

**Fact sheet**

# Georgia



## Every Girl Counts

### Son Preference and Daughter Aversion

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# 1. Background

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Son preference and daughter aversion have predominantly been understood in terms of gender-biased sex selection, which has been identified and measured by the presence of a skewed sex ratio at birth (SRB). When the “natural” sex ratio of 105 males to 100 females skews even further towards males, it indicates a prevalence of prenatal sex selection in favour of sons. Despite a decreasing SRB and a parallel trend in attitudinal data, son preference remains of significant concern in Georgia. Data from the 2019 Caucasus Barometer (Figure 1) reveals that in the general population, 31 per cent of respondents express a preference for sons over daughters (compared to 46 per cent in 2010), while a smaller proportion of the population (11 per cent) report a preference for daughters. These figures highlight the persistent gender bias towards having male offspring. However, the younger population demonstrate a marked trend towards gender neutrality regarding the sex of their future child. Among respondents in the 18–34 age bracket, 28 per cent would prefer a son, while 61 per cent do not have a preference for either a boy or a girl.

Figure 1:  
**Gender preference of child by age group (%), 2019**

## 18–35



## 36–55



## 56+

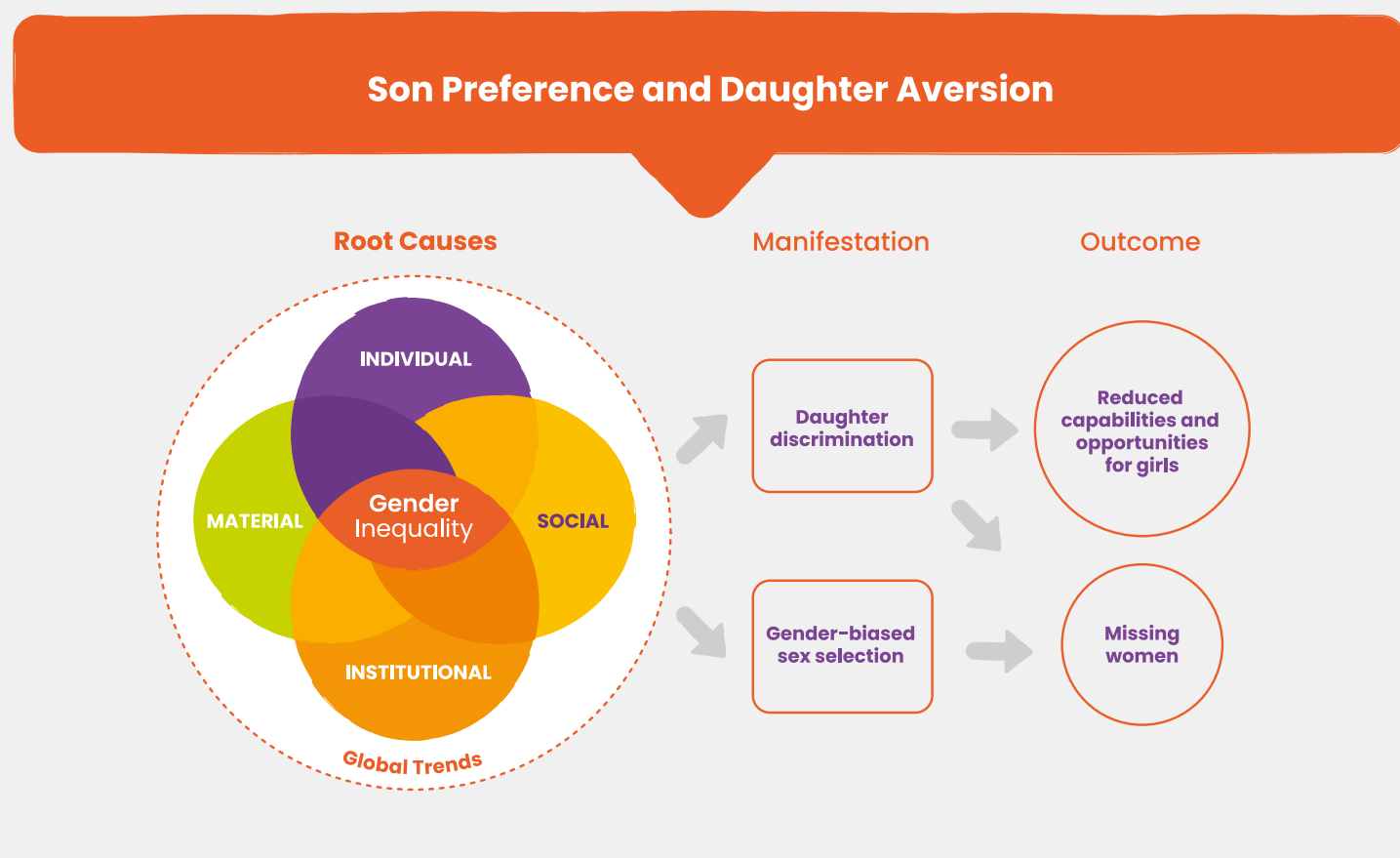


