



**Progress Report of the 2023 National Action Plan for
Georgia's European Union Integration**

2023

¹ Translated by Legislative Herald of Georgia

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1. General Overview

This report presents information on the progress of the 2023 National Action Plan for Georgia's European Union (EU) Integration covering the period from 1 January 2023 to 31 December 2023.¹

The annual report of the EU integration action plan includes, almost in all aspects, **key activities implemented in terms of both the approximation to the EU acquis, and institutional approximation, sectoral integration, international cooperation, and the enhancement of human resources**, including commitments that have not been fulfilled under the 2022 action plan.

2023 year was one of the most important year in terms of EU-Georgia cooperation. **On 14 December, 2023 the European Council granted Georgia with the EU candidate status**, thus turning Georgia's relations with the EU to qualitatively new and higher level.

As a result, Georgia became part of the EU enlargement package, which consists of the EU accession countries and envisages their support in the process of European transformation.

In accordance with the new commitments within the enlargement package, Georgia, for the first time, prepared and submitted to the European Commission **the national report on the implementation of reforms in Georgia, which had been prepared according to the structure corresponding to the EU membership criteria, and in compliance with new requirements**. The report prepared by Georgia was submitted to the European Commission on 19 April, and additional updated information was transmitted to the EC on 21 June and 20 September respectively.

In 2023, the European Commission evaluated Georgia for the first time within the framework of the enlargement package - **the Enlargement Report was published on 8 November 2023, and based on it**, the European Commission gave a recommendation to the European Council to grant Georgia the status of a candidate country for EU membership.

Under the coordination of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, a new format of dialogue with the EU named the '**Enlargement Dialogue**' was initiated during the visit of the high-level interagency delegation to Brussels on 29 June, within the framework of which bilateral meetings were held with representatives of the Directorate-General for Neighbourhood and Enlargement Negotiations (DG NEAR) and other sectoral directorates (DGs) of the European Commission. The Dialogue continued at the expert level within the framework of the EU-Georgia association cooperation sub-committees and became an important element of the agenda of the association sub-committees.

Significant progress has been achieved in terms approximation of the national legislation of Georgia with the EU acquis, namely, in accordance with the requirements of the EU-Georgia Association Agreement, new legislative acts have been adopted and applicable legislation has been amended.

The following new legislative acts were adopted and the following legislative amendments were made during the reporting period:

1. **New Law of Georgia on Public Procurement (9.2.2023);**
2. **Law of Georgia on Official Statistics (31.5.2023);**

¹ Part of the information presented in the report goes beyond the reporting period.

3. Law of Georgia on Personal Data Protection (14.6.2023);
4. Law of Georgia on Seafarers' Labour (31.5.2023);
5. Law of Georgia on Industrial Emissions and the draft laws deriving from it (29.6.2023);
6. Law of Georgia on Water Resources Management and the draft laws deriving from it (30.6.2023);
7. Law of Georgia on Radiation Protection, Nuclear Safety and Security (16.6.2023);
8. A legislative package regarding ozone-depleting substances, including on making amendments to the Law of Georgia on Ambient Air Protection (16.6.2023);
9. Law of Georgia on Sharing Telecommunication Infrastructure and the Physical Infrastructure Applicable for Telecommunication Purposes (31.5.2023);
10. Law of Georgia on E-commerce, with subsequent amendments to the Administrative Procedure Code of Georgia and to the Law of Georgia on Competition (13.6.2023);
11. Amendments to the Law of Georgia on Oil and Gas (22.2.2023);
12. Amendments to the Law of Georgia on Facilitating the Prevention of Money Laundering and the Financing of Terrorism (16.05.2023), in which the MONEYVAL recommendations have been taken into consideration;
13. Amendments to the Law of Georgia on Labour Migration (17.5.2023);
14. Amendments to the Railway Code of Georgia and the relevant accompanying draft laws (31.5.2023);
15. Law of Georgia on Voluntary Private Pension (28.8.2023);
16. Amendments to the Law of Georgia on Broadcasting (30.6.2023);
17. Amendments to the Law of Georgia on Tourism and Resorts (15.12.2023);
18. Law of Georgia on Human Organs Transplants (1.11.2023);
19. Law of Georgia on the Use of Human Tissues and Cells (1.11.2023);
20. Law of Georgia on Supplementary Supervision of Regulated Undertakings in a Financial Conglomerate (29.11.2023);
21. Amendments to the Law of Georgia on Money Laundering and the Financing of Terrorism and the Law of Georgia on Enforcement Proceedings (29.11.2023);
22. Amendments to the Law of Georgia on Making Amendments to the Law of Georgia on Motor Transport (30.11.2023);
23. Amendments to the Law of Georgia on Securities Market (15.12.2024).

In 2023, a meeting of the EU-Georgia Association Committee, a meeting of six thematic groups of the sub-committee on economic and sectoral cooperation, the EU-Georgia Human Rights Dialogue, the EU-Georgia high-level strategic dialogue on security issues, and a meeting of the EU-Georgia Parliamentary Association Committee were held. On 16 November 2023, the first EU-Georgia High-Level Energy Dialogue was established.

In addition, under the leadership of the Prime Minister of Georgia, 5 meetings of Georgia's EU Integration Commission were held at the national level, during which the EU integration issues EU were discussed and appropriate decisions were made.

From 4 October 2023 to February 2024, for the first time, Georgia participated as a guest country in the international culture festival 'Europalia-Georgia', within the framework of which large-scale and diverse events were held and Georgian culture was publicized in the EU.

Electronic software and a respective web portal (aa-monitoring.ge) for monitoring the implementation of the Association Agreement and the Association Agenda are successfully operating, and are being systematically improved both in terms of functions and content.

2. Political Dialogue and Reform, Cooperation in the Field of Foreign and Security Policy

2.1 Cooperation in the Field of Foreign and Security Policy

In 2023, a total of 141 statements made **on behalf of the EU High Representative** were submitted, of which Georgia **acceded to 70 and did not accede to 71 statements**; the percentage of accedence was 50 %. In addition, a total of 781 statements made on behalf of the EU, including sanctions and declarations, were submitted within the framework of international organisations, of which **Georgia acceded to 603 (78 %) and did not accede to 178**.

In November 2022, a platoon (35 soldiers) of the National Guard of the Defence Forces of **the Ministry of Defence of Georgia** carried out its last rotation in the European Union Training Mission in the Republic of Central Africa (**EUTM RCA**). Under the consultations with the EU, the subdivision has successfully completed its participation in the mission and returned to its home country in early June of 2023.

On 25 January 2023, another EU-Georgia consultation within the framework of the **Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP)** was successfully held at the Ministry of Defence.

Within the framework of the projects identified in the area of **PESCO**, consultations were held with a leading country (Hungary) of one of the projects. One of the necessary conditions for Georgia's participation in the PESCO projects is the signing of an administrative agreement with the **European Defence Agency (EDA)**, regarding which intensive negotiations are being carried out.

In order to establish a **Cyber Security Operations Centre (CSOC)** in the new building of the Cyber Security Bureau, the project has been approved and the respective infrastructure works have been performed. In addition, in March 2023, the merger of the relevant defence services (the IT Department, the Network Operations of the General Staff) into the LEPL Cyber Security Bureau was completed, which has significantly increased the scope of activities of the Cyber Security Bureau. Namely, as a result of the changes, **the scope of responsibility of the Cyber Security Bureau has been expanded** to include the security of networks and systems, the service management administration, and software development and management for the Ministry of Defence of Georgia.

In order to establish a cyber security laboratory, relevant documents have been signed with NATO, and the NSPA project manager has been appointed.

The Mentoring Programme Guide of the Ministry of Defence has been approved, which envisages the provision of managerial and sectoral mentoring.

2.2 Peaceful conflict resolution

During the reporting period, regular consultations were held with the EU Delegation to Georgia, the Office of the EU Special Representative for the South Caucasus, the EU Monitoring Mission (EUMM), the European External Action Service, the European Commission and other partners, regarding the implementation of the reconciliation and engagement policy, including the efficient implementation of the peace initiative '**A Step to a Better Future**', as well as in terms of the role and engagement of the EU in the process of confidence building between artificially divided communities. Regular consultations also covered topics such as the Geneva International Discussions, the functioning of incident prevention and response mechanisms and the need to

achieve tangible results, the current situation in the occupied territories, human rights violations, including illegal detentions of the civilians and strict restrictions on free movement, the strengthening of cooperation with the EU and the allocation of financial assistance, the implemented and planned projects in the occupied territories, the deepening of dialogue and confidence building between the divided communities, and other issues related to peaceful conflict resolution.

During the reporting period, active work was carried out with **the EU and its Member States** in order to intensify the topic of the Russia-Georgia conflict on the agenda of the EU, including the full implementation of **the Ceasefire Agreement of 12 August 2008**, concluded with the intermediation of the EU, and the safe, voluntary and dignified return of internally displaced persons (IDPs) and refugees to their homes, and to discuss other related issues in the relevant formats of the EU. During the reporting period, the topic of the Russia-Georgia conflict was raised at a number of meetings in the relevant formats of the EU, such as the Political and Security Committee and the European Parliament. During the period, cooperation was actively carried out with the **EU Special Representative for the South Caucasus and the Crisis in Georgia and its office** for the purpose of further enhancing the role and engagement of the EU instrument in the process of peaceful conflict resolution. It is notable that in their statements, press releases, or comments, the representatives of the EU and its Member States have publicly supported the territorial integrity of Georgia within its internationally recognised borders.

During the reporting period, three rounds of Geneva International Discussions were held: the 57th round was held on 4-5 April, the 58th round was held on 11-12 July, and the 59th round was held on 5-6 December, during which, with the active efforts of the Georgian side and the support of its partners, emphasis was placed on the main topics of the agenda, such as the implementation by the Russian Federation of the Ceasefire Agreement of 12 August 2008, concluded with the intermediation of the EU, and the return of IDPs and refugees to their homes. However, the Russian Federation continues to politicise the issue and undermines the possibility of progress in this direction. At the same time, active work was being carried out with the co-chairs of the Geneva International Discussions and the United States of America (the USA) regarding the effective continuation of the negotiations and the issues of harsh security, human rights, and the humanitarian situation on the ground. **At the third round of the Geneva International Discussions** special attention was paid to **the murder of the citizen of Georgia Tamaz Ginturi** on 6 November 2023 by representatives of the Russian occupation forces; the issues of releasing illegally detained persons in the regions of Abkhazia and Tskhinvali, and punishing those responsible for the murder of the citizens of Georgia, were vigorously raised.

During the reporting period, the Office of the State Minister participated in 7 meetings held in Ergneti under **the Incident Prevention and Response Mechanisms (IPRM)** (on 17 January, 2 March, 27 April, 3 July, 12 September, 1 November and 14 December), during which representatives from the central government of Georgia placed strong emphasis on the issues of safety, human rights and the humanitarian situation of people living on both sides of the occupation line, who suffered from conflict, inter alia the issue of the murder of Tamaz Ginturi, and demanded the unconditional and immediate release, based on a humanitarian approach, of illegally detained citizens of Georgia, and the restoration of free movement in the direction of Akhlagori.

In addition, active work continued with international partners, primarily with the co-chairs of the Geneva International Discussions, to restore **the IPRM meetings in the occupied region of Abkhazia**, which have been suspended since 27 June 2018 as a result of deliberate provocative actions by the occupying forces.

During the reporting period, there was close cooperation between **Georgia and the EU** in various international formats in terms of putting emphasis on matters related to the Russia-Georgia conflict and making statements

supporting the EU. the main topics of each visit, meeting, public speech and participation in international forums, were the severe security and humanitarian situation in the occupied territories, and the necessity for a peaceful resolution of the conflict. In addition, special attention was paid to the role and importance of the **EUMM** in this process, and accordingly, the extension of its mandate. **As for now, the mandate of the EUMM has been extended to December 2024.**

Georgia actively cooperated with the EUMM to prevent conflict escalation at the occupation line and to deal with the provocative actions of Russia. Furthermore, the importance of the said issue was being regularly emphasised within the framework of other international organisations, including the Council of Europe, the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) and the United Nations (UN). The **'hotline'** mechanism operating with the intermediation of the EUMM was actively used. Despite the attempts of the occupation regimes to politicise the hotline mechanism, as a result of the constructive approaches of Georgia, the mechanism remains an effective instrument for communication across the occupation line.

Intensive work was being carried out with both, the partner states and international organisations, including the EU, in order to maintain the issue of the Russia-Georgia conflict high on the international agenda. The main topics of each visit, meeting, public speech and participation in international forums, were the severe security and humanitarian situation in the occupied territories, and the necessity for a peaceful resolution of the conflict.

During the reporting period, the formats of the **UN Security Council, the UN General Assembly and its main committees, and the Human Rights Council** were actively and regularly used in order to inform the international community about the current situation in the territories of Georgia that are occupied by Russia. **About 80 national statements were made** in these formats during January-December period. Regular communication was carried out with the UN (New York, Geneva) in order to systematically inform them about the current developments in the territories of Georgia that are occupied by Russia.

During the reporting period, from January to December, **more than 20 national statements** were made at the meeting of the **OSCE Permanent Council**, which emphasised the issue of resolution of the Russia-Georgia conflict and the importance of the Russia-Georgia conflict regulation mechanisms and the peaceful and dignified return of IDPs. The statements supporting Georgia were also made by friendly and partner countries of Georgia.

During the reporting period, the formats of the **Committee of Ministers**, the Parliamentary Assembly, and the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe were actively used in order to inform the international community about the current situation in the territories of Georgia that are occupied by Russia. **About 80 national statements** were made in these formats during the January-December period.

In addition, several **international documents** were adopted on the issue of the Russia-Georgia conflict, the following of which are noteworthy: the Resolution of the UN General Assembly **on the Status of Internally Displaced Persons and Refugees from Abkhazia, Georgia, and the Tskhinvali Region/South Ossetia, Georgia** (7 June); the Report of the Secretary-General of the UN **on the Status of internally displaced persons and refugees from Abkhazia, Georgia and the Tskhinvali region/South Ossetia, Georgia** (1 May); the Resolution of the UN Human Rights Council on **Cooperation with Georgia** (4 April); the 27th Consolidated Report of the Secretary General of the Council of Europe on the **Conflict in Georgia** (3 April); the declaration made by the Council of Europe Summit in Reykjavik (16-17 May); the annual resolution of the Monitoring Committee (23-27 January);

the Country Report on Human Rights Practices of the U.S. Department of State (20 March); the 2022 Report of the U.S. Department of State on International Religious Freedom in Georgia (15 May); the declaration of the NATO Parliamentary Assembly (22 May). The mentioned issues were reflected, inter alia, in the Resolution of the UN Human Rights Council on **Cooperation with Georgia** (4 April), a report of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights '**Cooperation with Georgia**' (17 July), the Report of the Secretary-General of the UN on the Status of Internally Displaced Persons and Refugees from Abkhazia, Georgia and the Tskhinvali Region/South Ossetia, Georgia (1 May), the annual resolution of the Monitoring Committee of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (23-27 January), the UN Security Council statement on the anniversary of the Russia-Georgia War, the 27th and 28th Consolidated Reports of the Secretary General of the Council of Europe (3 April and 15 November), a decision of the Committee of Ministers at Deputy Level of the Council of Europe (31 October), and the Joint Statement of the OSCE Group of Friends of Georgia (1 December).

One of the most important priorities for the Government of Georgia was to ensure the availability of quality medical services for the population living in the occupied regions. The effective implementation of the **state referral healthcare programme** continued, which envisages the provision of free healthcare services to the populations living in the Abkhazia and Tskhinvali regions at medical facilities located in the territories controlled by the central government of Georgia; during the reporting period, 1 422 persons from both regions benefited from the programme.

At the same time, the Government of Georgia made efforts **to improve medical services within the occupied territories** and continued supporting local medical facilities. Namely, during the reporting period, immunisation and flu vaccines, as well as medicines for diabetes and AIDS, were supplied to the region of Abkhazia through **the coordination mechanism**, with a total value of approximately GEL 1.5 million. In total, in 2023, the amount of financing provided by the Government of Georgia on the healthcare component exceeded GEL 7 million. In addition, under the coordination mechanism, various agricultural equipment and plant protection products were supplied to the Abkhazia region; in 2023, preparations against the Asian brown marmorated stink bug and pesticides were supplied to the Abkhazia region.

The Interim Government Commission for Responding to the Needs of Affected Populations in Villages Adjacent to the Demarcation Line, which is co-chaired by the State Minister, continued to work actively in terms of responding to the needs of the population. Two meetings of the Commission were held in 2023. During the reporting period, 14 424 families received financial assistance for the provision of heating during the winter; in addition, the cost of studies at higher educational institutions were financed for up to 2000 students by the State. The rehabilitation works of 28 houses damaged as a result of the 2008 Russia-Georgia war in the village of Zardiaantkari, whose owners had not received any compensation from the State and had been provided with temporary accommodation, actively continued. At this stage, the project is in its final stage as more than 95% of the works have been completed.

In 2023, the Government of Georgia continued **the effective implementation of the peace initiative 'A Step to a Better Future'**. In this direction, the 4th grant competition of the '**Peace Fund for a Better Future**' was held from 15 May to 30 June, within the framework of which 129 business applications were registered from the occupied territories, which confirms the growing interest of the local population in carrying out joint trade and economic activities across the demarcation line. It is noteworthy that 43% of the beneficiaries of the Peace Fund are women.

In order to economically empower women affected by the conflict who live near the demarcation line, on the initiative of the Office of the State Minister and with the support of the Academy of the Ministry of Finance, a training session named **'Practical Course of Entrepreneurship – How to Start a Business'** was held for women living in the villages adjacent to the demarcation line and women representing ethnic minorities.

In 2023, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs continued meetings with refugee women living in the territories adjacent to the demarcation line and the non-governmental organisations working on their issues. In this context, on 18 December, with the support of the UN Women in Georgia and the United Kingdom, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs hosted a meeting with representatives of civil society, in the format of a round table, on the topic **'Geneva International Discussions – Women, Peace and Security'**. Internally displaced women affected by the conflict and representatives from non-governmental organisations participated in the meeting, during which the dynamics of the peace negotiations were widely discussed and special attention was paid to the problems of women affected by the conflict, the possibilities of solving such problems, and the need to strengthen the **'Women, Peace and Security'** agenda in the peace processes.

In order to ensure unhindered access to quality education, as a result of the reconciliation and engagement policy, including the peace initiative, in 2023, 235 students from the occupied territories were enrolled in the higher educational institutions of Georgia with state financing, without exams; in addition, in 2023, 4 entrants speaking the Ossetian language were registered on the Georgian language training programme **'1+4'**. Furthermore, as a result of passing the Unified National Examinations of their own accord, 6 more entrants were enrolled from the region of Abkhazia.

The process of the strategic revision of the 2010 state strategy **'Engagement through Cooperation'** and its accompanying action plan for the occupied territories started in 2021, within the framework of the **Government Commission for the Implementation of the Engagement Strategy Action Plan**, and aims to improve the social and economic condition of the population affected by the conflict and to enhance dialogue, based on common interests, and confidence building between artificially divided communities, that will be based on new visions, goals and priorities, using depoliticised, people-centred and needs-based approaches. It is notable that the strategic revision of the reconciliation and engagement policy is a part of the process of preparing a new and wider strategy for peaceful conflict resolution, which is in progress under the coordination of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

It is an important objective for the Government of Georgia that the benefits of the process of Georgia's European integration become equally accessible to the populations of the regions of Abkhazia and Tskhinvali. According to the **peace initiative**, the provision of simplified access to public services, including a passport of a citizen of Georgia, continued for the population living in the occupied regions. **As a result, in 2023, 142 persons from the occupied regions obtained a passport of a citizen of Georgia.**

In order to further strengthen the ethnically and culturally diverse society, **the implementation of the 2021-2030 State Strategy for Civic Equality and Integration and its 2023-2024 Action Plan** continued. Under the five interrelated priority directions of the Strategy, which entails **raising the level of knowledge of the official language among the representatives of ethnic minorities, improving access to quality education, increasing participation in civil, political, and economic processes, and supporting an intercultural dialogue**, particular importance was given to **the strengthening of the role of youth** in the peace process, including through regular meetings with them and awareness raising campaigns in various formats within the framework of: 1) the meetings held at the Information Center on NATO and the EU; 2) the information meetings and seminars held

at the Samtskhe-Javakheti State University; 3) the summer school of the Caucasus International University named **'Peace Policy and Restoration of Trust with the Occupied Regions'**, which was held in cooperation with the Office of the State Minister; 4) the cultural and educational seminars held in Telavi and Tskaltubo on the initiative and under the organisation of the Office of the State Minister and with the support of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP); 5) the Anaklia Summer Camp.

In order to engage in the peacebuilding process and encourage more young people with peacekeeping ideas, as well as to raise awareness and interest in this regard, in 2023, the Office of the State Minister further expanded the initiative **'the SMR Peace Award for Youth'**, established in 2021, within the framework of which new thematic nominations were determined, such as **'Best Peace Activity'**, **'Best Peace Idea'**, and **'Best Peace Message'**. On 21 September, at the annual high-level event **'Youth for a Better Future'** dedicated to the International Day of Peace, a monetary prize of GEL 3 000 was awarded to the winners in each nomination. In addition, as a result of close cooperation between the office of the State Minister and the Council of Europe, the winners in all three nominations took part in **the World Forum for Democracy held in Strasbourg**, which was dedicated to the topic of peace. Furthermore, the UNDP financed the project that won in the nomination **'Best Peace Idea'**.

In cooperation with **the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC)**, the programme of searching for persons who went missing in Georgia during the 1990s armed conflict and the 2008 Russia-Georgia war continued, which aimed to determine the fate and location of the missing persons and to support their families. Within the framework of the programme, in 2023, the remains of 58 persons considered missing in the region of Abkhazia were identified and transferred to their families for proper burial. In addition, in 2023, the meetings of the humanitarian coordination mechanism, consisting of Georgian and Abkhazian participants operating under the auspices of the ICRC on the issues of searching for missing persons, were resumed. The 14th meeting of the said mechanism was held on 13-14 March in Belgrade, and the 15th meeting was held on 20 December in Istanbul.

In order to support the integration of IDPs into Georgian society, 2 217 IDP families were provided with long-term dwellings; 185 dwelling places were transferred into the ownership of IDP families; in order to improve the living conditions of the IDPs, co-financing was allocated for renovation works to be performed on 34 facilities in their ownership; 20 091 IDPs were provided with one-off financial aid in the cases of emergency, and 695 families were provided with temporary dwellings. In addition, 236 small grants were allocated to IDPs; financial assistance was provided to 180 IDPs enrolled at vocational educational institutions, and 5 information campaigns were carried out.

In order to establish communication with the populations living in the conflict regions and to raise their awareness of human rights, the Public Defender's Office carried out 3 monitoring visits at the so-called Enguri checkpoint and 3 monitoring visits at the so-called Akhagori checkpoint. Monitoring visits were carried out in 15 villages alongside the occupation line.

2.3 Non-proliferation of Weapons of Mass Destruction

Continuing and deepening cooperation with the EU is one of the important directions for Georgia in terms of **the non-proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and improving capacities to reduce chemical, biological, radiological and nuclear (CBRN) threats**.

