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**Promotion and protection of all human rights, civil,
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including the right to development**

Report of the Special Rapporteur on the rights of persons with disabilities on his visit to Georgia

Comments by the State*

* The present document is being issued without formal editing.



Report of the Special Rapporteur on the rights of persons with disabilities on his visit to Georgia, from 4 to 14 September 2023 – Comments by the Republic of Georgia

Comments related to specific paragraphs and chapters

I. Introduction

Paragraph: 4

“A distinguishing feature of Georgia is the rupture left by armed conflict. The armed conflicts in 1991–1993 and 2008 resulted in destruction and the displacement of persons from Abkhazia, Georgia, and Tskhinvali region/South Ossetia, Georgia. In 2022, nearly 300,000 internally displaced persons were still registered in Georgia, many of whom have a disability. Consistent with his overall thematic focus on conflict and disability, the Special Rapporteur endeavoured to enter Abkhazia and Tskhinvali region/South Ossetia to assess the situation of persons with disabilities living there for himself. He regrets that this was not possible. Data on the number of persons with disabilities living in the two regions and information on the services and support available to them is not readily available. The Special Rapporteur is especially concerned that people with disabilities, and particularly older persons with disabilities, may face significant additional barriers to exercising their basic rights in those regions.”

Comment of the Georgian side:

1. In the paragraph 4, the Georgian side deems it of utmost necessity to stress the role and responsibility of Russia as a power exercising effective control in the occupied regions of Georgia. Numerous decisions by International Courts (ECHR and ICC) confirm the occupation and effective control of the Russian Federation over Georgia’s regions of Abkhazia and Tskhinvali region/South Ossetia.

Therefore, the Georgian side kindly asks to modify the present paragraph as follows:

2. *“A distinguishing feature of Georgia is the rupture left by armed conflict. The armed conflicts in 1991–1993 and 2008 resulted in destruction and the displacement of persons from Abkhazia, Georgia, and Tskhinvali region/South Ossetia, Georgia due to multiple waves of ethnic cleansing, as well as in occupation of Georgian indivisible regions by the Russian Federation. In 2022, nearly 300,000 internally displaced persons were still registered in Georgia, many of whom have a disability. Consistent with his overall thematic focus on conflict and disability, the Special Rapporteur endeavored to enter Abkhazia, Georgia, and Tskhinvali region/South Ossetia, Georgia to assess the situation of persons with disabilities living there for himself. He regrets that this was not possible, due to denial of access by the Russian Federation. Data on the number of persons with disabilities living in the two occupied regions and information on services and support available to them is not readily available. The Special Rapporteur is especially concerned that people with disabilities, and particularly older persons with disabilities, may face significant additional barriers to exercise their basic rights in those occupied regions.”*

II. Dynamics of change and institutional architecture

Paragraph: 10

“The enactment of the more specific Law on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in 2020 represents significant progress. It contains key rights and obligations, such as the right to live independently and awareness-raising. However, the concept of “reasonable accommodation”, which is integral to the prohibition of discrimination on the ground of disability, is not sufficiently developed within Georgian law. The legislation does, however,

provide a clear basis for a shift from the medical model to the biopsychosocial model of disability.”

Comment of the Georgian side:

3. Regarding the concept of “reasonable accommodation” Georgian law envisages the “principle which involves necessary and appropriate modification and adjustments without imposing a disproportionate or undue burden or obligation”. With this, the law minimizes the application of exceptions, thus ensures that PWDs exercise all human rights and fundamental freedoms on an equal basis with others. (Art 2.c)

4. As for the shift from medical model to the biopsychosocial model, it should be noted, that according to the Law on the Rights of the persons with Disability (Art. 37.2.a), the Ministry of Internally Displaced Persons from the Occupied Territories, Labour, Health and Social Affairs of Georgia shall: before 1 January 2023, ensure the approval of the plan of activities to be implemented with respect to the introduction of a biopsychosocial model mechanism for establishing disability status. The relevant bylaw was elaborated and adopted by the Ministry.

Paragraph: 17

“The intersectional dimension of disability is largely missing in both the 2020 Law on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and the National Strategy on Human Rights but could be accommodated under both. Certain groups, such as women with disabilities, those living in remote and rural areas, older people and persons with disabilities from ethnic minorities, face significant barriers to exercising their rights, including accessing disability status assessments and related benefits and services. The Special Rapporteur was also struck by accounts he heard about strong stigma (even in the disability community) against lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans and other gender-diverse persons, including those with disabilities. Georgia has an obligation to address multiple and intersectional discrimination against persons with disabilities.”

Comment of the Georgian side:

The National Strategy for the Protection of Human Rights on the rights of the Persons with disability

5. The National Strategy for the Protection of Human Rights (2022-2030) addresses all fundamental human rights and freedoms, puts a special emphasis on the protection of the rights of vulnerable groups, and fully is in line with the Sustainable Development Goals.

6. Ensuring the rights of individuals with disabilities (PWD) is a crucial component of the document, addressed in a distinct chapter and mainstreamed throughout the entire text.

7. The indicators of the goal-Equal access to equitable, fair, effective, impartial, and transparent justice underlines importance of the specialised judges on the in the issues of persons with disabilities and other types of vulnerability.

8. The dedicated attention is paid to the protection of the privacy and personal data of PWDs, in the section on the Right to privacy and protection of personal data, by specifying the protection of personal data of children and persons with disabilities.

9. Incorporating universal access to education is a key element of the strategy. The access to education section outlines the objective of "Ensuring equal access to education through the principle of lifelong learning." The objectives and indicators within this specific aim contribute to reinforcing the inclusive education policy.

10. The strategy aims to implement constitutional and international guarantees of equality in practice. Particular importance is attached to ensuring equality at all levels of the public and private sectors

11. Within the aim of strengthening the protection of minority rights and promoting the development of an equitable environment, particular emphasis is placed on objective "B," which highlights the "consideration of the needs of ethnic minorities and individuals with disabilities during the planning and delivery of state services to guarantee the right to equality.

12. In the segment addressing the right to participate in social and political life, there are provisions ensuring the "Effective realization of the electoral right for individuals with disabilities and citizens facing language barriers at both legislative and practical levels."

13. Special emphasis is placed on safeguarding the rights of children with disabilities, with objectives focused on ensuring the deinstitutionalization process, including that of children with disabilities. Additionally, there is a commitment to promoting measures to prevent the separation of children from their families.

