



GEORGIAN
YOUNG
LAWYERS'
ASSOCIATION

ANNUAL 2023 REPORT



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**ANNUAL 2023
REPORT**

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It is my honor to present to you and summarize with you the activities of GYLA in 2023. For 29 years now, we have been helping people, fighting to protect democracy and human rights - in courtrooms, in parliament, in closed and open formats, on the street, everywhere where we are heard, and trusted, and even where they try to suppress our voice.

Throughout these years, the organization has always remained true to its goals and principles, and 2023 was no exception, but it was full of challenges for GYLA and society as a whole. This year, the country's democratic future was repeatedly threatened. At the beginning of the year, the government's attempt to accept the so-called Russian Law, which was dangerous for the country, was stopped by a large-scale public protest. However, the tendency to limit civic space is increasing. Hostile propaganda spreads daily and threatens the credibility of civil society organizations.

In addition, 2023 is the year of historical opportunity - Georgia's rapprochement with the European Union. At the end of the year, Georgia is awaiting the status of a candidate country for EU membership. GYLA fully supports the country's European integration process. We have been trying throughout the year to push within our mandate for the country to show progress in fulfilling the 12-point recommendation plan. This is the desire and aspiration of the absolute majority of society.

At this important time, GYLA continues to work with special efforts on the issues that are the main priorities of the organization. Justice and access to it, monitoring of court proceedings, reform of administrative offenses legislation, elections, improvement of supervisory mechanisms at the central and local level, right to assembly and association, freedom of media and expression, right to private and family life, ill-treatment, right to live in a healthy environment, right to work, health care, right to proper housing, social security, rights of women, persons with disabilities, children, IDPs, elderly, LGBTQI+ people, ethnic and religious minorities - this is the list of issues that we worked on intensively throughout the year. We prepared dozens of reports, studies, assessments, guidelines, policy documents, and public statements, developed

recommendations and presented them to the addressees, met with relevant actors, held public and closed meetings, presentations, etc. It is worth noting that during the reporting period, we provided legal assistance to up to 20,000 people, and we won a number of important cases both at the national level and in the European Court of Human Rights. In 2023, we were able to attract relevant resources and announced a small grant competition to strengthen civil society organizations and informal initiative groups operating in the regions.

The continuation of work in these directions remains in the 2024 plan of GYLA. Besides, considering the election year, we are especially preparing for 2024. We are planning a large-scale election mission, we will observe the elections and protect the right of our citizens to choose their own values in a fair and free environment, without fear.

Finally, I would like to thank our community for the trust we receive from them every day. It reassures us and reminds us that we are doing important work. Thanks to the journalists who helped us bring our message to the public, as well as to our partners and donors, with whose support we were able to overcome difficulties and achieve important results. Special thanks to the main force, the GYLA team, for the great work done in a joint effort, the results of which you will see in this report.

Sincerely,

Nona Kurdovanidze

Chairwoman of the Georgian Young Lawyers' Association



**GEORGIAN
YOUNG
LAWYERS'
ASSOCIATION**

OFFICES OF GYLA

TBILISI OFFICE – 1994

ADJARA OFFICE -1995

RUSTAVI OFFICE - 1995

KUTAISI OFFICE - 1996

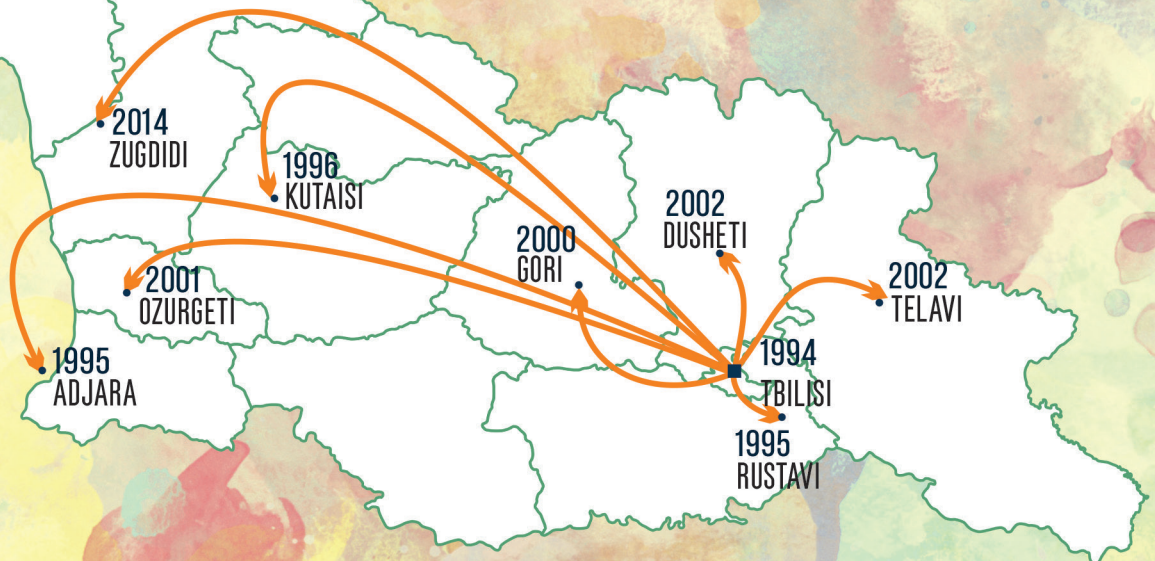
GORI OFFICE - 2000

OZURGETI OFFICE - 2001

TELAVI OFFICE - 2002

DUSHETI OFFICE - 2002

ZUGDIDI OFFICE - 2014



WHO WE ARE AND WHAT WE DO?

The Georgian Young Lawyers' Association (GYLA) is a membership-based organization with more than 400 members. It was founded in 1994 and since then it has been gradually expanding its field of activity. Today, GYLA, through 9 offices, operates throughout the country, serving to establish the rule of law and protect human rights both at the level of individuals and institutions.

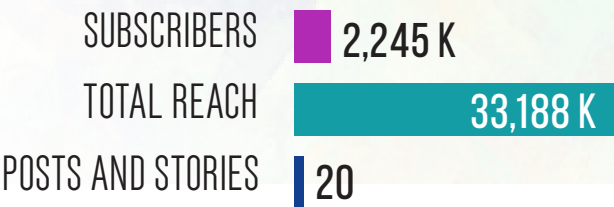
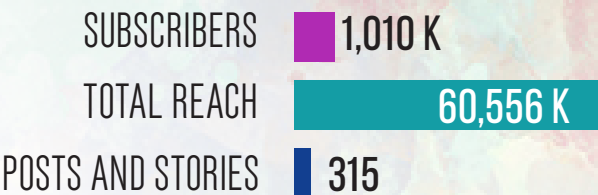
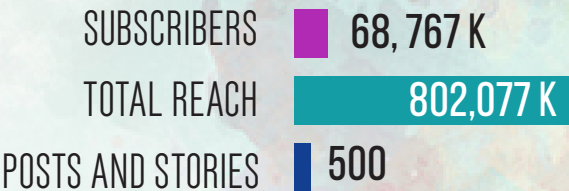
GYLA carries out content activities within the framework of three program areas. These are:

- LEGAL AID PROGRAM
- HUMAN RIGHTS PROTECTION PROGRAM
- DEMOCRATIC INSTITUTIONS SUPPORT PROGRAM

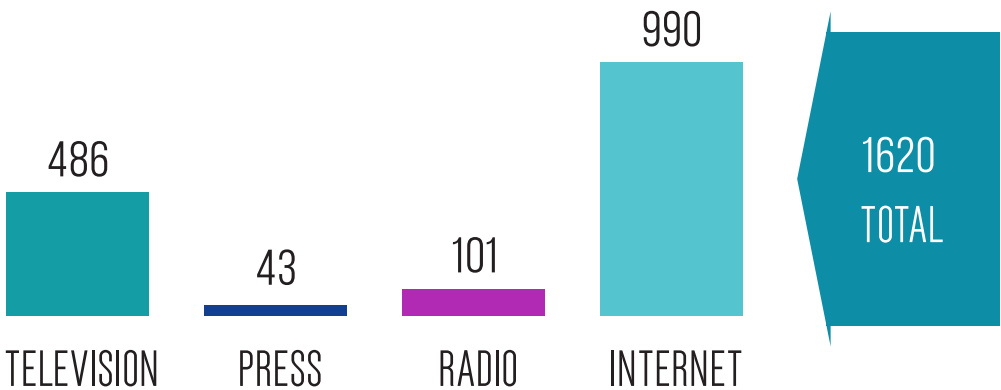
Following the statute and the established tradition, this time we present to you the 2023 report of activities carried out by GYLA Tbilisi and 8 regional offices. Reporting period: November 1, 2022 - October 31, 2023.