During the reporting period, **a number of meetings were held on issues related to improving capacities to reduce CBRN threats**, in which various agencies participated from Georgia, namely the following:

1) Representatives from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Georgia participated in the **Middle East and Central Asia Regional Workshop on the Amendment to the Convention on the Physical Protection of Nuclear Material (CPPNM)**, which was held on 7-8 February 2023, in an online format. 2) On 13 February 2023, the meeting of the interagency working group for the implementation of the project **'Institutional Capacity Building for Chemical Safety and Security in Georgia'** was held at the Ministry of Environment Protection and Agriculture of Georgia. 3) On 9-10 March 2023, **a meeting of the working group of the G7 Global Partnership Against the Spread of Weapons and Materials of Mass Destruction** was held in Tokyo. A statement was made at the plenary session, in which the main emphasis was put on the threats associated with the nuclear reactors of Ukraine due to the unjustified and illegitimate war waged by Russia, especially on the difficult situation in Zaporizhzhya. After the speeches, a discussion was held within the framework of the CBRN working group. 4) On 17-20 April 2023, **the annual NATO Conference on Arms Control, Disarmament and Weapons of Mass Destruction Non-Proliferation** was held at the U.S. Department of State. 5) On 10-11 May 2023, with the support of the Civil Council on Defense and Security and the U.S. Embassy in Georgia, the Conference of the **US-Black Sea Nonproliferation Professional Exchange** was held in Tbilisi. At the Conference, discussions were held between representatives of the Government, civil society, international organisations, academia and experts, during which the participants discussed issues such as nuclear and radiation safety, and the challenges and opportunities of the enlarged Black Sea region. 6) From 30 May to 1 June 2023, **the 20th High-Level Political Meeting of the Proliferation Security Initiative (PSI)** was held in Jeju, the Republic of Korea. During the meeting, the representatives of the countries emphasised the importance of the PSI, and taking into consideration the actions of the North Korean regime, the ongoing war in Ukraine, and the possibilities of modern technologies (artificial intelligence, quantum computing), the challenges and threats in terms of world safety, including the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction. 7) From 29 May to 2 June 2023, the **Snow Leopard Tabletop Exercise (TTX) on Legal Frameworks and Radiological/Nuclear Forensics and Investigations** was held in Dushanbe, Tajikistan, with the organisation of Romania and the Netherlands. During the event, panel discussions were held on the issues of the smuggling of nuclear and other radioactive materials, the response to incidents, detection strategies and existing practices in different countries. The issues of forensic examination and the follow-up coordination of criminal investigation were also discussed. The participants also had the opportunity to visit the Regional Centre of Chemical, Biological, Radiological and Nuclear Forensics. 8) On 15-16 June 2023, **the 22nd regular meeting of the Hague Code of Conduct against Ballistic Missile Proliferation (HCOG)** was held in Vienna, within the framework of which the countries made statements emphasising the importance of the timely distribution of annual reports provided for by the Code of Conduct. The majority of the statements covered the following three topics: Russia's war against Ukraine and weapons used by Russia in this war, Iran's nuclear programmes and the facts of transfer of ballistic and similar types of weapons to non-state actors, especially in the region of the Middle East, the facts of use of ballistic missiles by North Korea and the importance of the implementation of the UN Security Council resolutions regarding North Korea (Georgia acceded to the EU statement). 9) On 12-17 June 2023, the Geneva Centre for Security Policy organised the **'6th International Course on Risk and Crisis Management: Responding to Crisis in the 21st Century'** at the Schwarzenburg Federal Training Centre in Switzerland. 10) On 7-8 August 2023, a meeting of the **Biological Weapons Convention (BWC) working group** was held at **the UN headquarters in Geneva**, which was dedicated to the issues of international cooperation, assistance, and national implementation. 11) On 3-8 September 2023, a working visit was paid to **the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) and other chemical safety agencies** in Finland and Netherlands, in order to learn about best practices and

activities in terms of institutional organisation and chemicals and chemical safety. A working visit was carried out within the framework of the project '**Institutional Capacity Building for Chemical Safety and Security in Georgia**' (2022-2025), implemented with the support of the Ministry of Environmental Protection and Agriculture of Georgia and the Office of Weapons of Mass Destruction Terrorism (WMDT) of the U.S. Department of State, the purposes of which were the strengthening of the legislative framework and institutional capacity in the area of chemical safety, non-proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, the improvement of the chemical substances management system, and the fulfilment of international and national obligations in the area of environmental protection. 12) On 24-29 September 2023, **the 67th session of the General Conference of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA)** was held in Vienna. During the Conference, respective draft resolutions were discussed and bilateral meetings were held with representatives from the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA). 13) On 22-24 November 2023, a meeting of representatives from the responsible national bodies of the organisation member states was held at **the OPCW headquarters** in The Hague (Netherlands). 14) On 4-8 December 2023, the 3rd meeting of the working group of the **Biological Weapons Convention (BWC)** was held in Geneva, during which issues related to confidence building, transparency, compliance with the Convention and verification regime, were discussed. 15) On 10-15 December 2023, a meeting of representatives from the **member states of the Biological Weapons Convention (BWC)** was held.

In terms of the reduction of CBRN threats, a number of annual reports were prepared during the reporting period: 1) a completed form of the information exchange on the Biological Weapons Convention (BWC) confidence building measures – the annual report of Georgia – (UNODA BWC ISU); 2) national reports under the Chemical Weapons Convention – the Annual Declaration for Past Activities (ADPA) and the Annual Declaration for Anticipated Activities (ADAA); 3) the annual report under the Hague Code of Conduct against Ballistic Missile Proliferation (HCOC); 4) the annual national report under the Joint Convention of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA).

During the reporting period, the process of implementing and monitoring the fulfilment of commitments undertaken under the **international agreements in effect, the UN Action Plan, and resolutions of the UN Security Council**, as well as other international documents in this area, continued. Moreover, exports control continued at national level pursuant to the requirements of UN Security Council Resolutions, including **Resolution No 1540, and commitments and principles under international non-proliferation and security regimes**.

During the reporting period, the following annual reports were distributed **in the area of control of exports of small and light weapons and conventional arms**: 1) annual reports under Protocols 5 and 2 of the UN Convention on **Prohibitions or Restrictions on the Use of Certain Conventional Weapons which may be Deemed to be Excessively Injurious or to Have Indiscriminate Effects (CCW)**; 2) a report on military budget and planning, intended for the **OSCE Conflict Prevention Centre**; a report on anti-personnel mines; an annual report on military information exchange.

In June 2023, with the financial support of the Defense Threat Reduction Agency (DTRA) of the U.S. Department of Defense, two Island-class patrol boats and decontamination and CBRN equipment for the personnel of the Coast Guard boarding teams were provided to the Coast Guard Department of the Border Police of Georgia, a state subordinate agency within the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Georgia.

On 19-22 June 2023, at a high-level meeting held in Perry (USA), a Memorandum of Understanding on **Sustainability of CBRN Capacities** was signed by the parties.

Representatives from the **LEPL Operative-Technical Agency of Georgia** of the State Security Service of Georgia permanently provide software/technical and administration services to the nuclear and radiation control systems at the state border of Georgia.

During the reporting period, a representative of the LEPL Operative-Technical Agency of Georgia of the State Security Service of Georgia conducted a basic training on the topic '**Nuclear and Radiation Control at Border Checkpoints**' for the new employees of the MIA Patrol Police Department, at the base of the MIA Academy. 18 border controllers were trained.

With the cooperation of the LEPL Operative-Technical Agency of Georgia and the LEPL Training Centre of the State Security Service of Georgia, and the Defense Threat Reduction Agency (DTRA) of the U.S. Department of Defense, a training programme named '**Prevention of Proliferation of Weapons of Mass Destruction and Border Security**' was implemented at the Training Centre of the State Security Service of Georgia for the officers of agencies involved in border security. During the reporting period, within the framework of the programme, the following were conducted:

- Instructor Development Course – 8 employees of the State Security Service and the Ministry of Internal Affairs were trained;
- one training, during which 10 employees of the Ministry of Internal Affairs were trained.

On 12 December 2023, the 7th annual meeting of the Interagency Coordination Council on Combating CBRN Threats was held in Tbilisi, during which **the 2024-2026 Action Plan for the 2021-2030 National Strategy on the Reduction of Chemical, Biological, Radiological and Nuclear Threats** was approved.

The LEPL Agency of Nuclear and Radiation Safety has prepared draft amendments to '**the procedure for joint action during alarms caused by the detection of nuclear and radioactive materials at 17 border checkpoints, airports, ports and maritime spaces of Georgia, approved by Ordinance No 397 of the Government of Georgia, and 'the procedure for responding to the illegal circulation of nuclear and radioactive substances', approved by Order No 150 of the Minister of Environment and Natural Resources Protection of Georgia.**

3. Democracy, Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms; Strengthening Institutions

3.1 Human Rights

On 23 March 2023, the Parliament approved the **2022-2030 Human Rights Strategy**. On 28 December, **the 2024-2026 Action Plan** was approved at the sitting of the Government. On the basis of a transparent and inclusive process, the remarks submitted by the Parliament, municipalities, and non-governmental organisations were taken into account in the action plan.

A report on the **2021-2022 Action Plan against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment** has been prepared.

In terms of the protection of human rights, one of the important priorities is the **fight against domestic violence, violence against women, crimes committed by minors and against minors, and discrimination and hate crimes**. In connection with the legal mechanisms for combating violence against women and domestic violence, meetings were held with residents and representatives from local non-governmental organisations and

municipalities in Batumi, Kutaisi, Samtredia, Ozurgeti and Chokhatauri on the measures taken by the Ministry of Internal Affairs in this direction and the existing mechanisms. In addition, during the reporting period, the employees of the Ministry of Internal Affairs participated in an informational meeting held in the Kaspi Municipality with the population affected by the conflict on the issues of violence against women and domestic violence, state services and free legal aid.

Within the framework of the campaign '**Do Not Deprive of Childhood**', the following activities were carried out: informational meetings at schools; informational meetings with the population; informational meetings with school principals, social workers, and resource officers; information banners were displayed at 2 302 schools; a media seminar; an informational video clip; a TV programme on early marriage; a painting competition; and the distribution of printing materials to pupils.

In 2023, the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Georgia joined '**Equality Week**', including the global 16 Days of Activism against Gender-Based Violence.

As from 1 May 2023, a **legal mechanism for the protection of victims of violence against women and/or domestic violence** was launched in an updated format. Information thereon was broadcast both on television and through social networks.

In 2023, the series 'Police Files' continued, with episode 2 of season 6 were dedicated to the issues of domestic violence. The series were broadcasted on television and through social networks.

As from 1 May 2023, a **restraining order and a risk assessment instrument became effective in an updated format**. Police officers at the Police Departments in all regions of Georgia were informed about the changes made to the instrument and the electronic supervision. About 70 workshops were held and more than 1 900 employees were trained.

During the reporting period, with the support of the European Union for Georgia and the Georgian Centre for Psychosocial and Medical Rehabilitation of Torture Victims (GCRT), 2 trainings were conducted for the investigators of the police territorial units of the Ministry of Internal Affairs on the topic '**Trauma-informed Approach in the Investigation of Sexual Crimes**', during which 30 employees were trained.

In addition, within the framework of cooperation between the Ministry of Internal Affairs and the non-governmental organisation Anti-Violence Network of Georgia, a joint three-day training was held for representatives of the Ministry of Internal Affairs on the topic '**Violence against women and/or domestic violence and the mechanisms against it under the legislation of Georgia**'. About 100 employees were trained during the 5 meetings.

The Prosecutor's Office of Georgia conducted 18 training activities on issues of violence against women and domestic violence. Through the activities, 188 employees of the Prosecutor's Office of Georgia were trained. In addition, the monitoring of criminal cases related to domestic violence was carried out and a respective report was prepared.

The Human Rights Protection and Investigation Quality Monitoring Department of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Georgia monitors the investigations of crimes committed by minors and against minors, by assessing the adequacy and quality of the response of police officers to the notifications and data entered into the electronic system. If a shortcoming is detected, an employee of the Department contacts the investigator of the

case (and/or his/her superior), gives him/her appropriate instructions, and issues recommendations. If necessary, future activities for upgrading qualifications are also planned. During the reporting period, more than 3 200 cases of crimes committed by/against minors were monitored using the above methodology.

During the reporting period, a meeting was held within the framework of the Council of Europe project, during which an expert discussed the practice of investigating and prosecuting crimes motivated by intolerance in accordance with the case law of the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR). In addition, with the support of the Council of Europe, the employees of the Ministry were trained on the issues of carrying out legal proceedings for hate incidents. 100 employees were trained during 5 training sessions held.

57 training activities were carried out by the **Prosecutor's Office of Georgia** on **human rights** and **anti-discrimination** issues. A total of 500 prosecutors and investigators of the Prosecutor's Office were retrained within the framework of the training activities. Information on criminal prosecution and conviction for crimes motivated by intolerance **on the grounds of discrimination** was published on the website of the Prosecutor's Office of Georgia. In addition, segregated statistical data for the 12 months of 2022 were collected on crimes motivated by intolerance on the grounds of discrimination and were provided to the National Statistics Office of Georgia for publication.

21 training activities were conducted by **the Prosecutor's Office of Georgia** on the topic of gender-based violence. 262 employees of the Prosecutor's Office of Georgia were trained. A methodology for monitoring criminal cases of incidents of femicide and recording the relevant statistical data has been developed.

A report on the 2021-2022 Action Plan on the Fight against Trafficking in Human Beings has been prepared.

On 10 July 2023, **the 1st monitoring meeting of the Interagency Coordinating Council for Implementing Measures against Trafficking in Human Beings** was held, one of the purposes of which was a presentation by the Council member agencies of a 6 months' progress report of the 2023-2024 Action Plan for Fighting Against Trafficking in Human Beings. In addition, a 1-year (2023) progress report of the said Action Plan was discussed at the Council meeting on 27 December 2023.

On 20-21 May, with the financial support of the EU and in cooperation with the International Centre for Migration Policy Development (ICMPD), a training was conducted on the topic of **trafficking in human beings**, the target audience of which was the personnel of various medical institutions across Tbilisi. A total of 25 medical personnel were retrained.

On 28-29 July 2023, under the organisation of the Interagency Coordinating Council for Implementing Measures against Trafficking in Human Beings, a training was held for the social workers and employees of the shelters and crisis centres of the LEPL Agency for State Care and Assistance for the (Statutory) Victims of Human Trafficking on the topic '**identification of minor victims of human trafficking and the specifics of provision of services**'. During the training, emphasis was placed on the forms of exploitation indicative of trafficking in minors, the stages of the psychological development of children, techniques for establishing contact with minor victims, and the issue of children living and/or working on the streets. 28 representatives from the Agency participated in the training.

On 7-8 August, 5-6 September, 27-28 September and 17-18 October 2023, in cooperation with the secretariat of the Coordination Council, the LEPL Training Center of Justice organised a training on the topic of human trafficking. 59 employees of the LEPL Public Service Development Agency participated in the training.

On 20-24 November 2023, in close cooperation with OSCE, the 2nd simulation training was held on the topic of human trafficking. 35 professionals from different agencies operating in the area of fighting against human trafficking participated in the training.

On 11-12 December 2023, in cooperation with the International Organization for Migration and with the financial support of the EU, a training was held for the employees of the Prosecutor's Office of Georgia and the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Georgia, in which 22 representatives from the mentioned agencies participated. The training was conducted by an invited expert from the Netherlands and special emphasis was placed on the issue of online recruitment of minors for sexual exploitation.

In the first half of 2023, an in-depth research was conducted and published by the Analytical Department of the Supreme Court of Georgia on the topic '**Administrative and legal mechanisms of combating violence against women and domestic violence (protective orders)**'. In addition, within the framework of the Analytical Department, the latest guidelines of the European Court of Human Rights on social rights have been translated (the publications are available on the official website of the Supreme Court of Georgia: www.supremecourt.ge). In addition, decisions made by the European Court of Human Rights in 45 cases have been translated for the publication at the Georgian language interface of the electronic search system of Strasbourg court decisions (HUDOC).

In March 2023, 800 six-language brochures on state services available for victims of trafficking were provided to the LEPL Georgian National Tourism Administration for further distribution at tourism information centres. Furthermore, in order to identify cases of human trafficking, representatives of the Police Department of the Autonomous Republic of Adjara distributed 729 information brochures among the citizens about the threats of trafficking and the means of protection from it.

During 2023, 15 information meetings were held in cooperation with the LEPL Agency for State Care and Assistance for the (Statutory) Victims of Human Trafficking, which were attended by a total of 162 citizens. During the information meetings the participants were provided with information about public services offered by the Agency, which are intended for victims of human trafficking and violence.

On 16 October 2023, in cooperation with the International Organization for Migration, information meetings were held at public school No 4 and Iakob Gogebashvili Telavi State University, in Telavi, in relation to the EU Anti-Trafficking Day. About 70 students and pupils attended the meetings, during which emphasis was placed on the risks of the crime of human trafficking, vulnerable groups, and the role of state agencies in the area of fighting against crime.

Six service agencies (**shelters**) for victims of human trafficking and violence, and seven **crisis centres** for victims of violence, are operating under the **LEPL Agency for State Care and Assistance for the (Statutory) Victims of Human Trafficking**, namely the following: Tbilisi (2 shelters), Batumi, and Sighnaghi service agencies (shelters) for victims of human trafficking, Gori and Kutaisi service institutions (shelter and crisis centre combined) for victims of violence, and Tbilisi, Ozurgeti, Marneuli, Telavi and Zugdidi crisis centres for victims of violence.

In 2023, a total of 247 beneficiaries registered on a contractual basis used **the services of a shelter for the victims of violence**, and 2 132 persons used such services without a contract (in January-December). In 2023, 97 dependent persons used the shelter services and 48 dependent persons used the crisis centre services.

In 2023, 242 beneficiaries registered on a contractual basis used the services of **the crisis centres for victims of violence**.

During 2023, 14 applications **for compensation for victims** of violence against women and/or domestic violence were submitted to the LEPL Agency for State Care and Assistance for the (Statutory) Victims of Human Trafficking. 12 out of the 14 applications for compensation were granted.

In 2023, a total of 4 090 calls were made to **the hotline (116 006)** for assistance for the victims of violence, operating under the LEPL Agency for State Care and Assistance for the (Statutory) Victims of Human Trafficking.

During the reporting period, **the Public Defender's Office of Georgia** held 181 meetings on issues of **gender-based violence, domestic violence, and gender equality** in 8 regions of western and eastern Georgia (except Tbilisi), which were attended by 4 191 persons. The topics discussed at the meetings were early marriage, gender-based violence, violence against women, domestic violence, and femicide. In addition, 25 informational meetings were held on the said topics with school teachers (389 participants) and meetings were held in 43 villages with women living in the territories adjacent to the so-called demarcation line.

In order to promote the **UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities**, during the reporting period, the Public Defender's Office of Georgia held 17 informational meetings throughout the regions, which were attended by 332 persons. The target groups of the meetings were representatives from educational resource centres, associations of day nurseries, kindergartens, public schools, and organisations of persons with disabilities and local self-government organisations.

Special reports were prepared by the Public Defender of Georgia based on the monitoring results conducted at social accommodation places and soup kitchens, which included recommendations for solving the identified problems. In addition, the issue of exercising the right to employment of persons with disabilities was evaluated. As a result of the evaluation, respective recommendations were provided.

The deinstitutionalisation of large institutions for persons with disabilities continues. As of 2023, 3 large care homes are functioning for persons with disabilities in Martkopi, Dzevri, and Dusheti. In cooperation with the Czech Caritas, biopsychosocial assessments of persons with disabilities living in Martkopi and Dusheti were carried out. 18 persons, which constitutes more than 10 % of the residents of large institutions, with disabilities were transferred from Martkopi care home to 3 small family-type homes in Dusheti administrative unit, purchased in 2023 by Caritas Czech Republic. At present, 142 beneficiaries live in large institutions for persons with disabilities. Within the framework of a grant provided by the Czech government, purchasing of 7 additional small family-type homes is planned.

In order to disseminate information among different groups of society about anti-discrimination legislation and the practice of the Public Defender, the Office of the Public Defender held 28 meetings with representatives of local governments, 13 meetings with the employees of private companies, and 30 meetings with the population on the subjects of equality and prohibition of discrimination. Meetings on anti-discrimination legislation were also held with 659 public officers and 497 public school teachers.

3.2 Penitentiary and Probation System Reform

In 2023, **the procedures for managing the tool and cases of assessing the risks and needs of adult convicted persons was introduced** at No 12, No 14 and No 18 penitentiary institutions. During the reporting period, case

management was introduced in all penitentiary institutions. In 2023, 741 beneficiaries were involved in case management.

In accordance with the mandate imposed under the Optional Protocol to the Convention against Torture and other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (OPCAT), during the reporting period, the Public Defender's Office made monitoring visits to 47 police divisions and departments; 33 visits to 23 temporary detention isolators; 3 visits to the Temporary Accommodation Centre of the Migration Department of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Georgia; 20 visits to 8 penitentiary institutions (No 2, No 3, No 5, No 8, No 10, No 14, No 15 and No 16); 1 visit to the Special Tasks Department of the Ministry of Internal Affairs, 5 visits to the Facilities Protection Department of the Ministry of Internal Affairs, 7 visits to 3 psychiatric facilities, 4 visits to 2 shelters/accommodation places for persons with psychological disorders, and 6 visits to 6 military units. In addition, the monitoring of 2 collective return operations was carried out. An annual report of the National Preventive Mechanism was published, and a report of the visit to No 5 penitentiary institution and a report of monitoring of the Temporary Accommodation Centre of the Migration Department of the Ministry of Internal Affairs were prepared. A follow-up report on the visit to the inpatient psychiatric facility of Batumi Medical Center was prepared. The employees of the Monitoring Department of the Special Penitentiary Service were informed about the general principles of the monitoring methodology under the National Preventive Mechanism.

The Spousal/Partner Assault Perpetrator Risk Assessment instrument (SPAPRA) for adult convicted persons has been developed and is currently being implemented.

During the reporting period, **the mental healthcare standard** was developed for the penitentiary system and the action plan for its implementation was determined. In 2023, 116 employees were trained in mental health issues.

The World Health Organisation Disability Assessment Schedule (WHODAS) was translated within the framework of the Council of Europe project. In 2023, 3 groups of psychologists and social workers were trained.

During the reporting period, a total of 700 employees were trained as a result of 49 different trainings conducted in the penitentiary system.

Within the framework of cooperation with the U.S. Embassy INL, with the involvement of the Penitentiary, Probation and Convicted Persons' Vocational Training Centre, **the 2024-2030 strategy for the preparation for release and the transition management** and its two-year action plan have been prepared.

During the reporting period, the Department of Re-socialisation and Rehabilitation of Convicted Persons and Former Prisoners monitored and professionally supervised the rehabilitation process, which implied individual and group consultations with social workers and psychologists. In addition, diverted persons, convicted persons and former prisoners were engaged in new rehabilitation programmes. In 2023, 932 probationers and 198 former prisoners were engaged in rehabilitation programmes and services, and 295 beneficiaries were engaged in educational, cultural and informative activities.

Work is being actively carried out in the direction of **preparation for release of persons sentenced to life imprisonment**. During the reporting period, 35 beneficiaries underwent 8 stages of the programme for the preparation for release. Currently, 4 persons sentenced to life imprisonment are involved in the process. Within the framework of transition management, educational modules and process evaluation tests have been

developed for convicted persons engaged in the ‘Programme of Preparation for Release of Persons Sentenced to Life Imprisonment’ with the participation of social workers and psychologists from the Department of Re-socialisation and Rehabilitation of Convicted Persons and Former Prisoners. In all, **in 2023, 327 former prisoners were engaged in the re-socialisation and rehabilitation programmes.**

3.3 Rights of the Child

Within the framework of monitoring the implementation of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Code on the Rights of the Child, a chapter (consisting of 10 thematic sub-chapters) of the parliamentary report has been prepared **on the legal status of the child**. In addition, 3 special reports were prepared on the legal status of the child and their access to justice. Monitoring has been carried out at 30 small family-type homes, 2 boarding schools of the Islamic faith, **3 large residential facilities**, 4 day care centres and 3 shelters for homeless children, and 2 facilities for mothers and children. Monitoring was carried out in No 2, No 5, and No 8 penitentiary institutions and No 11 juvenile rehabilitation facility.

