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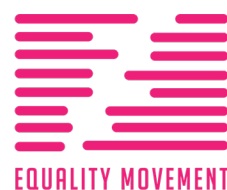


REPORT ON LGBTQ+ RIGHTS VIOLATIONS IN GEORGIA 2024



EQUALITY MOVEMENT





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Abbreviations

CEC - Central Electoral Commission
CPAC- Conservative Political Action Conference
CSO - Civil Society Organization
DEI - Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion
EU - European Union
GD - Georgian Dream
GEO - Georgian Elections Observatory
MDF - Media Development Foundation
MIA - Ministry of Internal Affairs of Georgia
ODIHR - Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights
OSCE - Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe
PACE - Parliamentary Assembly of The Council of Europe
PES - Party of European Socialists
PM - Prime Minister

Introduction

Alongside the radicalization of political homophobia, the LGBTQ+ rights have significantly deteriorated in Georgia. In addition, the space for implementing interventions aimed at establishing a supportive environment for LGBTQ+ community members and reducing their social and economic exclusion has become critically restricted. The current situation is alarmingly reversing the progress achieved by queer-feminist initiatives in Georgia.

The following report summarizes the key events and tendencies related to the radicalization of political homophobia in Georgia. Furthermore, it emphasizes such institutional decisions that remarkably harmed the well-being and safety of the LGBTQ+ community. The report specifically focuses on challenges and trends identified through the provision of legal and psycho-social services by Equality Movement in 2024.

The Radicalization of Political Homophobia

In recent years, homophobia has become one of the core elements of Georgia's political agenda. Since 2022, the spread of openly discriminatory statements by political figures, including high-ranking officials, has significantly intensified. The media monitoring [report](#) published by the Media Development Foundation (MDF) which reflects on the results of their research conducted in the first half of 2023, identified 2,527 sexist and homophobic discriminatory statements. The study also revealed that 34% of all homophobic statements were spread by politicians. Among political parties, Alt-info/Conservative Movement accounted for most homophobic statements, followed by the Georgian Dream and the Alliance of Patriots.

The anti-gender aspirations of the country's ruling party Georgian Dream (GD) became official in May 2023, when former Prime Minister (PM) Irakli Gharibashvili openly [declared](#) his commitment to traditional, family and conservative values while attending the Conservative Political Action Conference (CPAC) in Budapest, Hungary. His speech was saturated by homophobic messages.

„How do actors that oppose freedom and truth try to achieve their goals? It is through the destruction of traditional, family values and professing false freedom, LGBT propaganda, attempts to legalize gender change for minor children bypassing their parents, and enforcing these so-called changes, which distance people from their roots, family, tradition, culture, and history”.

In addition to homophobic statements, Gharibashvili promised “not to allow the abuse of majority by minority” in Georgia. It is worth noting that GD was strongly [criticized](#) by the Party of European Socialists (PES) for participation in a homophobic conference. Later, PES leadership unanimously decided to [expel](#) the Georgian Dream from the party.

Politically motivated homophobic messages quickly turned into action. On July 8, 2023, a group of “anti-LGBT protesters” [attacked](#) the territory prepared for the Pride Festival in Tbilisi. Participants of the so-called “counter-demonstration” organized by Alt-Info invaded the festival territory and damaged private property. LGBTQ+ activists were evacuated from the Pride Festival area. Despite the openly violent statements of “protesters”, the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Georgia (MIA) that had previously taken the responsibility to ensure the

safe implementation of the event, did not use any proportionate measures to prevent the violent actions of Alt-Info. The organizers of the event [stated](#) that the attack was jointly orchestrated by MIA and Alt-Info, **“against human rights and democracy”**. The investigation of the homophobic acts of violence on July 5, 2021, and July 8, 2023, still remains among the valid [recommendations](#) of the European Commission.

