

## Sustainable Urban Development in Georgia: Trends, Challenges and Opportunities

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### ABSTRACT

*Sustainable urban development has become one of the most important and complex directions of contemporary development, driven by accelerated urbanization, the concentration of economic activities in cities and growing social and environmental challenges. Cities, as the main engines of economic growth, simultaneously represent spaces of opportunity and concentrations of sustainability risks, which makes the adoption of integrated and long-term urban policies indispensable.*

*The purpose of this article is to analyse the sustainability of cities and settlements in Georgia within the framework of urban development policy and the conceptual basis of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, particularly SDG 11 ("Sustainable Cities and Communities"). The research employs a mixed methodological approach combining theoretical and conceptual analysis, policy review and case studies. The empirical component assesses the Smart Sustainable City Profile of Tbilisi and the Eco-Smart City initiative of Kutaisi, allowing an evaluation of how global sustainable development principles are adapted to different local urban contexts.*

*The findings show that urban development policy in Georgia only partially aligns with the goals and targets of sustainable development, especially with regard to basic infrastructure, housing, urban mobility, and environmental management. Significant structural gaps persist in social inclusion and environmental governance. The study confirms that sustainable urban development requires not only formal compliance with international frameworks, but also their deep and substantive integration into national and municipal policies.*

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## ქალაქების მდგრადი განვითარება საქართველოში: ტენდენციები, გამოწვევები და შესაძლებლობები

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**საკვანძო სიტყვები:**  
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*მდგრადი ურბანული განვითარება თანამედროვეობის ერთ-ერთ ყველაზე მნიშვნელოვან და კომპლექსურ მიმართულებად ჩამოყალიბდა, რაც განპირობებულია ურბანიზაციის დაჩქარებული ტემპებით, ეკონომიკური აქტივობების ქალაქებში კონცენტრაციითა და სოციალური თუ გარემოსდაცვითი გამოწვევებით. ქალაქები, როგორც ეკონომიკური ზრდის*

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პოლიტიკა და  
მმართველობა;  
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განვითარება

ძირითადი მამოძრავებლები, წარმოადგენენ, ერთი მხრივ, განვითარების შესაძლებლობებისა და, მეორე მხრივ, მდგრადობის რისკების კონცენტრაციის სივრცეს, რაც ინტეგრირებული და გრძელვადიანი ურბანული პოლიტიკის აუცილებლობას აჩენს.

სტატიის მიზანია საქართველოში ქალაქებისა და დასახლებების მდგრადობის ანალიზი ურბანული განვითარების პოლიტიკის ჭრილში და გაეროს მდგრადი განვითარების მიზნების (კერძოდ, SDG 11 - „მდგრადი ქალაქები და დასახლებები“) კონცეპტუალურ ჩარჩოზე დაყრდნობით. კვლევა დაეფუძნა შერეულ მეთოდოლოგიურ მიდგომას, რომელიც აერთიანებს თეორიულ და კონცეპტუალურ ანალიზს, პოლიტიკის დოკუმენტების მიმოხილვასა და შემთხვევების შესწავლას. ემპირიული ნაწილი მოიცავს თბილისის ჭკვიანი მდგრადი ქალაქის პროფილისა და ქუთაისის „ეკო-სმარტ ქალაქის“ ინიციატივის შეფასებას, რაც საშუალებას იძლევა გაანალიზდეს გლობალური მდგრადი განვითარების პრინციპების ადგილობრივი ადაპტაციის ხარისხი სხვადასხვა ურბანულ კონტექსტში.

კვლევის შედეგები აჩვენებს, რომ საქართველოში ურბანული განვითარების პოლიტიკა მხოლოდ ნაწილობრივ შეესაბამება მდგრადი განვითარების მიზნებსა და ამოცანებს, განსაკუთრებით ბაზისური ინფრასტრუქტურის განვითარების მიმართულებით. გამოვლინდა მნიშვნელოვანი სტრუქტურული ხარვეზები სოციალური ინკლუზიურობის, ხელმისაწვდომი საცხოვრებლის, ურბანული მობილობისა და გარემოსდაცვითი მართვის სფეროებში. კვლევა ადასტურებს, რომ მდგრადი ურბანული განვითარების უზრუნველყოფა მოითხოვს არა მხოლოდ საერთაშორისო ჩარჩოებთან ფორმალურ შესაბამისობას, არამედ მათი შინაარსობრივი ინტეგრაციის გაძლიერებას სახელმწიფო პოლიტიკაში ეროვნულ და მუნიციპალურ დონეებზე.

