



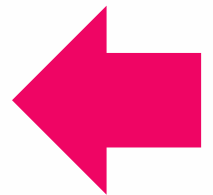
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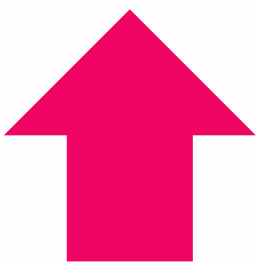
Development and Engagement Platform

# Fostering Engagement of Youth with Disabilities in Arts and Culture

Study Report



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2024

Author of the publication

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## Foreword

The project "**Fostering Engagement of Youth with Disabilities in Arts and Culture**" was implemented with the financial support of the European Union under its Eastern Partnership Civil Society Fellowship Programme. The project aims to present the challenges and barriers that prevent youth with disabilities from being more actively involved in the arts and culture sector of Georgia. The project also aims to advocate the rights of youth with disabilities and develop recommendations for state and cultural organizations as well as for youth with disabilities to raise their awareness about youth with disabilities' involvement in Arts and Culture.

This report includes information about the barriers faced by youth with disabilities who are involved in the field of arts and culture, as well as those who want to be involved in the field. The report includes recommendations for governmental and cultural organizations and youth with disabilities, which is a kind of guideline to overcome the existing barriers.

# I. Overview of the legislative framework

Everyone has the right to enjoy arts. However, a wheelchair user cannot attend a theater performance if the building is only accessible by stairs. A person with hearing-impairment will not be able to understand the content of the movie without subtitles or sign language translation. A visually impaired person cannot understand the content of a picture if it is not accompanied by an audio description that he/she can listen to. In the document "Culture Strategy 2025"[1] approved by the Government of Georgia on July 1, 2016, paragraph 2.2 states:

„All members of the society, including vulnerable groups, youth and minorities are actively engaged in cultural life and have access to cultural infrastructure and resources “.

The tasks outlined in the strategy envisage the active inclusion of people with special needs in cultural life, for which it is important to support the accessibility of creative and cultural projects, events and appropriate spaces. One of the tasks of the strategy is to support the development of adapted media programs for the purpose of integration of people with special needs into society and the development of mechanisms of benefits for students with disabilities, in order to access studies in cultural specialties.

From the tasks outlined in the strategy, it is also important to support and encourage cultural institutions and organizations, private structures and even legislative departments to offer special conditions (e.g. free entry, low ticket price, open day, etc.) to people with disabilities and support their employment.

One of the tasks of the strategy is to ensure the accessibility of cultural infrastructure for people with disabilities by adapting existing and under-construction cultural venues to their needs.

The strategy document is aimed at retraining the staff of cultural institutions and organizations, in order to develop the necessary skills to interact with people with disabilities, and to support cultural institutions and organizations with programs and materials adapted for people with disabilities (books printed in Braille, audiobooks, subtitles, Internet and digital applications, sign language translation, etc.).

One of the important tasks of the Culture Strategy 2025 is to promote the involvement of people with disabilities in culture and artistic education, with the support of appropriate legislative and regulatory mechanisms and the creation of an adapted environment and special programs.

The culture strategy created by the Ministry of Culture and Monument Protection of Georgia in 2016 responds to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD)[2], which entered into force on May 3, 2008.

The document obliges the state to replace the attitude established in the society with new approaches and fight against the existing stigmas and stereotypes. The state is obliged to consider the protection and promotion of the rights of persons with disabilities in all its planned policy programs and directions. Also, it is important that the persons with disabilities themselves and the organizations created by them fully participate in the monitoring process. In order to speed up the necessary actions at different sectors and levels, it is important for the government to establish or allocate a coordination mechanism.

In terms of the rights of persons with disabilities, the adoption of the Law "On the Rights of Persons with Disabilities"[3] by the Parliament of Georgia in 2020 is an important achievement. In 2013, Georgia ratified the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

The Law "On the Rights of Persons with Disabilities" defines the main mechanisms and principles of accessibility for persons with disabilities to their full participation in all spheres. Article 16 of the law defines participation in cultural, sports, entertainment and other public events. according to which, the state promotes the participation of persons with disabilities in cultural events and provides them with access to relevant

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[1] Culture Strategy 2025 - Ministry of Culture and Monument Protection of Georgia; 2016; pp. 17-18

[2] Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. United Nations

[3] Law of Georgia on the rights of persons with disabilities. 2020. <https://matsne.gov.ge/en/document/view/4923984?publication=0>

information and materials and full inclusion; The state also supports the development of appropriate mechanisms for the use and development of persons with disabilities creative potential.

