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# **EVALUATION OF GENDER EQUALITY POLICIES OF MUNICIPALITIES**

**PUBLIC DEFENDER OF GEORGIA  
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**Author of the Research: Mariam Janiashvili**

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# INTRODUCTION

Gender equality and the equal, effective and full enjoyment of all rights and freedoms by women and men is one of the important milestones of international human rights law and is directly related to human dignity and legal subjectivity. However, women still face barriers to equal participation in all spheres of life. Women belonging to different groups (e.g., representatives of religious and/or ethnic minorities, women with disabilities, the elderly, children, LBT women) are in an even more acute situation, they are subject to double discrimination.

Due to its systemic and complex nature, gender equality cannot be achieved only through creating formal, gender-neutral instruments and mechanisms (including legislation, policy documents), but by implementing policies that take into account the existing economic, social and cultural inequalities that women face.<sup>1</sup>

There is an obligation towards gender equality and gender mainstreaming in relation to all branches and levels of the state, and the exclusion of any level from this process leads to a significant failure of the policy, however, it is impossible not to emphasize the special role and functions of local government in this regard. Unlike the central government, municipalities have/should have more information on the needs and challenges facing residents of their territory, in relation to various aspects, including gender equality, and the possible effect of measures to be taken in this regard. Considering the above mentioned, one of the main focuses of the state policy in the direction of gender equality and gender mainstreaming should be the support of municipalities and their proper strengthening.

About five years have passed since the municipalities started to form the relevant institutional framework in the direction of gender equality and mainstreaming. In particular, since 2017, measures such as the creation and approval of an action plan on gender equality issues, the implementation of gender equality councils and the appointment of persons responsible for gender equality issues have been implemented. The formal existence of the mentioned measures is definitely important, but it is not enough to ensure gender equality and gender mainstreaming.

The purpose of this report is to evaluate the municipal policy in the direction of gender equality and gender mainstreaming, to analyze the steps taken by local authorities and to identify the challenges overcoming of which will be important in order to eliminate gender inequality and gender-insensitive approaches.

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1. The Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, General comment No. 16, The equal right of men and women to the enjoyment of all economic, social and cultural rights (art. 3 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights), 2005, par. 8.

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The evaluation of the existing policy in the direction of gender equality and gender mainstreaming at the municipal level was carried out on the basis of the Organic Law of Georgia “On the Public Defender of Georgia”, through desk and qualitative research methods.

Based on the content of the issue of gender mainstreaming and gender equality at the municipal level, several research directions were identified within the scope of the study:

- the functioning of gender equality councils at the municipal level and the main features of their activities;
- The question of validity of existing policy documents in the field of gender equality at the municipal level;
- Issues of development of sex-segregated data, as well as budgeting;
- Legal status of women and the existence of supporting mechanisms at the municipal level;
- Involvement and participation of women in the decision-making process.

Based on the content of the study topics, the research process included both desk and qualitative research. Within the framework of the desk study, the relevant international standards (both hard and so-called “soft” law norms) targeted at existing obligations in the direction of gender equality and gender mainstreaming, especially in terms of the functions of local authorities, were analyzed. On the other hand, the legislative, political and institutional frameworks for gender equality and gender mainstreaming at the local level were analyzed. As part of the desk research, secondary sources relevant to the topic, including reports and studies, were processed along with legislative and policy documents.

As part of the desk research, the Office of the Public Defender of Georgia requested and processed information from all municipalities of Georgia in order to better analyze the policies and practices of local authorities in the direction of gender equality and gender mainstreaming. Unfortunately, the Office received information from only 21 municipalities,<sup>2</sup> that is the limitation of the research in the process of analyzing the overall picture.

In addition, as mentioned above, the process of studying the municipal policy of gender equality and gender mainstreaming also took into account the implementation of qualitative research. On the basis of a pre-prepared questionnaire, the representatives of the Public Defender of Georgia visited all municipalities of Georgia and talked in the format of a focus group:

- With the members of the Gender Equality Councils of Municipalities - in total, interviews were conducted with 550 members of the Gender Equality Council of all municipalities of Georgia (except Senaki Municipality, where the Gender Equality Council was not functioning at the time of research);
- With women living in municipalities - a total of 427 women living in all municipalities of Georgia were interviewed.

In order to receive and process complete information during the study, the representatives of the Public Defender’s Office additionally interviewed the following actors:

- Head of the Human Rights Secretariat of the Georgian Government Administration;
- Head of the Permanent Parliamentary Council for Gender Equality;
- Deputy Executive Director of the National Association of Local Self-Governments of Georgia (hereinafter - “NALAG”).

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2. The municipalities of Lanchkhuti, Chokhatauri, Baghdati, Rustavi, Chiatura, Dedoplistskaro, Sighnaghi, Kvareli, Akhmeta, Gurjaani, Aspindza, Akhalkalaki, Borjomi, Ninotsminda, Gori, Kareli, Bolnisi, Gardabani, Dmanisi, Tetritskaro, Marneuli.

# MAIN FINDINGS

## **Institutional framework and policy measures for ensuring gender equality:**

- Municipal gender equality councils, as well as municipal gender equality policy documents are important mechanisms in the direction of gender equality and gender mainstreaming. The council operates in practically all municipalities. The only exception is the municipality of Senaki, where the council was not functioning at the moment of research;
- At the moment of focus-group meetings with the Gender Equality Councils, gender equality action plans were not approved in numerous municipalities (e.g., Senaki, Chkhorotsku, Kutaisi, Dedoplistskaro, Lagodekhi, Kvareli, Baghdati, Chiatura, Tianeti, Kazbegi, Mtskheta, Mestia, Tsalka, Tetrtskaro and Khobi municipalities).
- Unlike the action plans elaborated in previous years, the current action plans for gender equality were based on the “Guidelines for the development of municipal action plans for gender equality”, which, in turn, was developed by NALAG in 2021 with the support of the UN Women Georgia. Taking this into account, action plans have been refined and adapted more to local needs.
- Significant part of the municipalities has not implemented the assessment/analysis of the implementation of gender equality action plans, mostly due to the absence of a relevant formal mechanism in this direction;
- There are still many barriers to the effective functioning of gender equality councils, including in-depth knowledge and expertise of decision-makers and executives, financial and human resources, and sensitivity to gender equality issues of municipal decision-makers. The above-mentioned challenges ultimately have a dramatic negative impact on ensuring gender equality and gender mainstreaming at the local level;
- One of the barriers to the work of gender equality councils is the ongoing political processes in the municipality. For example, such a factor can be considered a change in the composition of the council as a result of elections and political changes, as a result of which institutional memory is lost, as well as the transition of issues related to the gender equality action plan and policy to the background by the political processes in the municipal council;
- To ensure the effectiveness of the work of the Municipal Gender Equality Councils, it is essential to ensure the openness and inclusiveness of its activities, which is related to challenges in individual territorial units. For example, women in several locations reported that they had never heard of the council and/or had never had a cooperative relationship with them;
- In 2022, active cooperation between the municipalities and the Parliament’s Gender Equality Council began, which, hopefully, will contribute to the formation and implementation of a uniform, coordinated and needs-oriented policy in the direction of gender equality in the future. On the other hand, the future cooperation framework of municipalities with the inter-agency commission working on issues of gender equality, violence against women and domestic violence is still unclear; In the research process, the necessity of systematic and systematic retraining of the members of the Gender Equality Council and the employees of the municipalities was revealed, including regarding gender equality, women’s rights, gender mainstreaming;
- The majority of municipal gender equality councils indicated that they do not have mechanisms to respond to misogynistic/sexist and/or homophobic statements made by officials against equality;

- As the research revealed, municipalities rely on information received from different sources during policy development. For most of them, the challenge is the implementation of research and the processing of statistical data, which creates an important barrier in the direction of development and implementation of evidence-based policies, including relevant documents and services;
- A significant part of gender equality councils of municipalities indicates that sex-segregated data is not collected. The members of the Council of Municipalities mentioned the necessity of retraining and qualification raising in this part;
- Insufficient financial resources are one of the barriers to the implementation of gender equality policy measures. Only a few municipalities have budgeted directly allocated for gender equality. Council members emphasize the importance of providing knowledge and human resources to develop a gender-sensitive budget.

**The human rights situation of women at the municipal level and their involvement in the decision-making process:**

- Research shows that most women across the country do not have information on their support services, including the services offered by the municipalities. Along with awareness, a common problem is the sustainability of services, which should go beyond one-time cash payments;
- During the research process, women living in several municipalities indicated the trend of migration and the practice of feminization of migration as an already widely spread last resort aimed at physical survival;
- In terms of women's economic empowerment, a number of barriers have been identified, which require a response from the state, including household and caring work, problems related to transport access, language barriers for representatives of ethnic minorities, challenges related to access professional education, to access to pre-school educational institutions, as well as limited access to land;
- Violence against women and family is still one of the important challenges in the reality of Georgia. Unfortunately, the country does not meet this challenge with sustainable and effective services and mechanisms. Despite the existence of services at the central level as well as in part of municipalities, the temporary and/or one-time nature of these services is problematic, as well as meeting the necessary criteria for inclusion in the service (such as the fact of registration in the municipality and/or the fact of granting of a relevant status by state institutions (the court, the Ministry of Internal Affairs and/or the group determining the status of victims of domestic violence)), which creates the greatest barrier for women and creates a feeling of insecurity. The rate of women's awareness on response and support mechanisms is low; Research has shown that access to sexual and reproductive health services, as well as information, is an acute problem for women, especially in rural areas;
- The study showed that the employment of women, including in local self-government bodies, has increased, although a number of systemic barriers (undistributed domestic work, access to professional trainings, lack of sexual prevention mechanism, etc.) prevent their advancement and empowerment;
- Women living in different municipalities of Georgia indicated that the level of their involvement during meetings and decision-making in the municipality, including the development of the budget, is sharply low, which is due to many factors, including lack of awareness, lack of trust in the process, work at home, access to transport, stereotypical approaches. In this regard representatives of vulnerable groups face even greater challenges, including women with disabilities, representatives of ethnic/religious minorities, the elderly, IDP women, and others.

# 1. INTERNATIONAL STANDARDS IN THE FIELD OF GENDER EQUALITY AND GENDER MAINSTREAMING

In order to review the content of the existing standards in the field of gender equality and gender mainstreaming it is important to analyze international legal instruments mandatory for Georgia, as well as so-called soft law norms, developed within the framework of various international mechanisms.

The substantive aspects of the mentioned issues are emphasized by a number of international instruments, including documents developed within the framework of the United Nations, the Council of Europe, and the International Labor Organization. As an example we can name such instruments as the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, The Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence Against Women and Domestic Violence (Istanbul Convention), the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, as well as the Equal Remuneration Convention adopted under the auspices of the International Labor Organization (#100), Convention on Discrimination in the Field of Work and Employment (No. 111), Convention on Workers with Family Responsibilities (No. 156), Convention on Maternity Protection (No. 183) and Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work.<sup>3</sup>

Considering their importance, issues of gender equality and mainstreaming have also become part of the UN Sustainable Development Goals. According to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, states must achieve such important tasks as, for example, prohibiting all forms of discrimination against women, ensuring equal and effective participation of women in the political, economic and public areas and equal opportunities for promotion and leadership, ensuring equal access for women to economic resources, social protection system or relevant infrastructure.<sup>4</sup>

One of the main documents in terms of gender equality and mainstreaming is the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, which was adopted in 1995 in the framework of Fourth World Conference on Women and which defines 12 priority areas to which states should pay special attention. Among the mentioned priority areas are violence against women, poverty, education and professional training, health care, economy, women's participation in the state governance and decision-making process, media outlets and etc.<sup>5</sup>

## 1.1. Gender equality and gender mainstreaming - content of international obligations

Numerous international agreements and organizations emphasize the importance of gender equality and gender mainstreaming. Among them are the instruments to which Georgia is a contracting state and their implementation is obligatory for our country.

In the field of gender equality and gender mainstreaming, first of all, the 1979 UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women should be mentioned, contracting states of

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3. Information available at web-page: <https://bit.ly/3Q7w5Ts>.

4. Information available at web-page: <https://bit.ly/3SV28bd>.

5. Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, 1995, par. 19; <https://bit.ly/30IFl8r>.



the convention, including Georgia, are committed to immediately implement a policy of eliminating discrimination against women by all available means.<sup>6</sup> For this purpose, the convention prescribes a number of important obligations, including the introduction of the principle of gender equality into the constitution and legislation, the introduction and implementation of legislation prohibiting discrimination against women, as well as, for the same purpose, in the direction of ensuring the functioning of the institutional framework, which, eventually, will bring gender equality not only at the formal level, but also in practice will eliminate the discrimination that exists against women.<sup>7</sup>

It should be emphasized that the convention indicates the obligation of states to implement a policy of gender equality and prohibition of discrimination against women in all fields - political, economic and cultural<sup>8</sup> - and in specific provisions indicates a number of measures to be implemented, in order to ensure equal involvement and participation of women in political and public life, education, labor and employment, healthcare, social protection, in other fields of economic and social life.<sup>9</sup>

A number of other international agreements developed under the auspices of the United Nations also refer to gender equality, including the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, and others. Following these instruments, various mechanisms, including UN committees and special procedures, address a number of states' obligations in this area, including the formal existence of legislation, policies and institutional frameworks and their effective implementation in practice. The mentioned obligations, along with other fields, refer to issues such as the existence of a mechanism for assessing the effectiveness and impact of measures implemented by the state in the direction of gender equality and gender mainstreaming, as well as the protection of gender equality in the enjoyment of any civil, political, social, economic and cultural rights, including, in the direction of ensuring labor and employment, social protection, health care, education rights.<sup>10</sup>

Along with the above-mentioned requirements, international standards unambiguously point to the need to take into account the needs of women representing various vulnerable groups by the state when working in the direction of gender equality and gender mainstreaming, including, for example, women with disabilities,<sup>11</sup>

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6. United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women, 1979, Art. 2.

7. *ibid*

8. *Ibid*, art. 3

9. *Ibid*, art. 7-13

10. see 1966 International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, art. 3; Human Rights Committee, General Comment no. 28, Article 3 (The equality of rights between men and women), (Replaces general comment No. 4), 2000, HRI/GEN/1/Rev.9, par. 3; 1966 International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, art. 3, 7; The Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, General comment no. 23, General comment no. 23 (2016) on the right to just and favorable conditions of work (article 7 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights), 2016, Par. 11, 13, 16, 17, 30, 47; The Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, General comment no. 16, The equal right of men and women to the enjoyment of all economic, social and cultural rights (art. 3 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights), 2005, par. 26, 27, 30; The Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, General comment no. 19, The Right to Social Security, 2007, par. 19; Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, General Recommendation No. 24: Article 12 of the Convention (Women and Health), 1999, par. 31; The Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, General comment no. 22 on the right to sexual and reproductive health (article 12 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights), 2016, par. 25-28.

