

"Strengthening the Health and Well-being of Young People"

The fact sheet was prepared by the association HERA XXI, with support from the Gori Municipality Mayor's Office and the international network YSAFE. This Factsheet is based on the findings from the Regional Youth Forum, which visualizes the needs and recommendations identified by youth and stakeholders residing in Shida Kartli within the framework of the initiative "Strengthening the Health and Well-being of Young People."

Actors Participating in the development of Regional Recommendations



This fact sheet groups challenges and recommendations into three thematic categories:

1. Sexual and reproductive health and rights
2. Gender and freedom of identity
3. Mental health challenges in youth and its impact on sexual and reproductive health

Introduction

The legal and political framework of Georgia concerning youth issues aligns with international standards, including the obligations defined by the Georgia-EU Association Agreement and Agenda. The national concept of Georgian youth policy for 2020-2030, alongside the State Youth Strategy (2023-2026), positions young people as pivotal to the country's economic, political, and social development, recognizing them as the primary renewable source of human capital. To actualize this potential, the current strategy and youth policy prioritize the protection of human rights and equality, ensuring equal opportunities and fostering a transparent and inclusive environment.

Despite the comprehensive objectives outlined in the State Youth Strategy 2023-2026, significant challenges persist in advancing the health and well-being of young people. Notably, the 2023 Youth Policy Action Plan reports the lowest progress in Task 2.2 (Improving the mental health of young people) and Task 2.5 (Combating child/early marriages and teenage pregnancy), with completion rates of 25% and 18%, respectively.

Legal and Political Framework

The legal basis for the implementation of youth policy in Georgia is the "Concept of Georgian Youth Policy for 2020-2030" approved by the Parliament of Georgia. The Government of Georgia is responsible for the implementation of the strategic priorities defined by the concept, and the local authorities, in accordance with their competences, should facilitate the implementation of these priorities and the action plan.

The 'State Youth Strategy 2023-2026' represents a governmental initiative in Georgia designed to systematically and transparently advance the strategic priorities outlined in the 'Concept of the Youth Policy of Georgia for 2020-2030' (hereafter referred to as 'the Concept'). Aligned with the overarching national objectives articulated in 'Vision 2030 - Development Strategy of Georgia', this strategy specifically targets youth policy as a pivotal sub-chapter, ensuring cohesive and structured execution of its outlined goals."

The goals and objectives articulated in the state strategy are closely intertwined with the UN 2030 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Specifically, the indicators associated with the second task, "Enhancing the health and well-being of young people," align with those pertaining to health and well-being outlined in the third SDG. This correlation underscores the strategy's alignment with global efforts to promote sustainable development, focusing particularly on improving the health and well-being outcomes for young individuals within the broader framework of international developmental goals.

Association HERA XXI's contribution to the promotion of youth policy at the legislative and executive levels



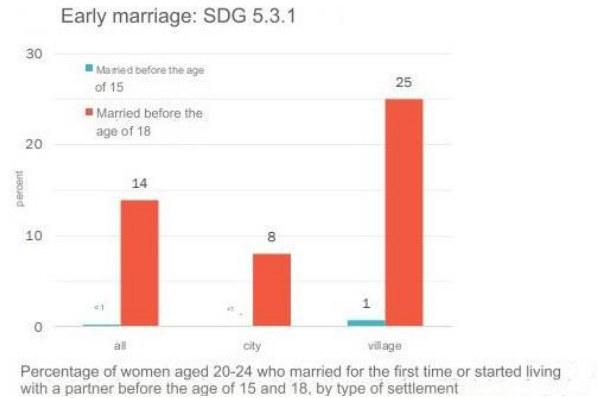
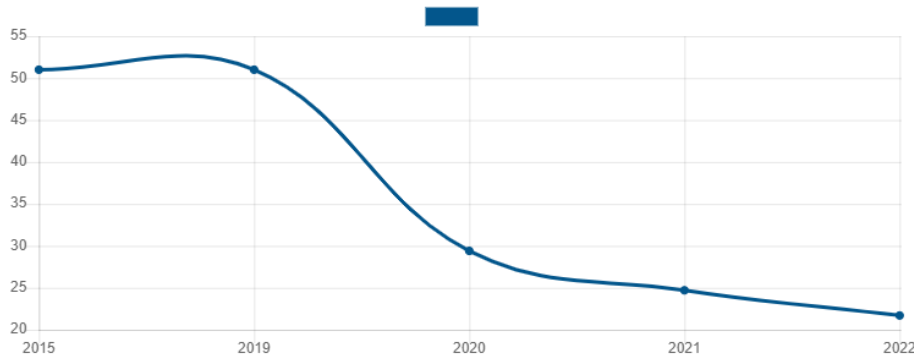
The Challenges at the National Level

Despite positive developments at the policy level, challenges persist in achieving the health and well-being objectives for young people in the country. The State Youth Strategy 2023-2026, informed by a comprehensive situational analysis, identifies limited access to health information and quality services as primary hurdles.

