



SDG 16, peace, justice and strong institutions: Addressing Cyber-Exploitation of Vulnerable Youth

Context: Georgia's Digital Landscape and Vulnerability

While Georgia has made significant strides in internet penetration and digital literacy, the rapid shift to online spaces has outpaced the development of specialised legal protections for minors.

Several factors contribute to this specific vulnerability:

- **Rapid Digitalisation:** Georgia has one of the highest rates of social media usage among teenagers in the Caucasus. This 'always-on' culture creates a broad surface for digital predators.
- **Legislative Gaps:** Traditional laws against harassment and exploitation were originally designed for physical spaces. Adapting these to 'Cyber-Stalking' and 'Digital Extortion' requires specialised judicial training.
- **Social Stigma:** In close-knit communities, victims of online exploitation often fear 'social shaming' more than the crime itself, leading to extremely low reporting rates.
- **Support Networks:** While Georgia has a robust **Legal Aid Service (LAS)** and organisations like the **Public Defender's Office (Ombudsman)**, specific expertise in digital forensics and victim-centred cyber-justice is still an evolving field.

The Individual: Nino, a 15-year-old student from a rural town in the Imereti region.

The Situation: Nino was approached on a popular social media platform by an individual posing as a peer. Over several months, the individual gained her trust and coerced her into sharing private images. Once obtained, the predator shifted to extortion, threatening to distribute the images to her school and family unless she provided money and further explicit content.

The Barrier: Terrified of the social consequences and the potential reaction of her conservative family, Nino did not tell anyone. She had no idea that 'Digital Extortion' was a crime she could report without being blamed herself. She lacked a legal representative who understood how to preserve digital evidence from encrypted apps.

The Intervention: Nino eventually reached out to a 24/7 child-help hotline operated by a local NGO. The NGO provided immediate psychological 'first aid' and connected her with a lawyer



from the **Legal Aid Service** who specialised in juvenile justice. Together, they petitioned the court for an anonymous filing to protect Nino's identity during the proceedings.

The Outcome: With the help of digital forensic experts, the perpetrator was identified and charged. More importantly, the court issued a 'Digital Protection Order', requiring the removal of the content from the platforms. Nino received long-term psychosocial support to reintegrate into her school environment.

Analysis: Systems and Statistics

This case study illustrates the intersection of **SDG 16.2** (Ending violence against children) and **16.3** (Ensuring equal access to justice):

- **The Silence Gap:** In Georgia, it is estimated that only **1 in 10** cases of digital exploitation involving minors are ever reported to the police.
- **The Rural Divide:** Access to specialised legal aid is significantly lower in rural regions compared to Tbilisi, where most tech-specialised NGOs are headquartered.
- **Institutional Synergy:** The success of Nino's case relied on a 'Referral Mechanism' – the seamless handoff from an NGO hotline to state legal services and digital forensic units.

Questions

1. What are the specific social and geographic barriers that prevent victims like Nino from seeking justice in Georgia?
2. How does the 'threat of social shaming' act as a barrier to the rule of law (SDG 16.3)?
3. In what ways must the Georgian judicial system adapt to handle digital evidence compared to physical evidence?
4. Why is the 'Right to Anonymity' crucial for minors involved in exploitation cases?
5. How can the state improve the 'Referral Mechanism' between rural schools and urban legal experts?
6. What role does digital literacy play as a preventative strategy for SDG 16?



List of References

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