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# Media Coverage of Climate Change and Environmental Issues

Capacity Challenges, Gaps, and Needs  
Assessment of Georgian Media for Improved  
Climate and Environmental Reporting



The study *“Capacity Challenges, Gaps and Needs Assessment of Georgian Media for Improved Climate and Environmental Reporting”* was commissioned by Westminster Foundation for Democracy (WFD) and conducted by NNLE Climate Basics.

Climate Basics is a non-profit organization in Georgia that mainly operates based on volunteer engagement. It carries out research and awareness-raising activities in the fields of climate change policy, law, and governance.

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The document is available for download in English and Georgian on the NNLE Climate Basics website: [www.climatebasics.info](http://www.climatebasics.info)

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Further inquiries on “Capacity Challenges, Gaps and Needs Assessment of Georgian Media for Improved Climate and Environmental Reporting” should be directed to: [info@climatebasics.info](mailto:info@climatebasics.info)

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# 1. The Georgian Media Landscape – General Overview

Media is an important bridge between different types of knowledge about climate and the environment, often mediating and influencing public perceptions, attitudes, and behaviors. Citizens rely upon media to interpret and make sense of the complexity of many scientific issues, including environmental and climate change science and policy. As Boykoff (2008) notes, “media representations are an important factor in public understanding and engagement with climate science, and thus deserve critical consideration”. Accordingly, media contribute significantly to forming both individual and collective public discourse on climate and environmental issues (Wozniak et al., 2017). The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) states that the media has the ability to mobilize public support for climate mitigation through its “shaping” power, i.e., it can create popular backing for measures to reduce or avoid the emission of greenhouse gases, which are warming the globe, and it may also be used to achieve the opposite (UN News, 2022).

Climate and environmental journalism refer to the reporting and analysis of news and information related to climate change, pollution, deforestation, loss of biodiversity, and other environmental concerns. It involves collecting, investigating, documenting, and explaining complex climate and environmental issues and their impact on society, human health, and ecosystems.

It is important to note there are significant differences between climate and environmental journalism in high-income countries versus low-income countries. Industrialized countries often have larger media organizations with specialized environmental and climate reporters and access to funding. Additionally, climate and environmental journalists in wealthy countries have better access to technology and relevant data, which supports the production of high-quality content. While in low- and middle-income countries, journalists may cover climate and environmental issues as part of a broader range of topics and face significant challenges, including limited financial and human resources, political instability, and censorship.

For the media to effectively play its role as the fourth estate in democracies by promoting accountability, encouraging participation, and debating matters of public importance (including issues related to climate change and environmental governance), certain political, legal, and economic conditions have to be fulfilled, collectively referred to as the “enabling environment”<sup>1</sup> (Europe Foundation, 2022; Free Press Unlimited, n.d.). Thus, to better understand the capacity challenges and needs of climate and environmental journalism in Georgia, it is necessary to consider the main characteristics of the Georgian media, such as the post-Soviet legacy, history of development, ownership, revenue sources, and the interaction between media and the audience.

The current media system in Georgia developed after the fall of the Soviet Union in 1991 amid a severe financial and humanitarian crisis. In the early 90s, the Georgian media soon became one of the most trusted institutions in the country, according to opinion polls (International Republican Institute, n.d.). Though, a survey conducted by the Caucasus Research Resource Center (CRRRC) and National Democratic Institute (NDI) found that currently, Georgians “appear to be selective in trusting media that aligns with their political beliefs” (Sichinava, 2018). Studies show that the media is a comparatively trusted and influential institution in the country, despite their

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1. Free Press Unlimited defines “enabling environment” as a material, political, legal and economic conditions and components that must be in place for media to be free, independent and viable. A broad analysis also includes business models, understanding of audiences and structural inequalities and biases within the media landscape.

uneven distribution and the audience's awareness of their political alliances, editorial control, and partisanship (CRRC, 2017). Freedom House (2022) rates the Georgian media as "partly free", and according to Reporters Without Borders (RWB) (2021) ranking<sup>2</sup> of press freedom in Georgia somewhat worsened in recent years, marking Georgia's media landscape as "pluralist but not yet independent."

In terms of ownership, Georgia has regulations in place to prevent undue concentration of ownership of broadcast media. Georgia's mainstream media is often described as heavily polarized, partisan, and favoring sensationalism with some pursuing pro-government editorial policies while others support the opposition (Freedom House, 2022; RWB, 2021). The government maintains formal and informal leverages to influence the media (Europe Foundation, 2022). Also, owners and sponsors of what we may refer to as "oppositional media" are mostly former or incumbent leaders of political parties. In addition, it is common in Georgia for journalists to enter politics or, vice versa, for politicians to enter journalism (Mikashavidze, n.d.). Since climate change and environmental issues are not a priority for Georgian political parties and the political elite (Gverdtsiteli & Janashia, 2022b), these issues are not discussed much in the mainstream media. All of the above information relates primarily to the main TV stations, which are the principal news source for the Georgian audience (RWB, 2021). Georgian radio, print, and online media present a diverse picture overall. Media funded by international donors are fairly balanced and characterized by thematic diversity (CRRC, n.d.).

Media revenue streams and ownership patterns are important to take into consideration, as sponsors and owners often determine or influence the thematic focus and editorial policies of the media organizations they support financially and/or manage (RWB, 2021).