MEDIA MONITORING

GYLA ON SOCIAL MEDIA



MEDIA COVERAGE



MEETINGS WITH PARTNERS AND SUPPORTERS OF GEORGIA

In 2023, the interest of our partner countries towards Georgia was particularly high. This interest was caused, on the one hand, by Georgia's stated goal of obtaining the status of a candidate for EU membership by the end of the year, and on the other hand by the dangerous processes that periodically appeared inside the country and threatened the country's democratic development. Accordingly, important delegations from many countries visited Georgia during the year. Their interest in meetings with civil society organizations was also great. It is important to note that, during the year, GYLA, together with partner organizations, was given the opportunity to be a participant in these meetings, to talk about the current situation in terms of democracy and human rights protection in the country, and to emphasize how important it is for Georgia to obtain the status of a candidate country. Among them, we are honored to have hosted the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Federal Republic of Germany, Annalena Baerbock, at the GYLA office. It should be noted that her official visit to Georgia began with a meeting with non-governmental organizations at the GYLA office, which was a message of support for civil society organizations in difficult times.





LEGAL AID

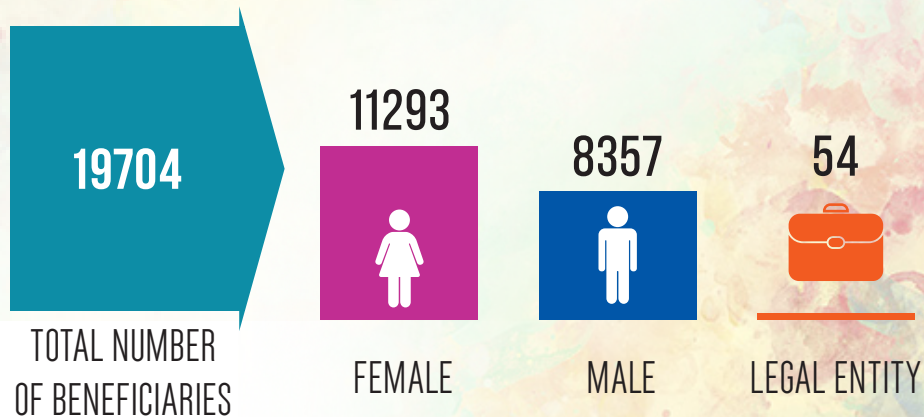
PROGRAM PRIORITIES

The legal assistance program of the Georgian Young Lawyers' Association worked in 4 priority directions during the reporting period:

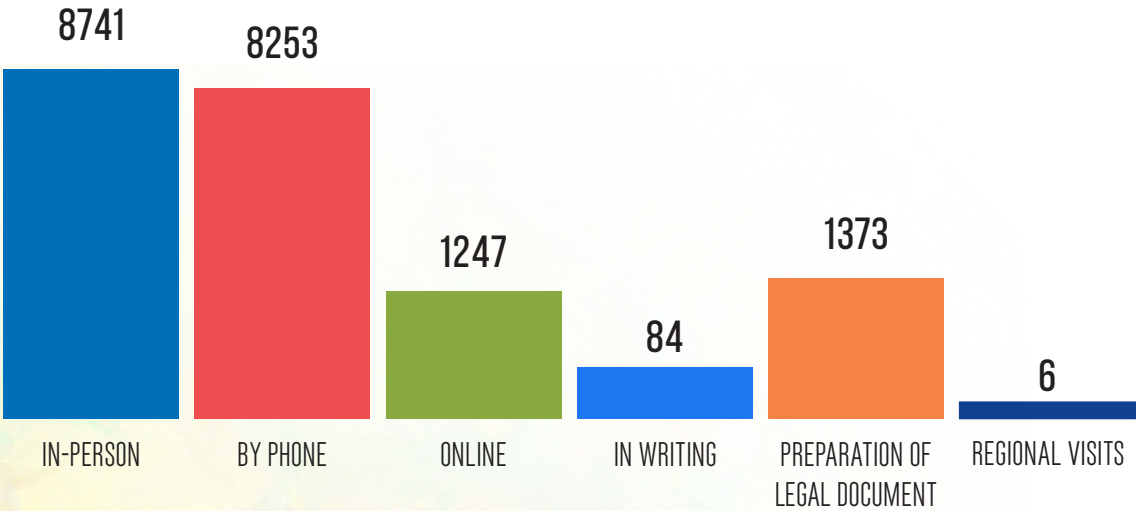
- LEGAL AID
- STRATEGIC LITIGATION
- APPLYING EXECUTIVE MECHANISMS
- RESPONDING TO SYSTEMIC PROBLEMS IDENTIFIED AS A RESULT OF LITIGATION

LEGAL AID

During the reporting period, GYLA provided legal assistance to **19 704** persons.



Types of consultations provided:



During the reporting period, GYLA successfully completed 49 cases at the national level.



Currently, **392** cases are being processed by GYLA:





IMPORTANT DECISIONS

Here are some important successfully completed cases during the reporting period:

■ **DUE TO THE EXPLOSION CAUSED BY A NATURAL GAS LEAK IN DIDI DIGHOMI IN 2019, TBILISI ENERGY WAS ORDERED TO PAY DAMAGES**

With the help of GYLA, the case of two minors was successfully completed and Tbilisi Energy LLC was obliged to pay maintenance for the minors until they reach the age of adulthood, as well as to compensate for the moral damages caused due to the health and the death of family members. The case concerned the explosion caused by a natural gas leak in one of the buildings in Tbilisi in January 2019. Tbilisi Energy LLC was informed about the leak in time, but the measures taken by it were not enough to neutralize the danger, which caused serious consequences. This case is important since the court decision established the responsibility of Tbilisi Energy LLC, not only as a private employer but also as an entity with delegated authority by the state, to supply natural gas to consumers in a safe manner, through systematic inspection.

■ **THE PUBLIC DEFENDER ESTABLISHED THE FACT OF DISCRIMINATORY TREATMENT TOWARDS EKATERINE KIKNADZE, DINARA VACHNADZE, NINO KHUNDADZE, AND DAVIT NIORADZE**

With the help of GYLA, persons employed in the field of culture - Ekaterine Kiknadze, Dinara Vachnadze, Nino Khundadze, and Davit Nioradze applied to the Public Defender and requested to establish discrimination based on different opinions. The case was about discriminatory treatment by the Minister of Culture, as a result of which they were restricted from implementing the research projects they won. The Public Defender established direct discrimination and indicated in the issued recommendation that the initiation of legislative changes and the subsequent refusal to finance the project they won were due only to the positions expressed by the applicants.