■ A girl      ■ A boy      ■ Does not matter      ■ Don't know or not answered

Cross tabulation (%)	A girl	A boy	Does not matter	Don't know or not answered
18–35	10	28	61	1
36–55	9	33	58	1
56+	15	31	53	1

Source: Caucasus Barometer 2019, Georgia, the Caucasus Research Resource Centers, 2019  
Question asked: If a family has one child, what would be the preferred gender of the child?

Figure 2:  
UNFPA conceptual framework on son preference and daughter aversion



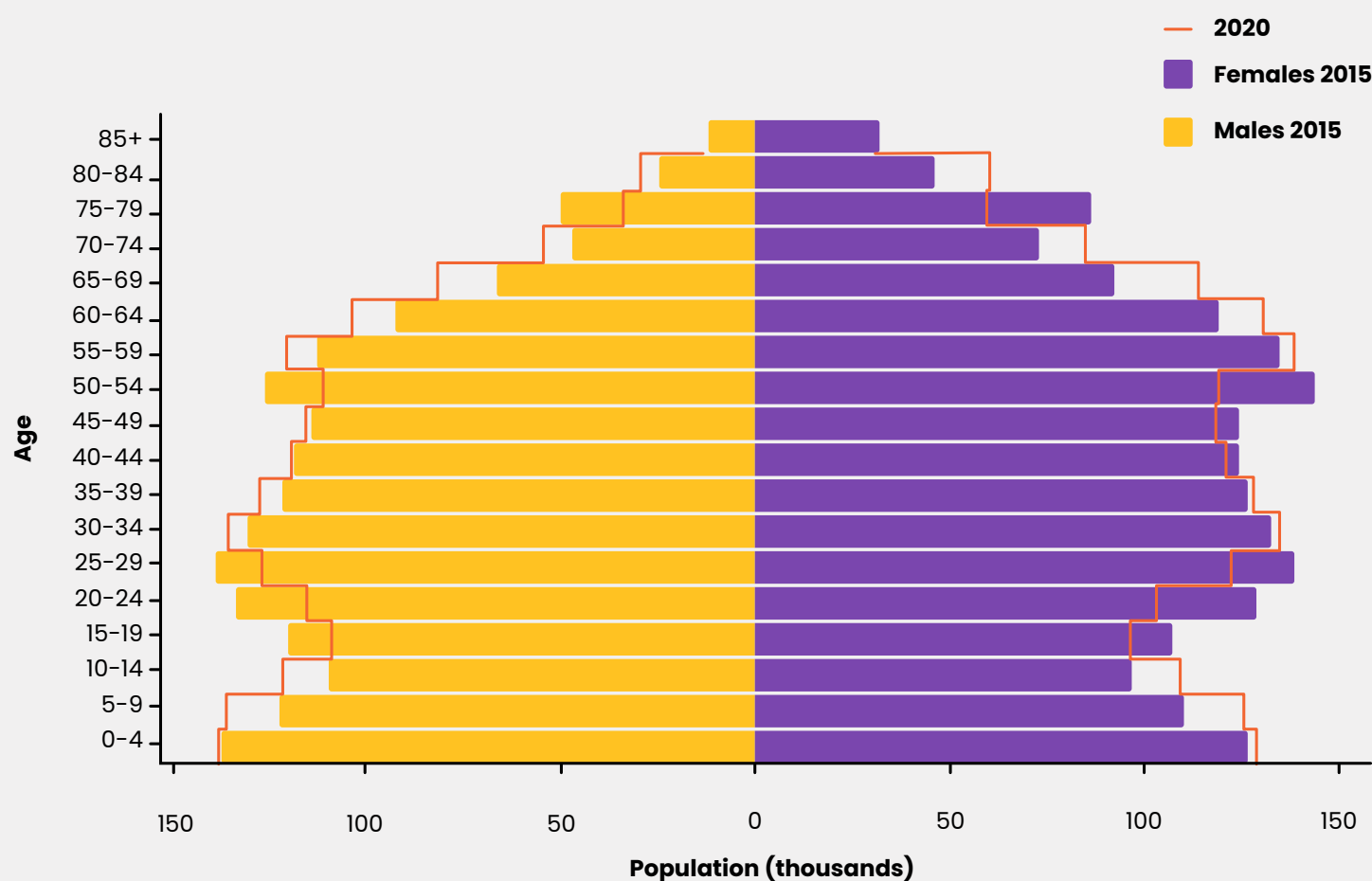
This fact sheet outlines the fundamental causes of son preference, examines its diverse manifestations and highlights its impact on women and girls, in alignment with the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) conceptual framework on son preference and daughter aversion (Figure 2). The framework identifies the root causes, manifestations and outcomes of son preference. This approach acknowledges that to understand the prevalence of son preference, it is necessary to go beyond analysing SRB. This is because SRB can only measure sex selection before birth; it cannot be used to explore other circumstances, such as couples who would prefer a son but do not necessarily choose to sex-select. An approach based solely on SRB also does not reveal how the attitudes and beliefs that place higher value on sons over daughters can profoundly impact the lived experiences of daughters raised in an environment where women are considered less valuable than men.