### **Categorization<sup>3</sup> of Georgian national and local media according to their sources of income/revenue:**

- The public broadcaster financed through the state budget and commercial income
- Media fully dependent on commercial income
- Media dependent on commercial income, loans, and donations
- Media fully or partially sponsored by Georgian banks
- Media fully funded by international donors
- International media funded by other countries

Over the years, Georgian media have struggled to guarantee content diversity and connect with the audience. Some media organizations have conducted limited research to better understand their audience, often with support from international donors (IREX, 2022, p. 177). The 2021 Media Landscape Assessment report found that important parts of the media, particularly national commercial television stations, focused mostly on partisan political issues, as opposed to broader issues of public interest, especially social and economic issues (Europe Foundation, 2022). There is a lack of content when it comes to the interests of minority groups, and even fewer media products are created in minority languages (Kintsurashvili et al., 2019)<sup>4</sup>. In his recent article, „Not

2. Georgia is ranked 60th out of 180 countries by RWB.

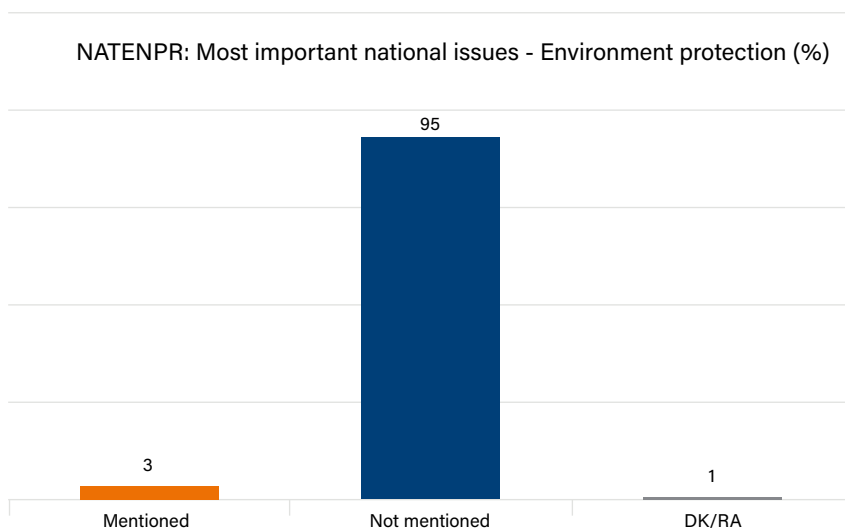
3. This categorization was done by NNLE Climate Basics experts, to highlight the influence of sponsors on editorial policies and thematic focus of media organizations.

4. According to the same source, about 15% of the Georgian population that does not belong to the Georgian ethnic group cannot read Georgian-language press.. One of the most important sources of information of the population of the two large regions of the country (Samtskhe-Javakheti and Kvemo Kartli) is the Azerbaijani, Armenian and Russian-language media.

a priority: Barriers to environmental reporting in the Republic of Georgia” Freedman (2021) outlines “despite major ecological challenge [...], news organizations in Georgia provide little environmental coverage to their audiences”. Based on interviews with journalists, media experts, and eco-NGO leaders the study identified four major reasons for the sparsity of coverage: shortcomings of journalists and news organizations; access to information and news sources; lack of priority; and lack of public demand (Freedman, 2021).

Interestingly, 97.6% of Georgian citizens have heard about climate change, and 91.35% of the respondents think that climate change is real and threatens humanity, according to the 2020 UNDP study (Durglishvili & Kechakmadze, 2020). The same study also found that “receiving information/knowledge on climate change is considered highly important” by the respondents (Durglishvili & Kechakmadze, 2020, p. 8). However, it is important to note, that according to the surveys about the most important and pressing problems Georgia faces today, issues related to environmental and climate topics are not perceived as a priority (see Tables 1, 2, 3) (ACT LLC, 2019; CISR, 2021; CRRC, 2022).

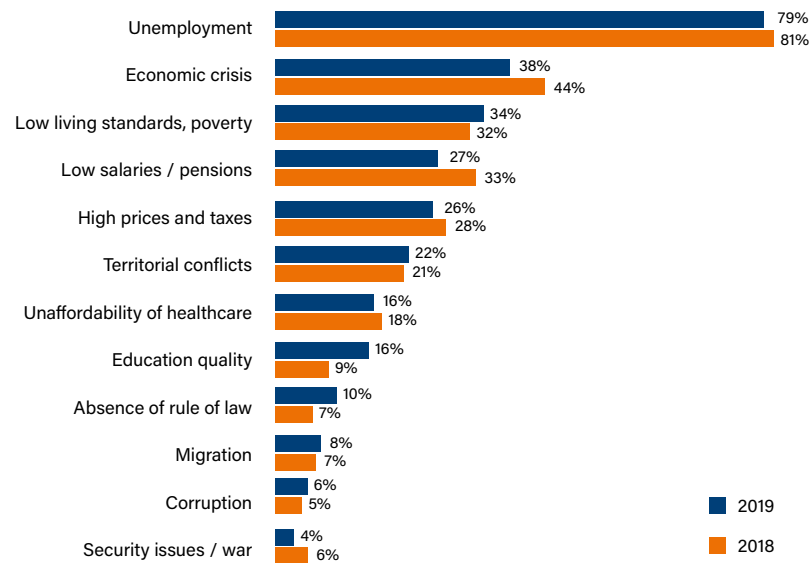
**Table 1.** Source: the annual household survey about social economic issues and political attitudes conducted by the Caucasus Research Resource Centers (CRRC).



