



ISSUE BRIEF



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WOMEN WITH DISABILITIES IN GEORGIA

Globally, the disability prevalence rate among women is higher (19.2 per cent) than that among men (12 per cent).¹ Furthermore, global estimates indicate that 57 to 81 per cent of all caregivers of people with disabilities are women, adding another gendered dimension to the issue of disability.² Women and girls with disabilities face systemic marginalization, attitudinal and environmental barriers, and barriers to accessing education, health care (including sexual and reproductive health), information and services, justice, and civic and political participation. Moreover, they face lower economic and social status, are exposed to an increased risk of violence, including sexual violence, and experience various forms of discrimination, including harmful gender-based discriminatory practices, among other obstacles.

In Georgia, data from the population census suggest that there were 184,958 people with functional disabilities (5.0 per cent of the population) in 2014, which is well below the global estimates (15.6 per cent). Following the global pattern, more women in Georgia (5.6 per cent) than men (4.3 per cent) have disabilities. The lack of specialized data and analysis makes it difficult to discern the real extent of disability and its gendered aspects in Georgia. However, the available scarce data suggest that the scope of the above-mentioned challenges is significant for women with disabilities in Georgia.

Policy and legal framework

Georgia has shown strong commitments to various international development agendas for disability-inclusive development and gender equality. In 1994, Georgia ratified the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC). In 1995, the country became a part of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (BPfA). In 2014, Georgia ratified the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD). Georgia is committed to the Incheon Strategy to “Make the Right Real” for people with disabilities for the 2013–2022 period. Georgia is also committed to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which contain a series of disability-related indicators.

At the national level, Georgia has adopted a number of laws that make commitments to persons with disabilities, including the Law on Gender Equality in 2010³ and the Code on the Rights of the Child in 2019.⁴ In 2020, Georgia adopted the Law on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, which fully entered into force in 2021.⁵ This law is of particular significance because it moves Georgia from a medical to a biopsychosocial model of disability, in line with CRPD standards.⁶ However, the available data show that these positive developments in the legal and

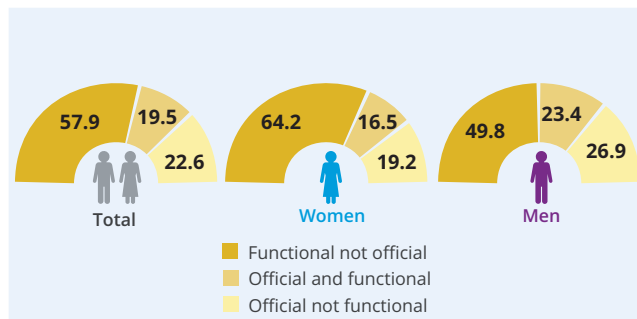


policy framework have not yet fully translated into an improved situation for persons with disabilities and for women and girls with disabilities in particular.

Women are more likely to have a disability but less likely to have official disability status

The 2014 census suggests that women with disabilities are less likely than men to have official disability status.⁷ According to the census data, 108,939 of the 184,958 people who reported having at least one functional disability were women (59 per cent).⁸ At the same time, the census showed that more men (52,170) than women (47,943) had official disability status.⁹ Comparing the data on functional disability and official disability statuses suggests that women are more likely than men to have a functional disability while not having official disability status (Figure 1).¹⁰

FIGURE 1
Distribution of persons with functional disabilities, official disability status and both, by sex (percentage)



Source: MoDPOTLHSA 2021; SSA 2021a; UN Women and UNICEF 2021.

This discrepancy can be explained by two facts. First, women live longer than men and, as a result, are more likely to develop a disability over their lifetime. However, in Georgia, people with disabilities over the age of retirement cannot receive both a disability benefit and an old-age pension. As the latter exceeds any social benefit package in monetary terms, there is little incentive for people with disabilities of pension age to register for an official disability status¹¹

