usage by CSOs during the COVID-19 pandemic reveals a significant shift toward online education and remote learning solutions. 61 % of organisations reported increased use of digital learning tools, reflecting an adaptation to lockdown restrictions and the need for alternative ways to deliver training, education, and capacity-building activities (see Figure 17).

**Figure 17: Use of digital learning tools during the COVID-19 Pandemic**
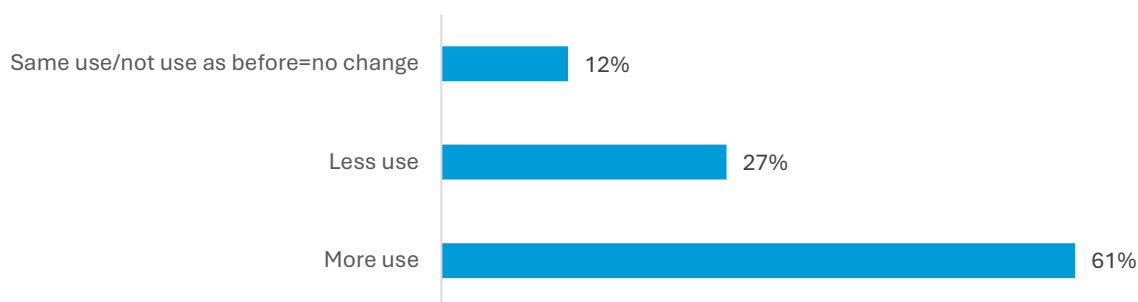


However, 27 % of CSOs reported using digital tools less, possibly due to challenges such as limited digital infrastructure, lack of technical skills among staff or beneficiaries, or difficulties in transitioning traditional programmes to an online format. A small portion (12 %) saw no change, indicating that their digital engagement remained consistent, either due to pre-existence on such tools or continued preference for in-person learning. Overall, the findings suggest that the pandemic accelerated digital transformation for many CSOs, though disparities in access and readiness remained a challenge.

The analysis of digital tools adopted by CSOs during the COVID-19 pandemic shows a strong preference for social media and virtual communication platforms, while more structured e-learning systems were less commonly used (see Figure 18).

**Figure 18: Usage of digital tools during the COVID-19 pandemic**
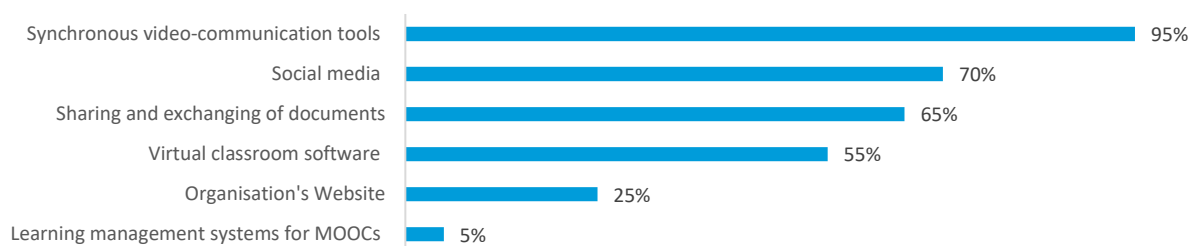


Synchronous video-communication tools are the most widely used, with 95 % of organisations utilising them, reflecting the growing reliance on real-time virtual interactions in CSO operations.

Social media (70 %) and document-sharing platforms (65 %) are also key tools, highlighting the importance of public outreach and collaborative work environments. Additionally, 55 % of CSOs use virtual classroom software, suggesting a moderate integration of structured e-learning solutions in their activities.

However, only 25 % of CSOs increased their use of dedicated learning management systems (LMS), and just 5 % expanded their use of MOOCs (Massive Open Online Courses), indicating that more advanced e-learning solutions were not a priority for most organisations. This could be due to limited digital literacy, lack of technical capacity, or the need for quick and flexible solutions during the crisis.

## 2.4 Lessons learned during COVID-19 pandemic crisis

The overwhelming majority of CSOs reported gaining valuable insights from the COVID-19 pandemic, with 97 % acknowledging short-term lessons and 91 % recognising long-term lessons (see Figure 19).

**Figure 19: Short-term and long-term lessons learned by organisations during the COVID-19 pandemic**
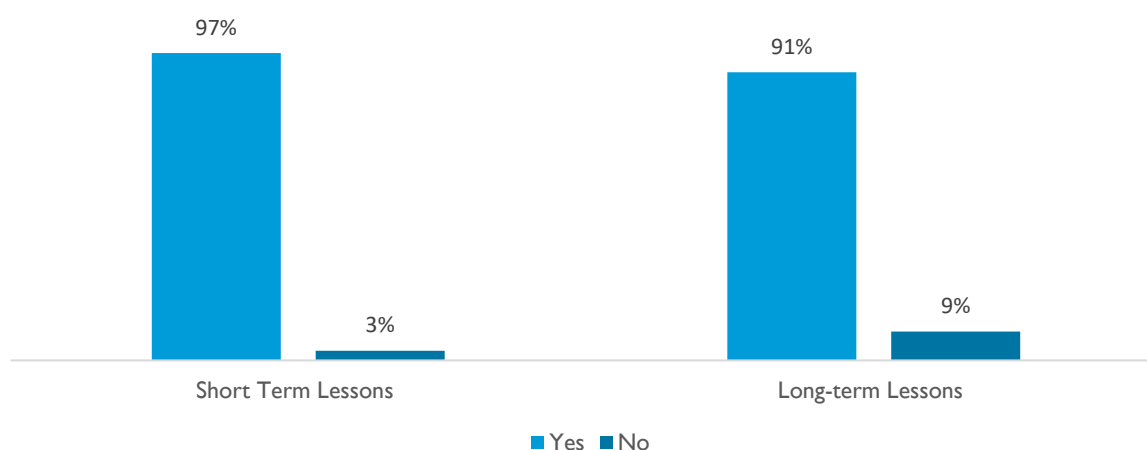


In the short term, CSOs learned to adapt quickly, reassess needs and adjust service delivery. However, gaps in internal preparedness highlighted the need for better contingency planning. Over the long term, CSOs gained strategic insights into the importance of service reprioritisation and innovation, internal capacity-building, and workforce development in crisis contexts. The following sections outline the key short-term and long-term lessons learned by CSOs during the pandemic.

### Short-term lessons

The analysis of short-term lessons learned by CSOs during emergencies or crises highlights key takeaways related to adaptation, collaboration, and efficiency. The most widely recognised lesson was assessing new needs quickly (84 % to a great extent) and adapting activity implementation and methods (81 %). Similarly, delivering services faster (65 %) and offering new services (56 %) were identified as critical areas of learning (see Figure 20).

**Figure 20: Short-term lessons learned under emergency or pressure during the Covid-19 pandemic**



Legend: No answer · Not at all · To a little extent · To a great extent

Chart data:
- That HCD plays a role in a crisis context: 3% / 3% / 28% / 66%
- Admitting unfitness of internal procedure: 3% / 38% / 41% / 19%
- To mobilise new resources: 3% / 13% / 56% / 28%
- To cooperate with other organisations: 3% / 3% / 63% / 31%
- To know and work for new beneficiary groups: 10% / 26% / 39% / 26%
- To access and use data about the pandemic: 3% / 3% / 38% / 56%
- To offer new services: 6% / 38% / 56%
- To adapt the activity implementation: 19% / 81%
- To assess new needs: 16% / 84%
- To deliver faster: 6% / 29% / 65%

Another key takeaway was the role of human capital development in crisis response (66 %). This suggests that many organisations recognise the value of investing in skills, training, and workforce capacity to enhance their resilience in emergencies.