The homophobic intentions supported by the ruling party have been gradually transformed into institutional decisions. In 2022/2023, the terminology referring to gender identity or sexual orientation completely disappeared from the strategic documents of national importance. First of all, the LGBTQ+ community has been fully removed from [Parliament’s Gender Equality Concept](#) document. It must be emphasized that the document now defines the concept of gender equality exclusively between ‘women’ and ‘men’. A similar scenario occurred during the development of the [National Strategy for the Protection of Human Rights of Georgia for 2022-2030](#) and the respective [Action Plan for 2024-2026](#). Despite the critics and joint efforts of local civil society organizations (CSOs) and international organizations, none of the LGBTQ+ issues have been integrated into the documents. Moreover, the development of the aforementioned documents has been carried out with limited involvement of civil society and was hence violating the principle of inclusiveness. This is where the process of institutionalizing political homophobia in Georgia began, which later has been transformed into dramatic legislative changes.

It should be emphasized that the National Strategy for the Protection of Human Rights for 2022-2030 was discussed by the Parliament of Georgia while [mass demonstrations](#) were held in Tbilisi against the “Foreign Agents Law” in March 2023. The draft law was initiated by GD’s satellite party People’s Power, and aimed to oppress non-governmental organizations and media outlets registered in the country. Due to the similarities with the law adopted by the Kremlin in 2012, the draft law was dubbed by the civil society as “Russian Law”. On March 10, 2023, the law passed the first of three readings but [was dropped](#) during the second hearing by the majority of the Parliament of Georgia.

In addition to the previously above-mentioned examples of political and institutional homophobia, in terms of the deterioration of LGBTQ+ rights, an additional challenge has occurred: On March 7, 2023, alongside the protest rallies against the so-called Russian Law, the Georgian Parliament [elected](#) a new Public Defender, Levan Ioseliani, for a 6-year term. It quickly turned out that the Public Defender’s Office, which previously acted as an ally of the LGBTQ+ community, became significantly influenced by the government.

The Turning Moment: Political Developments of 2024

The series of anti-democratic political events logically continued in 2024. On April 3, the Georgian Dream announced the [reintroduction](#) of the “Russian Law”. The content of the draft law practically remained the same, only the word “agent” has been replaced with a “less controversial” formulation. According to the new draft law, all non-entrepreneurial legal entities registered in Georgia receiving more than 20% of their financial resources from abroad have been labelled as “Organizations Pursuing the Interests of a Foreign Power”. In addition, the draft law equipped the governmental structures with such control and monitoring mechanisms such as access to critical and confidential information, for instance, the confidential data of beneficiaries.

In parallel with the international criticism and mass protests in Georgia, the law was [vetoed](#) by the President, Salome Zourabichvili. It should be pointed out that, the Venice Commission recommended through its [urgent opinion](#) to repeal the law in its current form. However, on May 28, 2024, the Parliament of Georgia overrode the President’s veto and adopted the [„Law of Georgia on Transparency of Foreign Influence”](#).

Alongside the reintroduction of the “Russian Law”, the Parliament of Georgia [abolished](#) the mandatory gender quotas, which was previously acknowledged as the country’s most significant mechanism for promoting women’s political empowerment. The gender quota mechanism defined by the Election Code of Georgia obliged the political parties to include at least one woman out of every four persons in party lists. The decision on its abolishment was initiated by the parliamentary opposition party Girchi and was supported by the ruling party Georgian Dream in exchange for Girchi’s vote in favor of GD’s candidate for the position of Central Election Commission (CEC) Chairperson.

The [amendment](#) also extended to the Organic Law on Political Associations of Citizens. The parliament of Georgia decided to abolish the financial incentives defined for political parties to support the proportionate representation of women in party lists.

In its [opinion](#), OSCE/ODIHR [assessed](#) the decision to abort the gender quotas and the instrument of financial incentives as a **“setback for the advancement of gender equality in Georgia, not in line with international human rights standards and OSCE commitments which mandate the elimination of discrimination against women in political and public life”**.

