



ევროკავშირი  
საქართველოსთვის  
The European Union for Georgia



# **An Advocacy, Media & Communication Strategic Framework and Toolkit to Prevent Gender-biased Sex Selection (GBSS) in Georgia**

**2019**

**ISSET**

International School of Economics at TSU  
Policy Institute



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# **An Advocacy, Media & Communication Strategic Framework and Toolkit to Prevent Gender-biased Sex Selection (GBSS) in Georgia**

An informative guide for various stakeholders, mostly communication professionals, to plan and implement a successful communication & advocacy campaign preventing Gender-biased Sex Selection and Son Preference in Georgia.

This strategic framework and toolkit is a result of a joint effort of the ISET Policy Institute (ISET-PI), in collaboration with the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) office in Georgia, as a part of the UNFPA Global Programme to Prevent Son Preference and the Undervaluing of Girls: Improving the sex ratio at birth in select countries in Asia and the Caucasus (2017-2019). Any statements and/or ideas expressed in the publication belong solely to the author and may not reflect the views of the UNFPA or the EU.

**ISET**

International School of Economics at TSU  
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## Acknowledgements

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The Global Programme aims to contribute to and strengthen evidence-based national policies and programmes addressing son preference, a poor valuation of girls, and gender inequalities that result in GBSS in the identified Caucasus and Asian countries. Additionally, the programme enhances learning using the expertise of the six participant countries, as well as building on the experiences and lessons learned from China, India, South Korea, and other countries to have launched laws, policies, and programmes that address son preference and sex selection.

The strategic framework and toolkit were prepared based on the *Regional Advocacy and Communication Strategy to Prevent Gender-biased Sex Selection (GBSS)*, developed by Monica Das Gupta (2019) within the framework of the Global Programme, in partnership with the International Children's Center (ICC), a non-governmental organization based in Ankara, Turkey, selected by the UNFPA HQ as an Interregional Mechanism (IRM) to support the implementation and coordination of the Global Programme to Prevent Son Preference and the Undervaluing of Girls.

Special recognition is owed to Ms. Nana Lobzhanidze, ISET staff and UNFPA Georgia CO colleagues for drafting and providing inputs on the framework and the corresponding toolkit. We would like to convey our gratitude to the EU for supporting the Global Programme for 2017-2019, in which Georgia is a partner country. The programme is highly valued in tackling the persistent causes of gender-biased sex selection, as a joint effort of the Georgian government, civil society, and academia in addressing the issues of gender-biased sex selection and son preference by applying evidence-based and holistic approaches to prevent such harmful practices. The programme in Georgia is implemented with a vision to support the delivery of a more equal, harmonious society, one free from discrimination, where every pregnancy is wanted, and every childbirth is equally valued and celebrated.

## Abbreviations

<b>CEDAW</b>	The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women
<b>CSO</b>	The Civil Society Organization
<b>EU</b>	The European Union
<b>GBSS</b>	Gender-biased sex selection
<b>Geostat</b>	The National Statistics Office of Georgia
<b>ICC</b>	The International Children's Center
<b>ICPD</b>	The International Conference on Population and Development
<b>IEC</b>	Information, education, and communication
<b>ISET-PI</b>	The ISET Policy Institute
<b>MoES</b>	The Ministry of Education, Science, Culture and Sport of Georgia
<b>NCCE</b>	The Network of Centers for Civic Engagement
<b>RCT</b>	The Randomized Control Trials
<b>SDG</b>	The Sustainable Development Goal
<b>SRB</b>	Sex ratio at birth
<b>UN</b>	The United Nations
<b>UNFPA</b>	The United Nations Population Fund
<b>UNFPA CO</b>	The UNFPA Country Office
<b>WB</b>	The World Bank

## Introduction

Gender-biased sex selection (GBSS) in favor of boys is an indicator of gender discrimination and highlights the inequality towards girls throughout many countries. Patriarchal structures reinforce a preference for sons and perpetuate a societal climate of violence and discrimination against women and girls. GBSS is moreover a symptom of the pervasive social, political, cultural, and economic injustices against women and girls. While, declining rates of fertility, and rapid technological developments that allow prenatal sex selection, have also further exacerbated these practices.

Since its independence from the Soviet Union, Georgia has experienced a significant rise in the number of male births over girls. A comprehensive countrywide report (2017), produced by UNFPA Georgia alongside the National Statistics Office of Georgia (Geostat), reveals that after reaching historically high levels in 2004 (115 boys per 100 girls), the sex ratio at birth (SRB) started to decline. This is certainly a positive direction towards greater gender equality, however, due to the notable preference for sons, most families in Georgia still wish to have at least one male child.

**The strategic direction of advocacy, media, and communication to prevent gender-biased sex selection should focus on the main drivers of this phenomenon; mainly social structures that motivate families to invest in sons, rather than daughters, further undervaluing girls and their potential contribution to household welfare.**

In order to understand, plan, and implement successful communication and advocacy initiatives that prevent gender-biased sex selection and son preference in Georgia, this strategic framework and toolkit act as an informative guide for the various stakeholders, including but not limited to civil society organizations; communication professionals; advocates and educators; national and local governmental structures; and the media.

Under the overarching framework of enhancing gender equality, there are various stakeholders working on the prevention of son preference and gender-biased sex selection, and ultimately they should strategically use communication and advocacy tools to maximize their impact. While conducting analysis and research, and working on strengthening the legislative framework, it is important to hold evidence-based advocacy activities to ensure the information reaches its intended audience and informs policies and programmes accordingly.

The strategic framework and toolkit are guided by a regional strategy,<sup>1</sup> and aim to support professionals *develop, enhance, and better channel* their advocacy strategies and to communicate more effectively with their target audiences; where special sections of the toolkit elaborate upon the different aspects of communications and advocacy. The document starts with a brief overview of the phenomenon and its determinants in Georgia, and provides an outlook of the national and international commitments and legislation relevant to its practice. Following the introduction, an important question is raised and elaborated upon, namely asking whether the focus should be on advocacy and communication. The subsequent sections are concerned with the planning of communication and advocacy, focused on (a) identifying target audiences, (b) tailoring messages for each of the specific target audiences, and (c) defining the preferred communication channels to effectively deliver key messages. The sections are intended to share preexisting experience and knowledge of GBSS prevention campaigns, and thus practical tips and successful examples are often referenced. Furthermore, the toolkit also focuses on the partnerships with different stakeholders for widening outreach, as well as securing resources for the sustainable implementation of further advocacy and communication. The document also touches upon the issue of working with the media and policymakers, deemed important because of the active role they play in implementing and influencing public opinion and policies of gender equality. The final section of the toolkit focuses on monitoring the progress and evaluation of the advocacy and communication interventions, which provide a valuable measurement of the impact.

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<sup>1</sup> The Regional Advocacy and Communication Strategy to Prevent Gender-biased Sex Selection (GBSS), developed by Monica Das Gupta (2019) within the framework of the Global Programme.





● Photo project: "A Girl is Born"  
Photo credit: UNFPA Georgia / Dina Oganova

## 1. Why focus on communication & advocacy to prevent GBSS?

### 1.1 Overview of the phenomenon: factors underlying gender-biased sex selection

Gender discrimination has fueled alarming sex selection trends in a number of countries, including Georgia, which since the 1990s has witnessed significantly distorted levels of sex ratio at birth (SRB) in favor of boys.

Georgian society is characterized by a **strong preference for sons** (son preference) due to its traditionally patriarchal structure. For instance, family membership is derived from and recorded through a father's lineage. Further still, women typically join their husbands' families after marriage, whereas sons are expected to stay with their parents and care for them into old age, thus sons are seen as more valuable than daughters. The country's patriarchal structure, the importance of the family and the male line, coupled with the socio-economic environment, has reduced the societal value of girls. The 2010 Caucasus Barometer survey identified that in cases where parents had only one child, 46 percent of respondents would prefer a son, 9% a girl, while 45% stated that it did not matter. The male role as the main contributor to family

subsistence and as the major source of support for aging parents appears to have further increased due to post-soviet economic and social hardships.

Among the consequences of post-soviet economic and political turmoil was a sharp **decline in fertility** rates. Couples postponed childbirth and even marriage, which shortened their reproductive span. With the notable son preference, lower fertility reduced families' ability to ensure the birth of a son through repeated pregnancies. Thus, with the increasing availability of sex detection technologies, couples might have opted for sex selection to ensure the birth of a son. The **availability of such technologies** for early determination of sex is not a root cause of gender-biased sex selection, yet the use of these technologies serves as a straightforward contributing factor.

Therefore, decreased fertility, coupled with the deeply-rooted preference for sons, and in combination with the increased availability of sex selection technologies, each contribute to the emergence of gender-biased sex selection; and, consequently, they have led to further gender imbalances in Georgia.

According to 2015 research supported by UNFPA, the sex ratio at birth peaked at 115.2 male births per 100 female births in 2004. However, it is generally accepted that the biological norm is 104-106 male per 100 female births (UNFPA 2015). Yet, the latest 2017 UNFPA research revealed the situation had changed in Georgia, where the SRB fell below 110 in 2009 and had almost reached a natural level of 105 male per 100 female births by 2016. The most recent SRB data from 2018 (GeoStat) shows that the current level is 107 boys per 100 girls.