■ **A MINOR CHILD OF A PERSON WHO DIED DURING CONSTRUCTION AS A RESULT OF AN INDUSTRIAL ACCIDENT WILL RECEIVE MAINTENANCE**

GYLA defended the interests of a child in court, whose father fell from a height while working on a construction site and died on the spot. As a result of the tragic death of the father, the child received a strong spiritual trauma and, at the same time, lost the breadwinner. According to the court's decision, the claim was satisfied and the defendant company was ordered to pay monthly maintenance in favor of the child, from the filing of the claim until reaching the age of adulthood.

■ **IRAKLI MACHUTADZE AGAINST THE PARLIAMENT OF GEORGIA**

GYLA successfully concluded the case of Irakli Machutadze. The Constitutional Court, without a substantive review, recognized as unconstitutional the norm according to which the mandated member of the Constitutional Court would automatically leave their position upon reaching the age of 50. The court considered that this record violated the first paragraph of Article 11 (prohibition of discrimination) and the second sentence of the first paragraph of Article 25 of the Constitution (protection of a public servant from unjustified termination of official authority).

■ **GIORGI GOROSHIDZE AND INDIKO ABASHIDZE AGAINST THE PARLIAMENT OF GEORGIA, THE MINISTER OF EDUCATION AND SCIENCE OF GEORGIA, AND THE ACADEMIC COUNCIL OF TBILISI STATE UNIVERSITY**

GYLA successfully completed the case of Giorgi Goroshidze and Indiko Abashidze. The Constitutional Court recognized as unconstitutional the norm that provided for the dismissal of a person from the academic position (professor, associate professor, assistant professor, and assistant) after the age of 65. The court also annulled the norm that prohibited a person over 65 from holding an academic position. The Constitutional Court considered that forcing a person to resign from an academic position upon reaching the age of 65 or not to hold it is discrimination based on age.

■ **A. D. AND OTHERS AGAINST GEORGIA**

On December 1, 2022, the European Court of Human Rights in the case of A. D. and others against Georgia (nos. 57864/17, 79087/17, 5353/19) found a violation of Article 8 of the European Convention on Human Rights (the right to protection of private and family life). The applicants appealed to the European Court because they were unable to obtain legal recognition of their gender in Georgia and to change the gender entry in their identity documents in accordance with their gender identity. According to the decision of the International Court of Justice, Article 8 of the European Convention on Human Rights obliges the state to provide fast, transparent, and accessible procedures that will allow changing the registered gender marker. In the same case, the court emphasized the shortcomings of the Georgian legislation and the vagueness of its provisions.

■ **PERADZE AND OTHERS AGAINST GEORGIA**

On July 19, 2015, a rally was held in front of the Tbilisi City Council to protest the Tbilisi Panorama project. Several participants were holding posters with the inscription “Panorama, my c***”, because of which the law enforcement officers arrested 7 people. According to the minutes of violations, the detainees had posters with obscene inscriptions, which they chanted loudly, and two of them did not obey the lawful request of the police officer. According to the assessment of the European Court of Human Rights, the plaintiffs used the obscene term as a stylistic tool to express a high degree of opposition to the Tbilisi Panorama project. Although they chose a controversial form for this, it is not enough to limit the freedom of assembly. In this case, the Court found a violation of Article 11 (freedom of assembly and association) in light of Article 10 (freedom of expression) of the Convention.

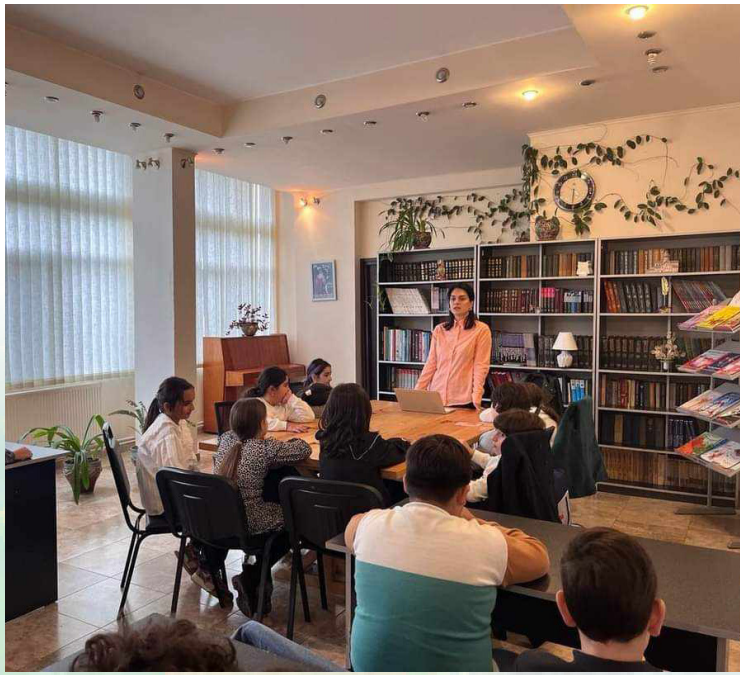


■ **OCHIGAVA AGAINST GEORGIA**

From 2011 to 2014, the applicant served their sentence in Gldani Penitentiary № 8, where they were systematically subjected to inhuman treatment by the penitentiary personnel. Although a national investigation led to the conviction of 7 people in this case, the European Court of Human Rights highlighted the shortcomings and long timelines in the process. According to its assessment, in 2012-2016, some inaction on the part of investigative bodies was revealed. Moreover, the complainant did not have the status of a victim, which prevented their involvement in the investigation. According to the court's explanation, "justice delayed is equal to justice denied", therefore, it considered that both the substantive and procedural part of Article 3 (prohibition of torture) of the European Convention on Human Rights had been violated. In addition, the international court did not ignore the decisions of the national courts. In particular, Tbilisi City Court and higher authorities (in 2014-2017), to which the complainant applied for compensation for material and moral damages, failed to establish the connection between the injuries sustained and the period of imprisonment, while the person was completely healthy during their placement in the penitentiary institution.

■ **A. G. AGAINST GEORGIA**

The European Court of Human Rights in the case A.G. against Georgia (no. 38650/18) found a violation of Article 2 (right to life) of the European Convention on Human Rights in conjunction with Article 14 (prohibition of discrimination). The case concerns the suicide of a woman victim of domestic violence, who made this decision due to systematic violence from her ex-husband. Over the years, the woman turned to the police for help 16 times. Despite this, the law enforcement agencies failed to exercise due diligence and did not fulfill their obligations. This created a feeling of impunity for the perpetrator and encouraged his violent actions.



■ A FRIEND OF THE COURT'S OPINION

GYLA and Sapari submitted to the Constitutional Court the written opinion of a Friend of the Court on the case *Budu Shekhiladze v. Parliament of Georgia*. *The case concerns the norm of the Law on State Pension, which sets the age of pension for women at 60, and for men at 65.* The plaintiff disputes that he, as a man, is in a discriminatory position compared to women. If the claim is satisfied, the women's retirement age may be increased from 60 to 65 years and equal to the men's retirement age.

The friend of the court's opinion filed by GYLA and Sapari notes that while men and women are essentially equal from a legal point of view, they do not have equal access to material resources. The statistics mentioned in the document show that women, unlike men, spend a large part of their time in unpaid work. In addition, with the motive of taking care of family members, they often refuse jobs, and promotions and agree to work part-time, which, compared to men, means receiving less income.

APPLYING EXECUTIVE MECHANISMS

One of the priority directions of GYLA is to work on the implementation of decisions and rulings of the European Court of Human Rights and to advocate both at the national and international levels. During the reporting period, GYLA submitted written opinions on the cases of 4 groups (*cases of Tsintsabadze, Tkhelidze, Rostomashvili, and Identity Group*) to the Parliament of Georgia and the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe.