Collaboration and resource mobilisation also emerged as essential factors, indicating that crises pushed CSOs to strengthen partnerships and seek alternative funding or support mechanisms to sustain their activities. While many CSOs adapted effectively to the crisis, internal preparedness remained a recognised challenge. 41 % of organisations admitted their internal procedures were unfit for the situation to some extent, while 19 % acknowledged it to a great extent. This highlights the need for stronger contingency planning and greater structural flexibility to enhance crisis resilience in the future.

## Long-term lessons

The analysis of long-term lessons learned by CSOs from implementing HCD activities during the crisis highlights a strong emphasis on service innovation and internal capacity-building, while challenges in funding and attracting external interest persisted (see Figure 21).

**Figure 21: Long-term strategic lessons learned during the COVID-19 pandemic**



| | Not at all | To a little extent | To a great extent |
|---|---|---|---|
| To increase our expertise | 20% | 53% | 27% |
| To improve our organisational skills | 7% | 30% | 63% |
| To innovate our internal processes | 10% | 27% | 63% |
| To cooperate with other organisations | 13% | 47% | 40% |
| To attract additional funds | 10% | 67% | 23% |
| To attract people and/or institutions | 40% | 43% | 17% |
| To attract other staff members | 37% | 50% | 13% |
| To re-train our staff members | 10% | 50% | 40% |
| To motivate our staff members | 3% | 43% | 53% |
| To understand the needs of new beneficiaries | 23% | 47% | 30% |
| To offer new services | 17% | 47% | 37% |
| To innovate our existing services | 3% | 17% | 80% |
| To re-prioritise our existing services | 7% | 21% | 71% |

■ Not at all  ■ To a little extent  ■ To a great extent

The most significant lesson was the need to innovate and adapt services, with 80 % of organisations prioritising innovation in existing services and 71 % focusing on reprioritising them. This indicates that CSOs recognised the importance of flexibility in service delivery to remain effective in changing environments. Additionally, 63 % of organisations learned to improve their organisational skills and innovate internal processes, reinforcing the need for internal resilience and efficiency in crisis management. Motivating and re-training staff emerged as a key focus, with 53 % and 40 % of CSOs, respectively, recognising these as critical areas. Collaboration was another important takeaway, with 40 % of CSOs acknowledging the need to cooperate with other organisations.

# CHAPTER 3. CIVIL SOCIETY IN ACTION: SUPPORTING REFUGEES OF THE RUSSIA-UKRAINE WAR

The analysis of Civil Society Organisations' (CSOs) involvement in refugee support services in Georgia reveals notable limitations in engagement. Despite the critical role CSOs can play in addressing the complex needs of displaced populations, only a small proportion of surveyed organisations reported active involvement in this area. The data shows that just 26 % of the surveyed CSOs provided any form of support to refugees during 2022, indicating a relatively narrow scope of activity in this field across the broader CSO landscape.

Although only nine of the surveyed CSOs explicitly offer services targeted at refugees, this limited engagement must be understood in the context of their operational focus and geographical distribution. The majority of these organisations are grassroots, operating primarily at the community level with limited resources and often focusing on local social, educational, or youth-related issues. Refugee-related services, by contrast, are mainly administered by national and international CSOs, many of which are headquartered in Tbilisi. These larger organisations are typically better positioned in terms of capacity, funding, and institutional linkages to coordinate with international actors and deliver specialised support to refugee populations.

Among the organisations that supported refugees, the most common form of assistance was psychological counselling (80 %), highlighting a strong recognition of the trauma and emotional distress faced by refugees (see Figure 22).

**Figure 22: Types of support provided to refugees since the start of the war**
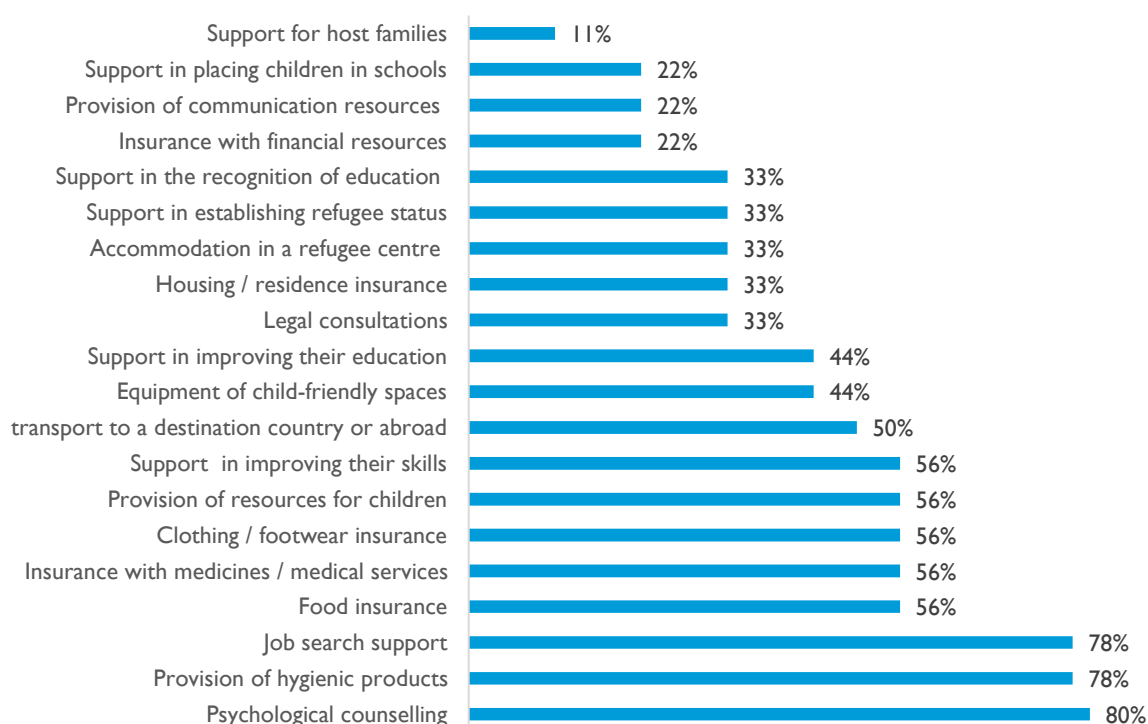


Additionally, provision of hygienic products (78 %), skill development (56 %), and access to essential items such as clothing, food, and medical supplies (50-56 %) were key areas of engagement. Additionally, 56 % of CSOs engaged in skills development efforts, indicating a focus on enhancing

refugees' employability and self-sufficiency. These findings indicate that CSOs played a crucial role in addressing refugees' immediate needs, particularly in mental health and essential services.
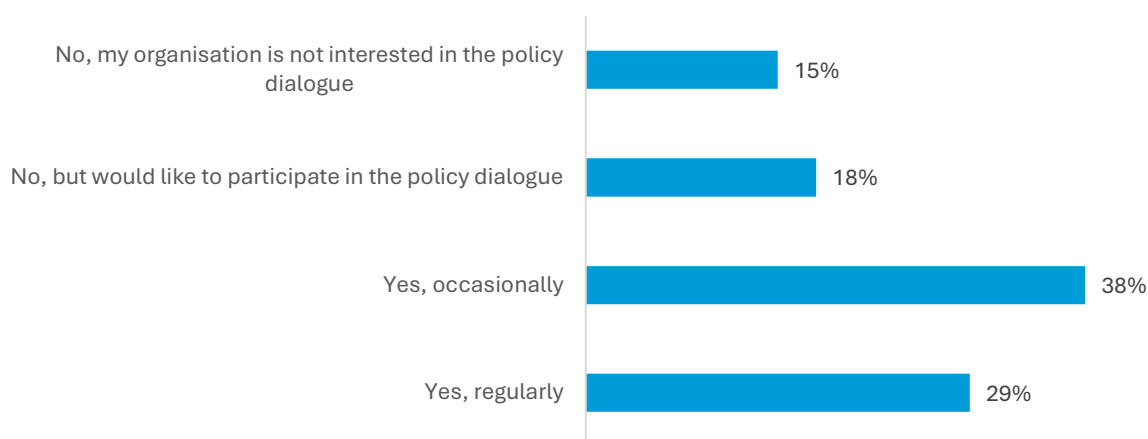
Fewer organisations provided support in areas such as legal consultations (33 %), housing and residence assistance (33 %), and educational recognition (33 %). Notably, only 11 % of CSOs reported assisting host families, suggesting that support mechanisms for host communities remained limited.