NDI: Public attitudes in Georgia, July-August 2022  
Retrieved from <http://caucasusbarometer.org>

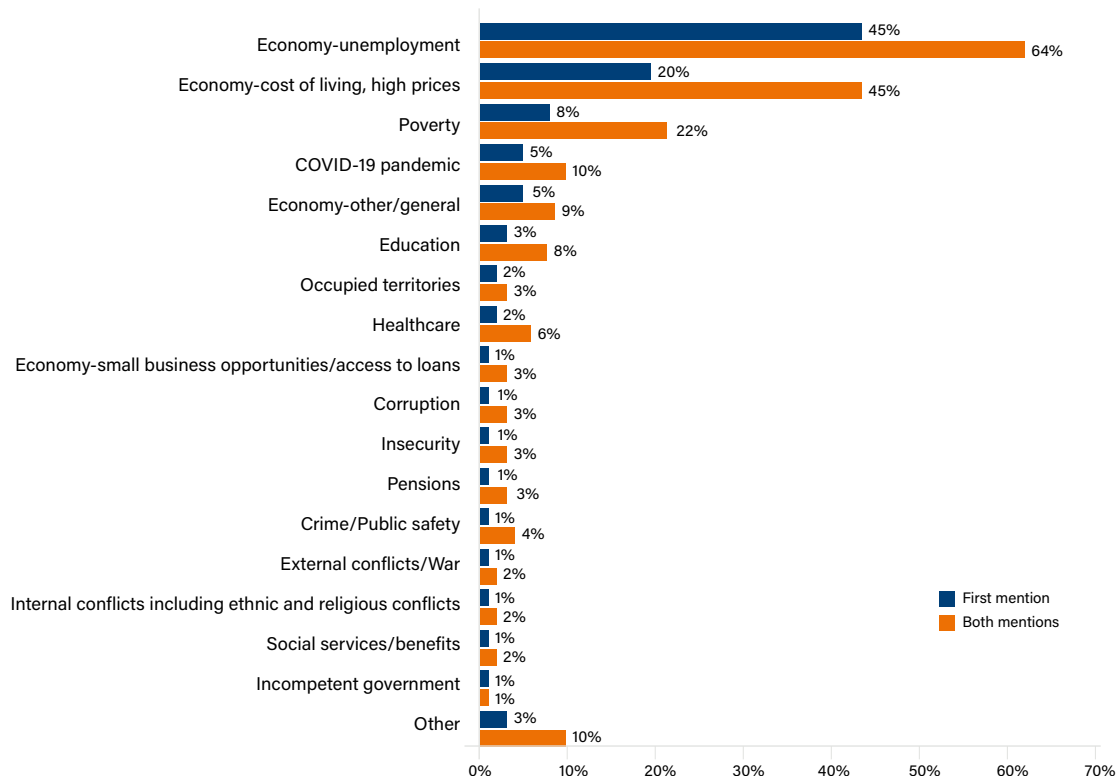
**Table 2.** Source: The 2019 Opinion Survey of Georgia by ACT LLC.

**FIGURE 33- What do you consider to be the most pressing problems facing your country? (Q4.2, multiple answers possible)**



**Table 3.** Source: Center for Insights in Survey Research (CISR), post-Covid-19 survey.

**What is the most important problem facing our country today?\***  
(Respondents permitted to provide two spontaneous answers)



Last but not least, Georgian media outlets can be classified as politically liberal-right, left-liberal, or conservative, although this is not based on systematic analysis. Nevertheless, we could argue that left-liberal media is the one that is more interested in social, climate and environmental topics.

## 2. Methodology

To identify the gaps and challenges in the Georgian media landscape in terms of covering climate and environmental issues and to assess the needs of Georgian media organizations as well as individual reporters, a qualitative study was conducted. The study consisted of three main methods of data collection and validation: a desk review of secondary sources, semi-structured interviews of relevant stakeholders, and a validation workshop.

### **Ultimately, the study answers the following research questions:**

- ▶ RQ1: What are the main challenges, gaps, and needs in terms of climate and environmental reporting in Georgian media?
- ▶ RQ2: What needs to be done to improve the coverage of climate change and environmental issues in Georgian media?

### **Desk Research**

The desk research entailed reviewing and analyzing selected/relevant reports, assessments, case studies, and other publicly available secondary data sources to better comprehend and identify data on relevant indicators and trends.

### **Semi-structured stakeholder interviews**

Given the constraints on time, resources and the lack of empirically coherent secondary data on the topic, first-hand information was collected from the representatives of Georgian media organizations. For that, relevant the respondents were selected purposively for the study, with particular emphasis on TV and online news organizations. The reason for prioritizing these two types of media is the characteristics of the media landscape in Georgia. According to the Media Consumption and Audience Perceptions research published by Thomas Reuters Foundation (2021), in Georgia, “the most popular source of information or news cited was TV, with 65% using it daily and 84% at least weekly, [...] social media (72% weekly) and search engines (67% weekly) are also widely used.” In contrast, only 24% of the population used the radio at least once a week, and only 15% of the respondents mentioned the press. A similar conclusion was made by the international organization Internews Georgia in the Information Ecosystem Assessment report, noting that “print media and traditional radio stations have limited circulations and reach” (Keshelashvili et al., 2021, p. 6). Additionally, a lot of media previously operating as printed newspapers or as a magazine nowadays exist either completely online or in a hybrid regime combining printed and online media formats. As Durglishvili & Kechakmadze (2020) note, “among the sources normally used to receive information on climate change, national TV channels are clearly the most prominent. Social networks and internet sources with short news coverage were also frequently mentioned.” Thus, interviewing representatives of TV and online media outlets proportionally to the patterns of media consumption in Georgia gives an illustrative result to identify the main challenges, gaps, and needs of Georgian media to pursue quality climate reporting.



Within the scope of the study, 15 semi-structured interviews with journalists, producers, executive editors, media managers, and experts, representing both Georgia's central and regional television, radio, online, and print media were conducted.

N	Media type	Media outlet
1	National	Georgian Public Broadcaster
2	National	Imedi TV
3	National	Formula TV
4	National	Formula Business TV
5	Regional	Adjara TV
6	Regional	Brojomi TV
7	Regional	Marneuli Community Radio
8	Online	On.ge
9	Online	Netgazeti
10	Online	Publika
11	Online	Indigo
12	International	Euronews TV
13	International	Euronews TV
14	International	Radio Liberty
15	Academia	Tbilisi State University

The pre-selected list of media organizations was prepared by the research team. The main selection criteria were: (1) media consumption patterns in Georgia, and (2) diversity of media outlets representing national and local media outlets (including regions inhabited mostly by ethnic minority groups), pro-government and opposition/critical media, commercial and public broadcasters, etc.

