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**WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION
IN PUBLIC AND POLITICAL LIFE
AND ECONOMIC ACTIVITIES**



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WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION IN PUBLIC AND POLITICAL LIFE AND ECONOMIC ACTIVITIES - EXISTING BARRIERS AND OPPORTUNITIES

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INTRODUCTION

One of the measures of country's democracy is the women's participation in the decision-making processes and the level of protection of their rights. Georgia, in line with its international commitments has made significant steps toward promoting gender equality and women's access to political, social and economic life, by carrying out political and legislative reforms. However, ensuring women's meaningful participation, which means influencing politics, public welfare that leads to solution of the problems, remains a significant challenge.

According to the data of the Inter-Parliamentary Union, as of July 2022, Georgia ranks 123 out of 185 countries in terms of representation of women in national parliaments. Global Gender Gap Report 2021, Georgia ranks 49th out of 156 countries. According to the same report, it ranks 60th place in terms of women's political participation and 64th place in terms of economic opportunities.¹ Gender distribution in Georgia's executive and legislative branches is still quite unequal. Only 2 women (8%) are among the 12 ministers in the Government of Georgia.² A relatively large gender gap in power has traditionally been observed in the legislative branch, both at the national and municipal levels. In 2020, the share of female MPs in Georgia was 19.3%,³ and the number of women in local self-government bodies was 15.5%. According to the NDI report, 31.4% of the candidates elected by the proportional system are women. However, despite the progress achieved through mandatory gender

1 Global Gender Gap Report, 2021, World Economic Report, p. 197, available at https://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF_GGGR_2021.pdf

2 According to 2022 July data.

3 Man and woman in Georgia, National Statistics Office of Georgia, 2021, p. 117, available at https://www.geostat.ge/media/41854/%E1%83%A5%E1%83%90%E1%83%9A%E1%83%98-%E1%83%93%E1%83%90-%E1%83%99%E1%83%90%E1%83%AA%E1%83%98-%E1%83%A1%E1%83%90%E1%83%A5%E1%83%90%E1%83%A0%E1%83%97%E1%83%95%E1%83%94%E1%83%9A%E1%83%9D%E1%83%A8%E1%83%98_2021.pdf

quotas, the number of women beyond proportional lists is quite small. Only 3 out of 64 newly elected mayors (4.7%), and 45 out of 664 majority council members are women (6.8%).⁴

Besides, there are still firmly rooted stereotypical views and cultural attitudes about women's role in public and political life in society, which identifies the women's condition and position at different stages of life. For example, different models of raising boys and girls, gender-stereotyped expectations towards women and men, and unequal distribution of work in the family affect the level of women's inclusiveness and participation in public life. Household chores (raising children, cleaning, cooking and taking care of family members) are mainly considered women's responsibility. More often than men, women have to choose between career and family, which affects the level of their involvement in public life. At the same time, women are more often victims of gender-based violence in the family, workplace, or society. It oppresses women and extinguishes their desire to develop, reducing ambitions, competitiveness and productivity.

Women's participation in social and political life is essential for building a democratic state and ensuring social justice and it is a precondition for social welfare and development. Based on their gender roles and experience, women have different views and approaches to several issues. Women pay more attention to issues such as gender-based violence, necessary preventive measures to eliminate it and ways of responding to it. They understand the single mothers' problems, the necessity of women's economic empowerment and the obstacles hindering their access to existing economic programs. Women feel the negative impact of environmental and infrastructural problems on their lives. These issues have a distinct gender dimension. Their solution and resolution require women's unconditional inclusiveness and integration of their vision in legislative activities and national, local or international policy making.

This document is a consolidated data report of the research conducted in six target municipalities by the Women's Fund "Sukhumi", within the framework of the project "Bridging the Gap: People to People -Initiatives for Conflict Resolution", supported by **the USAID agency**, which reflects the public attitude towards women's participation in political and public life and economic activities.

The study aimed to study the attitudes of various society groups towards women's participation in political and public life and economic activities. The attention was focused on views and

⁴ Election evaluation long-term small-scale mission of Georgia. Local self-government elections of 2021. Election evaluation report September 1 - November 5, 2021, NDI, available at https://www.ndi.org/sites/default/files/NDI%20Georgia%202021%20Limited%20Long%20Term%20Election%20Assessment%20Mission%20Report%20GEO_0.pdf

stereotypes prevailing in society about women's role and status, as well as on the barriers and facilitating factors hindering their participation.

The findings revealed through the research, and the recommendations developed based on them will be the basis for advocacy campaigns carried out by the Fund "Sukhumi" representatives, women and young leaders living in local communities in the six target municipalities.

PART I: STUDY METHODOLOGY AND DEMOGRAPHIC DATA

Methodology: 90 women and young leaders of the local communities of six target municipalities trained by the Fund "Sukhumi" participated in the data collection process.

The study was conducted using **quantitative** and **qualitative** methods.

A questionnaire which mainly consisted of closed questions was developed for **quantitative research**. **The questionnaire** was filled out online, during which **965 respondents** were interviewed.

The focus group discussion technique and in-depth individual interviews with a pre-designed structured questionnaire were used within the qualitative research framework. **In total, 24 focus groups and 24 in-depth interviews** were conducted, in which representatives of local self-government and non-governmental organizations, professional groups, and experts from various fields were involved.

A total of **151 people** participated in the qualitative research, including **124 women** and **27 men**. In total, the study involved **1116 people** (706 women and 410 men), including IDPs, locals, socially vulnerable and disabled people, single mothers and mothers of large families, teachers, doctors, entrepreneurs, community leaders, students, pensioners, youth, local experts and other groups of society.

The study covered the **population of six municipalities** in two regions of western Georgia - **Imereti and Samegrelo** - Kutaisi (out of the total number of respondents - 16.2%), Tskaltubo (16.9%), Khoni (15.5%), Zugdidi (18.8%), Senaki (16.6%) and Tsalenjikha (16.1%). Respondents were selected based on different socio-demographic characteristics, allowing for generalising the data.

The survey was conducted during December 2021-January 2022.

Socio-demographic characteristics of the study:

Gender: the majority of respondents (582 persons) - 60.3% were women, and 39.7% (383 persons) – were men.

Age: the age limit of respondents ranged from 18 to 65, the majority of which - 34.3%, were from 18 to 30; 33% - from 31 to 45; 18.3% - from 45 to 65; 8.3% - from 56 to 54 and a relatively small proportion, namely 6.1%-were women over 65.

59.6% of respondents are **local population**, and 35.5% are **IDPs**. It should also be noted that in **Zugdidi and Tsalenjikha municipalities, most of the surveyed local population were women and men living in the villages adjacent to the ABL⁵**, which makes up about a third of the total number of respondents.

Marital status: more than half of the respondents are married - 56.3%, single - 28.2%, divorced - 5.9%, widowed - 5.7%, and in unregistered marriage-2.1%.

Education: more than half of the respondents have higher education - 53.4%, secondary education - 23.2%, vocational education - 17.5% and incomplete secondary education - 5.9%.

Employment: more of the respondents are employees - 55.1%, unemployed - 19.2%, students - 10.4%, housewives - 9.2% and pensioners - 6.1%.

PART II: WOMAN`S PARTICIPATION IN PUBLIC AND POLITICAL LIFE

2.1. THE ROLE OF MEN AND WOMEN IN THE FAMILY AND SOCIETY - PUBLIC ATTITUDES

Society's attitude towards the role of men and women in the family and society is significantly determined by **firmly established and prevailing stereotypes among the population**. They clearly distinguish the position of men and women in the family and indicate the superiority of men over women regarding the distribution of household responsibilities, taking care of the family's financial well-being, and positioning themselves at the decision-making reins.

According to the quantitative data, **taking care of the house and family** (78.9% of the cases), **raising children** (66% of the cases), **cleaning the house and cooking** (30.9% of the cases) are considered women's primary functions. Whereas **the function of managing family finances** (15.6%), **earning money for personal and family needs** (26.4%), and **taking a leading position in public and decision-making** (21.6%) is less assigned to them. It should also be noted that the answer «**a woman should study for career development**» (42.7% of cases) was relatively high, which was emphasised mainly by the respondents aged 18-30 (58.6%).