The UNFPA research from 2017 highlights that these recent positive trends can be attributed to a number of factors, such as strengthened state institutions and social security, improved economic conditions, increased fertility, the economic empowerment of women, and the overall advancement of gender equality. Nevertheless, disaggregated data reveals that gender-biased sex selection is still prevalent in certain conditions and varies across groups. Son preference becomes more notable with **higher order births** and depends on the **gender composition of the children** (by the third or higher birth order, the sex ratio at birth reaches 173.8 in families without previous male births).

The **urban-rural divide** is also significant, with the sex ratio at birth in 2010-2014 reaching a high of 111.8 boys per 100 girls in rural areas, while it was only moderately skewed in urban districts, with 107.1 boys to girls (close to the natural level). In rural areas, the sex ratio at birth is much higher than in urban districts, especially in regions in which mostly ethnic minorities reside. For instance, a higher son preference is found in Azeri and Armenian families compared to their Georgian counterparts. The absence of sons is also less significant among wealthier families, wage earners, and families relying on social assistance.

Despite certain progress, **social and family norms** are still deeply rooted in traditions and national pride and can be staunchly resistant to change. Traditional and cultural gender discrimination remains at the core of son preference. Furthermore, public awareness towards son preference and gender-biased sex selection is still limited among both citizens and policy experts in the country.

If not addressed, distorted sex ratios are going to have a lasting impact on population dynamics. Due to gender-biased sex selection, women of child-bearing age will decline more still in upcoming years, further exacerbating the issue of population decline (UNFPA, 2015). Additionally, the distorted SRB rates result in a demographic imbalance between men and women. The pronounced son preference and gender-biased sex selection moreover creates tremendous pressure on women to produce sons, which consequently may have negative effects on their mental and physical health. An unwanted female birth can also lead to domestic violence, abandonment, or divorce. Although in Georgia the recent trends are positive, to prevent the recurrence of negative practices, it is absolutely crucial that these trends are encouraged and sustained. Therefore, it is vital to consider changes in societal norms and awareness raising towards son preference as part of the strategic framework.



## 1.2 National legislation and international commitments

### National legislation and framework

Georgia identifies principles of gender equality at the constitutional level. In recent years, Georgia has made significant progress towards strengthening the legislative and policy framework to enhance gender equality and eliminate harmful practices against women and girls. Several policy documents, laws, and legislative acts have been adopted, including the Gender Equality Law (2010); the Non-Discrimination Law (2014); as well as the respective Gender Equality National Action Plans (2018-2020). Important steps were made towards criminalizing sexual harassment in 2019. Furthermore, the Georgian government criminalized domestic violence in 2012, forced marriage in 2014, FGM in 2017, and ratified the Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (the Istanbul Convention) in 2017. Besides already existing parliamentary Gender Equality Council, a national mechanism for Gender Equality - the inter-agency Commission on Gender Equality, Violence against Women, and Domestic Violence was established in 2017, in the executive branch of the government to steer implementation of policy and action against gender inequality, violence against women, and domestic violence.

Nevertheless, despite such progress, gender inequality is still considered a major constraint to the more sustainable, harmonious, and inclusive development of Georgian society. Laws and legislative frameworks are in place, however they are not always fully enforced. For example, though the Civil Code of Georgia states that heirs have equal rights to inherit familial property, a widely recognized custom still gives priority to sons.

There is also no separate law to regulate sex-selective abortions, leaving only orders and protocols. The main legislative act to address this issue is within the Law of Georgia on Healthcare. The 139<sup>th</sup> Article of the law states that women are only allowed to have a legal abortion if the duration of pregnancy does not exceed 12 weeks. The permissible period for abortions can be extended to 22 weeks under special medical or social indications, as determined by the Minister of IDPs from the Occupied Territories, Labour, Health and Social Affairs of Georgia. The rules regulating artificial termination of pregnancy ensure that **terminating a pregnancy on the ground of fetal sex is prohibited**.

### International commitments

Georgia ratified the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) in 1994. CEDAW clearly defines discrimination and identifies the obligations of state parties to create more balanced civil and individual rights in society. The convention contains articles related to combating stereotypes, the role of women in political and public life, and their access to education, employment, health services, and various further social and economic advantages. Under the Programme of Action in the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD), signed by more than 179 states in 1994, Georgia agreed to eliminate all forms of discrimination against female children and the harmful practice of son preference. Furthermore, commitments to address harmful practices also align with the 2030 agenda for Sustainable Development, including the SDGs (most notably Goal 5), which provide an overarching framework to accelerate and expand efforts to respond to the underlying drivers and consequences of GBSS.



● "A Girl is Born" Photo Exhibition | Author: Dina Oganova  
Photo credit: UNFPA Georgia | Vladimer Valishvili

### 1.3 Why focus on communication and advocacy?

To answer this question, the emphasis should be on understanding the phenomena and its main drivers from cultural, social, economic, and demographic perspectives. As previously noted, the main driver of GBSS, leading to a skewed SRB in favor of boys, is reliant on previous gender inequalities expressed by a strong preference towards sons. These inequalities are a part of social and family norms and are deeply rooted in traditional values and national pride, which can be heavily resistant to change, especially in the regions and in rural areas. Moreover, a lack of awareness regarding GBSS, poor societal valuation of girls compared to boys, cultural stereotyping, and typical perceptions of gender roles affects how this harmful practice is addressed. Therefore, a complex approach is required, including advocacy and communication, to prevent gender-biased sex selection in Georgia. **The advocacy and communication aimed at behavioral changes are crucial instruments for preventing son preference, and altering cultural attitudes and gender stereotypes, which subsequently contribute towards enhancing gender equality and leading to gender transformation.**

Communication and advocacy also serve to reach the general public, policymakers, CSOs, and other influential actors. Utilizing various channels of communication will help convey the right messages to different stakeholders about harmful practices, future demographic and socio-economic implications of GBSS, as well as advocating progressive changes for gender equality. In turn, increased sensitivity and awareness of the harmful practices of GBSS will contribute to behavioral changes and a stronger overall perception of gender.

## 2. Building partnerships, developing a strategy, & leveraging financing

### 2.1 Building partnerships

Addressing son preference as a root cause of GBSS and fostering gender equality in Georgia requires building partnerships between the relevant key actors at an international, national, and local level. The core motivation for building alliances with different stakeholders is the exchange of knowledge, experience, and resources; to avoid repetitive efforts and to best use each and every partner for the achievement of the set objectives (Table 1).

Developing a network of relevant international organizations and foreign embassies will be beneficial for mobilizing resources; creating plans and strategies to advance human rights and gender equality; conducting cooperative research; and generating new products to strengthen evidence-based advocacy.

Amendments to the existing laws and the full implementation of legislation and policies aligned with international commitments are the exclusive responsibility of the government of Georgia. While cooperation with parliament, line ministries, and inter-agency commissions will also be very beneficial for the prevention of GBSS. Governmental bodies on a national and local level can offer crucial inputs, support, and facilitation in developing and implementing communication and advocacy-based activities.

In certain Georgian regions, decline in sex selection has been slower than in the capital. Accordingly, communication and advocacy should be focused more on the regions in order to help them attain mainstream development, therefore, the process requires close cooperation with regional NGOs and CSOs. Such organizations are essential to better understanding local environments, reaching target groups, and delivering key messages far and wide. Youth organizations can be particularly effective in critically approaching the gender views of the next generation and consequently their families and communities.

National and local media should be considered as core partners in communication and advocacy. Media outlets such as television, radio, periodicals, and online platforms are the best methods for delivering key messages to the general public and raising campaign profiles. In the long-term, messages delivered by the media can moreover alter mainstream norms and behaviors. Together with the media, digital influencers, bloggers, writers, and highly influential social activists can also play a vital role in altering public behavior.

Healthcare providers, especially Sexual and Reproductive Health Care service providers, and ultrasound specialists are considered crucial partners in addressing gender-biased sex selection. These medical professionals are in direct contact with expectant parents and they maintain a level of trust that enables them to have a positive impact. Aside from their daily healthcare contributions, these providers are also able to participate in and support the building of a more equal, sustainable, and harmonious society. By being aware of the causes and consequences of GBSS and by practicing the more ethical uses of sex determination technologies, medical professionals can contribute towards reducing GBSS and promoting a society where both sexes are equally celebrated, cherished, and valued.

The inclusion of building partnerships with religious leaders is also deemed beneficial. In Georgia, 83.4% of the population are Orthodox Christians, 10.7% Muslims, and 2.9% belong to the Armenian Apostolic Church.<sup>2</sup> According to a recent survey conducted by CRRRC,<sup>3</sup> 47% of the population of Georgia have full trust in the religious institution to which they belong, and a further 31% rather trust religious institutions,

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<sup>2</sup> General Population Census Main Results, 2014.

<sup>3</sup> Countering violent extremism in Georgia: needs assessment, 2018.





● National Workshop on GBSS  
Photo credit: UNFPA Georgia | Vladimer Valishvili

which makes these bodies extremely influential. Thus, creating a dialog with religious leaders to advocate for the equal value of girls and boys may prove an excellent platform for addressing the issues. However, the messaging should be approached with extreme **caution and sensitivity**, and the emphasis should be placed on the importance of discouraging harmful practices, including early and child marriage, promoting the importance of not differentiating between genders, and highlighting the equal value of both sexes.