In 2023, **the Department of Child’s Rights of the Public Defender’s Office of Georgia** held 23 information meetings with various target groups, including schoolchildren. Representatives from the Regional Division of the Public Defender’s Office **held 269 meetings on the rights of the child, 111 of which were specifically related to the issues of violence against children and the available protection mechanisms**. In addition, the Department of Criminal Justice held **100 meetings with 2 975 pupils**. Furthermore, the Gender Department **held a number of meetings on the topics of early (child) marriage**, and the Human Rights Education Department **held meetings on the topic of human rights education**.

In order to open a new psychological and social rehabilitation services facility for children who are victims of sexual violence, a plot of land in Kutaisi was transferred for use to the LEPL Agency for State Care and Assistance for the (Statutory) Victims of Human Trafficking. Currently, the design works of the said facility building are being carried out.

In order to create a 24-hour service for **homeless children and children with challenging behaviour**, real estate has been purchased in Tbilisi with the support of donor organisations, where renovation works are currently being carried out.

Within the framework of the Social Rehabilitation and Child Care State Programme, in 2023, **2 service providers under the personal assistant sub-programme and 2 service providers under the home care sub-programme were registered in two municipalities**.

The Prosecutor’s Office carried out 13 training activities on the issues of **the rights of the child**. A total of 113 prosecutors and investigators from the Prosecutor’s Office were retrained within the framework of the training activities.

3.4 Reform of the Judiciary

In 2023, in parallel with updating statistical reporting forms, with the participation of the CEPEJ experts, a two-year CEPEJ evaluation cycle has been developed and the data for Georgia have been presented reflecting

the main trends, and the efficiency indicators of the justice system have been analysed. The joint projects of the Council of Europe and the EU named **'Support to modernisation of court management in Georgia'** and **'Support for a better evaluation of the results of judicial reform efforts in the Eastern Partnership'** continued, within the framework of which a training for trainers 'Seminar for Statisticians on Forensic Data Collection, Analysis and Reporting' was held in November 2023. Technical documents were presented at the training, comments were discussed and future steps were planned. Work on creating web forms for primary accounting documents (PAD) for civil cases will commence next year.

Furthermore, within the framework of the Council of Europe project **'Promoting the Effective Protection of Equality and Non-Discrimination in Georgia'**, the cycle of training for judicial assistants of courts of first and appellate instances and for the employees of the Statistics Office continued (80 officials participated). During the training special attention was paid to European standards of substantiation of the decisions of the national courts in civil, administrative and criminal cases, as well as the role of statistics in the fulfilment of international commitments.

The statistics sector was actively engaged in the Council of Europe project **'Promoting an Integrated Approach to End Violence against Women and Enhancing Gender Equality in Georgia'**, within the framework of which training was held for court officials in November on 'the collection of administrative data on violence against women and domestic violence', which aimed to inform the participants about international standards and recommendations, with an emphasis on the basic assessments under the Istanbul Convention and GREVIO, to facilitate the implementation of the recommended indicators, and to improve the collection of statistical information, pertaining to the methods of providing compensation to victims. As a result, work has begun to ensure the registration of statistical data of the cases submitted to courts regarding the compensation to be granted starting from next year to victims of violence against women and domestic violence.

During 2023, the statistics sector of the Supreme Court of Georgia actively cooperated with the IT Office of the Management Department of the Council of Justice in the process of upgrading the case management programme, in order to take into account all the indicators as much as possible that will ultimately lead to the possibility to receive the statistical data automatically.

In addition, a number of trainings/seminars have been conducted in the area of **civil, administrative and criminal law**. In particular, within the framework of the Council of Europe project 'Ensuring child-friendly justice in Georgia: preventing and protecting children from violence, including in the digital environment', on 6-8 June, training in criminal law was conducted for the employees of the Analytical Department of the Supreme Court of Georgia on the topic of online sexual abuse and sexual exploitation of children (with a total of 5 participants). Moreover, with the support of the EU twinning project and in cooperation with the Georgian National Competition Agency, on 23 June, training was conducted in civil law for judicial assistants on the topic 'protection of consumer rights – challenges and international experience' (with a total of 11 participants). In addition, with the support of the German Foundation for International Legal Cooperation (IRZ), on 7 July, a seminar was conducted with the participation of a German expert for judges at the Supreme Court of Georgia on the topic 'Topical issues of administrative law in the light of EU law' (with a total of 32 participants). Furthermore, with the support of the Embassy of Germany in Georgia, on 20 November, a meeting was held for judges at the Supreme Court with the participation of a German expert, Ulrich Hagenloch, on the topic 'the comparison of the organisational structure of the Georgian and German judicial systems (27 participants in total), and within the framework of the Council of Europe project 'Strengthening Independence and

Professionalism of Justice in Georgia', on 13-14 December, training was conducted for the judicial assistants of the Supreme Court on the latest practice of the European Court of Human Rights (25 participants in total).

During the reporting period, in order to develop **the strategy and action plan for the information and technological development of the judicial system**, a working group was established with the support of donor organisations, which comprises court chairpersons, managers, heads of the panel secretariats, the Chairperson of the Court Management Department of the High Council of Justice, and appointed field experts. The appointed experts have prepared an information and technological development strategy and a three-year action plan.

A working group comprising members of the High Council of Justice, court managers, and judicial officers, is at the final stage of preparation of the draft of the organisational work and case management procedures at common courts. The project will be finalised in the near future with the engagement of the members of the working group, judicial officers, the IT Group of the High Council of Justice, and the statistics sector of the Analytical Department of the Supreme Court.

In order to **raise public awareness** on judicial activities, the High Council of Justice has started preparing information pamphlets on the principles, rules, and procedures of judicial activities.

In order to raise public awareness on disciplinary proceedings against judges, during the reporting period, the Independent Inspector conducted a public lecture for students of the Caucasus University. During the lecture, the Independent Inspector provided information to the students about the system of disciplinary liability of judges and the powers of the Independent Inspector.

In order to prepare comments on the Norms of Judicial Ethics, on 24 March 2023, the High Council of Justice established a working group, which is composed of judges of the courts of all three instances. The working group is at the final stage of preparing comments on the Norms of Judicial Ethics.

The information technologies group of the High Council of Justice continues to work on building a new case management software platform.

In terms of justice reform, trainings were conducted during the reporting period, including the following:

- 'In-depth Training Course on Judicial Ethics', which was held on 11-12 February by the High School of Justice. A total of 18 judges were trained.
- 'Prohibition of Discrimination – Domestic Law and International Standards', which was held on 4-5 March and 13-14 May by the High School of Justice. A total of 10 judges and 22 public servants were trained.
- 'Elimination of Discrimination and Sexual Harassment and the Justice System of Georgia', which was held on 11-12 March within the framework of cooperation between the High School of Justice and the USAID Rule of Law Program. A total of 20 public servants were trained. The training was held for judges on 17-19 June, during which 12 judges were trained.
- 'Issues Related to Migration', which was held on 1-2 April by the High School of Justice. A total of 8 public servants were trained.
- On 6-7 May, within the framework of the cooperation between the High School of Justice and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), a training was held on issues of refugee

law. A total of 16 judges were trained. The second training on that topic was held on 20-21 May for public servants; as a result, 15 public servants were trained.

- On 17-19 June, the High School of Justice conducted training on the ‘prohibition of discrimination, sexual harassment, violence against women, and access to justice in the cases of violence against women’. A total of 12 judges were trained.
- On 7-8 October, the training ‘Migration Issues’ was conducted with cooperation between the High School of Justice and the IOM-UN Migration. 1 judge and 12 officials were trained.
- On 20-22 and 22-24 October, the High School of Justice conducted 2 training sessions on judicial ethics. A total of 44 judges were trained.

3.5 Civil Service Reform and the Fight against Corruption

During the reporting period, a number of activities were implemented regarding **civil service reform and the fight against corruption**.

With the support of the EU project ‘**Support to the Public Administration Reform in Georgia (PAR)**’, the **Civil Service Bureau has finalised a document on the analysis of the situation in public service**, which includes the vision and action plan for the development of the public service. The following important activities were carried out during the analysis: the existing documents were analysed, meetings were held in the format of interviews and focused discussions, and the data available to the Bureau were processed, during which local and foreign experts used various indicators. In addition, workshops were held with the participation of local and foreign experts and representatives from the Civil Service Bureau, as a result of which the vision of the development of public service and the respective action plan were developed. Furthermore, in order to become familiar with the analysis results provided in the document and the future priority directions of the Civil Service Bureau, determined based on the analysis results, an HR forum was held, which was attended by up to 50 representatives of human resources management (HRM) departments.

In accordance with the **methodology of strategic human resources management**, developed by the Civil Service Bureau with the support of the EU project ‘**Support to the Public Administration Reform in Georgia**’ (PAR), a training module ‘Strategic Workforce Planning’ was prepared. Workshops were held regarding the training module with the participation of up to 70 representatives from the HRM departments of central and public institutions.

During the reporting period, a **draft procedure for the HRM strategy** was drawn up on the basis of the HRM strategy development guidelines, which will provide methodological assistance to public institutions in the process of strategy development. The procedure is approved by an order of the Head of the Civil Service Bureau.

Within the framework of the project ‘**Fostering Decentralisation and Good Governance at the Local Level**’, implemented by the Civil Service Bureau with the support of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the Civil Service Bureau held meetings on the issues of public service reform for about 130 representatives of the HRM unit, who were acquainted, inter alia, with the HRM strategy guidelines.

On 11 January 2023, a meeting of the Public Administration Reform high-rank interagency coordination council was held with the organisation of the Administration of the Government of Georgia, as the agency coordinating the Public Administration Reform.

By Ordinance No 66 of 16 February 2023, the Government of Georgia approved the **2023-2026 Public Administration Reform Strategy and the 2023-2024 Action Plan for its implementation**.

In September 2023, the PAR Secretariat started the preparation of **the first progress (monitoring) report of the action plan**. In accordance with successfully established practice, representatives from local non-governmental and international organisations were actively involved in the monitoring process, who submitted to the Secretariat their evaluations/comments regarding the progress of the implementation of the action plan. **The monitoring report** will be submitted to the PAR Council at the beginning of 2024 and will be published on the website of the Government of Georgia.

On 20 December 2023, the administration of the Government of Georgia hosted **the 1st meeting of the high-rank interagency coordination council** of the Open Government Georgia. The OGP Georgia Council discussed the draft of the **5th Action Plan of Open Government Georgia for 2024-2025, which was approved by Ordinance No 555 of 29 December 2023 of the Government of Georgia**. As of January 2024, the implementation of the action plan has begun.

In connection with the Community Centre rebranding project, within the framework of which 89 Community Centres were united under the brand of the Public Service Hall, and more than 470 services became accessible to customers, a broad PR and marketing campaign has been carried out, including 2 video-clips broadcast on TV.

At the end of 2023, a user survey was conducted regarding awareness of the project. 88% of the surveyed users are informed of the Mobile Public Service Hall project.

The following services were introduced at the Public Service Hall:

services of the Pension Agency:

- disbursement of pension and pension assets (only in a form of single withdrawal);
- withdrawal from a pension scheme;
- updating/providing authorisation parameters;
- providing a certificate;
- application with optional content;
- selection of an investment profile.

services of the Georgian National Energy and Water Supply Regulatory Commission (GNERC):

- application with optional content.

The Georgian e-service (digital Public Service Hall) portal is being updated and a mobile application is being developed. As a result of an updated portal, e-services will be more easily accessible to persons with disabilities. Works to be performed within the framework of updating the portal have been planned and scheduled. Work continues on the UI/UX design. The process of replacement of services uploaded in an iframe format is also actively underway, because the services uploaded in this format are not compatible with the options available for persons with disabilities.

The development of the first phase of the **mobile application** has been completed, is currently being tested, and work continues to improve both its design and its functionality.

The development and testing for the introduction on the portal of the qualified electronic signature visualisation has been completed. The process of complete integration on the portal of the iframe services of the Public Registry and of the updating of current services is underway. In order to integrate the new services of the LEPL Public Service Development Agency, the development of information services has been completed and is being tested before their placement in a real environment; the integration of functional services continues as well. The integration of the services of other agencies is underway.

The development of the first stage of the MY.GOV.GE mobile application has been completed and the application is being tested before launching in a real environment. Both the most demanded services and the new information services and digital documents have been integrated into the application.

173 employees of the agency providing state services have undergone trainings, and the unified approaches/principles envisaged by the strategy were implemented in at least one direction at the following 6 agencies:

1. LEPL Public Service Development Agency (the Ministry of Justice of Georgia);
2. LEPL National Agency of Public Registry (the Ministry of Justice of Georgia);
3. LEPL Revenue Service (the Ministry of Finance of Georgia);
4. LEPL National Agency of State Property (the Ministry of Economy and Sustainable Development of Georgia);
5. NNLE Rural Development Agency (the Ministry of Environmental Protection and Agriculture of Georgia);
6. LEPL Pension Agency.

In order to create the necessary environment **for the recognition of the qualified trust services in Georgia by the EU**, a document has been prepared, which includes recommendations on the approximation of the qualified trust services to EU standards. The recommendation document has been prepared by Tarvi Martens, an expert in electronic authentication and trusted services, hired within the framework of EU technical support.

8 training activities were carried out **on the issues of the investigation and criminal prosecution of crimes of corruption**. A total of **18 prosecutors and investigators of the Prosecutor's Office** were retrained within the framework of the training activities.

In order to deepen international cooperation and share the experience of partner countries in the area of the **prevention of and the fight against corruption**, 8 events were held in 2023, in which representatives from the State Security Service participated, including the following:

- The 11th and 12th pre-operational meetings of the Interpol Anti-Transnational Financial Crime Working Group and operation 'First Light 2023', in an online format.
- A seminar held by the German Foundation for International Legal Cooperation (IRZ) in Dusseldorf, Germany, **on issues of fighting against corruption**.
- The 1st meeting of the regional interagency Black Sea Anti-Corruption Working Group held at the International Law Enforcement Academy (ILEA) in Budapest, Hungary with the support of the Transnational Anti-Corruption Partnership (TAP) programme of the Federal Bureau of Investigation of the USA, the Office of Overseas Prosecutorial Development Assistance and Training (OPDAT) of the U.S. Department of Justice, and the Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs (INL).

- A regular meeting of the Working Subgroup on Combating Corruption and Money Laundering held within the framework of the Organization for Democracy and Economic Development (GUAM).
- The 10th Annual Women in Policing Conference held in Tbilisi with the organisation of the Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs (INL) of the U.S. Embassy in Georgia. The event brought together women working in law enforcement agencies from around the world.
- 2 meetings on issues of fighting against corruption were held between representatives from the Anti-Corruption Agency of the State Security Service and the U.S. Embassy in Georgia.

In 2023, with the engagement of the State Security Service and relevant agencies, **7 draft agreements on the exchange and mutual protection of classified information and 2 draft agreements on cooperation in the area of crime, including the fight against corruption**, were initiated and the respective consultations/negotiations are being carried out with partner countries and international organisations.

In addition, the State Security Service has initiated and respective consultations are being carried out with the relevant agency of a partner country on a draft memorandum of understanding on cooperation in the area of the fight against corruption.

4. Freedom, Security and Justice

4.1 Personal Data Protection

On 14 June 2023, the Parliament of Georgia adopted **the Law of Georgia on Personal Data Protection**. A number of meetings were held with both private and public sectors before the adoption of the draft law. In all, 20 information meetings were held with 1 565 interested persons.

In order to raise public awareness of the activities of the **Personal Data Protection Service of Georgia**, and to increase trust therein, the following **awareness raising campaigns** were conducted during the reporting period: In order to raise public awareness, 204 posts were published on the official website and social media account of the Service. The campaign ‘confidentiality is your right’ was carried out, which consisted of 5 video clips and the total number of access was 255 000. 18 television programmes were broadcast in the morning and afternoon, which hosted representatives of the Service. Informational posters were displayed in Tbilisi metro and buses. An information corner on personal data protection was opened at Ivane Javakhishvili Tbilisi State University.

The first 2023 edition of a bilingual, international, academic periodical journal ‘**Personal Data Protection Law**’, founded by the Personal Data Protection Service, was published in both the Georgian and English languages. The journal has successfully passed the indexing process in the HeinOnline research database. The official website of the journal has been developed: www.journal.pdps.ge.

It should be noted that, in order to implement the internationally recognised standards of personal data protection, an international academic conference ‘The State of Personal Data Protection and Its Legal Aspects in Georgia’ was held, which was organised by the Service.

The Service had also prepared the following **draft legal acts, most of which were also adopted**:

- a new Law of Georgia **on Personal Data Protection** (adopted);
- a **draft Code of Ethics** (adopted);
- a **draft procedure for disciplinary proceedings** (adopted);
- **draft amendments to the Procedure of Examining the Lawfulness of Personal Data Processing** (adopted);

- **2 draft amendments to the statute of the Personal Data Protection Service** (adopted);
- **draft procedures for internship at the Personal Data Protection Service** (adopted);
- **a draft of the criteria for determining incidents posing a significant threat to fundamental human rights and freedoms, and of the procedure for notifying the Personal Data Protection Service of an incident** (prepared);
- **a draft of the criteria for determining the circumstances giving rise to the obligation for a data protection impact assessment and of the assessment procedure** (prepared);
- **a draft document on determining the category of persons who are not obliged to designate/appoint a personal data protection officer** (prepared);
- **a draft procedure for registering a special representative by the Personal Data Protection Service** (prepared).

In addition, the Service has prepared a number of individual legal acts (including policy documents):

4 recommendation documents about personal data protection law:

- a guide to the appointment and activities of a personal data protection officer (prepared);
- a guide to the implementation of measures related to an incident (prepared);
- guideline recommendations for public institutions on issuing/updating internal legal acts for ensuring compliance with the Law of Georgia on Personal Data Protection (prepared);
- a guide for the private sector to important changes envisaged by a new Law of Georgia on Personal Data Protection, and to their implementation (prepared).

In addition, a thematic recommendation document ‘**Guide to the Protection of Minors’ Personal Data: Theory and Practice**’ has been prepared.

A syllabus and a thematic guide have been prepared on the topic of **children’s personal data protection**. Moreover, **the gender equality policy document has been approved** by an act of the Head of the Service, regarding which a number of meetings were held. Information about the approved document has been provided to the employees of the Service. Therefore, the gender equality policy document has been implemented in practice.

Consultations have been held with public institutions, private organisations, law enforcement agencies and natural persons on issues related to personal data protection. **5 106 consultations** were provided during the reporting period.

In order to take into consideration personal data protection standards, **170 internal national draft legal acts have been examined**. The process continues without interruption based on the referral of the agencies.

3 statements and 7 decisions related to cases of high public interest were published on the official website and social network page of the Service.

The Personal Data Protection Service started the inspection of the lawfulness of data processing regarding 192 facts. 78 inspections were scheduled, and 114 inspections were unscheduled.

267 incidents of offences were identified, 39 of which were identified as a result of inspections started in 2022 and completed during the reporting period, and 228 were identified as a result of inspections started and completed during the reporting period.

In 225 identified incidents of offences the Service imposed fines and warnings as administrative sanctions. Out of the 123 fines imposed as administrative sanctions, 19 were imposed as a result of inspections started in 2022 and completed during the reporting period, and 104 were imposed as a result of inspections started and completed during the reporting period.

Out of the imposed 102 warnings, 15 were imposed as a result of inspections started in 2022 and completed during the reporting period, and 87 were imposed as a result of inspections started and completed during the reporting period.

In addition to imposing administrative sanctions, in order to eliminate the deficiencies identified at the institutions/organisations and to remedy the shortcomings, **the Service provides recommendations and assigns mandatory tasks**. The Service has assigned and provided **469 tasks and recommendations** for public and private organisations and law enforcement agencies. Out of 456 assigned tasks, 63 were related to inspections started in 2022 and completed during the reporting period, and 393 were related to inspections started and completed during the reporting period. Out of 13 provided recommendations, 1 was related to the inspection started in 2022 and completed during the reporting period, and 12 were related to inspections started and completed in 2023.

The employees of the **Personal Data Protection Service** participated in 136 qualification upgrading events. In order to ensure the availability of the **training courses of the Personal Data Protection Service** for the general public, it is planned to launch a remote platform **that will be adapted to the needs of persons with disabilities**. The rebranding of the electronic platform has been completed. It is planned to develop special modules that will be integrated into the platform and will be accessible to the general public. It is noteworthy that the platform is fully adapted to the needs of persons with disabilities.

In order to raise awareness among public servants, representatives of the private sector, interested persons, and different target groups on issues of personal data protection, the Service conducted **62 trainings/information meetings** in which **3 158 trainees** participated.

Consultations have been held with public institutions, private organisations, law enforcement agencies and natural persons on issues related to personal data protection. **5 106 consultations** were provided during the reporting period.

4.2 Migration and Asylum

In February, an extensive questionnaire completed by the member agencies of the Migration Commission was submitted to the Directorate-General for Migration and Home Affairs (DG HOME) of the European Commission, based on which a so-called **2022 Consolidated Report on Migration and Asylum** has been prepared, in which information about Georgia and other observer countries has been included together with other EU Member States. Along with the text of the report, the European Migration Network (EMN) was also provided with statistical information from the last five years (2018-2022) with regard to migration and asylum, by means of a special file dedicated to data collection by the member agencies of the Commission.

Based on a completed questionnaire and the submitted statistical information, **together with the consolidated report, the EMN has also prepared the 2022 country review document**, which represents a resume of the national report and is accompanied by a statistical annex.

Furthermore, the secretariat of the Migration Commission has been working, together with member agencies, on the preparation of the EMN national report, which is similar to a migration profile in terms of content and

has been prepared from the perspective of the country of destination of migrants (immigration). The document contains information only about Georgia and describes in more detail the developments in the country in 2022 in terms of migration. The document, which has been drawn up according to ten thematic directions, also contains relevant statistical data in order to better analyse migration trends.

The work on the 2022 National Report on Migration and Asylum was completed and it was submitted to the EMN on 5 May 2023 (it was uploaded on the EMN internal portal).

The draft 2024 Action Plan for the 2021-2030 Migration Strategy of Georgia was prepared under the coordination of the Secretariat of the State Commission on Migration Issues and with intensive communication with its member agencies, which was also agreed with donor/international organisations and was approved at the 32nd meeting of the Commission on 26 December 2023.

During the reporting period, under readmission agreements concluded by Georgia, **the Migration Department of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Georgia** reviewed the readmission applications of **4 365 persons, 4 343** of which were decided positively, and **22** of which were decided negatively.

On 26 January 2023, the **'Agreement between the Government of the United Kingdom and the Government of Georgia on the readmission of persons residing without authorisation'** was signed. The Agreement entered into force on 1 May 2023.

On 16 February 2023, a protocol was signed between **Georgia and Spain on the implementation of the 'Agreement between the European Union and Georgia on the readmission of persons residing without authorisation'**.

On 1 June 2023, the **'Agreement between Georgia and Iceland on the readmission of persons residing without authorisation'** entered into force.

4 536 non-biometric passports were annulled from 1 January to 25 December 2023, inclusive. In total, 2 080 non-biometric passports remained valid. A total of 315 480 biometric passports were issued during that period.

Within the framework of the State Programme for Supporting Reintegration of Returned Georgian Migrants, **365 beneficiaries were engaged in the Programme and obtained financing.**

In 2023, 2 550 persons benefited from the foreigners' integration programme offered by the **Integration Centre for Internationally Protected Persons.**

4.3 Border Management

In order to enhance the capacities of the employees of the **Border Police**, modules designed according to the existing challenges in the area of effective border management have been developed and implemented; the employees of the Border Police have been retrained according to modern standards.