⁵ Residents of the village Paluri, Pakhulani, Tskoushi and Lia were interviewed in Tsalenjikha municipality. In addition, we interviewed residents of Khurcha, Orsantia, Koki, Anaklia, Didi Nedzi, Tsaishi and Oruli in Zugdidi municipality. -

Unlike the women's role, **the men's role in the family and society** was distributed in reverse proportion. In addition to **the obligation of taking care of the home and family, which is considered by the interviewees as more or less a similar function of men and women** (67.6% of cases), society still assigns a dominant role and obligation of earning money (66.8%) and managing financial resources in the family (37.6%) to men. While **household and family activities like preparing dinner and tidying up are practically not considered a man's function**. Significantly, a small part of the respondents considers food preparation and cleaning a man's function (4.4% of respondents). These are men aged 18-30 and 31-45 (27 out of 42 respondents). It shows a trend to break traditional gender stereotypes in the young and middle-aged generation, especially among men. Significantly, society assigns **the responsibility of raising children to men twice less than women** (37.6% of cases). The answer «**protecting the family from external threats**» is noticeably higher among men (47.1% of cases), while only 8.8% of respondents assign this function to women (see diagrams #1 and #2 for details).

Diagram #1

What is the women's role in the family and society (no more than 3 answers)

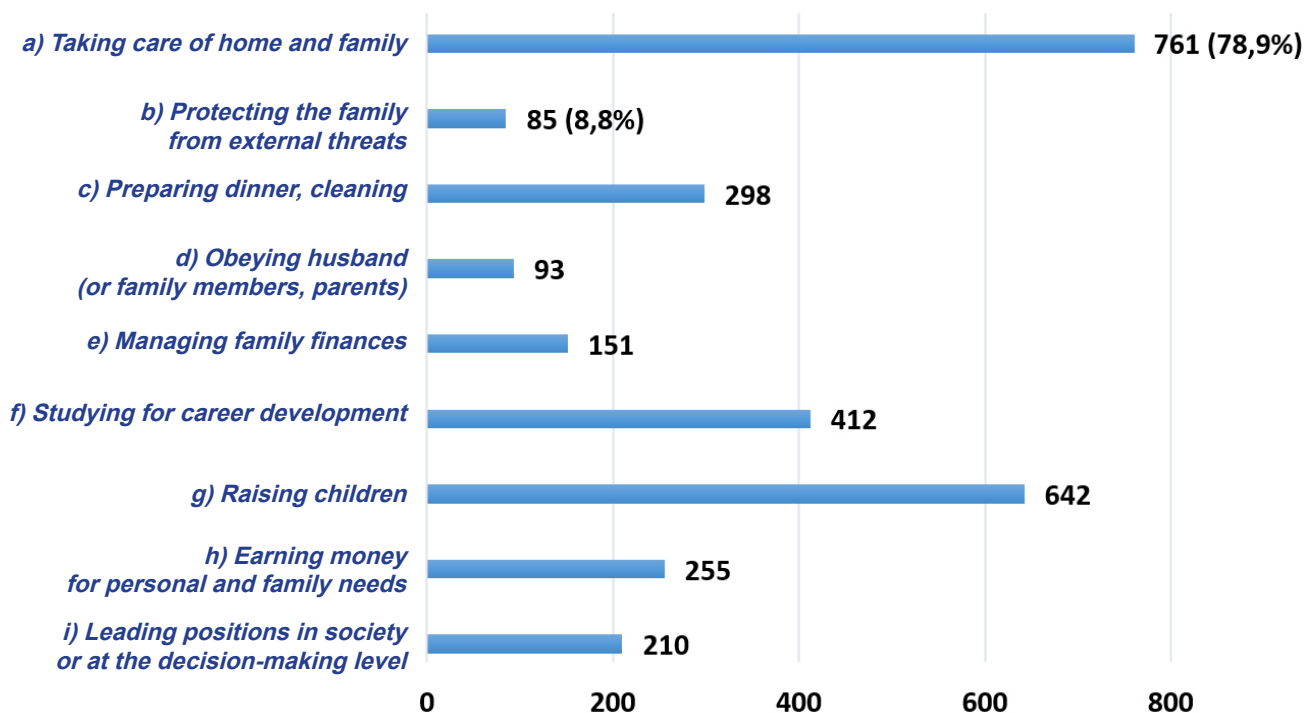
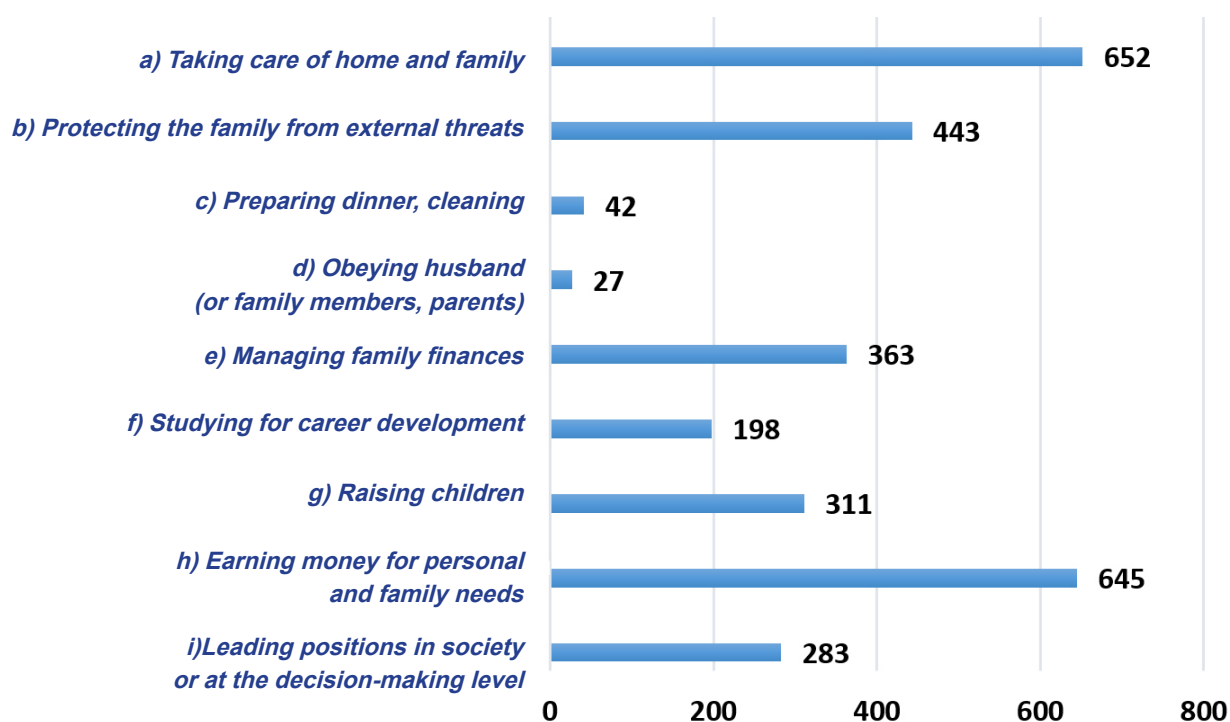


Diagram #2

What is the men`s role in the family and society (no more than 3 answers)



Qualitative study data support the gender stereotypes of men and women's roles in society. According to it, the men's dominant role in the family compared to women's and women's "double work" are considered the norms. For instance, *"man is the backbone of the family" and "man is the breadwinner"*. Besides, the women's primary function is *«raising children and taking care of the family»*. Although the men participating in the study consider women's involvement in public life, they still believe that this should not harm the family - *"A woman can go to work, be busy with public affairs, but only if she equally copes with domestic and public activities."* - (Focus group with men, Zugdidi municipality); *"A woman should be in the kitchen. But if she is very smart, she may be involved in public life too. However, she should still spend more time in the kitchen"* - (M.A., a man of 45, Khoni municipality). Otherwise according to some men respondents - *"It turns out that men should do "women's work" and then their [men's] rights should be protected?!"* - (men's group discussion, Senaki). Women participating in the focus group discussion believe that *"Society imposes more obligations and responsibilities on women, and gives more rights to men"*, which they think is unfair and must be changed.