**Table 1: Building partnerships**

Stakeholders	Expected goals and areas of collaboration
<p><b>International</b></p> <p>International organizations/ relevant UN agencies, Foreign Embassies, EU</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Collaborate to develop/strengthen plans and strategies to advance human rights and gender equality;</li> <li>• Exchange best practice in communication and advocacy;</li> <li>• Undertake joint research;</li> <li>• Generate the products based on the new knowledge to strengthen evidence-based advocacy.</li> </ul>

Stakeholders	Expected goals and areas of collaboration
<p><b>National</b></p> <p>Governmental bodies:</p> <p>Gender Equality Council at the Parliament of Georgia</p> <p>Inter-agency Commission on Gender Equality, violence against Women and Domestic Violence</p> <p>Line Ministries</p> <p>Youth Agency</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Strengthen the legislative framework on gender equality;</li> <li>• Advocate and support to carry out family-friendly policies;</li> <li>• Strengthen the monitoring of law enforcement and address the legislative bottlenecks hindering women in fully exercising their rights;</li> <li>• Implement policy measures/relevant Action Plans aimed at advancing gender equality and eliminating harmful gender stereotypes and practices, specifically targeting rural populations and ethnic minority communities;</li> <li>• Ensure female access to universal information, education, and services on sexual and reproductive health and rights;</li> <li>• Address cultural stereotypes that depict daughters as less valuable or less beneficial than sons, those often at the root of discriminatory attitudes and practices;</li> <li>• Integrate a curricula on gender equality issues and sexual and reproductive health in the formal education system;</li> <li>• Strengthen non-formal education for the youth regarding their rights, including gender equality, and sexual and reproductive health and rights.</li> </ul>
<p>The media</p> <p>Social media influencers</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reporting, TV stories, talk shows, articles, and blogs showcasing distorted stereotypes in society regarding son preference and GBSS, as well as displaying success stories about girls and women who can act as positive role models and challenge the existing stereotypes;</li> <li>• Promoting gender sensitive reporting and story coverage.</li> </ul>
<p>Medical society</p> <p>Professional medical associations</p> <p>Academia</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sensitize medical workers to the implications of GBSS;</li> <li>• Advocate the ethical use of sex detection technologies;</li> <li>• Support the elaboration of guidelines and recommendations for health workers;</li> <li>• Integrate issues of GBSS and son preference into the research agenda.</li> </ul>



Stakeholders		Expected goals and areas of collaboration
Local	Governmental bodies: Women rooms under local municipalities Local gender equality councils Municipalities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Integrate GBSS preventative mechanisms into relevant local strategies and action plans;</li> <li>• Negotiate the allocation of relevant resources for the implementation of GBSS preventative mechanisms;</li> <li>• Strengthen the technical capacity to implement communication campaigns on GBSS and son preference;</li> <li>• Facilitate better integration of ethnic minorities and their access to information and resources;</li> <li>• Raise the awareness of the general public on GBSS, especially in rural areas;</li> <li>• Host workshops and summer/winter camps for the youth.</li> </ul>
	CSOs and NGOs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Raise awareness on GBSS by delivering key messages far and wide;</li> <li>• Strengthen the capacities of CSOs and NGOs to lead advocacy and communication activities for the elimination of GBSS;</li> <li>• Promote activities aiming to change behaviors and gender perceptions.</li> </ul>
	The media Social media influencers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reporting, TV stories, talk shows, articles, and blogs showcasing greater gender sensitivity away from the distorted existing stereotypes regarding son preference and GBSS;</li> <li>• Put a spotlight on the success stories of girls and women who can act as positive role models and challenge the existing stereotypes.</li> </ul>
	Health workers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Advocate for the ethical use of fetal sex detection technologies;</li> <li>• Promote gender sensitivity among health workers.</li> </ul>
	Religious leaders	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Promote the equal value of girls and boys.</li> </ul>

## 2.2 Developing a strategy

Having identified the relevant partners and set mutual goals, the next step is to develop a strategy for achieving such goals. A general strategy can thus be developed with a long-term plan that reflects the current situation, allocates future goals, and identifies the necessary transitional steps. Raising awareness can moreover be considered a main step in reducing son preference and, therefore, strategies with different partners should include the necessary activities for raising general public awareness. Another important part of the strategy is to find the most effective ways to reach the objectives.

One can refer to the UNFPA Georgia country office strategic approach to highlight the lack of awareness around gender-biased sex selection, son preference, poor societal valuation of girls to boys, typical cultural stereotypes, and perceptions towards gender roles (table 2).

**Table 2: UNFPA Georgia country office, strategic approach responding to GBSS**

In order to holistically tackle the harmful practice of GBSS, the action programme in Georgia is directed towards: strengthening the knowledge base and supporting evidence-based policy advocacy initiatives; reinforcing the policy framework for combating harmful practices and enhancing gender equality; and increasing awareness on GBSS through communication and advocacy campaigns - engaging the youth, couples, local communities, the healthcare sector, the media, as well as CSOs.

- » UNFPA CO is helping strengthen and expand the knowledge base in order to provide evidence to develop strategies for interventions aimed at addressing skewed SRB and GBSS. Such initiatives include, but are not limited to, carrying out qualitative and quantitative research on the harmful practices of GBSS and son preference, developing comprehensive research reports, and creating and updating the Country Profile and Fact Sheet;
- » From a gender and rights-based perspective, UNFPA CO supports the development of promotional materials and implements awareness-raising interventions that strive to challenge and transform mindsets and attitudes towards gender stereotypes, by recognizing the problems and bringing a greater consensus on the equal recognition of boys and girls. Particular attention is given to the rural regions in which Azeri ethnic minority groups reside, as SRB is notably affected among these groups. Awareness raising interventions are designed based on the available evidence and are delivered with increased attention to the protection of female reproductive rights;
- » Furthermore, equally crucial are supporting interventions which aim to raise awareness and sensitize reproductive healthcare providers and media representatives on son preference and GBSS, and thus increase their engagement to prevent these harmful practices;
- » Regarding UNFPA's strategic vision, youth and future parents (couples of a reproductive age, 18-39) are at the forefront of eliminating son preference and promoting equal gender perception, therefore, advocacy and communication efforts are directed towards increasing awareness. Thus, the value of women and girls in society is being reimagined, and couples are being engaged to build more harmonious, equal, and sustainable societies, with guaranteed rights and choices for all;
- » As part of the UNFPA CO response to GBSS, establishing partnerships and strengthening the technical capacity of national stakeholders are key strategic plans. Strengthening the technical capacity of local and national stakeholders will help improve the awareness of various policy instruments, and build partnerships with local self-government units (municipalities), local gender equality councils, women's rooms (space for women's community gathering, which functions under local municipalities), gender activists, CSOs, and schools, which will allow access to the most closed ethnic minority groups and, as key pillars of the holistic approach, help implement communication and information campaigns on son preference and GBSS;
- » UNFPA Georgia also cooperates with other UN agencies and programmes (e.g., the UN Joint programme for Gender Equality funded by the Government of Sweden, 2016-2020) and certain development partners, such as the WB, to complement and synergize ongoing work towards strengthening the knowledge base on GBSS and its prevention within the country.

## 2.3 Leveraging financing

Partnerships with international, national, and local entities can be useful not only for the exchange of expertise and experience, but also for mobilizing resources, including financial means. Aiming to alter the current situation, a number of international foundations and foreign embassies in Georgia actively work on gender equality issues and financially support their programmes (mainly through grants).

Governmental partnerships can stretch the available resources and financing by piggybacking on activities using the government's vast administrative and outreach structures. Governmental bodies can thus offer in-kind contributions, for instance: disseminating communication materials, dedicating venues for workshops and meetings, organizing summer or winter camps, etc. Local municipalities can also provide human resources and logistical support for conducting advocacy activities.

## 3. Designing a communication strategy

The careful design of a communication strategy helps ensure that communications efforts will be coordinated and effectively implemented and ultimately achieve their set goals. It will also help clarify the necessary arrangements and resources, and identify how to use them. In essence, careful planning of the campaign enables us to reach the right people with the right message at the right time.

### 3.1 Defining the communication objectives

The main objective of communication and advocacy is to prevent GBSS in Georgia. The country still has a son preference deeply rooted in traditional values and national pride, however it should be focused on sensitizing and **raising awareness to the realities and harmful practices of GBSS. This can be achieved through activities that aim to change mindsets and attitudes towards girls, that and increase the recognition and value of women in society. Thus, Georgia in turn will further promote the strengthening of gender equality.**

#### Why should raising awareness be the main objective of the campaign?

The qualitative field analysis conducted in 2014 by UNFPA Georgia CO, within the framework of the UN Joint Program for Gender Equality, in collaboration with the WB, included in-depth interviews with different groups of society across four regions of the country (Tbilisi, Mtskheta-Mtianeti, Adjara, and Samegrelo-Zemo Svaneti) and it discerned the following:

- A significant number of respondents stated that they had never heard of sex-selective abortions, most of these respondents were men;

- When presented with recent sex ratio at birth (SRB) statistics, the respondents still seemed to doubt the problem. Thus, the intensity of son preference was often ignored or denied;
- The respondents who had at least some notion of sex selection stated clearly that they did not support the practice and attributed it to prevailing “Georgian customs”;
- According to the 2010 Caucasus Barometer survey, in cases where parents had only one child, 46 percent of respondents preferred a son, 9 percent preferred a girl, and 45 percent stated it did not matter.