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# CHAPTER 4. CSOS IN ACTION: SHAPING POLICY THROUGH DIALOGUE

## 4.1 CSOs' involvement in policy dialogue

The analysis of the survey regarding CSO involvement in policy dialogue on non-formal learning, informal learning, and employment highlights a moderate level of engagement, with room for greater participation. A combined 67 % of organisations are engaged in policy dialogue, with 38 % participating occasionally. However, only 29 % are involved on a regular basis, suggesting that consistent participation remains a challenge (see Figure 23).

**Figure 23: Involvement in policy dialogue on skills development and employment services**

| | |
|---|---|
| No, my organisation is not interested in the policy dialogue | 15% |
| No, but would like to participate in the policy dialogue | 18% |
| Yes, occasionally | 38% |
| Yes, regularly | 29% |

Meanwhile, 18 % of CSOs are not currently involved but are interested in joining policy dialogue efforts, representing an opportunity for increased engagement if proper mechanisms for inclusion are established. However, 15 % of organisations expressed no interest in participating, which may reflect a lack of capacity, relevance to their work, or scepticism about the effectiveness of policy engagement.

The UN Woman report 2024, emphasises that civil society collaboration with government agencies severely deteriorated following the adoption of the Law on Transparency of Foreign Influence. This legislation significantly restricted CSOs' capacity to participate effectively in policy-making processes. Similarly, although written prior to the law's adoption, the CSO Meter Report 2023 highlights negative government rhetoric against prominent civil society organisations, undermining trust and hindering meaningful partnerships and policy advocacy efforts.

During the focus group meeting, CSO representatives reported that, prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, a structured and institutionalised process ensured their meaningful participation in policy dialogue in Georgia. However, in recent years, these mechanisms have deteriorated significantly, with formal engagement opportunities becoming increasingly limited.

At the time of the workshop, participants raised concerns over emerging legislative trends that appeared to restrict civil society's involvement in governance and decision-making. These concerns have since been substantiated by the recent introduction of a legislative package in Parliament, which proposes removing the mandatory participation of CSOs in public decision-making processes across 14 different legislative acts[13]. These developments indicate a systematic reduction in opportunities for

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[13] https://www.interpressnews.ge/ka/article/831284-parlamentshi-inicirebulia-sakanonmdeblo-paketi-romlis-tanaxmad-sajaro-gadacqvetilebata-migebis-processhi-arasamtavrobo-organizaciata-monacileoba-savaldebulo-agar-ikneba/.

CSOs to contribute to policy formulation, posing additional challenges to their effective participation in democratic governance.

## 4.2 CSO stakeholder mapping and engagement levels

The analysis of CSO stakeholder mapping reveals that civil society platforms, academic institutions, and education/training providers are considered key partners, while trade unions and the National Employment Agency are less integrated into CSO networks (see Figure 24).

**Figure 24: Stakeholders identified by CSOs**
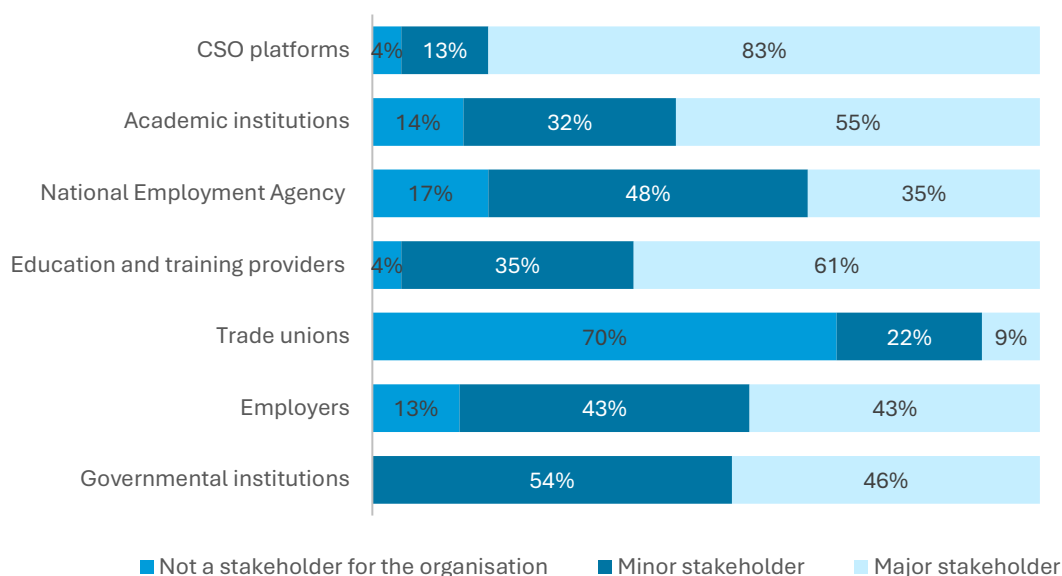


CSO platforms (83 %) are the most widely recognised major stakeholders, indicating strong collaboration within the civil society sector. Similarly, academic institutions (55 %) and education and training providers (61 %) are viewed as important partners, reflecting CSOs' focus on learning, skills development, and knowledge sharing.

Government institutions are viewed as major stakeholders by 46 % of CSOs, though 54 % consider them only minor stakeholders, suggesting a degree of engagement but potential challenges in deep collaboration with public agencies. Similarly, employers (43 %) are identified as key stakeholders, but an equal share of organisations see them as only minor partners, indicating that engagement with the private sector remains underdeveloped.

The analysis of CSO connections and reporting to stakeholders reveals that a majority of organisations maintain at least some level of engagement with key stakeholders, though the consistency of these connections varies (see Figure 25).