The fact sheet extracts and applies research and data relating to Georgia to better understand the context, underlying factors and impacts of son preference. Son preference is a harmful norm stemming from gender-biased, patriarchal systems that assign and reinforce a higher social status to men and boys, thereby favouring male over female children. Daughter aversion is an attitudinal aversion to daughters stemming from the belief in the lower socially ascribed value of females and is seen as the counterpart to son preference. While harmful attitudes and behaviour towards daughters have a detrimental impact on their development throughout their lives, it is important to note that son preference and daughter aversion as attitudes do not necessarily lead to less parental care, poorer health or lower nutritional and educational outcomes for girls in Georgia.

The population pyramid in Figure 3 shows the demographic structure of Georgia in 2015 (represented by yellow and purple bars) and 2020 (highlighted in orange). The relatively symmetrical shape indicates a balanced gender distribution within the population. Notably, the population aged 25 and above comprises more females, indicating migration among the male workforce and a greater life expectancy for women (as seen in the 65+ age groups). By contrast, the younger population (under 20 years old) has a slightly higher proportion of males, which can be attributed to the higher sex ratios at birth during the late 1990s and early 2000s. The gender distribution in Georgia remained unchanged between 2015 and 2020.

Analysing the age distribution in 2015 shows a significantly larger population under 10 years of age compared to the adjacent age group of 10 to 15 years – reflecting the increase in live births since 2005. Overall, these observations provide insights into how the persistent practice of son preference has continued to affect the evolving demographics of Georgia over 2015–2020.

Figure 3:  
**Population pyramid of Georgia, 2015–2020**



Source: National Statistics Office of Georgia, 2023, Geostat

## 2. Root causes

Son preference in Georgia is rooted in a complex dynamic of sociocultural, political and historical factors.

Son preference in Georgia is rooted in a complex dynamic of sociocultural, political and historical factors. To accurately understand and address the deeply ingrained preference for sons and aversion towards daughters, UNFPA has constructed a conceptual framework (Figure 2) adapted from Cislighi and Heise's 2018 dynamic framework for social change. The conceptual framework highlights the individual, societal, material and institutional origins of son preference within broader contextual global trends which may influence the identified root causes. While these root causes are inherently intersecting, overlapping and dynamic, this fact sheet addresses them separately as a basis for analysis. Gender equality is positioned at the centre of the framework, in recognition that all root causes are influenced and sustained by unequal gender power relations.