This series of anti-democratic political decisions made by the ruling party has moreover brought Georgia's foreign relations to an impasse. The EU began to [freeze](#) direct support to the Georgian Government, redirecting its focus entirely to civil society and media. Furthermore, the U.S. Department of State has imposed [visa restrictions](#) on individuals responsible for or complicit in undermining democracy in Georgia, as well as their family members.

The fight against the so-called LGBT propaganda became moreover the major pre-election motto for the ruling party in 2024. Georgian Dream [introduced](#) a constitutional draft establishing censorship and imposing significant restrictions for the personal and family life of LGBTQ+ individuals. The constitutional draft aimed to supplement Article 30 of the Georgian Constitution by the new paragraph outlining that, ***“the protection of family values and minors will be ensured by the constitutional law”***. It must be emphasized that at a pro-government [assembly](#) organized by GD on April 29, Bidzina Ivanishvili, billionaire oligarch and de-facto ruler of the Georgian Dream, openly positioned the anti-Western agenda of the ruling party. As part of his speech, Ivanishvili clearly declared that the initiation of the anti-LGBT and anti-NGO laws in addition to legislative regulation, served the purpose of spending civil society's energy of resistance well before the elections.

On June 25, the Venice Commission published an [opinion](#) regarding the anti-LGBT draft constitutional law. The Commission criticized both the legal aspects of the draft, as well as the process and circumstances of its initiation and recommended to ***“reconsider this legislative proposal entirely and to not proceed with its adoption”***. Nevertheless, about one month prior to the election, on September 17, the Parliament of Georgia adopted the [Law of Georgia on the Protection of Family Values and Minors](#) and 18 related amendments to various laws.

The new anti-LGBT law, which came into force on December 2, equally undermines the civil, political, social and economic rights of the LGBTQ+ community. In addition, it poses significant challenges towards human rights advocacy. It should be noted that certain provisions of the law, such as ban on same-sex marriage, have never been permitted under the Georgian legislation. Additionally, the law prohibits LGBTQ+ individuals from adopting or fostering minors, even though the monitoring of its implementation seems [vague](#).

In addition, it needs to be stressed that the law severely limits the rights of trans individuals by banning legal gender recognition and by criminalizing trans-specific healthcare services which can be considered as a practice of indirect criminalization of the trans community. Furthermore, the law imposes censorship on LGBTQ+ content by prohibiting its dissemination in educational institutions, through broadcasting and in ad-

vertising. The law even restricts direct communication with minors about related issues.

Additionally, the law restricts such an assembly or manifestation that aims to “popularize” the LGBTQ+ issues. Moreover, despite widespread homo-, bi-, and transphobic discrimination in the labor market, the law also exempts employers from anti-discriminatory obligations to recognize and respect a person's gender identity. It is worth noting that the President of Georgia, Salome Zourabichvili, [neither vetoed nor signed](#) the anti-LGBT law.

The day after the Parliament of Georgia passed the anti-LGBT law, the celebrity transgender woman, model and influencer, Kesaria Abramidze, was found [brutally murdered](#) in her home. The case has been investigated under Article 109 of the Criminal Code referring to the intentional murder with aggravating circumstances of special cruelty based on gender identity. Just a month later, the recipient of the Kato Mikeladze Prize, trans activist and member of Equality Movement's team, Nata Talikishvili, [was attacked](#). The investigation is in progress under Article 126 of the Criminal Code, involving violence. The case is being processed by EM's lawyers.