## Figure 25: CSOs' connections and reporting to stakeholders



| | |
|---|---|
| Organisation is not interested in being connected/reporting | 7% |
| Organisation would like to be connected/report | 3% |
| Yes, occasionally | 40% |
| Yes, regularly | 27% |
| N/A | 23% |
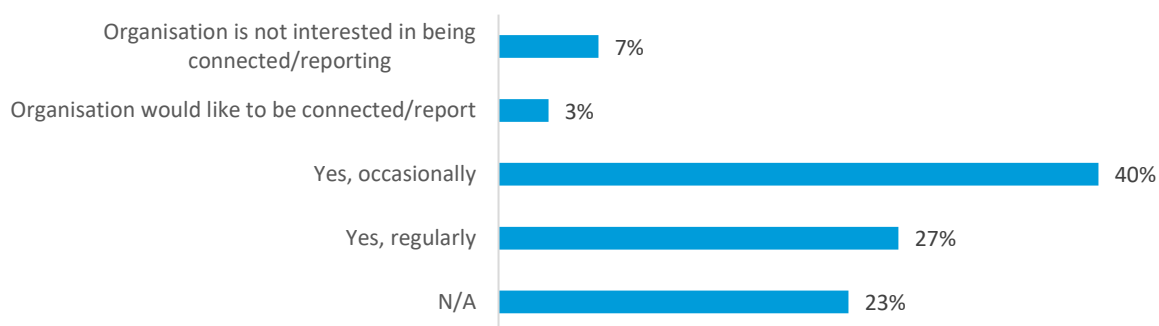
No less than 40 % of CSOs report occasional connections with stakeholders, while 27 % are regularly engaged, indicating that more than two-thirds of organisations recognise the importance of maintaining relationships with 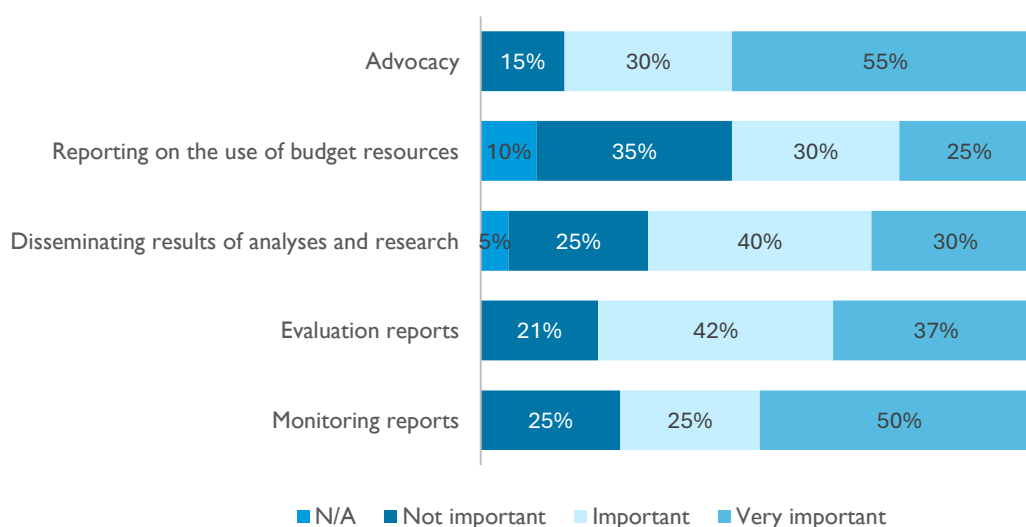relevant institutions. However, the fact that only 27 % are engaged on a regular basis suggests that structured and consistent reporting mechanisms may not be fully in place across the sector.

A notable 23 % selected 'N/A', which may indicate that these organisations do not see stakeholder engagement as a key aspect of their work or that reporting obligations are unclear.

Overall, the findings suggest that while CSOs in Georgia maintain stakeholder connections, many do so on an ad hoc basis rather than through structured or regular engagement. Strengthening reporting frameworks and fostering deeper institutional linkages could enhance collaboration and improve the overall effectiveness of civil society initiatives. The analysis further highlights that advocacy, monitoring, and evaluation are the primary aspects of engagement, while financial reporting and research dissemination are less consistently emphasised.

Interestingly, advocacy is the most significant component of CSOs' engagement with stakeholders, with 55% of CSOs considering it very important and 30% considering it important (see Figure 26). This aligns with previous findings that many organisations participate in policy dialogue, even if not always on a regular basis. This suggests that CSOs primarily use their stakeholder connections to influence policies, promote reforms, and engage in broader discussions on non-formal learning, employment, and social issues. However, these responses may reflect past experiences rather than current realities, as recent legislative restrictions have significantly undermined the role of CSOs in advocacy and policy engagement.

## Figure 26: Main content of CSO connections and reporting



| | N/A | Not important | Important | Very important |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Advocacy | 15% | | 30% | 55% |
| Reporting on the use of budget resources | 10% | 35% | 30% | 25% |
| Disseminating results of analyses and research | 5% | 25% | 40% | 30% |
| Evaluation reports | | 21% | 42% | 37% |
| Monitoring reports | | 25% | 25% | 50% |

Monitoring (50 % very important) and evaluation reports (37 % very important, 42 % important) are also central to CSO-stakeholder interactions, reflecting commitment to impact assessment and accountability. Given that many CSOs report only occasional engagement with stakeholders, this may indicate that reporting is done primarily in response to specific project requirements rather than through continuous dialogue.

Research and analysis dissemination is somewhat valued, with 30 % considering it very important and 40 % important. However, financial reporting is less emphasised, with only 25 % rating it as very important, while 35 % view it as not important. This suggests that transparency in budget management is not always a key part of CSO-stakeholder engagement, potentially due to the nature of partnerships or a focus on qualitative impact rather than financial accountability.

## 4.3    CSOs' role compared to the government's role

The analysis of CSOs' roles in comparison to national and local governments in HCD highlights a predominantly complementary and collaborative relationship, with limited misalignment or disengagement from government activities (see Figure 27). This suggests that most CSOs operate within the existing system rather than in opposition to it, aiming to enhance rather than replace or contradict government efforts.

However, legislative changes, including the recently introduced Law on Transparency of Foreign Influence, may impact this dynamic by redefining the roles CSOs play relative to government institutions. While CSOs have traditionally worked to fill gaps in service provision, contribute expertise, and support marginalised groups, increased restrictions could shift their role toward more independent or parallel service delivery, rather than integrated collaboration.

**Figure 27: CSOs' role compared to the role of the national or local government**
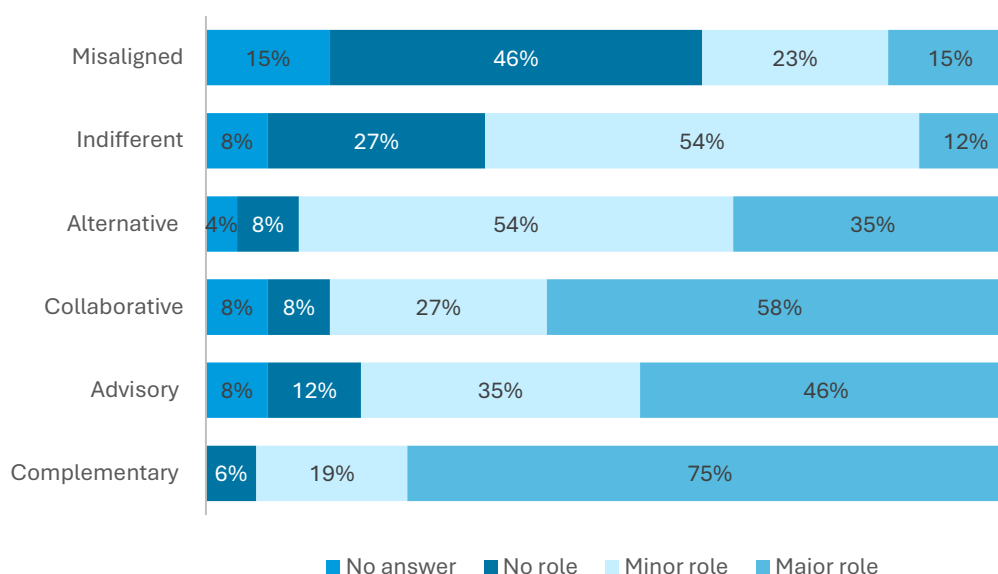


Advisory roles are also significant, with 46 % of CSOs reporting that they are consulted on policies, programmes, and other government decisions, while another 35 % play a minor advisory role. This indicates that while many CSOs contribute expertise and insights, fewer than half have a major influence in shaping government policy.

Meanwhile, 54 % of CSOs see themselves as alternative actors, addressing beneficiary groups that government programmes do not reach, with 35 % considering this a major part of their role. This reflects the flexibility of civil society in reaching underserved populations and addressing gaps in public services.