As a result of the analysis of the execution of cases, the following aspects were identified among the problematic issues in each group:

- **Tsintsabadze Group** - existence of a criminal subculture in penitentiary institutions, shortcomings related to the involvement of the victim in the criminal justice process, including problems in terms of assigning status and monitoring the process from the victim's side, as well as the lack of legal mechanisms to protect against torture and ill-treatment.
- **The Tkhelidze Group** - improper/inaccurate recording of explanations of victims of domestic violence by the police, challenges related to identifying the motive of discrimination based on gender, inadequate integration of the risk assessment questionnaire into police activities, gaps in the implementation of electronic bracelets.
- **Rostomashvili Group** - improper quality and shortcomings of the investigator's decision as the basis for conducting a search/seizure with urgent necessity, challenges in appealing the legality of the search protocol, and the non-uniformity of the practice related to the admissibility of evidence at the pre-trial session, which is due to the vagueness of the norms.
- **Identity Group** - encouragement of discrimination by state officials, ineffective investigation of violence related to marches, lack of a special unit in the Ministry of Internal Affairs to combat hate crimes, and gaps in identifying discriminatory motives when investigating such crimes.

RESPONDING TO SYSTEMIC PROBLEMS IDENTIFIED AS A RESULT OF PROCEEDINGS

To solve the systemic problems identified as a result of the proceedings, GYLA applies various mechanisms. During the reporting period, the organization carried out a number of activities in this regard.

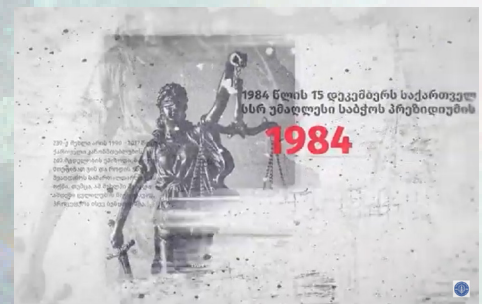
- Active advocacy continued in the direction of **changing the Code of Administrative Offenses incompatible with human rights and its systematic reformation**. For this purpose:



- **4 quarterly reviews of Justice under the 1984 Code were prepared.** The Code of Administrative Offenses adopted in 1984 is still in force in Georgia, which, from the point of view of human rights protection, is the basis of significant problems. The quarterly reports include the main developments in the legislation and practice of administrative offenses in the period from October 2022 to June 2023.
- **The forum Justice under the 1984 Code was held,** the purpose of which was to provide the public with information about the gaps in the legislation and practice in this direction, as well as to listen to the opinions of representatives of various agencies on the challenges that arise from their perspective. During the forum, GYLA also summarized the results of the Justice under the 1984 Code project.



- A series of podcasts was prepared, within which guests - judges, experts of international and constitutional law, employees of the Public Defender's Office - spoke about the shortcomings in the legislation and practice of administrative offenses.
- GYLA is working on the case of a minor, in which **the shortcomings of the service provided by the state program for health protection - phenylketonuria screening - were identified**. In an effort to educate and advocate for the public about this problem, GYLA has prepared a document that outlines the gaps in the state's newborn screening program for phenylketonuria.
- A panel discussion was held on the topic of **Labor rights in the fields of public service and culture**. At the meeting, GYLA presented a report on the new personnel policy of the Ministry of Culture and included a legal analysis of labor disputes in this field.





- **A practical guide was prepared for journalists - regarding interference in professional activities and compensation for damages.** In recent years, journalistic activity in Georgia has been associated with working under health-threatening conditions. On June 20-21, 2019, and July 5, 2021, journalists were not only hindered in their professional activities but also were threatened their lives and health. As a result, a number of media representatives received serious body injuries, their work equipment was out of order. The guide discusses the main legal regulations and practices that will help journalists to restore their violated rights. In addition, the international standards for the protection of journalists, which apply during the coverage of public gatherings, are given.
- **A meeting was held with local media representatives in Gori regarding their rights.** Through the practical guide prepared by GYLA, journalists received detailed information about the international standards that apply during the coverage of public gatherings.
- **A guide for media representatives - How to request public information was published.** The document addresses the following issues: whether a specific material belongs to the category of public information, how an interested person





should request public information, and what levers exist in case of illegal refusal of the request. The purpose of the guide is to inform media representatives on these topics.

- **The manual was prepared on How to Use the Right to Strike.** The document discusses the rights of employees concerning strikes and relevant practical issues.
- **Another guide was prepared for rally participants and activists.** The purpose of the manual is to increase their awareness and provide information on such issues as formal requirements of legislation and aspects to be considered in practice during assembly/manifestations, relevant prohibitions, and defense methods in case of the use of special means by the police. The manual also discusses the rights and duties of the Municipality Office and the police during a peaceful protest/demonstration.



**A PROTESTER'S GUIDE
TO THE FREEDOM OF
ASSEMBLY 2023**



HUMAN RIGHTS

PROGRAM PRIORITIES

Protection of human rights is one of the main strategic tasks of the Georgian Young Lawyers' Association. The organization studies the situation in the country in this regard, analyzes the challenges, and promotes changes at the policy level. During the reporting period, the human rights protection program worked in 4 priority directions:

- EQUALITY POLICY
- SOCIAL POLICY
- CRIMINAL JUSTICE
- FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION

Below is the information about the challenges, achievements, and activities that GYLA implemented as a project or as a volunteer during the reporting period. In addition, the program actively performed the role of a human rights watchdog, within the framework of which 31 statements were prepared on various legal violations and issues.



MONITORING THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE NATIONAL HUMAN RIGHTS STRATEGY

CHALLENGES

The Georgian Parliament approved the National Human Rights Strategy (for 2022-2030) without prior discussion with the interested parties. At this stage, it remains a challenge to develop an action plan of the strategy with the involvement of civil society, for its proper execution, since it is not known what format the Human Rights Secretariat of the Government of Georgia has developed for this.

During the reporting period, GYLA played the role of a facilitator in the process of presenting joint opinions of non-governmental organizations on the Human Rights Action Plan and also advocated the effective involvement of the civil sector in this direction.



ACTIVITIES

For this purpose, GYLA:

- Held **1 press conference**.
- Issued **2 announcements**.
- Submitted, on behalf of 24 organizations, **written opinions** regarding the activities that are appropriate in the process of developing the Human Rights Action Plan in order to take into account the principles recognized by the Constitution of Georgia, and in order to establish a democratic, legal state.
- Developed **a tool for monitoring the National Strategy for Human Rights**, which was created for the **first time** in Georgia. **Training** was also provided to civil society organizations on these issues.

საქართველოს 2022-2030 წლების
ადამიანის უფლებათა დაცვის
ეროვნული სტრატეგიის
მონიტორინგის ინსტრუმენტი



ACHIEVEMENTS

By creating a monitoring tool, civil society was strengthened with relevant knowledge and skills in the direction of the implementation of the National Human Rights Strategy.

ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION

CHALLENGES

Gaps in environmental protection legislation and its effective enforcement remain a significant challenge in the country. Among them: a) environmental criminal regulation cannot properly ensure the prevention and response to crimes committed against the rules of environmental protection; b) it is problematic to impose criminal liability on legal entities; c) In terms of climate change, there is no unified legal framework at this stage, and the issues of adaptation to climate change will be important in the process of developing the law, since the threats arising from it put human life, health and development at risk; d) effective use of environmental procedural rights remains a challenge, in particular, obtaining public information on these issues from relevant state agencies is a problematic and time-consuming process; e) interested persons are often not given the opportunity to be meaningfully involved in the decision-making process and to have access to effective, timely justice; f) the level of awareness in the country about environmental protection, climate change and basic human rights related to these issues is still low.