Interviews took place mostly in person in Tbilisi and online in late November and early December 2022. The interviews were recorded digitally, and they lasted 30 to 40 minutes. Interviewees gave verbal consent for their participation and their responses to be recorded for the purposes of this report.

**During data collection, the following challenges were encountered:**

- In some cases, high-ranking media decision-makers refused to be interviewed. Some of them did not seem interested or did not perceive climate and/or environment as an important topic.
- Generally, media awareness of climate change and environmental issues in Georgia can be regarded as rather low, resulting in, some respondents being reluctant to participate in the needs assessment interview.

## Validation Workshops

After collecting information through semi-structured interviews, analyzing the data, and summarizing the key findings and recommendations, two validation workshops were conducted.

1. Validation workshop on December 23, 2022, was attended by the interviewed study informants as well as other media representatives, in total 23 journalists and media experts representing 18 media outlets. The main objectives of the meeting were to present key findings of the Needs Assessment Report, validate the study results, and collect feedback.
2. Validation workshop on February 14, 2022, was attended by the interviewed study informants as well as other media and donor organization representatives, in total 13 journalists and media experts representing 12 media outlets and 7 attendees representing five donor organizations. The main objective of the meeting was to present and validate the action plan for improved climate and environmental reporting.

## 3. Climate and Environmental Journalism in Georgia: Main Challenges and Gaps

This section draws on in-depth interviews with journalists, producers, editors-in-chief, and media experts representing Georgia's central as well as regional TV, radio, online, and print media.

### 3.1 Lack of priority

**The Georgian mainstream media shows little to no interest in reporting on climate and environmental issues.** As mentioned earlier, the media in Georgia are overly focused on partisan political issues and favoring sensationalism. Moreover, since political leaders in Georgia rarely (almost never) talk about the climate crisis and environmental issues (Gverdtseteli & Janashia, 2022a), the media, with few exceptions, also see these issues as irrelevant. A representative of an international media company in Georgia could not recall a single case of journalists questioning politicians specifically about environmental protection and climate change. According to a representative of a critical/opposition media<sup>5</sup> "political instability, existential drama, [...], the struggle for survival, etc., directly affect the prioritization of politically important issues," and "it would be inadequate for a journalist to worry about issues such as whether there will be 5 centimeters less snow this season." A media manager of a regional radio also notes that "[...] at the local authority level, this is never discussed [...]." A representative of the public broadcaster says that the "private TV channels and their founders aren't concerned at all, or even in contrary [...] it is not in their interest to cover climate and environmental issues."

**In terms of media metrics,<sup>6</sup> content on climate change and environmental issues in Georgia is perceived as rather unpopular.** There are no studies on the performance of climate and environmental content in Georgia, nor are there any measures of content impact.<sup>7</sup> However, in the interviews, respondents described coverage of climate and environmental topics as "unpopular," "a luxury subject," "not a priority," "not a mainstream topic," "not commercially viable," "no views," "the subject of a narrow circle of elites," "not important to our society," "perceived unseriously," etc. These attitudes and perceptions put climate and environmental journalism at risk of being under-placed in the media.

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5. The opposition media describes itself as "critical and oppositional." The term was used accordingly in this study.

6. Pageviews, click-through, share, session time and scroll-depth — are some of the most common content performance metrics.

7. Impact metrics look at and evaluate audience behavior after consuming journalistic content.

### **It is common for media to overlook environmental and climate change issues in their editorial policy.**

Only representatives of international media and some online media indicated that environmental and climate topics are supported by their editorial policy. Despite this, on a personal level, all respondents consider climate and environmental topics to be “quite important.” Nevertheless, some of them feel they don’t know enough, especially about climate change and why this issue is relevant to Georgia.

### **The Georgian media mainly report on natural disasters and a few international news stories on climate and environmental topics.**

Stories about ongoing climate and environmental projects supported by various international donors are aired outside of prime time<sup>8</sup>. As one regional media representative observes, natural disasters are covered “from forest fire to forest fire, from flood to flood,” reactively and only at that moment. According to informants, when reporting on natural disasters, media outlets never ask the question if the disaster could somehow be attributed to climate change.

### **The events related to hydropower plants (HPP) received the most media attention.**

Participants of the study mentioned several issues that warranted extensive media coverage, such as the Namakhvani HPP case and its media coverage, an “extremely politicized” event where the environmental side of the story was not a priority for the media. “If it had been a purely ecological problem, there would not have been so much attention [...]. It had a nationalist tint, implying that something was being done against Georgians, it was a red flag for many. Unfortunately, the media did not succeed in adequately covering HPP issues, professionalism and qualification were lacking, and the process was also not transparent,” said the editor-in-chief of an international media outlet. According to a critical/opposition media manager, “the events and circumstances surrounding the Namakhvani HPP can be considered a successful Russian hybrid warfare operation. [...] Environmental concerns, much less climate change issues, were not at the forefront of the debate.”

## **3.2 Lack of effective training**

### **Respondents could not name any best practices for media training on climate and environmental reporting.**

It was frequently mentioned that training should not be primarily about the visibility and reporting of the funded projects. “There are often workshops on environmental issues that I used to attend, but I don’t do it anymore. I protest (...). All projects only care about their visibility and reporting about project activities, including government agencies (...). I cannot think of training where journalists were educated about what is climate change, about causes and effects of climate change, etc.,” said a TV producer.