The Georgian Elections Observatory (GEO) has published a [media analysis](#) that summarizes the homophobic statements made by the high-ranking GD officials prior to the country's parliamentary elections. The analysis highlights remarks such as those by then-Prime Minister, Irakli Kobakhidze, who claimed that the propaganda could lead to an increased number of LGBTQ+ individuals, stating: ***“Statistics show something else. In fact, after the spread of [LGBT] propaganda, the number of LGBT people in the respective countries exceeded 20%.”*** The analysis also mentions Bidzina Ivanishvili's statement that framed so-called LGBT propaganda as a threat to the nation's survival, saying: ***“anti-Christian forces are trying to erase the identity of nations, states, and people. Their goal is to turn a person into a being devoid of dignity and morality, who will not have any national, religious, or personal identity; one should not even know for sure whether one is a man or a woman.”*** The analysis suggests that the timing of the anti-LGBT law was chosen on purpose to serve such pre-election objectives as constructing a narrative of cultural protectionism against Western liberalism.

Georgia's parliamentary election was held on October 26. According to the [official results](#) published by CEC, the Georgian Dream won the elections with approximately 54% of votes, which triggered mass protests in Tbilisi. The official results were not recognized by the President of Georgia, Salome Zourabichvili, nor by any of the four pro-European election subjects. Local CSOs serving as election observers [published evidence](#) of election fraud. In addition, the systemic election violations were mentioned in the [Final Report](#) of the ODIHR Election Observation Mission and the [Election Observation Report](#) issued by PACE.

Nevertheless, the mass protests in the country have significantly intensified since GD's announcement on November 28 to [put](#) EU accession talks on hold until 2028. The protest rallies across Georgia were [violently dispersed](#) by police forces using tear gas, pepper spray, water cannons and varieties of physical abuse. Hundreds of protesters have been arrested, including around 50 on criminal charges. Most of them experienced violence, including torture and degrading treatment from police forces during and after their detention.

On December 28, local CSOs issued a joint [statement](#) underlining various cases of severe misconduct against women who had been detained during protest rallies. According to the statement, in addition to physical violence, the female detainees were also subjected to inhuman and degrading treatment, sexual harassment, and threats of rape by police officers.

Notably, the police behavior during the protest was also linked with a homophobic context. Some detainees recall that employees of the Special Tasks Department of the Ministry of Internal Affairs actively used [homophobic hate speech](#): ***"They discussed the European Union as if it demanded the legalization of same-sex marriage. They were mostly homophobic, stating that the LGBTQ community should not be allowed to come out to the streets. When I mentioned their constitutional rights, it meant nothing to them. This was accompanied by shouting, swearing, insults, and degrading communication."***

Moreover, the head of the Special Tasks Department of MIA, Zviad Kharazishvili, publicly made a homophobic [remark](#) when communicating with a journalist. Former Senior Official of the Special Tasks Department, Irakli Shaishmelashvili, who left MIA and migrated from the country with his family during the December rallies, confirmed in an [interview](#) with Radio Liberty that homophobic disinformation was actively spread among MIA employees. Accordingly, it appears that the homophobic indoctrination within law enforcement agencies was carried out intentionally to incite hatred towards the protest participants. Shaishmelashvili also revealed on TV Pirveli that on July 5, 2021, MIA was [coordinating](#) with the Head of the Public Relations Service of the Georgian Patriarchate, Andria Jaghmaidze, which resulted in the failure to prevent violence against activists and journalists during the intended Pride March: violent groups physically assaulted dozens of people, attacked the offices of Shame Movement and Tbilisi Pride, and damaged private property.