Paragraph: 19

"The commitment, knowledge and activism of persons with disabilities, their representative organizations and civil society in Georgia are impressive. It is therefore with alarm that the Special Rapporteur heard concerns about a possible shrinking of the civic space and allegations of harassment of some disability rights defenders, especially after the introduction of a draft law "on transparency of foreign influence" in the parliament in February 2023. The draft law would have required all civil society and media organizations that receive more than 20 per cent of their funding from other countries and international organizations to be registered as "agents of foreign influence". The proposal was rejected by the parliament in March 2023. Organizations of persons with disabilities should be free to seek and secure funds and resources from national and international donors and States should in effect promote and facilitate their access to foreign funding as part of international cooperation and development aid pursuant to article 32 of the Convention."

Comment of the Georgian side:

14. The legislative changes served to ensure transparency of the activities of foreign entities and it had no relevance with shrinking the civic space. When elaborating the legislative changes, the experience of other advanced states was shared - similar legislation and practice exists, including in the USA, Australia and Israel. More specifically, the Foreign Agents Registration Act (FARA) operates in the United States under the Foreign Agents Registration Act (1); In 2018, Australia adopted the Foreign Influence Transparency Scheme Act (FITSA) in accordance with US law 2; the Israeli Knesset in 2016 made a similar amendment to the 2011 law on the obligation to identify subjects supported by a foreign political party. The package of legislative amendments repeated the norms of the Foreign Agents Registration Act (FARA) in force in the United States, although it was not adopted at the national level due to the immaturity of the issue.

Paragraph: 20

"In its general comment No.7 (2018), the Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities outlined how Governments should support representative organizations of persons with disabilities, particularly to strengthen their capacity and thus ensure effective participation. That is distinct from funding projects and services for persons with disabilities. It is vital to ensure that those within the disability community who face multiple forms of discrimination are included, such as women, youth, children, ethnic minorities, older persons, lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans and other gender-diverse persons, refugees and people with intellectual and psychosocial disabilities. The Special Rapporteur recalls that the 2020 Law on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities promises that the State will promote the operation of representative organizations in general (art. 14 (4)) and at the level of municipalities in relation to independent living (art. 35 (2))."

Comment of the Georgian side:

15. Under the state social rehabilitation and child care program, the services are being provided mostly by NGOs among which are PDOs i.e. they are funded from the state budget. For instance, Coalition for Independent Living is providing service for assistive devices and technologies (wheelchairs) and is manufacturing these items at place in Georgia by employing PwDs. Many other service providers of Daycare Centers are persons with disabilities parent's organizations, etc. The funding of these programs increases annually. In 2023 it reached almost 67ml GEL. All interested and qualified organization have opportunity to become service provider under the mentioned program.

16. In 2023 the Ministry of internally Displaced Persons from the occupied Territories, Labour, Health and Social Affairs of Georgia has adopted Order N47/N (of July 11, 2023) on the approval of the minimum service standards of the Center for Independent Living of Persons with Disabilities which will also contribute to the development of such services at the municipal level.

III. Key policy domains

A. Legal capacity and access to justice

Paragraphs: 23 and 24

“The 2015 legal reforms amending the Civil Code and 67 other laws move in the right direction by ostensibly implementing supported decision-making. However, as observed by the Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, legislation and practices within Georgia “continue to deny legal capacity for persons with intellectual disabilities and persons with psychosocial disabilities considered to have ‘antisocial personality disorder’”. The Committee also highlighted the problematic reliance on a medical assessment of legal capacity by the National Forensics Bureau in appointing support staff, delays in implementing supported decision mechanisms and limited public awareness of the equal recognition of persons with disabilities before the law and of supported decision-making.”

“The Special Rapporteur echoes the conclusions of the Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and observes that the concept of supported decision-making is insufficiently developed in Georgia. It is not about guiding or directing a person, it is about a process of revealing a person's wishes and preferences and respecting them. In Georgia, the National Forensics Bureau is the only institution mandated to carry out psychosocial needs assessments to determine the need for supported decision-making. However, the relevant assessments are effectively functional assessments that can lead to determinations of legal incapacity. That is another remnant of the medical model. Such assessments seem at odds with supported decision-making as envisaged in the Convention. Clear and detailed guidance on what supported decision-making is (and what it is not) is required and would be fully consistent with the intention of the 2015 reforms.”

Comment of the Georgian side:

17. LEPL Levan Samkharauli National Forensics Bureau disagrees with this assessment. Bureau operates in accordance with the 2015 legislative revisions and the examination is conducted by applying bio-psycho-social paradigm rather than a medical model. The examination is carried out by a multidisciplinary team, which consists of a psychiatrist, a psychologist, an occupational therapist and a social worker. This kind of approach excludes the fact that a person is evaluated only from a medical standpoint. Furthermore, the wording that persons with mental or psychological limitations are considered to have “antisocial personality disorder” in Georgia legislation and practice is completely unclear. It would have been beneficial that the Special Rapporteur consulted with the Bureau experts and specialists who actively participate in the psychological needs examination process while preparing examination report, instead relied on information from third parties when drawing conclusions.

Paragraph: 25

“The first interaction most individuals, including persons with disabilities, have with the justice system is with law enforcement officials. The Special Rapporteur notes progress at the Ministry of Internal Affairs and in its training initiatives to ensure that police officers understand the rights of persons with disabilities and how to respond to their needs. That is a positive step towards raising awareness and reducing stigma and discrimination among law enforcement personnel. Even so, the Special Rapporteur is deeply concerned by the practice of the police and/or emergency medical service personnel, when responding to an incident, of bringing a person with a psychosocial disability to a mental health institution, even when the individual concerned expresses disagreement. The potential for direct and indirect coercion in situations involving law enforcement or emergency medical services is high, especially without the appropriate support services.”

Comment of the Georgian side:

18. It is important to note that the police do not make decisions regarding the necessity of involuntary inpatient psychiatric care, rather this determination is made by a doctor of urgent medical aid or a doctor holding an appropriate certificate.

19. Specifically, according to Article 18 (3) of Law of Georgia on Psychiatric Care, the need for involuntary inpatient psychiatric care shall be defined by a physician of urgent medical aid or a physician holding an appropriate certificate.

20. Consequently, appropriate law enforcement bodies are obliged to carry out the hospitalisation of a patient upon respective request.