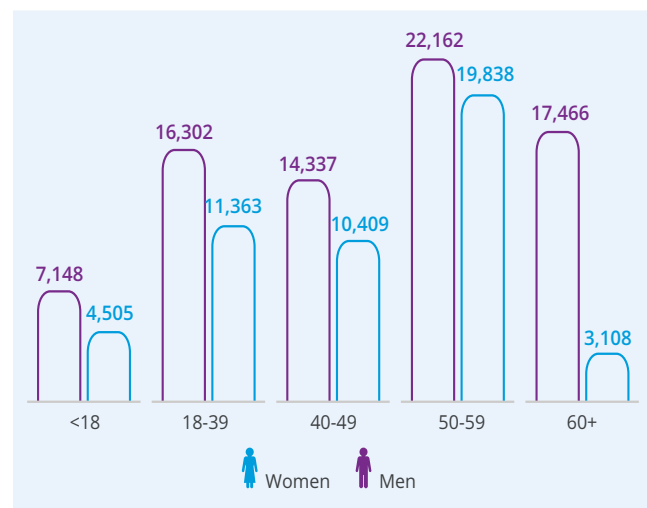
Second, due to widespread stereotypes, parents are likely not registering girls as having disabilities, even if they are

aware of their daughter's disability. This practice stems from stereotypes around women with disabilities—and specifically the fear that disclosure of disability may prevent her from getting married. For boys with disabilities, this status is considered less of a problem when it comes to finding a partner and getting married.¹² As a result of these two factors, women are largely underrepresented in official disability statistics.

Women with disabilities are less likely to benefit from social assistance than men with disabilities

The lack of the official status not only makes women with disabilities invisible to policymakers but also prevents them from receiving state benefits and accessing services for which they should be eligible. In Georgia, more men receive the social package—monetary support for people with disabilities—than women in every age group and disability category. The difference is particularly stark for those over the age of 60, as seen in Figure 2. This stems from the fact that the official pension age is lower for women (60 years of age for women and 65 for men), who tend to choose an old-age pension over a social package (i.e. disability benefit) and thus do not need to register for an official disability status.

FIGURE 2
Distribution of social package beneficiaries, by sex and age group, 2020



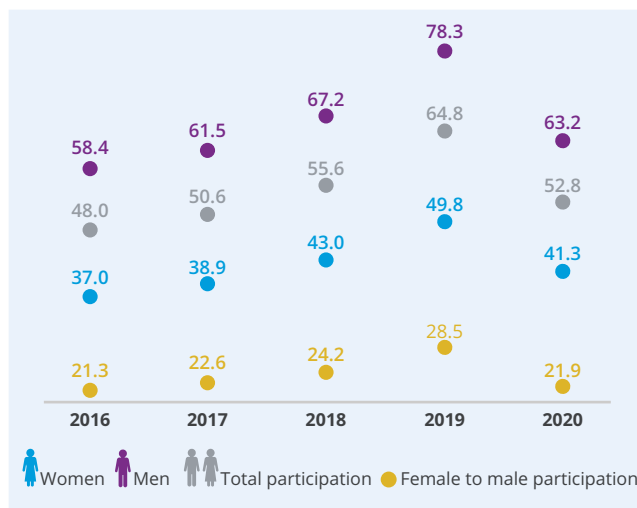
Source: MoDPOTLHSA 2021; SSA 2021a; UN Women and UNICEF 2021.

Women’s lack of official disability status leads to fewer women than men receiving COVID-19-related support as well. Even though the majority of people with disabilities in Georgia are women, only 37 per cent of the beneficiaries of programmes aimed at supporting people with disabilities during the pandemic were women.¹³

Women with disabilities are underserved by the healthcare system

Data on the Universal Healthcare Programme (UHP) indicate that women with disabilities are significantly less likely to use the UHP. In 2020, 41.3 per cent of women with disabilities and 63.2 per cent of men with disabilities used the UHP, a gap of 21.9 percentage points. Notably, the COVID-19 pandemic reduced the usage of the UHP for people with disabilities as well as people in general (Figure 3). While emergency medical treatment has remained readily accessible during the pandemic, women with disabilities postponed or cancelled planned medical treatment, as some services were unavailable.¹⁴