11. The Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, General comment no. 5: Persons with disabilities, 1994, par. 19. 2006 UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, Preamble, Art. 6; Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, General comment no. 3 (2016) on women and girls with disabilities, CRPD/C/GC/3, 2016.

the elderly,<sup>12</sup> women living in rural areas,<sup>13</sup> as well as women representing ethnic minorities.<sup>14</sup>

While talking about gender equality, the Committee on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women refers to the fact that purely programmatic or legislative approaches cannot ensure de facto gender equality. Considering the context, it might be necessary to implement encouraging measures for women, aiming to ensure their proper activation and representation, as well as the equal distribution of resources and power between women and men.<sup>15</sup> In this direction, it is worth to mention special measures intended to ensure gender equality, including the introduction of the quota system, in order to integrate women in the fields of education, economy, political life and employment.<sup>16</sup>

In addition, international standards refer to two other important obligations that have a significant impact on gender equality and gender mainstreaming policies:

Collection of statistical data - the state should process sex-segregated statistics in relation to any sector and make them available to interested persons/parties.<sup>17</sup> In the end, such statistics will help the state, on the one hand, to assess the impact of existing policies on women, and, on the other hand, to identify existing needs and plan targeted measures.

Guaranteeing participation - the mentioned direction is an integral part of the paradigm based on human rights. International standards clearly indicate that states should pay special attention to the participation of women in the process of decision-making, implementation, monitoring and evaluation by relevant agencies.<sup>18</sup> In this direction, one of the essential issues is the gender-sensitive budgeting process.<sup>19</sup>

## 1.2. The role of municipalities in ensuring gender mainstreaming and gender equality

The role of local government in the direction of gender equality and gender mainstreaming is very important. As mentioned above, the effective involvement and participation of women in any area of life is impossible without the participation of the governing bodies at the local level. Moreover, often, municipalities are the relevant actors whose main functions include the development and implementation of social and economic empowerment, infrastructural programs and services for the local population and ensuring their availability,

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12. The Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, General comment No. 6, The economic, social and cultural rights of older persons, 1995, par. 21; Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, General Recommendation No. 27 on Older Women and Protection of their Human Rights, CEDAW/C/GC/27, 2010, par. 10.

13. United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women, 1979, Art. 14; Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, General Recommendation No. 34 (2016) on the rights of rural women, CEDAW/C/GC/34, 2016, para. 35.

14. Report of the Independent Expert on minority issues, Rita Izsák, A/HRC/25/56, 2014, par. 50.

15. Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, General Recommendation No. 25: Article 4, paragraph 1, of the Convention (temporary special measures), 2004, par. 8.

16. Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, General Recommendation No. 5: Temporary Special Measures, 1988.

17. Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, General recommendation No. 9: Statistical data concerning the situation of women, 1989.

18. The Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, General comment No. 16, The equal right of men and women to the enjoyment of all economic, social and cultural rights (art. 3 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights), 2005, par. 37.

19. Report of the Working Group on the issue of discrimination against women in law and in practice, A/HRC/35/29, 2017, par. 31.

in the content of which the principle of gender equality and gender perspectives should be introduced and implemented.

The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action sets important standards for the role of local governments. The instrument indicates that all levels of government should contribute to the empowerment and advancement of women, and to this end, develop, implement, and oversee gender-sensitive and effective policies and programs.<sup>20</sup>

However, the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, among other things, emphasizes the importance of municipalities in a number of areas for the protection of women's rights. These include violence against women and girls and appropriate support for victims of violence, ensuring women's equal access to education, health care, real estate ownership, credit, capital, natural resources and development programs, as well as women's access to housing infrastructure, water, energy resources and others.<sup>21</sup>

On the other hand, the Committee on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women indicates the need for effective implementation of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women by all levels of government, including municipalities. The Committee also emphasizes the need for sustained support in this process by all relevant agencies, including local authorities, including the provision of sufficient financial, human and technical resources.<sup>22</sup>

Additionally, the committee considers the issue of coordination between different levels of government as one of the important directions of the working process in the direction of gender equality and gender mainstreaming.<sup>23</sup> According to the committee, in order to achieve the set goals and tasks, inter-agency coordination, including between local and central governments, should be systematic and institutionalized.<sup>24</sup> One of the important instruments in the direction of gender equality and gender mainstreaming at the local level is the European Charter "On Equality of Women and Men in Local Life", which was created in 2006 within the framework of the Council of European Municipalities and Regions and which is signed by 20 municipalities of Georgia.<sup>25</sup> The document indicates the important role that local authorities have in the direction of strengthening gender equality among the population and defines six main principles for local and regional governments, which are relevant for their activities in this field:<sup>26</sup>

- **Equality between women and men is a fundamental right** - this principle implies the elimination of any kind of discrimination by local authorities in all areas of their activities;
- **In order to ensure equality between women and men, it is necessary to fight the problem of**

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20. Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, 1995, par. 19; <https://bit.ly/30IFl8r>.

21. *ibid*, par. 80, 110, 125, 166, 256.

22. Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, Concluding observations on the combined eighth and ninth periodic reports of Sweden, CEDAW/C/SWE/CO/8-9, 2016, par. 19.

23. Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, concluding observations on the ninth periodic report of Mexico, CEDAW/C/MEX/CO/9, 2018, par. 15; Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, Concluding observations on the combined fifth and sixth periodic reports of Estonia, CEDAW/C/EST/CO/5-6, 2016, par. 13.

24. *ibid*

25. Lagodekhi (2019), Kvareli (2020), Akhmet (2020), Tianeti (2020), Gardabani (2020), Rustavi (2019), Mtskheta (2020), Gori (2020), Bolnisi (2020), Oni (2021), Municipalities of Aspindze (2020), Ambrolauri (2020), Tsageri (2020), Tskaltubo (2020), Kutaisi (2019), Khobi (2021), Senaki (2020), Lanchkhuti (2021), Ozurgeti (2019), Poti (2020), Ninotsminda (2020).

26. European Charter on Equality between Women and Men in Local Life, 2006, <https://bit.ly/3Oc3Jlu>.

**discrimination** - the principle refers to the consideration of issues of discrimination based on different affiliations when fighting gender inequality;

- **The balanced participation of women and men in the decision-making process is a prerequisite for a democratic society** - the local government has the obligation to implement measures to protect the ensure balance and equal participation of women and men in the decision-making process;
- **Eliminating gender stereotypes is of fundamental importance for achieving equality between women and men** - local authorities should promote the elimination of stereotypes and obstacles that cause gender inequality in various spheres of life;
- **Integrating a gender perspective in all activities of local and regional authorities is necessary to strengthen equality between women and men** - the mentioned principle implies consideration of the gender perspective in the process of developing legislation or policy, including through usage of gender mainstreaming and gender budgeting.
- **Relevantly ensured action plans and programs are mandatory tool to increase equality between women and men** - local authorities should develop equality action plans and programs, which will be provided with adequate financial and human resources.

In addition to general principles, the document envisages the obligations of local authorities in a number of fields, including education, health, social protection, mobility, urban planning, economic development and environmental protection, which eventually ensures gender equality among population.

## 2. OVERVIEW OF RELEVANT NATIONAL STANDARDS

Along with the international standards, it is important to overview the existing standards at the national level. The importance of gender equality is primarily emphasized by the Constitution of Georgia, which indicates that the state provides equal rights and opportunities for men and women and takes special measures to ensure essential equality between them and eliminate inequality.<sup>27</sup>

The principle of equality defined by the Constitution is the basis of the Law of Georgia “On Gender Equality”, which aims to ensure the inadmissibility of discrimination in all areas of public life, to create appropriate conditions for the realization of equal rights, freedoms and opportunities for women and men, to promote the prevention and elimination of discrimination.<sup>28</sup>

Along with the mentioned law, important national instruments for ensuring gender equality are the laws “On elimination of all forms of discrimination” and “On prevention of violence against women and/or domestic violence, protection and assistance for victims of violence”.<sup>29</sup>

In addition, it worth to mention that the Government of Georgia nationalized the goals and indicators provided for in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and elaborated and approved the corresponding action plan, one of the directions of which is to achieve gender equality and improve the opportunities of all women and girls.<sup>30</sup> The action plan includes specific/national indicators and target indicators for Georgia, among which are:

- Existence of legislation in accordance with international standards in order to promote, enforce and monitor equality and non-discrimination based on gender;
- Proportional number of seats occupied by women in parliament and local government;
- Proportional number of directly elected female mayors;
- Proportional number of appointed female state representatives;
- Proportional number of women in managing positions;
- The share of women in I and II rank civil servant positions;
- Proportional number of women in decision-making positions in the judicial system (positions in regional/city courts, appeals courts and the Supreme Court);
- Difference in salaries based on gender;
- Proportional amount of the population living in rural areas, by gender, who have ownership or guaranteed rights to agricultural land;
- Existence of a legal framework that ensures equal rights for women to own and/or control land.

An important policy document is the National Human Rights Protection Strategy of Georgia (for 2014-2020), one of the strategic directions of which was to ensure gender equality, protect women’s rights and fight against domestic violence.<sup>31</sup> The strategy covered five tasks:

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27. Constitution of Georgia, art 11

28. Law of Georgia “On Gender Equality”, Art. 1-2

29. Law of Georgia “On Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination”; Law of Georgia “On prevention of violence against women and/or domestic violence, protection and assistance to victims of violence”.

30. Information available at web-page: <https://bit.ly/3ykjvdz>

31. Strategic direction #14

- Implementation of effective measures to ensure gender equality in all areas of public life, especially in political activities and the decision-making process;
- Quick and effective response to any fact of violation of gender equality;
- Ensuring full compliance with international standards of protection and assistance mechanisms and legal framework for women against domestic violence;
- Raising the awareness of people employed in the public sector and society on the issues of gender equality and domestic violence;
- Ensuring access to legal protection, psycho-social rehabilitation and shelter for victims of violence.

Currently, the Parliament of Georgia is considering a new strategy for the protection of human rights, which covers the years 2022-2030 and one of the priority directions of which is still the protection of gender equality. Additionally, the Government of Georgia is planning to approve the action plan, which will outline the steps to be taken by the executive government in the coming years, inter alia, in the direction of gender equality, in the process of implementing the human rights protection strategy. In parallel with the above-mentioned, in October 2022, the Government of Georgia approved the 2022-2024 Action Plan on Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence and Measures to be Implemented for the Protection of Victims (Survivors)<sup>32</sup> and the 2022-2024 Georgian National Action Plan for Implementation of the UN Security Council Resolutions on Women, Peace and Security.<sup>33</sup> The documents mainly concern the central government, however, in the thematic directions, it also provides for the creation of a cooperation mechanism with municipalities. For example, the Action Plan on Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence and Measures to be Implemented for the Protection of Victims (Survivors) provides for the creation of a cooperation mechanism with municipalities on the issues of violence against women and domestic violence, while National Action Plan for Implementation of the UN Security Council Resolutions on Women, Peace and Security underlines the role of municipalities, as partner entities of the central government, in relation to a number of activities, mostly concerning meetings with the population and implementation of awareness-raising measures.

32. № 509 Ordinance of the Government of Georgia of 26 October 2022 “on Approval of the 2022-2024 Action Plan on Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence and Measures to be Implemented for the Protection of Victims (Survivors)”.

33. № 510 Ordinance of the Government of Georgia of 26 October 2022 “on Approval of 2022-2024 Georgian National Action Plan for Implementation of the UN Security Council Resolutions on Women, Peace and Security”.

### 3. OVERVIEW OF THE NATIONAL INSTITUTIONAL MECHANISMS

Along with national legislative and policy documents, the country has developed institutional mechanisms over the years, the main goal of which is to ensure gender equality and empower women. Such mechanisms at the level of the central government include the Permanent Council on Gender Equality at the level of the Parliament, which was established in 2017,<sup>34</sup> and the Interagency Commission working on the issues of gender equality, violence against women and domestic violence at the level of the executive authority, the statute of which was approved by the Government of Georgia in 2017.<sup>35</sup>

Despite the importance of central government in policy elaboration and implementation, local governments have an essential role in gender equality and gender mainstreaming. This issue is emphasized in the law of Georgia “On Gender Equality”, according to which municipal bodies, within the competence, should develop and implement measures to ensure the detection and elimination of discrimination on site.<sup>36</sup>

Municipalities also have the obligation to develop budgets, socio-economic development priorities, municipal programs and plans in a way excluding any form of discrimination.<sup>37</sup> On the other hand, the law refers to the obligation of the central government, within the competence of the agencies, to support the municipalities in their activities in order to avoid discrimination and to protect universally recognized human rights and freedoms.<sup>38</sup>

In addition, according to the Local Self-Government Code, the municipality is authorized to carry out activities in the direction of promoting gender equality, preventing violence against women and/or domestic violence, as well as protecting and assisting victims of violence against women and/or domestic violence. The mentioned function is not a delegated or own authority of the municipality, but gives the local government the opportunity to regulate issues on its own initiative, the resolution of which does not represent the authority of another government body according to Georgian legislation and is not prohibited by law.<sup>39</sup>

For the purpose of systematic work on gender issues and coordination with the Permanent Parliamentary Council on Gender Equality of the Parliament of Georgia, councils (Sakrebulo) in municipalities are creating a Municipal Gender Equality Councils. Together with the council, for the purpose of studying gender issues in the municipality, planning and coordinating relevant measures, the mayor of the municipality determines the civil servant responsible for gender equality issues in the municipality.<sup>40</sup>

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34. “Statute of the Permanent Parliamentary Council on Gender Equality” approved by the order of the Chairman of the Parliament of Georgia No. 41/3 of February 16, 2017 (18.06.2019 No. 1/223/19), <https://bit.ly/3gaARnr>.

35. Resolution No. 286 of the Government of Georgia of June 12, 2017 “On the creation of the interdepartmental commission working on the issues of gender equality, violence against women and domestic violence and approval of the statute”.

36. Georgian Law on Gender Equality, art.13

37. *ibid*

38. *ibid*

39. Organic Law of Georgia “Local Self-Government Code of Georgia”, art. 16.

40. Georgian Law on Gender Equality, art.13



## 4. ENSURING GENDER EQUALITY AND GENDER MAINSTREAMING IN MUNICIPALITIES - MAIN TRENDS

### 4.1. Functioning of Gender Equality Councils - key achievements and challenges

Regardless of the standards existing on international or national levels, there are many challenges in the practice of municipalities, which create a significant barrier in the direction of ensuring gender equality and gender mainstreaming locally. The research identified such problems as the absence of policy documents and/or the fact that they are not research-based, the institutional and expert weakness of gender equality councils at the local level and the need for their strengthening and support, the ambiguity of the framework for cooperation with mechanisms existing at central level, and etc.<sup>41</sup>

#### 4.1.1. Functioning of gender equality councils

The Gender Equality Councils formally exist in all municipalities. The only exception was the municipality of Senaki, where the council was not functioning for the moment of research.<sup>42</sup> In December 2022, the Gender Equality Council of Senaki Municipality resumed its functioning.