Other respondents described the trainings they participated in as superficial or not fully adapted to the needs of Georgian media. Some noted that they have difficulty following the trainers’ language when they are trained by technical experts, as they often use concepts and vocabulary that are not familiar to media representatives. “In general, it is good to know about the urgency of the issue; however, the trainer was a technical expert, and my question regarding reporting standards when covering natural disasters remained almost unanswered. It would be beneficial if both climate/environment experts and media experts were present,” said a journalist representing regional media. A representative of academia stressed the importance of training trainers and equipping them with the appropriate tools and knowledge they need to train journalists on how to report about climate and environmental issues.

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8. Prime time – the time from 19:00 to 24:00, when a broadcaster’s programmes may be viewed or heard by a peak number of the audience within the broadcaster’s service area; Law of Georgia on Broadcasting <https://matsne.gov.ge/en/document/view/32866?impose=parallelEn&fullscreen=1&publication=52>

**Journalists lack training in terms of handling climate and environmental data.** Most media representatives emphasized the need for training in data collection, analysis, and visualization. “In fact, there are many things hidden in the data, in the big data, and we don’t know where to find this data,” explained an editor-in-chief representing international media. According to an online media journalist often working on scientific topics, “it is a similar problem to the coverage of COVID-19 (...). Understanding and interpreting numbers is not easy for Georgian mainstream media. And what they themselves do not understand is very difficult to convey. Or worse, they spread false information.”

**There is a lack of practice-oriented training.** Some respondents noted that training should not be just theoretical. Instead, it should be interactive, participatory, and hands-on. The editor of an online journal suggested that “training should be a production. If it is just a training to learn something theoretically, we don’t have time for that. During the training, journalists should prepare materials on a certain topic for publication. In this case, it will be easier for the media to send a journalist to attend the training, and it would even save the media some resources.”

**Some media representatives have language barriers when working with international trainers.** In general, all respondents indicated that they always find it very interesting to learn about best practices from international experts, especially from countries where climate and environmental topics are a priority and thus the expertise and professionalism is quite high. However, there are language barriers: “We had very good seminars, a journalist from the New York Times was a trainer, but the attendance was low, there was a language barrier, and for most of the journalists it was tiring to listen to a simultaneous translator,” said an online media founder. A producer on a TV show also noted that “the language barrier is there, and it’s not just my problem, it’s the problem for many others.”

**Attitudes towards the LEPL Environmental Information and Education Center (EIEC) as a training provider are mixed.** A further question related to the willingness and trust of media representatives to participate in training opportunities organized by the EIEC. The EIEC, which is under the Ministry of Environmental Protection and Agriculture of Georgia (MEPA), is tasked with promoting environmental and agricultural education and raising public awareness, supporting public participation in decision-making process, and ensuring access to environmental and agricultural information. In the interviews, it was identified that some representatives of critical/opposition media are unwilling to attend “government training”, preferring training supported by a trusted international donor. Some respondents suggested that government agencies have created their “comfortable bubble” and that critical media do not have access to these training sessions. A representative of a community radio said: “It is not a problem for us to cooperate with the state agencies, they have a problem with dealing with us. Especially by trying to create a ‘comfort zone’ where only those who are not critical are invited to the training (...). We can be invited, and if we say something critical, then we end up on the blacklist.” Almost half of those interviewed are open and willing to participate in trainings organized by EIEC.

### 3.3 Awareness, sensitivity, and basic climate literacy

**Georgian media organizations do not have profound knowledge of climate and environmental issues, as well as current state policies and laws in this area. They are also unaware of why these issues are important to the country.** “Why should this be important for the public, which is poor and politically disoriented in a post-Covid reality?” asked one of the respondents. “What makes us believe they would read about this?” Along with journalists, media sponsors, owners, producers, editors-in-chief, and other media decision-makers also have low awareness in terms of environmental and climate issues. Even if a journalist attends climate and environmental training and becomes interested in the topic, they must “convince the producer” or “executive

editors" that time and money should be allocated to covering these topics, according to a representative of an online media outlet. The media representatives interviewed within this research were unaware of the study „What Does the Georgian Population Think About Climate Change?“ (Durglishvili & Kechakmadze, 2020) conducted on the Georgian population's perceptions of climate change.

**Young journalists are more interested in and more knowledgeable about environmental and climate issues.** "They take it more personally," commented a head of the Georgian branch of an international media outlet. "It is very obvious that it is so important for them yet unimportant for older generation journalists. We rely on the initiative of the younger generation." Because of these individual journalists, environmental and climate issues may receive limited coverage in their media outlets. "I'm interested in this topic, and I try to popularize it at work so that we don't miss important international events (...) so that someone can broadcast from the climate conference," said a young journalist working in an international media. "Without me, these topics would probably be addressed less frequently."

**For journalists and their audiences, climate change is harder to understand than other environmental issues. The former is perceived as a global challenge that has little to do with Georgia.** In media coverage, climate change is often treated as a global issue, while other environmental issues are often viewed from a very local perspective. There is a lack of understanding about how global climate change relates to specific local (Georgian) challenges. As a result, the media lacks the tools and language to report on climate issues in relation to local environmental, economic or socio-political challenges that are more interesting to their audience – "the only topic we found that is interesting and relevant for the Georgian public is the melting of glaciers," said a representative of an international media outlet.

**Climate change is a relatively new topic for most of the journalists, and some of them still fail to see concrete ways in which it affects the Georgian reality.** Many seem to believe that climate change is so global that nothing can be done about it in Georgia. Environmental issues, on the other hand, are obvious. Yet environmental media coverage remains episodic and descriptive rather than analytical or investigative. There are few resources dedicated to finding connections between global issues and local challenges, to help make climate change more relevant to audiences.