Paragraph: 26

“Furthermore, in line with the Criminal Procedure Code, individuals with psychosocial and intellectual disabilities are burdened with an effective presumption against their legal capacity in judicial proceedings. In particular, articles 50 (2), 75 (1) and 191 of the Criminal Procedure Code are contrary to the rights established by articles 12 and 13 of the Convention. Those articles were frequently highlighted by diverse stakeholders, as they can prevent persons with psychosocial and intellectual disabilities from giving testimony based on a determination by the National Forensics Bureau. That is particularly concerning in cases where a victim with a disability, especially in a case concerning gender-based violence, might not be able to testify and therefore seek redress and remedies. The Special Rapporteur applauds the prosecution service for recognizing the incongruence of the law with article 12 of the Convention and attempting to address the issue. However, that solution is not sustainable in the long term, as it depends on judicial discretion to suspend the law. The automatic termination of criminal proceedings if the accused is found insane by a court, based on assessments by forensic experts, is concerning, as the accused can be placed under compulsory psychiatric treatment for years without a determination of responsibility for the crime.”

Comment of the Georgian side:

21. The Section 26 refers to current laws as well as the procedures followed by court and investigating agencies. The Bureau acts in accordance with existing national laws and provides expertise on issues/questions raised by the customers.

22. According to the Criminal Procedure Code of Georgia, the Ministry of Internal Affairs, regardless of a person's disability status on psychosocial and/or intellectual grounds, diligently conducts interviews within its competence, adhering to the law and employing principle of reasonable accommodation.

23. It should be noted that in 2021, the Human Rights Protection and Investigation Quality Monitoring Department of the Ministry of Internal Affairs, supported by the United Nations Population Fund, elaborated a recommendation with the objective of promoting the effective inclusion of witnesses, victims, and defendants with disabilities in the investigation process.

24. Supported by CoE, recommendation has also been elaborated with the objective of promoting the effective inclusion of juveniles with disabilities in the investigation process.

25. This recommendations are accompanied by a questionnaire for planning interviews involving persons with disabilities, allowing for the personalized scheduling of their participation in investigative or procedural actions.

Paragraph: 28

“The Special Rapporteur is encouraged by promising steps taken, such as the access to free legal aid for all persons with disability status through the Legal Aid Service. That institution also aims to deploy mobile legal clinics throughout the country. The Special Rapporteur welcomes the initiatives of the prosecution service and the High Council of Judges in 2021 to adopt specific guidelines and methodology on working with persons with disabilities in judicial proceedings.”

Comment of the Georgian side:

26. Mobile legal clinic is a micro-bus equipped to cater to the diverse needs of disadvantaged groups, including persons with disabilities, the elderly, and those residing in remote regions. The vehicle's design prioritizes privacy and confidentiality during the legal assistance process and ensures that it receives local maintenance support and insurance. This project aims to enhance the capacity of Legal Aid Service to improve access to legal services for disadvantaged groups. The expected outcomes include improved service delivery, increased efficiency, enhanced accountability, and better coordination among Legal Aid Service Bureaus in Georgia. By introducing the Mobile Legal Clinic and conducting comprehensive awareness campaigns, Legal Aid Service aims to make a substantial difference in the lives of those who face certain challenges towards equality.

B. Independent living and community-based services

Paragraph: 29

“The 2020 Law on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities introduces important provisions on independent living, including the right of a person with disabilities to choose a place of residence. That said, until now the deinstitutionalization process has been implemented in a fragmented way, leaving some large residential institutions operating, while community and home-based services remain underdeveloped, especially outside Tbilisi. In line with the National Human Rights Strategy, the deinstitutionalization process should be completed by 2030.”

Comment of the Georgian side:

27. The process of deinstitutionalization and the development of alternative care services in Georgia has been running for several years with support of the donor organizations. Thanks to these interventions many large boarding homes have been closed down and new alternative care services have been created in different municipalities. In this process, geographic accessibility to the services is also taken into consideration. Currently, with the assistance of donor organization, two large boarding homes are under DI process. The beneficiaries are offered to move to new small family style homes in various locations in Dusheti, Tskaltubo and Zugdidi municipalities.

28. Further to ensure the sustainability of DI process, the respective DI strategy and action plan have been created and approved by the Ministry of internally Displaced Persons from the occupied Territories, Labour, Health and Social Affairs of Georgia in 2023 (*For additional information, please see the comment to Paragraph 30*).

Paragraph: 30

“A deinstitutionalization strategy and a related action plan on independent living and deinstitutionalization for the period 2023–2025 were adopted in early 2023. They should provide an impetus to move coherently ahead. The action plan takes a holistic approach by addressing the prevention of institutionalization through a better referral and case management system, mapping existing services and needs and increasing access to alternative housing services, improving services, including by developing monitoring tools and complaint mechanisms, and awareness-raising targeting different stakeholders. However, no dedicated budget appears to be attached to its implementation. Development of the workforce to assist in independent living is one element requiring sustained attention and investment, as the Special Rapporteur consistently heard about the challenge of finding and retaining qualified professionals.”

Comment of the Georgian side:

29. The implementation of the deinstitutionalization strategy (2023- 2030) and respective action plan (2023 – 2025) is carried out with the donor support and administrative resources. The core element of the strategy is to ensure mechanism of prevention of institutionalization and creation of supportive services, in order to ensure the sustainability of DI process. For this purpose two important services of homecare and personal assistant have been created and will be rolled out in 2024 at the country level.

30. With the support of Czech Development Agency, a special project is being implemented to support deinstitutionalization of Dusheti and Markofi boarding homes. Within the framework of the project 6 houses were purchased for the development of small family-type services for adults with disabilities residing in Martkofi. 18 beneficiaries have been already transferred to 3 houses in Dusheti in the fall of 2023 and remaining services will be ready in the first half of 2024 to receive beneficiaries.

31. In addition, the State Care Agency has received the state property (houses) which will be also used for development of respective service in 2024. Overall, the main activities of the strategy and action plan are being implemented under the state funds. The process of implementation of the documents is supervised by the Deinstitutionalization Committee of Disability Council established by the Ministry. The committee is composed of NGOs, PwDs and other interested parties, including representatives of public defenders, parliament and other governmental entities.