Article 17 of the Law determines the raising of awareness for the promotion of the potential of persons with disabilities and their contribution to public life and the implementation of long-term programs that contribute to the breaking of stereotypes that cause discrimination on the basis of disability;

One of the main priorities of the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth of Georgia is to increase the access of people with disabilities to the field of arts and culture. However, despite a number of measures taken by the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth of Georgia to implement the aforementioned goals and priorities, there are still many problems that prevent youth with disabilities from being actively involved in the field of arts and culture.

Unfortunately, it still remains a challenge to integrate people with disabilities in the field of culture and arts and to create an inclusive environment for them.

The barriers and recommendations given in the report were created on the basis of focus groups and in-depth interviews conducted within the project, in which representatives of the state, cultural and non-governmental organizations working on disability issues, as well as youth with disabilities already involved in arts and culture and youth with disabilities willing to be involved in the field, were actively involved.

# II. Research Methodology

## 2.1 Research goal

The project "Fostering engagement of youth with disabilities in arts and culture" aimed:

- To identify the barriers that prevent youth with disabilities to be more actively involved in the sector of arts and culture of Georgia;
- To advocate the rights of persons with disabilities;
- To develop recommendations on the needs of persons with disabilities, both for state and cultural organizations, and for persons with disabilities themselves, in order to raise their awareness regarding the involvement of persons with disabilities in the field of arts and culture;

To achieve the goal of the research, the following questions were defined:

- What are the barriers faced by youth with disabilities who are involved in the field of arts and culture/who want to be actively involved in the field of arts and culture?
- How did youth with disabilities involved in arts and culture overcome existing barriers?
- To what extent do youth with disabilities interested in arts have the opportunity to receive higher arts education?
- To what extent do youth with disabilities interested in arts have the opportunity to become arts creators themselves?
- Has society's stereotypical attitude towards people with disabilities changed over the last decade?
- To what extent do artists with disabilities working in Georgia offer a quality product to the audience?
- What should the state/cultural organizations/non-governmental sector do to make arts and culture more accessible to youth with disabilities?

## 2.2 Research objectives

To achieve the goal of the research, the following objectives were defined:

- Identification of barriers that prevent youth with disabilities from actively engaging in artistic and cultural life;
- Identification of ways and methods of overcoming barriers, which in the future will contribute to encouraging the involvement of youth with disabilities in the field of arts and culture;
- Identifying opportunities that will help youth with disabilities who want to be involved in the field of arts and culture to achieve their goals;
- The role of the state/cultural organizations/non-governmental organizations and their willingness to promote the involvement of youth with disabilities in the sector;
- Advocacy of the rights of youth with disabilities;
- Development of ways and recommendations to overcome barriers, in order to promote the involvement of youth with disabilities in the sector;

## 2.3 Research design

Based on the complexity of the research topic, the qualitative research method was selected.

As part of the qualitative research, two focus group discussions were held, in which participated youth with disabilities from three regions of Georgia: Adjara, Imereti and Tbilisi. One focus group discussion was held with youth with disabilities who are already involved in arts and culture. Meanwhile, the second focus group discussion was held with youth with disabilities, who have the desire to be actively involved in the field of arts and culture but are unable to because of barriers. The age of the respondents in the focus groups was between 14 and 30. 8 youth with disabilities took part in each focus group. The total number of respondents was 16. Each discussion lasted for 1-1.5 hours.

Youth with different disabilities took part in the research. Among them were youth with motor, sensory (visually impaired, hearing impairment) and intellectual disabilities.

As part of the research, 9 in-depth interviews with filed experts were planned and carried out. Two interviews with a representatives of state organizations, four interviews with representatives of cultural organizations and three interviews with representatives of an NGOs.

Each in-depth interview lasted 1-1.5 hours.

## 2.4 Research participants

### 2.4.1 Profiles of focus group participants

2 focus group discussions were held within the framework of the research. 8 youth with disabilities participated in each focus group. The total number of respondents was 16. They represented three regions of Georgia: Tbilisi, Imereti and Adjara. Their age ranged from 14 to 30.

Parents of several youth with disabilities also attended the focus group discussions. The selected respondents of the research were: youth with disabilities who are already involved in the field of arts and culture and youth with disabilities who have the desire to be involved in the field, but cannot because of existing barriers. Development and Engagement Platform published a registration form for the focus groups on the organization's Social page. Among the registered respondents, for the first focus group, were selected youth with disabilities who are actively involved in the field of arts and culture. And, for the second focus group, youth with disabilities who have the desire to be actively involved in the field, but are unable to do so due to existing barriers.

1. Focus group #1 – In the discussion participated youth with disabilities, who are actively involved in the field of arts and culture.