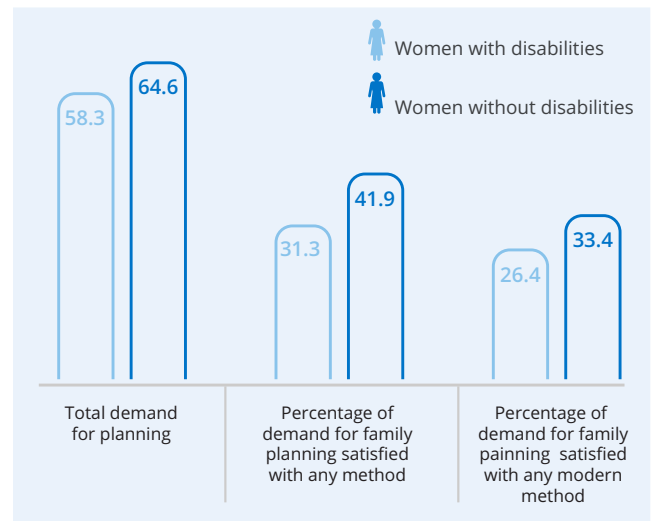
FIGURE 3
Participation rate in the Universal Healthcare Programme (percentage)



Source: MoIDPOTLHSA 2021; SSA 2021a; UN Women and UNICEF 2021.

Women with disabilities have lower demand for family planning, but those that do have such needs, they are significantly less likely to have their demand met (Figure 4).

FIGURE 4
Need and demand for family planning among women currently married or in a union, by functional disability status (percentage)



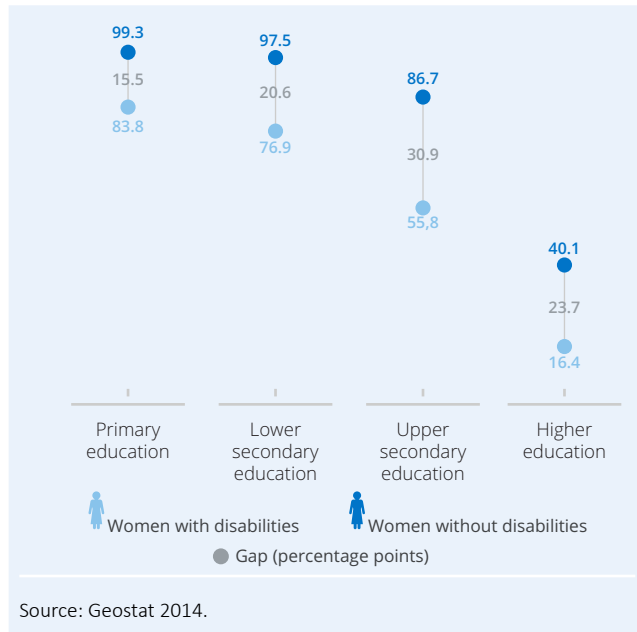
Source: UNICEF and Geostat 2018.

Women with disabilities are given fewer opportunities to pursue education

In general, people with disabilities in Georgia face systematic challenges in accessing education, as they are less likely than people without disabilities to access education. The data on completion rates show that the gap between girls with and without disabilities increases with age. Girls with disabilities are 15.5 percentage points less likely to complete primary education and 20.6 percentage points less likely to complete lower secondary education. This gap increases to 30.9 percentage points for the upper secondary level (Figure 5).

FIGURE 5

Gaps in completion rates between people with and without disabilities (percentage) (related to SDG indicator 4.1.2.)



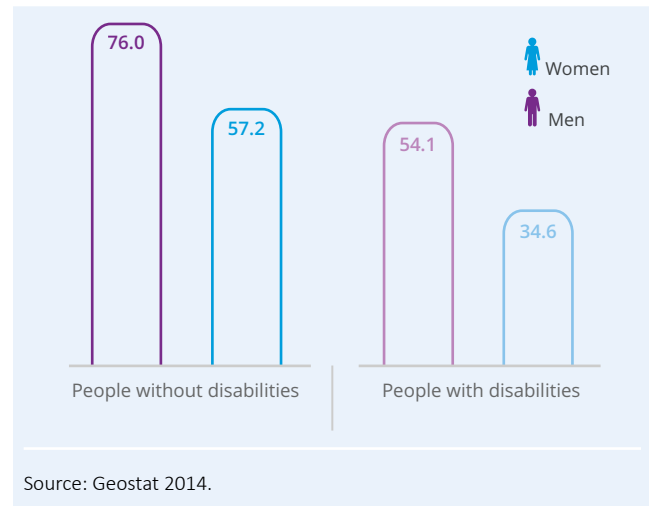
Girls with disabilities face multiple forms of discrimination in addition to being discriminated against based on disability. According to a qualitative study, boys and girls with disabilities are treated differently within the education system. Boys are reported to be given more freedom to learn a profession; consequently, they find it easier to find work. Conversely, girls are reported to be more stereotyped as unable to integrate with society and are more likely to be encouraged to engage in housework, reflecting the broader public attitudes towards men and women.¹⁵