In contrast, only 15 % of CSOs report being misaligned with the government to a major extent, while 46 % indicate no role in this regard. This suggests that direct conflict with government policies is rare, and most organisations find ways to work either alongside or independently of public institutions. A small portion of CSOs (12 %) remain indifferent, meaning they do not engage with or inform the government about their work, while 54 % play a minor role in this category.

## 4.4  CSOs Responses to Changing Legal Environment

As part of the survey, CSOs were asked an open-ended question: 'To what extent have you taken any actions in the past year to change the legal status of your organisation or to register it outside Georgia?' This question aimed to assess whether organisations were affected by the adoption of the Transparency of Foreign Influence law in August 2024 and how they were responding to the new legislative environment.

The responses indicate a divergence in organisational strategies. While half of the surveyed CSOs reported taking no action, a notable one-third (11 organisations) refrained from answering the question, potentially highlighting the sensitivity of the issue. Additionally, six CSOs confirmed they had taken steps to change their legal status, reflecting proactive adjustments to the evolving regulatory framework.

Furthermore, the survey revealed that two CSOs refused to participate entirely, citing their closure due to the new legislation. This suggests that for some organisations, the law's impact has been substantial enough to result in the termination of their operations.

The findings underscore the growing uncertainty and complexity surrounding the legal environment for CSOs in Georgia, as organisations navigate regulatory challenges, potential operational risks, and shifting compliance requirements. The varied responses — ranging from legal restructuring and relocation efforts to hesitancy and complete cessation of operations — highlight the far-reaching implications of legislative changes on the sustainability and strategic planning of CSOs.

# CHAPTER 5. CSOS AND HUMAN CAPITAL DEVELOPMENT: UNLOCKING THE POTENTIAL

To gain insights into the perceived roles and contributions of CSOs within the broader policy landscape, the survey asked organisations to identify their competitive advantages compared to public, private, and non-governmental actors at the national or municipal level. Based on responses from the surveyed CSOs, comparative advantages over other public, private, and non-governmental organisations at the national or municipal level highlights a strong role in shaping policies, ensuring transparency, and supporting underserved groups (see Figure 28).

**Figure 28: Comparative advantages of CSOs at national and municipal levels**



| | No answer | No advantage | Minor advantage | Major advantage |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Evaluate independently HCD policy outcomes | 18% | 9% | 53% | 21% |
| Monitor skills development policy implementation | 18% | 9% | 47% | 26% |
| Support effectiveness of HCD processes | 15% | | 29% | 56% |
| Ensure HCD policy transparency and accountability | 15% | 9% | 44% | 32% |
| Detect needs, amplify voices for policy dialogue | 15% | 3% | 32% | 50% |
| Improve the outcome of policy dialogue | 18% | 21% | 35% | 26% |
| Guarantee transparency of public consultations | 15% | 12% | 53% | 21% |
| Improve the quality of HCD policy dialogue | 18% | 9% | 41% | 32% |
| Provide innovative advice to shape HCD policies | 12% | 6% | 47% | 35% |
| Provide independent advice to shape HCD policies | 6% | | 28% | 67% |

A key strength for CSOs in Georgia is their capacity to provide independent advice on shaping HCD policies, with 67 % identifying this as a major advantage and an additional 28 % considering it a minor advantage (See Figure 23). This suggests that CSOs play a crucial role in offering objective and innovative policy recommendations, contributing to the development of more inclusive and effective policies.

Beyond policy advice, CSOs highlight their ability to drive transparency and accountability, with 32 % citing this as a major advantage and 44 % as a minor advantage. Additionally, their role in supporting the effectiveness of HCD processes is well recognised, with 56 % considering it a major advantage and 29 % a minor one. Another notable strength is their capacity to identify the needs of marginalised groups, with 50 % of CSOs rating this as a major advantage. This underscores their critical role in bridging gaps in formal education and employment systems, ensuring that vulnerable populations are included in policy discussions and service provision.

Despite these strengths, CSOs report challenges in influencing policy evaluation, implementation oversight, and public consultations, indicating that their engagement in these areas remains constrained. However, the survey reveals a positive outlook regarding CSOs' future role in HCD, with 73 % expressing intent to strengthen their contribution — 32 % being fully committed and 41 % planning to do so to some extent (see Figure 29).

Nevertheless, 26 % of CSOs indicate that current conditions are not conducive to expanding their role in HCD, suggesting that funding limitations, policy barriers, and operational constraints may be hindering their ability to enhance their impact further. These findings emphasise the need for sustained support and an enabling policy environment to maximise CSOs' contributions to HCD in Georgia.

**Figure 29: CSOs' plans to strengthen their contribution to HCD**
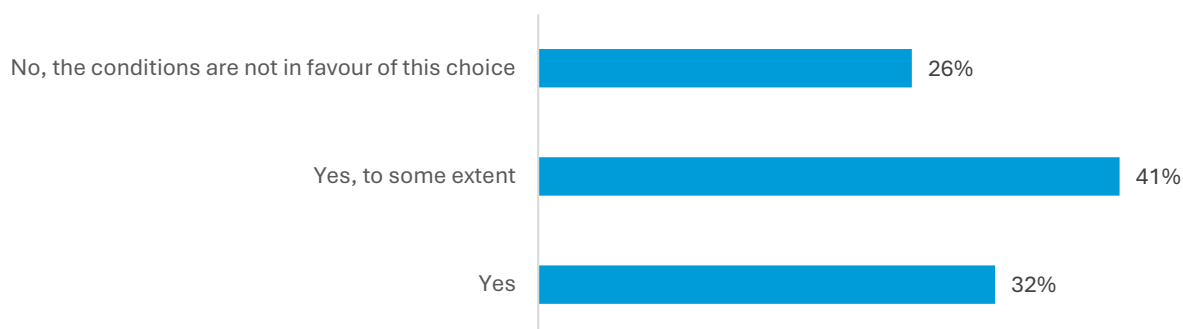


The survey also identified areas where the CSOs themselves see opportunities to enhance their contribution to the Human Capital Development (HCD) sector. These potential areas for future engagement reflect a strong emphasis on improving accessibility, fostering innovation, and promoting employability — particularly in ways that better serve their target groups. A clear priority is improving the accessibility of formal, informal, and non-formal learning opportunities, with 100 % of CSOs considering this a very likely area for future engagement. This suggests that ensuring diverse and flexible learning pathways remains a top concern for the sector. Similarly, inclusiveness in learning opportunities is a highly likely focus for 60 % of CSOs, with another 36 % considering it likely. This aligns with ongoing efforts to support marginalised groups and create equitable learning environments (see Figure 30).