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## Introduction

Contemporary global development processes are increasingly characterized by the interdependence of economic, social and environmental dimensions, which necessitates a reconsideration of traditional development models. In this context, sustainable development has emerged as a universal paradigm aimed at achieving economic growth, social well-being and environmental balance simultaneously. This approach is especially relevant in urban development, as cities have become the primary arenas of population concentration, economic activity and infrastructure.

Rapid global urbanization significantly increases the role of cities in sustainable development. Cities function simultaneously as engines of economic progress and as spaces where social inequality and environmental risks accumulate. Therefore, sustainable urban development is no longer merely a matter of spatial

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planning, but a complex socio-economic and governance challenge requiring integrated policy frameworks and long-term strategic vision.

The concept of sustainable development has been institutionalized through the United Nations 2030 Agenda and its 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Among them, SDG 11 (“Sustainable Cities and Communities”) provides a global framework for creating inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable urban environments. However, its effectiveness depends on how well it is adapted to national and local realities.

In Georgia, sustainable urban development is particularly relevant due to urban-regional imbalances, economic concentration in the capital and environmental pressures. Urban policy must simultaneously address economic growth, social inclusion, and environmental sustainability. Hence, a systematic assessment of the alignment between global sustainable development frameworks and national and municipal policies is essential.

### **Literature Review**

The concept of sustainable development was formed as a response to the economic, social and ecological challenges facing the modern world. Its classical definition is presented in the report *Our Common Future* of the World Commission on Environment and Development (the Brundtland Report, 1987), according to which sustainable development implies meeting the needs of the present in such a way that it does not limit the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. This approach laid the foundation for the three-dimensional model of sustainable development, which integrates economic efficiency, social justice, and environmental balance.

Subsequently, the concept of sustainable development was institutionally reinforced by the United Nations 2030 Agenda and the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which represent the universal framework of contemporary development. The academic literature recognizes that the SDGs create a common goal-oriented system; however, their effective implementation depends on consideration of national and local contexts (United Nations, 2016; Sachs et al., 2025).

In the context of urban development, sustainable development acquires particular importance under conditions of rapid urbanization. Cities simultaneously represent the main drivers of economic growth and areas of concentration of social inequality and environmental risks (World Bank, 2023; United Nations, 2024). In this regard, a special role is assigned to Sustainable Development Goal 11 (“Sustainable Cities and Communities”), which is aimed at forming inclusive, safe, resilient, and sustainable urban spaces.

The literature devotes particular attention to the problem of adapting global sustainable development frameworks at the local level. Studies indicate that in developing and transition economies, a mismatch frequently exists between declared goals and practical policies, which is caused by institutional weaknesses and limited governance capacity (Sachs et al., 2025).

In the context of Georgia, existing studies emphasize the sharp asymmetry of urban development between the capital and regional cities. Housing affordability and the severity of environmental problems are also particularly alarming (Sustainable Development Report: Georgia, 2025; UNECE, 2023). At the same time, the literature contains little integrated analysis that would systematically assess the compatibility between global goals and local urban policy within the SDG 11 framework. The present paper represents a modest attempt to fill this gap, which determines its relevance and practical value.

### **Research Methodology**

The research conducted within the framework of this article is based on a mixed methodological approach that combines theoretical analysis, documentary research and case study analysis. The methodological framework is built on the principles of systemic and integrated analysis, which ensures the assessment of sustainable urban development in the interconnection between global and local contexts.

At the initial stage, theoretical and conceptual analysis was applied, within which the main approaches to sustainable development, the United Nations 2030 Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals were reviewed, with particular attention paid to SDG 11. At the next stage, regulatory documents and policy analysis were carried out, covering Georgia’s national and municipal urban development strategies, legislative acts and

international reports. This method was used to assess the degree of compatibility between international frameworks and national policy.

Finally, using the case study method, the Smart Sustainable City Profile of Tbilisi and the “Eco-Smart City” initiative of Kutaisi were evaluated, which made it possible to analyze the practical implementation of sustainable development principles in different urban contexts.