The activities of gender equality councils of municipalities have been associated with significant challenges for the years. The composition of the councils, the issues of awareness on the legal status of women, the absence of action plans or, in case of their existence the issue of implementation, as well as the cooperation with the existing mechanisms at the central level, were problematic.<sup>43</sup>

In addition, as the members of the gender equality council of several municipalities mentioned, over the years there were many questions regarding the need and necessity of the council, the attitude towards its activities and functions was frequently not serious and/or nihilistic.<sup>44</sup>

*“When we started working, even the word gender itself was regarded as funny. Now we have passed this stage, now the needs of women have been identified, [even though] we started working in the framework of the council from 2017.”*

*Member of the Gender Equality Council of Khulo Municipality*

In case of complaints from citizens, within the scope of its competence, the Gender Equality Council itself takes measures or addresses the responsible agencies and/or organizations with petitions. For example, the members of the gender equality council of Telavi municipality mentioned that the problem of addresses in the villages was solved by their efforts.<sup>45</sup> The members of the Gender Equality Council of Akhmeta and Ninotsminda municipalities noted that, an amendment was introduced in the local budget, based on their initiative, which defined the mechanism of financial assistance for women victims of violence. Many municipal councils indicate future goals and initiatives, including the creation of services, as well as the proceeding of statistics, which they intend to present to the decision-making entities of the municipality in the future.

41. Interview with the head of the Human Rights Secretariat of the Government of Georgia.

42. Interview with the representative of NALAG

43. Interview with the Chairman of the Permanent Council for Gender Equality of the Parliament.

44. Focus group with members of gender equality councils of Batumi and Van municipalities.

45. Focus group with members of Telavi Municipality Gender Equality Council.



In addition, during the process of study, a number of systemic challenges hindering the activities of the council were identified. One of these challenges is the impact of political processes in the municipality on the work of the Council. For example, according to the members of the Gender Equality Council of Borjomi Municipality, the members of the council alter during elections and political changes, in the absence of institutional memory, the new council sets new goals, while the old goals are still unfulfilled, which ultimately creates a chaotic process. On the other hand, the representatives of Abasha municipality noted that the composition of the council needs to be renewed, however, active work could not be carried out regarding structural and substantive issues, because at the time of conducting of the study, the chairman of the council has not been elected, and in the process of creation of the council municipality issues related to the gender equality action plan and policy could not be discussed.

Other municipalities also talked about existing challenges related to the functioning of the council, for example:

- The representatives of Tetrtskaro municipality mentioned that a problem in the work of the council is the lack of free time of the members from their official duties.
- The Gender Equality Council of Kutaisi Municipality referred that for the effective work of the given platform, it is necessary to arrange a number of organizational issues, which only relies on enthusiasm and creates the need to reimburse the position of the secretary of the Council.

A large number of members can become an obstacle for the effectiveness of the work of the council. Such is a case of Khashuri municipality, where gender equality council consists of 147 members. Despite the fact that the board members did not mention challenges that might accompany the mobilization of the full council, the issue of effective engagement, participation of all members and flexibility of the board itself at such a scale platform is under significant question.

In order to ensure the effectiveness of the work of the Municipal Gender Equality Council, it is essential to ensure the openness and inclusiveness of its activities, which is related to the challenges in individual territorial units. For example, women living in the Khulo municipality indicated that the council's activities are not open and transparent, and that it does not have any influence on policy making at the local level, which is a significant problem.<sup>46</sup> The challenges of participation and involvement in gender equality councils were also mentioned by women living in the municipalities of Lanchkhuti, Samtredia, Tianeti, Mtskheta, Abasha, Tsalenjikha, Tetrtskaro, Kaspi, Kareli and Khashuri and they underlined that they never heard about the council and/or had never had a collaborative relationship with them.<sup>47</sup>

Representatives of gender equality councils of some municipalities (Kutaisi, Keda, Dusheti, Akhaltsikhe, Khobi, Batumi and Poti municipalities) indicate that representatives of non-governmental organizations are enrolled as their members.<sup>48</sup> Bringing them in as members of the board was an important step forward for the more effective implementation of the platform's activities, as such organizations, on the one hand, put the needs of different groups more clearly on the agenda of the board's activities, and on the other hand,

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46. Focus group with women living in Khulo municipality.

47. Focus group with women living in the municipalities of Lanchkhuti, Samtredia, Tianeti, Mtskheta, Abasha, Tsalenjikha, Tetrtskaro, Kaspi, Kareli, Khashuri.

48. Focus group with members of gender equality councils of Kutaisi, Keda, Dusheti, Akhaltsikhe, Khobi, Batumi and Poti municipalities.

they carry out researches which boards could not afford financially by themselves.<sup>49</sup> Some municipalities noted that a media representatives are included in their councils.<sup>50</sup>

However, some municipalities<sup>51</sup> (municipalities of Khulo, Dusheti, Kvareli, Kazbegi, Lagodekhi, Sagarejo, Abasha, Mtskheta, Khashuri, Lentekhi, Ambrolauri, Mestia, Oni, Tsageri, Martvili, Aspindza, Dmanisi and Tetrtskaro) indicated that they have difficulties in cooperation with other actors - non-governmental organizations and/or the media, as they do not function in the territory of municipality and/or their number is drastically low.

#### **4.1.2. Basic needs of members of the Gender Equality Council**

In the process of ensuring gender equality and gender mainstreaming, the needs of municipalities and gender equality councils working at the local level, depending on working thematic are diverse. As the study identified, one of the main challenges for the municipal government is providing expert and sufficient financial resources.<sup>52</sup>

Members of numerous municipal Gender Equality Councils indicated that having knowledge and sensitivity in the field of gender equality and women's rights is particularly important for them.<sup>53</sup> However, within the framework of the study, challenges were identified in this direction. In particular, the representatives of the Gender Equality Council of particular municipalities have showed a stereotypical attitude towards some topics, including the lack of need for maternity leave for men (Akhmeta Municipality), the employment of men in kindergartens, as well as the prevention of family violence (Kharagauli Municipality). At the same time, the lack of awareness of the members of council was highlighted in a number directions, including the problem of sexual harassment (Akhalkalaki municipality).

*“For civil servants, it is necessary to learn something and change the existing mentality. The joke is often that we Georgians do not need to be taught how to respect women. When one says that we had King Tamar, we have a monument of Mother of Kartli, for me these jokes are an indication that the official is not competent and has no idea about gender equality.”*

*Member of Gender Equality Council  
of Shuakhevi Municipality*

*“The topic of gender has progressed so much that today you can hardly tell who is a woman and who is a man. I won't take away the remote controller from a woman, but if the food she started to cook spills out of the pot, you should tell her. I know how to respect a woman - a lion and a cub are equal.”*

*Member of the Gender Equality Council  
of Ambrolauri Municipality*

49. Focus group with the members of gender equality councils of Batumi and Poti municipalities.

50. Focus group with members of the gender equality council of Samtredia and Kutaisi municipalities.

51. For example, the municipalities of Khulo, Dusheti, Kvareli, Kazbegi, Lagodekhi, Sagarejo, Abasha, Mtskheta, Khashuri, Lentekhi, Ambrolauri, Mestia, Oni, Tsageri, Martvili, Aspindza, Dmanisi, Tetrtskaro.

52. Note: regarding financial resources and budgetary issues, see the present report, chapter. 4.2.3.

53. For example, a focus group with members of gender equality councils of Khulo, Lanchkhuti, Ozurgeti, Kobuleti and Chokhatauri municipalities.

The Chairman of the Permanent Council for Gender Equality of the Parliament also draws attention to the low level of awareness and points out that one of the main problems is the awareness of the members of the councils (especially new members) on “basic issues”.<sup>54</sup>

According to the representative of NALAG, in-depth and continuous trainings of the representatives of the Council is important and necessary.<sup>55</sup> The representatives of the municipalities mentioned that trainings are organized for the employees of self-government and members of the Gender Equality Council by local or international organization, as well as the Permanent Council for Gender Equality of the Parliament, but at the moment this is not a part of systematic trainings. Particular councils also referred to the thematic e-courses of the Office of the Public Defender as one of the important mechanisms of knowledge enhancement.<sup>56</sup>

On the other hand, it is worth emphasizing the challenges that the municipalities highlighted in this direction:

- Baghdati Municipality indicated that the retraining initiatives relate only the employees of the municipality and not the members of the Gender Equality Council;
- The representatives of gender equality councils of Lentekhi, Tsageri and Abasha Municipalities indicated that they have a need for trainings related to gender equality; However their retraining did not take place, mostly due to the scarcity of resources. That indicates the need to train not a part of the gender equality councils, but their entire composition;The municipalities of Batumi and Akhmeta talked about the lack of willingness of employees to be retrained and participate in trainings, although none of them indicated the reasons for this, which, among other things, could be due to traditional gender roles, women’s household and caring obligations;
- The municipalities of Zestafon, Tianeti and Chiatura indicated that the last trainings were conducted a few years ago, before the pandemic;
- Gender Equality Council of Tbilisi Municipality referred to the need for retraining and to the existing overlap in terms of funding between the Parliament and Tbilisi Councils however, the members of the Council did never address with the issue of retraining to the Council of Parliamentary.

While talking about the current challenges related to gender equality and women’s rights, the members of the Gender Equality Council mentioned that it is absolutely important to increase the knowledge and sensitivity of decision-makers.<sup>57</sup> Members of particular municipal councils have indicated that gender-insensitive, sexist and discriminative remarks by officials are common,<sup>58</sup> including among politically opposed Members of Parliament.<sup>59</sup>

In parallel with mentioned above, except some cases, representatives of Gender Equality Councils of almost all municipalities stated that they do not have mechanisms to respond to misogynistic/sexist and/or homophobic statements made by officials (who, in turn, are persons responsible for the planning and/or implementation of the relevant policy) in the municipality.<sup>60</sup> It should be noted that the majority

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54. Interview with the Chairman of the Permanent Council for Gender Equality of the Parliament.

55. Interview with NALAG representative.

56. Focus group with the members of gender equality councils of Telavi and Baghdati municipalities.

57. Focus group with members of Telavi Municipality Gender Equality Council.

58. Focus group with members of Gender equality councils of Lagodekhi and Kharagauli municipalities.

59. Focus group with members of the gender equality council of Lagodekhi and Kharagauli municipalities.

60. For example, a focus group with members of gender equality councils of Samtredia, Dedoplistskaro, Kobuleti, Ozurgeti, Chokhatauri,

of representatives of the municipalities also failed to recall such cases when the need to use response mechanisms arose.

One of the exceptions in this direction is Kutaisi Municipality, whose Gender Equality Council has indicated the possibility of imposing disciplinary responsibility in such cases; Also, Gender Equality Council of Lanchkhuti Municipality indicated that in such situations the Council meets and discusses the violation along with the Ethics Council. The Gender Equality Council of Gori Municipality emphasized that function to respond such kind of issues is provided to it by the statute and in such cases, it is limited to recommendations. Additionally, several other municipalities refer to the Code of Ethics and its regulation, including Tbilisi, Zugdidi, Baghdati and Shuakhevi municipalities.

Batumi municipality also has an interesting experience, its gender equality council members also noted that the council immediately expresses its position towards discriminatory statements - members agree on a common text on a communication platform created in social networks and then publish it.<sup>61</sup>

### **4.1.3. Cooperation of municipalities with the central government**

Considering diverse experience of municipalities in the direction of gender equality and gender mainstreaming, cooperation of local authorities with thematic platforms at the central level is of particular importance. Regardless of the importance of the cooperation of the existing mechanisms at the central and municipal level, it is essential for the authorities at both levels understand their functions and that the mentioned cooperation should be conducted not in the conditions of mutual subordination, but in the conditions of effective coordination.<sup>62</sup>

As identified in the study, municipalities have experience in mechanisms at the central level:

- *Permanent Council of Gender Equality of the Parliament*

As the chairman of the permanent platform notes, this year the council started coordinating with the municipal councils and received information about the problems and challenges that local bodies are facing.<sup>63</sup> The mentioned activity was mainly aimed to cover only the basic needs (mainly, action plans, budgeting and statistics directions). According to the Chairman of the Council, this year the Parliamentary Council took on a certain task of coordinating with donors and covering the needs of municipalities in this way, including the development of action plans.<sup>64</sup>

For the purpose of future communication and coordination, the Parliamentary Council held a meeting with most of the municipalities, introduced the activities of the Parliamentary Council and received information from them regarding their activities.<sup>65</sup> Additionally, a social network group was created with their participation, which helped to spread information more quickly between the parliamentary and municipal councils.<sup>66</sup>

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Khulo, Telavi, Lagodekhi, Kvareli, Sagarejo, Signaghi, Akhmeta and Kharagauli municipalities.

61. Focus group with members of the Gender Equality Council of Batumi Municipality.

62. Interview with NALAG representative

63. Interview with the Chairman of the Permanent Council for Gender Equality of the Parliament.

64. *ibid*

65. *ibid*

66. *ibid*

Next year, the Permanent Council on Gender Equality of the Parliament plans to be in constant coordination with the municipal councils and introduce new topics in the format of cooperation. The Chairman of the Council talked about two initiatives, in connection with which cooperation with the local authorities will be strengthened next year: 1. Proposing a model of sexual harassment mechanism, in order to introduce it at the local level; 2. Transferring women's rooms to the auxiliary units of gender councils.

- *Interagency commission working on issues of gender equality, violence against women and domestic violence*

According to the human rights secretariat of the government administration, the administration has cooperation and communication with the municipalities mainly within the framework of the Inter-agency Commission Working on Issues of Gender Equality, Violence against Women and Domestic Violence.<sup>67</sup> However, the members and advisors of the Gender Equality Council are not members of the above-mentioned inter-agency platform and therefore do not have the right to vote.

According to the human rights secretariat of the government administration, they had the most active cooperation with the municipalities during the development of 2022-2024 Action Plan on Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence and Measures to be Implemented for the Protection of Victims (Survivors) and the 2022-2024 Georgian National Action Plan for Implementation of the UN Security Council Resolutions on Women, Peace and Security, which mostly , meant participation of municipalities in the format of meetings with agencies during the development process of these documents.

In addition, in the conditions of decentralization, and of the need for uniform standards on gender policy, there was a need for closer cooperation between the central and municipal mechanisms. Taking this into account, a memorandum was signed between the government administration and NALAG in May 2022, which foresees for the cooperation of the government administration with local self-governments.<sup>68</sup> Despite the need, the representative of the human rights secretariat of the government administration notes that communication barriers exist due to the number of municipalities.

***“It is very difficult to gather 64 municipalities and talk face to face, and it is not effective either. We had tried before and there were so many of us, it was not productive. Our strategy is to thematically cooperate with those municipalities which, for example, focus on violence, IDPs, etc. and have good practices.”***  
***Head of the Human Rights Secretariat of the Government of Georgia***

The representative of the Secretariat of Human Rights also indicates that they plan to introduce the content of the government action plans to the municipalities, however, at this stage, the government administration and the inter-departmental committee do not have a specific, established vision in terms of future cooperation with the municipalities and involvement in the activities of the committee.<sup>69</sup>

Gender equality councils of municipalities are also talking about cooperation with the existing mechanisms at the central level. Municipalities indicate that they have experience of cooperation with one or both mechanisms at the central level, mainly in the process of developing action plans, as well as in the direction of trainings/retraining, requesting/sharing information.

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67. Interview with the head of the Human Rights Secretariat of the Government of Georgia.