<b>N</b>	<b>Sex</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Location</b>	<b>Disability</b>
1	Male	14-20	Ajara	Motor
2	Female	14-20	Ajara	Sensory
3	Female	26-30	Tbilisi	Sensory
4	Male	26-30	Tbilisi	Intellectual
5	Female	21-25	Tbilisi	Intellectual
6	Female	14-20	Tbilisi	Intellectual
7	Female	14-20	Ajara	Intellectual
8	Female	26-30	Ajara	Sensory

*Table #1. Data of respondents who participated in focus group 1*

2. Focus group #2 - In the discussion participated youth with disabilities, who have the desire to be actively involved in the field of arts and culture, but are unable to because of barriers.

N	Sex	Age	Location	Disability
1	Female	21-25	Ajara	Motor
2	Female	26-30	Tbilisi	Motor
3	Female	26-30	Tbilisi	Motor
4	Male	14-20	Ajara	Sensory/Motor
5	Female	21-25	Imereti	Sensory
6	Male	26-30	Tbilisi	Intellectual
7	Male	21-25	Tbilisi	Intellectual
8	Female	14-20	Imereti	Intellectual

*Table #2. Data of respondents who participated in focus group 2*

Youth with disabilities who participated in the focus groups had motor, sensory and intellectual disabilities. Both focus group discussions were conducted remotely.

### **2.4.1 In-depth interview participants' profiles**

In-depth interviews were conducted with state/cultural/NGO representatives. Respondents were selected on the basis of the "snowball" sampling technique, based on their involvement and experience in the field. Representatives of the Parliament of Georgia and the Ministry of Education and Science of Georgia participated in the in-depth interview. Four representatives of the cultural organization and three representatives of the non-governmental organization working on disability issues, participated in the interview.

Type of the organization	Number of respondents
State organizations	2
Cultural organizations	4
NGOs	3

*Table #3. Number of respondents who participated in in-depth interviews*

## III. Key findings

### Existing barriers in the field of arts and culture of Georgia

As part of the research, the barriers faced by artists with disabilities as well as youth with disabilities who want to be actively involved in the field were identified.

#### 3.1 Infrastructural barrier

The majority of cultural and artistic institutions in Georgia are not accessible. Cultural institutions that are considered to be accessible have only adapted toilets and just first floor of the venue for wheelchair users. In access report[4] prepared by the British Council in 2017, the accessibility of two state theaters of Georgia was evaluated. These theaters are: Marjanishvili Theater and Rustaveli National Theater. As mentioned in the research document, the venue of Marjanishvili theater is not fully adapted. The central entrance has many stairs, which is a barrier for wheelchair users and visually impaired people.

Wheelchair users can enter the building through the side entrance, although there is no sign anywhere to help them find the side entrance. The internal space of the theatre building is also not accessible for people with disabilities. As for Rustaveli National Theater, there is a special place for wheelchair users on the ground floor. One of the loggia box of the theater has been adapted, from which the stage can be seen perfectly. However, the narrow entrance to the loggia box prevents wheelchair users from entering it unassisted. The museum on the upper floor of the theater is not accessible for wheelchair users/people with motor disabilities. It should be noted that in recent years the toilets of both Marjanishvili Theater and the Rustaveli Theater have been adapted.

According to the respondents involved in the research, Batumi Puppets and Youth Theatre has been partially adapted. The theater has an entrance ramp and adapted restrooms. However, there is no space for wheelchair users in the auditorium of the theater. As for Batumi Drama Theater, the venue is fully accessible. However, the space in the parterre is only for 8 wheelchairs, which creates a kind of barrier, because only 8 wheelchair users have the opportunity to attend the event.

The historical building of Tbilisi State Academy of Arts has been adapted. It is possible to enter historical part of the building by elevator. So, people with motor disabilities can move freely in the building. However, the second building where studies are taking place, is currently being reconstructed. It is difficult to plan how the connecting space between these two buildings will be adapted architecturally. However, the main events and exhibitions take place in the first building, a historic building that is accessible to people with motor disabilities. Unfortunately, there are no other, more voluminous studies that will talk about the accessibility of cultural/art institutions in Georgia.

Buildings where inclusive theater or dance groups rehearse are also not adapted. Many artistic directors of inclusive companies are unable to accept wheelchair users/people with motor disabilities in the company due to infrastructural barriers.

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[4] Access report – Marjanishvili Theatre/Rustaveli National Theatre. British Council. 2017

” It is very difficult to find accessible buildings. However, we think to enter all spaces and play so that the representatives of those inaccessible spaces see the need that it is important to adapt the space. When we make performances in similar spaces and they see that audience with disabilities want to attend such events, they will understand that the space needs to be adapted.”[5]

The Law "On the Rights of Persons with Disabilities"[6] adopted by the Parliament of Georgia in 2020 states: The Ministry of Culture and Sports of Georgia, within the scope of its competence, provides access to any field of culture for persons with disabilities, including artistic education, art, creativity, cultural events and cultural tourism, as well as any field of sports, and participation in the cultural and sports life of persons with disabilities, which means:

a) development of action plans for provision of adapted programs and materials, adaptation standards and methods, accessibility of culture and sports infrastructure;

Despite the existing record in the law, accessibility of cultural institutions remains a challenge.