The study also applies elements of comparative analysis, which helps identify common trends, differences and structural gaps in Georgia’s urban policy. The interpretation of results is based on qualitative assessment and ensures that conclusions are supported by evidence.

### **Main Discussion**

Cities in modern states represent the main driving forces of economic development, as it is in urban spaces that the largest share of economic activity is concentrated. Cities generate a significant share of national gross domestic product, integrate industrial, financial, educational and innovative potential and function as the primary platforms of the labor market. Accordingly, economic, social and spatial processes taking place in cities determine not only local but also national development dynamics.

Urban spaces concentrate the main resources of business, investment and human capital, which determines the role of cities as key drivers of economic growth. Value added is created in cities, innovation develops, competitive sectors are formed and a significant share of jobs is generated. As a result of this concentration, economic decisions and policies implemented in cities directly affect national macroeconomic indicators, including economic growth, employment and the investment environment.

At the same time, the economic function of cities is not limited to GDP generation. Urban space also represents a hub of infrastructure networks, logistics centers and financial flows, which ensures the formation of economic linkages between regions. The efficiency of cities, or conversely their structural problems, spread across the entire national economy and determine the pace and quality of national development.

It should be noted that uneven development of urban economic processes often leads to regional imbalances, increased internal migration and the growth of social inequality. Consequently, the development model implemented in cities — whether sustainable or unsustainable — automatically affects national socio-economic stability. Under sustainable urban development, cities are transformed into centers not only of economic growth, but also of social well-being and environmental responsibility, which forms the basis of long-term national development.

The role of cities as economic drivers must therefore be considered when formulating national development strategies, since the effectiveness of processes occurring in urban space determines the overall direction of economic, social and institutional development of the country.

Thus, understanding sustainable development in the interconnection between the global scale and the local (Georgian) context makes it clear that international frameworks represent not a ready-made model, but a strategic framework that provides direction, the effectiveness of which is determined by the quality of its adaptation at the local level. In the case of Georgia, this process acquires particular importance, as the country’s development reality requires the transformation of global goals into concrete policies, institutional mechanisms, and practical decisions. This circumstance necessitates a systematic assessment of compatibility between international frameworks and national and urban policies, which allows the identification of both existing achievements and structural gaps and improvement potential. On this basis, empirical analysis is carried out, focusing on the real implementation of sustainable development principles in Georgia’s urban development practice.

Cities represent strategic centers of the economy in modern states, which is particularly evident in the case of Georgia based on statistical data from recent years. Tbilisi accounts for a significant share of the country’s economic activity. According to 2024 data, Tbilisi generates approximately 53.08% of Georgia’s gross domestic product (GDP), which significantly outweighs the economic structure of all other regions and highlights the dominant role of the capital in the national economy.

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It should be noted that this indicator is systematically high: in 2023, Tbilisi produced 52.7% of the country's total GDP, and in 2022 50.7%, which indicates the stability of the large city's economic importance and the formation of a unipolar economic structure in the country.

Tbilisi's economic share is driven both by population concentration (the city hosts a large share of the employed population and consumer market) and by the diversity of economic sectors located there — wholesale and retail trade, real estate, construction and other high-value-added sectors generate significant volumes of goods and services.

This concentration leads to two major outcomes: on the one hand, it strengthens economic efficiency and innovation potential in the capital; on the other hand, it increases regional inequality and spatial imbalance across the country.

1. The classical dynamics of the national economy depend heavily on Tbilisi's performance. Changes occurring in the city directly affect national GDP trends and growth rates.
2. The risks of regional imbalance increase, as other cities and regions significantly lag in economic development, while the main resources and investments are largely concentrated in the capital.

Georgia's cities, and especially Tbilisi, therefore occupy a dominant position in the country's economic development. This is not merely a statistical fact but a long-term trend that shapes economic policy priorities, welfare and the overall development trajectory of the country. Consequently, the strategic economic importance of cities for Georgia is exceptionally high, since the performance and productivity of processes occurring in urban areas largely determine the country's entire economic system.