In order to deepen cooperation with the border management agencies of partner countries in the area of border management, **in March 2023, the 2023-2024 Cooperation Plan was signed to deepen cooperation with the Republic of Moldova.**

On 24 April 2023, the Head of the Border Police of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Georgia and the Head of the Border Agency of **the Republic of Lithuania** signed the **2023-2024 Cooperation Plan** in Vilnius.

On 14 June 2023, the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Georgia and the Hellenic Republic Ministry of National Defence signed a technical agreement ‘on placement of the personnel of the Coast Guard Department of the Border Police of Georgia, a state subordinate agency of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Georgia, on the vessels of the Hellenic Navy during the participation in the NATO’s maritime security operation ‘Operation Sea Guardian’ (OSG)’.

During the reporting period, with the financial assistance of the EU, within the framework of the EU programme ‘Security, Accountability and Fight against Crime in Georgia’ (SAFE) and with the support of the International Organization for Migration (IOM):

- an electronic surveillance system was installed on the protected sections of two border sectors (by the LEPL Operative-Technical Agency of Georgia of the State Security Service of Georgia);
- 10 vehicles (SUZUKI JIMNY) were provided to the Border Police of Georgia;
- 10 lorries (IVECO) were provided to the Border Police of Georgia;
- the equipment necessary for installing the MIA network at 6 border sectors was provided to the Border Police of Georgia.

With the financial support of the U.S. Defense Threat Reduction Agency (DTRA), various items of CBRN safety equipment were provided to the personnel of two Island-class patrol boats and the Coast Guard boarding teams of the Coast Guard Department.

With the assistance of the U.S. European Command (EUCOM), within the framework of Phase II of the Black Sea Maritime Domain Awareness (MDA) project, the radio stations were upgraded on 8 vessels of the Coast Guard Department. Within the framework of Phase III of the project, the infrastructure necessary for the installation of underwater monitoring system was arranged at the Coast Guard Department.

With the assistance of the U.S. Export Control and Related Border Security Program (EXBS), in order to improve land border defence, the Border Police of Georgia was provided with:

- 2 off-road vehicles;
- 5 thermal vision devices;
- 21 handheld radio devices.

In order to enhance cooperation with the European Border and Coast Guard Agency (Frontex), five departments of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Georgia (the Border Police, the Patrol Police Department, the Information-Analytical Department, the Migration Department, and the MIA Academy) are actively engaged in activities organised by Frontex. During the reporting period, 79 employees of the Ministry of Internal Affairs participated in 14 events organised by Frontex.

Among other events, a high-level meeting held on 21 November 2023 between the heads of the border management agencies of the partner countries in the process of joining the EU and the Frontex Management Board is noteworthy. Georgia, as a country in the process of joining the EU, participated for the first time in a meeting of this format together with other EU partner countries.

In addition, in order to reduce the flow of illegal migrants from Georgia, within the framework of cooperation with Frontex, from 1 January to 31 December 2023, **employees from the Patrol Police Department of the Ministry of Internal Affairs were deployed at airports in the following EU Member States:** 11 times in Latvia, 7 times in Poland, twice in Italy, and once in France and Czech Republic. During the same period, in order to share best practices and experience, Georgian officers were seconded to the Port of Constanța in Romania and to the border checkpoints in Latvia, Moldova (twice in Palanka and twice in Giurgiulesti), Poland (Terespol), and Estonia (Narva).

At the same time, during the reporting period, the Migration Department of the Ministry of Internal Affairs participated in **26 joint return operations**, as a result of which **1 338 persons** were returned to Georgia.

4.4 Combating Organised Crime

The Ministry of Internal Affairs of Georgia continues to take action **against organised criminal groups**. For this purpose, **the 2023-2024 Action Plan of the 2021-2024 National Strategy for Combating Organised Crime** had been prepared, which was approved by Ordinance No 148 of 11 April 2023 of the Government of Georgia. It is notable that the recommendations produced by the working group established under the auspices of the Defence and Security Committee of the Parliament of Georgia were taken into consideration in the Action Plan, in order to implement the recommendations of the working groups on combating organised crime and on combating cybercrime and of the European Commission. During the reporting period, within the framework of the preparation of the said Action Plan, a meeting of the interagency coordination council was held.

In order to inform the public about the activities carried out and the achieved results in the direction of combating organised crime, the respective information is regularly published on the official platforms of the Ministry and on the Facebook page of the Central Criminal Police Department of the Ministry. The information campaign against organised crime is being carried out in the following **four areas: cybercrime, criminal mentality, trafficking, and drug-related crime**.

During the reporting period, **4 briefings were held** in relation to organised crime. The briefings were broadcast on television, social networks and news agencies.

The employees of the Ministry of Internal Affairs held meetings at schools on the topic of raising awareness of organised crime. At the meetings, representatives from the respective divisions of the Ministry presented to the pupils video clips on the topic of organised crime in relation to trafficking, cybercrime, ‘thief in law’ mentality, and drug-related crime.

On 21-22 June 2023, the Ministry of Internal Affairs took part in the ‘**Georgia Cybersecurity Forum 2023**’, which was organised by the office of the National Security Council.

During the reporting period, 2 episodes of season 6 of the series ‘Police Files’ were broadcast on television and social networks, which were dedicated to the issues of organised crime.

With the support of the UN Office on Drugs and Crime, the **Container Control Programme (CCP)** is being implemented in Georgia, together with more than 20 other countries of the world, the purpose of which is to assess risk factors for shipped cargo, to carry out surveillance, and if necessary, to open and inspect the cargo.

The division established within the framework of the CCP has identified a risky shipment and seized 80 kg of the narcotic drug heroin at Poti Port, which was headed to European countries.

At the end of 2023, at the summarising briefing of the year held at the Ministry, the Director of the Central Criminal Police Department spoke in detail about policing measures and their outcomes in the fight against drug-related crime. In addition, the facts of the arrest of a number of drug dealers worldwide as a result of large-scale and complex operations and the successful fight against drug dealers were also mentioned.

During the reporting period, as a result of measures taken by the Central Criminal Police Department for the purpose of detecting, eliminating and preventing organised crime, **criminal proceedings were brought against 160 participants in 46 organised criminal groups.**

In addition, active measures are being taken against the '**criminal underworld**' both within the country and abroad, in close cooperation with our foreign colleagues. During the reporting period, criminal proceedings were brought against 4 'thieves in law', and criminal prosecutions started against 71 persons on charges of participating in 'gatherings of thieves in law', membership of the 'criminal underworld', supporting the 'criminal underworld', and contacting a 'thief in law'.

The Ministry of Internal Affairs of Georgia continued active work in respect of **intelligence-led policing and community-oriented policing.** During the reporting period, a special working group prepared the **2023-2025 Action Plan of the 2021-2025 Strategy for the Development of Intelligence-Led Policing**, which was approved by **Order No 1/153 of 5 April 2023 of the Minister of Internal Affairs.**

During 2023, public order officers visited 25 schools in Tbilisi, where they met about 1 400 teenagers and talked about a number of priority issues, among which **raising awareness about organised crime** was one of the important topics.

A special training course for analysts was prepared and approved by the MIA Academy. Within the framework of the said training, 94 employees of the Ministry of Internal Affairs were retrained.

In addition, 3 employees of the Information-Analytical Department of the Ministry of Internal Affairs participated in the training for cyber security analysts, which was held on 13-15 December 2023 under the organisation of **the office of the National Security Council of Georgia and the UK-Georgia Cyber Partnership (UKGCP) programme.**

Within the framework of the EU-funded project '**Training and Operational Partnership Against Organised Crime**' (TOPCOP), a representative from the Information-Analytical Department of the Ministry of Internal Affairs participated in the workshop of the Analysis Network Composed of Analysis Single Points of Contact (ANASPOC), held on 5-7 September and 11-13 December 2023, in the Hague, Netherlands.

Active work is being carried out by the **Special Investigation Service** for the purpose of the effective and unbiased investigation of cases assigned to its investigative jurisdiction.

Within the framework of the formation of the unified investigation policy, in Q1 of 2023, the Special Investigation Service drew up two new guidelines: 1) **guidelines for correct legal qualification of torture and cruel treatment and related crimes** (February-April 2023); 2) **investigation quality monitoring guidelines** (January-February 2023).

On 8 May 2023, the **Victims' Rights Protection Unit** was established by an order of the Head of the Special Investigation Service, which is staffed by the advisors of victims, witnesses and affected persons. The primary goal of the employees of the said Unit is to provide consultations to victims, witnesses and affected persons about their rights, and to inform them about the mechanisms created for their protection and investigation and other procedures, in order to make it as easy as possible for victims, witnesses and affected persons to defend themselves, to overcome psychological difficulties, to build trust in state institutions and to have the sense of justice.

On 8 May 2023, **III Division of East Georgia** was established under the Investigation Department by an order of the Head of the Special Investigation Service. The Division is completely focused on the investigation of crimes committed against human rights and freedoms, which enables the Investigation Department to have investigators who are specialised in crimes of qualitatively different categories, nature and content. Such investigators investigate only one category of crimes, which makes the investigation process more efficient and potentially increases the rate of opening cases.

Two new regional offices were established in Samegrelo-Zemo Svaneti and Kakheti for the purpose of geographical accessibility. The regional offices were staffed with professionals selected through open competition. Work will continue in the coming years in order to ensure regional accessibility. During the reporting period, in active cooperation with Gori and Rustavi municipalities, plots of land were transferred to the Service for building offices. Work on the construction projects is underway.

For the professional development of the employees, 31 training activities were carried out for 316 participants in January-June 2023.

Since the establishment of the Service, information related to its activities, implemented reforms, challenges and future development plans has been proactively published on the official Facebook page of the Service. Official statements are being made on cases of high public interest and the public is being informed about ongoing cases. During 2023, the Special Investigation Service **made 47 official statements, and held 2 briefings and up to 50 informational meetings.**

The founding conference of the public-private partnership platform in the area of cybersecurity **was organised by the LEPL Digital Governance Agency** with the support of the EU twinning project. Organisations with different mandates and critical information entities in the area of cybersecurity at the national level participated in the event. Representatives of public and private sectors will share knowledge and experience with one another about the introduction of new reliable products and solutions, innovative approaches, new standards and best practices, through the platform.

The platform has two co-chairs (one from public sector and one from private sector). Several working groups will be formed, within the framework of which the participants will discuss and agree on common and best solutions to problematic issues.

The members of the public-private partnership platform are the organisations with different mandates and critical information entities in the area of cybersecurity at the national level such as the LEPL Digital Governance Agency, the National Security Council of Georgia, the Cyber Security Bureau of the Ministry of Defence of Georgia, and the Operative-Technical Agency of the State Security Service of Georgia.

4.5 Combating Illegal Drugs

On 24 February 2023, the **2023-2030 National Strategy on Drug Policy and the 2023-2024 Action Plan** were approved at the meeting of the Interagency Coordination Council on the Fight against Drug Abuse.

Information on the drug situation in the country is being continuously exchanged with the **European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction (EMCDDA)** both within the framework of the bilateral project 'EMCDDA4GE' between the EMCDDA and Georgia, and within the framework of the European Neighbourhood Policy regional project 'EU4MD', which combines the Eastern European Neighbourhood Policy countries as well (Ukraine, Moldova, Armenia, and Azerbaijan). In 2023, the member agencies of the Council participated in up to 10 regional meetings. A dialogue within the framework of the Eastern Partnership countries was not held during the reporting period.

In respect of raising awareness among decision-makers and representatives from municipalities on issues of preventing drug abuse, decision-makers from municipalities and school principals (in all 40 persons) were trained in evidence-based prevention issues. **The training was conducted on the basis of the training course 'European Prevention Curriculum' (EUPC) in compliance with to the EMCDDA standards.**

A bilateral project 'EMCDDA4GE' between the EMCDDA and Georgia was successfully implemented, the closing event of which was held on 14 June. Most of the activities planned within the framework of the project were successfully carried out, and the mechanisms of information collection, monitoring, analysis and reporting with regard to the drug situation in the country, were improved. In terms of prevention, the EUPC has been translated and adapted, which is actively used for the training of decision-makers. In addition, a general population survey (GPS) has been conducted and its guidelines have been adapted to promote effective treatment approaches.

Within the framework of the project 'Developing a Drug Prevention Support Network for Parents and Professionals in Georgia', in cooperation and partnership with the EMCDDA, the Pompidou Group of the Council of Europe has completed regional cascade trainings for school principals and representatives from local self-government bodies (municipalities) of Georgia, including decision-making persons. During 2023, trainings were held in 10 municipalities: Tbilisi, Rustavi, Gori, Telavi, Akhaltsikhe, Batumi, Poti, Zugdidi, Kutaisi and Zestaponi. 146 persons were trained.

In order to implement **the National Early Warning System (NEWS)**, the existing challenges and thematic agencies and organisations have been identified at the initial stage. A working group has been created, which is actively working on the development of the EWS model in the country. A conceptual framework document has also been prepared, which describes the EWS implementation stages. An interagency coordination meeting was held on 19 September, during which the conceptual framework was discussed and specific steps were planned in terms of the implementation of NEWS.

The minutes of the meetings for monitoring the implementation of the 2021-2022 Action Plan of the National Strategy on Drug Policy have been prepared, which contain detailed information on the implementation of the activities envisaged by the Action Plan. During 2021-2023, 4 monitoring meetings were held.

A new departmental accountability system has been introduced, which has been operational since 2021 and entails face-to-face (remote, during the pandemic) meetings between the relevant agencies every six months and verbal reporting on the activities carried out during the past period, together with a respective

presentation. Such an approach proved to be more effective than the existing written reporting system. At the face-to-face meetings, the representatives from the member agencies are able to discuss issues that are relevant in their agencies at a given stage, to hear recommendations from other member agencies about emerging challenges, and in some cases, to resolve issues in cooperation with several agencies. The meetings have been held once in every six months. In 2021-2022, **4 meetings were held for the purpose of monitoring the implementation of the drug policy action plan**, namely on 16 July 2021, on 20 January 2022, on 11 October 2022, and on 7 February 2023.

Georgia continues taking active steps **against drug trafficking**. As a result of operational and investigative measures carried out during the reporting period, **282 drug dealers were arrested. 89 persons** were arrested and prosecuted for selling drugs online, and **12 online drug selling outlets were closed. 82 persons were arrested on charges of drug smuggling**.

4.6 Fighting against Terrorism/Money Laundering and Financing of Terrorism

In order to comply with recommendations and ensure further approximation, legislative amendments had been prepared, and on 16 May 2023, the Parliament of Georgia approved the draft Law of Georgia on Making Amendments to the Law of Georgia on Facilitating the Prevention of Money Laundering and the Financing of Terrorism, by which MONEYVAL recommendations have been taken into account.

In order to fulfil the requirements of the Financial Action Task Force (FATF) Special Recommendation VI of 2012 related to terrorist financing (on financial sanctions related to terrorism and terrorist financing), the following activities have been carried out:

- On 29 November 2023, legislative amendments to the Law of Georgia on Money Laundering and the Financing of Terrorism and the Law of Georgia on Enforcement Proceedings were adopted.
- On 5 June 2023, the statute of the State Commission for Implementation of United Nations Security Council Resolutions was approved.
- The rule and procedure for the formation of lists of sanctioned persons has been prepared and was adopted on 26 April 2023.
- 2 persons were included in the local list of sanctioned persons.
- On 26 April 2023, a meeting of the State Commission for Implementation of United Nations Security Council Resolutions was held.
- On 26 April 2023, at the meeting of the State Commission, the guidelines for the implementation of the sanctions of the UN Security Council were approved.
- In November 2023, the draft guidelines for combating money laundering and the financing of terrorism were prepared for notaries.
- With the assistance of the EU project, a workshop was planned with the Chamber of Notaries of Latvia, in order to share experience in the area of supervision.

Since February 2023, **the Anti-Money Laundering Supervision Department has been functioning at the Service for Accounting, Reporting and Auditing Supervision of the Ministry of Finance of Georgia, which supervises the accountants providing professional services, accounting companies, certified accountants, auditors, and audit firms for the purposes of facilitating the prevention of money laundering and the financing of terrorism. 2 employees of the Department have obtained the ACAMS CAMS certification.**

According to the legislative amendments of December 2022 to the **Law of Georgia on Facilitating the Prevention of Money Laundering and the Financing of Terrorism** and the **Law of Georgia on Accounting, Reporting and Audit**, the accountants providing professional services and accounting companies were added to the list of obliged entities, which contributes to the compliance with Article 2(1)(3) of the 4th EU Directive (2015/849). With respect to the obliged entities Order N-3 of the Head of the Service for Accounting, Reporting and Auditing Supervision of the Ministry of Finance of Georgia ‘**on approval of the procedure for keeping the state registry of accountants providing professional services and the state registry of accounting companies in electronic form, as well as their structure and form, and the list of information contained in them, and the procedure for the identification of users**’ entered into force on 3 May 2023, which ensures the identification of the said entities. This serves for compliance with the obligation provided for in Article 48(2) of the 4th EU Directive (2015/849), according to which the Service should have appropriate capabilities to ensure supervision, which in turn is a precondition for fulfilling the requirements of Section 2 (Supervision) of Chapter 6 of the said Directive with respect to the Service.

On 25 August 2023, Order No 5-8 of the Head of the **Service for Accounting, Reporting and Auditing Supervision** ‘on approval of the procedure for obtaining continuing education in the area of facilitating the prevention of money laundering and the financing of terrorism’ entered into force. In addition, Order No 5-9 on making amendments to Order No 5-13 of 18 August 2017 of the Head of the Service for Accounting, Reporting and Auditing Supervision on approval of the continuing education standards’, prepared by the Service, entered into force.

On 7 November 2023, Order No 5-14 of the Head of the Service for Accounting, Reporting and Auditing Supervision ‘**on the procedure for examining the structure of ownership and control (administration) of clients, and for identifying and verifying beneficial owners by an obliged entity**’ entered into force, which aims to create guidelines for obliged entities with respect to the process of examining the structure of client ownership and control (administration), and of identifying and verifying the ownership structure, which in turn will support the obliged entities to carry out their activities in accordance with the **FATF** recommendations.

During the reporting period, a training of trainers on issues of money laundering and the financing of terrorism was held for auditors and the respective employees of audit firms, under the **Public Administration Reform in Georgia (PAR)**.

Two meetings were held with obliged entities with regard to the legislative amendments related to facilitating the prevention of money laundering and the financing of terrorism and ‘the procedures for keeping the state registries of accountants providing professional services and accounting companies in electronic form’.

On 6 September 2023, the Service published the **Guidelines for Fighting against Money Laundering and the Financing of Terrorism**. The Guidelines will provide valuable assistance to the obliged entities in the introduction of effective mechanisms for facilitating the prevention, detection and elimination of money laundering and the financing of terrorism. It is a recommendatory document, which was drawn up within the framework of the EU project ‘Support to the Public Administration Reform in Georgia’.

In 2023, with the engagement of the State Security Service and relevant agencies, the **Agreement on the Exchange and Protection of Classified Information with the European Union Agency for Law Enforcement Cooperation (Europol)** was signed by Georgia and sent to the other side for signature. In addition, **7 draft agreements** on the exchange and protection of classified information and **2 draft agreements** on cooperation in

the area of crime, including the fight against terrorism, were initiated and the respective consultations/negotiations are being carried out with partner countries and international organisations.

4.7 Legal Cooperation

The LEPL MIA Academy, as a contact entity for **the European Union Agency for Law Enforcement Training (CEPOL)** in Georgia, coordinates CEPOL Exchange Programmes and residential/online training courses and webinars. In 2023, within the framework of the **TOPCOP** exchange programme financed by the EU, 14 employees of the law enforcement bodies upgraded qualifications, 5 employees underwent online English language courses, and 2 employees completed the online OSINT course.

In 2023, 29 activities (training, webinars, workshops and study visits) **were carried out** within the framework of the same project, in which 159 representatives participated.

On 11-15 December 2023, for the first time in Georgia, CEPOL and TOPCOP organised the training of trainers on the topic of fighting against drug-related crimes, which was hosted by the MIA Academy.

In 2023, a total of 9 500 requests were exchanged with foreign states by **the Centre of International Cooperation in Law Enforcement of the Central Criminal Police Department** using different channels (Europol, Interpol, attachés, and bilateral cooperation), including more than 1 300 requests which were received and operational information about 19 500 persons which was exchanged through the Secure Information Exchange Network Application (SIENA).

Within the framework of cooperation with Europol, Georgia, together with Italy, Greece and Ukraine, is participating **in the joint investigation group for fighting against illegal migration**.

In 2023, a number of significant activities was carried out in the direction of deepening cooperation with Europol, including the following:

- The State Security Service implemented the necessary procedures for **launching the Counter Terrorism Secure Information Exchange Network Application (CT SIENA)**, including a meeting held between the parties (in a video-conference format), during which the technical details necessary for launching the CT SIENA were agreed. In addition, the agency determined the relevant responsible persons.
- **Agreement on the Exchange and Protection of Classified Information between Europol and Georgia** was signed by Georgia and the signed texts were sent for signature to Europol through diplomatic channels.

On the initiative of and as a result of the measures taken by the State Security Service, Georgia became a member of the following four of **Europol's counter-terrorism analysis projects**:

- project 'Travellers';
- project 'Terrorist Finance Tracking Program' (TFTP);
- project 'Check the Web' (CTW);
- project 'AP Hydra'.

In addition, in parallel to joining the Analysis Projects, on the initiative of the State Security Service, Georgia automatically became a member of **Europol's Counter Terrorism Joint Liaison Team (CT JLT)**.

During the reporting period, **the multinational exercise EU MODEX 2023 was conducted in Georgia** with the organisation of the Emergency Management Service of the Ministry of Internal Affairs and within the

framework of the EU Civil Protection Mechanism. The goals of the exercise were to improve coordinated actions between state agencies in the process of responding to emergency situations, to provide technical (expert) support during crises in the country, and to test the support regulations of the host country. Employees of the Emergency Management Service and the Border Police of the Ministry of Internal Affairs, the National Security Council, the National Guard of the Defence Forces of the Ministry of Defence of Georgia, the National Forestry Agency, the Roads Department of Georgia, the City Hall of Borjomi Municipality, and the EU Delegation to Georgia, took part in the exercise.

Within the framework of investigation by the Office of the Prosecutor at The Hague International Criminal Court of crimes committed during the 2008 Russia-Georgia war, appropriate domestic procedures were implemented to fulfil the requests of the Office of the Prosecutor and to efficiently pursue the investigation. Effective coordination with the respective state agencies, and the gathering, analysis, and provision of information to the Office of the Prosecutor, are continuously carried out. Meetings on issues important for cooperation and on the signing of international agreements are regularly held with representatives of the International Criminal Court.

It is noteworthy that as a result of the ongoing cooperation, on 10 March 2022, the Office of the Prosecutor at The Hague International Criminal Court submitted to the pre-trial chamber requests to issue orders for the arrest of 3 accused persons (representatives of Tskhinvali ‘government’) with respect to the episode of crimes committed against Georgian civilian hostages during the ‘August War’. As on 30 June 2022, the International Criminal Court issued orders for the arrest of the representatives of the de facto ‘government’ of the Tskhinvali region accused of the torture and ill-treatment of Georgian civilian hostages, Georgia continues close cooperation with the Court, including for the purpose of enforcing the orders, in order for the perpetrators to be brought before the courts of international justice.

It should be noted that the Government of Georgia continues to cooperate with the **Trust Funds for Victims (TFV) of the International Criminal Court**. In this regard, it is notable that, since 1 April 2023, the TFV has been implementing an assistance programme for the victims of the August War, the duration of which is 3 years, with a total budget of EUR 600 000. The services offered within the framework of the programme include both medical and physical rehabilitation and livelihood and financial support.