During the discussion, **the the impact of "education" on stereotypical views was highlighted**. Part of the respondents emphasized that education does not always mean

freedom from stereotypes since - *“Many fulfilled women often voice the position that “men’s decision is superior”.* However, at the same time they emphasized that **this is mainly characteristic of the older generation of women.**

The qualitative research showed **the trend of liberation of the young generation from gender stereotypes** - *“I have seen a lot in practice, even at the trainings I have conducted that young generation, who have received civic education or have undergone trainings, significantly change their approaches. They understand that they should act according to their desire and will, not by the influence of others or their fathers.”* - (Civil society organization representative, an activist, a man of 42, Zugdidi); *“I’m young [21 years old], and I live independently. When you live alone, you become an object of gossip for society because they believe a woman should live with her family. However, an active woman doing something is normal to me... I think our future is in our hands, regardless of gender.”* (L.M. young girl, tutor of 21, displaced from Gali, Zugdidi municipality).

During the discussion, it was revealed that the society’s attitude towards gender roles in **the village and the city** is different. The respondents emphasized that a woman in the city has more opportunities for self-realization. Besides, living in the city requires her [woman] to be active, which in turn naturally leads to her empowerment and, to some extent, liberation from traditional gender stereotypes, equal distribution and management of time and roles - *“The situation of a woman in the city is drastically different from that in the countryside. If young people in the city do not work all day, supporting themselves or their families is impossible. You will often meet families where a woman works until a certain time, then a man, and if they have children, they share their time and duties. In the villages, people still have the same mentality, and they think that “taking care of a child is not a man’s job; it is the woman’s duty.”*- (M. P., a teacher, IDP, Tsalenjikha municipality).

Although gender stereotypes still exist, provision assessments in the quantitative study revealed readiness to revise the roles established for men and women. The absolute majority (83.4%) agrees with the statement that **“women should have the right to speak on important decisions in the family and society”** (83.4%); **“women should discuss financial issues in the family on an equal footing”** - 80%; **“men and women should be equally involved in household chores (taking care of home and children)”** - 81,7%. 47.5% fully agree, 28% partially agree, and 19.7% disagree with the statement that **“a married woman can choose to work outside the home without her husband’s consent”**. Notably, 23.9% of respondents agree, and 43.9% disagree with the statement **“in case of conflict or disagreement between husband and wife, the final decisive word is upon the husband”**.

2.2. WOMEN'S INCLUSIVENESS IN PUBLIC AND POLITICAL LIFE

Qualitative research participants' opinions about increasing women's inclusiveness in social and political life were divided.

One part (mainly women) notes that women's involvement in social and political life is significant for social welfare and development, better identifying existing needs and responding to them because women have a different view of the problem and feel peculiarly the impact of existing problems on their lives - *"Increasing women's inclusiveness in public and political life is not only important but necessary. In all strong and developed countries, women's participation in politics in various leading positions, such as ambassadors, is high because women's empowerment is a precondition for strengthening the country and solving many social problems."* (M. A., woman, 49, housewife, Tskaltubo).

"Women understand the existing problems better and feel their impact on their lives differently. For example, men do not bother so much that a woman does not have water at home, they do not wash laundry and dishes, and do not clean the house." (T.S., a woman of 29, entrepreneur, village Tskoushi, Tsalenjikha municipality).

During the discussion, respondents highlighted the qualities of women that can be considered as contributing factors to women's success in social and political life - *"Women are less aggressive, peace-loving and try to resolve the conflict mainly through negotiations."* (Focus group, Khoni).

Although **the second part** of the respondents recognises the women's talent and potential in the political arena, they still do not consider politics a "woman's job" - *"I like women in politics; they are not less intelligent than anyone else. Do I want my mother or wife to be in politics? I don't want to because I prefer the lady of my family to be in a calm environment and not to be confronted."* (B.B., a man of 35, the City Council member, IDP Khoni Municipality).

The third part (mostly men) clearly expresses **horizontal gender segregation approaches** and delineates **«female» and «male» professions**, and considers women's place to be more in education, health care and social services.

Some men stated that women's participation in decision-making positions is necessary. However, it should be done not through quotas. According to their opinion, women should become more active - *"Georgian legislation has regulated women's participation in politics, including in the self-governing electoral body and the parliament. Setting quotas is included in the legislation; I would say that including women only through quotas is not the result. Women themselves should be more active, and not a specific party should decide who should be included in the list."* (B.B., a male of 35, Khoni Municipality City Council member, head of the Khoni IDPs' initiative group).

Part of the women participating in the qualitative study emphasized that today a woman has taken a lot of responsibility towards the family and the country, **and her role in public welfare is already quite high. However, this is not adequately understood, appreciated and recognized** - «*Women are the main source of our budget in Georgia. There are so many immigrants sending money. A woman does the main work in the household. The fact that women play the secondary role is just a prevailing opinion in society. Women do everything, but society does not admit it.*» - (E.B., a woman of 58, small entrepreneur, village Koki).

It is significant that according to the quantitative research, the absolute majority of respondents believe that **increasing women's involvement in public and political life is essential - 83.1%**. 90% of women and 70% of men participating in the study agreed with this opinion. 7.3% of respondents **do not consider it necessary** for women to participate in the political and public life, the majority of whom are men aged 31-55. 10.3% find it difficult to express a position regarding the mentioned issue.

When asked why women's participation in decision-making is essential for them, according to most respondents, **women will make politics more balanced, socially oriented (55%), and adjusted to the women's priorities and specific needs (48.4%)**. Furthermore, the study also highlighted women's **diplomacy (36.8%) and a high level of reliability among the population (23.3%)**, which is an additional argument to emphasize the need for their inclusiveness in public or political life (see table #1 for details). Significantly, 10.8% of respondents do not agree with any of the answers mentioned above, and men of middle age (31-45 years old) prevail.

Table #1

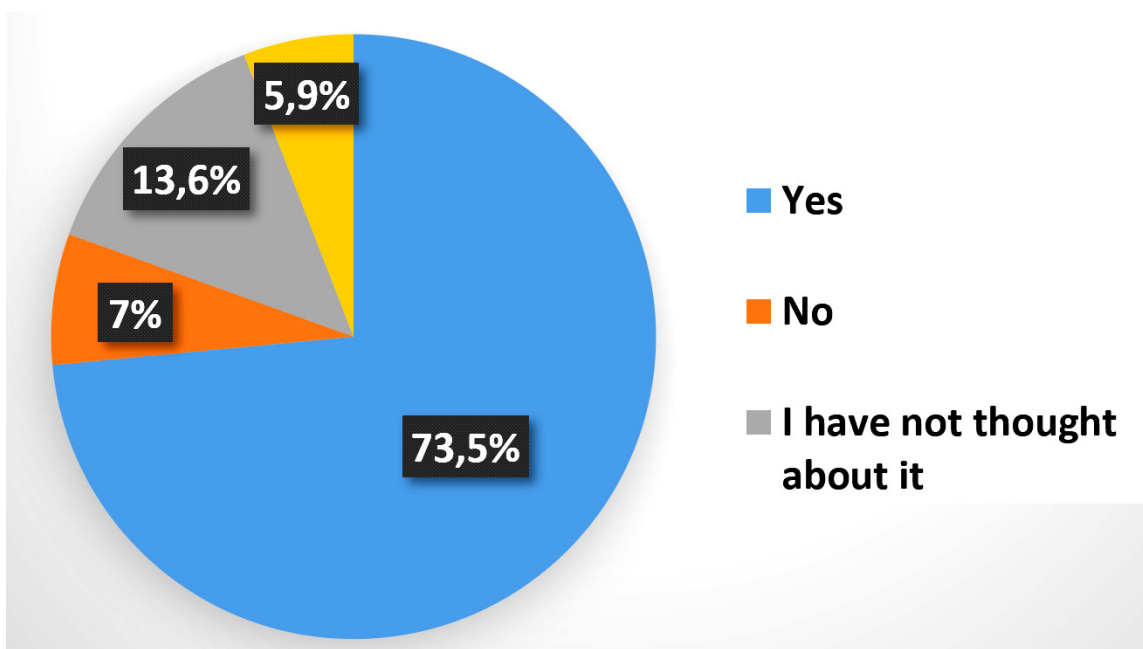
<i>Why is women's participation in decision-making important, both in public and political life?</i>	
	<i>% of cases</i>
<i>a) Woman will balance politics and make it more socially oriented</i>	55
<i>b) Woman will pay more attention to the specific needs and priorities of women</i>	48,8
<i>c) Woman enjoys more trust in society</i>	23,3%
<i>d) Woman is more diplomatic</i>	36,8
<i>e) I do not agree with any opinion</i>	10,8

Although gender equality acceptance is slowly emerging in the population's consciousness, paradoxically, the interviewees' answers regarding the opinion spread in the society on women's participation at different levels of government were divided. Most respondents believe that two opinions are generally prevail in society - «**Women should have the same opportunity to be elected to decision-making positions as men**» - 41.5%; «**Men are more compatible with political life than women**» - 32.4%. The first opinion was emphasised mainly by women, and the second by men aged 18-45. On the other hand, 13.2% of respondents believe that there is still a widespread opinion in society that **the primary function of a woman is taking care of family and children and not positioning herself on the public political stage, and also that women are not good leaders** (3.8%).