This assessment of root causes is not intended to fully represent the degree to which these factors are prevalent within different ethnic groups in Georgia. For instance, rigid gender norms have been observed to be stronger in ethnic minorities such as the Armenian and Azerbaijani communities (ISET-PI and UNFPA, 2020). The unique characteristics and contexts of these diverse communities must be considered in any holistic understanding and approach to addressing son preference in Georgia.

### Individual

Root causes at the individual level are personal beliefs which underlie perceptions of the importance of having a son in the family and the lower value of daughters. In contemporary Georgian society, there are practical concerns about financial support for parents in old age and an expectation that daughters will move to the husband's family after marriage. These exist alongside ideological concerns that sons continue the family lineage, will be the principal heirs of the family inheritance, and bring honour and reputation to the family. However, beliefs and attitudes are shifting as part of a general trend towards more gender-equal norms, which promote more flexible, balanced concepts of intimate relationships and lifestyles (Guilmoto and Tafuro 2017).

### Social

Individual beliefs and attitudes are closely linked to social norms that persist in contemporary Georgian society. The desire to carry on the family name, traditionally passed along the male line, remains a significant reason for preferring sons over daughters. Women are expected to join their husbands' family after marriage, while sons usually live at their parents' home and stay close (Guilmoto and Tafuro, 2017). Women face societal pressure to bear sons, and men may face ridicule if they do not father a male child – making it difficult for young families to challenge the deeply entrenched harmful norm of son preference (ISET-PI and UNFPA, 2020).

## **Material**

Improved economic conditions in Georgia and shifts in labour market dynamics towards a service-based economy have fostered women's economic empowerment. This has diminished the traditional reliance on sons as a source of financial support in later life (ISET-PI and UNFPA, 2020). Despite equal inheritance laws, in practice the long-standing tradition of property inheritance favouring men remains prevalent in rural areas, perpetuating women's unequal access to capital and financial resources (Guilmoto and Tafuro, 2017). This reinforces son preference and affects women's decision-making and bargaining power, including decisions about the timing and number of children they have.

## **Institutional**

After the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1990, the absence of social safety nets meant families in the Caucasus region became heavily dependent on family networks for support (Guilmoto and Duthé, 2013). Since then, Georgia has adopted various social protection programmes to mitigate poverty and financial instability, including the Targeted Social Assistance Programme, the Universal Healthcare System, the State Pension System, and the State Demographic Support Programme. However, while these reforms have alleviated some pressure on family support, there is no significant evidence that they have fully addressed the underlying problem, meaning families still rely heavily on sons for care and support (ISET-PI and UNFPA, 2020). On the other hand, the implementation of gender-specific social policies, such as parental leave reforms, has helped to foster gender equality by allowing women to maintain their roles in the workforce after having children and encouraging men to participate more actively in childcare responsibilities (ISET-PI and UNFPA, 2020).

## Global trends and contributing factors

Global trends such as demographic shifts, urbanization, digital technologies, inequalities and conflict have influenced gender preferences and families' fertility decisions in a country-specific way.

### → **Declining fertility rates**

Following the independence of Georgia, there was a significant dip in the fertility rate. Before independence, families had sufficient resources to have multiple children until they had a son. With families preferring to have fewer children in the face of economic hardships after the collapse of the Soviet Union, it became more challenging to ensure the birth of a desired male child (Dudwick, 2015). While not a root cause in itself, low fertility heightens the pressure on women to have sons, indirectly bolstering son preference.

### → **Poverty**

Poverty contributes to a preference for sons, as families have insufficient resources to support multiple children and prefer to have at least one son who can provide financial support to parents in their old age. Indeed, evidence has shown that among households of lower economic status, the birth ratio is skewed towards males (Guilmoto and Tafuro, 2017).