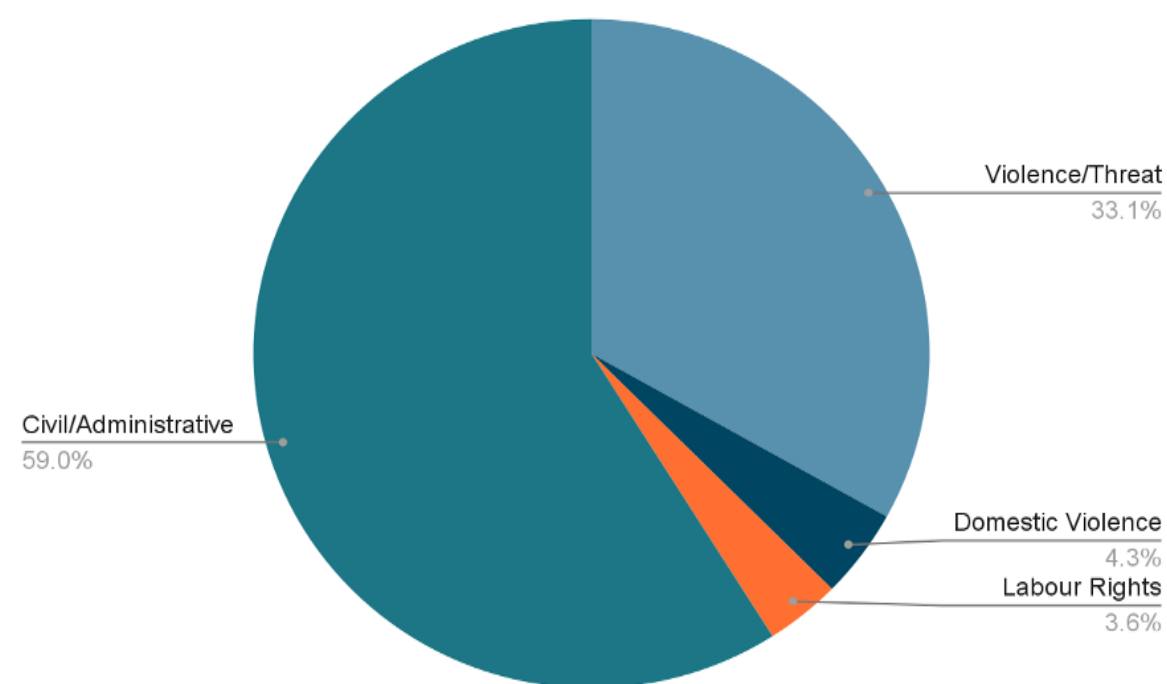
The United States, Great Britain, Ukraine, Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia are among the countries that imposed various sanctions on Bidzina Ivanishvili, MIA officials, and other GD allies. Protests which continue across Georgia demand new elections and the release of detainees. LGBTQ+ individuals and queer-feminist activists are actively engaged in the public resistance movement.

Legal and Psycho-social Services: Results and Challenges

The number of state services responding to the needs of vulnerable groups is critically limited in Georgia. For many years now, the non-governmental sector has tried to bridge this gap. In this regard, the LGBTQ+ community faces particular exclusion. Over the years, due to the inadequate implementation of anti-discriminatory mechanisms and domination of oppressive discourses in society, especially among professional groups, the state services designed to mitigate and overcome the challenges faced by the community remain absent. In response, the Equality Movement provides the LGBTQ+ community with donor-funded legal, psycho-social and healthcare services.

Legal Support

Through the course of 2024, Equality Movement provided legal assistance to 257 beneficiaries and the organization's team of lawyers processed 139 legal cases. The vast number of the legal cases processed by Equality Movement were related to hate crimes in 2024. In addition, the organization has processed several cases concerning violations of labour rights. However, it's important to stress that after the so-called Russian Laws were enacted, a large number of LGBTQ+ individuals asked the organization to assist them while requesting official documentation from MIA and the Prosecutor's Office of Georgia for the purpose of seeking asylum in another country. Hence, it can be assumed that as a result of the radicalization of political and institutional homophobia in the country the number of queer individuals migrating to relatively safer countries has increased.



Based on providing legal aid, the organization's lawyers underline that the trust of LGBTQ+ individuals in police and investigative institutions is noticeably decreased. Due to the anti-democratic developments in recent periods, even in cases of evident violence, victims refrain from reporting incidents to the relevant institutions.

It should be pointed out that communication with judicial and other administrative bodies has become extremely difficult during the reporting period. The institutions have been systematically violating deadlines, both in terms of scheduling proceedings and providing feedback on requested information that hindered the process of providing legal services comprehensively.

