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Motion

Supporting youth organisations and the right of young people to organise, learn and participate freely in civil society in Georgia

Signed by: International Federation of Catholic Parochial Youth Movements (FIMCAP)

Introduction

Since the ruling party of Georgia, Georgian Dream, announced in November 2024 that it was suspending EU accession talks, students, young activists and youth-led groups have participated in daily protests to defend Georgia's European future. These protests have continued for almost 2 years. At the heart of the crisis is a "foreign agents" law, first proposed in 2023 and followed by increasingly harsher legislation, which places independent organisations, including youth organisations, under greater state control.

The European Youth Forum adopted a motion on protecting civil society and civic spaces in Georgia in May 2024, when the law had just been passed. More than two years on, the risks identified in that motion have only deepened. The situation directly affects young people and the organisations through which they organise, learn, volunteer and participate in.

Initiation and adoption of the law

The Government of Georgia first initiated the "foreign agents" law in March 2023. The law would force civil society organisations that receive funding from sources outside of the country to be registered as "foreign agents". After mass protests on this occasion, the law was subsequently withdrawn from the parliament.

In April 2024, the party reintroduced an identical bill, the Law on Transparency of Foreign Influence. Students and young people were among the first to mobilise. But despite mass protests, this time parliament adopted the law in its third reading on the 14th of May. President Salome Zourabichvili vetoed it on the 18th of May, and on 28th of May parliament overrode the veto by 84 votes to 4. The EU said it deeply regretted the override, which disregarded the Venice Commission's recommendation to repeal the law.[1]

The adoption of The Law on Transparency of Foreign Influence (in force since 3 June 2024)[2] was not the last of restrictive measures by the Georgian government. After controversial parliamentary elections in October of 2024 and suspension of EU accession talks in November, Georgian Dream adopted additional laws, that further undermine civil society, youth sector and independent media:[3]

- the Foreign Agents Registration Act (adopted 1 April 2025, in force 31 May 2025):[4] Registration, six-monthly reporting and labelling for anyone acting for a "foreign principal"; definitions cover influencing public opinion and sharing information with international partners.

- First amendment on Law on Grants:[5] Prior government approval for any foreign grant, tied to government priorities; June 2025 extends "grant" to technical and expert assistance.

- Second amendment on Law on Grants:[6] Receiving an unauthorised foreign grant becomes a criminal offence, applied retroactively; employees of affected organisations barred from political parties.

It is worth noting that the law echoes the 2012 Russian "foreign agent" legislation, which has severely harmed civil society in Russia. Subsequently, this law has been popularly nicknamed as the "Russian Law".

The government rejects the comparison and presents the measures as transparency tools. It described the 2025 act as a Georgian version of the US Foreign Agents Registration Act, but Geor-

1 Euronews, "Georgia's EU hopes fade as parliament approves 'Russian law' on foreign agents", 28 May 2024. https://www.euronews.com/my-europe/2024/05/28/georgia-eu-hopes-fade-as-parliament-set-to-approve-russian-law-on-foreign-agents

2 The Law on Transparency of Foreign Influence, June 2024. https://matsne.gov.ge/en/document/view/6171895?publication=1

3 Human Rights Watch, "Georgia: New Laws Devastate Independent Civic Groups", 9 July 2026. https://www.hrw.org/news/2026/07/09/georgia-new-laws-devastate-independent-civic-groups

4 Foreign Agents Registration Act, April 2025. https://matsne.gov.ge/en/document/view/6461578?publication=1

5 Law on Grants, June 1996. https://matsne.gov.ge/en/document/view/31510?publication=39

6 Law on Grants, June 1996. https://matsne.gov.ge/en/document/view/31510?publication=39

gian legal scholars warned from the outset that it would be applied far more broadly across civil society and the press.[7] When most organisations refused to register under the 2024 law, the explanatory note to the 2025 act treated this as evidence that the earlier law had failed and stronger sanctions were needed.[8] The sequence has been one of escalation: first labelling, then registration and reporting, then control of funding and criminal liability.