### → **Minorities and mobility**

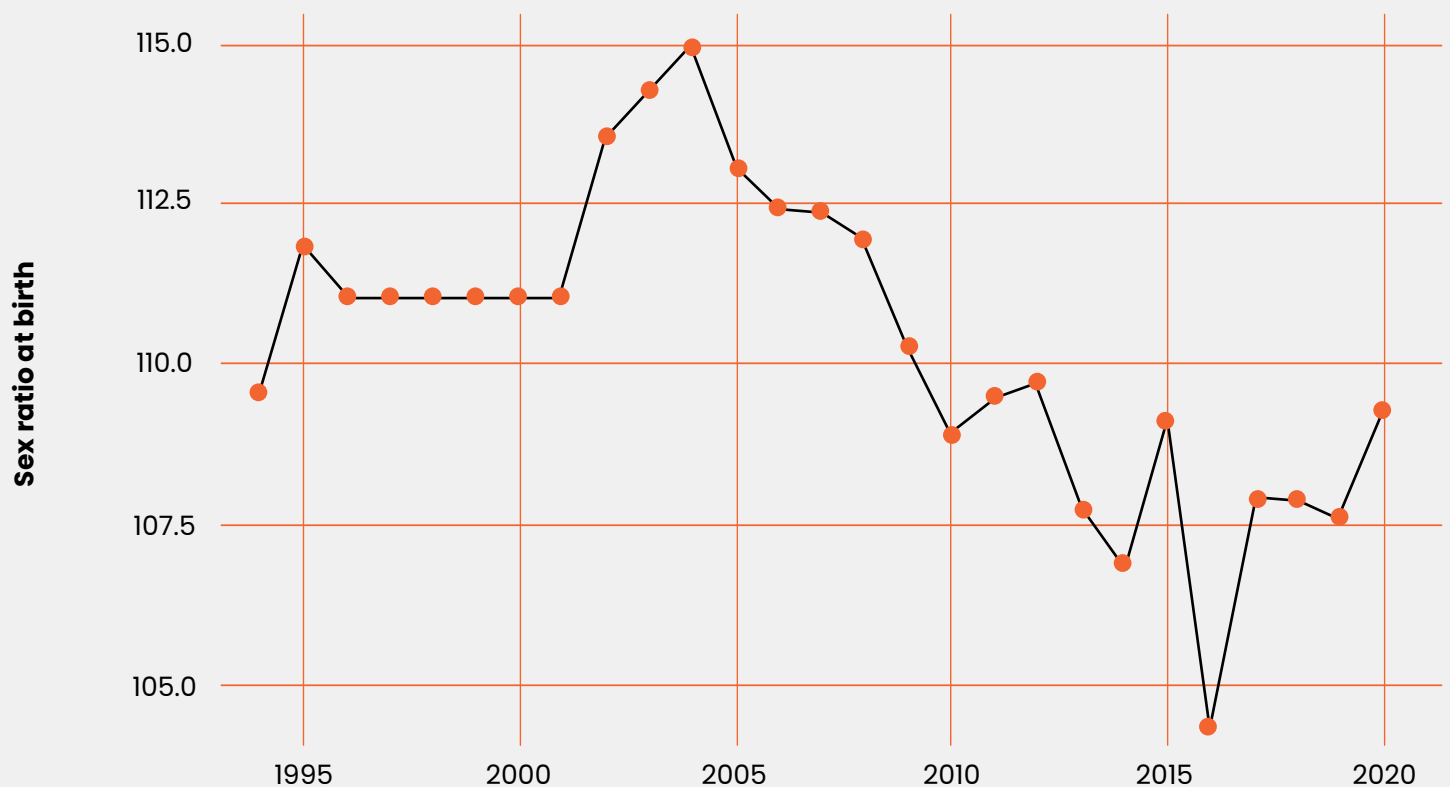
Georgia is experiencing a transformation in societal values as the country moves towards more gender-equitable laws, policies and norms. However, ethnic minority groups are undergoing this transformation at a slower rate due to limited societal integration and their geographic and rural isolation. Migration and exposure to other cultures, particularly through traditional and social media, also have an impact. Georgians primarily migrate to western and eastern Europe, where they experience more gender-equal norms and values, while ethnic minorities often move to Azerbaijan, Türkiye and Russia, limiting their exposure to gender-equal norms and lifestyles (ISET-PI and UNFPA, 2020).

### 3. Manifestations

After the independence of Georgia in 1991, the SRB stayed high, hovering at around 110 male births per 100 female births during the second half of the 1990s and the first half of the 2000s, peaking at 115 boys per 100 girls born in 2004 (Figure 4).