Sustainable development represents one of the most relevant and complex problems in contemporary development discourse, the significance of which is determined by both global and national and local challenges. The relevance of this issue was clearly reflected in the United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, in which sustainable development is established as a universal development model and specified through 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). This demonstrates that sustainable development is no longer merely a theoretical concept but has become a central direction of global policy and development strategies.

The problem of sustainable development is characterized by its multi-level significance. In the global context, it is associated with addressing challenges such as economic inequality, climate change, accelerated urbanization, excessive use of natural resources, and social exclusion. At the same time, sustainable development is not uniform or universal for all countries; it acquires different content and meaning depending on a country's socio-economic, institutional and spatial characteristics.

At the local level, sustainable development is shaped by specific local characteristics determined by historical development paths, economic structure, governance systems and spatial organization. In the case of Georgia, sustainable development becomes particularly relevant against the background of urban and regional imbalances, decentralization processes, the need to strengthen municipal governance and environmental challenges. Therefore, global goals and principles require adaptation to national and local realities.

Sustainable development constitutes a development paradigm that aims to achieve economic growth, social well-being and environmental balance simultaneously. In this context, green economic dynamism is considered the practical economic foundation of sustainable development, while integrated approaches to urban governance represent its institutional and governance mechanism.

Cities, as spaces of population, economic activity and infrastructure concentration, serve as the primary arenas for the realization of sustainable development processes. It is in cities that sustainable development principles are transformed from abstract goals into concrete economic, social and environmental decisions. In this process, green economic dynamism ensures a model of economic growth that does not contradict environmental requirements while at the same time creating new economic opportunities.

Green economic dynamism is linked to sustainable development through several key channels. First, it promotes the qualitative transformation of economic growth. Growth is no longer based solely on intensive resource consumption, but on innovation, energy efficiency and low-carbon technologies. Second, the green

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economy generates social benefits, including new jobs, a healthier environment and improved quality of life. At the same time, it reduces environmental pressure, thereby strengthening the ecological dimension of sustainable development.

Integrated approaches to urban governance represent the governance framework through which sustainable development is implemented in practice. These approaches imply the integration of economic, environmental, and social policies, the coordinated participation of different sectors (government, private sector, civil society) and decision-making based on long-term impacts. Such governance ensures that sustainable development goals do not remain confined to sectoral policies, but become the overall strategic direction of city development within the framework of “new public governance.”

Internationally adopted sustainable development decisions — including the UN Sustainable Development Goals, green growth strategies, and urban development frameworks — form a shared global vision. However, their effectiveness depends on how well these approaches are adapted to local realities. This is where the interaction between the global and local dimensions of sustainable development becomes evident: universal principles are implemented by taking into account the socio-economic, spatial and institutional specifics of a particular country and city.

In the context of Georgia, sustainable development, green economic dynamism, and integrated urban governance constitute closely interconnected tasks. Urbanization trends, the concentration of economic activity in cities and environmental challenges intensify the demand for a governance model that simultaneously ensures economic development, social stability and environmental protection. Therefore, green economic dynamism and integrated urban governance can be considered the main instruments for the realization of sustainable development in Georgia’s cities.

After analyzing the theoretical framework of sustainable urban development, the UNECE Smart Sustainable City Profile of Tbilisi and the national indicators of SDG 11, it is necessary to examine how these principles are implemented in practice in specific urban spaces. For this purpose, the study applies a case study approach using the examples of Tbilisi and Kutaisi, as well as an analysis of the implementation of SDG 11 (“Sustainable Cities and Communities”) in Georgia. The selection of these cities is determined by their different scales and governance experiences, which makes it possible to systematically assess the degree of local adaptation of sustainable development principles and to identify the structural gaps that are common to Georgian urban policy.

#### Smart Sustainable City Profile of Tbilisi

The Smart Sustainable City Profile of Tbilisi was developed at the request of Tbilisi City Hall and funded under the 12th tranche of the United Nations Development Account (UNDA) project — Smart Sustainable Cities for the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the New Urban Agenda in the UNECE region. The project supports selected beneficiary cities in their transition toward smart and sustainable development in order to accelerate the implementation of Sustainable Development Goal 11 and the SDGs in general. The Tbilisi Smart Sustainable City Profile was specifically created to assess progress toward becoming a sustainable city, mainly in the context of SDG 11, which aims to create inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable cities and communities.