These findings show that, in 2014, the level of public awareness towards son preference was limited, especially outside of Tbilisi. A recent study (2019), *Social-Economic Policy Analysis with regard to GBSS and Son Preference*, conducted by ISET-PI in partnership with UNFPA Georgia CO in the regions of Kakheti, Kvemo Kartli, Samtskhe-Javakheti, and Samegrelo-Zemo Svaneti showed that awareness regarding GBSS has increased among both women and men, as respondents in all four regions recognized the presence of son preference. This level of awareness itself, and recognizing it as a problem, is an initial step towards the long-lasting process of balancing gender perceptions. Nevertheless, in some regions (Kvemo Kartli and Samtskhe-Javakheti) the respondents did not problematize the practice of sex selection, and they stressed the importance of having a son for the continuation of a family line, whereas in Kakheti and Samegrelo-Zemo Svaneti, the prevailing attitudes towards GBSS were quite negative.

Therefore, communication and advocacy should strive to mobilize communities, facilitate discussions, and bring greater consensus to the equal value of boys and girls, while yet considering local cultural values. Activities should aim to raise awareness about the consequences of son preference and gender-biased sex selection, especially the grave social and demographic results, thus people will ultimately fully comprehend the impacts of such “personal decisions” on society as a whole. Furthermore, the communication campaign should contribute to facilitating a dialogue on GBSS at both the individual and community level, and to stimulate the building of an environment where girls and boys are equally celebrated, and each of their potentials are fulfilled.

## Why is it important to advocate and communicate at national and local levels?

Georgia has a high degree of regional diversification in terms of cultural values, traditions, and ethnicities. Therefore, there is significant regional variation in sex ratio at birth across the country. In a broader sense, the rural urban divide is significant. Tbilisi, the capital and the largest city in the country, was characterized in 2010-2014 by one of the lowest sex selections at birth (105). Yet, three southeastern Georgian regions, namely, Kakheti, Kvemo-Kartli, and Samtskhe-Javakheti, have a notably higher SRB than the Georgian average. These regions are populated by more ethnic minorities, namely Azerbaijanis and Armenians, and SRB within these groups is slanted more considerably towards boys. Consequently, aside from a nationwide communication campaign, it is important to tailor individualized informational campaigns with specific messages and to convey these messages to target groups at local levels in regions densely populated by ethnic minorities.

An example of such an approach was used during the communication campaign addressing harmful practices, carried out by UNFPA Georgia (Table 3).

**Table 3: Communication campaign at the national and local level**

UNFPA in partnership with its national implementing partners, the Public Service Development Agency under the Ministry of Justice (running local village community centers), local gender equality councils and women's rooms within the municipalities each address harmful practices at the national and local level from various relevant perspectives:

- » UNFPA CO, in collaboration with the WB, designed the communication and advocacy campaign “Do not differentiate, a daughter and a son are both your future” for the prevention of son preference and GBSS. This local communication campaign was implemented in 2017-2018 within the Georgian regions of **Kvemo Kartli and Kakheti**; in which the Azeri ethnic minority population - according to the research-<sup>4</sup> skew the sex ratio at birth (SRB), among the highest in the country, while child marriage is still common practice;
- » The campaign targeted adolescents and the youth to raise awareness about their rights and the harmful practices of both child and early marriage and of son preference. It also acted to engage the youth as sources of knowledge to help spread information, in collaboration with local educational resource centers (under the MoES) and school principals, by organizing informative meetings, led by young educators in more than 40 secondary schools in Kvemo Kartli and Kakheti;
- » The campaign convened with parents and teachers in Kvemo Kartli and Kakheti to facilitate discussions on early and child marriage, son preference, and GBSS;
- » Working with local communities of both Georgian and Azeri nationalities, and targeting couples of a reproductive age (18-39) to challenge the gender discriminatory practices of son preference and gender-biased sex selection;
- » The drive worked with young people to challenge gender-based stereotypes in the selected target region through the Youth Equality Festival; using street art, a photo exhibition, and a public talk given by highly influential personalities- which focused on the importance of gender equality and treating male and female children equally;
- » It also worked with reproductive healthcare providers in the Kvemo Kartli region, sensitizing them to the ethical use of sex detection technology and highlighting the prevention of gender-biased sex selection practices.

Information meetings conducted under specifically crafted modules were accompanied by expressly designed Information, Education and Communication (**IEC**) materials for various target groups (brochures, comic books) and visual aids, such as the animated video *Father of Girls*, which increased audience engagement due to its storyline and the characters featured. Prior to the information meetings, the Training of Trainers (ToT) was undertaken to prepare educators from local communities to facilitate information meetings in the local language.

At the national level, to mobilize public attention around harmful practices, a documentary photo project *A Girl is Born*, by documentary photographer Dina Oganova,<sup>5</sup> was prepared and exhibited in Tbilisi and Marneuli (Kvemo Kartli). These issues were also highlighted on popular TV and media outlets to trigger a public discourse.

The UNFPA Georgia Country Office ensured that communication activities were conducted and synergized within the framework of different projects, and undertaken according to the same methodology, thus making them a part of a single national communication campaign.

4 Trends in Sex Ratio at Birth in Georgia- an Analysis based on the 2014 General Population Census Data (2017) developed in cooperation with the National Statistics Office of Georgia (Geostat) and the UNFPA Georgia office.

5 A Girl is Born: <http://dikarka.ge/stories/silent-garden--a-girl-is-born/>





● Photo project: "A Girl is Born"  
Photo credit: UNFPA Georgia / Dina Oganova

## 3.2 Identifying the target audiences

Correctly identifying the target audience is one of the most important prerequisites of a successful communication campaign, especially when it is intended to alter the cultural attitudes and behaviors of the people. To illustrate the point, the relevant audiences can be divided into two categories: 1. Top priority - must communicate with; and 2. Second priority - advisable to communicate with.

The top priority list should include those people whose behavioral changes will directly lead to a transformation in SRB. These are: a. people of a reproductive age in urban and rural areas (18-39 years old); b. the youth in urban and rural areas; and c. parents-in-law.

While the second priority list includes: a. health workers at national and local levels; b. teachers at national and local levels; c. local government officials; d. local CSOs and NGOs; e. religious and community leaders; and f. media representatives at national and local levels. These target groups are also considered to be potential future partners, who should be sensitized and empowered to further contribute to the process of raising awareness and widening outreach.

## 3.3 Identifying key messages to help prevent GBSS

By altering the social norms underlying these phenomena, communication on GBSS seeks to prevent both son preference and pressure to discriminate against daughters before and after birth. To communicate with different audiences, various messages can be developed for certain sub-groups of the population.

Nevertheless, all the messages must be **positive**- focusing on the benefits that greater gender equality can bring to families and societies. This is likely to make it easier for people to absorb the messages and draw them into thinking about gender issues. While messages using themes that appeal across generations are likely to be the most effective. For instance, if a message shows how a daughter can be helpful to their parents, their households, and to society, it can encourage everyone to perceive the benefits of gender equality, from men and women, parents, parents-in-law, and to the older generation. Furthermore, it is also important to provide warnings highlighting the negative repercussions if SRB does not decrease. It is moreover extremely helpful to list obsolete stereotypes and to contradict them by revealing the real current situation.

#### Table 4: Positive messaging

It is sensible to have a common slogan for the campaign at both the national and local levels. For instance, UNFPA Georgia, while conducting the informative campaign on GBSS in Kakheti and Kvemo Kartli, applied the slogan ***“Do not differentiate, a daughter and a son are both your future”***. This phrase emphasizes that the aim of the campaign is to promote equal value and rights for girls and boys, and that there is no intention to diminish the role of sons by advocating for the prevention of son preference.

#### Messages may be more effective if they avoid:

***Implicit or explicit moralizing*** can make people defensive and less receptive to a message. Forcing a judgment on people’s social norms and behaviors by somehow shaming or blaming them also fails to help. However, much one may disagree with son preference or sex selection, it is unhelpful to imply that people who hold different views are unenlightened “deplorables” or even murderers.

***Eliciting pity*** for unborn girls, young girls, or women by portraying them as victims or objects of pity devalues them. While, inaccurately phrased messages that daughters are not really a burden can inadvertently reinforce perceptions that they are indeed a burden. Thus, campaigns should also avoid using the term “missing girls”.

The campaign should thus be built on positive messages, and the key themes should be:

**How families and society benefit from investing in girls:** having daughters and investing in their full potential benefits both households and parents - including into old age, and for communities and society at large.

Messages that daughters can help their parents, and be as valuable as sons, directly addresses parents’ motivations in childbearing. Therefore, changing the perceptions of the relative roles of sons and daughters is key. It is equally important to show that there is no difference in raising girls and boys, and with equal treatment girls can achieve success and support their families.

If parents realize that daughters can be as successful as their sons, and therefore can help them in later life, they will be encouraged to have daughters, and consequently to empower them as independent actors. Sons will otherwise obtain the most parental investment and inheritance, while wives will remain dependent spouses, taking care of their children, husbands, and parents-in-law.