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Figure 4:  
**Sex ratio at birth in Georgia, 1994–2020**



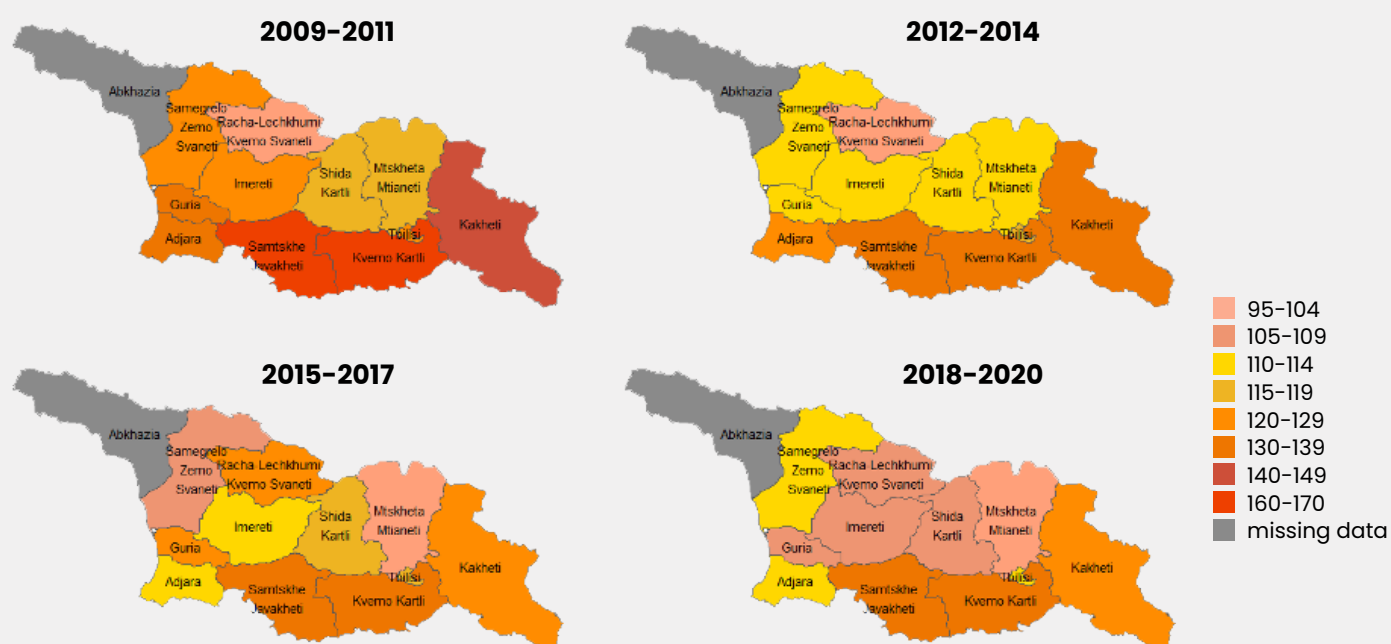
Source: National Statistics Office of Georgia, 2023



The persistently high SRB in Georgia indicates a strong preference for sons and is evidence of the practice of gender-biased sex selection. This becomes more pronounced for births after the second child. Among first births, the sex ratio is close to the biological norm and remains relatively stable over time. The sex ratio for second births was higher than for first births in Georgia in the late 2000s but started to decline to the same level after 2010. However, Georgia has seen a markedly high SRB at parity 3+ (third and subsequent births), higher than 130 males per 100 females before 2010. Although the ratio decreased to a much lower level in recent years, of 114 males per 100 females between 2017–2020, this is still considerably higher than the normal level.

The strikingly high SRB for third and subsequent births is likely a manifestation of son preference and differential stopping behaviour (i.e. when couples choose to stop having children) for higher parity births. The majority of the population in Georgia would prefer to have no more than three children (National Statistics Office of Georgia, 2019), but if the first two children are both girls, families with a strong son preference may choose to give birth to more children until they have a son. They are also likely to practise gender-biased sex selection if they know that the fetus is female, which leads to the skewed sex ratio towards males at parity 3+. Figure 5 shows the three-year moving average of the SRB at parity 3+ in Georgia by region between 2009 and 2020. It can be seen that, despite an overall descending trend, SRB at parity 3+ in the regions of Kakheti, Kvemo Kartli and Samtskhe–Javakheti is substantially above the national average.