**Figure 30: Potential domains for strengthening CSO contribution to HCD sector**
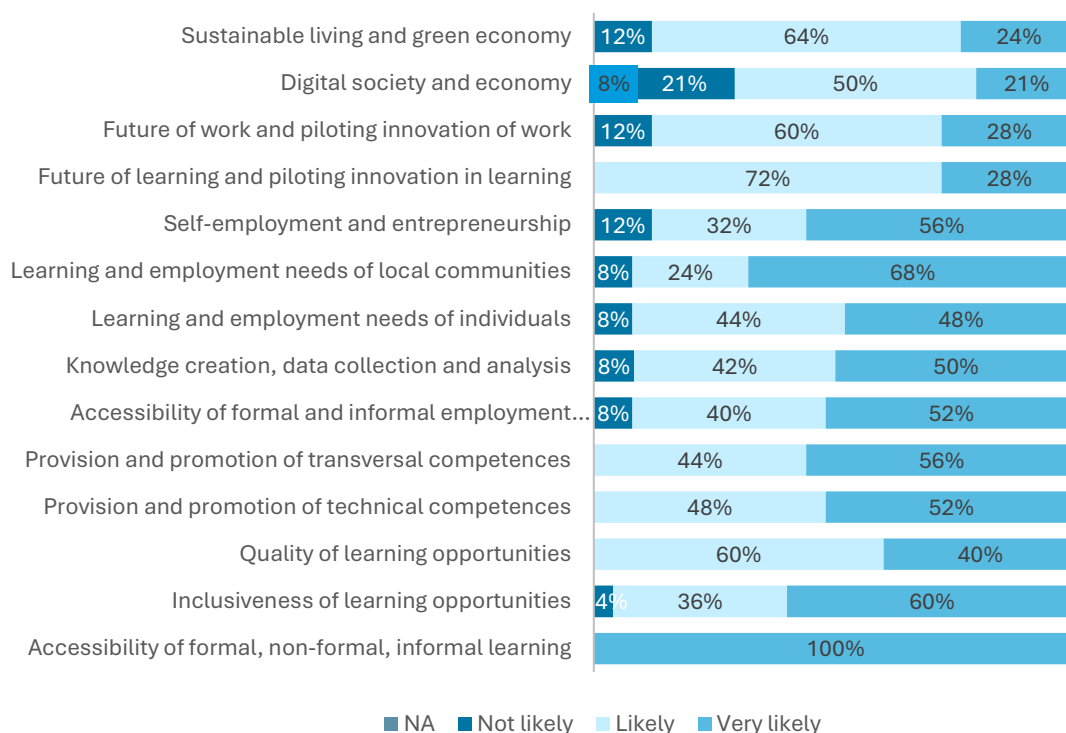
Employability is another major area of focus, with self-employment and entrepreneurship identified as a very likely priority by 56 % of CSOs, recognising the need for preparing individuals for the evolving labour market through entrepreneurship and skills development.

Technical and transversal skills development also stand out as significant areas for future contributions: 52 % of CSOs see the provision of technical competences as very likely, while 56 % prioritise transversal skills such as teamwork and communication. This reflects an awareness of the growing importance of holistic skill sets in workforce readiness.

However, engagement in emerging fields such as the digital economy (21 % very likely, 50 % likely) and sustainable living and the green economy (24 % very likely, 64 % likely) appears more uncertain, suggesting that while CSOs acknowledge their importance, capacity-building and resource allocation may be needed to strengthen their role in these areas.

# CHAPTER 6. MAIN FINDINGS: CSOS IN GEORGIA'S HUMAN CAPITAL DEVELOPMENT AGENDA

**Regional Disparities and Centralisation in Tbilisi —** A significant concentration of Georgian CSOs is located in the capital, Tbilisi (26 %), highlighting uneven geographical distribution. While cities like Kutaisi (Imereti) and Telavi (Kakheti) have moderate representation, regions like Kvemo Kartli, Adjara, and especially Racha-Lechkhumi and Mtskheta-Mtianeti are substantially underserved. Centralisation in Tbilisi, driven by better funding, infrastructure, and proximity to decision-makers, results in weaker representation and limited outreach capacity across rural and remote areas.

**Predominant Local and Community Engagement —** The overwhelming majority (94 %) of Georgian CSOs prioritise local, grassroots-level work, with approximately half also maintaining a regional presence. However, fewer organisations consistently engage at the national (29 %) or international (3 %) levels. This local-centric approach ensures direct responsiveness to community needs, allowing CSOs to address specific challenges at the grassroots level. However, it also limits their ability to influence broader national policy frameworks and reduces opportunities for cross-border knowledge exchange. Additionally, the heavy concentration of CSOs at the local level highlights the critical need for sustained funding, as small, grassroots organisations often struggle with financial constraints that hinder their long-term sustainability and scalability.

**Leadership and Participation in Networks —** While Georgian CSOs actively participate in networks (68 % membership), very few (18 %) assume leadership or management roles within these networks. Organisations primarily engage in collaborative platforms such as the UN Global Compact and Social Entrepreneurship Ecosystem Platform, demonstrating robust participation but limited leadership due to constraints in capacity, funding, and resources.

**Reliance on Digital Platforms and Limited Digital Capacity —** Synchronous video-communication tools (95 %) and social media (70 %), particularly Facebook, are the dominant digital channels used by Georgian CSOs. However, only 25 % maintain dedicated websites, revealing significant gaps in digital infrastructure, skills, and financial resources. This reliance on real-time communication and third-party platforms may impact long-term visibility, outreach potential, and organisational resilience, particularly in times of crisis or shifting digital trends. Additionally, the limited use of structured online learning platforms such as learning management systems for MOOCs (5 %) suggests that many CSOs prioritise immediate engagement tools over long-term digital capacity-building investments.

**Staffing Constraints and Dependence on Short-Term Staff —** Georgian CSOs largely operate with limited human resources, with most organisations employing fewer than 14 paid staff, supplemented by volunteers or consultants. Resource limitations and uncertain funding result in high staff turnover and reliance on short-term or project-based employment. These staffing constraints significantly hinder the development of institutional memory, strategic planning, and long-term sustainability.

**Persistent Donor Dependency and Vulnerability —** Georgian CSOs remain overwhelmingly reliant on international donor funding (91 %) due to limited domestic funding sources from private contributions and government grants. Recent legislative actions, particularly the controversial Law on Transparency of Foreign Influence, have exacerbated financial instability, severely restricting CSOs' access to foreign funding and threatening operational effectiveness and independence.

**Diverse Adaptation Strategies to Legislative Changes —** CSOs in Georgia have responded to the new legal environment in different ways, reflecting varying levels of concern and adaptation. While half of the surveyed organisations did not take any action, a significant portion (one-third) chose not to disclose their stance, possibly indicating hesitation or the sensitivity of the issue. Meanwhile, six organisations actively pursued legal restructuring or considered registering outside of Georgia, signalling a strategic shift to maintain operations under the evolving framework. Additionally, two CSOs withdrew from the survey entirely due to the impact of the law, having ceased their activities altogether. These findings illustrate the uncertainty surrounding the sector's future, with some

organisations taking pre-emptive steps to adjust, while others face heightened risks to their sustainability and engagement in civic space.

**Focused Priorities and Limited Engagement with Environmental SDGs —** CSOs show clear prioritisation towards Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) related to education (SDG 4), employment (SDG 8), and poverty reduction (SDG 1). However, their engagement with environmental sustainability and infrastructure-related SDGs, such as climate action (SDG 13), renewable energy (SDG 7), and water and sanitation (SDG 6), remains notably lower, reflecting strategic prioritisation, limited funding, or perceived immediate urgency of social over environmental issues.

**Beneficiary Selection and Gaps in Serving Vulnerable Populations —** While Georgian CSOs effectively support broad groups such as youth and adults, targeted interventions for marginalised groups — including refugees, migrants, asylum seekers, and internally displaced persons (IDPs) — are less frequent. Additionally, men with special needs remain notably underserved compared to women. These service gaps highlight potential areas for improving inclusivity and ensuring comprehensive community support.

**Limited Long-term Support for Refugees from Russia-Ukraine War —** 26 % of surveyed CSOs provided assistance to refugees from the Russia-Ukraine war, primarily focusing on immediate humanitarian needs such as psychological support and basic essentials (hygienic products, clothing). Essential long-term integration services, including employment support, legal assistance, housing, and education placement, were largely neglected. These findings reflect broader capacity and resource limitations within CSOs, highlighting critical gaps in comprehensive refugee support infrastructure.

**Moderate but Inconsistent Policy Dialogue Involvement —** CSOs actively participate in policy dialogues related to non-formal and informal learning, and employment, with 67 % involved to varying degrees. However, consistent participation remains limited (only 29 % regularly participate), reflecting challenges such as capacity constraints, limited resources, restrictive legislative environments, or governmental resistance to civil society involvement. Expanding opportunities and providing more structured engagement mechanisms could significantly enhance CSO influence on national policy.