68. *ibid*

69. *ibid*

It should be noted that a significant part of the gender equality councils has a much more active cooperation with the Parliament's Permanent Council for Gender Equality. The members of the councils of certain municipalities (for example, Telavi, Gurjaani, Dedoplistskaro, Telavi, Lagodekhi, Sagarejo, Signaghi, Mtskheta and Gardabani municipalities) cannot recall cases of cooperation with the inter-agency commission on the level of Government Administration working on issues of gender equality, violence against women and domestic violence. Additionally, it is noteworthy, that NALAG, which is an umbrella organization of municipalities, takes part in the format of an Inter-agency Commission, which, in turn, implies the involvement of municipalities.

## 4.2. Formation of policies related to gender equality in municipalities

Working on issues of gender equality and gender mainstreaming requires from municipalities to create mechanisms that are adapted to the local context, consider the barriers faced by the population and are sensitive to the needs and challenges of vulnerable groups.

As the research revealed, municipalities rely on information from different sources when developing policies. For most of them, the challenge is to carry out their own complex, systematic and systemic (and not fragmented) research, which would focus on the problematic issues in the field of gender equality and women's rights and to process statistical data, which creates an undefeatable barrier in the direction of development and implementation of evidence-based policies, including relevant documents and services. As a result of interviews with gender equality councils of municipalities, the following ways of collecting information and data during policy development were identified:

- The representatives of the Gender Equality Council of the municipalities of Kutaisi, Rustavi, Kvareli, Signaghi, Dedoplistskaro, Lagodekhi, Sagarejo, Baghdati, Chiaturi, Chokhatauri, Shuakhevi, Vani, Khoni, Dusheti, Kazbegi, Aspindza, Akhaltsikhe, Borjomi, Kaspi, Ninotsminda, Gardabani and Marneuli indicated, that various actors (including social services, with the support of Members of municipal councils, non-governmental organizations) carry out inquiries in order to identify problems;
- Representatives of Kutaisi, Rustavi, Tskaltubo, Ozurgeti, Shuakhevi, Sagarejo, Terjola, Sachkhere, Chiatura, Khulo, Vani, Chokhatauri, Khoni, Dusheti, Kazbegi, Lentekhi, Ambrolauri, Mestia, Oni, Tsageri, Martvili, Tsalenjikha, Adigeni, Akhalkalaki, Akhaltsikhe, Gardabani, Dmanisi, Tsalka, Tetrtskaro, Bolnisi, Marneuli, Gori and Kaspi municipalities emphasized that they get information about existing problems through meeting with the population/participating in village meetings;
- Representatives of Tbilisi, Kutaisi, Batumi, Sachkhere, Tskaltubo, Terjola, Signaghi, Tkibuli, Shuakhevi, Dusheti, Kazbegi, Lentekhi, Aspindza and Bolnisi municipalities indicated that they receive information on the problems as a result of complaints received from population;
- 10 municipalities of Georgia (Keda, Shuakhevi, Kharagauli, Khashuri, Oni, Bolnisi, Rustavi, Kazbegi, Sagarejo and Lagodekhi municipalities) are involved in the project supported by GIZ - "Accountable member of municipal council for a strong democracy", which, along with various activities, foresees operation of unified portal ([www.chemisakrebulo.ge](http://www.chemisakrebulo.ge)), placing various types of public information on the electronic platform, giving citizens the opportunity to schedule meetings, publicly ask questions and/or express their opinions through the portal;
- The representatives of Akhmeta, Dedoplistskaro, Lagodekhi and Tianeti municipalities indicated that they have not/cannot carry out studies to identify the problems.

Along with the need for information and statistics, participants of the study emphasized the importance of political will and sensitivity to gender equality issues as essential elements for planning and implementing effective gender equality policies. Unfortunately, decision-makers at the local level have not in-depth understanding of gender equality issues, and there is a need for coordinated work with them, as well as with direct executives.<sup>70</sup>

#### **4.2.1. Action plans and strategies for gender equality**

Action plans and strategies for gender equality are the most important mechanisms for protecting women's rights, strengthening equality and ensuring gender mainstreaming at the municipal level.

The Gender Equality Strategy is a medium-term document that includes priority directions for municipalities at the local level. At the time of the research, the strategy was in force only in certain municipalities (Kutaisi, Keda, Signaghi, Gurjaani, Telavi, Sagarejo, Terjola, Kharagauli, Kazbegi, Aspindza, Akhalkalaki, Akhaltsikhe, Dmanisi and Khashuri municipalities).

Action plans have an important role in ensuring gender equality at the municipal level and include a list of steps to be taken by the municipality in the shortest possible time. By the time of conducting the focus group meetings with the gender equality councils, in several municipalities (Senaki, Chkhorotsku, Kutaisi, Dedoplistskaro, Lagodekhi, Kvareli, Baghdati, Chiatura, Tianeti, Kazbegi, Mtskheta, Mestia, Tsalka, Tetrtsaro and Khobi municipalities) gender equality action plans were not in effect and/or were in the process development. In subsequent periods, such a document was approved by certain municipalities (for example, Kutaisi, Lagodekhi and Kazbegi municipalities).

Despite the formal existence of action plans, over the years their general and blanket character, leaving groups with different needs beyond these tools, not taking into account the issues of cross-discrimination, lack of sufficient budget, as well as human resources and/or expertise,<sup>71</sup> that at the end of the day caused problems in the implementation of action plans.<sup>72</sup>

As the gender equality councils of the municipalities note, progress has been made in the planning and content of the current action plans compared to previous years,<sup>73</sup> among other things, guidelines developed by UN Women and NALAG assisted in this regard. However, there are still challenges in this direction. One of the important challenges to be mentioned in this section is the generic and/or template nature of gender equality action plans.<sup>74</sup> The need to advance the current action plans was also stressed by the members of the Gender Equality Council of certain municipalities (e.g., Poti and Lanchkhuti municipalities).

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70. Interview with NALAG representative

71. see Office of the Public Defender of Georgia, Evaluation of Gender Policy of Local Self-Government Bodies: With Special Emphasis on Women's Economic Empowerment, 2020; Interview with NALAG representative.

72. For example, the members of the Gender Council of Batumi Municipality pointed out that 35 of the 135 items included in the previous years' plan remained unfulfilled; The representatives of Lagodekhi Municipality Gender Council noted that the plan of the previous years could not be implemented and remained only on paper; The members of the gender council of Signaghi municipality indicated that despite the important content of the action plan, it was not actually implemented.

73. For example, a focus group with members of gender equality councils of Kutaisi, Khoni, Kedi, Vani, Tskaltubo, Ozurgeti, Chokhatauri, Sachkhere, Samtredia, Martvil, Gardabani, Dmanisi, Marneuli and Gori municipalities.

74. Interview with the Chairman of the Permanent Council for Gender Equality of the Parliament.



In the action plans of the municipalities, there are more or less clear indicators of the tasks, activities and performance, the documents include the obligation of the municipalities in terms of awareness raising, research, statistical data collection, gender-sensitive budgeting, as well as implementation of services for certain vulnerable groups. However, despite the fact that it is important for policy documents to cover a number of areas and groups, due to the short time frame of the action plan, it should be realistic and flexible. In this part, the action plan of Aspindza municipality (2021-2022) is problematic, which envisages the implementation of 103 activities in a number of directions within 2 years.

The study found that one of the main challenges of action plans is that their content is not based on research results, which, as mentioned above, is one of the main barriers to evidence-based policy making. An example of less adaptation to local needs and contexts are action plans of Lanchkhuti and Chokhatauri municipalities, as their content are identical with the exception of one activity.

On the other hand, in the process of developing action plans, good practices were identified and other municipalities should pay attention to them. In particular, it is about basing the process and content of action plans on the results of the research. In some municipalities (for example, Zugdidi, Dusheti and Khobi Municipalities), the process of developing action plans was preceded by the creation of advisory groups, which included members of the Gender Equality Council, representatives of local non-governmental organization/organizations, as well as international organizations, representatives of public agencies, and members of the Council of Persons with Disabilities and the Youth Council, if any existed. The action plan was developed after meeting with them.<sup>75</sup>

Another important direction, which is an integral part of the process of implementation of action plans and other policy documents, is the stage of evaluation and monitoring. The mentioned process is a mechanism for identifying the effectiveness of the implementation of policies and action plans, and the next steps of municipalities should be based on it. It is worth to mention that a significant part of the municipalities<sup>76</sup> has not carried out the assessment/analysis of gender equality action plans until now, mostly due to the lack of a relevant formal mechanism in this direction.

It should be emphasized that in the new action plans of municipalities, the evaluation and monitoring mechanism of their implementation are foreseen, and if implemented, it will be a significant step forward in the direction of evaluating the existing policy and identifying challenges.

#### **4.2.2. Collection of sex-segregated data**

Collection of sex-segregated statistics is one of the most important issues for ensuring gender equality. This kind of data provides the opportunity to reveal the needs at the local level and to identify the impact of the measures taken by the municipalities over a number of groups.

Unfortunately, despite the need, a significant number of municipal gender equality councils indicate that sex-segregated data are not collected.<sup>77</sup> On the other hand, particular municipalities indicate the collection

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75. Interview with NALAG representative

76. Lagodekhi, Rustavi, Sagarejo, Akhmeta, Ozurgeti, Telavi, Dusheti, Kazbegi, Lentekhi, Ambrolauri, Mestia, Tsageri, Abasha, Martvili, Chkhorotsku, Poti, Tsalendjikhi, Adigeni, Akhaltsikhe, Borjomi, Ninotsminda, Gardabani, Dmanisi, Tsalka, Gori, Kaspi, Tetrtskaro and Khobi municipalities.

77. Focus group with the members gender equality councils of Batumi, Rustavi, Tskaltubo, Lanchkhuti, Khulo, Keda, Kobuleti, Shuakhevi,



of segregated statistics in different areas, which is carried out by the City Hall Office and/or the Gender Equality Council.<sup>78</sup> In this regard, the activity of Zugdidi municipality, which collects sex-segregated statistics in practically all directions, should be positively emphasized.<sup>79</sup>

It should be noted that the members of the Gender Equality Council of particular municipalities (Ozurgeti, Poti, Mtskheta, Marneuli, Akhmeta, Terjola and Sachkhere<sup>80</sup> municipalities) were not informed/fully informed about the extent to which the municipality collects and processes such statistical data.

However, as mentioned above, some municipalities indicate that in the absence of statistical data, information about needs is collected during meetings with the local population by the mayor or other representative of the municipality, which is important for identifying the needs of the locals, although it cannot be considered as formal mechanism for producing statistics.

The most important challenge that exists in this direction is the low level of awareness and knowledge of municipal employees in the field. Members of the Gender Equality Council of several municipalities referred to the need for retraining and raising qualifications in the direction of collection statistical data.<sup>81</sup> Along with knowledge and awareness, in municipalities (for example, Keda, Khulo, Chiatura municipalities) the lack of specialists working in the field of data processing and/or the absence of a special structural unit/employee responsible for this in the City Hall is also problematic.

#### **4.2.3. Budgeting issue**

One of the important challenges that exist in the direction of the implementation of gender equality policy measures is the insufficient budget for its implementation. As the Chairman of the Permanent Council of Gender Equality of the Parliament mentions, only a few municipalities have budgeted directly for gender equality, and it took a whole year of work to generate financial resources at the local level. In the end, municipalities were provided with special guidelines from the Ministry of Finance, based on this Parliamentary Council hopes that many more municipalities will allocate budgets next year.

The information provided by the chairman of the Permanent Council for Gender Equality of the Parliament is supported by the results of the analysis of the municipal budgets and the interviews with the members of the Gender Equality Council. In particular, as it was mentioned, the activities of increasing the awareness of the population about gender equality are integrated in various programs of the municipal budgets, while directly promoting gender equality, implementing the gender equality action plan and/or ensuring the work of the Gender Equality Council as an independent program, are listed in only a few of them.

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Dedoplistskaro, Telavi, Lagodekhi, Akhmeta, Baghdati, Tkibuli, Tianeti, Dusheti, Lentekhi, Chkhorotsku, Adigeni, Aspindza, Akhalkalaki, Borjomi, Ninotsminda, Gardabani, Tetrtskaro and Khashuri municipalities.

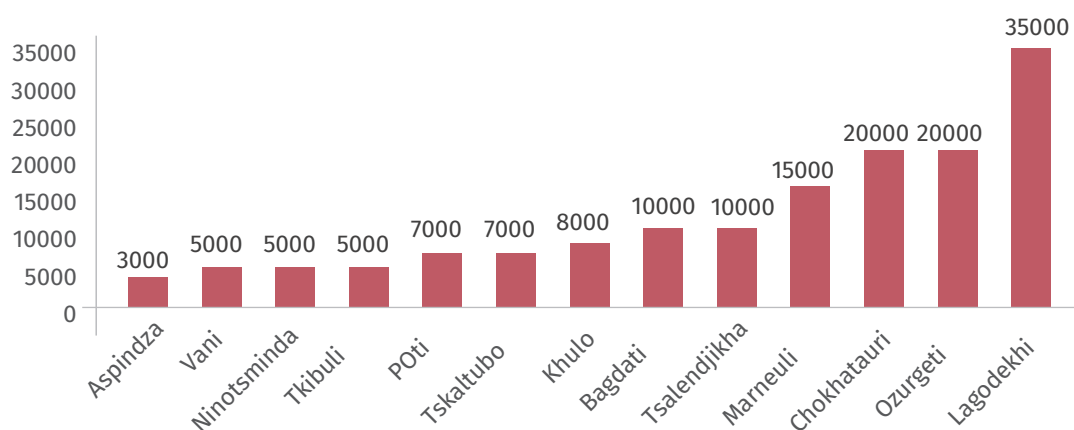
78. Focus group with members of gender equality councils of Tbilisi, Gurjaani, Khoni, Kazbegi, Lentekhi, Ambrolauri, Mestia, Tsalki, Tsageri, Vani, Abasha, Tsalenjikha and Akhaltsikhe municipalities.

79. Interview with NALAG representative

80. Note: in the case of Sachkhere and Terjola municipalities, the person responsible for collecting statistics was on vacation, and the people participating in the focus group did not have information about the specifics of his activities.

81. Focus group with members of gender equality councils of Chokhatauri, Keda and Chiatura municipalities.

**Table N 1. Budget allocated by municipalities for the program of gender equality/fostering the work of gender equality council for 2022 (GEL)**



Furthermore, the actual budget of the gender equality council of Kharagauli municipality constitutes 3,000 GEL, this amount, due to the absence of an independent budget code is spent from whole budget, mainly for trainings, as well as for the transportation of citizens for inclusion in screening programs.<sup>82</sup> The members of the gender equality council of Aspindza Municipality underlined, that 3 000 GEL (although not in the form of independent activity) is allocated for the implementation of activities foreseen by the action plan for gender equality.<sup>83</sup> The representatives of the gender equality council of Ninotsminda Municipality also discussed the financial resources (5 000 GEL) allocated for this end.<sup>84</sup>

Regarding the budget, the municipalities of Sagarejo and Zugdidi should also be highlighted. In particular, the budget of the Sagarejo municipality includes the activities provided for by the gender equality action plan under the general program - “Ensuring the activities of the legislative and executive authorities”. On the other hand, in the budget of Zugdidi municipality, there is a “program of gender equality, strengthening of families and children”, the amount allocated for its implementation was equal to 230,000 GEL (*N.B. At the end of the budget year – December 23, 2022, the financial resources for this program were corrected and 112 000 GEL was allocated*). The program includes a number of activities in different directions, including funds allocated for the “Women’s Room”, as well as events on the issues of domestic violence victims and gender equality.