It is noteworthy that despite the firmly rooted stereotypes in society, the majority of the respondents have a **desire for career advancement** - 73.5% (see diagram #3), which was practically equally divided between women (74%) and men (71%). In terms of age, the desire for career advancement was mainly reported by the 18-45 age group. 7% say that career advancement is not a priority, and 5.9% indicate that **they do not have such an opportunity**. Most of them are women (6.4%) and only 5.2% are men. **Lack of opportunity for career advancement**, in most cases was emphasized by the IDPs.

Diagram #3

Do you have a desire for career advancement?



2.3. BARRIERS TO WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION IN PUBLIC AND POLITICAL LIFE

Many obstacles hinder women's active participation in the public and political arena, which primarily stemmed from cultural-traditional and social-political factors prevailing in the society.

During the qualitative research, the respondents identified the following barriers:

❖ *Incompatibility of family responsibilities and career life*

Family responsibilities are widely perceived as one of the main obstacles to women's career advancement. Traditionally, women in Georgia are more engaged in family activities (raising children, working in the kitchen, keeping the household clean), which takes a lot of time. In addition, when women simultaneously work in different positions or jobs, there is little time left for additional social activity.

Families in a poor economic situation, whose incomes are pretty limited, cannot free women from the family and household burdens, considering the lack of free public childcare services supporting working women. Inflexible work schedules, short working hours of public kindergartens/schools or absence of summer kindergartens/schools prevent women from being employed or being active in public and political life - *"Nobody supported me in raising children. I had no financial means to hire someone to assist me. Therefore, I had to leave everything, and I could not realize myself in the public life."* (N. G., 45 years old, small entrepreneur, village Didi Nedzi). Male respondents also support the view that *"a woman should take care of her family first"*, and they clearly distinguish between *"women's and men's work"*.

During the discussion, the female respondents touched upon women's reproductive function and role, which is undervalued and still used as the dominant argument for less support of women's participation in social and political life and justification of women's attachment to the family. These factors significantly limit women in career advancement.

Despite the fact that the boundaries between public and private lives of women are gradually becoming blurred in Georgia, **domestic work is still perceived as a legitimate space for women, while public space is predominantly associated with men.**

❖ *The nature of politics - rigid, «dirty» and «unfair»*

It has been noted that **the barrier to women's involvement in politics is sometimes the "character" of politics, in which the game rules are often too rigid and harsh** - *"I have no desire to be in politics. I hate even turning on the TV and watching public channels, it is full of filth, lies, a mockery..."* (Ph. Sh., a woman of 59, kindergarten teacher, village Koki).

During the discussion, the respondents noted that "politics is dirty". They emphasized the unfair practices of "black" PR technologies and intimidation, which on the one hand, discourages

women from participating in politics under unfair rules of the game, and on the other hand, deprives them of the support of their family members - *“Although I admit a woman’s intelligence, I would not like my wife to be in politics... I don’t want her to face the problems and rigidity in the political space.”* - (men’s focus group, Zugdidi municipality).

According to female respondents, a particular part of women believe that *“politics is not their business”*, which gives men additional leverage to prove their superiority.

❖ **The «manly» model of politics**

The dominance of men in the political arena conditions the organization of this space by “man’s rules” - *“Men have created their “world” in politics and feel comfortable there. They have their code of conduct and speak the same language and are not interested in engaging women who violate their normal state of affairs.”* (women politicians, individual interview, Tbilisi).

Today’s masculine model of politics is based on competition and confrontation, and women usually diverge from such an environment.

The work schedule characteristic of active social and political life is not adjusted to the specific situation of mothers of young children. Women hardly balance family life with demands such as working late hours and travelling outside the city/abroad. Accordingly, they either refrain from being active themselves or do not have the family support to participate in the active political or public life.

❖ **Lack of financial resources**

Limited economic resources prevent women from advancing and gaining leadership positions - *“In the conditions of mass unemployment and the difficult socio-economic situation in the country, many employed women prefer to be satisfied with what they have and do not want to take the risk and lose their existing status in search of political advancement.”* (woman of 35, civil activist, Kutaisi).

The financial barrier often arises due to the **uneven distribution of family tasks**, which takes more time for women and limits the opportunity of earning money. If the spouse is financially well off, the woman must stay home and not think about development and self-realization since *“she has everything and there is nothing more she should want.”*

❖ **Lack of women’s solidarity**

The lack of women’s solidarity is another essential obstacle to women’s active participation in decision-making and political life. According to some respondents, there are women who have already established themselves in politics. However, they do not show **the necessary support for implementing a gender equality policy**. There is also a category of women who

do not vote for female candidates or criticize them for their actions - *“One of my female friends put forward a candidacy for the village deputy position, which caused a negative reaction from a certain part of the society, including women, who have been commenting “ she should stay at home and raise her children. She has a job, and politics is not her job”... Even though, she is a strong woman, the society`s views turned out to be an impeding factor.”* – I. Ch., a woman of 36, housewife, Khoni.

Respondents also emphasized that society and women themselves **are more critical and demanding towards women** and have more expectations from them than from male politicians or leaders.

According to quantitative data, a woman’s active inclusiveness in public and political life is mostly prevented by **the lack of relevant qualifications** (47.5% of cases) and **lack of education** (29.8%); **family and childcare obligations** (38.7% of cases); **insufficient funds to get engaged in politics** -32.3%; **long and inflexible working hours** (31.3%) and **high competition** - 27.2% (see table #2 for details). 20% of respondents indicated that they do not want to enter the active public and political arena, which was practically equally distributed between women and men participating in the research. In terms of age, young and middle-aged respondents are the least interested in active participation.