According to the Youth Index (UNFPA, 2021), a comparative assessment of gender-specific indicators reveals a significant downward trajectory in critical areas such as adolescent birth and abortion rates, although both metrics continue to exceed those observed in European nations.

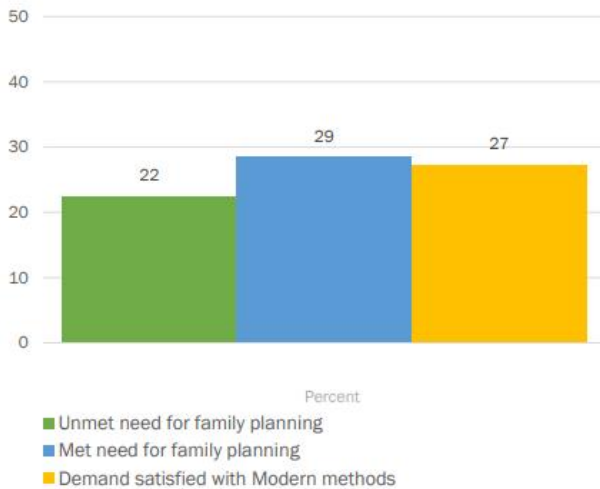
the MICS multi-indicator survey of births rate among adolescents (10-14 years; 15-19 years) per 1,000 women of the corresponding age group.

(UNICEF, 2018)



In 2023, the abortion rate among individuals aged 15-25 was recorded at 2950, constituting 20% of the overall abortion rate across the population.

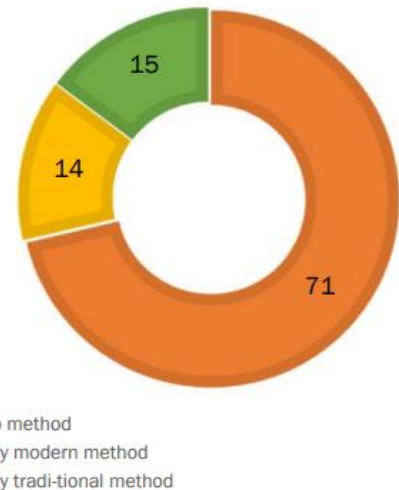
Need and Demand for Family Planning (Currently Married/In Union)



Percentage of women age 15-19 years who are currently married or in union with unmet and met need for family planning, percentage of demand for family planning satisfied by modern method.

*Data for "Demand satisfied with Modern methods" are based on 25-49 unweighted cases

Use of Contraception (Currently Married/In Union)



Percentage of women age 15-19 years currently married or in union who are using (or whose partner is using) a Modern contraceptive method, Traditional contraceptive method or No contraceptive method

Violence against women and girls continues to pose a significant challenge, with 15.7% of young women aged 18-29 reporting experiences of sexual violence before reaching the age of 18 (UN Women, 2022).

In its situational analysis, the youth strategy also addresses prevalent forms of violence affecting adolescents and children, including cyberbullying, online violence, traditional bullying, and sexual harassment.

Sexual and Reproductive Rights and Domestic Violence - Barriers to Access to Survivors Protection Services;

- Early marriage, especially for young people who represent marginalized groups (youth living in hard-to-reach territorial units and rural areas, IDP settlements, refugee youth, ethnic minorities, socially and economically disadvantaged youth, youth with specific needs): Sexting and other forms of online violence also remain a challenge.