Nevertheless, the budget of a significant part of municipalities completely ignores gender issues and directions of women’s empowerment and support, which creates a significant barrier in the direction of implementing programs and initiatives focused on this group. The same is emphasized by the gender equality councils of the municipalities, indicating that their budgets are still not gender sensitive and barely takes into account challenges faced by women.

In the conditions of information vacuum regarding gender budgeting, the Academy of Ministry of Finance of Georgia, with the support of UN Women Georgia took responsibility for the training of local government

82. Focus group with the members of the Gender Equality Council of Kharagauli Municipality.

83. Focus group with the members of the Gender Equality Council of Aspindza Municipality.

84. Focus group with the members of the Gender Equality Council of Ninotsminda Municipality.

representatives.<sup>85</sup> The training was attended by 43 representatives of central and local municipalities of Georgia.<sup>86</sup>

*“This gender budgeting turned out to be everyone’s budgeting, nothing else.”*  
*Member of Gender Equality Council of Kobuleti Municipality*

According to the members of the Gender Equality Council of Municipalities, only one training is not enough and additional trainings are necessary, and it is essential that decision-makers and employees who do not work directly in the financial service, but are involved in the budgeting process, participate in similar trainings.<sup>87</sup>

At the end, it can be seen that most of the municipalities still have significant problems in the direction of gender budgeting due to the challenges related to awareness and qualified human resources. Representatives of gender equality councils of certain municipalities<sup>88</sup> stated that it is difficult to put the information received through the trainings into practice. The need for retraining is further challenged by the non-uniformity and informality of the practices of collecting the necessary information before developing programs, which further hinders the introduction of gender budgeting at the local level.

#### **4.2.4. The impact of the coronavirus pandemic on the implementation of gender equality policies**

The COVID-19 pandemic has created significant challenges for municipalities in implementing gender equality policies. On the one hand, it has led to the suspension or moving to remote mode of a number important services/programs,<sup>89</sup> and on the other hand, it has created problems for local authorities in communicating with the population, including women.

The pandemic has also had a negative impact on the activities of gender equality councils of municipalities.<sup>90</sup> According to them, the pandemic has negatively affected the implementation of the gender equality action plan, although with the help of online platforms, municipalities were still trying to work and implement activities. The gender equality councils of Zugdidi, Keda and Khoni municipalities indicated that during this period, women were provided with information on issues relevant to them through a hotline/telephone.

It should be emphasized that the municipalities mostly did not talk about the local practices of applying gender-sensitive approaches in handling the measures taken during the pandemic/overcoming the crisis

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85. Interview with the Chairman of the Permanent Council for Gender Equality of the Parliament.

86. UN Women, “Public officials deepen their knowledge of gender-sensitive budgeting”, 15.07.2022, <https://bit.ly/3WwNDfI>

87. Focus group with members of the gender equality council of Batumi, Chokhatauri, Shuakhevi, Khulo, Kobuleti, Signaghi, Baghdati, Vani, Samtredia, Tkibuli, Oni, Akhaltsikhe, Gardabani, Khobi, Dedoplistskaro and Keda municipalities.

88. E.g., Telavi, Lagodekhi, Signaghi Municipalities

89. Note: Gender Council of Tbilisi Municipality has indicated that certain services will continue to be implemented remotely and the procedures for inclusion in the services have been simplified.

90. Focus group with the members of gender equality councils of Kutaisi, Tskaltubo, Lanchkhuti, Dedoplistskaro, Gurjaani, Sagarejo, Chokhatauri, Shuakhevi, Kobuleti, Lagodekhi, Signaghi, Baghdati, Vani, Terjola, Sachkhere, Chiatura, Kharagauli, Khoni, Dusheti, Kazbegi, Mestia, Abasha, Martvili, Adigeni, Aspindza, Akhalkalaki, Akhaltsikhe, Ninotsminda, Dmanisi, Bolnisi, Marneuli, Gori and Khobi municipalities.

caused by the pandemic. The main issue, which was mentioned by a number of municipalities,<sup>91</sup> was the distribution of household items, food baskets and/or medicines to the population.

It is noteworthy that the gender equality councils of the municipality also did not talk about the issues of the pandemic and women and domestic violence, as well as their possible role in the given period.

*“We could not recall abusers online, not to abuse, could we? We were not able meet.”*  
*Member of Gender Council of Akhalkalaki Municipality*

On the other hand:

- Gender Equality Council of Shuakhevi Municipality requested statistical information about violence from the Ministry of Internal Affairs. According to the information, during the pandemic, the appeals in this part increased, however, despite the data, the Council did not plan any type of event. The representatives of the Gender Equality Council of Khashuri Municipality also talked about the increase in domestic violence rates, although they did not give any examples of their response.
- The Gender Equality Council of Samtredia municipality also requested statistics on victims of violence, which turned out to be lower than the figures before the pandemic. With these data, the members of the Council justify the decrease in cases of violence, although they do not consider possibility, that the decrease in indicators was caused by the difficulties in identifying cases of violence. The members of the Gender Equality Council of Chkhorotsku municipality also talked about the reduction of cases as a significant trend, however, there is no response from their side in this direction;
- The Gender Equality Council of Marneuli Municipality indicated that in the process of overcoming the pandemic crisis, a campaign against violence against women was started on their initiative.

### **4.3. Overview of the legal status of women at the municipal level and supporting mechanisms**

Along with gender equality strategies and action plans, one of the most important issues in the process of ensuring gender equality at the local level is the existence of women’s support mechanisms, which should include social protection, economic empowerment, access to health services, infrastructure, protection from violence and appropriate support for women affected by violence. Identifying and reflecting the needs of representatives of vulnerable groups in relevant services.

At the local level, the needs of women and men differ. As the municipalities mentioned, the content difference between the initiatives put forward by women and men during the village assemblies is a proof of this.<sup>92</sup> In particular, among the issues raised by women, the establishment/expansion of child care services, the existence of social packages, the arrangement of the road intended for pedestrians, as well as the provision of water prevail.<sup>93</sup> Despite the above, it should be noted that the members of the Gender Equality Council of

91. For example, Zugdidi, Kutaisi, Ozurgeti, Chokhatauri, Kedi, Khulo, Shuakhevi, Baghdati, Vani, Zestafoni, Kharagauli, Tskaltubo, Khoni, Ambrolauri, Mestia, Tsageri, Martvili, Chkhorotsku, Akhalkalaki, Aspindza, Akhaltsikhe, Tsalka, Kaspi, Bolnisi, Gori, Batumi and Kobuleti municipalities.

92. Focus group with members of the gender equality council of Vani, Telavi, Tskaltubo, Lagodekhi, Baghdati, Samtredia, Khulo, Mtskheta, Oni, Adigeni, Akhalkalaki, Akhaltsikhe and Gardabani municipalities.

93. Focus group with members of the gender equality council of Tbilisi, Tskaltubo, Lagodekhi, Khulo, Signaghi, Gurjaani, Baghdati, Vani, Mtskheta and Akhaltsikhe municipalities.

individual municipalities do not see the difference between the needs of women and men or find it difficult to discuss the issue.<sup>94</sup>

As the Chairman of the Permanent Council of Gender Equality of the Parliament stated, the budgets for services aimed at women in municipalities are practically used,<sup>95</sup> which may indicate two trends: 1. There are no funds in the budget for the implementation of services; 2. The population has information about the services available at the municipal level and actively uses them.<sup>96</sup> The research shows that most women across the country do not have information about their support services, including those offered by the municipality. Along with awareness, a common problem is the sustainability of services, which should be developed beyond one-time cash payments, and the lack of services to meet the needs of the population, which is usually caused by a lack of research.

Another problem pointed out by women living in different municipalities is improper communication with them by local authorities when receiving services.

*“When I gave birth to my third child, I faced a lot of troubles from them, my husband is from Zestafon, and they didn’t give me support here until I brought a report from his place that I didn’t receive assistance. I understand, this is their internal rule. In the meantime, my sister gave birth to her fourth child, and when I brought the documents, do you know what they told me? - “You are not satisfied and bring your sister now?”  
A woman living in Kobuleti municipality*

#### **4.3.1 Women’s economic empowerment and social protection**

In order to ensure gender equality at the local level, it is essential, on the one hand, to introduce economic empowerment programs and ensure their long-term sustainability; on the other hand, it is necessary that municipalities increase women’s awareness of the existing mechanisms at the local level in a coordinated manner.<sup>97</sup>

The study process showed that employment is the main need of women. Women living in different municipalities also note that the socio-economic situation of the population has significantly worsened in recent years.<sup>98</sup> In parallel to the mentioned challenges, the services aimed at women’s social protection and economic empowerment mainly include only monetary assistance, which is one-time and not sustainable, and therefore, significantly hinders the real empowerment of women.

*„The municipality cannot and will not do much in terms of poverty eradication, we have to help ourselves.“  
A woman living in Senaki Municipality*

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94. For example, the municipalities of Kvarli, Akhmeta, Zestafoni, Terjola, Tkibuli, Abasha, Khobi.

95. Note: As on 26th October 2022 (date of interview).

96. Interview with the Chairman of the Permanent Council for Gender Equality of the Parliament.

97. Interview with the representative of NALAG.

98. Focus group with women living in the municipalities of Batumi, Kobuleti, Gurjaani, Sagarejo, Dusheti, Tsalka, Bolnisi and Rustavi.

Given the impossibility of employment and improvement of the socio-economic situation, women living in several municipalities pointed to the trend of migration and the practice of feminization of migration, as an already widely used last resort.<sup>99</sup>

On the other hand, the municipalities, as well as the women participating in the study, identified various mechanisms of support for women, such as assistance in the drafting of projects, provision of space for economic activities, arrangement of roads and transport and financing of projects/business ideas.<sup>100</sup> The study also identified the long-term support programs for families in some of the municipalities, such as support for entrepreneurship, purchase of agricultural machinery and tools, support for greenhouse farming, purchase of poultry and livestock.<sup>101</sup>

As to the main barriers in women's economic empowerment, the study identified several main challenges:

- *Women's domestic work*

Women living in different municipalities of Georgia named domestic work and care-related work as one of the important barriers to accessing the formal labor market.<sup>102</sup> While women are unable to share the care responsibilities with men and there is a lack of care or support services at the central or municipal levels, women face significant barriers to employment. This problem becomes even more acute for women living in areas where water supply systems and infrastructure (including road infrastructure) are not in order, as this aggravates their already heavy burden.<sup>103</sup>

The burden of domestic work and home-care is also noteworthy in relation to mothers with many children and/or single mothers, as well as parents of disabled children. As women reported, their socio-economic vulnerability is high, nevertheless, support services are non-existent or scarce. In this situation, it is difficult for them to get any kind of employment, which makes their social situation even worse.<sup>104</sup>

Along with the mentioned barriers, women indicate that there still is a stereotypical attitude in households regarding the employment of women, including by their spouses, which significantly hinders their inclusion

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99. Focus group with women living in the municipalities of Shuakhevi, Baghdati, Vani, Samtredia, Tkibuli, Sachkhere, Kutaisi, Dedoplistskaro, Signagi, Sagarejo, Dusheti, Lentekhi, Khobi, Tsalenjikha, Adigeni, Aspindza, Akhaltsikhe, Gardabani, Marneuli, Kaspi and Kareli.

100. For example, the municipalities of Kutaisi, Terjola, Tskaltubo, Sachkhere, Baghdati, Kharagauli, Khoni, Dusheti; focus group with women living in the municipalities of Keda and Sachkhere. Resolution No. 20 of the Tskaltubo Municipality Sakrebulo of December 23, 2021 "On Approval of the 2022 Budget of Tskaltubo Municipality"; Resolution No. 9 of the Kobuleti Municipality Sakrebulo of December 24, 2021 "On Approval of the 2022 Local Programmatic Budget of the Kobuleti Municipality"; Resolution No. 26 of the Lanchkhuti Municipality Sakrebulo of November 25, 2021 "On Approval of the 2022 Budget of the Lanchkhuti Municipality".

101. Focus group with the members of the Gender Equality Council of Baghdati and Khoni municipalities; focus group with women living in Keda Municipality; Resolution No. 4-7 of Tbilisi Municipality Sakrebulo of December 27, 2021 "On Approval of the 2022 Budget of Tbilisi Municipality"; Resolution No. 17 of Bolnisi Municipality Sakrebulo of December 1, 2021 "On Approval of the 2022 Local Programmatic Budget of Bolnisi Municipality"; Resolution No. 27 of the Dusheti Municipality Sakrebulo of December 24, 2021 "On the Approval of the 2022 Budget of the Dusheti Municipality"; Resolution No. 17 of Ozurgeti Municipality Sakrebulo of December 28, 2021 "On Approval of the 2022 Budget of Ozurgeti Municipality"; Resolution No. 10 of the Keda Municipality Sakrebulo of December 29, 2021 "On the Approval of the 2022 Local Budget of Keda Municipality";

102. Focus group with women living in the municipalities of Zugdidi, Khulo and Senaki.

103. Focus group with women living in the municipalities of Khulo, Lanchkhuti, Chokhatauri, Baghdati, Tkibuli, Tskaltubo, Chiatura, Gurjaani, Dedoplistskaro, Sagarejo, Lagodekhi, Telavi, Dusheti, Tianeti, Kazbegi, Mtskheta, Lentekhi, Ambrolauri, mEstia, Tsageri, Zugdidi, Abasha, Chkhorotsku, Senaki, Khobi, Tsalenjikha, Poti, Dmanisi, Gardabani and Marneuli.

104. Focus group with women living in the municipalities of Lanchkhuti, Shuakhevi and Chokhatauri.

in the labor market.<sup>105</sup> Early marriage also has a significant impact on women's economic independence, which women living in some municipalities still talk about.<sup>106</sup>

- *Language barriers*

The language barrier is one of the factors hindering the employment of women belonging to the ethnic minority; it is not counterbalanced by the effective policy of the state, in terms of ensuring access to state language learning courses for these individuals.<sup>107</sup>

Another challenge, which was identified during the study in terms of the language barrier, is the inability to be included in economic empowerment programs. For example, women living in Akhalkalaki municipality indicated that many women from this territorial unit submitted an application to be involved in the program under "Enterprise Georgia", however, due to the lack of knowledge of the state language, they could not be enrolled.

