

NOT THE SAME COUNTRY

A REVIEW OF LEGISLATIVE CHANGES IN GEORGIA AFTER 2024 AND CASE STUDIES OF NON-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANISATIONS OPERATING UNDER CONDITIONS OF RESTRICTED FREEDOM

Executive Summary

Purpose and Scope of the Report

This report analyses the political and legal transformations in Georgia following the 2024 parliamentary elections and their impact on the functioning of non-governmental organisations. The document provides both a detailed overview of legal changes and their practical application, illustrating the conditions under which Georgian media and non-governmental organisations currently operate. Its aim is to present the political and social consequences of these transformations and to formulate recommendations for Polish institutions regarding possible forms of support for Georgian civil society.

Political and Legal Context

After 2024, Georgia began rapidly introducing controversial legal changes that have significantly affected state–society relations. The new regulations, introduced under the pretext of protecting sovereignty, in practice strengthen state control over society. A package of restrictive regulations has been adopted that limit the activities of non-governmental organisations.

The Law “On the Transparency of Foreign Influence” establishes a 20% threshold for foreign funding, above which registration in a special database becomes mandatory under the threat of

administrative sanctions. Another law, “On the Registration of Foreign Agents”, the so-called FARA, introduces a requirement of prior registration based on the nature of the activity (organisations that act as agents of a foreign principal are required to register). It also covers natural persons and introduces criminal liability.

In addition, an obligation has been introduced to obtain government approval for grants (with a broadly defined concept of a “grant”), which in practice limits the funding of non-governmental organisations. In parallel, media law has been amended, strengthening the powers of the state regulator to interfere in content and introducing a ban on foreign funding of media outlets, which raises concerns about censorship and the restriction of editorial independence.

The changes also include the removal of the terms “gender” and “gender identity” from statutes, the tightening of standards in defamation cases (reversal of the burden of proof and a narrowing of the definition of defamation), as well as the symbolic reinstatement of the provision on “treason against the homeland”. In practice, this creates a legal environment conducive to pressure on civil society and the media, while procedural gaps and discretionary enforcement of the regulations persist.

Case Studies of NGOs

As a result of the above-mentioned legal changes, Georgian non-governmental organisations and media currently face four main types of challenge.

1. Financial Challenges

The introduction of the new laws has in practice cut them off from legal foreign grants. The largest donors have suspended funding, and organisations must choose between registering on the “agents” list and losing their financial resources. Many are suspending operations, moving them abroad, or operating in a grey zone.

2. Organisational Challenges

The sector is increasingly based on voluntary work, without stable structures and prospects for professionalisation. Political purges and control of the labour market have limited employment opportunities, while fears of repression have led to an outflow of staff and volunteers. Long-term planning has become practically impossible.

3. Security Challenges

NGOs and media operate in an atmosphere of permanent threat. Repressions include beatings, arrests, court proceedings, cyberattacks and freezing of bank accounts. Violence against journalists and activists is used on an ongoing basis, and some activists and editorial teams decide to emigrate.

4. Image and Communication Challenges

The government and pro-government media conduct a massive disinformation and hate campaign, portraying NGOs as “traitors” and “agents of the West”. This undermines public trust, hampers communication and forces a shift to secure channels, as well as a constant struggle to maintain credibility.

Georgian NGOs must therefore operate under conditions of legal, financial and physical repression, which drive de-institutionalisation, relocation of activities to the EU or functioning underground. They lack stable sources of funding, security and public trust, and their continued existence in the country is in question.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR POLISH INSTITUTIONS CO-OPERATING WITH GEORGIAN NGOS

1. Funding and Stability

The primary challenge remains ensuring the financial stability of non-governmental organisations in Georgia. Mechanisms for continuous funding should be developed, including core funding and bridging grants for basic operating costs. At the same time, it is advisable to promote among Georgian organisations alternative models of fundraising, such as crowdfunding, micro-donations or patronage systems, as well as to share knowledge in this field acquired from organisations operating in similarly difficult conditions, for example in Belarus. It is necessary to take into account the possibility of concluding contracts with private individuals carrying out specific activities in Georgia, as well as to make use of the mediation of international

organisations that still enjoy operational freedom.

2. Organisational and Human Resource Development

Another key direction is strengthening organisational capacity. Georgian NGOs require support in building membership structures, professionalising volunteering and developing the digital, communication and analytical competences of staff. Mentoring and training programmes for young leaders are particularly needed, as well as initiatives supporting the creation of consortia and co-operation networks that will enable more effective use of limited resources.

3. Legal and Digital Security

In co-operation with Georgian partners, it is crucial to ensure safe funding channels and to refrain from PR-type activities that could expose organisations to repression. Programmes in the field of cybersecurity are indispensable, including

audits, training and access to appropriate technical infrastructure. It is also advisable to create rapid response mechanisms to repression, encompassing legal assistance, monitoring and international advocacy. Models of co-operation based on registration and maintenance of bank accounts in European Union countries should also be considered, as they reduce the risk of blockades by local authorities.

4. Image and Communication

The final area requiring support is communication and the building of a positive image of NGOs. Georgian organisations need to strengthen narratives that emphasise their role in society. Particularly important are activities in the field of fact-checking, media literacy and information campaigns aimed at broad audiences, including the younger generation. The development of a presence in social media is of key importance, as is participation in cultural and educational events abroad, which helps to rebuild public trust and enhance the credibility of the sector.