The 2005 Convention on Choice of Court Agreements has been submitted to the Parliament of Georgia for ratification, and currently committee discussions are in progress.

On 25 May 2023, the Minister of Justice of Georgia signed the 2007 **Hague Convention on the International Recovery of Child Support and Other Forms of Family Maintenance** and the Protocol of 23 November 2007 of the 2007 **Hague Convention on the Law Applicable to Maintenance Obligations**. The Convention and its Protocol were ratified by the Parliament of Georgia on 15 December 2023. In order to implement the Conventions, the preparation of guidelines and the training of employees of the respective agencies will begin in 2024.

The preparatory works are underway for recognising the accession of the respective states to the 1980 **Hague Convention on the Civil Aspects of International Child Abduction**.

5. Trade and Trade-related Matters

In order to support the participation of Georgian companies in international events, trade fairs and missions in EU Member States, in 2023, with the help of the LEPL Enterprise Georgia, representatives of small and medium-sized enterprises participated in 10 international exhibitions and 2 fashion week showrooms held in Italy, Germany, Portugal and France. In total 114 co-financing events have been carried out by the Agency.

Within the framework of the programme supporting co-financing of loan/leasing interest for small and medium-sized enterprises by the Agency, in 2023, 655 loans/leasing co-financing were approved for 560 companies under the universal programmes, with the total approved amount of GEL 519.6 million. Within the framework of the above projects, it is planned to make investments of a total amount of GEL 898.1 million, and to create more than 5 700 new jobs.

Within the framework of the **training programme for export managers of small and medium-sized enterprises**, three certification courses were carried out for export managers in Tbilisi, Zugdidi and Telavi, and 60 export managers were trained.

In 2023, **about 100 companies** were registered on the 'Trade with Georgia' platform.

On 1 January 2023, the Georgian National Agency for Standards and Metrology was granted **the status of an affiliated member of the European standardisation organisations (CEN/CENELEC)**. Work has started for the evaluation of the current situation and the requirements necessary for further integration of the Agency into European standardisation organisations.

As of 2023, the Georgian National Agency for Standards and Metrology registered in all 4 261 standards as Georgian standards, including the following:

- Georgian Standard ISO (international standards) – 45;
- Georgian Standard EN (European standards) – 4 216.

The work on updating the database and harmonising it with European standards is in progress.

The number of internationally recognised Calibration and Measurement Capabilities (CMC) records of the **Georgian National Agency for Standards and Metrology** has been maintained at 65 CMC records. In order to maintain international recognition and to ensure the traceability of measurements, the 2023 calibration programmes for reference materials and measuring instruments have been prepared at the Metrology Institute of the Agency, and the calibration and measuring capabilities of the national metrology institutes of different countries (Czech Republic (CMI), Turkiye (UME), Poland (GUM), Italy (InRIM), and Spain (CEM)) have been analysed and selected. Within the framework of a twinning project, the calibration of the loaded-piston manometer has been completed at the Spanish Metrology Centre (CEM), and the standards and measuring instruments have been calibrated at the metrology institutions of Czech Republic (CMI), Turkiye (UME), and Poland (GUM). In order to ensure traceability, within the framework of a twinning project, the standards have been sent to the metrology institute of Italy (InRIM) for calibration. The participation in the regional key comparisons in the area of temperature measurements of the European Association of National Metrology Institutes (EURAMET) and the bilateral comparisons with the Spanish Metrology Centre (CEM) in the area of physicochemical measurements have been planned.

On 24-27 July 2023, EURAMET experts (representatives of the metrology institutes of Spain and Italy) carried out **an evaluation (peer-review)** at the standardisation departments of the Metrology Institute of the Agency

(electricity, temperature and humidity, mass and related measurements, and quality management) **in accordance with ISO/IEC 17025:2017 standard**. Based on the successful evaluation, the initial presentation of the GEOSTM quality system was planned, which was presented at the EURAMET Technical Committee for Quality on 7 November 2023, which is one of the preconditions for full EURAMET membership.

In order to implement Directive 2014/35/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council of 26 February 2014 (*on the harmonisation of the laws of the Member States relating to the making available on the market of electrical equipment designed for use within certain voltage limits*), **‘the Technical Regulations for the Electrical Equipment Designed for Use within Certain Voltage Limits’** were approved by Ordinance No 165 of 1 May 2023 of the Government of Georgia. The Georgian National Agency for Standards and Metrology has adopted and published a list of standards (harmonised standards) for the fulfilment of the requirements of the technical regulations (sst.geostm.gov.ge).

In order to implement Directive 2014/30/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council of 26 February 2014 (*on the harmonisation of the laws of the Member States relating to electromagnetic compatibility*), **a draft ordinance of the Government of Georgia on approval of the technical regulations on electromagnetic compatibility** has been prepared. Consultations are being carried out with relevant agencies, after which it will be submitted to the Government of Georgia for approval.

Within the framework of preparing the technical regulations according to Regulation (EU) No 305/2011 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 9 March 2011 *laying down harmonised conditions for the marketing of construction products*, **by Ordinance No 156 of 18 April 2023 of the Government of Georgia ‘the Technical Regulations on Construction Products’ were amended**, as a result of which 17 new construction products were determined.

According to Directive 2014/53/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council of 16 April 2014 (*on the harmonisation of the laws of the Member States relating to the making available on the market of radio equipment and repealing Directive 1999/5/EC*), **Ordinance No 161 of the Government of Georgia was adopted on 24 April 2023 ‘on approval of the technical regulations on radio broadcasting’**.

Based on the risk analysis carried out by the **LEPL Market Surveillance Agency**, in 2023, the following market surveillance procedures were carried out in the areas subject to surveillance:

- 150 types of marketed construction products were inspected on the local market;
- 9 types of pressure equipment were inspected on the local market;
- 14 types of marketed machinery were inspected on the local market;
- 138 types of marketed paints were inspected on the local market;
- 174 types of marketed toys were inspected on the local market;
- 82 types of appliances burning gaseous fuels were inspected on the local market;
- 35 types of marketed personal protective equipment were inspected on the local market;
- 108 ordinances adopted regarding restrictive measures were verified;
- samples of 44 types of construction products were taken and sent to appropriate accredited laboratories;
- samples of 138 types of paint were taken and sent to appropriate accredited laboratories;
- samples of 171 types of toys were taken and sent to appropriate accredited laboratories;
- samples of 2 types of appliances burning gaseous fuels were taken and sent to appropriate accredited laboratories.

In addition, the following advance notices from **seven Customs Clearance Zones of the Revenue Service** were inspected:

- advance notices of the import of 12 313 items of construction products;
- advance notices of the import of 2 721 items of machinery;
- advance notices of the import of 5 052 items of toys;
- advance notices of the import of 1 574 items of personal protective equipment;
- advance notices of the import of 3 055 items of appliances burning gaseous fuels;
- 72 types of marketed construction products were inspected on the local market and appropriate recommendations produced;
- 29 types of marketed electrical equipment were inspected on the local market and appropriate recommendations produced.

The final result of **the peer evaluation of the LEPL Unified National Body of Accreditation – Accreditation Center**, carried out by the European Accreditation (EA), was published on 24 July 2023, based on which the Accreditation Center maintained recognition in all areas recognised in the previous years, namely as follows:

- accreditation of testing laboratories (according to international standard ISO/IEC 17025);
- accreditation of calibration laboratories (according to international standard ISO/IEC 17025);
- accreditation of medical laboratories (according to international standard ISO 15189);
- accreditation of inspection bodies (according to international standard ISO/IEC 17020);
- accreditation of product certification bodies (according to international standard ISO/IEC 17065);
- accreditation of personnel certification bodies (according to international standard ISO/IEC 17024).

Based on the positive results of the peer evaluation carried out by the EA, on 1 August 2023, **the Accreditation Center of Georgia expanded its recognition by the International Laboratory Accreditation Cooperation (ILAC)** in terms of the accreditation of the proficiency test providers (according to the ISO/IEC 17043 standard).

In terms of the approximation of the legislation of Georgia to the relevant EU normative acts under **Annex XI-B to the Association Agreement**, the following ordinances of the Government of Georgia have been adopted:

- Ordinance No 565 of 12 December 2022 of the Government of Georgia on approval of the technical regulations laying down the conditions for use of activated alumina for the removal of fluoride from natural mineral waters and spring waters.
- Ordinance No 174 of 8 May 2023 of the Government of Georgia on approval of the procedure for using lactic acid to reduce microbiological surface contamination on bovine carcasses, half-carcasses or quarters of meat.
- Ordinance No 225 of 13 June 2023 of the Government of Georgia on approval of the technical regulations on the reference points for action (RPA) related to prohibited/inadmissible pharmacologically active substances in foodstuffs of animal origin.
- Ordinance No 212 of 5 June 2023 of the Government of Georgia on approval of the technical regulations on the procedures for carrying out the analysis of residue limits of pharmacologically active substances in foodstuffs of animal origin, sampling, and interpretation of results.
- Ordinance No 446 of 14 November 2023 of the Government of Georgia on the technical regulations on ceramic articles intended to come into contact with foodstuffs.
- Ordinance No 447 of 14 November 2023 of the Government of Georgia on approval of the technical regulations on foods intended for use in energy-restricted diets for weight reduction.
- Ordinance No 306 of 15 August 2023 of the Government of Georgia on making amendments to Ordinance No 648 of 28 October 2020 of the Government of Georgia on approval of the conditions for the marketing of oil and fibre crop seeds.
- Ordinance No 305 of 15 August 2023 of the Government of Georgia on making amendments to Ordinance No 46 of 20 January 2020 of the Government of Georgia on approval of the conditions for the marketing of fodder-crop seed.

- Ordinance No 304 of 15 August 2023 of the Government of Georgia on approval of the conditions for the marketing of fodder plant seed mixtures intended for use in the preservation of genetic resources.
- Ordinance No 303 of 15 August 2023 of the Government of Georgia on making amendments to Ordinance No 39 of 17 January 2020 of the Government of Georgia on making amendments to Ordinance No 336 of 13 June 2018 of the Government of Georgia on approval of the procedures for certification of seed and planting material of agricultural plant species subject to mandatory certification.
- Ordinance No 545 of 29 December 2023 of the Government of Georgia on approval of minimum requirements for the protection of laying hens.
- Ordinance No 275 of 24 July 2023 of the Government of Georgia on approval of minimum frequency of certain state controls for checking compliance with animal health requirements.
- Order No 2-120 of 10 March 2023 of the Minister of Environmental Protection and Agriculture of Georgia on the guidelines for using genetically modified microorganisms in the controlled conditions/closed systems and for carrying out risk assessment when working with genetically modified microorganisms in the controlled conditions/closed systems.
- Ordinance No 304 of 8 June 2022 of the Government of Georgia on approval of the technical regulations on plastic materials and articles intended to come into contact with food.
- Ordinance No 493 of 18 December 2023 of the Government of Georgia on making amendments to Ordinance No 40 of 17 January 2020 of the Government of Georgia on approval of the conditions for the marketing of fruit plant propagating material and fruit plants intended for fruit production.
- Ordinance No 472 of 4 December 2023 of the Government of Georgia on making amendments to Ordinance No 199 of 22 April 2019 of the Government of Georgia on approval of the conditions for the marketing of propagating material of ornamental plants.
- Ordinance No 494 of 18 December 2023 of the Government of Georgia on making amendments to Ordinance No 587 of 23 December 2022 of the Government of Georgia on approval of the procedures for distinctness, uniformity and stability (DUS) testing of new animal breeds and/or new plant species.

The following draft ordinances of the Government of Georgia have been drawn up:

- on approval of the procedures for the manufacture, placing on the market, and use of medicated feed;
- on approval of technical regulations on the content of undesirable substances in animal feed;
- on approval of technical regulations on the placing of plant protection products on the market.

Within the scope of implementing **sanitary, phytosanitary and veterinary border control procedures**:

- phytosanitary border control was carried out in relation to 28 399 goods items;
- veterinary border control was carried out in relation to 17 732 goods items;
- border control over the safety of food/feed of non-animal origin was carried out in relation to 2 933 goods items.

The legislative amendments necessary for the operation of the transit application at the national level have been prepared and entered into force on 3 April 2023, in particular, **the text of Order No 257 of 29 August 2019 of the Minister of Finance of Georgia on approval of the instructions for the movement and clearance of goods in the customs territory of Georgia has been amended**, and Annex No 20 titled the **'instructions on the possibility of using the New Computerised Transit System (NCTS) during customs formalities'** has been added.

The development of **the new NCTS application** has been completed. The application has been functioning (has been tested) at the national level since 3 April 2023.

On 31 May 2023, a training course on testing and using the NCTS application was held for the employees of the Customs Clearance Zones of Tbilisi, Poti, Batumi and Tbilisi airport of the **Customs Department**, as well as Akhaltsikhe and Kutaisi clearance and service departments. On 14 June, a training course was held for the

employees of Batumi Port, Vale, Kartsakhi, Poti and Kulevi ports, and Poti Free Industrial Zone. On 13 April 2023, a regular workshop was held with the representatives of the business sector for the purpose of the presentation of the **NCTS**. On 26 June 2023, a meeting was held between the representatives of the Revenue Service and a Swiss company 'SGS', during which the prospects for cooperation in relation to the NCTS were discussed. On 6-7 September 2023, a training course was held for representatives of the private sector on the use of the NCTS application.

The texts of the **Common Transit Convention (CTC)** and the **Single Administrative Document (SAD)** were translated. The relevant internal procedures for the accession to the conventions have started.

First drafts of the subordinate normative acts necessary for the implementation of certain articles of a **new Customs Code**, namely the simplified customs declaration, have been prepared.

On 6 June 2023, a meeting of the **EU-Georgia Customs Sub-Committee** was held.

For the purpose of gradual approximation to EU legislation under the Association Agreement, on 9 February 2023, the Parliament of Georgia adopted a new **Law of Georgia on Public Procurement**. The reform aims to improve the rational and effective spending of state budget funds, to promote the formation of a competitive environment in accordance with EU Regulations and Directives, and to fundamentally update and modernise the public procurement system. The main provisions of the Law will enter into force on 1 January 2025, and certain provisions will enter into force in 2027 and 2029.

Within the framework of the commitments undertaken under the Association Agreement, the State Procurement Agency has started the process of approximation to the EU **utilities sector Directive**. For this purpose, within the framework of the EU-funded project supporting the implementation of the Association Agreement, a draft law has been prepared in cooperation with an international expert, which is aimed at legal approximation to the EU utilities sector Directive. The first draft of the law has been forwarded to the OECD-SIGMA for expert comments. A wide discussion of the draft law is planned from 2024, which will then be submitted to the Government of Georgia.

On 13 June 2023, the Parliament of Georgia adopted the **Law of Georgia on Electronic Commerce, together with subsequent amendments to the Administrative Procedure Code of Georgia and the Law of Georgia on Competition**.

Within the framework of approximation of the legislation of Georgia to the relevant EU legislation provided for by Annex XV-B to the Association Agreement, draft amendments to the Law of Georgia **on Electronic Communications** have been prepared in order to approximate to the following EU Directives:

- concerning the processing of personal data and the protection of privacy in the electronic communications sector (Directive 2002/58/EC);
- on the authorisation of electronic communications networks and services (Directive 2002/20/EC);
- on access to, and interconnection of, electronic communications networks and associated facilities (Directive 2002/19/EC);
- on a common regulatory framework for electronic communications networks and services (Directive 2002/21/EC).

In addition, within the framework of the project 'Log-in Georgia' launched in cooperation with the World Bank, the Ministry of Economy and Sustainable Development of Georgia, and the National Communications

Commission, in which the consulting company EY was also involved, work on the preparation of **legislative amendments related to universal services** has been completed. Draft amendments to the Law of Georgia on Electronic Communications have been prepared. It is planned to implement further procedures for the adoption of the draft amendments.

Agreement has been reached with the European Commission regarding the draft Law of Georgia **on Post**, according to which, in addition to the existing commitments (*97/67/EC amended by Directives 2002/39/EC, 2008/6/EC*), in accordance with a new proposal of the European Commission, Georgia will undertake a new commitment in terms of approximation to the **regulation on cross-border parcel delivery services** (*Regulation (EU) 2018/644*), which will be reflected in the current draft Law of Georgia on Post. The date of implementation by Georgia has been set as 2024. The respective amendments are being reflected in Annex XV-C to the Association Agreement.

In 2023, the employees of the Georgian National Competition Agency participated in 15 events related to **main issues of competition policy (including the legislative changes)**. In addition, 5 training sessions were held for the employees of the Agency within the framework of the EU-funded twinning project 'Strengthening Capacity of the Competition Agency of Georgia'. Issues related to the on-site inspection of economic agents, the effective mechanisms of concentration control, market research mechanisms, the methodology for determining fines, and the use of OSINT tools during investigations, were discussed during the training.

On 16-18 November 2023, **II International Conference on Competition and Consumer Protection** was held, which was jointly organised by five regulatory agencies, namely the Georgian Competition and Consumer Agency (GCCA), the National Bank, the GNERC, the LEPL Insurance State Supervision Service of Georgia, and the Communications Commission of Georgia. Delegations from 20 countries and the heads of the competition and consumer protection agencies of 10 different countries, as well as members of governments and parliaments, local and international experts, and representatives from public institutions, regulatory bodies, academia, and the business sector, participated in the Conference.

On 1 February 2023, the Chairperson of **the LEPL National Intellectual Property Center of Georgia 'Sakpatenti'** and the Director of the State Agency on Intellectual Property of the Republic of Moldova signed the **interstate Agreement on Mutual Recognition and Protection of Geographical Indications of the two countries**. Based on the Agreement, the Republic of Moldova undertakes the obligation to protect products with the status of Georgian geographical indications from any misuse or imitation. On the part of Georgia, products with the status of 10 geographical indications from the Republic of Moldova will be protected in Georgia.

The Agreement between the Government of Georgia and the European Patent Organisation on Validation of European Patents has been ratified, which entered into force on 15 January 2024. The Agreement will strengthen the protection of industrial property and contribute to the achievement of the goals of the EU-Georgia Association Agreement. Validation increases the possibility of Georgia joining the EPO. In addition, based on the Agreement, respective amendments have been made to the Patent Law of Georgia.

On 3 May 2023, the presentation of **the collection of European court decisions** in the area of intellectual property was held at the High School of Justice. The collection was published in the Georgian language within the framework of the EUGIPP project. The document was prepared on the basis of the decisions of the General Court of the European Union (GCEU), the Court of Justice of the European Union (CJEU), and the Boards of Appeal (BOA) of the European Union Intellectual Property Office (EUIPO), and aims to approximate the judicial practice of Georgia with that of the EU.

On 14-16 June 2023, the **Worldwide Symposium on Geographical Indications** was held in Georgia, which was organised by the World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO) and Sakpatenti, and was attended by up to 300 representatives from 62 countries and remotely attended by up to 800 participants from different countries. In addition, **64 Georgian geographical indications** registered with Sakpatenti were exhibited.

On 24-25 July 2023, the **7th International Conference ‘Georgia Against Counterfeiting and Piracy’** was held in Batumi, which was organised by Sakpatenti and the Commerce Law Development Program (CLDP) of the U.S. Department of Commerce. Together with the representatives of the enforcement bodies of different countries, up to 200 representatives from both public and private sectors attended the Conference.

A **meeting of the Interagency Subcommittee on the implementation of DCFTA** was held on 26-27 December 2023, in Gori, within the framework of which **the drafts of the Medium-term (2024-2026) and the 2024 Action Plans for the Implementation of DCFTA** were discussed. The draft Medium-term (2024-2026) Action Plan for the Implementation of DCFTA will be approved in Q1 of 2024.

The following activities have been carried out within the framework of measures of compliance with international obligations related to climate change:

The 2024-2025 Climate Change Action Plan of Georgia has been prepared.

The 2022 report on the implementation of the 2021-2023 Action Plan for the implementation of the Nationally Determined Contribution (NDC) document has been prepared. The report has been submitted to the administration of the Government of Georgia and published on the website of the Ministry of Environmental Protection and Agriculture of Georgia.

The preparation of the **Fifth National Communication of Georgia (FNC) to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC)** and the **first Biennial Transparency Report (BTR)** has been commenced, the experts have been selected and the working groups responsible for its respective parts have been formed. A working group has been formed in order to prepare a national greenhouse gas inventory; the inventory component will be included in both the Fifth National Communication (FNC) and the first Biennial Transparency Report (BTR). Furthermore, the preparation of the vulnerability analysis and the national inventory for the identified sectors has started. The draft of Chapter 1 (National Circumstances) of the BTR has been drawn up.

In order to facilitate trade in timber products produced as a result of sustainable forest management, **23 additional Business Yards** have been set up in 2023. In all **54 Business Yards** have been set up throughout the country.

In order to bring draft subordinate normative acts into compliance with a new Forest Code of Georgia, the following were approved in 2023:

- ✓ **the procedure for establishing a Forester Day in Georgia and rewarding people employed in the forestry sector** – Order No 2-66 of the Minister of Environmental Protection and Agriculture of Georgia, 16.2.2023;
- ✓ **on the commission determining the status of a forest** – Order No 2-67 of the Minister of Environmental Protection and Agriculture of Georgia, 16.2.2023;
- ✓ **the procedures for the import, export and production of forest reproductive materials (FRM)** – Order No 2-553 of the Minister of Environmental Protection and Agriculture of Georgia, 12.7.2023;

- ✓ active work is being carried out on the following subordinate acts: ‘on determining the official uniform for persons employed in the state forest’, ‘on the instructions for operating the forest information and monitoring system’, and ‘on determining the ranking of positions and qualification requirements for persons employed in the state forest’. The drafts of the subordinate acts have been submitted to the management bodies for consideration. In 2023, a total of 3 subordinate acts were approved.

6. Economic Cooperation

According to a preliminary estimation, **the increase in real gross domestic product (GDP) amounted to 8.3 %** in December 2023, compared to the same period of the previous year, and the average actual growth was 7 % in 2023.¹

On 31 May 2023, the Parliament of Georgia adopted the **Law of Georgia on Official Statistics**, which fully approximates the statistics legislation of Georgia to international and EU standards.

The National Statistics Office of Georgia (Geostat) has determined and disseminated the **Unit Value Indices (UVI) of export and import** according to the positions of the Commodity Nomenclature (HS) of Foreign Economic Activity.

Geostat processed the quarterly data of 2022, and the detailed data was published on 31 July 2023. The data is available on the Geostat website.² The 2022 data on international trade with services was processed and the revised data was published in October 2023.³

A pilot version of the agricultural census questionnaire has been prepared.

The following activities have been carried out within the framework of the preparatory works for the 2024 general census of population:

- the field work under the first stage (compiling the lists of buildings and households actually living there) has been performed;
- a pilot version of the questionnaire for the general census of population has been prepared;
- a pilot software for the general census of population has been developed.

The main accounts of the system of national accounts (from the production accounts to the capital accounts) for the institutional sectors have been calculated based on the data of 2021 and 2022. The sectoral accounts will be published on the Geostat website in the first half of 2024.

A consolidated annual report on the development of the state internal financial control system was prepared and submitted to the Government of Georgia. The report was approved by the Government of Georgia (by Decree No 893 of 15 May 2023 of the Government of Georgia).

¹ <https://www.geostat.ge/ka/single-news/3058/ekonomikuri-zrdis-tsinastsari-shefaseba-dekemberi-2023>

² <https://www.geostat.ge/ka/modules/categories/713/sagareo-vachrobis-erteulis-ghirebulebis-indeksebi>

³ <https://www.geostat.ge/ka/modules/categories/766/momsakhurebit-saertashoriso-vachroba>

With the support of the **OECD/SIGMA**, the preparatory works for the national certification programme for **internal auditors** have been carried out, which entails the preparation of the certification modules and guidelines, the training of trainers, communication with donors, and the preparation of training materials and examination tests.