It is important to adapt buildings to international accessibility standards. Often, buildings are adapted without considering international standards, which ultimately leads to the problem that people with disabilities practically can't access the building. The ramp may be installed in such a way that a wheelchair user cannot climb it independently.

In Chapter IV of the document developed by the Parliament of Georgia, "Transitional and Final Provisions"[7], Article 36, the transitional provisions state that by January 1, 2021, the Ministry of Education, Science, Culture and Sports of Georgia, should ensure the development and approval of the program for the certification of sign language interpreters, and by 2035 Until December 31, gradually adapt existing buildings and other types of infrastructure, as well as existing services, in accordance with the universal design before the publication of this law, in order to ensure full accessibility for persons with disabilities. In case the building cannot be adapted for technical reasons, which must be confirmed by an appropriate expert opinion, consider alternative means of action to ensure full accessibility for persons with disabilities. And, from the moment of publication of the law, the design and construction of buildings should be carried out on the arrangement of space for persons with disabilities and the approval of the technical regulations of architectural and planning elements.

This record is a very big step forward. However, it is important to strictly monitor and evaluate the implementation of the law in order to make the infrastructure as accessible as possible to persons with disabilities.

The infrastructural barrier is the biggest barrier that prevents youth with disabilities from attending various cultural/artistic events or from participating in such events.

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[[5] Respondent 4

[6] Law of Georgia on the rights of persons with disabilities. 2020. <https://matsne.gov.ge/ka/document/view/4923984?publication=2>

[7] Chapter IV Transitional and Final Provisions. Article 36. Transitional provisions. 2021.



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### 3.2 Unadopted repertoire/environment

Huge barrier for youth with disabilities is the unadapted repertoire/environment in theatres, museums and galleries. Almost no theater repertoire in Georgia is adapted for people with hearing impairment/visually impaired/intellectually disabled people. There are no audio descriptions of the paintings or museum exhibits presented in the galleries and museums. During the performances, no subtitles or sign language translations are used. There is no an alternative adapted online space available for youth with disabilities. The websites of cultural organizations are not adapted. It is worth noting that in Rustaveli State Theater, main scenes for visually impaired people have been voiced and headphones are distributed to them. And for the persons with hearing impairment, subtitles go on a screen that is installed on the stage. Unfortunately, persons with disabilities do not have access to the mentioned information. It is important to package information about such a precedent accordingly and provide it to the public, so that people with disabilities have the opportunity to actively participate in theater life. Such case will also motivate other theaters and artistic spaces to adapt the repertoire as well.

### 3.3 Stereotypical attitude

Over the past decade, public awareness towards people with disabilities has increased. However, youth with disabilities involved in the field of arts often become victims of stereotypical attitudes. The stereotypical attitude of the society still remains one of the main barriers. As a result of the interviews conducted within the framework of the research, it was revealed, that performances held by inclusive dance or theater companies are mostly attended by family members of people with disabilities involved in the performance. Because most of the society has a stereotypical attitude towards disabled art/artist, they think that the arts they create will not be of high quality, therefore they do not attend such events.

“ *The biggest problem is in people. To this day, many people think that what I achieved on my own, I achieved because someone felt sorry for me. Why should someone has felt sorry for me? I object to that. Such an attitude should not exist anymore. They don't think that people with disabilities also have talent, let's help and develop this talent. When everyone says that disability doesn't exist and we are your equals, why should I feel sorry for anyone. I do the same as any other person. However, we all do it in our own way. We must overcome this pity and stereotypes. Nothing will get better if we continue thinking like this" [8].*

In many cases, non-disabled actors refuse to inclusive companies to cooperate, because they think that such a collaboration will not be beneficial for their artistic career. It is often the case that parents of people with disabilities themselves have a stereotypical attitude towards their children's abilities and think that they will not be able to actively participate in the field of arts. Artists need a lot of effort to gain the trust of parents of youth with disabilities and convince them of their children's abilities.

“ *A lot has changed in recent years. Many people already feel the urgency of the issue and admit that people with disabilities should have a space where they can learn to dance, but not a stage where they can dance" [9].*

It should be noted that the state itself has a stereotypical attitude towards people with disabilities. Despite the 2020 Law on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, which theoretically states that cultural events should be accessible to people with disabilities, in practice, no efforts are made by the state to make all cultural events accessible to people with disabilities. The stereotypical attitude of the state is expressed in the fact that they believe that people with disabilities won't fight for their rights as non-disabled people will. People with disabilities also contribute to this stereotypical attitude, because they do not fight for their rights and do not demand from the state to take the measures necessary for them to be fully involved in the field of arts and culture. Representatives of many non-governmental organizations working in the direction of advocacy for the rights of persons with disabilities find it difficult to convince representatives of state structures that they have an obligation to make the environment more inclusive for persons with disabilities.