ACTIVITIES

During the reporting year, GYLA:

- Developed and submitted **opinions** regarding the **Green Book** of the Climate Change Law, which proposed what issues should be covered in the law, what type of obligations should be imposed on the state, and what should be the enforcement mechanisms.
- Developed **opinions** on what issues should be reflected in **the Human Rights Action Plan** regarding the right to live in a healthy environment.
- Was involved in meetings related to the right to live in a healthy environment. Among them, it **participated in 3 international conferences**.

- Published **2 informative blogs** and **1 review** on various topical issues related to the right to live in a healthy environment.
- Held the presentation of the study **The Criminal Regulation of Environmental Protection**.



ACHIEVEMENTS

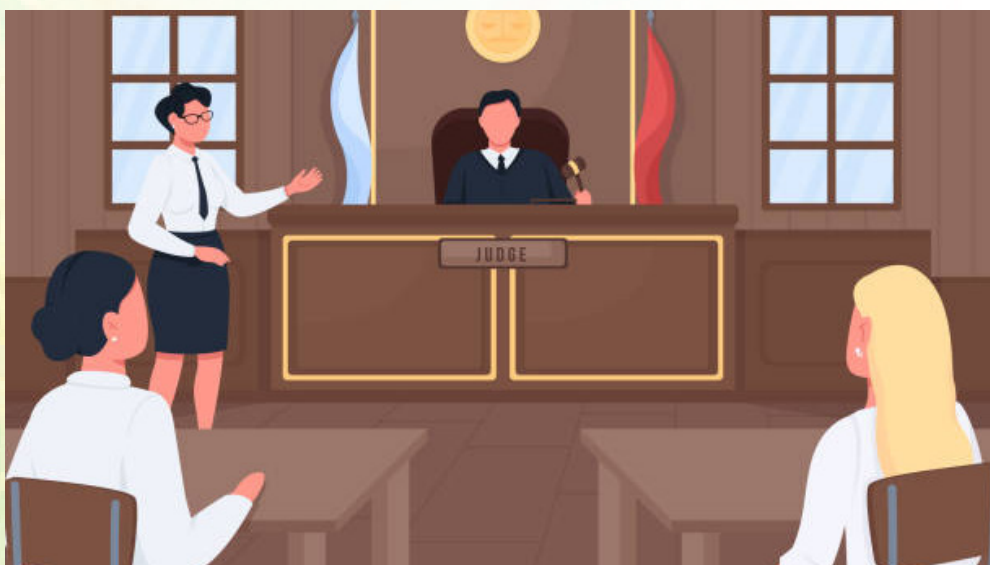
A study prepared by GYLA on environmental criminal regulation has identified the main problems that need to be solved to achieve the goals set in this regard. The organization has also developed recommendations to overcome existing challenges. The research provided popularization of important issues and created the basis for future cooperation with various state agencies, non-governmental organizations, and representatives of civil society. In addition, through blogs and studies prepared by GYLA on environmental protection and climate change, the interested parties received information about the threats to human rights in this regard and the obligations of the state.

MONITORING OF JUDICIAL PROCEEDINGS

CHALLENGES

For more than 10 years, GYLA has been monitoring criminal justice processes. During the reporting period, monitoring of civil cases related to the Strategic Lawsuit Against Civil Participation (so-called SLAPP cases) was also carried out.

Challenges identified as a result of monitoring criminal justice processes:



a) The practice of using only two types of preventive measures - bail and imprisonment, as well as their justification - is still problematic. b) Weak control of the court regarding plea agreements is alarming. c) Favorable approaches of the court to family crimes can be observed, which is expressed in the ratio of light prevention measures and punishments compared to the previous period. d) The temporary rule on remote holding of court sessions set by the legislation expired on January 1, 2023, although the Criminal Procedure Code has not yet been amended to introduce the appropriate regulation in this regard.

Challenges identified as a result of monitoring civil law cases:

Within the framework of monitoring, GYLA mainly monitored legal disputes related to defamation, which was identified as one of the tools to limit civil participation. These cases give the impression that they are aimed at causing financial damage to media outlets and, as a result, hindering their activities.

ACTIVITIES

During the reporting period, GYLA:

- Presented **opinions** and participated in committee hearings on amendments to the Code of Criminal Procedure, which were related to the reform of deterrence measures.
- **Prepared Criminal Law Monitoring Report № 17**, which includes, along with systematic, demand-based judicial monitoring.
- **4 blogs** were prepared by volunteers within the project.
- The project One Month as a Court Monitor was implemented, within the framework of which, a total of **10 students were involved** in the court monitoring process **as volunteers**. The goal of the project is to raise the awareness of young people about the functioning of the judicial system.
- **2 information meetings were held**, including with representatives of the Equality Movement. GYLA shared with them information about demand-based trial monitoring, taking cases, and filtering criteria.
- **An announcement was made regarding** the criminal cases of Nika Gvaramia and Lazare Grigoriadis.

ACHIEVEMENTS

The reform of deterrence measures can be described as an achievement that GYLA has been advocating for years, in particular, calling for an increase in their number and the addition of effective deterrence measures. However, it is essential to assess in the future how this reform will manifest itself in practice.

FREEDOM OF ASSEMBLY, ASSOCIATION, AND EXPRESSION

CHALLENGES

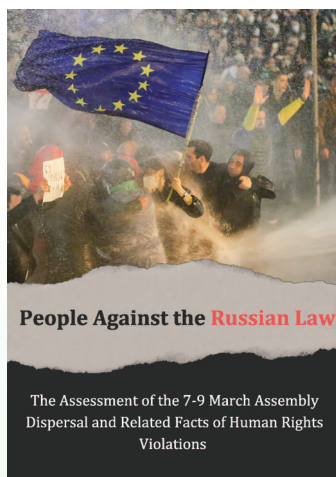
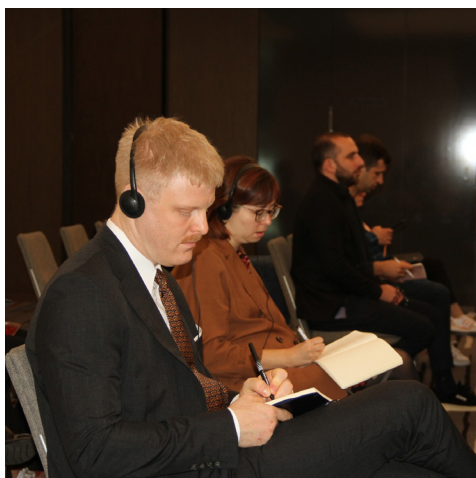
During the reporting period, there were attempts to narrow the space for both civil engagement and for media representatives to carry out their activities without interference. A clear example of this is the so-called Russian law, which was withdrawn by the ruling power amid mass protests. The government often used aggressive rhetoric against journalists and pressured non-state media outlets. One of the manifestations of such pressure is the increased number of so-called SLAPP cases. The Ministry of Culture, Sports, and Youth of Georgia is increasingly trying to increase the governmental influence in specific directions. The right of assembly of LGBT+ groups could not be implemented even within the closed event this year. The scale of pressure and discrediting rhetoric towards civil society organizations and their representatives has also increased.



ACTIVITIES

During the reporting period, GYLA monitored the facts of restrictions on the freedom of assembly, manifestation, and expression in Georgia, both in Tbilisi and in the regions. In this direction, the organization carried out the following activities:

- Prepared and distributed **12 announcements**.
- Was actively involved in the activities of **the media coalition** to monitor and respond to the ongoing events against the media.
- Contributed to **the Equality Coalition** and **CSO Meter** report on freedom of assembly, demonstration, and expression.
- **Worked** on hate crimes committed against media representatives within the framework of **the No to Phobia Coalition**.
- Prepared the **report People Against the Russian Law**, which assessed the trends and facts of human rights violations during the March 7-9 protests.