The Central Harmonisation Unit closely cooperates with the Academy of the Ministry of Finance of Georgia in order to implement the programme. In addition, in cooperation with the Academy of the Ministry of Finance, the process of certifying 20 internal auditors has started. They have already been trained in 2 modules (out of 4). Furthermore, it is planned to train an additional 20 internal auditors from the beginning of 2024. The preparatory works in this direction have been completed.

With the support of the World Bank and with the engagement of the Ernst & Young Office in Georgia, the IT audit guidelines have been prepared for internal auditors. Currently, 2 pilot audits are being carried out using the said guidelines.

Chief Risk Officers have been determined in 6 central ministries (the Ministry of Finance; the Ministry of Internal Affairs; the Ministry of Internally Displaced Persons from the Occupied Territories, Labour, Health and Social Affairs of Georgia; the Ministry of Education and Science; the Ministry of Environmental Protection and Agriculture; and the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth), and additionally, at the Ministry of Defence. A study visit was organised in Sweden for the Chief Risk Officers. The Ministry of Defence and the Ministry of Environmental Protection and Agriculture have already prepared risk management policy documents, while at the remaining five ministries this process is ongoing.

For the purpose of approximation of the legislation of Georgia to Council Directive 2003/96/EC, **draft amendments to the Tax Code of Georgia** have been prepared.

A report of the **State Audit Office** regarding the report of the Government ‘on the annual performance of the 2022 state budget’ has been prepared and submitted to the Parliament of Georgia.

3 interagency compliance audits, 13 financial audits and 24 compliance audits have been carried out; system-related recommendations have been issued with respect to the effectiveness, economy and efficiency of public resources management, and 10 performance audits have been carried out.

The texts of **the Common Transit Convention (CTC) and the Single Administrative Document (SAD)** have been translated. The relevant internal procedures for accession to the conventions have started.

In order to prepare implementation norms for certain articles of the new Customs Code, **a consultation meeting was held with economic operators**, within the framework of which they were provided with information on ongoing and planned measures for the implementation of a simplified customs declaration.

In addition, first drafts of the subordinate normative acts necessary for the implementation of certain articles of a new Customs Code, namely the simplified customs declaration, have been prepared.

On 26 January 2023, a meeting was held between the representatives of the Representation of Georgia to the EU and the DG TRADE (Directorate General for Trade), during which issues related to the implementation of the **DCFTA** were discussed, including the agreement between Georgia and the EU on the Mutual Recognition of the Authorised Economic Operators (AEO).

7. Other Fields of Cooperation

7.1 Transport

The Association Agreement envisages approximation to EU standards in the areas of **maritime, road, rail and air transport**.

Maritime transport

In terms of the legislative approximation to the directives provided for by the Association Agreement (Title VI, Chapter 1, Annex XV-D, **Maritime Transport**, technical and operational rules), work has been completed on the following Directives:

For the approximation of the legislation of Georgia to Directive 1999/63/EC of 21 June 1999 (*concerning the Agreement on the organisation of working time of seafarers concluded by the European Community Shipowners' Association (ECSA) and the Federation of Transport Workers' Unions in the European Union (FST) – Annex: European Agreement on the organisation of working time of seafarers*), and Directive 1999/95/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 13 December 1999 (*concerning the enforcement of provisions in respect of seafarers' hours of work on board ships calling at Community ports*), on 2 May 2023, by Ordinance No 2774-XI06-X03, the Parliament of Georgia ratified **the Maritime Labour Convention (MLC) of 23 February 2006 of the International Labour Organisation**. In addition, on 31 May 2023, the Parliament of Georgia adopted the Law of Georgia **on Seafarers' Labour**, which fully reflects the requirements of the Convention and the Directives and will enter into force on 1 July 2024.

Directive 2010/65/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council of 20 October 2010 (*on reporting formalities for ships arriving in and/or departing from ports of the Member States and repealing Directive 2002/6/EC*) was replaced by Regulation (EU) 2019/1239 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 20 June 2019 (*establishing a European Maritime Single Window environment and repealing Directive 2010/65/EU*). As a result, a draft Law of Georgia **on Making Amendments to the Maritime Code of Georgia** was prepared, which was submitted to the Parliament of Georgia. After the adoption of the draft Law, the Government of Georgia must adopt an ordinance of the Government of Georgia '**on approval of the rules of operation and management of the Maritime Single Window System in the Ports of Georgia**'.

Road transport

Within the framework of approximation of the legislation of Georgia to the directives provided for by the Association Agreement (Title VI, Chapter 1, Annex XXIV, **road transport**), the following activities were carried out in 2023:

For the purpose of the approximation of the legislation of Georgia to Directive 2006/22/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 15 March 2006 (*on minimum conditions for the implementation of Council Regulations (EEC) No 3820/85 and (EEC) No 3821/85 concerning social legislation relating to road transport activities and repealing Council Directive 88/599/EEC*), a draft Law of Georgia **on Making Amendments to the Law of Georgia on Traffic** and a draft Law of Georgia on Making Amendments to the Administrative Offences Code of Georgia have been prepared and submitted to the Government of Georgia. The projects envisage the roadside checks of motor vehicles in accordance with the requirements of the mentioned Directive.

In order to fulfil the commitments provided for by Article 3(1)(a), (b), (c) and (d) of Regulation (EC) No 1071/2009 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 21 October 2009 (*establishing common rules*

concerning the conditions to be complied with to pursue the occupation of road transport operator and repealing Council Directive 96/26/EC), within the framework of the reform planned in the area of domestic road transportation, **the Law of Georgia on Making Amendments to the Law of Georgia on Road Transport** was adopted on 30 November 2023, on the basis of which the relevant points of the Regulation will be reflected in the respective subordinate acts.

The applicable legislation of Georgia partially complies with the minimum standards of physical and mental fitness for driving established by Directive 2006/126/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 20 December 2006 **on driving licences**, including the definition of restriction codes. It is notable that, taking into consideration the requirements of the Directive in this direction, **a draft joint order of the Minister of Internally Displaced Persons from the Occupied Territories, Labour, Health and Social Affairs of Georgia and the Minister of Internal Affairs of Georgia has been drawn up**, which has been submitted to the Ministry of Internally Displaced Persons from the Occupied Territories, Labour, Health and Social Affairs of Georgia for further discussions.

In order to conduct the practical test to obtain a driving licence on roads, the obligation to pass an additional second stage of the practical test (on roads) to obtain a driving licence has been introduced under both the legislation and the respective subordinate normative acts. **Namely, the practical test to obtain a driving licence for B and BE category vehicles has two stages, which also includes passing the test in real traffic.** Therefore, to obtain the driving licence for the mentioned categories, interested persons take a practical test in real traffic conditions as well.

Railway

Within the framework of approximation of the legislation of Georgia to the Directives provided for by the Association Agreement (Title VI, Chapter 1, Annex XXIV, **rail transport**), the following activities were carried out during 2023:

For the purpose of approximation of the legislation of Georgia to Directive 2007/59/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 23 October 2007 (*on the certification of train drivers operating locomotives and trains on the railway system in the Community*) and Directive 2008/68/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 24 September 2008 (*on the inland transport of dangerous goods*), **the Law of Georgia No 2998-XIობ-Xოო on Making Amendments to the Railway Code of Georgia** was adopted on 31 May 2023, as a result of which the main principles of the Directives 2007/59/EC and 2008/68/EC were reflected in the legislation of Georgia, and the legislative basis has been laid for full approximation to the Directives. In addition, during the transition period before the entry into force of the Law (before 1 January 2025), the respective subordinate normative acts must be adopted for full compliance with the Directives. Negotiations have been commenced with regard to the implementation of the EU technical assistance twinning project, which envisages the issues of approximation to Directives 2007/59/EC and 2008/68/EC.

As a result of the amendments made to the Railway Code of Georgia, the main principles of Directive 2016/798 (replacing Directive 2004/49/EC *on safety on the Community's railways*) have been reflected in the legislation of Georgia. **The LEPL Rail Transport Agency of Georgia** has been established and the legislative basis has been laid for full approximation to the Directive. In addition, during the transition period before the entry into force of the Law (before 1 January 2025), the respective subordinate normative acts must be adopted for full compliance with the Directive. The EU technical assistance twinning project has been completed. Negotiations

have been commenced regarding the implementation of another EU twinning project, which envisages approximation to Directive 2016/798.

Air transport

Within the framework of the approximation of the legislation of Georgia to the directives provided for by the Association Agreement (Title VI, Chapter 1, Annex XXIV, **Air Transport**, Common Aviation Area Agreement between the European Union and its Member States, of the one part, and Georgia, of the other part), in 2023, work has been in progress for:

approximation to Commission Regulation (EU) No 1321/2014 (*on the continuing airworthiness of aircraft and aeronautical products, parts and appliances, and on the approval of organisations and personnel involved in these tasks*); part-145, part-147, part-66, Part-CAMO, and part-CAO of the Regulation have been implemented, and part-M is left, the project of which has been prepared and submitted for industry observations.

7.2 Cooperation in the Field of Energy

In compliance with the commitments undertaken under the EU-Georgia Association Agreement (Title VI, Chapter 2, **Energy Cooperation**, Annex XXV), the following activities were carried out in 2023 in order to approximate national legislation to EU legislative acts and international legal instruments:

On 16 November 2023, **the first EU-Georgia High-Level Energy Dialogue** was established.

For the purpose of the approximation of the legislation of Georgia to Directive 94/22/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 30 May 1994 '*on the conditions for granting and using authorizations for the prospecting, exploration and production of hydrocarbons*', **the Law of Georgia on Making Amendments to the Law of Georgia on Oil and Gas was adopted on 22 February 2023**. Based on the amendments to the Law, on 10 April, Order No 11/027 of the Head of the State Agency of Oil and Gas was issued. As a result of the implementation of the amendments, the requirements of the Directive have been fully taken into consideration.

For the purpose of the approximation of the legislation of Georgia to Directive 2009/28/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 23 April 2009 '*on the promotion of the use of energy from renewable sources*', and for adopting the relevant subordinate normative acts, in cooperation with the Secretariat of the Energy Community and other engaged parties, **8 subordinate acts have been prepared and approved**. In addition, 1 draft subordinate act has been prepared. The remaining subordinate acts will be prepared and approved within the framework of the EU/KfW technical support.

In order to approximate the legislation of Georgia to Directive 2012/27/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council of 25 October 2012 '*on energy efficiency, amending Directives 2009/125/EC and 2010/30/EU and repealing Directives 2004/8/EC and 2006/32/EC*', **15 subordinate acts have been prepared and approved. In addition, 4 draft subordinate acts have been prepared**. The activities are being carried out within the framework of the technical assistance project with the budget of EUR 8.4 million.

For the transposition into the legislation of Georgia of Directive 2018/2002 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 11 December 2018 '*amending Directive 2012/27/EU on energy efficiency*', draft amendments to the law have been prepared in accordance with the revised Directive, which will be submitted for approval.

In order to approximate the legislation of Georgia to Directive 2010/31/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council of 19 May 2010 ‘*on the energy performance of buildings*’, which is a recast of Decision 2009/05/MC-EnC of 18 December 2009 related to the implementation of certain energy efficiency Directives, **four subordinate acts under the Law of Georgia on Energy Efficiency of Buildings have been approved**. The drafts of the remaining subordinate acts are being prepared for approval.

7.3 Environmental Protection

In compliance with the commitments undertaken under the EU-Georgia Association Agreement (Title VI, Chapter 3, **Environment**, Annex XXVI, and Chapter 4, **Climate Action**, Annex XXVII), the following measures were taken in 2023, in order to approximate national legislation to EU legislative acts and international legal instruments:

The respective requirements of Directive 2010/75/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council of 24 November 2010 ‘*on industrial emissions*’ have been reflected in the national legislation, namely on 29 June 2023, at the third hearing, the Parliament of Georgia adopted the Law of Georgia **on Industrial Emissions** and the deriving draft laws.

On 30 June 2023, at the third hearing, the Parliament of Georgia adopted the *Law of Georgia on Water Resources Management and the deriving legislative package*. The legislative package on Water Resources Management envisages complex legislative amendments which, based on the commitments undertaken under the EU-Georgia Association Agreement, completely change the principles of water resources management and establish a unified modern water resources management system, which complies with the EU Directives applicable in the area of water resources management.

On 16 June 2023, at the third hearing, the Parliament of Georgia adopted **a package of draft laws related to the ozone-depleting substances**, including the amendments to the Law of Georgia on Ambient Air Protection.

On 31 May 2023, the Parliament of Georgia supported the **ratification of the Minamata Convention on Mercury** and the deriving package of legislative amendments.

In coordination with the Ministry of Environmental Protection and Agriculture of Georgia and with the support of the UNDP and the Government of Sweden, **the draft 2023-2025 plan for ambient air quality management for the central zone** has been prepared with the involvement of Georgian and European experts and all key stakeholders. The public review of the draft plan was held on 26 June. The plan was approved by **Decree No 1431 of 7 August 2023 of the Government of Georgia**.

At the same time, within the framework of the EU technical support project ‘**Support for Environmental Protection and Fighting Against Climate Change**’ and with the engagement of Georgian and European experts, basic research has been carried out for the preparation of **the ambient air quality management plan for the Tbilisi agglomeration**. On 20 June 2023, the first meeting of Tbilisi working group was held. The preliminary results of the research were presented to the members of the working group and a discussion was held on the issues of air pollution in Tbilisi. On 24 November, at the second meeting of the Tbilisi working group, the final results of the research conducted with respect to the ambient air pollution in Tbilisi, the priorities of the action plan, and recommended activities, were presented. A working draft of the action plan has been drawn up, which is being actively discussed. Within the framework of the same project, the preparation of **the ambient air quality management plan for the Black Sea zone** has been commenced. On 7 December 2023, the first meeting of the Black Sea Zone working group was held. Information on the air pollution situation in the area, and the activities

planned for the preparation of an action plan under the project, were presented to the members of the working group and a discussion was held about the challenges in the Black Sea zone. At the first stage, it is planned to conduct basic research, on the basis of which a draft action plan will be prepared.

In the area of radioactive waste management, on 16 June 2023, the Parliament of Georgia adopted the **Law of Georgia on Radiation Protection, Nuclear Safety and Security**, prepared by the LEPL Nuclear and Radiation Safety Agency, which regulates issues related to radioactive waste management in accordance with the international commitments undertaken by Georgia. Taking into consideration the Law of Georgia on Radioactive Waste and the goals of **the 2017-2031 National Strategy on Radioactive Waste Management** approved by Ordinance No 640 of the Government of Georgia, the LEPL Agency of Nuclear and Radiation Safety has prepared draft amendments to the national legislation regulating radioactive waste management. The amendments were approved by the following ordinances of the Government of Georgia:

1. Ordinance No 453 of 20 November 2023 on Approval of the Technical Regulations for Handling Radioactive Waste;
2. Ordinance No 452 of 20 November 2023 on Approval of the Technical Regulations for Main Requirements for the Safety Report for a Radioactive Waste Disposal Facility;
3. Ordinance No 455 of 20 November 2023 on Approval of the Technical Regulations for Main Requirements for the Safety Report for Radioactive Waste Treatment and Storage Facilities.

Within the framework of flood hazard mapping activities for the river basin of Georgia, flood hazard maps have been prepared for **5 rivers (Mtkvari, Khrami-Ktsia, Iori, Alazani, Chorokhi-Ajaristskali)** under the UNDP programme 'Reducing the Risk of Climate-driven Disasters in Georgia', with the financial support of the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC). The flood hazard mapping methodology fully complies with the requirements of the Floods Directive.

In order to evaluate **the condition of the environment of the Georgian coast and the territorial waters of the Black Sea**, in September 2023, monitoring was carried out at 12 stations.

The monitoring (automatic and qualitative) of underground freshwater was carried out at 70 water points; in order to expand the monitoring network, the equipment for 2 wells has been purchased and technical works will be commenced for setting up automatic stations. In order to prepare an information bulletin on the quantitative and qualitative properties of underground freshwater in Georgia, information on the monitoring research has been partially processed. In 2023, 357 samples were taken for laboratory analysis from the water points of the monitoring network (149 – chemical, 136 – bacteriological, 56 – heavy metals, and 16 – petroleum products).

In close cooperation with the UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO/GFCM) and the EU, on the basis of **Decree No 639 of 3 April 2023 of the Government of Georgia on Approval of Aquaculture Zones in the Marine Waters of Georgia**, 3 zones for fish farms and 5 aquaculture zones for shellfish production have been approved.

The final drafts of the management plans for four approved areas of the Emerald Network, namely Alazani (GE000022), Goderdzi (GE000026), Gombori (GE000027), and Tbilisi Otter island (GE000048), have been prepared.

The final draft of the Law of Georgia **on Biodiversity** has been prepared. The draft Law has undergone public discussions. It has also been submitted to and approved by the Government of Georgia. The draft Law will be submitted to the Parliament of Georgia for consideration in the near future.

7.4 Agriculture and Rural Development

Development of the agriculture sector (Association Agreement, Title VI, Chapter 10), full utilisation of agricultural potential, and its targeted use, are important for the economic growth of the country. Therefore, approximation to EU standards in the areas of agriculture and rural development is a priority for Georgia.

Within the framework of **the state programme of co-financing of the storage enterprises of agricultural cooperatives**, in 2023, 16 projects were approved under the component of processing enterprises with the total cost of GEL 18 554 855, out of which GEL 6 830 940 was the amount of co-financing. 24 projects were approved **in the component of storage enterprises** with the total cost of GEL 34 791 864, out of which GEL 8 368 675 was the amount of co-financing. The establishment of 15 processing enterprises and 44 storage infrastructures have been fully/partially financed.

In terms of implementing the technical support programme for existing projects, 32 beneficiaries have implemented the international food safety standard (HACCP, ISO-22000, BRCS, GLOBAL G.A.P), and 29 beneficiaries branded their products/company. Agreements (for agricultural cooperatives) on purchasing the equipment necessary for giving the products their final commodity form was concluded with 7 beneficiaries. 10 beneficiaries registered a trademark. The total cost of the activities/projects is GEL 1 657 868.65, out of which GEL 839 665.00 is the amount of co-financing of the activities/projects on the part of the Agency. The amount of co-financing on the part of the Agency is GEL 841 088.61.

During the reporting period, 62 agreements were concluded within the framework of the programme for **co-financing the purchasing of agricultural equipment**. The total investments of the projects amounted to GEL 18 484 026, out of which GEL 6 307 042 is co-financing on the part of the Agency. 59 beneficiaries were fully/partially financed during the reporting period. During the reporting period, 3 cooperatives were financed within the framework of the **state programme of co-financing of storage enterprises of agricultural cooperatives**.

Within the framework of **the tea plantation rehabilitation state programme 'Georgian Tea'**, during the reporting period, agreements were signed with 4 beneficiaries, the area of rehabilitation plantations being 120.97 hectares. The total cost of rehabilitation amounts to GEL 438 137, out of which GEL 305 136 is the amount of co-financing on the part of the Agency.

Within the framework of the Dairy Modernization and Market Access Project (DIMMA), 535 agreements were concluded with 412 unique beneficiaries. The total investments of the project amounted to GEL 16 643 022, out of which GEL 12 958 866 was the amount of co-financing on the part of the Agency under the agreements. 264 beneficiaries were fully/partially financed during the reporting period.

Within the framework of the 'Plant the Future' programme: (1) 412 garden projects to be cultivated on an area of 2 610.32 hectares were approved, and the investment amounted to GEL 63 388 385, out of which GEL 29 008 899 was the amount of co-financing on the part of the Agency; (2) within the framework of the component of co-financing **the construction of anti-hail systems**, 10 applications were granted and the investment amounted to GEL 4 574 512, out of which GEL 474 278 was the amount of co-financing on the part of the Agency, and the area in question 71.89 hectares; (3) within the framework of the component of co-financing **the installation of drip irrigation systems**, 46 applications were granted and the investment amounted to GEL 1 164 242, out of which GEL 492 003 was the amount of co-financing on the part of the Agency, and the area in question 239.02 hectares; (4) within the framework of the component of co-financing the installation of **wells/bore-holes/pumping stations**, 63 applications were granted and the investment amounted

to GEL 2 186 531, out of which GEL 1 077 821 was the amount of co-financing on the part of the Agency, and the area in question 299.86 hectares; (5) within the framework of the component of co-financing the replacement of damaged saplings in the **gardens of perennial plants**, plantations and vineyards, 2 (two) applications were granted and the investment amounted to GEL 155 274, out of which GEL 133 092 was the amount of co-financing on the part of the Agency, and the area in question 51.07 hectares; (6) within the framework of the component of co-financing the purchase of sprayers, 1 application was granted and the investment amounted to GEL 5 000, out of which GEL 5 000 was the amount of co-financing on the part of the Agency.

Within the framework of the state programme for supporting beekeeping agricultural cooperatives, 6 agreements were concluded during the reporting period. Under these agreements, the amount of co-financing on the part of the Agency amounted to GEL 97 048. Under the programme, 8 cooperatives were fully/partially financed.

Within the framework of **the Preferential Agrocredit Project**, during the reporting period, banks disbursed 10 000 loans amounting to GEL 1 031 194 901. The amount of co-financing on the part of the Agency was GEL 209 468 368. 38 907 loans were serviced.

Within the framework of the **Agro Insurance Project**, a total of 15 035 policies were issued and 16 641.34 hectares of crops were insured. The cost of the insured crops is GEL 167 683 280. The share of the Agency in the insurance premium is GEL 11 499 259.

Within the framework of the programme '**Pilot Program for Women**', 8 agreements were concluded with 8 unique beneficiaries. The total investment amounted to GEL 182 996, out of which GEL 164 222 was the amount of co-financing on the part of the Agency under the agreements. 36 beneficiaries were fully/partially financed during the reporting period.

In order to promote Georgian agricultural products, 4 international and 1 local exhibition were held during the reporting period. In addition, **the following activities were carried out for the purpose of the development of extension and scientific and research activities in the area of agriculture**: 62 trainings were held; 80 articles were published; 596 recommendations were produced; 40 conferences were held; 6 grant projects were prepared; 13 monographs/books/leaflets were published; 1 468 varieties and species of vegetables, fruits, legumes and technical crops were sown; 181 hectares of experiment and demonstration plots of land were used; 42 collection plants of fruit varieties (including 28 local varieties) were cultivated; 4 collection gardens were arranged; the corresponding number of processed samples of agricultural products included in the research is 30; 6 soil maps were prepared; the number of certified nurseries is 34; the number of certified seed and planting material is 1 804 tonnes. The genetic resources of annual and perennial crops were collected, as follows: 506 specimens of vine (460 of which are local forms and specimens, and 46 of which are wild); 150 varieties and forms of fruit; a living collection of 2005 varieties of forest woody plants; 450 saplings of the main collection of mulberry; 342 saplings of mulberry rootstock plantation; 20 saplings of mulberry seed collection; the number of specimens stored in the in vitro bank: 1350 (including potato – 1400, vine – 15, sweet potato – 5, goji berry – 30, and chrysanthemum – 10); specimens stored in the plant genetic resources bank: 45 specimens of wheat and 35 specimens of corn; soil on 25 000 hectares of land was examined; 800 samples of soil of agricultural land were examined in the laboratory; 12 biological preparations were tested; collection plants of local tea varieties – 11, local varieties and forms – 6 000. Conservation of the Georgian gene pool of agricultural animals: bovine animals – 394 (including Georgian mountain cow – 18, Caucasian chestnut cow – 315; Ajarian cow – 14, Megrelian cow – 47; Kakhetian pig – 630; sheep and goats – 519 (including soft woolled and semisoft woolled

sheep – 47, Imeretian sheep – 276, Tushetian sheep – 37, Megrelian goat – 159); poultry – 910 (including hen – 550, Jersey Buff turkey – 180, Mottled duck – 30, Javakhetian goose – 150); fish: crossbreed of Parioni and mirror carp with biomass – 150 kg; bees – 59 families; Mulberry silkworm – 65 species.