In most rural environments, women increasingly provide physical care for their ageing parents, especially if they live nearby. The messages can thus show the benefits of offering girls the opportunity to be independent, self-reliant decision-makers. This enhances their ability not only to take care of their parents but also to support them financially.

Portraying women as role models can further increase the value of girls in society. If society often regards women as successful entrepreneurs, politicians, or professionals, the indirect message is that the ill-treatment of daughters and wives is wholly counterproductive. Crucially, having a gender equal society in turn leads to a more sustainably developed country, where there is stress on active female participation in different roles: in business, in politics, in society, etc.

To better persuade an audience it is advisable to list the social norms and stereotypes and to provide active contradictions, for instance:

- 1) **Sons stay in their family, while daughters join their husbands' families, thus later in life sons care for elderly parents and support them financially.** This, however, is not always the case, as most caregivers in Georgia are women. Moreover, daughters are as equally likely as sons to financially support elderly parents. It is a matter of **physical proximity** (whomever lives closest to elderly parents) rather than a matter of gender. Furthermore, as demonstrated by UNFPA research in 2017, the introduction and consolidation of social security, pensions, and other policies, in place since 2005, has had the effect of gradually relieving the traditional patrilineal family of its crucial role as a socio-economic buffer against health, unemployment, and the hazards of old age. Therefore, the reliance on family as a traditional safeguard has been reduced.
- 2) **Sons will carry the family name, be natural heirs, will continue working the family land or the family business, and maintain family property. Thus, for the continuation of families, sons are integral.** While this has perhaps been the case in the past, today most women study, join the labour market, have careers, and make names for themselves- bringing the spotlight to their paternal family name. Presently, more and more women are becoming successful and making their parents proud. Furthermore, according to the law, both sons and daughters are the lawful equal inheritors of parental property,<sup>6</sup> and all children are entitled to a share of property. Although traditions might maintain certain practices, the law hold different standards.
- 3) **Sex-selective abortions are the cause of GBSS.** It is a common misconception that sex-selective abortions are the cause of GBSS. Gender inequality resulting in strong preference for boys over girls is the underlying cause of GBSS, not abortions. The problem is derived from the deeply engrained preference for sons, rather than female access to full reproductive rights. Limiting access to certain services without addressing the social norms and structures that determine their use is, therefore, likely to result in severe consequences and may violate women's human rights. In order to tackle the problem, it is necessary to address its root causes, which entails eliminating attitudes, behaviors, and practices that devalue and discriminate against women.

**The adverse consequences from a disbalance in the sex ratio, increasing the number of boys and decreasing the number of girls born, is also highly noteworthy.** One approach is to actively warn people that practicing GBSS impacts Georgia's demographic composition. The current trend of having more boys than girls ensures a greater number of men to women in the future, this will have an effect on the marriage market, due to a shortage of brides; decrease the number of births, with fewer women of reproductive age; and affect the overall balance of the population. Consequently, GBSS leads to many negative social consequences, such as marriage disparity, even lower fertility rates, and a resultant population decrease.

**It is important to promote gender equality.** Information needs to be disseminated on the laws and policies which help women improve their positions in households and in society, and moreover details must be

6 The Georgian Civil Code, adopted in 2007.

provided on how to best employ such regulations. The laws should focus on gender equality, and policies on being more family-friendly, to offer opportunities to both men and women, to share their responsibilities equally, and to plan families according to personal aspirations. Furthermore, as in many countries in the region, in Georgia men are still ahead in terms of income, occupation within managerial positions, and decision-making. While men are also potentially valuable in helping empower women as equal members of society. Thus, to guarantee rights and universal choice, it is clear that a transformation in gender perception cannot and will not happen without the relentless efforts of both men and women.

**Messages need to be carefully piloted and tested to ensure that they are acceptable and effective before being used on a large scale. Audience testing of messages is routinely used in advocacy to help change behaviors, as such, audience feedback is crucial to adjust the messages as required.**

### 3.4 Define the communication channels and messages to best target audience communication

Working with different target audiences, no matter of their priority, it is important to remember to encourage people to rethink their norms and stereotypes in a way that notionally improves lives, rather than attacking the social order. Messages should be simple, easily understandable, and attention-grabbing. Messages with different focuses for different target groups can work correspondingly, and it is important to create common messages for the entire communication campaign, those which will be prominent and equally understandable for every target audience.

If the main objective of a campaign is to raise awareness on a certain issue, in this case GBSS, using different means of communication is crucial. For instance, people should receive messages through different channels: meetings, informative and promotional materials, television and social ads, outdoor advertisements, reporting, televisual stories, etc.

#### What can be done?

#### Messages and communication channels for people of a reproductive age (18-39 years old) in urban and rural areas

**Social and online media-** In urban areas, people aged 18-39 are typically active internet users. Hence, communication and messages to this subgroup at a national level can be delivered via social and online media. Aside from the cost of producing the messages, advocacy through social media is relatively inexpensive. Short animations, infographics, cartoons, and success stories of women may be posted on social media outlets (helpfully, on Facebook posts can be boosted and promoted selecting certain age ranges - e.g., the target audience between 18-39). The messages should reflect the existing, but obsolete, stereotypes that contribute to son preference and the poor valuation of girls. They should also emphasize the increasing importance of female roles in social life by providing examples of women who study, join the labour market, and have careers. The communication also ought to warn people about the future consequences of GBSS. Each of these products can then be unified under one slogan, much like UNFPA Georgia's informative campaign slogan "Do not differentiate, a daughter and a son are both your future!"

Online media outlets such as *liberali.ge*, *netgazeti.ge*, *tabula.ge*, *on.ge*, *batumelebi.ge*, which are popular online platforms not only in Tbilisi but also in the regions, can be helpful to further unpack GBSS practices via articles on the future implications of son preference, the importance of not differentiating between genders, and of making decisions based on the gender of a future child. Interviews with experts on gender equality issues will offer the audience valuable opinions regarding GBSS. While, quotes from respectable members



of society and highly visible personalities expressing their opinion on GBSS can also be incorporated. Thus, these messages in due course will reach the general public.

**Outdoor advertising-** In urban areas, outdoor advertisement is a very effective way of communicating campaign messages. Street billboards, buses, bus shelters, minibuses, and metro stations can each be actively used for conveying the core campaign messages. However, this means of communication is quite costly and requires considerable financing. For such external advertisement, it is better to avoid long messages and to create eye-catching slogans and visuals. Outdoor advertisement is the best way to reach not only the specific target audience but also the general public.

**Traditional media outlets-** Advocacy through television may also be actively utilized. According to various polls, approximately 70% of the Georgian population receives information through television.<sup>7</sup> One method of transmission, is to place adverts on different TV channels, this is possible with enough resources, as commercial ads are costly on national stations. Although, it is noteworthy that the Georgian law on broadcasting (article 65)<sup>8</sup> obliges the Public Broadcaster, Ajara TV, the Radio of the Public Broadcaster, and community broadcasters to allot at least 60 seconds per hour free of charge and without discrimination to a submitted social advertisement, and other broadcasters must allot at least 90 seconds every three hours. A social advertisement is defined as an “advertisement intended to promote the public good, achieve a charitable purpose, raise public awareness regarding important social issues and facilitate positive change in public behavior.” By placing social ads on national and local TV channels, the messages will reach every target audience in both urban and rural areas. Radio advertisement is also an effective way of delivering messages to the audience, moreover, in comparison to television, radio advertising is relatively cheap.

**Face to face communication-** When a campaign for the people of a reproductive age (18-39 years old) is held in the regions it is important to actively involve local partners- NGOs and municipalities. In the regions, internet penetration is not as significant as in big cities, thus informal and informative meetings will help reach the target audiences. Local CSOs and the municipalities can also assist in mobilizing and engaging local communities. For the meeting venues, local partners can be considered, such as the Network of Centers for Civic Engagement (NCCE) and women’s rooms based in the municipalities.

Working in regions populated by ethnic minorities, it is also important to consider language barriers. If information sessions and training are to be chosen as a mode of communication, it is advisable that they be conducted in a local language, for instance Georgian and Azeri (Kvemo Kartli) or Armenian (Javakheti). While conducting informative meetings in Kvemo Kartli, UNFPA Georgia designed a training module in Azeri and Georgian to help facilitate a discussion on son preference and GBSS; participants were introduced to various exercises as an opportunity to reflect on the existing stereotypes that contribute to son preference and the low value of girls within both families and society. Informative meetings conducted by UNFPA Georgia were accompanied by an animated video, *Father of Girls*, that increased audience engagement due to its storyline and characters. This model delivered content in a local language by native speaking educators, which guaranteed that any language barriers were embraced.

**Community engagement-** Due to centuries-old traditions and deeply rooted societal norms, the honor of men without a male heir is sometimes questioned, especially in the regions. Hence, it is important to reach local communities, including men in the regions, and alter their approach as their views heavily influence their households and communities. If men are supportive of having daughters, the pressure on women to bear sons is equally reduced. With the help of local NGOs and the municipalities, it is important to try to ensure active male engagement in the informative meetings. The main messages for men should highlight that daughters can be valuable to their parents and households, and that they can make their parents no less proud than sons. The messages should also identify that most often daughters care for their senior parents. Men should be warned, carefully and neutrally, about the future consequences of skewed SRB on

7 Knowledge and Attitudes of the Population of Georgia towards the Judiciary, 2018.

8 The Georgian Law on Broadcasting.





● MenCare  
Mari Nakani for MenCare Georgia/UNFPA Georgia

population dynamics. During the meetings, a core message of the campaign can be conveyed by fathers of three and more daughters showcasing that they are proud and happy with their children.