There are often cases when the artists, directors or artistic directors have a stereotypical attitude towards youth with disabilities involved in arts. Youth with disabilities are not fully included in the events, because artistic directors think that they will not be able to give high quality performance. Such an attitude further exacerbates the stigma in society. This is also a kind of barrier for youth with disabilities and turns off their desire to be active in the field of arts. One of the main reasons for the stereotypical attitude towards people with disabilities in society is that society is still guided by the medical model, which treats people with disabilities as "patients", "sick people", who have complicated physical disorders and need treatment. The United States of America and many western countries have already rejected the medical model and moved to a social model, according to which the problems of people with disabilities are the result of wrong attitudes of society (for example, existing stigma and discrimination, false beliefs that significantly complicate the lives of

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[8] Respondent 8

[9] Respondent 5

people with disabilities). If the medical model freed the society, the social model, on the contrary, puts the primary responsibility on it. The center for the social model is a person with disabilities, to whom barriers in the environment create even more obstacles.

Therefore, it is important to advance the social model in order to change the public consciousness.

The stereotypical attitude from society makes youth with disabilities lose their self-confidence. Some artists with disabilities have given up on their artistic activity because of the stereotypical attitude from the society. Meanwhile, youth with disabilities who wanted to be actively involved in arts and culture refrained from taking a similar step.



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### 3.4 Lack of access to higher artistic education

One of the important barriers for youth with disabilities is lack of access to higher artistic education. Youth with disabilities do not have the opportunity to enroll in higher artistic institutions. The first precedent was recorded in 2023, when a person with Down syndrome enrolled on faculty of choreography at the Institute of Culture of Georgia. It should be noted that the educational program is not adapted for youth with disabilities. When an applicant applies for a choreographic course at an arts institution, one of the selection criteria is to present a health certificate that confirms that he/she does not have a disability. Therefore, this criterion is a big barrier for youth with disabilities who want to enroll on the faculty of choreography.

According to the respondents involved in the research, the Theater University does not remember a single application from persons with disabilities regarding studying at the university.

It should be noted that many youth with disabilities do not have the opportunity to obtain a certificate of secondary education, which significantly prevents them from continuing their studies in higher artistic institutions.

Instead of attending higher arts institutions, youth with disabilities are often offered various arts trainings or certificate programs that are often not authorized and accredited by National Center for Educational Quality Enhancement. Currently, Tbilisi State Academy of Arts is working on the development of short-term certificate program for anyone involved in the arts who wants to teach fine and applied arts to inclusive groups in an integrated format or in exclusive settings, at day care centers.

“Every genius person, who has given us something precious in history and which we are growing up with, had disability. Stevie Wonder was visually impaired, yet generations of us grow up listening to his music.”<sup>[10]</sup>

It is important to note that as a result of the very active work of the Ministry of Education and Science of Georgia, most of the vocational educational institutions are fully accessible for youth with disabilities. Vocational educational institutions are guided by the standards established by the state. It is also worth noting

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[10] Respondent 3



that the Ministry of Education and Science often conducts trainings for representatives of vocational educational institutions in order to raise their awareness in order to overcome the stereotypical attitude that exists in society towards people with disabilities.

People with disabilities should have the opportunity to engage in artistic activities from childhood.

Lack of access to higher arts education is a significant barrier for youth with disabilities who want to explore the arts in greater depth.

### 3.5 Scarce funding from the state

The Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth of Georgia annually announces the competition "Promotion of inclusive artistic projects". In 2022, the budget of the competition was 120,000 GEL. In 2021, the budget of the competition was 97,055 GEL. According to the Ministry of Culture, in 2022, the number of people involved and employed in the winning projects within the competition was 137, of which 66 were people with disabilities.

Municipal department of culture, education, sport and youth affairs of Tbilisi city hall, the Department of Culture Projects and Programs provides support for the implementation of projects in the field of culture. Within the framework of the program, the allocated budget is mainly distributed in three directions: Promotion of the development of the cultural sphere, "Creative Tbilisi" competition, promotion of inclusive arts and education. According to the respondents involved in the research, such a distribution of the budget is discriminatory, because Tbilisi City Hall has a separate budget allocated for the promotion of inclusive arts and education, and a separate budget for the promotion of the development of the cultural sphere. The budget for inclusive arts is very small. A project that mentions the word "inclusive" automatically goes into the "promotion of inclusive arts and education" section.