**Weak Collaboration with Employment and Labour Stakeholders —** CSOs predominantly engage with other civil society actors (83 %), education providers (61 %), and academic institutions (55 %). However, their collaboration with key employment-related stakeholders, including trade unions (70 % non-engagement), employers (43 % minor engagement), and the National Employment Service (65 % minor or no engagement), remains notably weak. Strengthening ties with these stakeholders is critical for creating integrated approaches to skills development, employment support, and economic inclusion.

**Predominantly Complementary Role in Relation to Government —** Most Georgian CSOs (75 %) perceive their role as complementary to government, addressing needs not fully covered by public institutions. Additionally, 58 % report collaborative engagement with the government on specific programmes. While advisory roles are also significant, fewer organisations (46 %) regularly influence policy decisions. This indicates strong potential for expanding structured policy advisory roles, facilitating better integration of CSO expertise into public policy.

**CSOs' Strengths in Independent Advice and Transparency —** Georgian CSOs identify significant comparative advantages in providing independent, transparent, and objective advice on human capital development policies (67 %) and monitoring the effectiveness of education and training initiatives (56 %). Their strength in transparency and accountability (53 %) is particularly critical in ensuring inclusive policy consultations and implementation. Leveraging these strengths could substantially enhance their credibility and policy influence.

**Future Focus on Accessibility, Innovation, and Employability —** Looking ahead, Georgian CSOs strongly prioritise improving accessibility to diverse learning opportunities (100 %), piloting innovative learning methods (72 %), and supporting employability through entrepreneurship and self-employment initiatives (56 %). These priorities reflect a clear vision for addressing Georgia's evolving labour market needs and promoting inclusive economic growth, provided adequate funding and supportive policy environments are in place.

# ANNEX 1 — SUMMARY OF BENEFICIARY INTERVIEWS

**Demographic profile:** as part of this research, 7 beneficiaries from the following CSOs were interviewed:

- Kaspi Adult Education Centre
- Self-Government Resource Centre of Racha-Lechkhumi and Kvemo Svaneti
- Charity Humanitarian Centre 'Abkhazia' -CHCA
- World Vision Georgia

The beneficiaries included one man and six women from diverse regions of Georgia (Tbilisi, Tsalenjikha, Kaspi, Gori, and Ambrolauri) and represented varied professional backgrounds and age groups.

**Beneficiary needs and services provided —** The cohort of interviewed beneficiaries included individuals from vulnerable groups facing systemic barriers to HCD, such as a single mother, women who married underage (and consequently lacked formal education) an IDP woman, refugee children, and a women over 55 seeking skills to remain employable. As a result, their needs varied significantly, and the services they received were diverse, including language courses, computer literacy programmes, marketing workshops, and training in project writing and grant applications.

> *'It was a small grant contest for vulnerable women. There were women who were beneficiaries of social assistance programmes, and I was involved as an IDP woman. […] The award was a grant worth 1 000 GEL[14] to start a small business. We attended training on how to write a grant proposal. […] It was a two-day training, and then we had a week to prepare our proposals. During this one-week period, we also received support and feedback from the trainer. […]' (Female, Tbilisi)*

> *'I personally attended a training course in computer literacy and English language. Later, I also got engaged in various projects and other training. There were also some network meetings. And I got to work on the project 'Radio Kaspi,' where I worked as a radio host until December [2024].' (Female, Kaspi)*

Interestingly, some beneficiaries initially lacked awareness of the training opportunities relevant to their needs, underscoring the CSOs' critical role in identifying and addressing these gaps. Many beneficiaries had not actively sought out such programmes, either due to a lack of information or because they were unaware of how these opportunities could benefit them. This highlights the importance of CSOs in not only providing services but also in proactively reaching out to vulnerable groups and guiding them toward relevant training.

> *'To be honest, I had never sat down and given thought to what specific course would have been beneficial for me. Rather, I came across opportunities and took advantage of them.' (Female, Ambrolauri)*

**Impact of HCD services —** The majority of beneficiaries reported significant improvements in their professional skills and personal development due to the services provided by CSOs. Many acquired new competencies that directly enhanced their careers. For instance, language and computer courses were frequently highlighted as pivotal in improving job prospects. A few beneficiaries completed marketing, project writing, and grant application training, successfully expanding their businesses and launching new start-ups. One participant even mentioned that the knowledge and skills gained from CSO training helped them transition into a new profession.

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[14] 21 August 2025, 1,000 Georgian Lari (GEL) equals approximately 317 EUR, based on the official exchange rate published by National Bank of Georgia.

*'I completed the full course in computer literacy, and I'm extremely happy with that. Well, I had some experience with computers before, but my knowledge was lacking. This course helped me gain skills and knowledge that I never had before. [...] As I mentioned, I work in the library, and I no longer have to ask IT specialists for help when working with our software. I don't have any difficulties while working, I feel confident, and this job has become a whole lot easier for me.'*

*'Yes, indeed, the [training course] was very helpful! This organisation helped me improve the quality of my life. As I already told you, I had no idea about entrepreneurship before. And it's not easy to change professions and, consequently, the entire course of my life. I got lucky that this organisation appeared in my life—they helped me start a new life here [in Ambrolauri] through these trainings, consultations, and more. I know that many other people are just as happy with the organisation as I am.' (Female, Ambrolauri)*

Interestingly, beyond technical skills, CSOs have played a crucial role in expanding beneficiaries' professional networks. One of the beneficiaries said that, through the various workshops and collaborative projects, she gained valuable connections for future endeavours.

Two of our respondents were teachers who received additional support for their students, in the form of formal and non-formal education training and, in some cases, stationery supplies, laptops, printers and other equipment. The students actively participated in these sessions, showing great enthusiasm and engagement throughout the process. The beneficiaries highlighted that the sessions were not only educational but also interactive and enjoyable, keeping students motivated and eager to learn.

*'When I see the Ukrainian kids smiling, playing, having fun, it means that, OK, your work is nice and you are doing best practice you can provide.' (Male, Tbilisi)*

Feedback on CSOs and service quality was overwhelmingly positive. They praised the professionalism and dedication of service providers, noting that training sessions were welcoming, comfortable, inclusive, and encouraged active participation, with follow-ups ensuring sustained support beyond the initial training. Despite their overall satisfaction, some beneficiaries suggested improvements, including scaling up the services and offering a wider selection of training courses that are needed for the modern job market.

**Communication and feedback mechanisms —** Information about CSOs and their services was easily accessible, with participants generally discovering them through social media, personal networks, or direct outreach from CSO representatives. Regardless of how the initial contact was established, the beneficiaries maintained communication with the organisation primarily through social media, specifically Facebook.

*'I found out [about the organisation] through the internet. We all have Facebook, and I had Salome [CSO representative] among my friend lists. She lives in Kaspi and reached out to me through the official page of the organisation, and I accepted the invitation. Then they announced the programme over there—we had to fill out an application, and then there was an interview process and selection of the candidates' (Female, Kaspi)*

The beneficiaries noted that verbal or written feedback mechanisms were incorporated in the CSOs' service delivery process. The beneficiaries expressed that their feedback was duly recorded and taken into account by the organisations.

*'After the training, they always provided assessment forms asking what kind of skills we acquired. We had the opportunity to express our opinions and give them to the trainer, or we could just share our opinions out loud with the trainer.' (Female, Kaspi)*

**Future interest and engagement in HCD service —** There was a strong interest among participants in engaging in similar services and programmes in the future. They were eager to continue receiving support from the same organisations as well as from other CSOs. Interestingly, many mentioned their desire to learn new skills and gain knowledge, recognising it as critical for success in today's fast-changing world.