Paragraph: 32

“The Special Rapporteur visited one of the remaining larger institutions in Dusheti and smaller-scale residences, such as the Qedeli community in Sighnaghi. He was impressed with the improvements and with the general attitude of the management in the larger institution in favour of alternative community options. While smaller family-type houses can provide better support to develop independent living skills than large institutions, they should only be viewed as a transitional measure and do not constitute an independent living arrangement. The Special Rapporteur is of the view that the focus on family-type houses should not be to the detriment of the longer-term goal of developing quality and accessible support and services in the community.”

Comment of the Georgian side:

32. According to the 2023-2030 strategy for independent living and deinstitutionalization of people with disabilities, it is determined that the community based services, including small family-type homes are not the final target of the deinstitutionalization process. The main focus is reintegration and rehabilitation of beneficiaries, promotion of their independent living in the community and prevention of institutionalization, creation of supporting services. This is one of the main aims of the family type services to prepare beneficiaries (whenever possible) for independent living.

33. The state recognizes the need to develop supportive services for people with disabilities and implements various programs for day center services, and the provision of assistive devices, etc. At present, the necessary measures for the introduction and implementation of personal assistant services and home care services are underway.

Paragraph: 33

“The 2020 law does not expressly refer to the right to adequate housing and there is currently no national housing strategy or unified standards for providing social housing. Social housing is managed at the municipal level, leading to diverse practices that mostly do not take into account the individual needs of persons with disabilities and make it difficult for them to apply for housing in another municipality. That is particularly limiting for students wishing to study in a different region. Moreover, poor conditions and the lack of adaptable housing render the social housing stock inadequate and inaccessible for people with disabilities. In addition, there is no programme for subsidizing home renovations and the equipment needed to enable persons with disabilities to live in the community.”

Comment of the Georgian side:

34. The Law on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities outlines the principles for adequate housing, more specifically, according to Art. 4.3: “The State shall recognise the right of a person with disabilities to independently choose a place of residence. The coercion of a person with disabilities to reside at a specially designated place shall be prohibited, unless it is based upon a necessity provided for by the legislation of Georgia, and/or by the requirements of the penitentiary system.”

35. With the support of the European Union, the Czech Development Agency and the French Development Agency are implementing the project "Strengthening of Social Protection Systems in Georgia". In the frame of the project currently the Ministry of IDPs from the occupied territories, Labor, Health and Social Protection of Georgia (MoIDPLHSA) is working on the draft law on housing in order to ensure regulatory basis for this field.

36. As for accessibility issue of the housing, The "Technical Regulation - "National Accessibility Standards" was approved by the Resolution N732 of the Government of Georgia on December 4, 2020 and came into force in March 2021 which applies to all new construction processes of the buildings. The criteria presented within the framework of the regulation make the buildings, facilities accessible for that persons who could not walk due to physical disabilities, are deaf and hard of hearing, are blind and short sighted, they are not able to coordinate and others.

37. Built and under construction public purpose facilities must be into compliance with the requirements of this technical regulation within the time frame determined by the national accessibility plan which will be approved by the Government of Georgia.

Paragraph: 35

“Other key services, such as assistive technology, merit close attention. Despite recent progress in standard-setting, unmet needs for assistive technology remain high. Access to quality assistive technology is hindered by the fact of disability status being a prerequisite for obtaining some devices, the limited number and models of State-funded assistive products, the small number of registered providers (and in some cases very narrow criteria to register as a provider), and limited access to service providers outside the main cities. Access is also affected by insufficient public funding, long waiting lists, a lack of related support services and limited awareness among potential beneficiaries and health practitioners. Many persons with disabilities therefore end up paying out of their own pockets for assistive technology, assuming, that is, that they can afford it.”

Comment of the Georgian side:

38. The disability status is not a necessary condition for receiving assistive devices. Depending on their health condition, persons of all ages are eligible to receive the following: movable frames, eye prosthesis, orthoses, crutches, sticks and mechanical wheelchairs. For the elderly: prostheses, hearing aids, electric wheelchairs. The service is provided in accordance with the requirements/steps set by the World Health Organization for service providers: assessment based on face-to-face meeting, delivery of the assistive devices to beneficiaries on their geographical availability, customization, repair during the guarantee period.

39. From 2022, based on the recommendation of the World Health Organization, a pilot project was implemented with the engagement of primary healthcare and provision of assistive technologies, with the goal of increasing access to aids at the municipal level.

Paragraph: 37

“In the absence of quality and accessible services to enable independent living, the onus is often placed on families to care for and support family members with disabilities. In Georgia, the Special Rapporteur was particularly struck by experiences shared by parents of children with disabilities, mainly women, with one mother telling him that “families are living in hell”. A recent study found that the cost of goods and services required for raising a child with disabilities are out of reach for most families in Georgia. Support and services to help children with disabilities transition into adult life are missing. Going forward, care and support services must take the rights of carers into account and ensure there are support and respite services for families.”

Comment of the Georgian side:

40. Within the framework of the "State Program of Social Rehabilitation and Child Care", many programs are targeting children such as a sub-program of services in day care center, early childhood development subprogram, habilitation/rehabilitation program etc, which are a family supportive service.

41. From 2023, within the framework of the program, it is planned to implement the services of providing Home Care and Personal Assistant. Currently, the measures for the introduction and implementation of services are underway.

C. Accessibility**Paragraph: 41**

“Persons with disabilities regularly shared experiences with the Special Rapporteur of how changes made to the physical environment (for example, ramps, textured tiles and crosswalk audio cues) were at times unusable, incomplete or incorrectly calibrated. The reported net effect was to leave things in some instances even more inaccessible than before. It was further reported that complaints were only addressed after the fact, once the issue was posted on social media. Insufficient enforcement of the accessibility standards was also raised in conversation with the Legal Aid Service. The Service highlighted several cases where the construction of a building had been halted, owing to non-compliance with accessibility standards, or to compel the retrofitting of the necessary accessibility measures, such as elevators or ramps, in an already completed building. Such cases would probably not have occurred if enforcement had been more robust.”

Comment of the Georgian side:

42. The Legal Aid Service of Georgia has 2 fully adapted buildings in Rustavi and Zestafoni with elevators and ramps. In other regions, buildings are taken by the lease agreement and cannot be modified in any terms as are not the property of Legal Aid Services. For this matter Legal Aid Service started the program of the Mobile Legal clinics throughout

the country. This innovative method aims to provide legal assistance to disadvantaged communities in every region of Georgia even in rural areas, particularly those facing limited access to legal services.