## Table 5: MenCare Campaign

Engagement with men is a crucial part of enhancing gender equality and ending harmful practices against girls and women. After years of tireless work to promote gender transformative approaches, the launch of the MenCare campaign in Georgia is a benchmark achievement of UNFPA Georgia and its partners. The campaign is based on evidence generated by the UNFPA-supported research on *Men and Gender Relations in Georgia* (2014). The MenCare is open to all men who share the idea and principles of the campaign. Its success has been largely due to its evidence-based design, tailored specifically for the Georgian socio-cultural context.

The campaign promotes male involvement, for equitable, nonviolent fathers and caregivers in order to achieve greater family well-being, gender equality, and better health for both mothers and fathers, and their children. Some remarkable success stories include: the Men Talking to Men initiative, introducing the Father's Day Celebration, the Father's Football Cup in partnership with the Georgian Football Federation, the Fathers' Blog, etc., and promoting equal and responsible parenting, including through advocacy for the introduction of paternity leave.

The campaign is supported by the UN Joint Programme for Gender Equality, funded by the government of Sweden (2016-2020) and is implemented in partnership with the NGO We Care.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>9</sup> More detailed information can be found on the UNFPA Georgia webpage: MenCare Georgia, 2018.



● Public Talk by writer Giorgi Kekelidze on Gender Equality in Marneuli  
Photo credit: UNFPA Georgia | Vladimer Valishvili

**Public events and IEC materials-** Developing and distributing informative, educational, and promotional materials, outdoor events, and street billboards provides a perfect opportunity to reach all target audiences. Moreover, public events, such as exhibitions and lectures, can also contribute to delivering tailor-made messages. One key example is Dina Oganova's Documentary Photo Exhibition, *A Girl is Born*; supported by UNFPA Georgia in Tbilisi and Marneuli (Kvemo Kartli). The expressed goal of the photo documentary, featuring families with only daughters from Tbilisi, Kakheti, and Kvemo Kartli, was to raise public awareness on the importance of treating male and female children equally, and to provide children with equal opportunities for their development and empowerment, for the benefit of families, society, and the country as a whole. The photos were accompanied by corresponding quotes from parents each sharing their positive experiences of only having girls.

## What can be done?

### Messages and communication channels for youth and adolescents in urban and rural areas

**Formal and non-formal education-** Actively working with the youth and increasing their awareness is key method leading the process of gender transformation. Whether through formal or non-formal education, young people should be encouraged to discuss, critically approach, and express their opinions on son preference and GBSS. Besides which, training, peer education session and workshops, and other forms of "edutainment" can be used. For instance, a series of animations featuring issues related to GBSS can be developed for screenings,<sup>10</sup> which can then be used to help start face to face conversations. It is moreover

10 Similar to Father of Daughters, the short film was developed with the support of UNFPA CO in Georgia.

advisable that public lectures be held in schools, with the involvement of popular figures, as change agents, from the worlds of sports, film, show business, literature, etc.

Trained teachers, especially those heading civic education lessons, can be of great help promoting gender equality and supporting the equalization of students' expectations for their futures. They can also help raise girls' aspirations, provide role models, and create more equal opportunities for girls and boys. By doing so, teachers will highlight that gender-based discrimination is unsuitable and inappropriate. The material provided will be taken home, which increases the probability that it will also reach the students families, thus increasing the awareness of high school students on GBSS issues will also indirectly reach parents and grandparents.

If it is financially viable, one suggestion is to hold essay competition for young people on topics of gender equality, such as "Girls and boys are equal". The winners then may be awarded with a prize and medal entitled "Supporter of gender equality". Additionally, within the campaign, in the process of strengthening gender equality and preventing the harmful practices of GBSS, to engage more youth outdoor events such as photo exhibitions, street paintings, meetings with famous writers, actors and singers can be further conducted.

By identifying popular youth TV programmes, they may thereafter be used for unfolding the problem of GBSS. For instance, one of such programmes is *Bookshelf* offered on the Public Broadcaster.

Regional NGOs in particular can contribute to working with youth in the regions. By partnering with local municipalities, NGOs can organize summer and winter camps where awareness of GBSS can be raised and the issues brought up alongside engaging activities.

It should be noted that in the Georgian regions with ethnic minorities, informational brochures and other materials should be bilingual, and the same is true for animations that must be adapted into local languages.

## What can be done?

### Messages and the channels of communication for parents-in-law

Frequently, there is notable pressure from parents-in-law, and members of extended families, regarding the importance of a family having a son and heir. This the case due to the practice of residing with families after marriage. According to UNFPA research (2017),<sup>11</sup> the practice of post-marital co-residence with parents is still quite widespread in Georgian society. In most cases, a married couple resides with or near the husband's parents; for 82% of multigenerational families, the spouses live with the husband's parents, and this pattern remains similar to the 2002 figures. Co-residence after marriage is more common in the villages (over 90%) and its likelihood increases in poor households. Two regions - Samtskhe-Javakheti and Kakheti - stand out, having the greatest share of patrilocal residence. While the practice is most frequent among the Azeri population (94%). In contrast, it is less widespread in urban areas, at 75%, and Tbilisi has the lowest figure of 69%. Therefore, parents-in-law are a top priority target audience, and altering their attitudes towards son preference could reduce the pressure on their children.

It is a difficult task to alter attitudes that have been shaped over time by strong traditions and beliefs. However, developing tailored messages for each target group should help establish a critical approach to GBSS. The discourse that daughters can support their parents in old age and be as valuable as sons, and that under the right conditions girls can be equally successful, is a strong example of the messaging. Warnings about the consequences of GBSS can be delivered to each target group, for instance outlining that younger generations may fail to find wives because of a future squeeze on the marriage market.

11 Trends in Sex Ratio at Birth in Georgia- an Analysis based on the 2014 General Population Census Data (2017) developed in cooperation with the National Statistics Office of Georgia (Geostat) and the UNFPA Georgia office.





● Photo project: "A Girl is Born"  
Photo credit: UNFPA Georgia | Dina Oganova

One effective ways of reaching this given target group (mostly those aged 50 and above) is via traditional media, namely, television and radio ads and programmes, newspapers, magazines, and outdoor advertisements. For example, some magazines have specific sections with real-life stories featured in different issues. Such sections with the life stories can be used to promote successful women who were born as 3<sup>rd</sup> or 4<sup>th</sup> undesired children, but who have become appreciated by their families for their accomplishments. Such stories might have an impact helping senior family members become more empathetic to the issues. It is therefore advisable to identify magazines that are popular among housewives within the target age range.

One of the most popular TV shows in Georgia is *My Wife's Friends*, and if GBSS issues were raised on the show, it would guarantee at least a strong societal discussion of the problems. Several national channels also air afternoon shows that could be used to help generate discussions on GBSS issues. Inviting experts and specialists from relevant fields (health workers, experts on demographic and gender issues, etc.) as guests would increase the audiences' level of trust due to the evidence-based discussions carried out.

These channels of communication will help impact the target group in urban areas. Nevertheless, in the regions, Georgian language journals and magazines will be less effective, as people over 50 from ethnic minorities are often unfamiliar with the language. In such cases, informational brochures should be printed in Azeri and Armenian and distributed with the help of local NGOs and municipalities. Equally, all billboards and posters to be placed on village administrative buildings should be bilingual. It would also desirable to identify respected members of local communities to deliver campaign messages to the target audience. It will be more likely that senior citizens, over 50, will positively receive messages from such respected individuals. These local leaders might also be considered as speakers for local radio or TV, where they can promote the primary campaign messages.

## What can be done?

### The means of communication for health workers, teachers, local officials, local CSOs and NGOs, religious leaders, and journalists at national and local levels

The sensitization and engagement of **reproductive healthcare providers**, especially ultrasound specialists, is vital in addressing gender-biased sex selection. These providers are in direct contact with patients and have a level of trust that enables them to make a positive impact. Aside from their daily healthcare contributions, these providers are also able to participate in and support the building of a more equal, sustainable, and harmonious society. By being aware of the causes and consequences of GBSS and by practicing the more ethical uses of sex determination technologies, medical professionals can contribute towards reducing GBSS and promoting a society where both sexes are equally celebrated, cherished, and valued.

Consequently, informative discussions and dialogs that encourage the engagement of medical professionals (involving, but not limited to Georgian, Armenian, and Azeri professionals) as partners in GBSS prevention should be fully backed; to be achieved via advocacy, sensitization, and awareness-raising programmes, alongside promoting the ethical use of prenatal sex detection technologies. Round table discussions to discuss joint approaches to GBSS prevention with professional associations, line ministries, and health workers are also highly encouraged. These activities should encourage service providers to not engage in or support discriminatory behaviors towards female children or to violate medical ethics. This can be achieved by not disclosing the fetal sex at parental request (unless required for medical reasons), until a pregnancy reaches gestational age (after 14-16 weeks), by which stage greater sex detection accuracy is ensured. It is important to stress that this would ensure female autonomy for access to personal health information, and increase the accuracy of fetal sex detection, while providing parents time to prepare for the birth of a child of either sex.