Youth Mental Health and Access to Youth-friendly Services;

- Access to mental health services is still associated with stigma. Young people are not aware of whether there are confidential, accessible and friendly mental health services in the country.
- Low awareness of young people regarding youth-friendly services (Association HERA XXI, 2021);

Barriers to Access to Information on Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights

- The low level of awareness among young people regarding the importance of sexual and reproductive health and rights. The findings indicate that many youths are not only alienated from these crucial topics but are also, in some cases, naive about reproductive health and maintaining healthy lifestyles. This lack of awareness and understanding poses significant challenges for their overall well-being and health outcomes.. (Association HERA XXI, Institute of Social Research and Analysis, 2018);

Access to Telemedicine Services for Young People

- The state of health in rural areas is significantly impacted by limited infrastructure and an insufficient number of medical workers, resulting in young people frequently encountering serious difficulties in accessing timely and comprehensive healthcare services. A substantial portion of the youth population remains uninformed about modern alternatives for receiving medical services, such as telemedicine and e-health services. Despite recent advancements in developing standards and legislative regulations for telemedicine services, a large segment of the population remains unaware of these available options. This lack of awareness exacerbates the challenges faced by rural communities in obtaining necessary healthcare.

Low Level of Awareness on the Importance of Civil Activism

- The young people also do not understand the importance of civic activism, lack information about engagement and local civic participation mechanisms, advocacy, and exhibit a reluctance to participate ("Needs and Challenges of Young People at the Regional and Local Level"). (2021) Friedrich-Ebert Stiftung, South Caucasus Regional Office);

Challenges identified at the regional forum: Sexual and reproductive health and rights

Lack of availability of information on the health and well-being of young people

Adolescents report limited access to information on crucial issues such as family planning, early marriage and its impact on reproductive health, menstruation and bodily changes during adolescence, HIV testing, human papillomavirus, and safe termination of pregnancy. This lack of information is evident in both formal educational settings, such as schools, and informal spaces, including reliable online platforms or websites. Consequently, adolescents struggle to obtain age-appropriate, accurate, and reliable information on topics pertinent to their well-being and development.

Right to informed choice

Barriers to accessing reliable and age-appropriate information significantly limit the ability of adolescents and young people to exercise their right to make informed choices. This right is closely related to various aspects of their lives. For instance, a young girl needs accurate information to make conscious decisions about not entering into marriage or family relationships, starting a sex life, and maintaining independence without stigma or interference. Additionally, such information is crucial for her to make an informed decision about whether she wants to have a child.

Lack of youth-friendly sexual and reproductive health services

Young people often lack information on where they can access sexual and reproductive health services without facing stigma or physician bias, in environments that are trusted, comfortable, friendly, and confidential. They report issues related to the attitudes of doctors towards young patients, concerns about anonymity and safety, and instances of service refusal for minors. These factors contribute to a sense of mistrust and create significant barriers, leading to a reluctance or inability to seek medical help, even when necessary.

Access to modern methods of family planning

The provision of modern methods of contraception is neither covered by differentiated universal health care packages for young people nor subsidized by the government. Consequently, young people often find themselves in an information vacuum, as articulated by a common sentiment among them: "nobody gives you advice on this issue at all, and you have to find and find out information on your own." This lack of structured support and guidance exacerbates their challenges in accessing and utilizing contraception effectively.

Safe termination of pregnancy

Although current legislation permits minors from the age of 14 to access safe termination of pregnancy services without parental or guardian consent, young people encounter significant barriers in exercising this right. On one hand, a lack of information hinders their awareness and understanding of available services. On the other hand, instances of medical service refusal further complicate their ability to obtain necessary care. These obstacles often compel young people to resort to unsafe methods, thereby jeopardizing their health and well-being.

The majority of young people interviewed in Gori municipality (57%) report that access to medical services is problematic. Notably, the respondents indicated that youth aged 14-18 are more actively involved in various activities, but their level of activity declines after the age of 19. Additionally, girls tend to be more active before marriage, while boys face issues related to stereotypes, which hinder their participation in various events (Research of the Needs, Challenges, Interests, and Resources of Young People, Gori Municipality, 2020).

Gender and Freedom of Identity

The absence of a gender-equitable environment.

Despite the existence of anti-discrimination legislation and constitutional guarantees of non-discrimination, young people highlight challenges in achieving a gender-equitable environment. They emphasize the lack of awareness and prevalence of stigma within society. Young people underscore the crucial role of volunteers, non-governmental organization representatives, and educational settings in disseminating accurate, stigma-free information about gender identity, freedom of expression, and gender diversity.

Fighting the gender stereotypes

According to young people, gender stereotypes are the basis of gender inequality, discrimination based on gender and violation of rights. Young people focus on the role of formal educational institutions in combating gender stereotypes from an early age within the framework of the subject of “Me and Society.”