Table #2

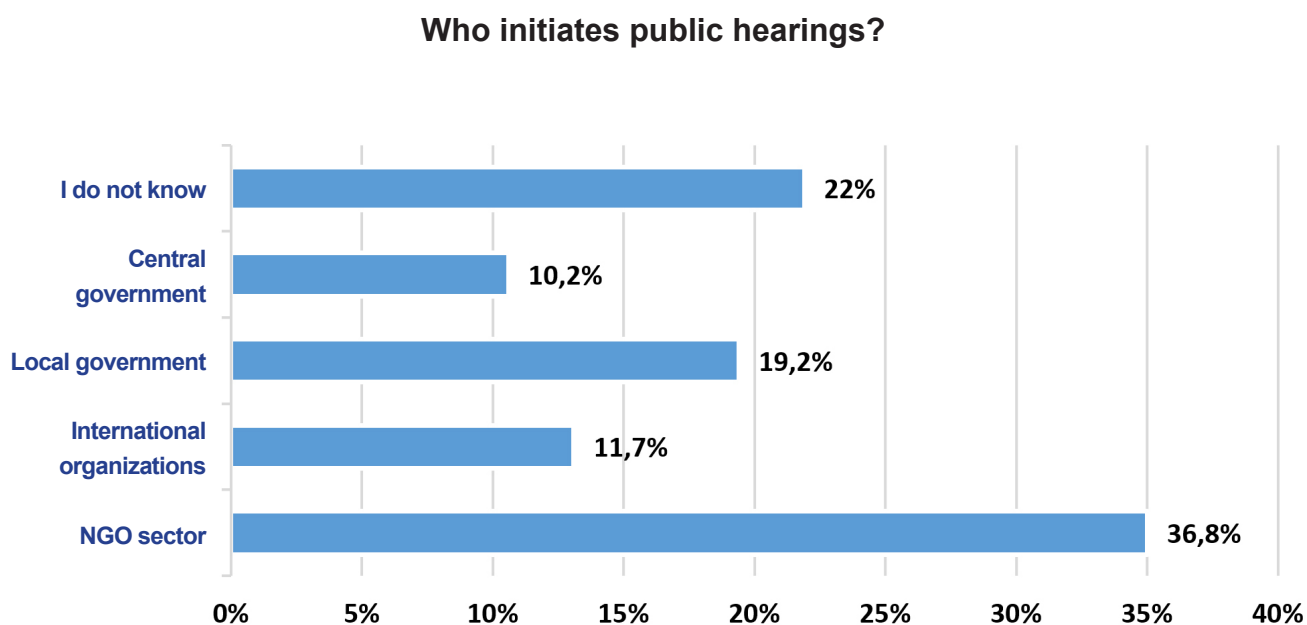
<i>What prevents you from being actively involved in public or political life?</i>	<i>%</i>
<i>a) Lack of relevant qualification</i>	<i>47,5</i>
<i>b) Responsibility for family and children</i>	<i>38,7</i>
<i>c) Lack of financial means</i>	<i>32,3</i>
<i>d) Long working hours</i>	<i>31,3</i>
<i>e) Lack of appropriate education</i>	<i>29,8</i>
<i>f) great competition</i>	<i>27,2</i>
<i>g) Lack of leadership qualities</i>	<i>25,1</i>
<i>h) I have no desire to actively participate in public and political life</i>	<i>20</i>
<i>i) Gender stereotypes in society that women do not have a place in leading positions</i>	<i>15,5</i>
<i>j) Lack of support from the partner (family)</i>	<i>12,5</i>
<i>k) Non-existence of women’s movement and solidarity</i>	<i>9,5</i>

2.4. WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION IN PUBLIC DISCUSSIONS AND THE MOST COMMON FORMS OF ENGAGEMENT

The survey data revealed a low level of citizen inclusiveness in public discussions. More than half of the respondents (50.5%) have not participated in the discussions related to the population's priority needs or topical issues for their community. Only 39.2% have participated, and the number of men (40%) and women (38%) is equally distributed among them. More than a third of the interviewed IDPs also have the experience of participating in public discussions (37%). However, 10.4% of respondents have never heard of such an opportunity. The elderly aged +65, people of 18-30 (40%) and 31-45 years (40%) are more active age categories. Citizens aged 56-64 are the least involved (22%). Qualitative research participants emphasized the role of non-governmental organizations in organizing discussions and being interested in the population's needs and the problems they face. Participants emphasized Women's Fund "Sukhumi"'s meetings. In their opinion, *"Their meetings are not just tick box exercise (focus group participants, Khoni municipality).*

In the quantitative study, more respondents named the non-governmental sector as the initiator of public discussions (36.8%), and the local government took second place (19.2%). Participants mentioned the central government the least (10.2%) in organising meetings and discussions with the population. (See Diagram #4 for details).

Diagram #4



As for the desired forms of the population's inclusiveness and participation in public discussions, according to the quantitative data, three main forms of involvement were identified: **meetings to study the population's needs** - (62.8%); **meetings in villages or communities with local authorities** - (50.5%), and **engagement in civil councils at local authorities to discuss local problems** (26.5%). In addition, more than a quarter of respondents indicated discussing local/central programs and budgets with government representatives (25.1%).

Qualitative research participants emphasized **the importance of attending City Council sessions and village congregations and establishing "open door" days** in the City Halls, which, in their opinion, is the best way to raise voice and reach out the decision-makers, which may affect the decisions. A **petition** was also mentioned, as a good tool for initiating issues and solutions critical to the community.

The participants also touched on the necessity of introducing a systematic practice of studying **the population's needs** and importance of timely response and addressing the issues raised by the population - *"There are many forms of inclusiveness. I would underline the needs-assessment. Identifying the problem and then working to eliminate that problem is essential."* (a woman of 43, Lia, librarian, Zugdidi municipality).

During the monitoring exercise, respondents discussed the importance of **introducing the online participation systems during the pandemic** and stressed on the need to strengthen citizens' digital skills.

When discussing the problems, **the population's passivity** to participate in public discussions was emphasized - *»The problem is that we are not active in the community, we don't talk about problems out loud, we adapt to the current situation, and we don't strive for better.»* (woman of 47, resident of village Tskoushi). However, at the same time, they also pointed out the reasons of existing inertness, including **years of unsolved severe social conditions, mistrust and nihilism** - *"People have to live in challenging conditions, struggle for survival every day, and their problems have been unresolved for years... So they don't believe anything will change with their participation."* - (M. Ch., an IGP woman of 31, activist, Zugdidi Municipality).

2.5. FACTORS CONTRIBUTING TO THE STRENGTHENING OF WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION

According to the qualitative research participants, **the woman must have the desire and ambition to be active**. However, **family support is crucial in this case**. Both female and male respondents indicated this equally - *"When there is support from the family, then all other areas will become available for women."* (L. G., a man of 37, lawyer, village Didi Nedzi).

Respondents also mentioned **appropriate family conditions** to strengthen women's participation and the equal distribution of the women's double burden to other family members - *«A person should develop every day, but in our reality, when a woman rushes to work in the morning, takes care of her family after returning home, then runs to the farm, or takes care of livestock, in the evening, she barely can receive information and develop. Therefore, it is necessary to create the necessary conditions for a women's development.»*- (I. G., a woman of 52, mathematician, Khoni).

Respondents emphasized **the need for greater acceptance of women's empowerment by society**. It is essential to bring about mental changes so that society realizes that *"the kitchen is not a woman's job"*. So, it is necessary to **demonstrate women leaders' successful examples** and emphasize the positive role of women. The awareness and information campaign must be aimed at men - *"Men will hear, see and understand many things and will have less negative attitude towards active and leader women."*- (Ts.J., a woman of 37, married, employed).

During the discussion, respondents expressed the opinion that the government should make women more active, on the one hand, through **the development of gender-sensitive laws/ refining the existing ones**, and on the other hand, through **the proper enforcement of already existing laws and policies** - *"It is not enough to talk about gender equality and refer to the laws on the shelf. It is also necessary to implement them in all spheres so that women can enjoy all the rights granted to them."* (N. N., a woman of 56, kindergarten teacher, village Koki, Zugdidi municipality).

They emphasized the role of non-governmental organizations in conducting information meetings, discussions, and trainings with women, where the leadership skills and self-esteem of women should be raised so that they believe in their own potential and become more active, not to be afraid of the stereotypes remaining in the society - *"It would be good if "women's clubs" were created. They would be aimed to work with "passive" women, to interest them... women who, due to various cultural-psychological and economic barriers, do not want to be active in society, or have ever been, but due to existing circumstances they hold back."*- (M.S., woman, local government representative, Khoni municipality).

The quantitative data accurately reflect the trends identified in the qualitative research, where most respondents underlined - **“the need to create conditions for career growth for women (internships, training courses)”** - 35.5%. Male and female respondents equally share this opinion. A third of the respondents also believe it is essential to **“work more with women on leadership qualities and public-political participation”** - 30%; 22.5% of the respondents indicated raising public awareness and increasing solidarity towards female candidates (see table #3).

Table #3

<i>• What would contribute to increasing women’s participation at the decision-making level?</i>	<i>%</i>
<i>Creation of conditions for career growth (internship, training courses)</i>	<i>35,5</i>
<i>More work with women on leadership qualities and public-political participation</i>	<i>30,1</i>
<i>Raising public awareness and increasing solidarity towards female candidates</i>	<i>22,5</i>
<i>Promotion of women leaders</i>	<i>7</i>
<i>Opportunity to get education abroad</i>	<i>5,3</i>

PART III: WOMEN’S PARTICIPATION IN ECONOMIC ACTIVITIES

Among the major global priorities are women’s economic empowerment and participation in business activities. Women’s economic empowerment and involvement in entrepreneurial activities are essential for the country’s economic development and poverty reduction. It also creates the main precondition for overcoming discrimination against women, achieving equality, and preventing violence against women.