7.5 Employment, Social Policy and Equal Opportunities

An important priority is approximation to EU standards in terms of employment, social policy and equal opportunities (Association Agreement, **Title VI, Chapter 14, Annex XXX**).

In 2023, the first meeting of the **Tripartite Social Partnership Commission** was held. At the meeting, the parties discussed the drafts of the 2024-2028 National Strategy of Labour and Employment Policy of Georgia and the 2024-2026 Action Plan for its implementation, the recommendations produced by the Governmental Committee of the European Social Charter and European Code of Social Security, the recommendations of the Council of Europe regarding accession to the unratified articles/paragraphs of the European Social Charter, and the recommendations provided for by the 2023 report of the European Commission on the EU Enlargement Policy. The procedures for the certification of intermediary companies determined by the Law of Georgia on Labour Migration were discussed at a meeting of the working group established within the framework of the **Tripartite Social Partnership Commission**.

On 17 May 2023, the Parliament of Georgia approved **legislative amendments to the Law of Georgia on Labour Migration**. The amendments will contribute to legal labour migration, the reduction of cases of illegal labour migration and trafficking, the establishment of an effective system of state monitoring of the activities of natural and legal persons related to labour arrangements abroad, and the promotion and support of the development of their lawful activities by the State. The draft Law envisages the legalisation of the activities of intermediary companies and the improvement of registration of data of citizens of Georgia employed abroad.

Together with various state institutions, various non-governmental organisations, and experts, the International Organization for Migration (IOM) and the International centre for Migration Policy Development (ICMPD) actively participated in the process of preparation of the document.

During the reporting period, **mediation in respect of 11 collective labour disputes** was carried out, 4 of which were concluded with conciliation (the parties failed to reach an agreement in 7 cases).

Within the framework of the 2023 Employment Support Services Development Programme, 17 339 job seekers were registered in the system, and 1 111 employers registered 11 470 vacancies. **Consultants of supported employment** provided support services to 198 persons with disabilities. **In order to support the employment of less competitive groups**, 120 vacancies were found for persons with disabilities, and 19 persons were employed. Individual consultations were provided to 11 329 job seekers. Consultations on career planning and professional consultations were provided to 4 856 job seekers. **9 employment forums were held**.

Within the framework of the 2023 State Programme for Qualification Raising for Job Seekers, 36 training organisations were registered for participation in the Programme. 3 911 beneficiaries were engaged in 97 professions in demand, 2 007 of which completed their training. 31 employers and 144 interns were engaged in the internship component of the State Programme for Professional Training, Retraining and Qualifications Raising of Job Seekers and 87 job seekers were employed.

In terms of occupational safety, according to the Association Agenda, **the technical regulations on the minimum health and safety requirements for the manual handling of loads have been prepared and approved by Ordinance No 167**, which is in full compliance with Directive 90/269/EEC of 29 May 1990.

As of 2023, out of 26 directives provided for by Annex XXX to the Association Agreement regarding health and safety at the workplace:

6 directives have been fully reflected; 2 directives have been partially reflected; a draft law drawn up in compliance with 3 directives is ready for the discussion in the thematic group ‘health and safety at the workplace’; draft normative acts have been prepared in accordance with 5 directives.

In addition, a new EU project for twinning public institutions in the area of occupational safety was approved during the reporting period, which aims to take respective steps for the approximation of the legislation of Georgia to 10 EU Directives.

As for the **results of the inspections** carried out by the **LEPL Labour Inspection Service**, the results for 2023 are as follows:

- **under the Organic Law of Georgia on Occupational Safety**, 3 767 inspections (initial and follow-up, until the elimination of violations) were carried out at 1 636 facilities, the inspections covered approximately 82 508 employees, and taking into consideration the detected violations, 14 178 instructions were issued;
- 1 779 inspections were carried out under **the Organic Law of Georgia the Labour Code of Georgia and the Law of Georgia on Labour Migration**; within the framework of the implemented supervision, 1 395 facilities/workplaces were inspected as a result of initial inspections; considering the identified violations, the Labour Inspection Service issued 2 620 instructions; the inspections covered approximately 72 000 employees;
- **in accordance with Ordinance No 112 of the Government of Georgia on the prevention of forced labour**, inspections were carried out in 303 facilities, 292 of which were scheduled, and 11 were unscheduled;
- 119 inspections (111 scheduled and 8 unscheduled) were carried out in 119 facilities; no violations were identified in 118 facilities, and 1 facility was subject to administrative liability.

The official website of the LEPL Labour Inspection Service lio.moh.gov.ge has been created; in addition, **the hotline of the Service ‘1575’** operates continuously, which provides information to all interested parties on issues related to labour standards. In 2023, the hotline received more than 11 000 calls.

In addition, on the basis of the received applications, the LEPL Labour Inspection Service provided written and verbal consultations regarding labour rights to 1 090 interested persons.

7.6 Healthcare

For the purpose of the harmonisation of the legislation of Georgia with EU legislation in the area of public health (Association Agreement, Title VI, Chapter 15, Annex XXX), the following draft subordinate normative acts: **‘on approval of the procedure for the selection of donors of blood and blood components and for the conformity assessment’** and **‘on approval of the procedure for collecting blood and blood components’** have been drawn up and discussed with the interested/participating parties and submitted to the Ministry for approval; the following draft subordinate acts have been drawn up and are ready for adoption: **‘on approval of the procedure for performing immunohematological tests’**; **‘on the recognition of the guidelines and lists of standards for the**

international and national best practices of the quality and safety system of human blood and its components, and the introduction of the guidelines and standards for national best practices’.

In November 2023, **the Parliament of Georgia approved the following Laws:** the Law of Georgia on Human Organs Transplants and the Law of Georgia on the Use of Human Tissues and Cells. The said Laws ensure the establishment of a complete system, which regulates the basic principles of transplantation of human organs and the use of human tissues/cells, the legal relations related to organ, tissue and cell donation, determines the rights of donors and recipients, regulates issues related to the sourcing, quality and safety of tissues and organs, and the approximation of traceability and safety norms to the European standards.

In 2023, the work on the draft Law of Georgia on **Medically Assisted Reproduction** was completed and it was submitted to the Government of Georgia. The draft Law regulates all aspects of in vitro fertilisation, surrogacy, and medically assisted reproduction. The draft Law was drawn up in compliance with EU directives and it regulates a hitherto insufficiently regulated area in Georgia. The parliament has begun consideration of the draft Law.

The draft Law of Georgia on Medical Devices has been drawn up, which regulates main legal relations in this area, brings the respective normative acts under a single legal framework, and is in compliance with the relevant EU legal acts provided for by the Association Agreement. The process of discussing the draft Law with the relevant stakeholders is underway.

The 2023-2025 National Strategy and Action Plan for the Elimination of Viral Hepatitis in Georgia was approved by Order No 21/5 of 5 April 2023 of the Minister of Internally Displaced Persons from the Occupied Territories, Labour, Health and Social Affairs of Georgia.

In 2023, **the General Bacteriology Laboratory of the Lugar Center was accredited according to the ISO 17043 standard.**

The 2023-2025 National HIV/AIDS Strategy and Action Plan was approved by Order No 65/5 of 6 September 2023 of the Minister of Internally Displaced Persons from the Occupied Territories, Labour, Health and Social Affairs of Georgia.

The 2023-2025 National Strategy for Fighting against Tuberculosis was approved by Order No 54/5 of 21 July 2023 of the Minister of Internally Displaced Persons from the Occupied Territories, Labour, Health and Social Affairs of Georgia.

The 2024-2030 National Antimicrobial Resistance Strategy and its 2024-2026 Action Plan were approved by Order No 96/5 of 21 December 2023 of the Minister of Internally Displaced Persons from the Occupied Territories, Labour, Health and Social Affairs of Georgia.

Based on the CAESAR Antimicrobial Resistance (AMR) reporting protocol, the 2024 National Reporting Protocol was drawn up and approved during the reporting period; in addition, Order No 01-26/5 was also updated in accordance with the requirements of the protocol (Order No 79/5; date: 2.11.2023).

Under the leadership of the LEPL Regulation Agency for Medical and Pharmaceutical Activities, **the monitoring and control of the implementation of infection prevention and control regulating documents, protocols, and guidelines, was carried out at 85 inpatient care facilities.**

Modern principles of surgical antibiotic prophylaxis have been implemented at the surgery departments of 10 inpatient care facilities.

7.7 Cooperation in the Field of Innovation

In order to **deepen bilateral cooperation** with EU Member States in the direction of innovations and technology, 1 working agreement has been concluded between the EU and Georgia on the project '*Do IT with the EU*'.

The following activities were carried out in terms of **connecting angel and venture investors and/or mentors with Georgian start-ups** (organisation of pitching sessions and B2B meetings): the Investment Ecosystem Conference (AXEL); DataFest; ProdAct Community Conference; Touch Summit; MarTech Festival by Touch; Startup Investment Forum Batumi; and 500 Global Masterclass.

Within the framework of activities planned for the purpose of participation of Georgian start-ups in the **start-up facilitation events (conferences, seminars) organised by the EU and other countries**, Georgian start-ups participated in the national round of the 'Startup World Cup' competition, the New York conference 'Globalize', the '500 Global' events, the Web Summit, and the Polish Demo Day.

In terms of financing innovation and technology projects, 40 beneficiaries were financed with grants from **the co-financing programme**, and 41 beneficiaries were financed under the programme '**Small Grants for Regions**'.

Within the framework of the following activities implemented under the **ICT training course** carried out in Tbilisi and the regions of Georgia, Technological Weeks – 1 446 beneficiaries; training on artificial intelligence, machine learning, e-commerce, technology development processes, STEAM disciplines, ICT technologies – 2 969 beneficiaries were trained

In 2023, Senaki Innovation Centre was opened.

Within the framework of the preparation of the **draft strategic document of innovations of Georgia**, on 2 June 2023, in cooperation with the UN Economic Commission for Europe, the recommendations for improving the innovation policy for the region named '**Interim Sub-regional Innovation Policy Outlook 2022: Eastern Europe and the South Caucasus**' were prepared and published. (<https://unece.org/economic-cooperation-and-integration/publications/interim-sub-regional-innovation-policy-outlook>)

7.8 Cooperation in the Field of the Information Society

On 30 June 2023, amendments were made to the **Law of Georgia on Broadcasting** (adopted on 22 December 2022), ensuring full approximation to a new Audiovisual Media Services Directive (AVMSD) (2018/1808/EU), according to which the deadline for the preparation and approval of legislative normative acts was set as 1 July 2024. Namely, the following acts:

- code (codes) of conduct for on-demand audiovisual media services providers and video-sharing platform services providers;
- guidelines on defining a small audience and a low income audiovisual media services provider for the purpose of exemption from the obligation of marketing European productions;
- standards for continuous and progressive availability of media services for persons with disabilities;
- an information portal accessible to persons with disabilities (where it will be possible to receive complaints), and the procedure for the development and operation of such portal.

7.9 Tourism

On 15 December 2023, amendments to the Law of Georgia on Tourism and Resorts were adopted, which determines state policy in the area of tourism and the subjects and forms of tourism activities, regulates tourism activities, and determines the rights and guarantees of a tourist as a consumer, contractual relations for travel services, the functions and obligations of state authorities and local self-government bodies, public-private partnership mechanisms in the area of tourism, travel safety, and other issues related to tourism.

In 2023, the LEPL Georgian National Tourism Administration hosted **40 press and information tours** from EU Member States.

During the reporting period, the LEPL Georgian National Tourism Administration participated in the following **international tourism fairs** organised in EU Member States: FITUR – Madrid, Spain; MATKA – Helsinki, Finland; Baltour – Riga, Latvia; BIT – Milan, Italy; ITB – Berlin, Germany, Top Resa – Paris, France; and PTAK Warsaw – Warsaw, Poland.

In 2023, **marketing campaigns** were carried out in EU Member States on the following platforms:

- In cooperation with the German communication agency ‘KPRN Network GmbH’, the Georgian National Tourism Administration implemented an integrated marketing campaign in Germany. The purpose of the campaign was to position Georgia on the German market as a tourist attractive country. Within the framework of the campaign, various PR and marketing activities were planned every month, such as digital advertising, printed advertising, activation of influencers, publication of articles on both printed and digital platforms, holding presentations about Georgia, and organising culinary shows.
- In order to attract the high-end tourist segment, in July-December 2023, the Georgian National Tourism Administration carried out a large-scale integrated marketing campaign on the Bloomberg media platform, the target markets of which in the EU were Italy, France, Spain, Germany, Poland, Estonia, Lithuania and Latvia.
- In November-December 2023, the Georgian National Tourism Administration carried out a marketing campaign on the travel platform Expedia, which implied the display of digital banners on Expedia and its partner websites, the publication of information about Georgia in the designated section of Expedia, and the activities on social media. The target market of the campaign from EU Member States was Germany.
- In November-December 2023, the Georgian National Tourism Administration carried out a marketing campaign on the Skyscanner platform, the target markets of which in the EU were Germany and Poland. The campaign included the display of digital banners on the Skyscanner websites, in the designated section of Skyscanner, and also on social media (Instagram, Facebook, and TikTok).

In order to promote the business tourism potential of the country, in 2023, the Georgian National Tourism Administration participated in the following **international business tourism events** held in EU Member States:

- On 29-31 January 2023, the Conventions and Exhibition Bureau of the Georgian National Tourism Administration participated in the forum ‘MCE Central and Eastern Europe’, held in Dresden, Germany. Forum participants were the conventions bureaus and service providers from Central and Eastern Europe, as well as representatives from international events ordering companies and

- associations from such priority markets as Denmark, Sweden, Belgium, Netherlands, Luxembourg, Germany, France, and Switzerland. During the event, representatives of the Bureau held B2B meetings.
- On 16 March 2023, the Conventions and Exhibition Bureau of the Georgian National Tourism Administration participated in the event ‘PURE Meetings and Events, 2023’, held in Paris, France. During the event, meetings were held with representatives from leading French companies operating in the field of business tourism, and with potential clients.
 - In order to promote the business tourism potential of Georgia and to hold meetings with potential partners, on 22-25 October 2023, the Conventions and Exhibition Bureau of the Georgian National Tourism Administration participated in the forum ‘m&i Lake Como 2023’, held in Italy. During the forum, meetings were held with representatives from the leading companies operating in the area of business in EU Member States (Belgium, Germany, France, Poland, and Finland).
 - On 23-25 May 2023, the Conventions and Exhibition Bureau of the Georgian National Tourism Administration participated in the international business tourism exhibition ‘IMEX 2023’, held in Frankfurt, Germany. At the exhibition the Bureau was represented together with 10 member companies (hotels and travel companies) and the Department of Tourism and Resorts of the Autonomous Republic of Ajara. Within the framework of the exhibition, representatives from the Georgian National Tourism Administration held meetings with potential partners, namely representatives from the areas of hospitality and events from Germany, France, Italy and Belgium. Issues related to organising large-scale conferences and corporate tours in Georgia were discussed at the meetings.
 - In order to raise awareness of the business tourism of Georgia, the Conventions and Exhibition Bureau of the Georgian National Tourism Administration participated in events held in the Business Tourism Pavilion within the framework of ‘ITB Berlin 2023’. As part of the event, B2B meetings were held with companies and associations operating in the area of business tourism in different EU Member States.
 - On 28-30 November 2023, the Conventions and Exhibition Bureau of the Georgian National Tourism Administration participated in the international tourism exhibition ‘IBTM World’, held in Barcelona, Spain. Representatives from eight member companies of the Bureau, the Department of Tourism and Resorts of the Autonomous Republic of Ajara, and Imereti tourist destination management organisation, participated in the exhibition together with the Conventions and Exhibition Bureau. Within the framework of the exhibition, in order to deepen partnership in the direction of business tourism, presentations, business negotiations and meetings were held with representatives from up to 40 international and local companies and associations.

In order to promote the **business tourism potential** of the country, in 2023, the LEPL Georgian National Tourism Administration also held **a road show**, a country presentation, and B2B meetings:

- On 6-8 June 2023, in cooperation with ‘Air Baltics’ airlines and the Department of Tourism and Resorts of the Autonomous Republic of Ajara, the Conventions and Exhibition Bureau of the Georgian National Tourism Administration held a road show in Denmark and Sweden titled ‘Roadshow – Scandinavia’. On 6 June in Copenhagen, Denmark, and on 8 June in Stockholm, Sweden, the Bureau hosted events, within the framework of which B2B meetings were held between representatives of the Georgian private sector (up to 14 companies that are members of the Bureau) and local leading organisations operating in the business tourism sector, in order to deepen cooperation in the direction of business tourism.

7.10 Education, Science, Youth

Georgia is approximating to the EU in this area (Association Agreement, Title VI, Chapter 16, Annex XXXII).

As of 2023, 31 projects with Georgian participants have been financed under the Framework Programme for Research and Innovation ‘**Horizon Europe**’ (with the participation of 28 organisations), in which the direct EU contribution amounts to EUR 3 633 399. In total, 166 project applications have been submitted by 101 organisations from Georgia.

As of 2023, 16 grant offices of ‘**Horizon Europe**’ have been operating in Georgia, which held 99 information meetings with more than 1 800 participants during the reporting period. During that period, 262 individual consultations were provided to potential applicants by the university grant offices.

As of 2023, Georgian researchers are engaged in 31 ongoing ‘**COST Action**’ activities; Georgian researchers have been nominated for membership of the Management Committee of 36 of these Actions.

During the reporting period, the Ministry of Education and Science of Georgia prepared a **final report on the 2022 performance indicators and the respective documents** envisaged by the EU programme ‘Developing and Bringing Skills into Compliance with Labour Market Requirements’, which have been submitted, together with the respective evidence, to the representatives of the EUMM.

The sectoral characteristics of medical education were updated and the draft accreditation standards and assessment procedures for doctoral programmes have been drawn up.
<https://eqe.ge/ka/page/static/1033/jandacva-socialuri-ketildgheoba>

In 2023, 198 new vocational training and retraining programmes were added to the **formal education system** in the areas of information and communication, agriculture, engineering, production and processing, business administration, education, personal services, architecture and construction, and art. During the reporting period 7 000 students were enrolled in the programmes.

The 2023-2026 strategy of career guidance, counselling and career planning in formal education and a respective action plan have been drawn up.

In April 2023, the non-entrepreneurial (non-commercial) legal entity the Institute of Culture was granted the right to **recognise informal education**, within the scope of the right to implement vocational training/retraining programmes, obtained in accordance with the procedure established by the legislation of Georgia. As of December 2023, 11 facilities have the right to recognise informal education.

As of 2023, the informal education recognition service is available in the following 11 areas: business and administration, information and communication technologies, personal services, engineering, security services, education, healthcare, architecture and construction, agriculture, production and processing, and art.

Registration for **vocational education programmes** was announced during the reporting period. During the admissions of 2023, the number of students enrolled in **the integrated vocational education programmes** was increased by 40 % compared to the previous year. In 2023, 783 students were enrolled in integrated vocational education programmes.

In coordination with the Skills Agency Georgia, in 2023, 30 project applications were financed within the framework of the competition announced for **the vocational education institutions and civic organisations**, which are implemented at 23 vocational education institutions. The financed projects are being implemented at the authorised vocational education institutions operating in Samegrelo, Kakheti, Racha, Guria, Kvemo Kartli, Shida Kartli, Samtskhe-Javakheti, Mtskheta-Mtianeti, Ajara, Imereti and Tbilisi.

In terms of the further development of the **European School**, during the reporting period, the National Director of the school was selected through an open competition. The school Management Board was established, its statute was approved, and its members were determined.

8 working groups were created at the Ministry of Education and Science in order to assist the European School in various initiatives.

On 23 May 2023, the graduation ceremony of the 4th cohort (38 students) was held. The admission of the 5th cohort has also been completed, and 20 of the best applicants have joined the 2023-2024 programme of the European School.

The construction of the European School building has started and the completion dates are the same; the new school building will be opened in September 2024. With its new infrastructure, the European School will provide services to 504 pupils, including 384 pupils at the elementary (grades 7-9) and secondary (grades 10-12) stages of education, and 120 pupils on the International Baccalaureate (IB) programme (grades 11-12).

As of 2023, a total of 4 500 teachers from 1 400 schools have been registered on the **European School Education Platform (ESEP)**. In order to share international experience, 19 teachers participated in seminars and conferences held in different European countries (France, Spain, Portugal, Hungary, Germany and Poland).

For the purpose of professional development, 2 962 teachers participated in the following training modules: Working on the ESEP and Initiating eTwinning Projects – 1 572 teachers were trained; ‘Planning eTwinning Projects with Web 2.0 Tools’ – 1 391 teachers were trained.

The news/resources posted on the ESEP portal are continuously being translated into Georgian.

Within the framework of the EU-funded project ‘Skills4Success’, considering the situation analysis and the international practice, **a conceptual document for developing youth entrepreneurship has been prepared**. The document overviews local context, is based on the best European experience, and provides recommendations for supporting youth entrepreneurship in Georgia. The document is accompanied by a public consultation report and the action plan.

The professional standards for youth workers were approved by Ordinance No 205 of 5 June 2023.

The EU-funded project ‘Skills4Success’ has been completed, within the framework of which 20 mobile youth workers have established youth services in 10 municipalities of 5 regions of Georgia, in which 2000 local youngsters have been engaged. After the completion of the project, an internal evaluation was conducted, based on which 6 workers continued their activities in 6 municipalities of 3 regions of Georgia.

A working version of the Law of Georgia on Youth has been drawn up within the framework of the EU Technical Assistance programme (Skills4Jobs). With the assistance of the Council of Europe, together with the

Youth Strategy, the draft Law has been revised by a youth policy expert. The working draft of the Law has been submitted to the Parliament.

Within the framework of the EU Technical Assistance programme 'Skills4Jobs', **a draft of the training course for youth workers, a concept document on youth services**, and based on it, **a document of quality standards for youth services** have also been prepared (for youth centres, areas and camps), which aim to introduce quality standards for youth centres, areas and camps and to facilitate the development of quality services.

As of 2023, 25 municipalities have youth councils/youth advisory councils approved by mayors.

In order to support the **strengthening of youth organisations**, the International Labour Organization (ILO) held a business training for the applicants of the 2022 grant competition of the LEPL Youth Agency. A total of 20 participants from 20 different organisations (all over Georgia) were selected to participate in the training 'Start and Develop Your Business', which aims to conduct trainings for potential micro/small entrepreneurs or for those who wish to receive business consulting in the regions of Georgia, for the purpose of developing entrepreneurship.

7.11 Cooperation in the Area of Culture and Sport

Deepening cooperation with the EU in the area of culture and sport within the framework of the Association Agreement (Association Agreement, Title VI, Chapters 17 and 19) is an important area. Various activities were carried out during the reporting period.

On 4 October 2023, the international culture festival 'Europalia-Georgia' was officially opened at the BOZAR Centre for Fine Arts, in Brussels, in which **Georgia participated as a guest country for the first time**. With the support of the Government of Georgia and with the involvement of the Ministry of Culture of Georgia, from 4 October 2023 to February 2024, inclusive, large-scale and diverse events were held in Belgium and its neighbouring countries within the framework of the festival 'Europalia-Georgia'.