The assessment applied key performance indicators (KPIs) for smart sustainable cities in order to evaluate the factual situation in Tbilisi in economic, social, and environmental dimensions relative to the Sustainable Development Goals.

1. The initial KPI assessment revealed mixed results for Tbilisi in achieving SDG 11 in several critical areas:

Performance level	Assessment area (linked to SDG 11)	Details
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Strong	Information and Communication Technology infrastructure	High scores in ICT infrastructure, water supply, sanitation and public sector governance. For example, in 2022, 100% of households had access to water, and 99.83% had access to safely managed drinking water services.
Medium	Social inclusion, housing, safety, culture, transport, employment	Medium performance was recorded in these areas. Housing expenditure amounted on average to 12.58% of income. Police presence was high (280.54 officers per 100,000 inhabitants).
Low	Electricity supply and low-emission vehicles	Electricity supply showed low scores due to frequent outages. Low-carbon vehicles accounted for less than 10% of registered vehicles.

Key Challenges Resulting from Urbanisation in Tbilisi

1. Environmental and Spatial Challenges

Unplanned urban expansion: The absence of a consistent framework for urban policy and governance has led to uncontrolled urban expansion and the destruction of green and open spaces. Urban development has consistently prioritized buildings and investments in urban infrastructure, which has resulted in a shortage of green open areas. Between 1987 and 2016, the built-up area increased significantly (from 23.63% to 37.53%), while the share of green areas declined from 29.12% to 23.45%. This reduction caused the amount of public green space per capita to fall below 4 m<sup>2</sup>.

Vulnerability to disasters (flooding): Unplanned urbanization, soil sealing, and the channeling of 12 rivers into concrete canals have increased Tbilisi’s vulnerability to flooding. For example, the 2015 flood claimed 21 lives and caused infrastructure damage amounting to approximately USD 50 million.

2. Mobility and Pollution Challenges

The increase in the number of private vehicles (approximately 600,000 registered cars), combined with inadequate public transport services, has worsened traffic congestion in the city. This, in turn, has led to significant air and noise pollution. In 2016, the transport sector was responsible for 84% of carbon monoxide (CO) emissions and 80% of nitrogen dioxide (NO<sub>2</sub>) emissions. In 2019, about 76% of Tbilisi residents identified air pollution as the most severe environmental problem.

Figure 1 illustrates the dynamics of the Air Quality Index (AQI) in Tbilisi from 2022 to 2026. The data show a persistent upward trend in air pollution. During the observed years, AQI values frequently exceeded 100, indicating air quality classified as unhealthy for sensitive groups according to international AQI standards.

The highest pollution peaks occurred in 2023 and 2025, when AQI levels repeatedly reached values between 120 and 160 from mid-January to the end of the month. These peaks coincide with periods of increased energy consumption for heating and greater dependence on private vehicles.

Preliminary data for January 2026 (first week) show AQI values fluctuating between approximately 70 and 95, corresponding to moderate and unhealthy air quality categories. This indicates that, despite regulatory efforts and the gradual modernization of the transport and energy sectors, winter air pollution remains a systemic challenge for Tbilisi.

These trends confirm that air quality deterioration in Tbilisi is not a rare phenomenon but rather a recurring seasonal and structural problem, closely linked to the intensity of urban transport, increased energy consumption, and insufficient progress in transitioning to sustainable mobility models.

Figure 1.

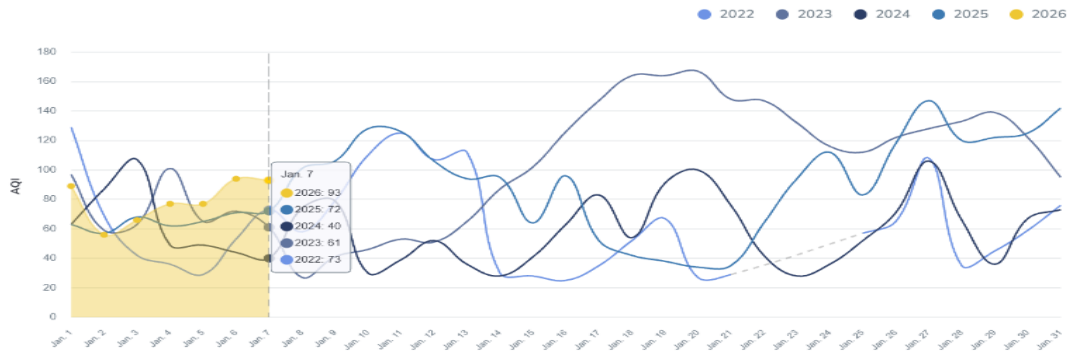
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The Mtkvari River is polluted as a result of unplanned urbanisation and the prioritisation of transport infrastructure, especially the highways located along both riverbanks, which cause water contamination through surface runoff from roads and industrial facilities.