Figure 5:  
**Sex ratio at birth at parity 3+ in Georgia, 2009–2020**



Source: National Statistics Office of Georgia, 2023

The exceptionally high SRB in these three regions of southern Georgia possibly reflects higher levels of son preference in rural areas as well as in Azerbaijani and Armenian families (Guilmoto and Tafuro, 2017, p. 32). Kakheti has a large rural and ethnic minority population, and about half of the people living in Kvemo Kartli and Samtskhe–Javakheti are Azerbaijanis or Armenians. By contrast, the SRB is well below the national average in Tbilisi, the country’s capital and largest city, where more people live in urban areas and have better access to education.

## 4. Outcomes

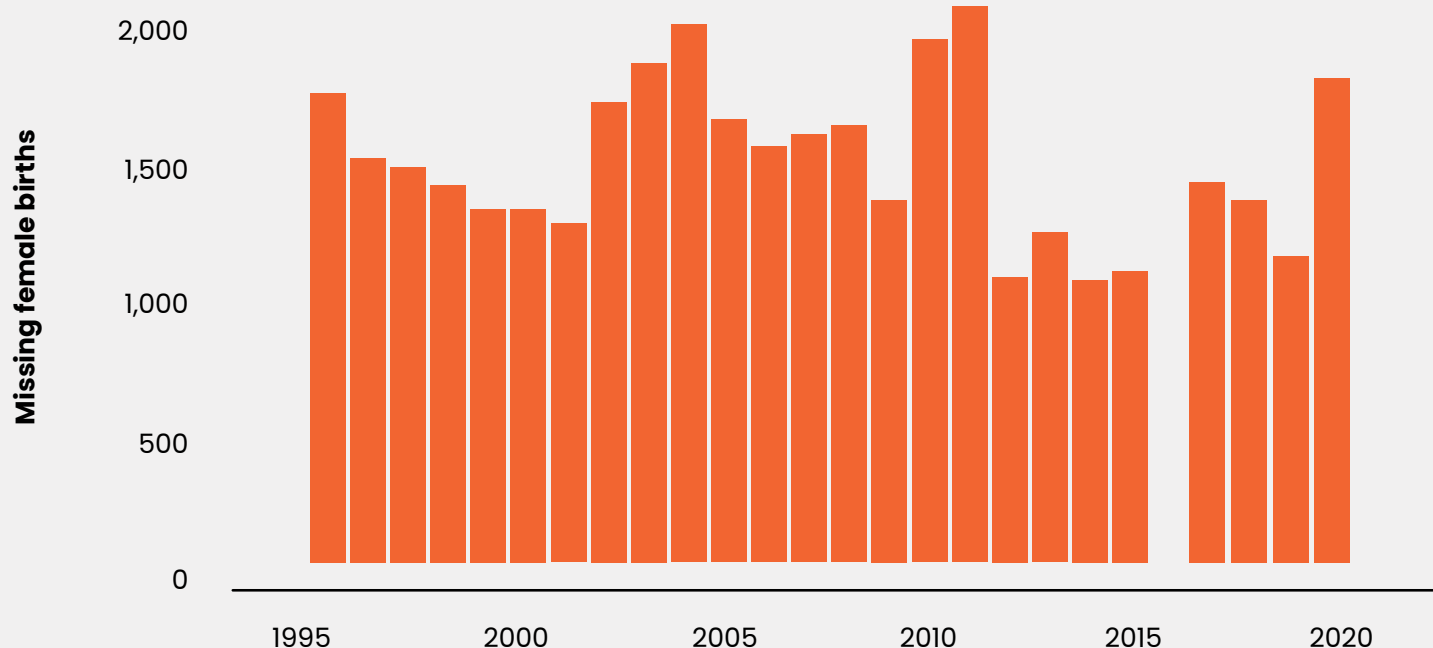
Son preference has a range of potential adverse consequences for women and girls. One commonly discussed outcome is that of missing female births.