ACHIEVEMENTS

During the reporting period, within the framework of monitoring freedom of assembly and expression, as well as advocacy, GYLA immediately responded to the violations of rights detected during all important gatherings and demonstrations during the year.



RIGHT TO WORK

CHALLENGES

Concerning the right to work, the following challenges were identified in the reporting period: duration of overtime work and its performance without pay; not using paid leave in full; full non-compensation of leave due to pregnancy, childbirth, and child care; termination of employment relationship due to violations and illegal dismissal; discrimination on various grounds in labor relations; lack of trade unions and, if there are any, interference in the activities of their representatives; lack of a decent minimum wage; lack of social guarantees in labor relations; the need to improve the effective supervision system for the protection of labor safety and labor rights.

ACTIVITIES

During the reporting period, GYLA:

- Was actively involved in the activities of the Fair Labor Platform and, together with other members of the platform, issued **26 statements** on labor safety and labor rights in Georgia.
- Conducted an **active advocacy campaign** on the protection of labor rights in the public service, within the framework of which **25 information cards** and **20 blogs** were published on various current topics. In addition, a **student essay competition** on current challenges in labor rights was announced.

- **2 working meetings** were held with representatives of human resources services of ministries and municipalities, regarding the main challenges in the protection of labor rights in the public service, as well as court practice.
- A public discussion of **Labor rights in the Field of Public Service and Culture** was held, where representatives of civil society organizations and trade unions were invited as speakers.
- The organization developed **opinions** on what issues related to the right to work should be reflected in the **Human Rights Action Plan**.



ACHIEVEMENTS

As a result of the monitoring and advocacy carried out by GYLA regarding labor safety and labor rights in the reporting period, citizens' awareness of these issues has increased. In addition, civil servants are more informed about the standards of protection of labor rights in public service.

REPORTS SENT TO INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS AND INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION

One of the main priorities of the Human Rights Program is to send shadow reports to international organizations, to increase the awareness of civil society organizations in this direction, and to develop relevant supporting documents.

During the reporting period, GYLA together with partner organizations submitted the following reports:

- 2 alternative reports to the UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW).
- An alternative report to the Advisory Committee of the Framework Convention on the Protection of National Minorities.
- An alternative report to the European Committee of Social Rights regarding the implementation of the European Social Charter by Georgia.

Within the framework of the joint cooperation of the European Implementation Network (EIN) and the Georgian Young Lawyers' Association, the **training** Implementation of the decisions of the European Court of Human Rights in Georgia was held, which was attended by representatives of non-governmental organizations. GYLA has also become **a partner of EIN in the project** - Support of Freedom of Speech through the Decisions of the European Court of Justice.



GYLA was involved in the **working group** of the Council of Europe, the purpose of which was to develop the National Strategy and Action Plan for the implementation of the judgments of the European Court of Human Rights. In addition, it became a **member** of the EUROPEAN PRISON LITIGATION NETWORK (EPLN). GYLA and EPLN held a joint **panel discussion** in Tbilisi: The EU Accession Process: What are the Prospects for the Reform of the Penitentiary Systems in Ukraine, Moldova, and Georgia?



SUPPORT FOR DEMOCRATIC INSTITUTIONS

PROGRAM PRIORITIES

Without broad public involvement in institutionalized politics, state institutions become tools in the hands of political and clan groups. Under these conditions, the public goods are used for their well-being, while the interests of other citizens are neglected. GYLA Democratic Institutions Support Program continues to work on such reforms and projects that will contribute to the establishment of institutions with solid, independent, transparent, and inclusive politics in Georgia.

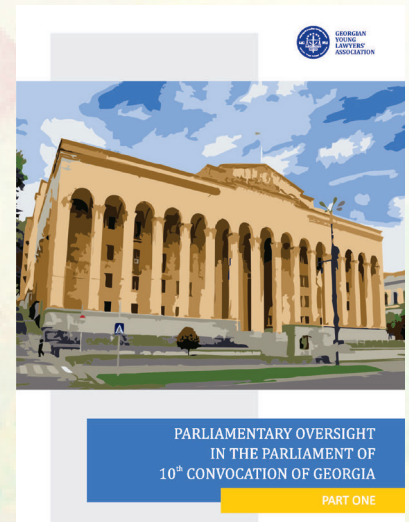
The program worked in 6 main directions during the reporting period:

- MONITORING OF PARLIAMENTARY ACTIVITIES
- JUSTICE
- PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION
- LOCAL SELF-GOVERNMENT
- ELECTIONS
- EUROPEAN INTEGRATION

MONITORING OF PARLIAMENTARY ACTIVITIES

CHALLENGES

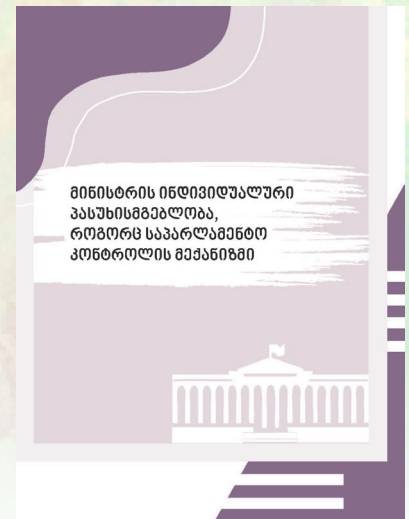
The monitoring of parliamentary activities carried out by GYLA includes not only issues of control of the legislative body but also all procedural aspects of its work. Ineffective use of parliamentary control mechanisms by deputies remains a challenge. At the same time, the legislative framework needs to strengthen such mechanisms in this regard, such as interpellation, parliamentary questions, summoning an accountable person to the committee, requesting information by the committee, and thematic research. Measures of individual responsibility of each member of the cabinet should also be improved.



ACTIVITIES

In this direction, during the reporting period, GYLA:

- Published the study **Parliamentary Control in the Parliament of the Tenth Convocation.**
- Another **small study** on the individual responsibility of the minister was prepared.
- Draft amendments to the Parliament's regulations were submitted to the legislative body.
- **Prepared 2 blogs.**
- Began work to study trust group activities and historical legal foundations.
- In order to spread information about the theoretical and practical aspects of parliamentary control mechanisms and international experience in the society, 4 trainings were conducted.



- **Presented opinions on planned changes to the Parliament's Rules of Procedure**, including the adoption of a legislative package by one vote. It also made oral recommendations to the Committee on Procedural Issues and Rules. In addition, it prepared opinions on the change of the rules for the creation of political groups in the Parliament, by which the non-partisan MPs in the parliamentary majority were given the opportunity to create such a group. It also submitted to the Parliament the opinions on changes to the regulations, which provided for the consideration of reports, instead of the plenary, in committee sessions, as well as regarding the change in the procedure of consideration in an accelerated manner and the manner of voting on the legislative package.
- Held a working meeting with the staff of the Committee, Office, and Departments of the Parliament of Georgia.
- Actively followed the events taking place in the Parliament in March 2023, which were related to the submission, discussion, and, finally, the withdrawal of the draft laws on the registration of civil society organizations as foreign transit agents. GYLA analyzed and assessed the relevant legislative procedures and their progress.



ACHIEVEMENTS

The Committee on Procedural Issues and Rules of the Parliament took into account part of the recommendations submitted by GYLA within the framework of the working group and reflected them in the initiated draft of the regulation. The Parliament also took into account the opinion of GYLA regarding the change of the quorum for adopting the draft laws included in the package (it will no longer be equal to the quorum established for the organic draft laws).

In addition, about 30 students, as well as representatives of regional civil and media organizations, were trained on issues of parliamentary control.