January Air Quality Analysis  
Tbilisi, Tbilisi, Georgia



Source: <https://www.aqi.in/dashboard/georgia/tbilisi/tbilisi/historical-analysis>

### 3. Housing and Social Challenges

The city has inherited and retained a legacy of low-quality housing. Structural extensions in multi-apartment buildings (such as balconies and annexes) often fail to comply with quality and safety standards, giving many buildings a “temporary” appearance.

New construction projects are frequently focused on high-priced apartments, making housing unaffordable for large segments of the population. Housing prices show a growing trend and expenditures on housing, water and energy significantly exceed those in other regions of Georgia.

These negative outcomes underline the critical need to strengthen the framework of urban policy and governance in order to ensure sustainable and integrated urban development.

#### Kutaisi – “Eco-Smart City” Initiative

The self-governing city of Kutaisi is one of the successful municipalities in Georgia that has actively implemented initiatives in the field of sustainable urban development. This project is supported within the framework of the European Union and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) “Mayors for Economic Growth” (M4EG) initiative. Kutaisi has developed its portfolio for the “Eco-Smart City” concept, which focuses on the introduction of green, innovative and sustainable urban solutions.

To achieve the status of an Eco-Smart City, the following initiatives have been implemented:

Green mobility – the city has promoted the use of electric and hybrid vehicles, introduced a free-parking policy for electric vehicles and developed infrastructure powered by alternative energy sources.

Energy efficiency – solar panels have been installed on the administrative building of “Transport Company 2020 Ltd.”, increasing energy efficiency and reducing the city’s carbon footprint.

Waste management and circular approaches – a system of large smart containers supports waste separation and reduces the amount of waste sent to landfills. Public participation in recycling and the establishment of composting centers is encouraged.

The Kutaisi case demonstrates that the adaptation of global sustainable development goals to local realities is feasible. The city’s initiatives not only support environmental objectives, but also create new economic opportunities, increase social benefits and strengthen the effectiveness of urban governance. The implementation of such initiatives is particularly important for Georgia, as it highlights that green economy and urban

sustainability strategies can be successfully implemented not only in the capital city, but also in medium-sized cities.

Based on the above-discussed case studies, we now proceed to the analysis of the implementation of SDG 11 (“Sustainable Cities and Communities”) in Georgia. Within this goal, the adapted targets for Georgia are:

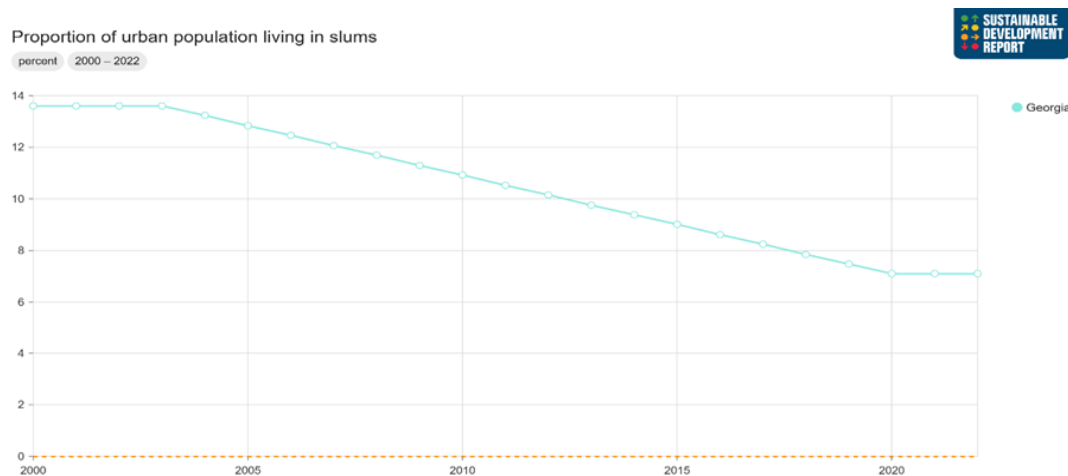
1. Ensuring safe housing conditions for internally displaced persons in Georgia (Target 11.1).
2. By 2030, reducing the negative environmental impact per capita in large cities, with particular attention to air quality, municipal waste, and other forms of pollution (Target 11.6).