### 3.4 Information sources and access to public information

**Journalists lack relevant, up-to-date materials for climate and environmental reporting, especially when it comes to the local context.** The main sources used by journalists are government reports and official documents, GeoStat data, studies and reports of the international organizations operating in Georgia, and foreign press. An online science media representative stated that often they use askgov.ge and climatebasics.info platforms, but perhaps 95% of the time they use foreign sources.

**Some of the information is gathered through consultations with academic and non-governmental experts, and with residents directly affected by natural disasters, although it is not easy to find respondents.** Journalists have a difficult time contacting local climate and environmental scientists, as the number of academic publications focusing on Georgia is limited. "It is also difficult to find suitable people who can speak popular language, an understandable language, not the language of some technical experts, which is boring even for journalists," said the editor-in-chief of online media. A manager of a regional community radio underlined that there are no local NGOs or experts there, which makes information collection about climate and environmental issues even more challenging. In general, journalists do not reach out to international experts or organizations based in other countries that could inform or comment on Georgian stories, because they do not know about them, they do not have contacts, and/or because of the language barrier.

**Experienced journalists already have well-developed networks, whereas journalists who are just starting their career struggle to find relevant respondents.** Access to sources and relevant respondents necessitates the development of trust. “We have access to sources because we have trusts; we have been working on this program for ten years, so sources also reach out to us,” noted a representative of a public broadcaster. However, other interviewees emphasized that local environment/climate technical experts and NOG representatives are not always “media friendly” and they are unwilling to collaborate with media. As the representative of a pro-government media noted, the political “allegiance” of respondents can also influence whether they feel comfortable making comments to certain media outlets: “Unfortunately, in a polarized country, one natural disaster can be reported in many different ways.”

**Politicians and government representatives “boycott” some media outlets.** However, this is not a problem that only affects reporting on climate and the environment. In the current polarized political climate in Georgia, some politicians and government officials either boycott the “critical/opposition media” or hardly ever engage with them. “It’s a struggle,” according to a representative of the “critical/opposition media,” “even during the pandemic, the Georgian authorities have not changed their political decision not to cooperate with critical media.”

**Journalists are divided on how easy it is to access public information, with some saying it is not a smooth process.** The representatives of the “oppositional media” tended to report negative experiences with obtaining public information: “they do not answer us anymore.” Respondents mentioned that official organizations delay responding for a long time or ignore requests completely, with some stating that the procedure has become particularly challenging in recent years, not only in the environmental field but in all domains. Media that are more pro-government or impartial (international media branches) experienced few difficulties; the only challenges were related to “ordinary bureaucracy.” More problems and difficulties with public information access are related to regional critical media: “Access to even general statistics is difficult, not to mention the politically problematic issues.”

In general, as climate and environmental issues are multi-sectoral, relevant public information could be requested from various governmental agencies. According to the report “Access to Public Information in Georgia 2021,” the quality of access to public information in the country improved by 2% in 2021 compared to the previous year (IDFI, 2022). IDFI found that among central public institutions, the highest rates of access to public information were observed in the Ministry of Regional Development and Infrastructure (95.93%) and the Ministry of Environment Protection and Agriculture (95.65%), while the lowest indicators were observed in the Administration of the Government of Georgia (30.44%) and the Ministry of Culture, Sports, and Youth (0%). As for the procedure, according to the existing legislation in Georgia, public institutions are obliged to answer requests for public information without delay. However, they may request a period of 10 days and even more if there are some technical problems or questions to clarify the request.

### 3.5 Limited specialization of journalists

**Individual journalists specializing in certain topics, particularly in environmental and climate issues, are uncommon in Georgian media.** Due to the lack of financial and human resources, a single journalist is rarely allocated to a specific field. Only a handful of media organizations employ science journalists, for whom reporting on climate and the environment is relatively simple. Nonetheless, they write about these topics primarily from scientific perspectives, rarely putting them into broader social, economic, or political contexts.

**There is no “tradition” for reporting on environmental and climate-related issues in the Georgian media.** “We are poor and not so old as a media organization,” said a representative from an international

media outlet branch, highlighting the lack of experience and knowledge in specialized reporting. Climate and environmental reporting are not taught in newsrooms or in universities. According to a representative from Tbilisi State University, media is not interested in such topics and thus does not invest in developing staff into professional environmental journalists. A young journalist from a science-oriented online media outlet stated that their journalists become more engaged and interested in specific topics after they are trained at work, and only after that do they become specialized in these issues. As of this moment, journalists covering environmental and climate issues are mostly “self-taught”; they take an interest in the topic without the support of the decision-makers in the organizations they work for.

**Georgian journalists are interested in relevant international practices of covering environmental and climate issues, which they believe can be both informative and inspiring.** A representative from the public broadcaster stated that it would be interesting to learn more about the “experience of what already works and can be shared with Georgia given its circumstances.” Journalists showed a special interest in learning more about the experiences of media representatives from post-Soviet countries or countries comparable to Georgia’s economic and political situation. A representative of an international media noted that he cannot make connections when reading news from wealthy Western countries, for example, about their emissions reduction strategies, which may not be as relevant for Georgia, a developing country with fairly low emissions.

**Georgian journalists are not aware of any plausible solutions to the climate and environmental problems.** “The challenge for me is when I’m working on a story, when I have to structure a story, and finally have to show a solution (...), this part is the most difficult (...). For example, now we are making a story about glaciers, that they are melting, and I don’t know what can be done, is there a solution to this problem?” Most of the respondents were unaware of any solutions, sustainable alternatives, or positive changes in the laws and policies relevant for climate and environmental reporting.