According to the respondents involved in the research, the budget allocated by the Ministry of Culture and Tbilisi City Hall for inclusive cultural projects is insufficient and not permanent. Therefore, it does not ensure the sustainability of inclusive projects.

“ *If we focus only on performances and not on the development of the artist, which happens between performances, and there will be no funding for this, then the field will not develop. There will always be one-off performances. We will not have professionals in inclusive dance, nor professionals with disabilities, who will continue to work in this field.*[11]

Both the Ministry of Culture and the City Halls of Municipalities, within the framework of the announced grant competitions, have special commissions, which evaluate the participants of the grant competition and reveal the winners. According to the respondents involved in the research, in many cases, probably the people involved in these commissions do not have acceptance towards issues related to people with disabilities. It is because of this that it is not possible to give funding and implement such important projects, which are vital for the maximum inclusion of youth with disabilities in the artistic and cultural life. Often, decision-makers misplace priorities. Government structures carry out evaluation and monitoring of inclusive projects implemented within the framework of the issued grant. However, monitoring and evaluation tools are often not effective for evaluating such projects. The inefficiency of the monitoring and evaluation system is directly related to the low quality of the inclusive project. In most cases, low-quality performances do not have an audience. The scarce funding allocated by the Ministry of Culture and the municipalities' City Halls is a significant barrier that prevents the sustainability and long-term existence of various inclusive artistic companies. The mentioned companies, in many cases, cannot even keep the employers within the project, because both youth with disabilities involved in the company, as well as non-disabled employers, lack motivation and a sense of stability. Similar companies exist from project to project.

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[11] Respondent 4



*When government structures provide funding, they should demand high quality of the created product. The high quality of the performances will increase the awareness of the organization implementing the inclusive event, as well as the awareness of the society in the direction of inclusion"[12]*

### **3.6 Lack of Access to Information**

Despite the fact that we live in the information age, one of the important challenges remains the access of youth with disabilities to information. Every arts institution has a website or a social network, where information is actively posted. However, they are not adapted for people with disabilities. When a special poster is published about an event planned in the future, it is not indicated if people with disabilities will be able to attend the event. Arts organizations do not have information posted on their website or social network about what services/benefits they offer to people with disabilities.

According to many youth with disabilities and their parents involved in the research, information about various inclusive projects or performances does not reach youth with disabilities, nor their parents. Consequently, they are unable to participate in or attend such events.

Youth with disabilities who participated in the research also emphasized the fact that nepotism takes place in such cases, because the organizations mostly share information about interesting projects/activities only with their acquaintances, and therefore this information does not reach all youth with disabilities. Many western countries are in an advanced position in the direction of the inclusion of the artistic sphere. They often promote various successful artists with disabilities or inclusive companies and performances. Unfortunately, in Georgia, the best examples are rarely shared with the public. There are many successful artists with disabilities and inclusive companies in Georgia, spreading the word about them will encourage other youth with disabilities to become more active in the field. Many youth with disabilities has language barrier. They do not speak foreign languages. Therefore, they do not have access to information in the field of arts and culture internationally. Access to information will give youth with disabilities more motivation to express their creative skills and abilities and become role models for other youth with disabilities.

### **3.7 Unpaid labor**

The fee received for the work is the biggest motivation, which encourages the employed person to fulfill the duties assigned to him with greater responsibility and diligence. There are several inclusive dance/theatre companies in Georgia. There are also artists and writers with disabilities who work every day to break down stereotypes and proudly display their immense abilities. They are not inferior to non-disabled artists and try to take a decent place in society. However, in many cases, in contrast to non-disabled artists, they perform such artistic activities voluntarily and completely free of charge, which is discriminatory and makes youth with disabilities lose motivation to be more actively involved in the field of arts and culture.

As mentioned by the founders of various inclusive companies involved in the research, they try to pay at least a small amount of fee to people with disabilities involved in various performances to encourage and appreciate their work. However, they give fees to artists with disabilities only within the framework of the project financed by the state. The amount of the grant announced by the state every year is very small and therefore, it is not enough to create a quality product and to pay fees to non-disabled and disabled artists involved in the creation

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[12] Respondent 9

of the product.

Not being paid for the work done by people with disabilities or being paid with a small amount of money is one of the important barriers, that many youth with disabilities who participated in the research highlighted.



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### **3.8 Absence of trained personnel**

Staff employed in arts and culture institutions often do not know how to assist a person with disabilities and how to communicate with him/her. They, like most of the society, have a stereotypical attitude towards people with disabilities. Often, carelessness is shown or so much attention is given that this also in a way depresses people with disabilities. The youth with disabilities involved in the research noted, that the attitude of the employees in cultural institutions is a barrier for them. They are unable to boldly approach arts institutions or spaces because they are afraid of becoming victims of stereotypical attitudes from the staff.