Paragraph: 42

“The Ministry of Economy and Sustainable Development has oversight and enforcement mechanisms in place for buildings of special importance, while municipalities have responsibility for other construction projects. It appears that more work needs to be done to assist municipalities in monitoring and enforcing compliance with the national accessibility standards. Of note is the fact that the plan to retrofit older buildings in line with the accessibility standards, as envisaged by government resolution 732 (art. 3), remains to be developed.”

Comment of the Georgian side:

Regarding the paragraph 42, the following issues should be noted:

43. The LEPL Technical and Construction Supervision Agency under the Ministry of Economy and Sustainable Development of Georgia is responsible for issuing construction permits for facilities of special importance (V class buildings) and allowing them into operation. As the agency noted: The LEPL Technical and Construction Supervision Agency issues the permission for construction in accordance with the Ordinance of the Government of Georgia №257 (date of issuing - 31/05/2019) on the Procedure for Issuing Construction Permits and Permit Conditions for Facilities of Special Importance (including radiation or nuclear facilities), while the architectural agreement submitted within the application documents, in accordance to the clause 3 of the Article 14 and the sub-clause “d” of the clause 2 of the Article 36 of the same Ordinance, should include the Expert Evaluation document confirming the compliance of the architectural project with the Ordinance of Georgia №41 (date of issuance – 28/01/2016) on Approving Technical Regulations for the Safety Rules for Buildings.

44. In accordance with the Part 11 (Accessibility) of the Ordinance of Georgia №41 (date of issuance – 28/01/2016) on Approving Technical Regulations for the Safety Rules for Buildings, the Expert Evaluation of the architectural project should also include confirmation of its compliance with the requirements of the “National Standard on Accessibility”.

45. Therefore, at the stage of agreeing the architectural project, the requirements of the National Standard on Accessibility are to be met and reflected in the Expert Evaluation. Non-submission of the above-mentioned documents is direct reason for rejection of the projects documentations.

46. At the same time, after issuing the permission, the Technical and Construction Supervision Agency implements supervision of the construction of the building, which implies the control of the compliance of the construction works stages with the agreed project documentation. If any breach regarding the compliance with the technical regulation provisions providing free access and usage of the space for the people with disabilities is observed during the contraction stage, it will lead to the amenability in accordance with the Article 45¹ of the Law of Georgia on Product Safety and Free Movement Code.

47. Moreover, incompliance with the requirements is also the reason for refusal to qualify the building into operation.

48. Regarding the fulfillment of accessibility requirements, it is important to note the issues defined by the Code of Spatial Planning, Architectural and Construction Activities of Georgia. In particular, the relevant municipal body, within the framework of public supervision, oversees the implementation of construction, including accessibility standards, as outlined in Article 118 of the Code. The violation of technical regulations - "National Accessibility Standards" constitutes one of the construction violations, as it is a component of the permit documentation. Consequently, the breach of the accessibility standard during construction leads to responsibilities defined by the Code of Spatial Planning, Architectural and Construction Activities of Georgia, particularly, under Article 132¹. Article 132¹ outlines

due fines for not meeting the requirements of the provisions regarding the persons with disabilities, and architectural and planning elements, which are mandated by the relevant technical regulations. The sum of the fine doubles if the violation is not rectified within the specified period determined by the supervisory body. Additionally, according to Article 127 of the Code, the public supervision body can discontinue construction if it does not comply with the permit conditions and cannot be corrected without discontinuing the construction.

49. In addition to the public supervision, the construction of facilities and the fulfillment of the permit conditions, including the accessibility standards, are monitored by a technical supervisor, as an accredited inspectorate body, which, in case of violation, notifies the public supervision body of the municipality, and the relevant measures are taken in accordance with the described procedure.

D. Inclusive education

Paragraph: 52

“There are still gaps in accessibility to higher education for students with disabilities. The Ministry of Education and Science awarded study grants to 77 students with disabilities seeking BA and MA degrees in the 2022–2023 academic year. That is one positive step towards making higher education more affordable for persons with disabilities. However, students with disabilities reported to the Special Rapporteur that the lack of accessibility and the absence of reasonable accommodation were key barriers to higher education. One visually impaired student had to use his screen reader to convert physical books, as the university had not made those materials accessible for him. Another student reported that a request for additional time as reasonable accommodation during examinations was denied because the university administration felt that would provide an unfair advantage. Yet another student noted that while she had been provided with a personal assistant, their skills were insufficient to provide the necessary assistance. In some instances, the daily difficulties in accessing facilities, classrooms and study materials led students with disabilities to abandon their studies. More needs to be done to make higher education more inclusive as the economic well-being of the country depends on it.”

Comment of the Georgian side:

50. Preparation for the ratification the Marrakesh Treaty and coordination process by relevant state agencies is underway. Adoption of national legislation in line with the Marrakesh Treaty is in progress (As of November 2023, adopted with the first reading). Initiation of legislation was preceded by transparent and inclusive consultations with interested parties and stakeholders.

E. Economic empowerment, employment and social protection

Paragraph: 57

“Social protection is fundamental for the active participation of persons with disabilities, especially considering the elevated risks of socioeconomic exclusion and poverty. In Georgia, persons with recognized disability status qualify for a disability cash benefit (the social package), with the amount varying, depending on the severity of their impairments. However, the current amount of the benefit is low and below the subsistence minimum for persons with moderate disabilities, a point echoed by the Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, which has observed that social benefits are insufficient to secure an adequate standard of living.”

Comment of the Georgian side:

51. In the process of reforming social security systems, the amendment to the Law of Georgia "On Social Assistance" was made and the indexation rule was introduced for pensioners/ social package recipients, which guarantees increasing of the minimum cash

benefit amount on annual basis. The cash amount for pensioner and disability has been almost equalized. System is permanently trying to respond to the needs. One of the aims of the GoG is support activation of PwDs and promotion of their employment. In 2022 the amendment to the law was made which enables PwDs employed in public sector to keep PwD social package together with receiving the salary. The state employment promotion program incorporates support to employment of PwDs by subsidizing the workplaces, providing employment assistant service and adapting the setting to the needs.