Son preference has a range of potential adverse consequences for women and girls. One commonly discussed outcome is that of missing female births. This refers to the girls who would have been born in the absence of son preference but were not born due to prenatal gender-biased sex selection. We can estimate the number of missing female births per year based on the annual series of estimated SRB in Georgia. This figure is the difference between expected female births (assuming a natural SRB of 105 males to 100 females) and the observed number of female births. Our estimates are plotted in Figure 6. During the studied period, the number of missing female births reached a maximum of 1,036 in 2011. This represents 4.2 per cent of observed female births. A decrease in the annual number of missing female births in Georgia from 2017 was followed by a noticeable rise in 2020, when there were 901 missing female births (4.1 per cent of observed female births).

In addition to missing female births, son preference has a range of long-term negative impacts on women’s and girls’ opportunities and capabilities over their life course. When girls grow up in an environment where sons are valued more or their parents wished for a son but got a daughter, personal beliefs and social norms about the lower value of girls persist. Furthermore, harmful gender norms are perpetuated when women’s social worth and identity are seen as deeply connected with their ability to produce a son. This reinforces the belief that women are primarily caregivers and responsible for the household, while men are the main breadwinners and, therefore, have more economic value. Under the pressure to bear sons, women may face psychological violence and abuse from their husbands or other family members. There is also evidence to suggest that some men have divorced their wives for not giving birth to a son (Guilmoto, 2015).

Figure 6:

# Annual number of missing female births in Georgia between 1995 and 2020



Source: Author's calculations, based on the annual sex ratio at birth series published by the National Statistics Office of Georgia, 2023

Note: We did not compute the number of missing female births in 2016. In that year, the annual sex ratio at birth was below the natural level, with 104 male births per 100 female births recorded.

Female economic empowerment contributes to a reduction in SRB imbalances by supporting women's financial independence and reducing familial pressure on women regarding their family planning decisions, potentially leading to fewer incidences of prenatal sex selection. It has been shown that a 1 per cent increase in the female employment rate (outside agriculture) in Georgia is associated with a reduction in SRB by 0.25 per cent (ISET and UNFPA, 2020, p. 7). However, the fact that women and girls are constantly undervalued in Georgian society due to son preference hampers their chances of gaining employment and becoming economically empowered. Furthermore, there is a significant gender wage gap in Georgia. According to a recent report, Georgian women's average wages are 36.2 per cent lower than wages paid to Georgian men, and women are underpaid relative to men in almost all sectors (International Labour Organization, 2022, p. 10) but work more hours than men do in the majority of sectors (International Labour Organization, 2022, p. 12). A lower labour force participation rate and reduced wages for women diminish their economic value, further perpetuating the preference for sons – creating a negative cycle.

Women are also underrepresented in the Government and Parliament of Georgia. Between 2005 and 2017, there were at least four times as many men as women in the Georgian Government, and female members of Parliament constituted only 20 per cent of the total (International Labour Organization, 2022, p. 20). Thus, the long-term consequences of son preference also serve as its root causes.

# 5. Recommendations

## 1 —————> **Policy and programme implications of this research**

- > The conceptual framework can be applied to communities within Georgia, with a systematic analysis of the root causes – the individual, social, material and institutional factors underlying son preference – for better policy and programme design and more efficient interventions.
- > Understanding the impact of son preference on women and girls throughout their life course can strengthen the formulation of policies that support broader gender equality. Such approaches aim to rectify the immediate issue of son preference and foster a society that values all genders equally.
- > At the institutional level, efforts need to be intensified to enhance social protection systems, thereby reducing dependency on family units, particularly sons, for support.

## 2 —————> **There is a need for more data collection**

To better understand the nature, dynamics and consequences of son preference and gender-biased sex selection, more data is required:

- > On non-fatal outcomes and opportunities for girls and women in education, health, labour force participation and social protection – particularly for subnational areas.

## 3 —————> **Further research is also required**

There is a need for further research to better understand:

- > The nature of son preference and prenatal sex selection among ethnic minority groups in southern areas of Georgia, including among third and subsequent births;
- > The consequences of son preference across women's life course, especially during the transition to adulthood, through adult years of active engagement in the labour force, to the last stages of life;
- > The role of conflict and global inflation on son preference and daughter aversion attitudes;
- > The role of social norms, including son preference, on gender bias in inheritance practices and their broader effects on women's lives and socioeconomic outcomes.

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