Police violence

The restrictive laws have been accompanied by a pattern of excessive force against largely peaceful young protesters, as documented by Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, Georgia's Public Defender and the OSCE.

Dispersal and ill-treatment

The reintroduction of the foreign influence law in April 2024 provoked mass protests that were met with beatings, tear gas, water cannon and rubber bullets, often without warning. The violence escalated after the 28th of November 2024. For over a week security forces used large amounts of tear gas and water cannon, and at times rubber bullets, against largely peaceful crowds. They chased down, beat and detained protesters, who were then ill-treated in police vans and stations.[9] Amnesty International recorded more than 460 detentions in the first two weeks, with around 300 people reporting severe beatings or other ill-treatment.[10] Masked, unidentified men attacked protesters and journalists, in several cases with apparent police complicity.[11]

Protesters have also reported chemical irritants mixed into water cannons. A BBC investigation published in late 2025 alleged that prohibited toxic chemicals were used against them.[12] A recent study reported by OC Media found long-term health consequences among protesters exposed to chemical irritants. The speaker of parliament rejected it and called for scrutiny of the funding behind the research.[13]

7 OC Media, "Three years after Georgia's NGO restrictions, what's left of civil society?", 21 September 2026. https://oc-media.org/three-years-after-georgias-ngo-restrictions-whats-left-of-civil-society/

8 Human Rights Watch, "Georgia: New Laws Devastate Independent Civic Groups", 9 July 2026. https://www.hrw.org/news/2026/07/09/georgia-new-laws-devastate-independent-civic-groups

9 Human Rights Watch, "Georgia: Brutal Police Violence Against Protesters", 24 December 2024. https://reliefweb.int/report/georgia/georgia-brutal-police-violence-against-protesters

10 Amnesty International, "Georgia: Extreme police brutality, torture and hospitalisations in violent crackdown against protesters", December 2024. https://www.amnesty.org.uk/press-releases/georgia-extreme-police-brutality-torture-and-hospitalisations-violent-crackdown

11 Amnesty International, "Georgia: Extreme police brutality, torture and hospitalisations in violent crackdown against protesters", December 2024. https://www.amnesty.org.uk/press-releases/georgia-extreme-police-brutality-torture-and-hospitalisations-violent-crackdown

12 BBC, "WW1 toxic compound sprayed on Georgian protesters, BBC evidence suggests", December 2025. https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/czrk7g50e1po

13 OC Media, "Study finds long-term health consequences among protesters exposed to chemical irritants in Georgia". https://oc-media.org/study-finds-long-term-health-consequences-among-protesters-exposed-to-chemical-irritants-in-georgia/

Women protesters have faced gender-based violence, including sexist insults, threats of sexual violence and degrading strip searches.[14]

By the end of 2025, not a single police officer or pro-government assailant had been held accountable. In May 2026, five police officers were charged with abuse of power for assaulting protesters, the only case of its kind so far, and only after independent television reporting exposed it.[15] Proceedings against protesters, by contrast, tend to move swiftly and end in harsh sanctions, while investigations into violence against them stall.

Young people have been among those detained and prosecuted, including students and founders of youth movements in Georgia. Some of them were sentenced to five years in prison.[16]

Impact on youth organisations and youth participation

Like the wider civil society sector, youth organisations in Georgia largely rely on international funding. The laws above therefore hit them where they are most exposed and the damage reaches young people who use their services, volunteer in them or work for them. These laws have been a major reason for the National Youth Council of Georgia to stop working as well.