In order to support the implementation of the **Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions** of 2005 of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), together with many other components, great attention is paid to the implementation of projects for and with the engagement of ethnic minorities, persons with disabilities, and persons with special educational needs. The Ministry of Culture has implemented the programme '**Facilitation of Culture**', within the framework of which, in order to support different disciplines of art and culture, 438 projects were contracted in 2023, including 286 projects through a competition and 152 projects without a competition.

Within the framework of the 'Creative Europe' programme, active work has been carried out during the reporting period in terms of raising awareness of the programme, consulting with beneficiaries and actively helping them in the working process. In total, 250 consultation meetings were held on the culture sub-programme and 200 meetings were held on the media sub-programme (both in physical and online formats); 10 information meetings were held regarding the competitions announced within the framework of the programme both in Georgia and in other participating countries. In addition, one of the most active competitions of the programme, namely the **Matchmaking** session, was also held. In 2023, 8 projects were financed with the participation of Georgia in all directions of the '**Creative Europe**' programme (culture, media, intersectoral).

The Ministry of Culture and Sports of Georgia has started the preparation of the draft of the **Code of Culture**, within the framework of which one of the directions will be the issue of the legal regulation of cultural heritage. Some part of the draft Code has already been drawn up. Two chapters have been discussed with the stakeholders. The draft Law will be initiated in the legislative body after its contextual and editorial revision.

During the reporting period, **the museums of representatives of ethnic minorities** carried out a number of events, including the following: 1) Up to 40 exhibitions and 25 educational programmes. The theatres of representatives of ethnic minorities held about 140 performances during the year, which were attended by about 22 000 spectators. 2) **The LEPL Folklore State Centre of Georgia** conducted research on the traditional music of the Azerbaijani community in Kvemo Kartli and Kakheti regions. Field expeditions were organised by the ethnomusicologists from the Folklore State Centre. The lists of local craftsmen and musical instruments were compiled. 3) **A non-entrepreneurial (non-commercial) legal entity Women's Alliance for Development** implemented a project '**Modern Context of Carpets – Teaching and Art**', which entails the teaching of traditional, including 'Borchalo', carpet weaving technology to the young people from Marneuli and surrounding villages. 4) The anniversary edition of a bilingual collection '**ART Miniature – Georgian Female Artists**' was published in four books, which includes the biographies of prominent representatives of Georgian art, including the anniversary collection (120 years anniversary) of the Georgian artist of German origin Irina Stenberg. 5) The anniversary album (2 volumes) '**View from the 80s – Tbilisi 1988**' and '**View from the 80s – Tbilisi 1989**' was published, which covers 60 years of work in photography of the Georgian photographer of Armenian origin Yuri Mechitov. In addition, the exhibition of the Georgian artist of Ukrainian origin Oleg Timchenko was held in the National Gallery. 6) **A non-entrepreneurial (non-commercial) legal entity Folklore Song and Dance Ensemble Nartebi** held 2 concerts in two border villages of the Shida Kartli region within the framework of the project '**New Year Concerts in Border Villages**'. 7) Within the framework of the project '**Georgia Seen Through Our Eyes**', implemented by the non-entrepreneurial (non-commercial) legal entity Women's Rights Community Initiative of Georgia, an exhibition of female artists of different nationalities (Armenian, Azerbaijani, Yezidi) was held at Tbilisi State Academy of Art in September. Within the framework of the project '**Boundless Art Spaces**', implemented by the non-entrepreneurial (non-commercial) legal entity Apollon Kutateladze Tbilisi State Academy of Art, the teachers of the Academy and the students of fine arts, design, and media art visited border villages (in Gori, Akhalkalaki, and Marneuli) and held seminars and workshops. During the event, local students created works; exhibitions were also held. 9) Within the framework of Shota Maghlakelidze's project '**Revived Debris**', an exhibition of Shota Maghlakelidze's works was organised in Marneuli. 10) Within the framework of the project '**Azerbaijani Hand-woven Carpets – Preservation of the Tradition**' implemented by the LEPL Mirza Phatali Akhundov Museum of Azerbaijan Culture, Azerbaijani professional female weavers delivered masterclasses. An exhibition of the craftsmen's works was held. 11) Within the framework of the project '**Visual Study of Centuries-old Mosques in the Mountainous Ajara**' implemented by the non-entrepreneurial (non-commercial) legal entity Culture and Contacts, photographs were taken in Khulo, Keda and Shuakhevi, and a digital catalogue was produced. The purpose of the project was to prepare a visual description of the mosques, which are a kind of memory of a multiconfessional and diverse society proving the centuries-old coexistence of Christian and Islamic cultures. The description of 17 wooden mosques, all their characteristic details, unique paintings created by Laz masters, and other unique works on wood, was prepared. 12) Within the framework of the project '**Teatrobana – Methods for Developing Creative Skills**', the Head of the 'Asteroid Studio', an actor, director, and teacher, Rusudan Bolkvadze, prepared a series of masterclasses, which were held and recorded at Giorgi Chitai Ethnographical Museum with the participation of the Studio's students (among whom were students of different nationalities and with different abilities, including persons with disabilities, persons with special

educational needs, and IDPs). 13) **At the international arts festival ‘Europalia 2023’**, on 10 November 2023, a concert was held at a concert hall in Bruges, in which the Georgian artist of Azerbaijani origin and performer of ancient Azerbaijani folk music, Tinatin Meitovi (Nargile Mehtieva), participated, who is the only female Ashik in Georgia. She performed Ashik songs using the traditional instrument Saz. 14) Within the framework of a competition for providing tour expenses titled **‘Georgian Pop Music and Folklore in the Regions’**, a non-entrepreneurial (non-commercial) legal entity **Folklore Song and Dance Ensemble Nartebi** had been financed, which held 2 concerts in Sachkhere and Marneuli in April and May 2023. 15) Within the framework of the competition **‘Support of Documentary/Scientific Popular Films’**, the project **‘In the Shadows of the Stars Together with the Superiors’** (the role of the Georgian-Jewish writer Jemal Ajiashvili in Georgian literature) was financed. 16) Two projects were financed within the framework of the competition **‘Facilitation of Translation Work’**, namely **‘Publication of a joint collection of modern Georgian and Ossetian poets’** and **‘Translation and publication of Mikha Lakerbaia’s novels’**.

The following 7 projects were financed within the framework of the competition **‘Facilitation of Inclusive Art Projects’**: **‘Development and promotion of modern inclusive theatre art’**, **‘Creative integration’**, **‘Interactive concert with the participation of a para-orchestra’**, **‘Inclusive performance Sea Gate’**, **‘The Little Prince’**, **‘Publication of The Knight in the Panther’s Skin in braille alphabet’**, **‘Authorship – a dialogue with the past’**, **‘Inclusive programme – Pirosmeni’s day in the National Gallery’**.

In order to promote a healthy lifestyle, an event **‘Sports Village’** was held within the framework of the **European Sports Week**, during which more than 20 types of sports were presented. More than 3000 people participated in the event. Various **#BeActive** sports festivals, parasports activities, veterans’ tournaments, marathons, media tournaments, bicycle racing for children and other activities were held. In total, more than 50 activities were held, in which about 20 000 people participated.

7.12 Regional Development

Regional development is one of the important components in the formation of the sustainable development policy of Georgia, therefore approximation to EU standards (Association Agreement, Title VI, Chapter 21) will facilitate the raising and further development of the quality of life of the population of Georgia using the resource potential of the country and its regions.

After the effective implementation of the Entrepreneurial Discovery Process (EDP) in the direction of Smart Specialization/S3 in Georgia, a respective EDP report has been prepared and approved. In addition, active work started in April 2023 and the draft of the Imereti Smart Specialization (S3) strategic document has been prepared. The process of agreement of the final version of the document with stakeholders is at its final stage. The review of the strategy document for its approval by the Imereti Regional Consultative Council (RCC) is planned in Q1 of 2024. According to the initial results of the process, it is planned to discuss the possibility of applying the ‘Smart Specialization’ approach to other region(s) as well.

During the reporting period, **the 2022 monitoring report on the implementation of the 2020-2022 Pilot Integrated Regional Development Programme (PIRDP)** was prepared and uploaded on the website of the Ministry.

After the successful completion of the **2020-2022 Pilot Integrated Regional Development Programme (PIRDP)**, since the beginning of 2023, work has been actively carried out in connection with the preparation of the new **2024-2026 Integrated Territorial Development Programme (ITDP) document**. The Programme includes a long-

term vision of regional development and new priority areas, such as **energy efficiency and environmental protection, human capital development and social infrastructure**. The new Programme will apply to all (9) regions, unlike the previous pilot programme, which applied only to 4 pilot regions. The project of the Programme has been prepared and it is being finally agreed with the relevant stakeholders.

After the effective implementation of the **Entrepreneurial Discovery Process (EDP)**, a respective EDP report was prepared and approved.

For the purpose of the approximation of Georgia to the EU Nomenclature of Territorial Units for Statistics (NUTS), at the beginning of 2023, work on the '**Harmonisation Plan**' was completed, which, as a result of consultations, was finally agreed upon with Geostat and the Ministry of Regional Development and Infrastructure of Georgia.

The Guidelines for Monitoring the Implementation of the Harmonisation Plan were also drawn up during the reporting period, according to which the responsible agencies will prepare and submit to the coordinating agency, twice a year, a progress report on the implementation of the Harmonisation Plan. The 2023 Consolidated Report on the implementation of the activities provided for by the 2023 Action Plan of the Harmonisation Plan was also prepared.

A construction company has been selected through a competition announced for the selection of a construction company **to construct a regional non-hazardous waste disposal facility**, and the preparatory works related to construction procedures have been commenced.

7.13 Financial Services

The purpose of cooperation between Georgia and the EU in the area of financial services (Title VI, Chapter 7, Annex XV-A to the Association Agreement) is to form a fully functioning market economy and to promote trade relations between both parties.

On 28 June 2023, the Parliament of Georgia adopted the Law of Georgia on **Voluntary Private Pension**.

The National Bank of Georgia is actively working on the changes to be made in the capital adequacy framework. Work is in progress in terms of definition/clarification of the elements of primary capital and the introduction of the Maximum Distributable Amount (MDA). The National Bank of Georgia also continues working on the **framework for consolidated supervision**. A **neutral countercyclical buffer** was introduced in March 2023, which is envisaged by Pillar 1 requirements and is part of the combined buffer requirements. This, in turn, is based on the Basel III framework.

The National Bank of Georgia is actively working on the changes to be made in the capital adequacy framework, including the following: work is in progress in terms of the definition/clarification of the elements of primary capital; the National Bank is working on the introduction of elements to be included in the capital, as well as deductible elements, and the Regulations on Capital Adequacy Requirements for Commercial Banks; a draft subordinate act has been drawn up for the purpose of introducing an additional methodology for counterparty credit risks, taking into consideration the CRR Regulation and Basel III approaches; in addition, a draft subordinate act has been drawn up on updating the standardised approach to weighting credit risks in accordance with the **CRR** Regulation. Work on the said projects continues. In addition, in order to ensure compliance with the **CRD** Directive, a draft subordinate act has been drawn up, which, among other things, envisages the introduction of the practice of publishing the sanctions (monetary fines) imposed within the

framework of the application of a supervisory mandate to commercial banks and microbanks. The draft has been prepared considering the approaches provided for by the Directive and it has been published on the website of the National Bank for public consultations.

In order to fulfil the requirements of Directive 2002/87/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 16 December 2002 on the supplementary supervision of credit institutions, insurance undertakings and investment firms in a financial conglomerate, in November 2023, the Parliament of Georgia adopted, through three hearings, **the Law of Georgia on Supplementary Supervision of Regulated Undertakings in a Financial Conglomerate**, and the relevant legislative package. The Law entered into force in December, immediately upon its promulgation. In addition, the National Bank of Georgia and the respective agency – LEPL Insurance State Supervision Service of Georgia – continue work on the identification and preparation of the necessary subordinate normative acts.

In 2023, the National Bank prepared and published, in December, for public information, **a draft subordinate normative act, which establishes a regulatory framework for the publication of imposed sanctions (fine, warning) in accordance with Directive 2014/65/EC**. As a result, in accordance with the Directive, it will be possible to proactively publish information on decisions regarding imposed fines and warnings.

In November 2023, the Parliament of Georgia also approved amendments to the Law of Georgia on Securities Market, which had been prepared with the co-authorship of the National Bank, and according to which the issue of the form of a contract to be concluded between a brokerage company and a client has been regulated in accordance with Directive 2014/65/EC.

Within the framework of the EU-funded **public services twinning project** (which was completed in September 2022), the project experts and the **Insurance State Supervision Service of Georgia** have prepared the initial framework of the legislation (the main regulatory draft law and the respective draft normative acts). The preparation of the initial framework of the legislation by a special working group comprising the employees of the Service and invited experts is at its final stage. The second stage will be its discussion with the respective stakeholders.

In order to establish an appropriate legal basis for Solvency II, a special working group comprising the employees of the Service and invited experts has completed the processing of **the main draft law regulating the insurance activities**, and currently the draft law is being finalised for its further consideration in accordance with the respective procedure.

On 3 May 2023, Order No 63 of the Head of **the Service for Accounting, Reporting and Auditing Supervision (SARAS) of the Ministry of Finance of Georgia** ‘on approval of the procedure for keeping the state registry of accountants providing professional services and the state registry of accounting companies in electronic form, as well as their structure and form, and the list of information contained in them, and the procedure for the identification of users’ entered into force. The registry of accountants providing professional services and accounting companies has been launched.

In 2023, **SARAS carried out monitoring at 27 quality management systems for auditors/audit companies**; in addition, SARAS prepared a draft Law of Georgia on Making Amendments to the Law of Georgia on Accounting, Reporting and Audit and a draft Law of Georgia on Making Amendments to the Law of Georgia

on Entrepreneurs, regarding which the Parliament of Georgia is carrying out further legal procedures within the framework of their consideration at the Parliamentary session. The draft Laws envisage the amendments for the purpose of implementing in the legislation of Georgia Regulation (EU) No 537/2014 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 16 April 2014 (on specific requirements regarding the statutory audit of public-interest entities); based on the Regulation, changes will concern important issues, such as **the introduction of the obligation of audit companies to submit a transparency report**, and **the prohibition of the provision of non-audit services by audit companies**, which directly pose threats to the independence of persons providing services to public-interest entities (PIE). Furthermore, the draft amendments include norms, the new formation of which was conditioned by a number of issues identified in the process of administrative proceedings during the period of operation of SARAS, based on which the legislation needed to be improved and completed.

In order to promote an increase in the quality and reliability of submitted financial statements, as from 2020, using EU practice, on the basis of Article 9(3) of the Law, SARAS started reviewing financial statements submitted by companies in terms of their compliance with international standards. In addition, within the framework of the activity, in order to increase the quality of reporting, SARAS inspects the financial statements in detail in terms of their compliance with the International Financial Reporting Standards (IFRS). In 2023, the financial statements of 11 PIEs, 11 first and 29 second category entities were inspected in detail. In total, the reports of 51 entities underwent an inspection of compliance with the International Financial Reporting Standards (IFRS).

In 2023, in accordance with Article 9(3) of the Law of Georgia on Accounting, Reporting and Audit, 73 901 financial statements of PIEs and first, second, third and fourth category undertakings/relevant groups for the reporting period of 2022, were inspected and made public on the reporting portal (www.reportal.ge), including 123 financial statements of undertakings having the status of PIE, 241 financial statements of first category undertakings/groups, 718 financial statements of second category undertakings/groups, 4 955 financial statements of third category undertakings/groups, and 67 864 financial statements of fourth category undertakings/groups; in addition, 3 657 financial statements of PIEs and first, second, third and fourth category undertakings/relevant groups for the reporting period of 2021 were inspected and made public, including 12 financial statements of undertakings having the status of PIE, 52 financial statements of first category undertakings/groups, 135 financial statements of second category undertakings/groups, 511 financial statements of third category undertakings/groups, and 2 947 financial statements of fourth category undertakings/groups.

An agreement was signed between SARAS and the International Finance Corporation (IFC). The purpose of the cooperation is to strengthen the capacity of SARAS of the Ministry of Finance of Georgia in terms of environmental, social and governance (ESG) reporting, and to develop a better sustainability reporting in Georgia, including in the area of ESG. In order to achieve that purpose, recognised international standards will be taken into consideration, including the requirements of the EU Corporate Sustainability Reporting Directive (CSRD).

8. Financial Aid, Anti-fraud and Control Provisions

During the reporting period, Support in Implementation of the Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area and Small and Medium Enterprise Development in Georgia (DCFTA-SMEs) NDCI-GEO-NEAR/2022/ACT-61198 was signed.

Interagency consultations have been carried out in view of new commitments based on the granting of the EU Perspective, in order to reform anti-fraud systems in EU assistance projects.

9. Institutional Cooperation

Meetings in various formats under the EU-Georgia institutional cooperation were held during the reporting period, within the framework of which important issues of cooperation and future plans were discussed.

On 18-19 July, the **8th meeting of the EU-Georgia Association Committee** was held in Brussels.

On 20 June, the **16th meeting of the EU-Georgia Human Rights Dialogue** was held in Tbilisi.

On 8 June, the **12th meeting of the EU-Georgia Parliamentary Association Committee (PAC)** was held in Brussels.

On 25 January, the 5th meeting under the **EU-Georgia high-level strategic dialogue on security issues** was held in Tbilisi.

The Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs of Georgia participated in the **Eastern Partnership Senior Officials Meeting (SOM)** held in Brussels on 30 March.

During the reporting period, in order to exchange information with the EU on progress in terms of fulfilling obligations undertaken under the Association Agreement and the Association Agenda, and to plan the steps for the following one year, with the coordination and engagement of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Georgia, meetings of **6 thematic groups of the EU-Georgia Association sub-committee on economic and sectoral cooperation** were held, with the participation of the relevant bodies and agencies of Georgia, the European Commission, the European External Action Service (EEAS), and the EU Delegation to Georgia. Namely, the following meetings were held:

- On 9 March, the 8th meeting of the 3rd thematic group of the EU-Georgia Association sub-committee on economic and sectoral cooperation '**Energy, Environment, Climate, Transport, and Civil Protection**' was held in Brussels.
- On 22 May, the 8th meeting of the thematic group of the EU-Georgia Association sub-committee on economic and sectoral cooperation '**Employment, Social Policy and Equal Opportunities; Public Healthcare**' was held in Brussels.
- On 29 June, the 8th meeting of the 2nd thematic group of the EU-Georgia Association sub-committee on economic and sectoral cooperation '**Industrial and enterprise policy and mining activities; Tourism; Corporate law and corporate governance; Consumer Policy; Tax Policy**' was held in Brussels.
- On 14 July, the 8th meeting of the 5th thematic group of the EU-Georgia Association sub-committee on economic and sectoral cooperation '**Agriculture and rural development; Fisheries and maritime governance; Regional development, Cross-border and regional level cooperation**' was held in Brussels.
- On 11 October, the 8th meeting of the 4th thematic group of the EU-Georgia Association sub-committee on economic and sectoral cooperation '**Information society; Audiovisual and media fields; Science and technologies; Education, training and youth; Culture, sports, and physical activity**' was held in Brussels.

- On 4 December, the 7th meeting of the 1st thematic group of the EU-Georgia Association sub-committee on economic and sectoral cooperation ‘**Economic dialogue, public finance management and financial control; Statistics; Financial services; Accounting and audit; Anti-fraud and control provisions**’ was held in Brussels.

On 29 March, under the leadership of a Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs Teimuraz Janjalia, an interagency delegation of Georgia visited Brussels, within the framework of which consultations were held with representatives of the Directorate-General for Neighbourhood and Enlargement Negotiations (DG NEAR) and other sectoral directorates (DGs) of the European Commission. The said visit marked the start of **a new stage of dialogue with the European Commission within the framework of the enlargement package**, and aimed to obtain information from the European Commission about certain measures and activities to be implemented by Georgia in the future within the framework of the enlargement package.

10. Strategic Communication

In relation to the submission of the application for Georgia’s EU membership and in accordance with the official approval by the EU of Georgia’s European Perspective, the text and the logical framework of the **2021-2025 Communication Strategy of the Government of Georgia for Georgia’s EU and NATO Membership** have been adapted in agreement with the agencies.

During the reporting period, meetings of the interagency working group on the ‘**2021-2025 Communication Strategy of the Government of Georgia for Georgia’s EU and NATO Membership**’ were held. An interim report of the 2023 Action Plan has been prepared. With the assistance of the project ‘**Support for the Implementation of the EU-Georgia Association Agreement -II**’, an invited expert held training sessions for the interagency working group on issues related to the preparation of activities under the communication strategy action plan, during which the **LEPL Digital Governance Agency** presented the strategy monitoring programme, and discussed the main disinformation narratives and the ways to deal with them.

With the organisation and participation of the LEPL Information Center on NATO and EU, during the reporting period, **994 various information and educational events were held regarding the EU. Approximately 29 780** persons both from Tbilisi and from different regions of Georgia participated in the events.

About 8 290 items of information materials prepared by the Center were disseminated throughout Georgia, including a Roadmap about NATO and the EU, Myths about NATO and the EU (in the Georgian, Armenian, and Azerbaijani languages).

Within the framework of an intensive digital campaign, **about 60 social media products** were created and published on EU-related topics in January-December, **which were viewed by a total of 1 911 995 people**. In addition, 76 posts were translated and published on social media in the languages of ethnic minorities (Armenian and Azerbaijani), which were viewed by a total of 809 782 people.

60 events were held within the framework of ‘European Days’, in which about **3 700 people** participated. Furthermore, the information campaign carried out through social networks, which was also carried out in the languages of ethnic minorities, covered up to 400 000 people.

A project ‘**Educational Debate Clubs about NATO and EU**’ is being carried out with the organisation of the Information Center, which aims to establish thematic debate clubs about NATO and the EU in the format of extracurricular activities at about 70 schools selected across the country, and to increase the knowledge of the

participating teachers and pupils about the European and Euro-Atlantic integration of Georgia using the format of Karl Popper's political debates. Within the framework of the project, debate clubs were established in 74 public schools across the country in the format of extracurricular activities, which were joined by up to 850 pupils. In addition, 74 teachers were trained on the topics of NATO, EU, and disinformation. Within the framework of the national debate tournament, 148 qualifying rounds were held, in which 74 teams participated with a total of 222 pupils.

Within the framework of the project 'Young European Ambassadors', 28 beneficiaries (young European ambassadors) of the project held about 90 meetings in 65 settlements of 23 municipalities of Georgia. More than 1700 participants attended the meetings. The programme is being implemented within the framework of the USAID programme 'Unity through Diversity', which is implemented by the United Nations Association of Georgia with the financial support of the USAID. The partners of the programme are the Information Center on NATO and the EU and the Office of the State Minister of Georgia for Reconciliation and Civic Equality.

In order to raise awareness among the population of their rights and obligations under the conditions of visa-free travel to the EU, one video-clip was prepared **with the organisation of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and with the financial support of the International centre for Migration Policy Development (ICMPD)**, which was broadcast on television (Rustavi 2, Public Broadcaster, POSTV) as a social advertisement. The video-clip was also uploaded on the online platform of the Ministry, and the Facebook page of the International Centre for Migration Policy Development (ICMPD).

11. Cooperation with Civil Society

Civil society representatives participate in the process of monitoring the implementation of the Association Agreement and the Association Agenda. In addition, civil society representatives had the opportunity to become familiarised with the draft 2023 National Action Plan for Georgia's EU Integration.

During the reporting period, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs participated in 4 meetings held within the framework of the EU-Georgia Civil Society National Platform of the Eastern Partnership (in Brussels and Tbilisi), during which issues related to the perspective of Georgia joining the EU, the benefits of candidate country status and future steps, the implementation of the Association Agreement, the implementation of 12 recommendations, and legislative and institutional approximation, were discussed.