UNFPA Georgia has already designed an informative brochure and communication guide on GBSS for healthcare providers. The brochure aims to increase awareness of GBSS, its causes, and the harmful consequences, but it also highlights the reproductive health and rights of women. While the communication guide provides useful hints on the positive messages health workers should use and how they can best communicate with patients. It is highly recommended that all IEC materials used with the communication campaign are accessible in multilingual formats (Azeri, Georgian, and Armenian).

With the help of local municipalities and education resource centers, workshops should be conducted for **teachers** of civic education within the selected regions. They should be aware, sensitized, and trained on gender sensitive issues (including GBSS) in order to discuss these topics in their classes. Teachers should be provided with the IEC materials to assist them during their classes and to bolster student interest on these subjects.

An additional series of meetings and training should be conducted for **local NGOs**. Meetings with local Civil Society Organizations will aim at capacity building, knowledge sharing, and information dissemination to address the harmful practices of GBSS in the regions. Various types of civic organizations can thus be mobilized, for instance sports clubs. While, crucially, youth organizations can also be particularly effective at shaping the views of the next generation, and through them their families and communities.

Informative workshops and training should be held with selected **journalists from broadcast, online, and printed media** to report more effectively on issues of gender equality, and specifically to create messages that help to prevent son preference and sex selection at national and local levels. Media representatives should be encouraged to portray women as role models, thus highlighting the value of women in society. If society often sees successful female entrepreneurs, politicians, and professionals, the indirect message is that the ill-treatment of daughters and wives is counterproductive for everyone; thus, they are not given the chance to contribute, succeed, or excel, unlike their male counterparts.

Discussing the harmful effects and the future impacts of GBSS on the composition of the population during informative dialogs and meetings with **religious and community leaders** will help to find common ground



and establish partnerships. As religious beliefs remain strong, it will be beneficial to build partnerships with local religious leaders, as they can notably affect people's values and behaviors. During weekly sermons, religious leaders can focus on the importance of not differentiating between the genders of future children and stress the equal value of both girls and boys.

Target groups	Messages
Women of reproductive age	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Do not differentiate, daughters and sons are both your future;</li> <li>• Build an environment where girls and boys are equally celebrated, and their potential is fulfilled;</li> <li>• Invest in daughters, to benefit their families and communities;</li> <li>• Daughters can be valuable to their parents and households, no less than sons;</li> <li>• Strengthen gender equality to benefit both men and women, so they might thrive and equally contribute to the sustainable development of their families, communities, and the country.</li> </ul>
Men of reproductive age	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Do not differentiate, daughters and sons are both your future;</li> <li>• Daughters can be valuable to their parents and households, no less than sons;</li> <li>• The future consequences of skewed SRB on the demography is formidable;</li> <li>• A gender equal society leads to a more sustainably developed country because of active female participation in various domains: business, politics, social life, culture, etc.;</li> <li>• Invest in daughters, to benefit their families and communities;</li> <li>• Girls make names for themselves - under their father's family name. More and more women are becoming successful and making their parents proud.</li> </ul>
Youth and adolescents	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Strengthen gender equality to benefit both men and women, so they might thrive and fully realize their potential;</li> <li>• Supporting gender equality can help achieve equal wealth and prosperity for both girls and boys;</li> <li>• Support the overcoming of gender norms and exercising the freedom to choose education without any gender prerequisites;</li> <li>• Gender equality will help women in regions populated by ethnic minorities to obtain higher levels of education and become independent.</li> </ul>

Target groups	Messages
Parents-in-law	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Girls and boys are equal; they can support their families equally, and achieve financial independence and success;</li> <li>Most often daughters take care of their senior parents;</li> <li>With equal treatment, girls also can achieve success and support their families;</li> <li>The future consequences of skewed SRB on the demography is formidable;</li> <li>Build an environment where girls and boys are equally celebrated, and their potential is fulfilled to ensure the sustainable development of the country;</li> <li>A gender equal society leads to a more sustainably developed country because of active female participation in various domains: business, politics, social life, culture, etc.;</li> <li>Do not differentiate, girls and boys are both your future;</li> <li>Daughters can be valuable to their parents and household, no less than sons.</li> </ul>
Government officials	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A gender equal society leads to a more sustainably developed country because of active female participation in various domains: business, politics, social life, culture, etc.;</li> <li>It is important to highlight the importance of the role of the woman in society, though not based around stereotypical roles (e.g. only as mothers). Provide examples of women who study, join the labor market, have a career, manage business ventures, and bring greater income and prosperity to the country;</li> <li>Human capital is the country's most important resource; providing opportunities to every individual; the chance to thrive and fully realize potential is of critical importance to the country's sustainable development;</li> <li>We need to build an environment where girls and boys are equally celebrated, and their potential is fulfilled.</li> </ul>
Teachers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Gender equal society leads to more sustainably developed country because of women's active participation in different directions: business, politics, social life, etc.;</li> <li>Build an environment where girls and boys are equally celebrated, and their potential is fulfilled;</li> <li>Gender-based discrimination is inappropriate and is forbidden;</li> <li>Both genders are offered equal future expectations;</li> <li>Investing in girls benefits their families, communities, and the country as a whole;</li> <li>When given the chance, girls are as successful as boys.</li> </ul>

Target groups	Messages
Health workers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Abortions are not the cause, but simply the means through which gender-biased sex selection is attained;</li> <li>• It is important to state that banning abortion will not resolve the problem of sex selection, but it will fuel the unsafe provision of abortions, increasing deaths and injuries caused by unsafe abortions;</li> <li>• <b>Health is more important than the sex of a child; is natural for both boys and girls to be born.</b> Messages should promote love, care, and attachment to daughters, and the joy and celebration linked to a birth;</li> <li>• Positive communication is especially very important in communicating with parents who already have two children; sex selective abortions are very common when a family already has two children. This can explain how the norms are changing in Georgian society, and that it is normal to have a family with three female children;</li> <li>• Emphasizing that abortion is legal in Georgia and that it is a woman's reproductive right, provided according to the rules of the national legislation. However, it is important to emphasize that it is not admissible to terminate a pregnancy with the view of gender-biased sex selection, unless it is essential to prevent congenital diseases closely connected to sex;</li> <li>• It is important to highlight the importance of the role of the woman in society, though not based around stereotypical roles (e.g. only as mothers). Provide examples of women who study, join the labor market, and have a career;</li> <li>• Provide information on the ethical use of the technology, stating the specific nature of the development of the fetus, for instance, determining sex before the 12<sup>th</sup> week may be imprecise, with a great degree of probability. Respectively, it is essential that the sex of the fetus not be disclosed to the patient until the 16<sup>th</sup> week of pregnancy, thus parents are not misled and the chance of gender-biased sex selection is reduced.</li> </ul>
CSOs and NGOs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Do not differentiate, girls and boys are both your future;</li> <li>• Daughters can be valuable to their parents and household, no less than sons;</li> <li>• The future consequences of skewed SRB on the demography is formidable;</li> <li>• A gender equal society leads to a more sustainably developed country because of active female participation in various domains: business, politics, social life, culture, etc.;</li> <li>• Invest in daughters, to benefit their families and communities;</li> <li>• It is important to highlight the importance of the role of the woman in society, though not based around stereotypical roles (e.g. only as mothers). Provide examples of women who study, join the labor market, and have a career.</li> </ul>

## 4. Working alongside the media as a mode of communication & advocacy

When there is a need to raise awareness on certain issues, and consequently change people's behavior, the media becomes indispensable, as it acts as an important conduit between us and the general public. The mass media can reach **vast numbers of people** and convey tailored messages to target groups. The media may also reach audiences both **directly** and **indirectly**, by influencing people who discuss the messages with their friends. However, when working with the media, it is important to correctly identify which outlets will be the most effective at reaching the target audiences. Therefore, analyzing **how the audience use various types of media** is essential. With the help of research agencies, the ratings of media outlets, as well as spectators' ages and genders can be defined and then the relevant content provided via the selected media format.

National and local TV and radio, national newspapers and magazines, local newspapers, media websites, blogs, and social networking sites, are all forms of media that can be utilized for communication against GBSS.

Alongside radio, television reaches the vast majority of people in Georgia.<sup>12</sup> With the help of TV and radio, information on GBSS, its future implications, women's legal rights, and specific policies can be disseminated to all target groups. Dissemination of information can be completed in many ways, for example airing brief advertisements and short videos and clips of popular figures (writers, singers, artists, actors, poets, etc.) who can convey the key campaign messages. It is noteworthy that, according to Georgian law,<sup>13</sup> the Public Broadcaster, Ajara TV and the Radio of the Public Broadcaster, and a community broadcaster are obliged to allot at least 60 seconds per hour free of charge and without discrimination to a social advertisement submitted for placement. It is highly probable that both state-run and commercial TV and radio stations will broadcast social adverts for free.

While, in-depth discussions with different experts on gender issue can be used as topics in talk shows. On popular talk shows, the stories can be told of women who are the 3<sup>rd</sup> or 4<sup>th</sup> child in their families; of women who have been left for not having a son; or of men who were the subject of mockery for only having daughters. The featured stories should be provided to television stations, including longer, in-depth stories, examining the different aspects of the issues in collaboration with an expert source. While artists, singers, actors, poets, and writers should not simply appear in TV ads, but they should also participate in various TV and radio programmes supporting gender equality and raising the problem of gender-biased sex selection.