The present study assessed the level of population and especially women’s awareness about economic empowerment programs, analyzed the barriers impeding their access to economic activities, and considered the factors contributing to women’s active participation in entrepreneurial activities.

3.1. INFORMING WOMEN ABOUT ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT STATE PROGRAMS AND CHANNELS FOR RECEIVING INFORMATION

According to the quantitative study data, **most respondents desire to participate in economic activities** (72.2%) and 23% of respondents **have no desire**. Only 4.8% could not participate in economic activities, despite their efforts.

The study revealed the low level of the population's awareness of the existing economic programs in the country. More than half of the respondents (53.5%) **do not have** sufficient information about existing business/entrepreneurship support programs. The lack of information was confirmed by the respondents of focus group discussions, especially rural women. They spoke about their ideas and desire to implement small businesses and use rural resources. But unfortunately, they do not have sufficient information about existing entrepreneurship support programs – *«I have a desire to start a small business, but I do not know to whom to address to provide me with this information. The rural population suffers from a lack of information.»*– (N.S., a woman of 37, housewife, village Pakhulni). 32.3% of **respondents are informed** about economic programs, while 14.2% **have not been interested in this issue**.

The most well-known programs for the majority of interviewed women are “Produce in Georgia”. However, some of the respondents who are already involved in business and represent non-governmental organizations also named another business and small entrepreneurship support programs funded by international organizations, including entrepreneurship development programs supported by the European Union. Their complete base is consolidated on a specially created web page - „Projects Georgia” <https://projects.org.ge/index.php>; European Neighborhood Program for Rural and Agricultural Development ENPARD (<https://eu4georgia.eu/ka/enpard/>); Programs implemented within the framework of the United Nations Development Program (UNDP).

Internet (websites and social networks) is **the primary source of information on economic programs for most of the respondents** - 78.5% of cases. 59.4% of respondents received information through «television and radio». A third of the respondents (31%) named **non-governmental organizations** as a source of information.

3.2. BARRIERS TO ACCESS TO ECONOMIC PROGRAMS

During the study, the barriers preventing the population from access to economic programs and engaging in business/entrepreneurial activities were identified.

According to a qualitative study, **barriers regarding equality between women and men are everywhere and in business as well**. **Gender stereotypes and diminishing women's opportunities** is considered obstacles. Female respondents indicate that **women are fully responsible for caring for their families and children**, while they have less support from

other family members. Therefore, it can become an obstacle for them. *«For a woman, family comes first... she cannot leave the house because she has children to take care of and cannot leave them... she often does not have a helper... if she leaves the house and devotes all her time to work, the society will look at it differently.»* – (IGP woman, 39 years old, housewife, Zugdidi municipality).

In addition, the insufficient number of free childcare services that would be adjusted to an employed mother working schedule (absence of childcare/extended care services in schools and kindergartens, absence of summer kindergartens and schools, insufficient day and evening childcare centers) is considered an important barrier to women's economic empowerment.

According to the male respondents of focus group, most citizens do not have the opportunity to start a business with their funds **due to a lack of financial means**. In addition, the high interest rate of the available credits **makes many people lose motivation** to start an entrepreneurial activity - *"The interest rate on bank loans is so high that in many cases it does not allow to start and develop the business properly."* – (focus group participants, Kutaisi), which makes them refrain from taking a loan to start a business. *"If I want to expand my business as a small entrepreneur, they do not offer a low-interest loan. There are such high interest rates in banks."* (N. K., a woman of 45, beekeeper, village Koki).

In addition, **the co-financing requirement** to participate in small-business programs [e.g. "Produce Georgia"] was also identified as an essential barrier to starting a business since most of the population cannot raise the necessary amount for their business themselves.

Respondents pointed out that refraining from starting economic activities is often **due to the fear of losing social status**. In the unpredictable business environment, the termination of the social security guarantee upon joining the economic program significantly reduces the motivation to participate in the mentioned programs - *"I am socially vulnerable and IDP as well. If I start any activity, I will stop receiving assistance immediately. It would be good if this support were not stopped for some time. Maybe I cannot carry out my activity at all. It is a hindering factor."* (female, 32 years old, self-employed, village Tskoushi).

The study also highlighted **the need for proper knowledge** to participate in economic programs. According to the respondents, even when they receive information about the projects, **they do not have the proper knowledge to write a business project**. Respondents also noted that **the state should offer consulting centres to the population**, even at the self-government base, that would advise applicants on the terms and benefits of economic programs and assist in filling out competition applications/business plans. During the discussions, respondents gave examples of when they wrote a business project that turned out to be successful with the help of self-government representatives and civil activists. They could not have done it independently (focus group participants, Khoni municipality).

The research revealed that many women **prefer to migrate abroad for work** due to lack of job prospects - *“A large part of women has to go abroad to create conditions for their children, even to pay tuition fees.”* (women`s focus group, Zugdidi municipality). The ladies participating in the discussion openly stated they were discussing the employment opportunity abroad. The reason is **fewer employment opportunities and low salaries in Georgia**.

They also noted **an unfavourable environment for expanding business and the absence of support from the state**. The IDP woman noted that she was denied the business project funding intended to expand the existing business since she initially received support for entrepreneurial activities from a **non-governmental organization** – *“The centre “Abkhazeti” financed the salon service program for me. I underwent courses, got a profession, got a certificate, and then was given the supplies to start a business. I needed some more equipments to start a small business. I saw that the IDPs and Ecomigrants Agency posted information about the business competition on its website. I filled out an application, wrote a project, and sent it. But it was rejected. They called me and told me that non-governmental organizations had financed me, their seals were on my certificate, and they could not fund me. Isn’t it unfair?!”* – (S.D., a woman of 34, IDP, Kakhati, Zugdidi municipality). Therefore, it is essential to consider that the grant money allocated by government or non-governmental organizations for business ideas is, in many cases, small and not enough for undertaking business activity. Therefore, in order to strengthen the business or increase the income, a person may need additional financial support - *“I had a mushroom business and wanted to expand, but they didn’t finance me. So I think there was selective justice.”* - (V. G., woman of 59, housewife, village Koki).

According to research participants, **the limited funds allocated for grant programs** significantly reduce the motivation of IDPs because business projects are rejected in conditions of high competition. It increases **nihilism and hopelessness** about the chances of winning - *“There is no opportunity for any economic activity in our country today. Nepotism and corruption in all areas are obstacles”... “I want to have my own small business from which I can get additional income. However, after a long search and the project failure, I got disappointed.”* (P.Sh., woman of 59, kindergarten caregiver, village Koki, Zugdidi municipality).

Women also noted that they mostly hear about the competition’s unsuccessful examples. To increase motivation, promoting successful examples and getting **to know the women who have received business grants and managed** their businesses successfully is essential - *“Unfortunately, there are cases when some people were involved in a program, wrote business plans, but then they did not finance them. Such negative examples suddenly spread and affect others. People have become hopeless. **Positive examples should be widely spread.** People should hear about those who were funded, for example, how they were distinguished and differed from others. It will increase the population`s interest and the desire to participate in the program for the second time.”* – (N.Sh., woman of 65, IDP, village Koki, Zugdidi municipality).