In addition to administrative barriers, there was also a case when the investigator openly disclosed a negative attitude towards the potential victim while interviewing. Particularly, the investigator tried to convince the potential victim that the fear and threat experienced during the hate crime incident in 2018 were misperceived by her, which could result in certain legal circumstances against her. The Special Investigation Service was informed by Equality Movement regarding the incident which resulted in launching an investigation. However, no proper response was received regarding the aforementioned issue. Later, as the organization learned from the prosecutor of the case, the investigator was given a ver-

bal reprimand. In addition, after some time, verbal communication took place between the investigator and the potential victim, during which the investigator apologized. The organization's lawyers emphasize that such incidents substantially increase the sense of insecurity and distrust among beneficiaries towards the state institutions responsible for human rights protection. This is especially noticeable in interactions with investigative structures.

In addition, during the reporting period, transgender women addressed EM for legal assistance, alleging that a law enforcement officer had used hate speech against her. The organization reported the incident to the Public Defender's Office. However, the institution has not taken any significant steps forward so far.

All in all, Equality Movement has provided various types of legal support to 52 victims of hate crimes in 2024, among them, 6 concerning domestic violence. Notably, in such cases, beneficiaries tend to initially express their willingness to report the incident to the relevant institutions, but at later stages, they refrain from complaining to family members. For instance, in 2024 the multidisciplinary team of EM worked on a case involving the abduction of a beneficiary by family members after the person had previously left home. Despite the efforts of the organization's lawyers and the readiness of relevant institutions to assist, the beneficiary chose not to continue with the case. Additionally, after being forcibly returned to his family, the person informed Equality Movement that he did not wish to file a complaint against his family nor benefit from other services offered by the organization. In 2024, there was also a case connected to a victim of domestic violence, who tried to stop the ongoing investigation in order to avoid a criminal case being processed against the abusive family member.

In 2024, the team of EM's lawyers also processed up to 50 cases concerning the violence and threats against LGBTQ+ individuals. Among them is the attack on the before-mentioned trans activist Nata Talikishvili. The attacker verbally abused her and struck her with a brick, resulting in a concussion. Later, it was revealed that the attacker was on a parliamentary list of the party coalition Strong Georgia, representing the party For the People. The investigation is ongoing under Article 126 of the Criminal Code. To date, the attacker has been granted 1,000 GEL bail.

A few days after the the anti-LGBT law was passed, the organization was contacted by a popular figure on TikTok who requested legal assistance. According to him, during a TikTok live feed, an unknown person threatened to kill him, specifically telling him that "he would be the next Kesaria." The case is being investigated under Article 151 of the Criminal Code referring to threats. The accused has been arrested and imprisonment was used as a preventive measure.

Notably, the number of cases processed by EM concerning homophobic hate speech or gender-based discrimination on social networks, particularly TikTok, was remarkably high in 2024. Among them is a case in which the Public Defender established the incitement of hate speech and discrimination on July 19, and addressed the disseminator of the video to **"refrain from spreading derogatory and discriminatory language against any vulnerable group, including the LGBTQ+ community."** The victim of discrimination in coordination with EM's lawyers plans to demand compensation for moral damages for the violation of honor and dignity in court.

Also, during the reporting period, several cases were processed involving the disclosure of information about the private lives of LGBTQ+ individuals, with or without the use of social networks, and cases of blackmailing through the dissemination of personal information, including forced "coming out" of individuals. For instance, EM was contacted by a trans individual whose before/after photos of transition have been disseminated on social media. In response, EM has informed the Special Investigation Service. The case is investigated under Article 157 of the Criminal Code which refers to the disclosure of information on private life or of personal data. In addition, in 2024, there was a case where the neighbors provided information about the personal life of LGBTQ+ individual to parents.