JUSTICE

CHALLENGES

One of the priority areas of GYLA is still justice and relevant issues related to it. Based on the monitoring results, the organization advocated fundamental changes with local and international actors throughout the year. The main challenge of the judicial system this year was the governance of an influential group of judges, which was facilitated by the current rule for selecting council members. While international partners talk about the need to reform the judiciary and the council, the authorities have encouraged corporatism in the council instead of carrying out fundamental reforms.

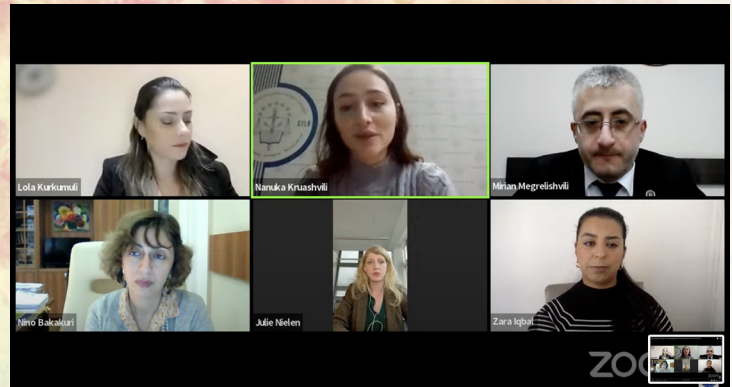
With the change in the law adopted at the end of 2021, the ban on electing the same person twice in a row as a member of the Council was abolished. Taking into account that the council usually includes only representatives of the influential group of judges, this change was evaluated as negative. The Venice Commission largely shared the critical assessments of civil society and emphasized the importance of these critiques in assessing the context surrounding judicial reform. In addition, the issue of electing 3 non-judge members loyal to the “clan” to the council is problematic. Meanwhile, the seat of 2 non-judicial members is still vacant.

As for the recommendations of the European Commission on justice, their partial implementation by the ruling party and the attempt to carry out the reform in a piecemeal manner cannot solve the problems related to informal influences in the system, corporatism, court administration and its accountability, at the same time, it cannot ensure the independence of individual judges.

ACTIVITIES

In this direction, during the reporting period, GYLA:

- Published 2 reports regarding the High Council of Justice and the Plenum of the Supreme Court of Georgia.
- Prepared the coalition study “10 Years of Justice Reforms: Challenges and Prospects”.
- Conducted 2 online discussions with the participation of local and international experts.
- Published 3 information cards.
- Prepared a blog post.
- Held 8 field meetings on challenges in the field of justice in the regions and ways to solve them (3 - individual, 5 - in coalition format).



ACHIEVEMENTS

During the reporting period, GYLA became the Chair of the Coalition for Independent and Transparent Justice and with this mandate continued to work to advocate for fundamental changes in the field of justice.

The organization prepared recommendations regarding the main challenges of the system, continued cooperation with international organizations to correctly identify existing problems, and proactively provided them with information on current issues.

ELECTIONS

CHALLENGES

Elections are one of the priority directions of GYLA's activities. During the reporting period, the Parliament adopted the draft law developed by the working group for the implementation of 12 recommendations of the European Commission. As a result, important changes were made in the election legislation: the rules for using electronic technologies in the elections were defined, the regulation on the certification of members of the precinct election commission was changed, the basis for recounting the ballots in case of an imbalance detected during the counting of votes in the precinct was determined, the deadlines for consideration of violations observed at the polling station on the day of voting and complaints received by the District Commission have been increased.

So far, the following challenges still exist: the vagueness of the details related to the use of electronic technologies and the low level of public awareness on this issue, the tightening of responsibility for the use of administrative resources for electoral purposes, the secrecy of the vote, the adequate response of the relevant bodies to the cases of voter bribery and agitation, the consistent and correct interpretation of the law by the election administration and the courts. In addition, with the draft law submitted by the ruling party during the reporting period, the procedure for staffing the CEC is changed and the majority is given the authority to single-handedly approve its composition.

ACTIVITIES

In this direction, during the reporting period, GYLA:

- Published **11 newsletters** on election issues.
- Prepared the report together with partner organizations (Transparency International Georgia, International Society for Fair Elections and Democracy).
- Published the study **Political Equality Index**.
- Held an online presentation.



- Opinions on amendments to the Election Code **were presented to the Parliament.**
- Published 2 announcements.
- Implemented **long-term and short-term observation missions.**
- Held a meeting with CEC representatives regarding electronic elections.
- Held **18 meetings with political parties** across Georgia, with the involvement of GYLA regional offices.
- Participated both in the parliamentary discussions related to the election legislation at the committee level, as well as in the activities of the working groups created by the Parliament.

ACHIEVEMENTS

GYLA successfully carried out long-term and short-term observation missions during the reporting period. The organization observed the mid-term elections of the Sakrebulo in Kutaisi held under the majoritarian system and the elections of the Gori-Kaspi majority member of the Parliament of Georgia, and the mayor of Gurjaani - in the respective constituencies. In addition, it participated in the committee discussions related to the election draft law in the Parliament and presented critical opinions to the ruling party on the amendments to be made to the election code.



PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION

CHALLENGES

On February 16, 2023, the Government of Georgia approved the Public Administration Reform Strategy for 2023-2026 and the Public Administration Reform Action Plan for 2023-2024. This strategy was approved two years after the previous guide was completed. Moreover, it does not fully address the needs identified through problem analysis and is largely focused on training and awareness raising rather than real reforms.

The OGP action plan beyond 2019 has not been approved. The development of the 2023-2024 action plan has been started, however, a large and important part of the commitments proposed by the civil organizations has not been shared. After the adoption of the so-called Russian Law in the first reading, the NGO members (GYLA, TI, IDFI, CSI) of the Open Government Parliamentary Council group suspended their partnership with the OGP Council of the Parliament.

In April 2013, the non-governmental sector, including GYLA, appealed to the members of the OGP Steering Committee to initiate rapid response policy procedures against the Government of Georgia, as Georgia was violating the values and principles of the OGP.

After 2020, Georgia's Anti-Corruption Strategy and Action Plan have also not been approved.

In November 2022, amendments were made to the Law of Georgia On Conflict of Interest and Corruption in Public Institutions, on the basis of which, among other innovations, the Anti-Corruption Bureau was created. Despite the fact that a number of powers have been united under one body (monitoring of declarations, monitoring of political party financing, protection of whistleblowers, etc.), it has no investigative functions. In addition, the head of the bureau is appointed by the Prime Minister, therefore, the low legitimacy of the head and the absence of an investigative function cannot guarantee independence. Meanwhile, Georgia does not participate in OECD ACN monitoring.

ACTIVITIES

In this direction, during the reporting period, GYLA:

- Published a statement regarding the suspension of membership in the Advisory Group of the Parliamentary Standing Council of Open Government, in response to government attacks on the civil sector.
- Participated in 3 working meetings organized by the Public Administration Reform Council, where it presented opinions to improve the Strategy and Action Plan.

ACHIEVEMENTS

Together with partner organizations, GYLA has started to use an effective mechanism to improve OGP processes in Georgia.

In addition, GYLA attended the international summit of OGP, where it had important communication with international and local actors on issues of improvement of OGP processes in Georgia.

The organization is still actively participating in the reform of public administration, although the progress depends on the effective steps taken by the Government of Georgia.

LOCAL SELF-GOVERNMENT

CHALLENGES

After the 2021 elections, a number of changes were made to the Local Self-Government Code, which weakened the role of the Sakrebulo in municipalities. GYLA responded to these legislative changes, on the one hand, with statements, and on the other hand, with appropriate conclusions. One of the essentially damaging changes was introduced in the Local Self-Government Code, according to which the mayor will no longer be terminated if the City Council fails to approve the municipal budget within the time limits set by the law.