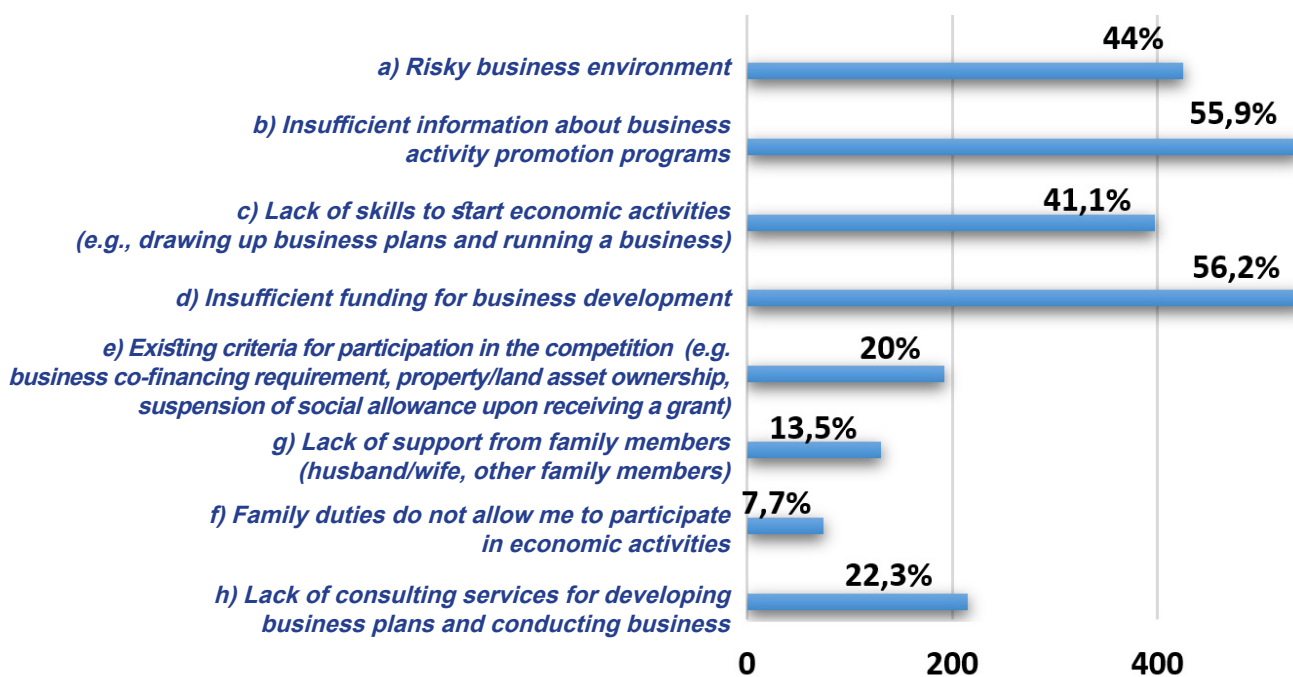
The competition criteria for involvement in the program, including the age limit for participating in the competition and the requirement to belong to a particular social group (disability, socially vulnerable status or victim of violence, etc.) were also reported as significant obstacles. According to the respondents, it dramatically limits the participation of many interested women in economic programs.

For women, **the criterion of owning a land plot** is a barrier when participating in the economic program, especially for IDPs, most of whom do not own land. It is also a problem for women, who are much less likely to own land assets, especially in rural areas where gender inequality is most pronounced.

Quantitative study data **is consistent with qualitative study data. The main factors hindering economic strengthening are as follows**, insufficient financing for business development (43.5% of cases); insufficient information about business activity promotion programs (55.9% of cases); risky business environment (44% of cases); the lack of skills to start economic activity (e.g., drawing up business plans and running a business) (41% of cases); absence of consulting services for developing business plans and conducting business - (22.3% of cases); existing criteria for participation in the competition (e.g. request for business co-financing, property/land asset ownership, suspension of social allowance when receiving a grant) (20% of cases) (See Diagram #6 for details).

Diagram #5

What barriers prevent women and men from starting economic/business activities (Identify 3 main barriers)?



3.3. PRIORITY BUSINESS AREAS FOR THE POPULATION AND ECONOMIC ACTIVITY SUPPORTING FACTORS

The list provided by female respondents in the qualitative study was quite diverse. It involved the following fields: shopping centre; computer centre; greenhouse; agro-tourism; laminate doors and windows production; confectionery and bakery; household service facilities, where various services will be gathered, including tailoring, beauty salon, workshop, which is mainly a priority for the rural population in the conditions of scarce services.

Male respondents also named interesting areas. They prefer the livestock farm development, wood processing enterprises, cultivation of nuts, laurel, greenhouses, tourism (car rental for tourists, gastronomy - ethno bar-restaurant, hotel, cafe, etc.); the opening of the sports and health complex.

Qualitative data indicate the horizontal segregation of men and women in choosing business fields, that is, **the trend of dividing business fields into “female” and “male”**.

According to quantitative data, the most preferred areas for business were **trading services** (shops) -25%; **public catering facilities** (cafe-bar, restaurant, pastry shops, etc.) -15% and **tourist business** (guides, transport services, organization of excursions, etc.) -14% (see details in Table #4).

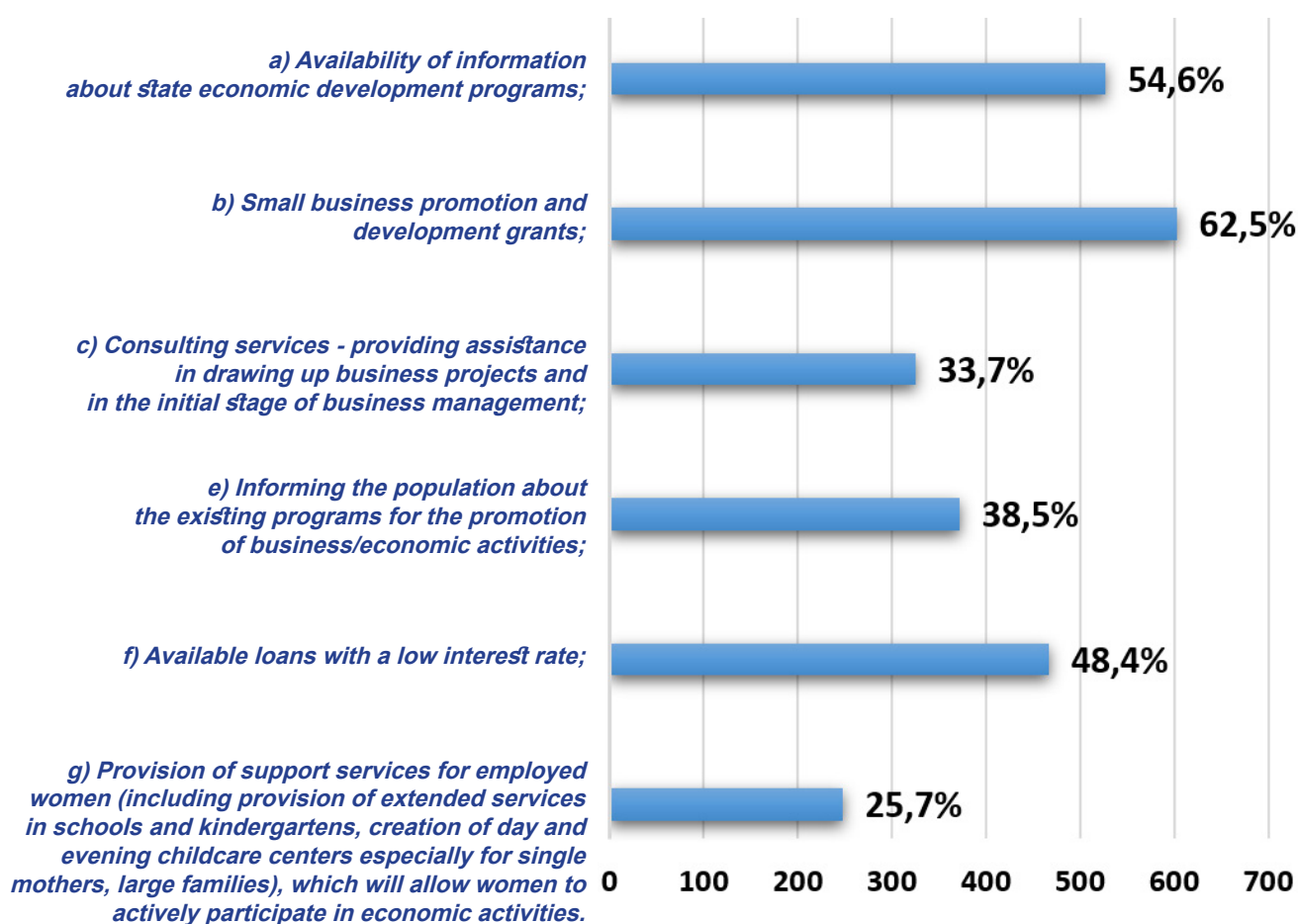
Table #4

<i>Which sphere of economic activity is more interesting for you?</i>	
<i>Sphere</i>	<i>Total %</i>
<i>Trading service (shop)</i>	<i>25%</i>
<i>Online shop</i>	<i>8.6%</i>
<i>public catering facilities (cafe-bar, restaurant, pastry shops)</i>	<i>15%</i>
<i>Hotel business</i>	<i>10,4%</i>
<i>tourist business (guides, transport services, organization of excursions)</i>	<i>14,2%</i>
<i>Making jewelry</i>	<i>3,5%</i>
<i>Digital and home appliance repair services</i>	<i>6,2%</i>
<i>Delivery service</i>	<i>2%</i>
<i>Entertainment center (children/youth)</i>	<i>6,5%</i>
<i>Sewing salon/atelier</i>	<i>6,2%</i>