These adapted targets aim to promote urban development and to address existing global challenges related to infrastructure, environmental pollution, air quality and transport.

Georgia publishes data in its Sustainable Development Reports, the dynamics of which can be summarised as follows:

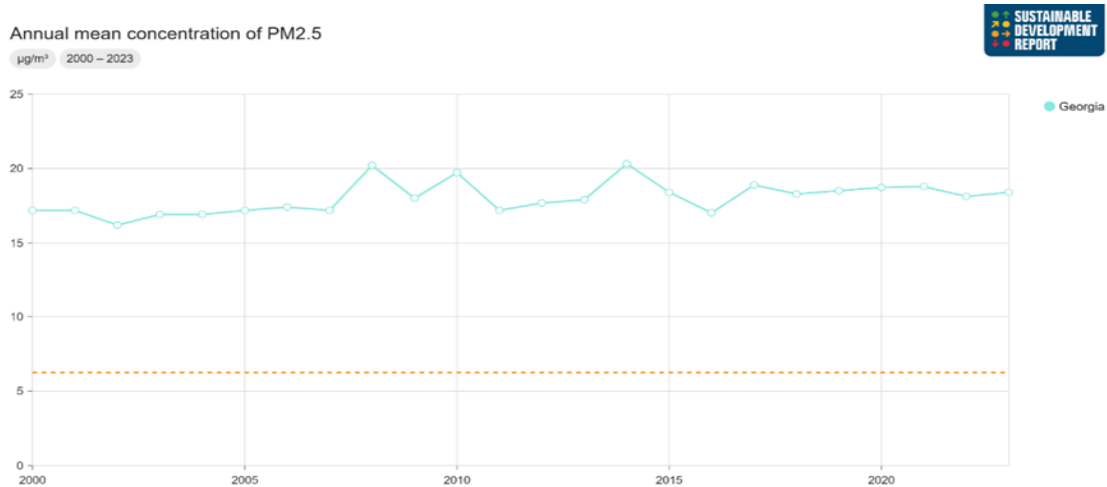
SDG 11.1 measures the share of the urban population living in housing that lacks one or more of the following elements: structural safety, access to water, sanitation, sufficient living space, or legal tenure. Monitoring data for Georgia are not fully updated; however, recent estimates indicate the existence of vulnerable urban areas with inadequate housing conditions. There is a substantial lag in the achievement of SDG 11.1.

Progress has been minimal: the proportion of the population living in such conditions declined only from 14% in 2000 to 7% in 2020. This problem is structural and requires direct intervention through state policy.



Source: <https://dashboards.sdindex.org/explorer/?metric=proportion-of-urban-population-living-in-slums>

2. SDG 11.6 is monitored through data on air pollution, in particular fine particulate matter (PM2.5), which is directly linked to public health. Progress in this area remains low, and the reforms implemented so far are not sufficient to establish a systematically healthy environment.



Source: <https://dashboards.sdgindex.org/explorer/?metric=annual-mean-concentration-of-pm2-5>

3. SDG 11.1 and related national indicators include data on the share of the population with permanent access to centralised drinking water. According to official sources, access is relatively high, at approximately 95–98%, which indicates that basic water infrastructure is comparatively well developed.



Source: <https://dashboards.sdgindex.org/explorer/?metric=access-to-improved-water-source-piped>

The analysis of Georgia’s SDG 11 indicators reveals a differentiated picture across sectors. While basic infrastructure, particularly water supply, shows relatively strong performance, social housing policy is critically underdeveloped, leading to the concentration of vulnerable urban groups in inadequate neighborhoods. At the same time, air pollution remains one of the major environmental challenges in large cities, significantly hindering the achievement of Target 11.6. Current policies fail to ensure the inclusive development envisaged by SDG 11,

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as improvements in physical infrastructure are not accompanied by the systematic integration of social and environmental components.