During the reporting period, the legal team also processed several cases of group or individual attacks and violence against LGBTQ+ individuals. Among them is group violence committed by minors. As a preventive measure, two minors were placed under supervision. The other cases of verbal or physical abuse are mostly committed on transphobic grounds by groups or individuals. One of them happened in the victim's house. The case is still under investigation.

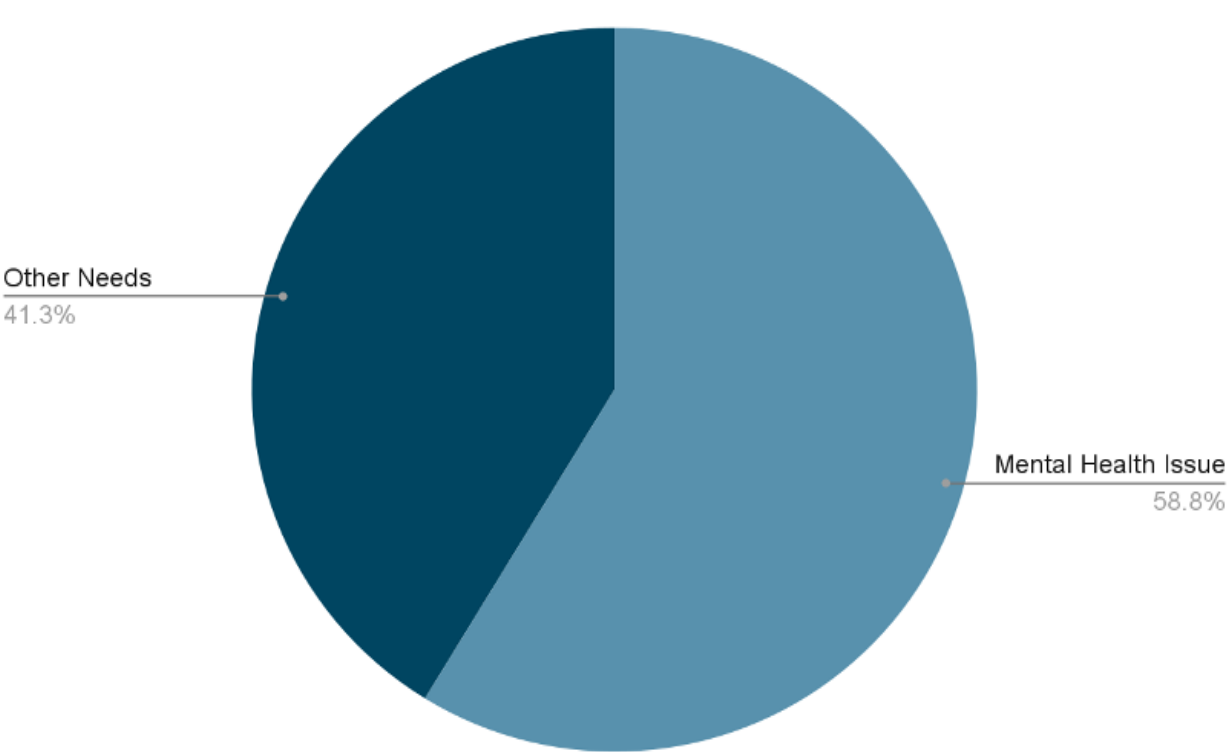
It is concerning that, based on the organization's information, several attacks on LGBTQ+ community members followed an identical pattern in 2024. The incidents happened during meetings scheduled through dating applications. For instance, EM was contacted by a citizen of a foreign country stating that after he arrived at such a date, unidentified people appeared at the scene, who physically assaulted and verbally abused him. Equality Movement provided the person with relevant consultation. However, the person refrained from reporting the incident to the police. As the organization is informed, victims of other dating app-related attacks have not contacted law enforcement agencies either.