To promote participation in economic activities and create favourable environmental conditions, most interviewees emphasized the need to provide **small business promotion and development grants** (62.5% of cases) and **the availability of information about state economic empowerment programs** (54.5% of cases). They also consider **providing loans with a low-interest rate as a priority** (48.4% of cases). In addition, **the need to inform the population** is considered important by 38.5% of respondents (see diagram #7 for details). According to quantitative data, the most preferred areas for business were **trading services** (shops) -25%; **public catering facilities (cafe-bar, restaurant, pastry shops, etc.)** -15% and **tourist business** (guides, transport services, organization of excursions, etc.) -14% (see details in Table #4).

Diagram #6

In your opinion, what can contribute to the involvement of women and men in business/economic activities? (select 3 priority answers)



According to the respondents participating in the qualitative study, for the effectiveness of the economic programs, it is essential **to offer a training course focused on the development of entrepreneurial skills** of the beneficiaries. Besides, it is necessary **to provide them with appropriate financial resources** to help use the acquired knowledge in practice. They also expressed an opinion about **the need to exempt a start-up entrepreneur from taxes** - *«To make business in Georgia more accessible, entrepreneurs should be exempted from taxes and given affordable and low-interest loans.»* (woman of 58, small entrepreneur, village Koki).

Respondents also indicated **the need for a lower interest rate on bank loans**. Since starting a business is associated with risks, paying high-interest rates for underdeveloped and unprofitable businesses at the first stage is a very heavy burden for entrepreneurs and often leads to business failure.

PART IV: CONCLUSION

Despite the significant breakdown of gender stereotypes and traditional patriarchal norms in society, unfair attitudes towards women's leadership and increasing their role in social and political life are still maintained. For example, taking care of the child and the family is considered a woman's duty. It significantly hinders women's inclusiveness in public life, reinforces the gender division and inequality, and defines stereotypical position, status and role of women - the woman is responsible for the family, and the man is the breadwinner.

Women's unpaid work in the family is not adequately valued and counted. The family does not "prevent" a woman from combining an active civil and economic role, provided that she simultaneously manages to fulfil all her family obligations. However, it is discriminatory towards women and is based on the unfair division of labour. Therefore, it is essential, whether in town or village, that the burden of unpaid family work be shared equally by both sexes so that women do not have to choose between career and family.

Women's social and political activeness and starting their businesses are also hampered by the lack of appropriate social infrastructure (e.g. flexible child care services), insufficient family support, inflexible work schedule, and lack of financial resources.

During the research, the measures undertaken by the state to promote entrepreneurial activity was also assessed as inefficient. The problem insufficient information and awareness of population about economic empowerment programs and their conditions was clearly revealed; the lack or absence of practice of providing appropriate consultations to the population regarding business project writing was also highlighted; criteria embedded in competition conditions (for example, co-financing requirements, confirmation of land asset ownership, high social score and automatic loss of social status and allowances when obtaining a grant, etc.) significantly hinder access and weaken the women's motivation to participate in the state economic programs.

The barriers and circumstances faced by women preventing their active participation in the public, political or economic life are often not adequately reflected or considered in the government policies and actions; on the one hand, due to weak institutional capabilities, but mainly due to the lack of appropriate political will.

There is no simple solution to eliminate existing gender inequality, especially in a country where gender inequality is deeply rooted in cultural and social norms, accompanied by a difficult socio-economic situation and a lack of social services.

To eliminate gender inequality and ensure women's participation in all arenas, it is essential to take coordinated actions and steps by all stakeholders, including **central and local authorities, international donor organizations, the private sector and civil society organizations**, which are generalized in the recommendations given below.

PART IV: RECOMMENDATIONS

- ❖ **Undertaking active awareness-raising campaigns** to change attitudes towards the culturally determined roles of men and women and related prevailing stereotypes. When planning the campaign, one of the essential objectives should be increasing the employers' sensitivity to gender issues;
- ❖ **Increasing public acceptance of women as successful leaders** by showcasing success stories. During the campaign, it is vital to emphasize the women's role as initiators of peace and conflict de-escalation. Also, focusing on the ability to balance policies and gender-specific needs and priorities;
- ❖ Developing and Providing special programs to identify women's initiatives (e.g. internship, qualification raising course, creation of women's clubs to attract "passive" women, etc.) **to increase women's activeness and raise their self-esteem**;
- ❖ **Promoting women's involvement in socio-political activities and focusing on their economic empowerment and improvement of their financial condition.** This should be done by thorough assessment of existing structural barriers on the way of women's professional realization and development and through implementation of proper policies and programs that addresses these barriers;
- ❖ **When planning and developing policies and programmes for social, political and economic empowerment of women,** special attention should be paid to specific vulnerable groups of women (e.g. IDPs, women living close the conflict divide line, victims of violence, single mothers, etc.) and their needs and the factors hindering women's participation in social, political or economic activities;
- ❖ **Producing gender statistics and studying gender effects of existing economic empowerment programs.** It is essential for all agencies working on economic empowerment to carry out **gender statistics of economic programs implemented by them and to introduce a gender-related monitoring and evaluation system** by using intersectional approach of funded projects to allow assessment and analysis of the impact scale of existing programs on women; it is important for all agencies working in the direction of economic empowerment to produce gender statistics of the economic programs implemented by them and to introduce a system of monitoring and evaluation of gender impact of funded projects, by using an intersectional approach (it is preferably to differentiate women's diverse social groups, such as IDPs, victims of violence, single mothers, young people, persons with disabilities, ethnic or religious minorities, etc.) in order to be able to assess and analyze the extent of the impact of existing programs on women. The mentioned information should be available on the websites of relevant agencies;

- ❖ **Creating a favorable business environment for women to engage in small and medium-sized businesses**, including supporting women-oriented business projects by providing small grants, business skills development and professional training. In addition, exempting from taxes start-up small entrepreneurs for at least a year and maintaining social status; as well as the abolition of co-financing and the requirement of land ownership and age restrictions;
- ❖ **Informing women about economic programs and providing consultations**: in order to raise women's interest in participation in economic empowerment projects, appropriate consulting service centres (i.e. based in municipalities) should be introduced, which would provide the population with information about state or local economic programs; detailed and careful explanation of the terms and conditions of the competition; practical assistance in filling out the application and developing the business plan. It is also desirable to assist women entrepreneurs in choosing locally profitable business areas that are more or less relevant to the specific location and correspond to market requirements;
- ❖ **To stimulate women's active social, political and economic activities, it is necessary to develop appropriate social services, including child care services**, which are multidimensional and include, provision of the municipality allowances to working mothers with small children; co-financing of day and evening child care centres; opening of extended and summer groups in kindergartens and schools; creation/development of children's rights protection departments and children's rooms on the municipality basis; introduction of a flexible work schedule adapted to the needs of working mothers etc.;
- ❖ **Introducing a partnership system with banking and microfinance organizations** and developing special programs focused on women's economic empowerment in cooperation with them, **which will increase women's access to financial resources, cheap and accessible credits**. It is vital to increase the role and importance of local self-government in this regard and to introduce local practices for administering similar programs.



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