Paragraph: 58

“Once a person with disability reaches retirement age, they must decide between receiving a disability benefit or a pension and cannot therefore accumulate contributions for both. That raises questions about the intended purpose of the disability benefit, namely whether it is meant to cover disability-related expenses or as a (partial) income replacement. Disability-related costs do not disappear when a person reaches retirement age. In addition, asylum-seekers and refugees with disabilities are excluded from receiving the disability benefit, although they can apply for disability status. They are also excluded from municipal programmes and services for persons with disabilities.”

Comment of the Georgian side:

52. It should be noted that beneficiaries of the social package assigned to the status of a person with disabilities must choose which monetary benefit they would prefer to use when they reach retirement age. This approach is based on international experiences regarding reaching the pension age, when a persons has an opportunity to choose what type of the cash support to get. Similar schemes are available throughout many EU countries.

F. Access to health care and rehabilitation

Paragraph: 61

“The health-care programme mainly covers various primary and secondary health-care services, limited essential drugs and rehabilitation in very specific cases. It does not cover assistive products or family planning services. The beneficiaries themselves co-finance services and medicines, while some are available for free to persons with disabilities and older persons. Some municipalities cover the cost of co-financing for persons with disabilities. Nevertheless, public spending on health remains low and nearly half the spending on health care in the country is made out of individuals’ pockets. Persons with disabilities and their families expressed concern to the Special Rapporteur about the difficulties of paying for their health-care needs.”

Comment of the Georgian side:

53. From November 2022, rehabilitation services for the condition developed as a result of cerebrovascular accident, traumatic injury of the head and spinal cord have been added to the general health care program.

54. By the System of Health Account data, share of OOP on health from the current expenditure is 42%.

Paragraph: 64

“Women of all ages with disabilities face barriers in obtaining information and accessing sexual and reproductive health services, particularly in mental health and residential care institutions. Stereotypes among medical professionals, who also lack knowledge of disability-inclusive health-care provision are pervasive. Women with disabilities emphasized that medical facilities and equipment were not accessible or adapted, which made gynaecological examinations degrading, if not impossible. Similarly, the needs of women with disabilities are not taken into account in family planning or antenatal care, during birth or in postnatal care.”

Comment of the Georgian side:

55. In January 2021, the Family Planning Standard Operating Procedures (SOP) for women of reproductive age with disabilities were developed and approved. A necessary condition for the provision of inpatient and outpatient services is the provision of infrastructure and services adapted to persons with disabilities, the control of which is carried out by the Agency for Regulation of Medical and Pharmaceutical Activities.

G. Right to family life**Paragraph: 65**

“The Special Rapporteur was concerned to hear about cases of parents with disabilities living in residential care institutions and not able to live with their children. That issue was highlighted by the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women in 2023. Children can be placed in State care facilities or foster care away from their parents, preventing regular contact. As part of the deinstitutionalization process and moving residents to smaller-scale institutions, conditions must be put in place to facilitate contact and promote family reunification according to the wishes of parents and children and in line with the best interests of the child.”

Comment of the Georgian side:

56. Within the framework of the "State Program of Social Rehabilitation and Child Care 2023", there is a sub-program of providing services in community organizations. Beneficiaries of these services are provided with the accommodation and food; additionally, an individual service plan is created for them. Development of professional skills, provision of clothing appropriate for age, gender and season and necessary items for personal hygiene is insured. In the services of the community organization of persons with disabilities, persons with disabilities may be accommodated together with their minor children. However, if this is not possible, taking into account the parent's skills, the fact of violence against the minor, the safety and the interests of the child is the highest value and at the request of the social worker and based on the decision made by the court, the minor will be separated from the biological family and after that, the child may be placed in state care (foster care, small family type houses). The best interests of the child are considered while deciding to separate a child, and this decision is based on international standards.

57. At the same time, when determining the form of placement and care of a minor in state care facilities, as well as when deciding the issue of which territorial unit the minor should be placed in, of course, the location of the parent and the proximity of the child to its biological environment are taken into account. Also, during the period of the minor's stay in state care facilities, the parent is registered as a visitor or as a person who can take away the minor, this process contributes family reunification. Registration of a parent as a visitor helps to improve the relationship between the child and the parent. Social worker of the state care agency is monitoring above mentioned processes, the goal of which is the timely reintegration the child into the biological family.

58. Also, it should be noted that according to the rules established by the Civil Code of Georgia, a person with psychosocial needs who has severe mental, intellectual disorders is assigned a supporter based on a court decision, who can be a person's family member, relative, close relative or a specialist who meets the requirements established by the Civil Code requirements. The Supporter's Institute assists people with psychosocial needs in realizing their rights and protecting their interests as much as possible, including communication with their children and the development/improvement of necessary skills. It is important that the guardianship authority monitors the activity of the supporter in the accordance to the rules established by the court.

*H. Mental health***Paragraph: 69**

“In Georgia, mental health is not part of primary health care and not covered under the universal health-care scheme. Most people must pay out of pocket unless they get free support from the State mental health programme, which has underdeveloped outpatient and community-based services. General practitioners are not usually trained to detect or manage mental health issues, which also inhibits efficient referral. A lot needs to be done on prevention and early intervention, and it is positive that the current strategy prioritizes this area and that reform of the primary health-care system envisages the integration of mental health services.”

Comment of the Georgian side:

59. From 2024, a complex reform of the primary health care system will begin, which also involves the integration of mental health prevention and management services into the PHC system. Two clinical pathways for PHC service providers have already been prepared. This process will continue.

Paragraph: 70

“There is a shortage of mental health-care professionals, which undermines the accessibility and availability of mental health services. That said, the Special Rapporteur was highly encouraged by the professionals he met with in the field of mental health, particularly the younger generation, who are eager to follow international practice and human rights standards.”

Comment of the Georgian side:

60. It has been prepared that the Human Resources in Health Care reform will be implemented step by step from 2024, which involves the assessment of the need for medical personnel, the improvement of postgraduate and Continuous Professional Development training, and the improvement of the certification and recertification process. Competencies of doctors will also be reviewed. The direction of mental health is considered one of the priorities.

Paragraph: 71

“Despite a significant increase in funding for community-based centres and services in the last decade, 58 per cent of the budget of the State mental health programme was still allocated to psychiatric institutions in 2020. Some reports have pointed to the funding system for mental health not being viable for multi-profile hospitals or smaller medical facilities to offer inpatient and outpatient mental health services. In recent years, the trend has therefore been towards fewer alternatives to large psychiatric institutions, where people with psychosocial disabilities are segregated from the rest of the population, often for extensive periods of time. It is hoped that changes in the funding system for inpatient mental health services, introduced in 2023, will be a step towards reversing that trend.”