Funding collapse and closures

A late-2025 study by the Social Justice Center found that 96% of surveyed organisations reported acute financial difficulties and 94% had reduced their activities. Among 136 organisations that jointly applied to the European Court of Human Rights, only 3 registered under the foreign influence law, 109 reported difficulty securing funding, 97 had cut staff or lost all staff, and 62 had been targeted by propaganda or disinformation. Of 114 community organisations active in 2024, only 37 were still operating in 2025. Donors have halted direct support.[17]

In 2025 the authorities froze the bank accounts of 12 independent organisations as part of a criminal investigation into alleged “sabotage” during the protests. No organisation or representative has been charged. From September 2025, around 100 organisations received information requests that included personal data about their beneficiaries. The government says it approved 177 of 222 grant applications between April 2025 and June 2026, but it is not required to give reasons for refusals.[18]

Regional organisations are hit hardest. Smaller groups lose the legal and organisational support that larger organisations once provided, and young people outside Tbilisi lose some of their

14 Amnesty International, “Georgia: Authorities built coordinated system to crush dissent and entrench power”, June 2026. https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2026/06/georgia-authorities-built-coordinated-system-to-crush-dissent-and-entrench-power/

15 Amnesty International, “Georgia: Authorities built coordinated system to crush dissent and entrench power”, June 2026. https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2026/06/georgia-authorities-built-coordinated-system-to-crush-dissent-and-entrench-power/

16 OC Media, “Georgian court sentences foreign agent law protester to five years in prison”, January 2025. https://oc-media.org/georgian-court-sentences-foreign-agent-law-protester-to-five-years-in-prison/

17 Human Rights Watch, “Georgia: New Laws Devastate Independent Civic Groups”, 9 July 2026. https://www.hrw.org/news/2026/07/09/georgia-new-laws-devastate-independent-civic-groups

18 Human Rights Watch, “Georgia: New Laws Devastate Independent Civic Groups”, 9 July 2026. https://www.hrw.org/news/2026/07/09/georgia-new-laws-devastate-independent-civic-groups

only access to non-formal education and civic participation. Many organisations now continue on a voluntary basis, but, as the director of the Social Justice Center put it, free labour cannot become permanent compensation for the systemic deficit created by the state.[19]

Additionally, reported coordinated smear campaigns, labelling civil society as "foreign agents", vandalism of offices, and threatening calls to the relatives of activists, including parents and young children, urging them to make their family members stop, further affects participation in civil society.[20]

Environmental NGOs and defenders have been one of the main targets. Ruling party leaders have portrayed local opposition to projects such as the Namakhvani hydropower plant as foreign-funded activity against national interest. Yet Georgia is a party to the Aarhus Convention, which obligates it under Article 3(8) to ensure that people defending the environment are not penalised, persecuted or harassed. For many young people outside Tbilisi, environmental action is a key route into civic participation.

European funding and the risk of isolating young people

In the field of youth and education, the Erasmus+ programme guide for 2026 states that Georgian authorities (central government, local authorities, agencies and state-owned enterprises) are no longer eligible, while mobility and cooperation with independent educational institutions continue. The EU has stated that young people have been at the forefront of efforts to keep Georgia on the European path and that it remains by their side.[21] This distinction between the government and young people must be maintained. At the same time, it is not clear from public sources how the grant-approval regime applies to European youth funding such as Erasmus+ or the European Youth Foundation, or what protection Georgian youth organisations have if they accept it. Without clarity, young people and organisations risk criminal liability for taking part in European youth programmes. This has been a reason for many youth organisations to stop or reduce their international activities.

19 OC Media, "Three years after Georgia's NGO restrictions, what's left of civil society?", 21 September 2026. https://oc-media.org/three-years-after-georgias-ngo-restrictions-whats-left-of-civil-society/

20 Human Rights Watch, "Georgia: New Laws Devastate Independent Civic Groups", 9 July 2026. https://www.hrw.org/news/2026/07/09/georgia-new-laws-devastate-independent-civic-groups

21 OC Media, "Erasmus+ suspends funding to Georgian authorities", https://oc-media.org/erasmus-suspends-funding-to-georgian-authorities/ ; EU Press Service via InterpressNews, 28 February 2025, https://www.interpressnews.ge/en/article/137931-eu-press-service-the-eu-has-suspended-programs-benefiting-the-georgian-government-but-will-not-halt-erasmus-mobility-and-exchange-programs-with-georgia