- *Women's professional training and re-training*

As mentioned before, the barriers facing women include domestic work and care related work, which, among other challenges, leads to the scarcity of time resources needed for their professional training. Given the intensity of care and the scarcity of support mechanisms, women with many children and/or single parents face particular challenges in this direction.<sup>108</sup> During the study, the problem of lack of vocational training institutions, geographical access to them and/or failure of the transportation system were highlighted as one of the important barriers facing women.<sup>109</sup>

The lack of interesting professions was pointed out by women living in different municipalities, which means that despite the availability of vocational schools, the lack of choices prevents them from getting involved in the education process.<sup>110</sup> Another challenge in this direction is the quality of teaching and, therefore, the problems of applying the acquired knowledge in practice.<sup>111</sup>

Members of the Gender Equality Council of Chiatura Municipality drew attention to the difficulties of access to professional education too. According to them, a vocational school is functioning in the municipality with the financial support of "Georgian Manganese". When discussing this educational institution and training programs, stereotypical attitudes were observed among the council members - they emphasized that the institution mainly offers "technical subjects", which is why women are not actively involved in the educational process; some of the council members noted that the institution is adapted for women, because "they teach how to grow/care for plants (e.g. roses)", beekeeping and others.

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105. Focus group with women living in the municipalities of Lanchkhuti, Gurjaani, Mestia, Oni and Gori.

106. For example, focus group with women living in the municipalities of Kaspi, Gardabani and Marneuli.

107. Focus group with women living in the municipalities of Gardabani and Gori.

108. Focus group with members of the Gender Equality Council of the municipality of Abasha.

109. Focus group with members of the Gender Equality Council of the municipality of Tetrtskaro. Focus group with women living in the municipalities of Lanchkuti, Shuakhevi, Khulo, Vani, Terjola, Samtredia, Mtskheta, Lentekhi, Ambrolauri, Oni, Tsageri, Chkhorotsku, Akhalkalaki, Akhaltsikhe, Dmanisi, Tsalka and Gardabani.

110. Focus group with women living in the municipality of Shuakhevi.

111. Focus group with women living in the municipality of Khulo.



- *Lack of childcare services*

In many municipalities,<sup>112</sup> there is a lack of pre-school educational institutions, which prevents the economic activation and empowerment of women. The availability of kindergartens in villages with a small population is particularly problematic. Women living in certain municipalities also pointed to the problem of transportation as a barrier to engaging in preschool education.<sup>113</sup>

Along with the problems of general access to kindergartens, there is also the lack of food in kindergartens,<sup>114</sup> as well as care services for children under 2 years of age and professionals being on the so-called summer duty. This doubles the burden of women's work at home.<sup>115</sup>

It should also be noted that the existence of the service, most likely, does not mean the absence of interference in women's employment. In this regard, it is worth emphasizing that the closing hours of public kindergartens coincide with working hours, as a result of which women face various challenges.<sup>116</sup>

- *Women's limited access to land*

Another challenge identified as a barrier to women's economic empowerment is women's limited access to land and lack of ownership/co-ownership of the land, which, among other things, prevents them from participating in a number of state-initiated programs (including the initiative aimed at empowering women entrepreneurs) and/or access to credit.<sup>117</sup>

Along with the discriminatory practices that are still well-established in society, another barrier to women's access to land is financial access. Some women participating in the study indicated that the property registration fee is high, which is why they do not have access to this service and are unable to register it.<sup>118</sup>

- *Transport, mobility and infrastructure issues*

In several municipalities, infrastructure failures and/or problems of access to transport significantly hinder women's economic activity. One of the main needs is the existence of proper public transport, as well as roads, which is an important problem in a large part of municipalities.<sup>119</sup> Women living in different

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112. For example municipalities of Kobuleti, Shuakhevi, Chokhatauri, Khulo, Gurjaani, Aspindza, Akhaltsikhe, Borjomi, Dmanisi, Bolnisi, Marneuli and Khashuri.

113. Focus group with women living in the municipalities of Ambrolauri, Lentekhi, Oni and Tsageri.

114. Focus group with the members of the Gender Equality Council of Ninotsminda Municipality.

115. For example, focus group with the members of the Gender Equality Council of Baghdati, Khoni, Tskaltubo, Vani, Sachkere and Bolnisi municipalities. Focus group with women living in the municipalities of Baghdati, Khoni, Kutaisi and Sagarejo.

116. Focus group with the members of the Gender Equality Council of Kutaisi Municipality.

117. Focus group with the members of the Gender Equality Council of Akhmeta, Kobuleti, Shuakhevi, Ambrolauri, Khulo, Rustavi, Oni and Keda Municipalities. Focus group with women living in the municipalities of Batumi, Kobuleti, Keda, Shuakhevi, Khulo, Chokhatauri, Baghdati, Vani, Samtredia, Tkibuli, Khoni, Dedoplistkaro, Sagarejo, Lagodekhi, Dusheti, Tianeti, Ambrolauri, Abasha, Adigeni and Borjomi municipalities.

118. Focus group with women living in the municipality of Lanchkhuti.

119. Focus group with the members of the Gender Equality Council of Chiatura, Telavi, Akhmeta, Dusheti, Mestia, Tsageri, Tsalenjikha, Gori, Khashuri and Khobi. Focus group with women living in the municipalities of Batumi, Keda, Shuakhevi, Akhmeta, Gurjaani, Kvareli, Sagarejo, Lagodekhi, Telavi, Mtskheta, Lentekhi, Ambrolauri, Mestia, Oni, Tsageri, Chkhorotsku, Senaki, Tsalenjikha, Akhalkalaki, Aspindza, Akhaltsikhe, Borjomi, Dmanisi, Tetrtskaro, Gardabani, Marneuli and Gori.



municipalities of Georgia pointed out that the issue of transportation and roads is one of the most acute problems at the local level, that have not been resolved for years. Consequently, it affects women even more acutely.<sup>120</sup>

*“The transport is important here - it should be accessible. Apart from school and kindergarten, a woman in the village cannot realize herself in any other way.”  
A woman living in Shuakhevi municipality*

It is noteworthy that the majority of Georgian municipalities still do not see the gender dimension of infrastructure, transport and mobility issues, with exception of some municipalities; in the latter case budgets emphasize the need to take into account the needs of women in this area. These issues are construction/rehabilitation/exploitation of road infrastructure (Baghdati and Keda municipalities), arrangement/rehabilitation/operation of outdoor lighting network (Baghdati, Ozurgeti, Zugdidi, Tskaltubo, Rustavi and Kutaisi municipalities), arrangement of public infrastructure spaces (Ozurgeti, Zugdidi, Keda, Tskaltubo and Tbilisi municipalities), development of water systems (Zugdidi municipality).

Along with the above-mentioned systemic challenges, the attitude of some municipalities towards the issue of women’s empowerment is noteworthy - for example, according to the representatives of the Gender Equality Council of Tkibuli Municipality - “there is no interest from women, otherwise the municipality would support such initiatives with all it means”; this ignores the proactive role of the local government in this regard and shifts the overall burden to women. When asked what initiatives were implemented “in case of interest”, the members of the Council mentioned the 4-month free internship at the City Hall as one of the examples.

In parallel, the study revealed that women’s awareness of support services at the municipal level is limited, which is another important barrier to involvement in services.<sup>121</sup> The representatives of the Gender Equality Council of some municipalities stated that women’s awareness has increased compared to previous years; to this end various methods are used, including meetings within the Women’s Rooms, meetings in schools and kindergartens, organizing online meetings, organizing trainings, placing information on flyers and distributing them, and publishing information in newspapers. <sup>122</sup> Nevertheless, most of the women participating in the study point to an information vacuum.

#### **4.3.2. Violence against women and domestic violence**

Violence against women and domestic violence remains one of the biggest challenges in the country. Various systemic problems characterized by, among others, the weakness of the prevention and response mechanisms, the fragmented and temporary nature of support services, lack of awareness and stigma, further aggravate the human rights situation of women.

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120. Focus group with women living in the municipalities of Batumi, Shuakhevi, Khulo, Mestia, Oni and Tsageri.

121. For example, focus group with women living in the municipalities of Kobuleti, Lanchkhuti, Tskaltubo, Dedoplistkharo, Mestia, Kazbegi, Chkhorotsku, Khobi, Tsalenjikha, Akhalkalaki, Dmanisi.

122. For example, focus group with the members of the Gender Equality Council of Ozurgeti, Keda, Khulo, Gurjaani, Baghdati, Tkibuli municipalities.

As revealed during the study process, local gender equality councils mainly have the functions of carrying out information campaigns on the issues of violence against women and domestic violence.<sup>123</sup> The representatives of some municipalities also point out that the number of women's referrals of violence cases have increased, which should be explained not by the increase in the number of cases, but by raising women's awareness.<sup>124</sup>

Despite the function of informing the population, the members of the Gender Equality Council of some municipalities (considering the opinions expressed during the research) themselves need retraining. The municipality of Kharagauli shall be mentioned in this regard; here stereotypical attitudes were identified among the members of the Gender Equality Council. For example, during the meeting, they stated that it is not appropriate to involve an outsider during "family quarrels".

***"Society should not encourage violence, but society has the right to intervene only to a certain extent. The fool thought that the quarrel between husband and wife was real."  
A member of the Gender Equality Council of Kharagauli Municipality***

The members of the Gender Equality Council of the Signagi Municipality discussed the lack of knowledge and sensitivity towards violence against women and domestic violence issues. They recalled as an example one of the cases when the victim of femicide had a meeting with the representative of the mayor to solve the problems before the murder; however, he failed to react properly and to redirect the victim to the relevant agencies. Women living in different municipalities also emphasized the lack of sensitivity of the police on this topic and/or the small number of social workers, which is an important barrier in terms of prevention and identification of the cases and providing relevant response.<sup>125</sup>

In addition, within the framework of the study, information was processed about the mechanisms relevant to the field. As a result of this, it was revealed that certain programs for women victims of domestic violence exist in part of municipalities. Given the lack of uniform standards throughout the country, the policy and practice concerning their operation and accessibility issues vary from municipality to municipality. Among these mechanisms are:

- Provision of rent allowance;<sup>126</sup>
- One-off cash assistance;<sup>127</sup>
- Regular cash assistance;<sup>128</sup>
- One-off or regular cash assistance for beneficiaries leaving the shelter for victims of domestic violence with the aim to promote their independent living;<sup>129</sup>

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123. For example, focus group with the members of the Gender Equality Council of Baghdati, Tskaltubo, Chokhatauri, Keda, Zestaponi, Ninotsminda, Marneuli municipalities.

124. Focus group with the members of the Gender Equality Council of Lanchkhuti, Telavi, Akhmeta municipalities.

125. Focus group with women living in the municipalities of Khulo, Lanchkhuti, Akhmeta, Telavi, Senaki, Khobi, Marneuli.

126. For example, Municipalities of Abasha, Bolnisi, Gurjaani, Vani, Zugdidi, Telavi, Lagodekhi, Lanchkhuti, Martvili, Ninotsminda, Ozurgeti, Sagarejo, Keda, Tskhaltubo, Kharagauli, Khoni and Poti.

127. For example, Municipalities of Akhmeta, Bolnisi, Baghdati, Vani, Zestaponi, Zugdidi, Tetrtskhari, Kaspi, Lanchkhuti, Sagarejo, Samtredia, Senaki, Tkhbuli, Chokhatauri, Tsalenjikha, Rustavi and Poti.

128. It concerns regular financial assistance (at least for several months) for women victims of violence; for example, Batumi and Keda Municipalities.

129. For example, Municipalities of Gori, Zestaponi and Kutaisi.

- Support using material, monetary and/or human resources;<sup>130</sup>
- Co-financing of projects presented for the purpose of supporting socially vulnerable families and groups;<sup>131</sup>
- Financing medical examination, service and/or medicines.<sup>132</sup>

Despite the services at the central level as well as in part of municipalities, the temporary and/or one-time nature of these services is problematic, as well as meeting the necessary criteria for inclusion in the service (such as the fact of registration in the municipality and/or the fact of granting of a relevant status by state institutions (the court, the Ministry of Internal Affairs and/or the group determining the status of victims of domestic violence)), which creates the greatest barrier for women and creates a feeling of insecurity.

*“There was a case of violence when the police, social services got involved in the case; The social worker told her that I will transfer you to a shelter, the state will take care of you, but this woman refused, the reason being that they would not keep her in the shelter for a long time, and she preferred to return to her husband.”  
A woman living in Kobuleti municipality*

As shown by the analysis of municipal budgets, in order to benefit from programs at the local level, women usually have to meet criteria such as being registered in the municipality and/or having a relevant status by state institutions (courts, the Ministry of Internal Affairs and/or the group determining the status of victims of domestic violence). The above barriers leave many women victims of violence without minimal support. A step forward in this regard is the case of the municipality of Khoni: here with the initiative of the Gender Equality Council, the requirement to be registered in the municipality for being included in the apartment rental program is no longer obligatory, therefore people actually living in the territorial unit can receive the benefit.<sup>133</sup>

Low level of awareness is another barrier in receiving services. The part of women participating in the study indicated that through various sources they have some information about the hotline, the existing response mechanisms in case of violence against women and domestic violence, including protective and restraining orders, as well as the shelter and crisis center for victims of violence.<sup>134</sup>

On the other hand, part of women living in a number of municipalities indicated that they did not have information about response mechanisms and/or municipal services in this regard.<sup>135</sup> A relevant example is the case of Lanchkhuti municipality, which has a one-time financial assistance program for women victims of violence, however, as the members of the Gender Equality Council point out, in the last three years, no

130. Zestafoni Municipality; This support covers: vocational training, fostering the employment, involvement in family support services, trainings in positive parenting, provision of rent allowance, purchase of agricultural equipment and goods, stationery, hygiene products, medicines for minors, as well as live-stock and others.

131. For example, Municipalities of Zugdidi, Lagodekhi and Ozurgeti.

132. For example, Municipalities of Ozurgeti, Kobuleti, Tskhaltubo and Kutaisi.

133. Focus group with the members of the Gender Equality Council of Khoni municipality.

134. Focus group with women living in the municipalities of Batumi, Kobuleti, Shuakhevi, Baghdati, Vani, Zestaponi, Tkibuli, Sachkhere, Tskaltubo, Khoni, Kutaisi, Dedoplistskaro, Mestia, Zugdidi, Martvili and Tetrtskaro.

135. Focus group with women living in the municipalities of Keda, Lanchkhuti, Terjola, Samtredia, Sachkhere, Tskaltubo, Khoni, Jytai, Akhmeta, Gurjaani, Dedoplistskaro, Sagarejo, Lagodekhi, Tianeti, Mtskheta, Lentekhi, Ambrolauri, Mestia, Chkhorotsku, Khobi, Tsalenjikha, Poti, Adigeni, Akhalkalaki, Aspindza, Akhaltsikhe, Borjomi, Ninotsminda, Tsalka, Bolnisi, Tetrtskaro, Gardabani, Rustavi, Marneuli, Kareli.

application has been made to the municipality for inclusion in the program; this should be explained due to the low level of awareness of the population on the mechanisms available at the local level.

### 4.3.3. Access to healthcare services

Access to quality healthcare is one of the most important challenges facing women. The study revealed challenges such as lack of health services and problems related to access such services, as well as low level of awareness of the population.