Comment of the Georgian side:

61. Within the framework of the state mental health program, the financing system for inpatient services has been changed since 2023, and payment is made based on bed days within the monthly limit (derived from the number of beds). The amount of funding per bed day for small units (30 beds and less) in multi-profile inpatient facilities and in large psychiatric inpatient facilities is also different: 65 GEL vs 49 GEL.

Paragraph: 74

“A number of stakeholders, including staff at the Tbilisi mental health centre, explained to the Special Rapporteur that people with psychosocial disabilities remain in psychiatric institutions, even when they do not need inpatient care, owing to the lack of family and community-based support services. That tends to undermine deinstitutionalization efforts, which constitute an important element of the national mental health strategy, 2021–2030. Here again, care needs to be taken not to focus on transitioning from large to small-scale institutions but to have in place sustainable, accessible and quality community-based mental health services, as well as raising awareness and fighting stigma, so that institutions can be closed.”

Comment of the Georgian side:

62. In 2023, the deinstitutionalization process continued, 3 small family style homes were created in Dusheti and the process continues.

63. The construction of a new alternative service in Bediani is an ongoing process, which will be completed in 2024. The new service will improve the living conditions for the beneficiaries and provide new services tailored to their individual needs. Alternative service of small homes for 6-8 persons was created in Senaki. Overall the services accommodates up to 120 beneficiaries who are provided residence places and improved living conditions. It must be clarified that these services are transitional in the DI process.

*I. Political participation***Paragraph: 77**

“The establishment of a working group focused on improving electoral access for persons with disabilities by the Central Election Commission of Georgia is a positive development. The amendments made in 2023 to the statute of the working group, in response to the concluding observations of the Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, to include women and young people with disabilities in the working group is also welcome. Whereas most activities related to the electoral process appear to target persons with physical impairments, some efforts have been put into making it inclusive of persons with intellectual and psychosocial disabilities and should be further expanded.”

Comment of the Georgian side:

64. The working group also works to support the inclusive participation of individuals with intellectual and mental disabilities in electoral processes. This commitment is evidenced by the development of a guideline project elaborated in an 'Easy Read' format, designed to facilitate the participation of individuals who are beneficiaries of support in the upcoming 2024 parliamentary elections in Georgia. By the end of the year, the CEC working group will further discuss the project with local nongovernmental organizations actively involved in assisting persons who are beneficiaries of support.

IV. Conclusions and recommendations**B. Recommendations****Paragraph: 85**

“Regarding legislation, policy, institutional arrangements, participation and data collection, the Special Rapporteur recommends that the Government:

(a) Urgently develop a detailed action plan to operationalize the National Human Rights Strategy and configure it so that it effectively amounts to a national strategy to implement the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. Ensure it addresses

multiple and intersecting discrimination faced by different groups within the disability community.“

Comment of the Georgian side:

65. The National Human Rights Action Plan has been elaborated and adopted by the Government of Georgia on December 28, 2023. The process was inclusive: non-governmental (including DPO's) and international organizations were actively involved. For the first time, consultations were also held with the municipalities.

66. The Action Plan has a separate chapter on the rights of persons with disabilities. It also addresses the multiple and intersecting discriminations; such as: women with disabilities; ethnic minorities with disabilities; children with disabilities.

Paragraph: 85

“Regarding legislation, policy, institutional arrangements, participation and data collection, the Special Rapporteur recommends that the Government:

(b) Strengthen the capacity and resources of the Interagency Coordination Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities to allow it to help clarify where the reforms are heading, assess progress and identify challenges in implementation.”

Comment of the Georgian side:

67. In September 2023 the Human Rights Secretariat of the Government Administration was transformed into the Human Rights Department, with increased mandate and number of staff. The Human Rights Department is now responsible for the support of the Interagency Coordination Committee.

Paragraph: 85

“Regarding legislation, policy, institutional arrangements, participation and data collection, the Special Rapporteur recommends that the Government:

(c) Develop clear and transparent terms of reference and procedures for regular and necessary governmental consultative mechanisms across the public sector with the full spectrum of the disability community.”

Comment of the Georgian side:

68. In order to fulfill the obligations of the United Nations Convention "On the Rights of Persons with Disabilities" and the Law of Georgia "On the Rights of Persons with Disabilities", the Government of Georgia's Resolution No. 551 of November 29, 2021 approved the Interagency Coordination of Implementation of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Committee and its statute. According to the Statute, the Committee meets at least two times a year. Since its establishment, the Committee met seven times, the last one was on January 2024.

69. Together with the Committee, a Consultative Council has been established to ensure the involvement of disabled persons, organizations working on the rights of disabled people and organizations representing disabled people in the activities of the Committee. The members of the Council are selected by the specially established selection commission, the members of which are:

- a) chairman/co-chairman of the committee;
- b) Head of Human Rights Department (office);
- c) representative of the Public Defender of Georgia (Office of the Public Defender);

d) Human Rights Council member, one representative of two international organizations (which does not participate in the competition as a candidate).

70. Currently, the Consultative Council consists of 25 members. Important to note that the call is open and any organization or persons working on the rights of persons with disabilities can submit an application for membership any time. The selection commission periodically reviews the received applications.

71. Other than that, in July 2023 the Committee has established two working groups: one on the issues of municipalities and another on inclusive education. Any interested person or entity can attend these meetings. The call for the membership of these working groups is also open.

Paragraph: 85

“Regarding legislation, policy, institutional arrangements, participation and data collection, the Special Rapporteur recommends that the Government:

(f) Expedite the transition towards a human rights-based model of disability, while meaningfully consulting persons with disabilities.”

Comment of the Georgian side:

72. Since 2021, Disability Advisory Group dedicated to the rights of persons with disabilities has been established within the Ministry of Internal Affairs. The Advisory Group comprises persons with disabilities, representatives of disability organizations, and other non-governmental organizations active in this domain. The 2022-2023 Action Plan for the Protection of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities of the Ministry of Internal Affairs involved five working meetings with the disabled community. All the mentioned meetings were carried out successfully. Furthermore, five additional working meetings are scheduled as part of the 2023-2024 Action Plan for the Protection of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities of the Ministry of Internal Affairs. (Action Plan for the Protection of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities covers the period from April 1, 2023 to April 1, 2024.)