Radio can a corroborating partner, offering a series of talk shows on the issues, as well as publishing blogs on GBSS online. On public transport people often listen to "Ar Daidardo" and "Dardimandi" on the radio. Short advertisements on these stations thus reach a lot of people. Moreover, TV and radio items on GBSS should be highlighted on their websites and Facebook pages. Thereafter, previously recorded TV and radio programmes can be reused during training.

Nevertheless, cooperation with TV and radio has its disadvantages. It is important to remember that information is filtered through journalists and editors, therefore it is easy to lose control of its content, or it may not even appear at all. The story or programme may also become oversimplified or inaccurate. It may be presented alongside opposing views, which might subsequently create a negative public reaction, marginalizing the subject ever more so. Thus, it is important to produce information in a form that journalists can use and not substantially change; for instance to offer to check facts before a story is released and to be prepared to counter contradictory views.

<sup>12</sup> Knowledge and Attitudes of the Population of Georgia towards the Judiciary, 2018.

<sup>13</sup> The Law of Georgia on Broadcasting.



● Equality Wall in Marneuli, street artist Gagosh in the working process.  
Photo credit: UNFPA Georgia | Vladimer Valishvili

National TV can reach regional target audiences, although in certain regions local media outlets are also popular. Therefore, it is important to use community TV and radio in the regions, and because of the language barrier, notably in areas populated by ethnic minorities. In Kvemo Kartli and Samtskhe-Javakheti, where many Azeris and Armenians reside, the local media outlets are bilingual, and this offers the opportunity to convey messages to them in their native languages. For instance, Marneuli TV and radio can produce programmes or adverts in both Georgian and Azeri. Equally, in Samtskhe-Javakheti the “Samkhretis Karibche” radio is bilingual, using both Georgian and Armenian.

Conventional print media, such as newspapers and magazines, can also contain advertisements and articles on gender equality and son preference. Like pamphlets, they may also be useful for conveying more detailed information in a form that can be kept for reference. However, print media may not reach the less literate audiences.

## 4.1 Additional mediums of communication

In addition to mass media outreach, it can be very effective to use public personages and organizations to spread messages that help change social norms and behaviors that affect son preference and sex selection. Various public individuals can bring varying different strengths to advocacy, while being agents of change. For example, *popular figures* from the world of sport, film, show business, etc. can each add a certain appeal and lure to GBSS messaging, just as they do in advertising commercial products.

Fathers of daughters can be also considered as partners for advocacy. Speaking about their experience as fathers, they could become powerful public agents of change. In particular, *political leaders who have three or more daughters* can be extremely effective at the national and community level. Real stories about their experiences raising three or four daughters could be related on social media or they could become guests



on entertainment television programmes. Equally, *female politicians and public figures* who are the third or fourth daughter in their families can appear on such programmes and discuss their struggles and successes.

Politicians at the national level are well-known throughout the country, whereas in the regions similar activities could be conducted using *local government officials*. As potentially powerful agents of change agents, they wield considerable influence and authority, and they can be mobilized to advocate for the changing of social norms and behaviors regarding GBSS. It is thus beneficial to train local officials in order to hone their skills in behavioral change and communication, and to then use them as proponents of the communication campaign.

## 5. Monitoring progress, evaluating impacts, different types of evaluation and indicators

Monitoring and evaluation are essential to the success of the programme, thus regular assessment ensures that any required adjustments are made. The effectiveness of different types of outreach also need to be assessed. While the programme impact must also be evaluated and the lessons learned disseminated.

**Impact evaluation- Randomized Control Trials (RCT)** are the gold standard in impact evaluation. These require a control population to provide a clear counterfactual of what changes might have taken place in the absence of the programme.

Such a counterfactual is difficult to devise in a communication programme, as they are typically designed to reach across a population and have ideas “contaminate” people throughout other groups. It is sometimes possible to create data from a “natural experiment”, in which, for example, only some people had access to a particular television channel. Such evaluations can usually only be carried out when a programme has been in place for some years. They can focus, for instance, on whether there is a shift in the proportion of people reporting strong son preference, a shift in the desired sex of children, or increased public support for more equal investment in both girls and boys.

Programmes should not necessarily expect to be able to measure changes in the sex ratio at birth. Such changes not only take time, but also result from a complex interplay of factors including many that are outside the scope of communication programmes, such as the availability of meaningful pensions and social insurance programmes.

RCT are extremely good when there is a campaign or project which aims for a specific locality, not that of the whole population. In addition, they can be used to evaluate the effectiveness of different interventions and thereafter choose the best. Therefore, instead of employing standard impact assessment mechanisms (like RCTs) it might be better to assess: 1. the process of conducting the communication campaign (if the process went as planned, for these purposes one should evaluate the input indicators: the coverage of TV channels in the region, etc.); and 2. certain outcomes of the communication campaign (what the population learnt from different TV programmes [using surveys and focus groups], etc.).

If there are other activities in the communication campaign (aside from TV programmes) that affect only a small group of ethnic minorities (as there are others in the same minority groups that have not been affected by these activities), a standard impact evaluation could be successfully conducted (e.g., using RCT). RCTs are though usually prolonged, as they look at the impact over time. There are, however, other less rigorous types of evaluation, such as survey data.

**Less rigorous types of evaluation- Survey data** can be used to evaluate programmes, both for routine feedback and for impact evaluation. While this form of impact evaluation lacks the rigor of RCTs, it can be conducted easily using data available from regular surveys.

Such evaluations commonly measure changes in specific indicators between a baseline survey conducted before the intervention begins, and surveys conducted at subsequent points in time- during the intervention or after its conclusion.

Such surveys can capture shifts in audience *views* on issues of gender equality, such as parental care for sons and daughters; equal inheritance for boys and girls; the acceptability of daughters supporting their parents; and more broadly, the respective roles of men and women in the home and in public life. Such surveys can also seek to capture shifts in *behaviors*, following exposure to advocacy. The KAP (Knowledge, Attitude, and Practice) surveys used for assessing family planning programmes offer one such example of this approach.

Surveys also help in programme design. Analysis of the baseline survey by the respondents' characteristics, such as age, gender, position in the household, residential location, and other socio-economic factors, can indicate the range of opinions held by the population, and thus how to focus the communication plan. Analysis of the data collected once the programme is underway will help to indicate whether it needs to be refocused. Additionally, referring to the preexisting knowledge base for the programme design or its baseline can aid impact evaluation at a later stage.

A very simple and cheap way to evaluate changes in son preference in Georgia might be adding one or two additional questions to the current annual surveys. This would offer the possibility to track any changes in indicators of son preference and compare it to its manifestation in GBSS change patterns. This kind of question may include, for example, asking married individuals of their ideal family composition, their baby gender preference for a child, etc.

The surveys could be sourced from the Integrated Household Survey, conducted by the National Statistics Office, or the Caucasus Barometer, conducted by CRRRC. These nationwide surveys provide the possibility to deconstruct answers in different dimensions (rural-urban, regional, age, gender, etc.).

Focus group discussions are a further popular technique for collecting information on people's views, offering a quick method of obtaining detailed insights. However, their use includes some serious pitfalls. What people say in a group can be affected by the dynamics of the group, especially if the party is drawn from people who live or work in the same place. Individuals may hesitate to express controversial opinions or fail to contradict someone in a position of authority. Besides which, focus groups are not based on formal sampling, so it is not possible to generalize on a larger community from a small group.

**Process Evaluation** determines whether programme activities have been implemented as intended and if they result in certain outputs. Process evaluation provides answers to the following questions: What has the programme done? When and where did the programme activities take place? What are the barriers/facilitators to the implementation of programme activities? Such process evaluation needs to be carried out on a regular basis, and this routine feedback identifies whether interventions are effectively reaching their intended audience. This is the least expensive form of assessment and the simplest to conduct. Process evaluation contains basic assessments, such as the size of the audience for each type of message and audience approval ratings to indicate how the messages are being received.

The evaluation also involves assessing other programme activities, such as how many local officials or teachers have received training in advocacy, and their responses. This can be accomplished via participant questionnaires upon completion of training courses and information sessions, which can thus provide an important source of information for gauging effectiveness and the influence of capacity building activities.

In process evaluation, one can see input indicators like: the number of medical staff trained in GBSS issues, the number of teachers trained, changes in the curriculum (including extra topics on gender equality), etc. This offers visibility to the overall progress of planned interventions, expressed in numerical terms.

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## UNFPA Global Programme to Prevent Son Preference and Gender-biased Sex Selection

The programme will contribute to addressing the imbalance in sex ratio via strengthening evidence-based national policies and programmes to tackle son preference, low value of girls and gender inequalities resulting in gender-biased sex selection in identified countries of prevalence in Asia (Bangladesh, Nepal and Viet Nam) and the Caucasus (Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia).

UNFPA Georgia  
UN House,  
Eristavi st. 9 Tbilisi, 0179  
Georgia  
[www.georgia.unfpa.org](http://www.georgia.unfpa.org)

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ISSET Policy Institute  
16 Zandukeli St. Tbilisi, 0108  
Georgia  
[www.iset-pi.ge](http://www.iset-pi.ge)