It should be noted that one of the main challenges of municipalities is the systematic planning of health services, resulted by the lack of access to information at the central level. In particular, local authorities do not have access to the databases of the Ministry of Internally Displaced Persons from Occupied Territories, Labor, Health and Social Affairs of Georgia; as a result they do not have statistics to identify the extent of existing needs and to plan policies and programs based on evidence.<sup>136</sup>

The study revealed the scarcity of health care programs aimed at the needs of women. Only budgets of some municipalities foresee support of women with oncological diseases with medicines, examinations (which includes people who are outside the state program), rehabilitation of women and/or their financial assistance.<sup>137</sup> In general, the practice of municipalities in terms of introduction and implementation of health care programs is different and, on the one hand, it is determined by the budget funds, and on the other hand, by the sensitivity of the representatives of the municipalities towards this topic.

Study shows that access to sexual and reproductive health services is a serious challenge for women, especially in rural areas.

Some municipalities do not have maternity and/or gynecological departments; as a result, women have to go to other municipalities to get services. For example, women living in Kharagauli municipality go to Zestaponi, residents of Lentekhi municipality - to Kutaisi, residents of Keda municipality - to Batumi; Residents of Tsalenjikha - to Zugdidi, residents of Khashuri municipality - to Borjomi or Gori; Residents of Kvareli Municipality – to Telavi. According to the members of the Gender Equality Council of Tsalenjikha Municipality, due to the absence of a maternity clinic, one of the locals gave birth on the road, which ended fatally. The representatives of the municipalities of Chokhatauri, Tkibuli, Chkhorotsku, Chiatura, Signagi, Adigeni, Kaspi, Mestia, Aspindza and Ninotsminda and/or women participating in the study also discussed the lack of sexual and reproductive health services.

Access to the maternity clinic for women living in villages was identified as a problem by the residents of Vani municipality; they pointed out that due to the absence of such a clinic in the municipality, women living in “remote villages” give birth at home.

The challenge in Khulo municipality is the absence of a municipal hospital, which creates a serious barrier to access the health care for the local population.<sup>138</sup> Access to outpatient facilities is also particularly problematic for residents of the border villages of the occupied territories.<sup>139</sup>

136. Interview with the Chairperson of the Permanent Parliamentary Gender Equality Council.

137. For example, municipalities of Tbilisi, Batumi, Lanchkhuti, Shuakhevi, Chokhatauri, Zugdidi, Ozurgeti, Samtredia.

138. Focus group with Khulo Gender Equality Council members.

139. Focus group with Gender Equality Council members of Kaspi and Khashuri municipalities.

Access to sexual and reproductive health services in Baghdati municipality is a problem even in the district center due to the lack of a specialist. It is worth noting that a car was placed in front of the city hall building of this municipality, which was meant to offer gynecological services to women and ensure access to the service in this form, however, due to the territorial location of the car, some women did not come for the examination. Currently, the municipality is working towards offering such a service for women in another, more convenient place.

In the municipality of Mestia, there is a service and a gynecologist is also available, however, due to the gender of the doctor (male), women apply less often, they do not take advantage of scheduled examinations, and in case of serious health conditions, they use the service available in another city.<sup>140</sup>

Women living in different municipalities emphasize the problems of transportation and/or financial access when receiving services;<sup>141</sup> Problems of financial access, including in terms of transportation, are mainly faced by the residents of those municipalities, who are forced to receive the service in another municipality;<sup>142</sup>

Women living in different municipalities indicate the problems of receiving quality services.<sup>143</sup> Risks and cases of disclosure of patients' personal information while receiving the service were also identified as one of the challenges during the study.<sup>144</sup>

In fact, there are no accessible sexual and reproductive health services for women with disabilities in clinics, including an adapted gynecological chair, which creates unresolved barriers to receiving services by representatives of this group.

Another acute problem are stereotypical attitudes related to receiving services, especially for women who are not in a civil marriage, which is why they refrain from medical consultation.<sup>145</sup>

Women living in the municipality of Vani also discuss stereotypical attitudes; they indicated that despite the presence of a doctor, they could not get access to an abortion for years because the doctor refused to perform the procedure "for religious reasons". Although the municipality is currently served by another doctor, women still do not have access to this service due to the lack of medical resources.<sup>146</sup>

Women living in some municipalities noted that issues related to sexual and reproductive health are still a taboo; hence, part of the population remains in an information vacuum, which has a negative impact on the realization of women's rights to this end.<sup>147</sup> For example, individuals participating in the study had incorrect information about abortion and believed that abortion is prohibited in Georgia.<sup>148</sup>

#### 4.3.4. Human rights situation of vulnerable groups

It is important to note that the needs of vulnerable groups at the municipal level have not yet been fully identified, and responding to the systemic challenges they face is a serious problem.

140. Focus group with Mestia Gender Equality Council members.

141. Focus group with women living in the municipalities of Batumi, Kobuleti, Keda, Chokhatauri, Lentekhi, Ambrolauri, Zugdidi, Kareli.

142. Focus group with Tsalenjikha Gender Equality Council members.

143. Focus group with women living in the municipalities of Batumi, Keda, Khulo, Dedoplistkaro, Telavi, Zugdidi, Dmanisi.

144. Focus group with women living in the municipalities of Senaki, Akhalkalaki.

145. Focus group with women living in the municipalities of Khulo, Akmeta.

146. Focus group with women living in the municipality of Vani.

147. Focus group with women living in the municipalities of Lanchkhuti, Chokhatauri, Baghdati, Gurjaani, Dedoplistkaro, Kvareli, Lagodekhi, Dusheti, Tlaneti, Mtskheta, Oni, Tsageri, Chkhorotsku, Tsalenjikha, Poti, Adigeni, Aspindza, Akhaltsikhe, Tsalka, Tetrtskaro, Marneuli, Kaspi, Kareli, Khashuri, Gori.

148. Focus group with women living in the municipality of Samtredia.

In the framework of the study, **women with disabilities** were identified as one of the vulnerable groups. The lack of access to transportation,<sup>149</sup> physical environment, and information was identified as a challenge they face; as a result, their engagement in public life, in many cases, faces barriers.

In general, the practices of municipalities towards persons with disabilities, including women with disabilities, vary, however, it should be noted that compared to other vulnerable groups, the number of programs/initiatives for persons with disabilities is more. Unfortunately, in many cases, they include one-time financial assistance and does not foresee the provision of sustainable support services.

The need for sustainable support of disabled persons, including women with disabilities, is also noted by the members of the Gender Equality Councils of municipalities. For example, they indicate that, despite the need, there is a lack of personal assistant, home care, and/or rehabilitation-habilitation services in many locations.<sup>150</sup> The absence and/or lack of such services, on the one hand, has a negative impact on the right of persons with disabilities (including women) to live independently, and on the other hand, it makes the unpaid work of family members, which is usually performed by women, more intense.

Another need identified in relation to services for persons with disabilities is the availability of day care centers and support services for children with disabilities.<sup>151</sup> There is no such service in some municipalities, however, transportation costs to other municipalities are financed to receive the service. Despite the importance of such support, women point to the need for the service to exist in the municipality, as the burden of the time resource associated with transportation falls on women as care givers.<sup>152</sup>

Municipal representatives were less vocal about addressing the needs of **elderly** in policies, although women living in some municipalities indicated that representatives of this group are often excluded from state policies.<sup>153</sup> Attention was drawn to this group only by the members of the Gender Equality Council of Poti Municipality, who pointed out that the Social Service and the Social Service Agency of the City Hall are located on the third floor of the municipality building, where it is difficult for the elderly to go. Accordingly, there are physical barriers along with informational ones in terms of their inclusion in social services.

The study identified **women ethnic minorities** as one of the vulnerable groups. Some municipalities indicate that, due to the high degree of their exclusion from public life, they implement certain support programs for them.<sup>154</sup> Nevertheless, some of the women participating in the study emphasized the passive role of the local authorities in terms of integration.<sup>155</sup>

Due to the fact that the municipalities do not provide resources for the translation of documents, public information, as well as the request or complaint submitted by the representative of this group into Georgian, the entire burden of translation (including the financial burden) falls on the representatives of the ethnic

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149. The municipality of Sachkhere indicated that accessible transport for disabled persons is operating on its territory.

150. Focus group with members of the Gender Equality Councils of Telavi, Khoni, Tskaltubo, Chuatura, Baghdati, Lagodekhi, Sagarejo, Signagi, Akhmeta, Lanchkhuti, Chokhatauri, Keda, Vani, Terjola, Lentekhi municipalities.

151. Focus group with women living in the municipalities of Tkibuli, Marneuli.

152. Focus group with women living in the municipality of Khulo.

153. Focus group with women living in the municipality of Tkibuli.

154. Focus group with the members of Kobuleti Gender Equality Council.

155. Focus group with women living in Sagarejo municipality.

minority, which is a significant barrier in terms of receiving information about various services and to get engaged in them. A number of actors focused on the information vacuum and exclusion of persons representing ethnic minorities during the study.<sup>156</sup>

Along with the above, one group that is not addressed by municipal budgets, action plans or other policy documents, as well as by the members of the Municipal Gender Equality Council, is **LBT women**, which once again indicates the extreme exclusion and invisibility of this group.

Women living in some municipalities focus on the challenges faced by LBT women<sup>157</sup> and indicate that the greatest pressure on them forces them to leave their homes and migrate internally/externally.<sup>158</sup> Part of the women participating in the study indicated that they have information about representatives of the queer community living in their territorial unit, who do not have the opportunity to express their identity, otherwise they face a real threat of violence from society and family members.<sup>159</sup>

The challenges faced by the representatives of this group are also confirmed by the Chairperson of the Permanent Parliamentary Council on Gender Equality, who indicates that, taking into account the existing attitudes and stereotypical views, there has been no progress in any direction regarding the LBT women's community.<sup>160</sup>

#### 4.4. Participation of women in decision-making processes

Involvement and effective participation of women in the decision-making process is one of the important prerequisites for ensuring gender equality and gender mainstreaming. The study analyzed on the one hand, the possibility of women to be employed in the municipality and to be in decision-making positions, on the other hand, it examined the participation of women in the decision-making process of the municipality.

##### 4.4.1. Representation of women on municipal positions

A number of Gender Equality Councils at the local level point out that women and men have the same employment opportunities in local self-government bodies, and there are no mechanisms to encourage women.<sup>161</sup> In addition, they point out that in municipalities, the remuneration of women and men for the same position is equal and is approved by the staff list.

Municipalities also indicate that they create an acceptable working environment for employees, however, a member of the Gender Equality Council of Tsalenjikha Municipality indicated that there is no bathroom in the building where the City Hall and the Sakrebulo (city council) are located (the Mayor and the Chairperson of Sakrebulo have personal bathrooms in the office space); as a result, they have to go home to use the bathroom.<sup>162</sup>

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156. Focus group with the members of Gardabani Gender Equality Council; Focus group with women living in Sagarejo, Ninotsminda, Gardabani, Kaspi municipalities.

157. Focus group with women living in the municipalities of Zugdidi, Telavi.

158. Focus group with women living in the municipality of Khulo.

159. Focus group with women living in the municipality of Chkhorotsku.

160. Interview with the Chairperson of the Permanent Parliamentary Gender Equality Council.

161. Focus group with the members of Lanchkhuti Gender Equality Council.

162. Focus group with the members of Tsalenjikha Gender Equality Council.



The majority of representatives of the Gender Equality Council indicate that women do not have barriers to employment and advancement in the municipality. However, the study showed, that the work practices of women in different positions of the municipality are heterogeneous. In certain municipalities, women are represented in certain decision-making positions,<sup>163</sup> which is of great importance in the implementation of gender equality policy at the local level.

On the other hand, there are municipalities where the representation of women in positions is low. As a rule, in such municipalities, except for some cases, high positions are held by men, whereas women occupy low-ranking civil servants' positions.<sup>164</sup> In the municipalities there are positions where only women are exclusively employed, for example, in the reception and case management department, as well as in such structural units as the library and kindergartens.<sup>165</sup>

*„For example, a man submitted an application to the city council for the position of a secretary, and they died laughing, how can a man be a secretary “  
A member of the Gender Equality Council of Batumi Municipality*

*“There was a vacancy in the City Hall for the position of a trustee in one of the villages, the initiative group presented a female candidate, she passed the interview, everything went well. [However] because you are a woman and if the pipe bursts at night you cannot go to repair it, they refused her”.  
A woman living in Akhaltsikhe municipality*

According to the women, for the jobs they “traditionally” hold in the municipalities, the remuneration is low, which is insufficient to meet even their minimum needs, and significantly reduces the degree of economic independence of women.<sup>166</sup>

Eventually, the study identified several problematic directions, which create significant barriers for women in terms of employment and/or advancement in local self-government bodies:

- Municipalities have not established sexual harassment prevention mechanisms, which is a necessary component of women’s employment and ensuring a safe working environment;<sup>167</sup>
- Issues of professional training of employed women are problematic in some municipalities. In most cases, women refuse to take part in retraining opportunities because of the burden of family work and care.<sup>168</sup> Information provided by the Gender Equality Council of Akhalkalaki Municipality is noteworthy, according to which some female employees were not allowed by their husbands to participate in

163. For example municipalities of Dusheti, Batumi, Tskaltubo, Kutaisi, Ozurgeti, Shuakhevi, Gurjaani, Baghdati, Terjola, Sachkhere, Kharagauli, Chuatura, Khoni, Lentekhu, Ambrolauri, Mestia, Oni, Tsageri, Chkhorotsku, akhaltsikhe, Tetrtskaro, Zugdidi.

164. For example, in the municipality of Lanchkhuti, with one exception, the heads of all departments of the City Hall are men; In the municipality of Chokhatauri, the vice-mayor is a woman, although the rest of the high-ranking positions are held by men; According to the Gender Equality Council of Khulo Municipality, the decision-makers are men - only 1 of the 10 offices of the City Hall is headed by a woman; All representatives of the mayors of Telavi and Khoni municipalities are men in the village; In the municipality of Samtredia, 4 out of 5 commissions of the Sakrebulo are headed by men; There is a shortage of women decision-makers in other locations as well, including in the municipalities of Dedoplistskaro, Telavi, Sagarejo, Gardabani, and Gori.

165. Focus group with the members of the Gender Equality Council of Batumi, Telavi, Zestaponi, Martvili municipalities. Focus group with women living in the municipalities of Keda, Tkibuli.

166. Focus group with women living in the municipalities of Khulo, Baghdati, Vani, Terjola, Sachkhere, Gori.

167. Note: here, some municipalities (Kutaisi, Vani, Gardabani, Gori) indicated the records of the Code of Conduct/Ethics and internal Charter.

168. Focus group with members of Gender Equality Councils of Lanchkhuti, Shuakhevi, Baghdati, Tsalka municipalities.



trainings, and those women who are “more realized” take part in such events;

- The members of the Gender Equality Council of Dmanisi, Ninotsminda and Akhaltsikhe municipalities stated that one of the barriers to women’s employment is that women are not allowed to work by their husbands/family members;
- The burden of women’s work at home, as well as the stereotypical and discriminatory attitude towards them prevents them from being in decision-making positions;<sup>169</sup>
- The mass employment of women in commissions is related to challenges, to the extent that occupying these positions is directly related to the intensity of people’s involvement in pre-election campaigns. Accordingly, political positions are formed according to the above;<sup>170</sup>
- A significant part of the municipalities<sup>171</sup> indicated that their building is completely or partially inaccessible to disabled persons,<sup>172</sup> which not only excludes their employment and active involvement in municipal activities, but also represents a barrier for citizens to enter the building and participate in public meetings and sessions.
- Along with women with disabilities, women from ethnic and/or linguistic minorities were identified as a vulnerable group, and one of the main challenges in their employment is the language barrier.<sup>173</sup>

Against this background, a number of actors consider the existence of a quota mechanism to be important. For example, the Chairperson of the Permanent Parliamentary Council for Gender Equality indicated that, due to the quota mechanism, at least one deputy chairperson of the Sakrebulo in each municipality is a woman.<sup>174</sup> Most of the Gender Equality Councils of the municipalities assess the quota positively, although they indicate that the mentioned mechanism should be used only temporarily, until the desired result is achieved.