*'I always tell Nana [CSO representative] that if a new opportunity comes up, to keep me in mind. I tell that to everybody. Please let me know — me and my school colleagues are ready to get actively engaged.' (Female, Ambrolauri)*

*'One part of my interest is artificial intelligence — its application in education and the ethics of using AI in education. Some extra practical skills in AI and neural networks would be useful because the programme is going to evolve. Sometimes you need to keep up and follow fast as well.' (Male, Tbilisi)*

# ANNEX 2 — NOTES FROM FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION

The focus group meeting took place in Tbilisi on 10 February and was attended by ETF representatives, 12 Georgian CSOs, representatives of the EU Delegation in Georgia, and PMCG representatives. The meeting aimed to achieve two main goals: (1) facilitate stakeholder exchange on Human Capital Development (HCD) efforts, including the CSO capacity assessment survey, and (2) discuss challenges and opportunities for Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) in Georgia. The discussions brought together diverse perspectives to explore these topics in depth.

**Opening remarks** — The meeting began with an introduction to ETF's work in Human Capital Development (HCD), including its CSO capacity assessment surveys conducted in various countries. Key issues in the HCD sector were highlighted, including gaps in secondary education, labour market skills mismatches, and the difficulties faced by youth, women, and other vulnerable groups — challenges that ETF had previously collaborated with local CSOs to address. However, it was noted that as new obstacles had emerged, there was a growing need for a deeper understanding of the sector in Georgia.

ETF representatives emphasised the importance of openly discussing challenges facing Georgian CSOs and identifying growth opportunities. Notably, they adopted a collaborative approach, seeking solutions rather than offering pre-formulated answers.

A representative from the EU Delegation to Georgia stressed the significance of the dialogue, noting that CSOs had become a priority for the EU, with a shift in focus away from public entities. Therefore, understanding the challenges and needs of CSOs was critical for their ongoing efforts.

**Discussion regarding survey methodology and fieldwork** — ETF representatives shared insights from CSO surveys conducted in various countries. It was noted that a key challenge was that many CSOs were unaware of their contributions to HCD, necessitating close collaboration between ETF and them to clarify their roles. Additionally, the variability in how CSOs are defined across countries was noted, underscoring the need for adaptable approaches to account for regional differences.

During the discussion, Georgian CSO representatives had the opportunity to ask PMCG representatives about sampling techniques, outreach strategies tailored to Georgia, and the interpretation of specific survey questions.

**Work of Georgian CSOs in HCD** — Representatives of the local CSOs had the opportunity to share exemplary projects completed by their organisations in the field of HCD, focusing on initiatives where they collaborated with state entities. Two specific projects highlighting this collaboration were presented during the meeting.

1. CENN completed a project[15] aimed at enhancing municipal waste management and promoting circular economy principles. The project included the development of a waste management plan and associated training for representatives from 14 municipalities. Additionally, it involved training lecturers in the principles of the circular economy. These lecturers then developed a module on the subject, which was subsequently incorporated into academic curricula.

2. RDFG, as a partner to CNFA, implemented a project[16] under the framework of a USAID-funded initiative aimed at strengthening the private and service sectors within municipal structures. The project supported 17 municipalities by equipping them with specific knowledge and skills for social democratic strategic development. However, certain components had to be discontinued following the introduction of new legislative frameworks in the country. A key focus of the project was preparing municipal representatives for disaster planning, addressing a critical gap as no state

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[15] https://www.cenn.org/circular-cities-and-regions-in-georgia/
[16] https://cnfa.org/program/usaid-resilient-communities-program/

agency was responsible for this component at the time. Ultimately, the project was suspended entirely due to the discontinuation of USAID funding.

**Challenges and Opportunities** — Stakeholders discussed a range of challenges, including legislative hurdles, funding constraints, and operational difficulties, while also identifying potential opportunities for growth and collaboration.

**Legislative Hurdles** — The adoption of the Transparency of Foreign Influence law was identified as a major barrier to CSO operations, as it requires CSOs to either register in the registry of foreign influences or face fines. CSOs pointed out that this legislation has significantly hindered cooperation between CSOs and the government, damaging trust and reputation at the local level. CSO representatives emphasised the need to return to the status quo before the introduction of these legislative changes to restore effective collaboration.

**Funding Constraints** — The CSOs pointed out that the new legislative environment, combined with the suspension of USAID activities, has created significant funding challenges for CSOs in Georgia. Previously, CSOs relied on two major funding sources: USAID and the EU. However, with USAID ceasing operations, only EU funding remains, which is restricted to non-profit organisations. This shift has left a gap in funding for organisations affected by the new Transparency of Foreign Influence law.

Additionally, it was pointed out that grant distribution often favours large organisations, leaving smaller CSOs with only subcontracting opportunities. This limits support for regional organisations, which play a key role at the local level.

**Opportunities** — Despite these challenges, several opportunities were identified by meeting participants:

- CSOs highlighted the potential for increased collaboration with universities and the private sector, rather than public entities.

- It was noted that the EU delegation's plans in Georgia to step up support for CSOs and reallocate funding originally intended for government entities could open new opportunities for CSOs, countering the perceived shrinking of their operational space.

- While specific opportunities were not yet identified, participants began exploring ideas such as philanthropic funding and other non-conventional approaches to foster a 'Win-Win-Win' environment for CSOs, the public sector, and communities.

**Closing remarks** — Towards the end of the meeting, ETF representatives acknowledged the ongoing challenges in Georgia, describing them as a vicious cycle. They confirmed that all concerns raised during the meeting would be thoroughly documented in Georgia Country report and encouraged CSO representatives to actively contribute to the report.

ETF representatives also outlined plans for a multi-sectoral programme focusing on HCD, CSO development, and initiatives in education, employment, social integration, and innovation. They acknowledged that collaboration with the EU delegation would be essential to advance these efforts. The meeting concluded with a proposal to schedule a follow-up discussion in September 2025 for more in-depth conversations on challenges and opportunities for CSOs.

# ACRONYMS

| | |
|---|---|
| AIC | Abkhazintercont |
| CATI | Computer-Assisted Telephone Interviewing |
| CCC Network | Caucasus Caregivers' Cooperation Network |
| CENN | Caucasus Environmental NGO Network |
| CHCA | Charity Humanitarian Centre 'Abkhazeti' |
| CNC | Civic Network Coalition |
| CSO | Civil Society Organisation |
| DVV | Deutscher Volkshochschulverband (German Adult Education Association) |
| EAP | Eastern Partnership |
| EASPD | European Association of Service Providers for Persons with Disabilities |
| EDEC | Education Development and Employment Centre |
| ENPARD | European Neighbourhood Programme for Agriculture and Rural Development |
| ETF | European Training Foundation |
| GAEN | Georgian Adult Education Network |
| GFA | Georgian Farmers' Association |
| GRCS | Georgian Red Cross Society |
| HCD | Human Capital Development |
| IDP | Internally Displaced Person |
| IRC | International Rescue Committee |
| MOOC | Massive Open Online Course |

| | |
|---|---|
| NGO | Non-Governmental Organisation |
| PACE | Platform for Adult Education in the Caucasus and Eastern Europe |
| PMCG | Policy and Management Consulting Group |
| RDFG | Rural Development for Future Georgia |
| CSOSI | Civil Society Organisations Sustainability Index |
| SDG | Sustainable Development Goal |
| SME | Small and Medium-sized Enterprise |
| SSI | Social Support Initiative |
| UN Global Compact | United Nations Global Compact |
| UN WOMEN | United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women |
| USAID | United States Agency for International Development |
| WFOYC | World Federation of Youth Councils |

ETF Working together Learning for life
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