Calls to action

Towards the Georgian authorities

The European Youth Forum calls on the Government and Parliament of Georgia to:

- Repeal the Law on Transparency of Foreign Influence, the Foreign Agents Registration Act and the amendments to the Law on Grants, including their criminal provisions and implementing decrees, in line with the recommendations of the Venice Commission, OSCE/ODIHR and the OSCE Moscow Mechanism and respect its commitments under the European Convention on Human Rights to guarantee political pluralism, freedom of expression as well as the freedom of peaceful assembly and association;

- Release all those detained or sentenced for taking part in peaceful protest and drop politically motivated charges;

- Protect the right to organise and take part in protests freely, without threats, intimidation or violence, including gender-based violence against women protesters; ensure that such incidents are investigated by an independent police oversight body and that those responsible are held accountable;

- Respect its obligations under the Aarhus convention by ensuring that young environmental defenders can participate in environmental decision-making without stigmatization, penalization or harassment;

- Guarantee the right of young people to form and fund organisations free from stigmatisation, and investigate and prosecute smear campaigns, threats against activists and their families, and attacks on offices.

Towards the European Union

The European Youth Forum calls on:

- The **Council of the EU** to impose targeted sanctions, such as asset freezes and travel bans, on those responsible for drafting and implementing the repressive legislation and for human rights violations against protesters, in line with the European Parliament's resolution[22] and the recommendations of the OSCE Moscow Mechanism report of March 2026;[23]

- The **European Commission and the EEAS** to make the repeal of the laws restricting civil society and the release of those held for political reasons central criteria in any engagement with the Georgian government, and to continue monitoring civic space and youth rights;

- The **European Commission** to maintain and expand direct, flexible and multi-year support for independent youth organisations, informal youth groups and young people in Georgia, including dedicated measures to reach organisations outside the capital region, as well as core funding and support to organisations operating from exile;

- The **European Commission** to preserve mobility and exchange opportunities for young people from Georgia, including by guaranteeing visa-free travel and participation in key programmes such as Erasmus+, and to ensure that restrictions on funding to Georgian authorities do not affect young people and youth organisations.

Towards the Council of Europe

- Calls on **member states of the Council of Europe**, including Georgia, to fully implement the Recommendation CM/Rec(2022)6 on protecting youth civil society and young people, and supporting their participation in democratic processes and the Recommenda-

22 European Parliament, Case of Elene Khoshtaria and political prisoners under the Georgian Dream regime, March 2026. https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/TA-10-2026-0083_EN.pdf

23 OSCE, Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights, March 2026. https://odihr.osce.org/sites/default/files/documents/official_documents/2026/03/odgal0009c1%20ODIHR%20NV%2082-2026%20report_Moscow%20Mechanism%20invoked%20in%20respect%20of%20Georgia_0.pdf

tion CM/Rec(2026)3 on the European Charter on the Participation of Young People in Local and Regional Life;

Therefore, the European Youth Forum:

- **Condemns** the laws and practices that restrict the right of young people to establish, join and fund independent organisations in Georgia, and the use of criminal investigations, asset freezes, smear campaigns and police violence against civil society and peaceful protesters;

- **Expresses its solidarity** with young people and independent youth organisations in Georgia, and with the students, young activists and youth workers who continue to organise under pressure;

- **Recognises** young people in Georgia and their organisations as defenders of democracy and as rights-holders, not as agents of foreign powers.

- **Reaffirms** its commitment to support young people and youth civil society in Georgia and their right to be represented at national and international levels, including through independent, youth-led structures;

- **Encourages** member organisations to partner with Georgian youth organisations, to include Georgia in their international advocacy agendas, and to share resources, expertise and platforms;

- **The European Youth Forum reaffirms** its solidarity with the young people of Georgia and its firm commitment to defend their right to organise, learn and participate in the democratic life of their country, and in the European future that so many of them have taken to the streets to defend.







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