The members of the Gender Equality Council of *Akhmeta Municipality* expressed a negative attitude regarding the quota mechanism and pointed out that “female members who do not have their own opinion and carry party interests without any problems are admitted to the Sakrebulo only because of the law; Keda Municipality’s Gender Equality Council indicated that instead of quotas, people should be selected based on their merit. This mechanism was severely criticized by the women members of the Gender Equality Council of Kobuleti Municipality, who stated that quotas are discriminatory and offensive, however, they are necessary in this situation. On the other hand, the men members of the council approach the quota mechanism in a completely stereotypical way.

***“Mr. [Council Member’s Name], you see how lucky we are?” What a beauty, do you see? (points to women) We agree to be in the minority”.  
A men member of Gender Equality Council of Kobuleti Municipality***

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169. Focus group with members of Gender Equality Councils of Baghdati, Khoni, Vani, Tianeti, Gardabani, Rustavi, Khashuri municipalities; Focus group with women living in the municipalities of Tkibuli, Akhmeta, Akhaltsikhe.

170. Interview with the Chairperson of the Permanent Parliamentary Gender Equality Council.

171. An exception is the municipality of Zestaponi, whose Gender Equality Council members indicated that the building is fully accessible for disabled people with mobility problems.

172. For example, the focus group with members of the Gender Equality Councils of Rustavi, Gurjaani, Telavi, Lanchkhuti, Ozurgeti, Dedoplistskaro, Kobuleti, Chokhatauri, Khulo, Shuakhevi, Lagodekhi, Signagi, Kvareli, Akhmeta, Chiatura, Tkibuli, Khoni, Lentekhi, Mestia, Abasha, Martvili, Poti, Chkhoroksu, Tsalendzhikha, Akhaltsikhe, Gardabani, Tsalka, Bolnisi, Marneuli, Khashuri, Khobi, municipalities.

173. Focus group with members of the Gender Equality Council of Ozurgeti, Kobuleti, Dmanis, Tetrtskaro, municipalities.

174. Interview with the Chairperson of the Permanent Parliamentary Gender Equality Council.

#### 4.4.2. Opportunities for women's participation in decision-making

Municipalities have mixed practices regarding women's involvement in decision-making at the local level. During the study, some municipalities indicated about various formats of meetings with the locals in the village assemblies, including for the purpose of discussing the budget.<sup>175</sup> Despite differences in local practices, a number of municipalities, as well as women living in some municipalities, indicated that the extent of women's involvement and participation in various types of meetings has increased in recent years.<sup>176</sup>

Nevertheless, women living in different municipalities of Georgia indicated that the degree of their involvement during meetings and decision-making, including the development of the budget, is extremely low.<sup>177</sup> Women living in some municipalities also emphasized that they do not participate in village assemblies, which are one of the important mechanisms for making decisions and sharing needs at the local level; in addition, it carries only a formal nature, there is a lack of information and/or desire (mostly, nihilism).<sup>178</sup>

In some cases, women point out that not only women, but the general population does not participate in the decision-making process, and the authority to make important decisions is only in the hands of a narrow group.<sup>179</sup>

*"I do not understand where the representative of the mayor was elected, where they were not elected, accompanied by "half a liter" of vodka, decisions are made in places where there are no women, for example, at the gathering place in the yard, where there are no women; they also do not go to meetings. In addition, women are not involved, nor are men involved, except for a specific narrow group."  
A woman living in Khulo Municipality*

Despite the activation of women in various formats, a number of systemic barriers related to their participation were identified in many municipalities. As indicated by women<sup>180</sup> these barriers include:

- Low awareness of women about the right to be involved in the decision-making process;
- The passive role of municipalities to create an inclusive decision-making process, including providing information about meetings;
- Women's low trust toward the processes and lack of hope for beneficial changes;
- Housework and the burden of care, due to which women do not have the time to be involved in the ongoing processes in the municipality;

175. Focus-group with the Gender Equality Council members of Kharagauli, Ambrolauri municipalities.

176. For example, a focus group with members of Gender Equality Councils of Ozurgeti, Shuakhevi, Ambrolauri, Tsalka municipalities; Focus group with women living in the municipalities of Keda, Chokhatauri, Sachkhere, Tskaltubo, Chiatura, Akhmeta, Kvareli, Martvili, Kaspi.

177. Focus group with women living in the municipalities of Shuakhevi, Lanchkhuti, Samtredia, Kharagauli, Sagarejo, Lagodekhi, Telavi, Tianeti, Mtskheta, Lentekhi, Ambrolauri, Oni, Tsageri, Abasha, Chkhorotsku, Khobi, Poti, Adigeni, Dmanisi, Tsalka, Bolnisi, Khashuri.

178. Focus group with women living in the municipalities of Lanchkhuti, Aspindza, Akhaltsikhe, Shuakhevi, Khulo, Baghdati, Vani, Zestaponi, Terjola, Samtredia, Tkibuli, Kharagauli, Sachkhere, Tskaltubo, Khoni, Kutaisi, Gurjaani, Dedoplistskaro, Sagarejo, Lagodekhi, Telavi, Tianeti, Mtskheta, Lentekhi, Mestia, Tsageri, Zugdidi, Abasha, Chkhorotsku, Poti, Adigeni, Akhalkalaki, Borjomi, Ninotsminda, Gardabani, Khashuri.

179. Focus group with women living in the municipalities of Khulo, Abasha, Chkhorotsku, Senaki, Tetrtskaro, Rustavi.

180. Focus group with women living in the municipalities of Batumi, Kobuleti, Keda, Shuakhevi, Khulo, Lanchkhuti, Baghdati, Vani, Zestaponi, Tkibuli, Kutaisi, Gurjaani, Dedoplistskaro, Tianeti, Kazbegi, Mtskheta, Lentekhi, Ambrolauri, Mestia, Oni, Tsageri, Zugdidi, Martvili, Chkhoroksu, Khobi, Tsalenjikha, Poti, Adigeni, Akhalkalaki, Aspindza, Akhaltsikhe, Ninotsminda, Dmanisi, Tsalka, Bolnisi, Tetrtskaro, Rustavi, Marneuli, Kareli, Khashuri.

- Stereotypical and discriminatory attitudes in the society towards the involvement and participation of women. It is noteworthy that the cases of internalization of the mentioned attitudes were also observed in the women participating in the study;
- In case of expressing a critical opinion or setting individual demands, attacks and negative attitude towards women, as well as selective involvement of the population;
- The problem of access to transport as a barrier to participation in meetings and events.

*“The influence of public opinion is also manifested in the fact that we are dependent on men, men still dominate and there is this view that a man is the main thing.”  
A woman living in Keda Municipality*

*“For example, I could not go to the village of [name], the road was not cleared, I wrote a post about it and received a reprimand, you should not be an intriguer. And after that, of course, I will not have a desire to say anything and go to any meeting.”  
A woman living in Khulo Municipality*

*“The representative of the village was in the town hall, and when I mentioned the problems, they scolded me, asking why I said that. I was there last year, and when I told them about the problems, they are not inviting me anymore.”  
A woman living in Marneuli Municipality*

Along with the above-mentioned barriers, the challenge is the involvement and participation of women from different groups in the decision-making process. One such group is **women with disabilities**. As mentioned above, the administrative buildings of a significant part of the municipalities are completely or partially inaccessible to persons with mobility problems, which excludes access to the building and the involvement of this community in various types of events. On the other hand, the problem is not only the involvement and participation of disabled people with other needs (for example, disabled people with hearing problems) in various events/processes, but also communication with municipality employees and receiving information/consultation from them on important issues, which again affects accessibility (including access to sign language translation).<sup>181</sup>

Another group that faces significant barriers in the meeting and decision-making process<sup>182</sup> are **ethnic minority women**. The low level of knowledge of the state language and the state’s neglecting attitude toward the right to access information in a language that is understandable to the representatives of this group is a prerequisite for their exclusion from decision-making processes. A number of municipalities (including Akhmeta, Kobuleti, Dedoplistskaro, Telavi municipalities) indicate the low level of integration and communication with ethnic minority representatives, including women. On the other hand, some municipalities (eg, Sagarejo and Lagodekhi municipalities) indicate that the degree of activity and integration of the representatives of the above-mentioned group has increased significantly.

181. Focus group with members of Gender Equality Councils of Tbilisi, Ambrolauri, Mestia, Tsageri, Dmanisi municipalities; Focus group with women living in the municipalities of Dedoplistskaro, Ambrolauri, Mestia, Tsageri.

182. Focus group with the members of the Gender Equality Councils of Gardabani, Dmanisi, Marneuli municipalities; Focus group with women living in the municipalities of Sagarejo, Lagodekhi, Telavi.

**Women representing the religious** minority spoke about the problems related to involvement and participation. For example, the residents of Khulo municipality noted that they presented an initiative to the municipality on the topic of Islamic heritage, according to which information about Islamic cultural heritage monuments would be posted on the website, as well as on tourist maps and information boards on the roads. When planning the budget, the municipality did not take their initiative into account, which, in their opinion, along with other examples, indicates to the practice that the municipality does not prohibit direct participation in the meeting, although it does not share women's recommendations and suggestions, therefore their involvement is also without results.

When talking about the barriers to involvement, the population also focused on age dimensions. For example, the women participating in the study indicated the low degree of involvement of **youth** in decision-making processes and the need for their participation.<sup>183</sup> Individual participants of the study also drew attention to the problem of involvement of the **elderly** and noted that representatives of this group are completely excluded from decision-making processes.<sup>184</sup> Along with the above-mentioned groups, **IDPs** were also identified as one of the excluded groups, who stated that they have communication challenges with various agencies and are not informed about any process taking place at the local level.<sup>185</sup>

Along with the above, one of the important prerequisites for the involvement and active participation of women is the high awareness of the population. In this part, the practice of municipalities is mixed. A number of municipalities have indicated that they hold information meetings in the municipality regarding gender equality. In these activities, as a rule, members of Gender Equality Councils are involved and they hold meetings in different locations (eg kindergartens, schools).<sup>186</sup> Women living in individual locations also indicated that they are implementing measures to raise awareness among the population together with the Gender Equality Council.<sup>187</sup> Nevertheless, both women living in different municipalities and representatives of municipal bodies indicate that the awareness level of women is still below average.<sup>188</sup>

As a result of different types of information activities, women living in some municipalities indicate that they are informed about the issues of gender equality and protection of women's rights at the local level, as well as the relevant documents on this topic.<sup>189</sup> However, in this case too, the study process was dominated by women who did not have information about the mentioned documents and relevant mechanisms.<sup>190</sup> Access to any type of information is especially challenging for women living in rural areas and/or women who do not have access to the Internet.<sup>191</sup>

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183. Focus group with women living in Shuakhevi, Abasha, Kaspi municipalities.

184. Focus group with women living in the municipalities of Dedoplistskaro, Lagodekhi, Telavi, Gardabani.

185. Focus group with women living in the municipalities of Khashuri and Gori.

186. Focus group with members of the Gender Equality Councils of Tbilisi, Ozurgeti, Gurjaani, Dedoplistskaro, Khulo, Shuakhevi, Kobuleti, Batumi, Sagarejo, Vani, Sachkhere, Samtredia, Tskaltubo, Chkhorotsku, Aspindza municipalities.

187. Focus group with women living in the municipalities of Chokhatauri, Sagarejo, Mtskheta.

188. Focus group with members of the Gender Equality Councils of Khulo, Kvareli, Terjola, Chiatura, Tkibuli, Ambrolauri, Mestia, Abasha, Chkhorotsku, Tsalenjikha, Dmanisi, Tsalka, Tetrtskaro, Khobi, municipalities; Focus group with women living in the municipalities of Batumi, Kobuleti, Lanchkhuti, Baghdati, Tkibuli, Kvareli, Abasha, Kareli.

189. Focus group with women living in the municipalities of Batumi, Chokhatauri, Gori.

190. Focus group with women living in the municipalities of Shuakhevi, Lanchkhuti, Baghdati, Vani, Zestaponi, Terjola, Tkibuli, Sachkhere, Tskaltubo, Chiatura, Khoni, Kutaisi, Dusheti, Tianeti, Lentekhi, Ambrolauri, Khashuri, Kareli, Mestia, Kaspi, Marneuli, Zugdidi, Abasha, Martvili, Khobi, Tsalenjikha, Poti, Adigeni, Akhalkalaki, Aspindza, Ninotsminda, Dmanisi, Tsalka, Tetrtskaro, Gardabani, Rustavi.

191. Focus group with women living in the municipalities of Chokhatauri, Khulo, Lagodekhi, Tianeti, Zugdidi, Adigeni, Tetrtskaro.

*“We have no information about the documents.  
These documents are on the website.  
I do not know how to use the Internet, for example, and how can I see it?”  
Women living in Khulo Municipality*

Although women in several locations reported that their involvement in the decision-making process has increased, the level of women’s awareness on involvement, participation, and advocacy is still significantly low. Realizing the possibility of participation of different groups (including women with disabilities, representatives of ethnic and/or religious minorities, the elderly) is a special challenge, which deprives them of the opportunity to put the challenges they face on the public agenda.

# RECOMMENDATIONS

## **To the Administration of the Government of Georgia:**

- Throughout 2023, in cooperation with NALAG, ensure informing the municipalities of Georgia and coordination between them and the relevant agencies, on the directions and priorities of the gender equality policy at the central level, including policy documents and standards.

## **To Municipalities:**

- Develop and approve gender equality strategies and action plans (in the absence of such) with the active participation of various interested actors, including local women;
- Take into account the needs of all vulnerable women (including women with disabilities, representatives of ethnic/religious minorities, the elderly, LBT women, etc.) in the gender equality policy documents;
- Provide gender equality action plans with appropriate financial and human resources;
- Provide continuous training of municipality employees and members of the Gender Equality Councils on issues of women's rights, gender equality and gender mainstreaming;
- Carry out periodic studies on the human rights situation of women at the local level and, based on their results, develop and implement various types of services, including in the field of women's economic empowerment, health care, and protection of victims of violence. Develop the communication strategy of the Municipal Gender Equality Councils and ensure their effective implementation;
- Provide systemic and systematic measures for raising the awareness of the population on the issues of women's rights, gender equality, violence against women and domestic violence. Take into account the needs of all vulnerable women (including women with disabilities, representatives of ethnic/religious minorities, the elderly, LBT women, etc.) during the planning and implementation of measures.