### 3.6 Engagement with different stakeholders

**There is a disconnect in communication between media and environmental organizations, with the latter only engaging with the media when it is necessary to provide visibility for ongoing projects.** Media experts said that if there are major issues in the country, the existing environmental organizations should be the first to say so – “they know better than us what are the challenges requiring media attention.” If the media is to be active in covering climate and environmental issues, they believe it is critical to have an active civil society that supports them. A journalist from the Georgian public broadcaster mentioned that “social activism helps journalists be bolder in covering given topics, when you know that there are people behind you.” Almost every respondent stated that with few exceptions, environmental organizations maintain a very passive relationship with the media and actively avoid being present in the media space. Most organizations struggle to trust media outlets, they are concerned that their statements might be taken out of context and used to benefit certain political agenda. As a result, media representatives are also unaware of existing environmental and climate organizations. At the regional level, there are even fewer organizations active on which the media can rely for information or expertise on environmental and climate issues.

**The lack of media coverage on environmental and climate issues is also due to politicians, both in government and in opposition, showing little interest.** “No politician is interested in commenting,” stated an online science and technology publication. According to journalists, state agencies are also slow to share information about new developments and policies, as well as documents and strategies adopted at the national level.



### 3.7 Lack of resources

**Lack of resources, whether in terms of time or human and financial capital, has a negative impact on climate and environmental reporting.** Due to limited resources, and the fact that climate and environmental issues are not considered as priority, they do not end up on the selected list of topics that are crucial to cover or explore in greater depth. The lack of resources is more noticeable in regional media.

**Commercial income for media organizations is becoming increasingly scarce and media production is becoming more and more expensive in the digital age.** According to one of online media representatives, existing resources are dwindling as businesses increasingly promote their products on Facebook or Google, limiting commercial revenue for media. An online/print media magazine also noted that Georgian companies are reluctant to sponsor media and get involved where environmental and climate issues are openly discussed because they see it as a potential threat. At the same time, creating online media products has become costly: "It requires multiple individuals, not just journalists. It necessitates a team comprised of journalists, designers, social media managers, and others, as well as a vision and product packaging," stated an online media representative.

**Climate and environmental reporting often relies solely on the personal interest and volunteerism of individual journalists.** In terms of human resources, respondents mentioned that there are no reporters working in media organisations with specialised knowledge in environmental and climate issues. To be able to hire specialized journalist for climate and environmental topics would be a "luxury" which they cannot afford. A journalist working in an international media branch in Georgia suggests that financial resources need to be directly allocated for environmental and climate reporting: "These topics are doable, searchable and can be completed. However, they require a significant of resources and time."



## 4. Capacity Challenges, Gaps and Needs Assessment of Georgian Media Outlets for Improved Climate and Environmental Reporting: Action Plan 2023 - 2025

Based on the challenges, gaps, and needs assessment of Georgian media in terms of climate and environmental reporting, Climate Basics proposes a comprehensive Action Plan in the following section of the document. The main goal is to help various stakeholders improve the quality of media coverage of climate- and environment-related issues. Applying specific approaches outlined in the Needs Assessment Action Plan has the potential to impact Georgian media positively. It can help address capacity challenges and gaps related to climate and environmental journalism in Georgia.

### **The action plan addresses the following stakeholders:**

- Development partners/donor organizations, to provide tailored technical and financial support to Georgian media for better climate and environmental journalism.
- Government institutions and agencies, to improve communication procedures and strategies with media outlets and to identify areas where policy could support media efforts to improve coverage of climate and environmental issues.
- Media trainers, for better climate and environmental reporting in Georgia.
- Media researchers, to identify areas requiring additional investigation.
- Media representatives, to better plan and execute professional duties while working on climate and environment-related topics.

In this section, the areas requiring the most action are prioritized, considering the findings and key results from the study. The prioritization ultimately informs the Action Plan, which focuses on specific strategies in targeted areas to impact outcomes. According to the assessment, Georgian journalists need to focus on three main areas of improvement to bring climate change into their reporting with more regularity:

- Ideas and relevant topics for stories they find interesting alongside with their editors and their audience.
- Tools necessary to compile reports quicker and better, including data, knowledge, and access to experts.
- Incentivization, through various kinds of professional rewards.

The general recommendation is that the strategy should be systematic, consistent, and long-term. This will guarantee dynamic and effective media engagement while working on climate and environmental topics.

**Goal: Improved coverage of climate change and environmental topics by Georgian media outlets**

<b>Needs and priority areas requiring improvement</b>	<b>Possible interventions - technical and financial assistance</b>	<b>Desired outcome</b>
<b>(1) Lack of priority</b>	<p><b>Situation analysis</b></p> <p>1.1 Examination of climate and environmental media content performance and impact metrics.</p> <p>1.2 Survey audience knowledge, and awareness of climate change and environmental topics.</p> <p>1.3 Media monitoring and the analysis of the media coverage on climate and environmental issues (including mainstream and new media).</p>	Clear understanding of challenges and opportunities related to climate and environmental reporting in Georgia.
<b>(2) Lack of effective training</b>	<p><b>Training of trainers (ToT)</b></p> <p>2.1 ToT for Georgian media trainers.</p> <p>2.2 Developing a climate and environmental reporting method handbook (including teaching materials) for trainers in Georgia.</p> <p>2.3 Exchanging international experience with trainers on the effectiveness of training based on specific target groups, methods and objectives.</p>	Media representatives from Georgia receive improved training, in Georgian language environment.
<b>(3) Awareness, sensitivity, and basic environment/climate literacy</b>	<p><b>Climate change and environmental education for journalists</b></p> <p>3.1 Training related to climate and environmental issues: Strengthen environment/climate literacy related to science, governance, and policy principles (at international, national, and local levels).</p> <p>3.2 Disseminating factsheets to journalists in relation to specific climate/environment events, proactive or reactive.</p> <p>3.3 Creating a daily or weekly climate/environment news round-up, emailed to journalists.</p> <p>3.4 Thematic press/media tours for journalists.</p> <p><b>Sharing international experience:</b></p> <p>3.5 Study visits, placements, and other exchange programs with representatives of Western media organizations with vast experience in climate/environmental reporting.</p> <p>3.6 Study visits, placements, and other exchange programs with the representatives of media organizations from Eastern Europe and the Caucasus countries.</p> <p>3.7 Study visits, placements, and other exchange programs with representatives of countries severely affected by climate change and environmental problems and/or actively transitioning to a green economy, including in the Global South.</p>	<p>Improved climate/environment literacy of media representatives and organizations.</p> <p>Journalists are aware of international experience, approaches, and context.</p>