Gender based violence and femicide

According to young people, addressing gender-based violence and safeguarding women's legal status is a critical concern in Georgia. Femicide, viewed as an extreme manifestation of violence, not only violates fundamental human rights but also poses a severe threat to women's lives. Young people argue that without comprehensive state-provided prevention services, efforts to combat violence remain disjointed and ineffective. They attribute the perpetuation of such violence in part to entrenched gender stereotypes acting as a catalyst within society.

Mental Health Challenges Among Young People

Lack of information on mental health services and inaccessibility of services

Access to services for young people residing in rural areas is often hindered by geographic distance and slow service delivery. Furthermore, the financial inaccessibility of available services exacerbates this issue, with a significant proportion being provided by private clinics due to limited state service availability in the region.

The absence of mental health professionals (psychologists/psychiatrists) and the high cost of their services

According to young people, mental health services in the region do not meet treatment standards, highlighted by concerns about the qualifications and insufficient numbers of psychologists and psychiatrists available. Additionally, the high cost of mental health services, such as visits to psychologists or psychiatrists, further acts as a barrier, leaving mental health issues unresolved and often stigmatized within the population.

Lack of adequate spaces for addressing Adolescent mental health with necessary interventions.

Based on the widespread exposure of adolescents to mental health issues during this critical developmental stage, physical health has a profound impact. Consequently, there is a need for structured spaces that promote healthy lifestyles, thereby reducing symptoms of stress, depression, and anxiety. Unfortunately, the region lacks sufficient recreational parks and other similar facilities where adolescents can engage in various activities conducive to their development.

Recommendations

Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights

- For the purpose of prevention, develop a state communication strategy on sexual and reproductive health and rights with the inclusion of all channels, including public broadcasting and social media.
- In accordance with the State Strategy for the Promotion of Maternal and Newborn Health, enable access to information and services on contraception by the government:
- Integrate family planning counseling and free delivery of contraceptives in the basic package of the universal health care program of Georgia for young people and socially vulnerable groups.
- Retrain doctors on the principles of youth-friendly services, and introduce a self-assessment system of counselling with doctors in clinics.
- Ensure the provision of telemedicine services to young people living in rural areas and regions in accordance with telemedicine standards.

○ Responsible decision-making agency: Ministry of Internally Displaced Persons from the Occupied Territories, Health, Labour and Social Affairs of Georgia

- In order to prevent early marriage and harmful practices of children, ensure the development and implementation of an age-appropriate comprehensive life skills/sexual education strategy and action plan by the Ministry of Education, Science and Youth in accordance with the UNESCO standard with emphasis of the rights of persons with disabilities.

○ Responsible decision-making agency: Ministry of Education, Science and Youth, Local Self-Government, Ministry of Internally Displaced Persons from the Occupied Territories, Health, Labour and Social Affairs of Georgia.

Gender and Freedom of Identity

- Integrate gender equality interventions into newly developed strategies and plans of municipalities.
- Implement an awareness raising campaign on gender equality to ensure the environment with equal involvement of both sexes, including by organizing targeted trainings, information meetings, forums;

○ Responsible decision-making agency and persons: local self-government, board, City council, volunteers, civil organizations, representatives of educational spaces

- Provide information on gender stereotypes from an early age through situational tasks, awareness raising campaigns and educational workshops in formal and informal educational spaces.

○ Responsible decision-making agency and persons: local self-government, school management, teachers, trainer-facilitators, community organizations, representatives of community and educational spaces, family

- Effective supervision of law enforcement mechanisms in terms of femicide prevention, increase the provision of preventive information, improve and increase the number and conditions of shelters for violence survivor girls and women:

○ Responsible decision-making agencies: Ministry of Internal Affairs, Police, Self-government, social workers, gender council, court, crisis centers.

Mental Health Challenges among Young People

- Train psychologists and psychiatrists working in the region to tailor their practices more effectively to the needs of adolescents, thereby reducing the impact of mental health problems on physical health.

○ Responsible decision-making agency: Ministry of Internally Displaced Persons from the Occupied Territories, Health, Labour and Social Affairs of Georgia

- Increase funding for mental health to mitigate the psychological and physical health impacts of mental health challenges experienced by women during adolescent ages.
- Establish additional recreational spaces where adolescents can cultivate a healthy lifestyle, thereby mitigating the impact of anxiety and stress on their well-being.

○ Responsible decision-making agency : local self-government, council
Train youth workers in accordance with the "Youth Worker Standard" in order to provide information and effective referral of young people to social and mental health services.

○ Responsible decision-making agency : Youth Agency, Youth Workers Association, National Center for Disease Control and Public Health



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