## IV. Conclusion and recommendations

In the field of arts and culture, people with disabilities have been active since the end of the 20th century. Throughout world history, they have created many alternative systems and values based on their own values and needs. In Great Britain, this practice started in the 1960s and continues successfully. It should be noted that despite many barriers, that pose a great obstacle to youth with disabilities in Georgia, they still try to get involved in the field of arts and culture. During the last decade, many non-governmental organizations have started working in Georgia, trying to advocate the rights of people with disabilities, so that people with disabilities know what they have the right to protect their rights and become more active. It is important that state organizations, artistic organizations and non-governmental organizations work in a coordinated way to jointly overcome the barriers that youth with disabilities face both in the field of culture and arts, as well as in everyday life. In order to promote the involvement of youth with disabilities in the field of arts and culture, the British Council in Georgia has done a lot of work in the frames four-year program "Unlimited: making the right moves"[13]. Since 2015, the program has had a significant impact on the arts and theater, as well as on the lives of people with disabilities. Within a few years of its inception, the program "Unlimited: Making the right moves" has become a great source of inspiration in terms of real reforms and improvement of Georgian society's attitude.

As a result of the implementation of the program in Georgia, the following results were achieved:

- The program became the source of inspiration for creating the first Tbilisi inclusive dance company in Georgia;
- Georgian dancers participated in the process of creating the international theatrical performance "Argonauts". This performance was staged by the British choreographer Ben Duke. It premiered as part of the UK season #UKGeorgia2019 and was well received.
- For the first time, the Parliament of Georgia hosted the International Art Forum for People with Disabilities. As a result of the feedback provided by the participants of the event, all of the 39 respondents confirm their awareness and positive attitude towards the inclusive arts, as well as their willingness to learn more about this field.

It is important to carry out similar projects often, so that youth with disabilities can share international experience and successful examples. Involvement in similar projects will significantly contribute to raising the awareness of youth with disabilities, as well as raising the public's awareness regarding the inclusivity of arts and culture.

The research revealed the need to create an adapted, complex website that would gather and integrate information related to inclusive arts. It is important to translate relevant literature and information from a foreign language into Georgian and place it on the mentioned website, so that Georgian youth with disabilities have access to information about disabled artists working abroad and integrated/inclusive artistic companies. During the research, it was revealed that many arts institutions in Georgia are monuments of cultural heritage, therefore it is not allowed to change the appearance of the building. However, it is important to plan the adaptation of such buildings using universal design so that neither the facade of the building nor the interior space changes drastically. When there is a will, anything is possible.

One of the most impeding barriers cited by inclusive arts companies is the scarce funding from the state. The funding is increasing every year, although the increase is insignificant and insufficient for the development of the sector. One-time projects and one-time financing, the amount of which is very scarce, significantly hinder the development of the field. For new organizations, it is very important to receive support from the state, so that organizations can strengthen and actively engage in the field, which requires stable resources. Inclusive artistic organizations do not have a sense of permanence, which threatens the stability and long-term existence of these organizations. It also threatens the motivation and desire of youth with disabilities to represent similar organizations and participate in the products created by them.

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[13] <https://www.britishcouncil.ge/programmes/arts/unlimited>

Inclusive artistic companies/cultural organizations see a barrier in the ineffectiveness of the monitoring and evaluation system developed by the state. In many cases, government representatives do the monitoring and evaluation of the given grant superficially. Photos of the projects implemented within the framework of the grant are sufficient for them. They do not attend events to assess whether a quality product has been created within the framework of the grant issued by the government. Therefore, a strong monitoring and evaluation system means a well-spent budget and a quality product, which in the future is related to the growth of the audience for inclusive performances and more viewer.

For youth with disabilities, the stereotypical attitude of the society is a barrier, which in many cases does not give them the opportunity to develop and achieve success.

Many of artists with disabilities involved in the study emphasized that all their achievements are accompanied by bullying from society. They think that pity is one of the main reasons why artists with disabilities are successful.

Representatives of the inclusive artistic companies, emphasized that people with disabilities involved in the field of arts are not inferior to non-disabled artists. In many cases, their determination and motivation are so high that after the performance, the audience often asks which artist was disabled and which was non-disabled.

Many visually impaired/hearing impaired youth are interested in attending various artistic events, but the unadapted repertoire is a barrier for them.

Institute for Development of Freedom of Information[14] published the results of a study conducted in 2015, according to which the number of people with disabilities in Georgia is equal to 3%. Consequently, this is a new audience for arts organizations. They must have the desire and motivation to attract new audiences in order to have more viewers. If cultural institutions will adapt the repertoire, they will also promote inclusive tourism, which will be very beneficial for both the cultural organizations and the state.