In parallel with the November/December protest rallies, the organisation was contacted by a woman stating that unidentified individuals wearing black masks verbally and physically abused her in the street. The incident occurred when she was returning home from a demonstration. After the group identified the victim as a protest participant, they started beating her, telling her that it would be better to stay home as the protest rallies are not

a woman's business. The incident was reported to the Special Investigation Service by EM, where the victim underwent a medical examination and was interviewed as a witness. The investigation is in progress under Articles 333 and 154 of the Criminal Code that involves exceeding official powers, using violence and unlawful interference with the journalist's professional activities.

Psycho-Social Support

The analysis of EM's psycho-social services leads us to noticeable conclusions. Through the course of 2024, Equality Movement's social workers supported about 240 beneficiaries. It should be pointed out that it became essential to redirect approximately 60% of the beneficiaries to the mental health services.



Based on the needs assessment of beneficiaries, the social workers identify the challenges that have been the most prevalent recently: Among them, psycho-emotional difficulties come first, particularly, depression, anxiety, panic attacks, etc. The organization's social workers believe that in addition to general stress factors, the significant increase in demand for mental health services in recent years is associated with the radicalization of the homophobic context in the county. They notice that since the anti-LGBT law has been enacted, the mental health conditions of the LGBTQ+ community have deteriorated.

During the reporting period, physical health problems were also relevant. Commonly, the beneficiaries required the social workers's support in terms of access to treatment and medicines and reaching qualified and sensitive doctors.

Social workers underline that access to healthcare services for the persons migrated to Georgia after the war started in Ukraine is critically limited. For instance, in 2024, EM's social worker was approached by a citizen of Russia, an HIV-positive person who was experiencing severe health complications. With EM's active involvement, the beneficiary was admitted to Tengiz Tsertsvadze Infectious Disease, AIDS and Clinical Immunology Research Center, where he was diagnosed with a contagious form of tuberculosis. Due to the severity of the diagnosis, the beneficiary required specialized medical care. Therefore, he was referred to the National Tuberculosis Center, which refused to provide him with the relevant service because of the absence of a residence permit. As a result of advocacy efforts by EM's social workers, the beneficiary was finally placed in an isolation unit, although it occurred two weeks later. Unfortunately, after 5 days of his transfer to the relevant health facility, he died. Social workers emphasize that the problem is widespread as they have previously witnessed cases where a lack of access to essential health services led to extremely critical outcomes.

In 2024, cases linked with the social and economic exclusion of the LGBTQ+ community were also prominent. Similar to previous years, access to housing, education, and employment were critical. In addition, especially among the trans community, access to information figured as a challenging issue.

The members of EM's multidisciplinary team underline that the number of beneficiaries who address the organization for needs related to migration has alarmingly increased. They emphasize that the number of individuals willing to migrate to safer countries has risen around ten times in 2024 which can be marked as an initial result of anti-LGBT law. EM's social workers provided such beneficiaries with assistance in preparing relevant documentation or identifying supporting services.

Conclusion

2025 began with unexpected uncertainty for the world. The election of a new U.S. administration in late 2024, was followed by a cascade of controversial promises. Among them was a pledge by Donald Trump to ["stop transgender lunacy"](#). Accordingly, it was soon [declared](#) that the U.S. federal government would recognize only "two sexes" and eliminate Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) programs. Donald Trump also signed executive orders banning transgender individuals from [U.S. armed forces](#) and [women's sport](#).

[Freezing foreign assistance](#) for a minimum of 90 days is among the decisions made by Trump's administration which has called into question the viability of numerous humanitarian programs. It will also impact programs aimed at supporting the rights and well-being of LGBTQ+ individuals. The concrete results of anti-gender developments in domestic and foreign policy of the U.S. remain unclear. However, this sudden development is undoubtedly one of the most significant threats to the LGBTQ+ community, including individuals in Georgia.

Despite the radical consequences at both the local and global levels, EM continues to implement programs and services aimed at supporting healthcare, socio-economic well-being, and human rights protection for the LGBTQ+ community.