Paragraph: 86

“Regarding legal capacity and access to justice, the Special Rapporteur recommends that the Government:

(c) Review and amend the methodology and procedures of psychosocial needs assessments by the National Forensics Bureau to move decisively away from medicalized examinations and align with the human rights model of disability.”

Comment of the Georgian side:

73. We are unable to support the aforementioned recommendation to the extent that we disagree with the assessments and conclusion presented in paragraph 23. Bureau’s psychological needs assessment methodology and procedures fully adhere to 2015 legislative reform. Instead of using a medical approach, a multidisciplinary team applies the bio-psychosocial model to their assessment. Georgia was among the first nations to implement reforms in this area, one of the first country, at the time the legislative amendments were adopted in 2015.

74. At the same time, we would like to emphasize our readiness to collaborate with other countries. National Forensics Bureau of Georgia is willing to share the experience of models considered successful by the Committee and to work on further enhancement of our existing methodology and procedures.

Paragraph: 86

“Regarding legal capacity and access to justice, the Special Rapporteur recommends that the Government:

(b) *Establish appropriate oversight mechanisms and conduct training for those supporting persons with disabilities with decision-making, law enforcement personnel, lawyers and judges, to ensure that persons with disabilities are provided with supported decision-making rather than substitute decision-making.*”

Comment of the Georgian side:

75. Within the Ministry of Internal Affairs, employees working in the relevant fields undergo continuous training on matters concerning persons with disabilities.

76. From April 2022 to April 2023 (Action Plan for the Protection of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities covers the period from April 1, 2022 to April 1, 2023.), over 2,700 employees of the Ministry of Internal Affairs (2,070 patrol inspectors, 60 employees of the temporary detention isolators, 196 community officers, 43 employees of migration department, 63 employees of the Service Agency of the Ministry of Internal Affairs, 69 firefighters and rescuers, 105 case management employees, 37 managers of territorial agencies and patrol police, 100 investigators) have received training on disability issues.

77. Subsequently, from April 2023 to April 2024, over 1,800 employees have received training on disability issues (462 employees of the Service Agency of the Ministry of Internal Affairs, 40 investigators, 60 border guards, 200 patrol inspectors, 100 employees of the security police, 40 employees of the temporary detention isolators, 233 firefighters and rescuers, 58 employees of migration department, 22 employees of the Public Safety Command Center “112”, 480 participants of the specialized professional educational program for basic police training, who were retrained on the "standard of the rights and communication of persons with disabilities").

Paragraph: 87

“Regarding independent living, economic empowerment and social protection, the Special Rapporteur recommends that the Government:

(p) *Simplify the procedures for applying and obtaining targeted social assistance and conduct related awareness-raising campaigns, specifically targeting persons with disabilities.*”

Comment of the Georgian side

78. The Ministry of Internal Affairs is actively involved in awareness raising initiatives.

79. Throughout 2022-2023, numerous meetings took place in various regions with the involvement of persons with disabilities and representatives of the disability organizations. The primary objective of these meetings was to discuss Ministry's recent initiatives aimed at enhancing the legal status of persons with disabilities. Simultaneously, these gatherings served as a platform to familiarize the Ministry with the recommendations and perspectives of the disabled community. Representatives from key units of the Ministry of Internal Affairs, including the Service Agency, Patrol Police Department, Emergency Situations Management Service, Public Safety Command Center "112," and the Human Rights Protection and Investigation Quality Monitoring Department, actively engaged in regional meetings.

80. During these meetings, the Ministry's employees, in line with their expertise and competence, delved into the legal empowerment measures implemented in previous years. They also presented the Ministry's future vision and planned activities to persons with disabilities, members of disability organizations, civil sector, and representatives from local self-government.

81. It is also noteworthy that in 2022 Ministry of Internal Affairs, in cooperation with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and with the support of the Embassy of Sweden in Georgia, held the conference dedicated to the International Day of Persons with Disabilities.

82. The persons with disabilities, along with the representatives of state agencies, international organizations and civil society that are working on the issues of persons with disabilities, attended the event.

83. At the conference, representatives of the Ministry summarized the activities carried out within the system of the Ministry of Internal Affairs in the direction of protection of rights of persons with disabilities. The members of the Disability Advisory Group on the rights of persons with spoke about the activities of the advisory group and their involvement in the process of implementing the Ministry's Action Plan.

Paragraph: 88

“(b) As a matter of priority, and in consultation with the disability community, develop and adopt a national accessibility strategy and action plan with clear time frames, benchmarks, dedicated funding for implementation and provisions for retrofitting existing stock. It should include measures to strengthen monitoring and enforcement mechanisms for compliance with accessibility standards, ways to provide regular guidance, the provision of expertise and capacity-building to municipalities and the basis and steps for retrofitting older building with accessibility requirements.”

Comment of the Georgian side:

84. The National Human Rights Action Plan envisages an obligation for the government to develop an Action plan for the implementation of the national accessibility standards until January 1, 2025.

General Information on Ethnic minorities/civic equality and integration

85. Government of Georgia is committed to continue effective implementation of the civic equality and integration policy with respect to the ethnic minorities. One of the key mechanisms of this policy is the *State Strategy for Civic Equality and Integration for 2021-2030 and the respective Action Plans* which aim to: - further strengthen democratic society; - create equal opportunities for all citizens regardless of their ethnicity, for full participation in all spheres of public life; and - further strengthen intercultural dialogue. The Strategy elaboration and its implementation is led and coordinated by the Office of the State Minister for Reconciliation and Civic Equality in close cooperation with relevant state agencies, with active engagement of civil society, experts and international partners.

86. The policy document is based on holistic approach; the goals and objectives identified in the Strategy document are addressed simultaneously and in a comprehensive way through the effective implementation of unique instruments and tools that imply improving access to quality education for ethnic minorities, including state language competence; increasing their participation in civic and political, social-economic, cultural processes; supporting cultural identity of ethnic minorities - with special focus on women and youth. Further support and empowerment of ethnic minorities with disabilities is considered as a cross-cutting priority.

87. Special emphasis is given to proactive delivery of information on public services, educational, economic and business opportunities for various segments of the population, including persons with disabilities. In this regard, large-scale door-to-door bilingual information/awareness raising campaigns are regularly conducted on state social programs and benefits, human rights, antidiscrimination and other acute issues in the regions densely populated by ethnic minorities.