<p><b>(4) Information sources and access to public information</b></p>	<p><b>Data collection, analysis, and visualization</b></p> <p>4.1 Training on collection, analysis, and visualization of climate/environmental data.</p> <p>4.2 Creating a platform (or adopting existing platforms) to generate and showcase data, data visualizations, storytelling and graphics that are directly relevant to Georgia.<sup>9</sup> Free to use for reporters.</p> <p>4.3 Database of highly qualified and trusted Georgian and international climate and environmental experts.</p> <p>4.4 Translating and/or summarizing key international climate and environment reports, summaries, conventions, and agreements.</p>	<p>Access to climate and environmental data is improved and effectively communicated.</p>
<p><b>(5) Limited specialization of journalists</b></p>	<p><b>Training related to reporting on climate and environmental issues</b></p> <p>5.1 Climate/environment communication and storytelling techniques (including visual storytelling).</p> <p>5.2 Telling local environment/climate change stories that matter.</p> <p>5.3 Finding climate and environmental issues to cover and ways to successfully pitch those issues to editors.</p> <p>5.4 Attribution (e.g., attributing extreme weather events to climate change).</p> <p>5.5 Standards of climate and environmental reporting.</p> <p>5.6 Climate change, disinformation, myths, and facts.</p> <p>5.7 Climate/environmental investigative journalism.</p> <p>5.8 Climate/environmental solutions journalism.</p> <p>5.9 Integrated safety training for natural disaster journalists (including simulations).</p> <p><b>Self-education opportunities</b></p> <p>5.10 Creating a climate and environmental reporting handbook or roadmap for journalists (including media toolkit).</p> <p>5.11 Developing an e-learning platform on climate and environmental reporting with learning materials, key facts, and messages (international and local context), visuals, etc. including a map of key stakeholders and causal links on how climate and environmental topics are influencing various social, economic, and political developments. Furthermore, the platform could include an online glossary explaining key concepts and terminology.</p> <p><b>Encouraging young professionals/journalism students</b></p> <p>5.12 Offering small grant programs for young journalists, bloggers, vloggers, and influencers.</p> <p>5.13 Organizing a climate and environmental reporting summer school for young journalists, bloggers, vloggers, and influencers.</p> <p>5.14 Supporting journalism schools in Georgia to develop climate and environmental curricula.</p> <p>5.15 Supporting young journalists to take part in local, regional, and international conferences.</p>	<p>Climate and environmental Journalists create quality content.</p> <p>Journalists have access to tailored self-education opportunities in the Georgian language.</p> <p>A new generation of journalists received training and is aware of the role of Georgian media in addressing climate change and environmental issues.</p>

7. Integrate with or create platforms similar to <https://www.forset.ge/work> and <https://askgov.ge/>

<p><b>(6) Engagement with different stakeholders</b></p>	<p><b>Networking</b></p> <p>6.1 Stakeholder mapping for climate and environmental journalism.</p> <p>6.2 Formats allowing the journalist and high-level media managers to network with relevant: government officials and agencies, donors, non-governmental organizations, private sector, and science representatives that could be potential informants for media. The networking platforms draw on and consider existing experiences and “best practices” of similar formats in Georgia.</p> <p>6.3 Establishing a non-partisan professional network or “club” where journalists freely exchange ideas and information, helping create a cohort of journalists who view themselves as subject specialists.</p> <p>6.4 climate change and environmental journalism national and international conferences bringing together journalists, scientists, government officials, advocacy leaders and others to explore the many facets of environmental/climate stories to improve the quality and accuracy of environmental/climate reporting.</p> <p>6.5 Encouraging journalists to join existing professional international networks,<sup>10</sup> creating a range of opportunities including bursaries and travel to cover international conferences and events.</p> <p><b>Mainstreaming climate and environmental topics in media</b></p> <p>6.6 Training and awareness raising for journalists working not only within the field of science, business, and politics, but also in other areas, such as travel, real estate, food, lifestyle, culture and health, sports, and technology journalism, etc.</p>	<p>Journalists can use their networks to increase the quantity and quality of climate and environmental reporting.</p> <p>Climate and environmental issues are better integrated across all desks</p>
<p><b>(7) Lack of financial resources</b></p>	<p><b>Fundraising and incentivization</b></p> <p>7.1 Survey of companies, banks, and investors to identify opportunities for cooperation between the media and the private sector.</p> <p>7.2. Training on writing grant proposals, fundraising, and marketing strategies.</p> <p>7.3 Offering grant programs to support professional journalists and/or news outlets to conduct investigations into climate and environmental affairs related to Georgia.</p> <p>7.4 Climate and environmental journalism (annual) award<sup>11</sup> in recognition of the work of Georgian climate and environmental journalists to bring related information, knowledge, and action to the forefront of public discourse.</p>	<p>Media organizations mobilize human and financial resources for improved climate and environmental reporting</p>

8. Some examples: Earth Journalism Network, Climate Tracker, Oxford Climate Journalism Network, CLEW Journalism Network.

9. Could become a part of the existing journalistic awards for instance the annual prize of Georgian Charter of Journalistic Ethics, or the EU Prize for Journalism.

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