Women with disabilities are significantly less likely to participate in the labour force

Labour market indicators tend to be weaker for people with disabilities in Georgia. Following the general pattern, they are even weaker for women with disabilities than men with disabilities. For instance, women with disabilities are 19.5 percentage points less likely to participate in the labour force than men with disabilities. Women with disabilities are 22.6 percentage points less likely to participate in the labour force than women without disabilities. The combined forms of discrimination that women with disabilities face from sex and disability lead to a gap in labour force participation of 41.4 percentage points compared with men without disabilities (Figure 6).¹⁶

FIGURE 6

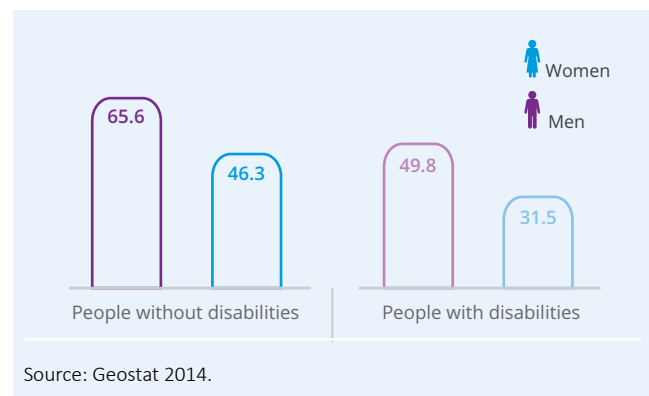
Labour force participation rate and employment rate, by sex and disability status (percentage)



The picture is quite similar when it comes to employment rates. Women with disabilities are 18.3 percentage points less likely to be employed than men with disabilities, and they are 14.8 percentage points less likely to be employed than women without disabilities (Figure 7).¹⁷

FIGURE 7

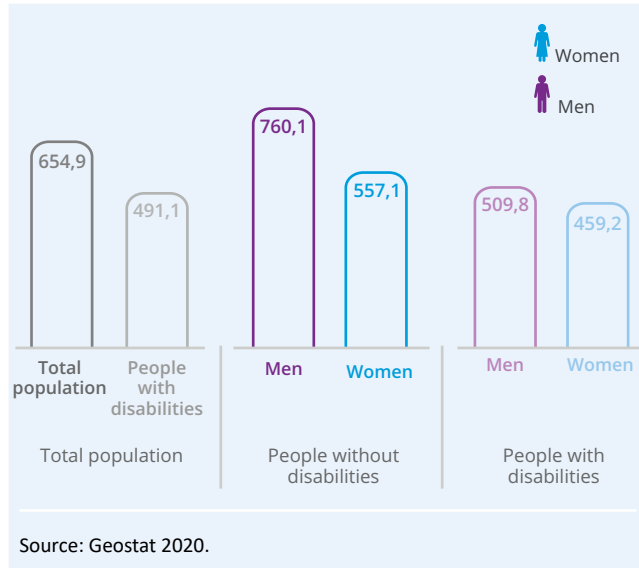
Employment rate, by sex and disability status (percentage)



People with disabilities in Georgia earn substantially less than people without disabilities on average, with a nominal wage gap of 25 per cent, according to the Labour Force Survey. Women with disabilities earn significantly less compared to women without disabilities (by 18 per cent) as well as compared to men with disabilities (by 10 per cent) in unadjusted terms (Figure 8).¹⁸