Based on all of the above, the following recommendations were developed:

## **4.1 To the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth of Georgia and the City Halls of Municipalities**

- To increase the funding of inclusive artistic/cultural organizations and to develop an annual funding system that will not be a one-time, but stable funding of inclusive artistic/cultural organizations and ensure the sustainability of such organizations;
- To develop an effective monitoring and evaluation tool, which will measure the purpose of the spent money and the quality of the created product;
- In the annual budget for state artistic institutions/schools, funds should be allocated for the purpose of adapting artistic buildings;
- To create an action plan to make higher artistic education accessible;
- To Conduct awareness-raising trainings/activities on inclusion for employers of the Ministry of Culture as well as for representatives of cultural organizations;
- To retrain personnel employed in the field of arts and culture; It is important to involve a disability expert in the process, who will help the cultural managers to develop a special guideline, which will guide employers of arts organizations on how to assist people with disabilities.

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[14] <https://idfi.ge/ge/statistics-of-persons-with-disabilities>

## 4.2 To cultural organizations

- To adapt repertoire/website so that visually/hearing impaired youth could attend various artistic/cultural events and find information about them.
- To create an alliance/board of cultural organizations that will involve experts with disabilities and help cultural organizations with topics connected with inclusion and attracting new audiences.
- To find additional resources/funds along with the state funding in order to maintain the stability and sustainability of the projects.
- To create high-quality inclusive cultural events. A quality product means more viewers, more awareness and more tickets sold.
- To plan an active information campaign about the activities/events that cultural organizations carry out, so that more youth with disabilities have access to similar activities.
- To create a short-term and long-term action plan on how to increase access to artistic/cultural events.
- To create special projects/programs within the framework of which youth with disabilities will have the opportunity to be employed in cultural institutions.

## 4.3 Non-governmental organizations working on inclusivity issues

- To plan and implement awareness-raising trainings for state organizations/sector representatives/parents of youth with disabilities/youth with disabilities, where invited international experts will share international experience and share qualitative inclusive products. Local experts will provide information about opportunities in the sector;
- To plan/implement trainings on project writing, that will help cultural organizations to find additional funds;
- To carry out an information campaign in order to promote successful youth with disabilities involved in arts, inclusive and integrated artistic organizations, so that more youth with disabilities will have the desire to be actively involved in the sector.
- To implement projects within the framework of which internationally recognized inclusive companies, disabled artists, representatives of inclusive non-governmental organizations and experts in the field will visit Georgia. will share their experiences with the local audience, provide information on best examples and give recommendations to promote the development of the field, which will motivate disabled youth/representatives of the sector to plan their future careers/activities considering the best international examples;
- To create an accessible arts website that will gather all information, research and links related to inclusive arts.
- To conduct a comprehensive study of art institutions to gather information on the level of accessibility of each institution to persons with disabilities and what needs to be done to fully adapt them.
- To create an informational map on which will be indicated information about all the artistic buildings that are accessible to people with disabilities and where various events or rehearsals can be held. A map like this will make it easier for inclusive companies to find rehearsal space.
- To plan and implement trainings that will raise the awareness of youth with disabilities about arts led by people with disabilities, so that in the future they will be motivated to create arts themselves and be the leaders of art companies.
- To carry out active advocacy of issues related to the higher artistic education of persons with disabilities and the adaptation of artistic infrastructure for them.

## 4.4 To Youth with disabilities

- To contact the cultural institution if there is no information regarding the availability of the event they wish to attend. It is important that all youth with disabilities inform the cultural institutions that they wish to attend the event so they take care of the adaptation of the event. As one of the respondents involved in the research pointed out, it is important that there is a demand and cultural institutions face the fact to start thinking about adapting their events. Youth with disabilities know that the event is not adapted, therefore they do not even think to attend cultural events. As long as there is no demand from their side, cultural institutions do not try to make events accessible. In order to speed up the processes, it is important that people with disabilities should demand what belongs to them by law.
- To use all platforms and opportunities that will help them achieve their goals; When others are fighting for the rights of people with disabilities, it is less convincing to government structures that people with disabilities really want changes. Therefore, it is important to unite and start fighting for your rights. Struggle always makes sense.
- To create an alliance, union, organization composed of disabled youth/artists. A long-term action plan should be developed, the goal of which will be the maximum accessibility of the culture and arts sector.
- To create and teach arts themselves; The establishment of Disability Led Arts will be a very big step forward, which will contribute to the inclusion of arts and culture;

The recommendation for all organizations and youth with disabilities would be the following: It is important that all parties are in active communication with each other. Correct/proactive communication and close collaboration between parties is the key to overcome all barriers.





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