One of the challenges of local self-government is the weakness of the supervisory function of the councils. Council members, commissions, factions, in fact, do not use the powers granted to them by the code and regulations, which affects the weakening of the accountability of the mayor and other officials. According to GYLA, they did not listen to the mayor's reports, and at least they did not use the written question of the member of the council, etc.

ACTIVITIES

In this direction, during the reporting period, GYLA:

- Published the study Council Supervision Over the Executive Body and Citizen Participation, which was presented to the public in the format of a public presentation.



- Developed **7** reports for the seven target municipalities, which analyzed the supervisory role of the Sakrebulo in each municipality.
- Held **7** presentations, at which it introduced the main findings and recommendations outlined in the report to the City Council and City Hall employees.



- Conducted **6 two-day trainings** in the target municipalities, which were attended by members of the City Council, staff of the office, and City Hall.
- Submitted an opinion to the Parliament on the planned changes in the Self-Government Code.
- Held **6 working meetings in 6 target municipalities** and proposed to each Sakrebulo the amendment of the regulations, as well as the provisions of the commission, which will strengthen the supervisory role of the Sakrebulo.

ACHIEVEMENTS

In 2 local self-governing units, the regulations of the Sakrebulo were improved in the supervisory part, and in 3 municipalities, work is underway to make changes in the regulations.

Also, 121 members of the City Council, employees of the office, and the City Hall were trained in the use of supervisory functions.

EUROPEAN INTEGRATION: CONTROL OF THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE EUROPEAN COMMISSION

CHALLENGES

In June 2022, Georgia received 12 recommendations from the European Commission, for which the country was given a few months to implement. The Parliament started active work in each direction, however, it was revealed that it could not show the proper progress so that the European Commission considers these priorities fully fulfilled.



ACTIVITIES

In this direction, during the reporting period, GYLA:

- Monitored the implementation process of 12 recommendations of the European Commission in 3 directions - in the part of elections, parliamentary control, and judicial reforms.
- Participated in the work of working groups created by the Parliament, and submitted opinions and recommendations.
- Developed and presented a report on the state of implementation of the recommendations in the three mentioned directions (the reporting period ended on April 15, 2023).
- Held 3 meetings with university students on the issue of European integration and implementation of 12 recommendations of the European Commission.
- Held a closed meeting on the topic of European integration with various actors, including international organizations, local non-governmental organizations, and political parties.
- Held a meeting with civil society organizations on the topic of European integration in Telavi municipality.
- Held a panel discussion and report presentation on this issue.

ACHIEVEMENTS

As a result of GYLA's information campaign, public knowledge about European integration and the importance of the 12 recommendations of the European Commission has increased.

The monitoring report on the European Commission's 12 priorities in the directions of the elections, parliamentary control, and judicial reforms was published. Monitoring, as of April 15, showed that there was still work to be done by Parliament to improve existing results. The legislative body had time for this until the autumn of the same year before the European Commission decided on the issue of granting candidate status.

The Government and the Parliament of Georgia changed their separate decisions in the process of implementing the recommendations of the European Commission. It was planned to take additional measures (including the improvement of the legislative framework) in order to bring Georgia as close as possible to the candidate status.



FUNDRAISING AND FINANCIAL REPORT

REPORTING PERIOD: NOVEMBER 1, 2022 - OCTOBER 31, 2023

In the reporting period, GYLA received a total of 1,969,345.42 GEL in the form of grants (grant income from the projects that the organization started implementing during the reporting period), donations, and membership fees. The break-down by sources is as follows:



During the reporting period, 81 employees, including 32 - in the regions, were employed in GYLA on more than one occasion. The total fund of their labor compensation amounted to 1,646,716.71 GEL. One-time honoraria were paid to 74 persons - 116,784.16 GEL in total.

The income tax on compensation for services, salaries, and honoraria of private individuals was a total of 377,707.22 GEL.

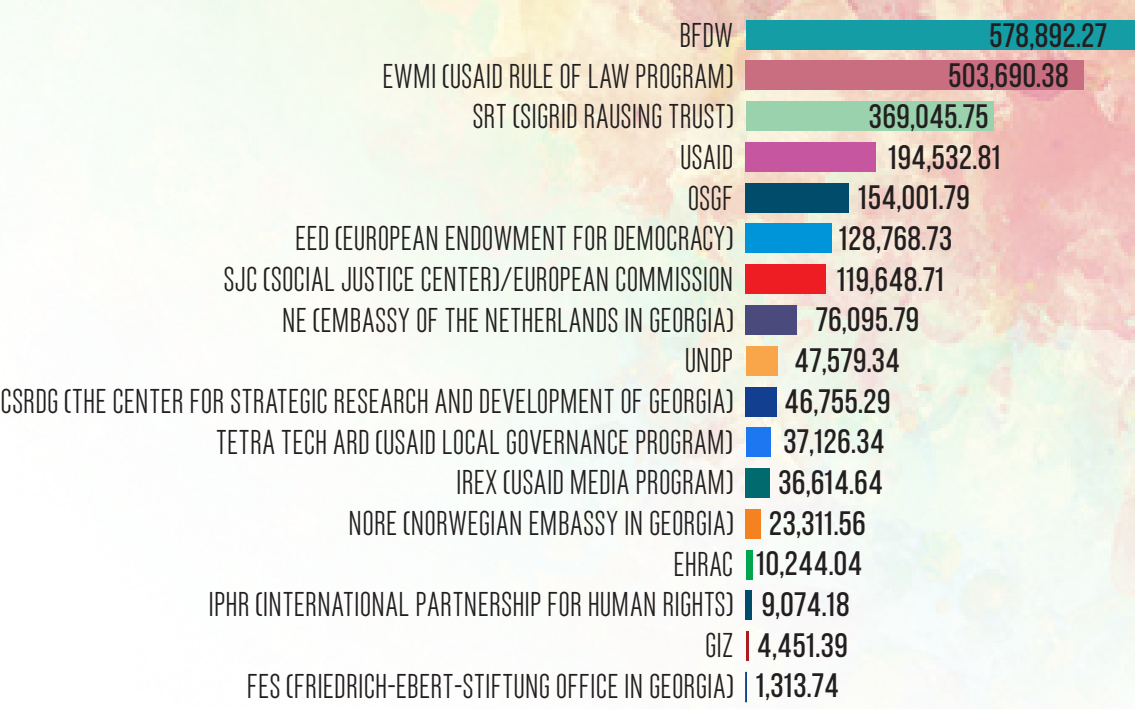
During the reporting period, GYLA acquired 15,214.70 GEL worth of fixed assets. In the same period, various small-priced office items worth 8,552.92 GEL were purchased.

59,281.42 GEL was spent to hold various seminars and meetings organized by GYLA, both in Tbilisi and in the regions.

Travel expenses of employees, members, and invited guests of the organization were a total of 40,325.17 GEL, office rent - 60,129.79 GEL, and communication expenses - 22,476.12 GEL.

Sub-grants provided by GYLA to local non-governmental organizations were a total of 82,699.42 GEL.

During the reporting period, 2,341,147.75 GEL was spent from the funds of the Association, which, according to the sources, looks as follows:



During the reporting period, GYLA prepared 24 project applications for submission to various donor organizations. From these:



As of October 31, 2023, GYLA is implementing 20 ongoing projects.

GOVERNING BODIES OF THE GEORGIAN YOUNG LAWYERS' ASSOCIATION

As of November 1, 2023

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Tamar Oniani - Deputy Chairwoman

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Rati Tinikashvili

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Telavi Office - Marekh Mgaloblishvili

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