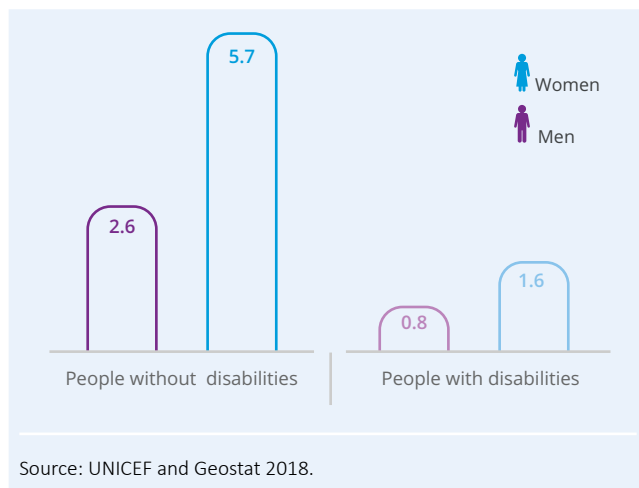
FIGURE 8
Earnings, by sex and disability status (GEL)



Women with disabilities face increased risks of violence and crime

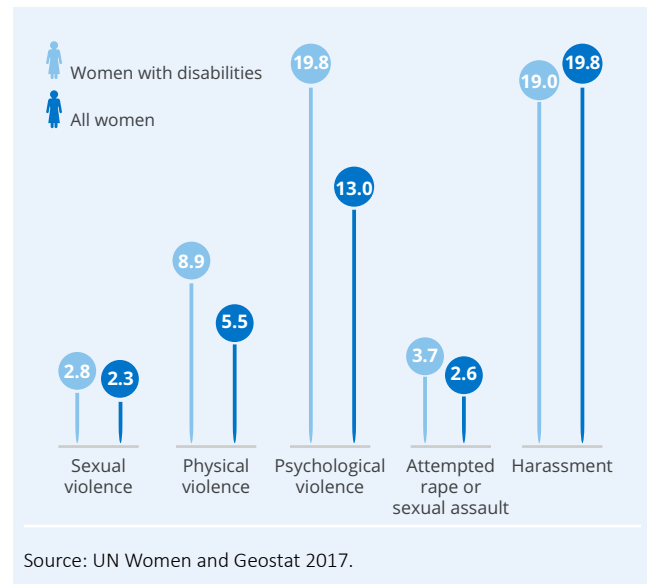
People with disabilities are significantly more likely to be victims of crime in Georgia. The victimization rate is also gendered, with women with disabilities being significantly more likely to be robbed or assaulted than women without disabilities or men with or without disabilities (Figure 9).¹⁹

FIGURE 9
Share of people reporting being robbed or assaulted in the preceding three years (percentage)



Women with disabilities are also more likely to be the victims of a wide range of types of violence (Figure 10).²⁰

FIGURE 10
Share of women reporting they were the victims of different forms of violence (percentage)



Conclusion

Available data show that in Georgia, the share of women with disabilities is higher than that of men with disabilities. However, women with disabilities are significantly less likely to have official disability status and receive disability assistance. As a result, they remain invisible for policymakers and service providers and are less likely to benefit from social assistance, including from COVID-19-related government support during the pandemic. At the same time, women with disabilities are significantly less likely to use the Universal Healthcare Programme, especially during the pandemic, and their demand for family planning is largely unmet.

Girls with disabilities in Georgia are less likely to attain education than girls without disabilities. Consequently, they have weaker access to the labour market, and they earn lower wages than both men with disabilities and women without disabilities. Women with disabilities face significantly higher crime victimization rates than women without disabilities or men with disabilities and are systematically exposed to higher rates of violence than women without disabilities.



ENDNOTES

- 1 WHO and World Bank 2011.
- 2 Sharma et al. 2016.
- 3 Government of Georgia 2010.
- 4 Government of Georgia 2019.
- 5 Government of Georgia 2020.
- 6 UN Women 2021.
- 7 GEOSTAT 2014.
- 8 UN Women and UNICEF 2021.
- 9 GEOSTAT 2014.
- 10 UN Women and UNICEF 2021.
- 11 Ibid.
- 13 UN Women and UNICEF 2021.
- 14 UN Women and CRRC 2020.
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- 16 GEOSTAT 2014.
- 17 ibid.
- 18 GEOSTAT 2020.
- 19 UNICEF and Geostat 2018.
- 20 UN Women and GEOSTAT 2017.

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