### **Conclusions and Recommendations**

The analysis presented in this study demonstrates that ensuring urban sustainability represents one of the most complex and multidimensional challenges of contemporary development, which cannot be addressed through sectoral or fragmented policies alone. Global experience and theoretical analysis confirm that sustainable development is based on the unity of economic efficiency, social justice, and environmental balance, with cities serving as the central arenas of this process.

The research finds that global sustainable development frameworks—particularly the United Nations 2030 Agenda and Sustainable Development Goal 11 (Sustainable Cities and Communities)—provide a clear and universal conceptual foundation for urban development. However, their effective implementation largely depends on the quality of adaptation at the national and local levels, as well as on institutional capacity and governance practices.

The analysis conducted in the Georgian context shows that, although sustainable development principles are formally integrated into a number of strategic documents, their practical implementation is characterized by systemic deficiencies. A significant gap between international commitments and actual urban policy was identified, particularly in the areas of spatial planning, housing policy, urban mobility, and environmental governance. This “implementation gap” is caused by both legislative and institutional weaknesses and by limited financial and administrative resources.

The study also confirms that urban development in Georgia is characterized by strong territorial asymmetry. Excessive economic and demographic concentration in the capital city, on the one hand, ensures economic dynamism, but on the other hand creates systemic sustainability risks. The relative underdevelopment of regional cities reinforces social and spatial inequality, which contradicts the inclusive principles of sustainable development.

The assessment of sustainable development implementation revealed imperfections in the monitoring and indicator system. Several important areas, such as housing affordability, urban poverty, the quality of green spaces, and the management of climate risks are either inadequately measured or not included at all in the national statistical system. This significantly complicates the evaluation of policy effectiveness and the adoption of evidence-based decisions.

The analysis of the urban cases of Tbilisi and Kutaisi shows that the local adaptation of sustainable urban development depends on the scale of governance, institutional flexibility, and the quality of local initiatives. The case of Kutaisi confirms that innovative and integrated approaches can be implemented in relatively small cities, whereas in the capital city the process is complicated by implementation difficulties and a diversity of competing interests. This conclusion underscores the need for decentralized, locally tailored policies.

The research results confirm that ensuring sustainable urban development in Georgia requires not only formal compliance with international frameworks, but also the strengthening of their substantive integration into national and municipal policies. Particular importance should be given to improving the legislative framework, enhancing institutional coordination, developing data-based monitoring systems, and strengthening the social dimension of urban policy.

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are proposed in order to enhance the effectiveness of sustainable urban development in Georgia:

- The legislation regulating spatial planning and urban development should be reviewed and substantively harmonised with sustainable development principles, particularly with the goals and targets of Sustainable Development Goal 11 (“Sustainable Cities and Communities”). The law should clearly reflect an integrated approach to the social, economic, and environmental components of sustainability.

- Municipal institutional and financial capacities should be strengthened in order to support the implementation of sustainable urban development. Local governments should be granted greater autonomy and resources to plan and implement long-term urban development strategies.
- A national monitoring system aligned with SDG 11 (“Sustainable Cities and Communities”) should be established, based on reliable, regular, and locally disaggregated data. It is recommended to strengthen urban statistics in areas such as housing affordability, urban poverty, green spaces, and climate risks.
- Urban policy should place particular emphasis on improving housing conditions for vulnerable groups, expanding affordable housing, and reducing urban inequality. This direction should be regarded as a fundamental prerequisite for sustainable development.
- The development of regional cities should be actively promoted in order to reduce excessive economic and demographic concentration in the capital. A decentralised urban development policy would contribute both to economic balance and to greater social and spatial equity.
- Climate change risks must be integrated into urban planning and infrastructure development, including through the expansion of green infrastructure and the use of ecosystem-based solutions.

The findings of this research confirm that ensuring sustainable urban development in Georgia requires not only formal alignment with international frameworks, but also the strengthening of their substantive integration into national and municipal governance. Special emphasis should be placed on improving the legislative base, enhancing institutional coordination, developing evidence-based monitoring systems, and strengthening the social dimension of urban policy.

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