



ASSESSMENT OF EFFECTIVENESS OF THE MUNICIPALITIES' PREVENTIVE MEASURES TO COMBAT VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN/DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

RAISING
AWARENESS

NEEDS
ASSESSMENT

EDUCATION

COORDINATION

GENDER
POLICY



July 2023

IDENTIFYING
RISK GROUPS

SUPPORT
SERVICES

COOPERATION

ECONOMIC
STRENGTHENING

GENDER
EQUALITY

INFORMING



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OF THE MUNICIPALITIES' PREVENTIVE MEASURES
TO COMBAT VIOLENCE AGAINST
WOMEN/DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

2023

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Within the frames of the project “Strengthening Women’s Rights in Western Georgia”, supported by the “Brot für die Welt”, the Women Fund “Sukhumi” studied and assessed the effectiveness of the preventive measures implemented by the municipalities to respond to issues of violence against women and/ domestic violence and quality of their cooperation with actors of referral mechanisms within their respective municipalities. The study employed qualitative research methods, including 9 focus groups and 45 in-depth interviews.

A crucial and effective method of combating gender-based and domestic violence at the local level is **developing a policy focused on prevention and timely response**. The ratification of “The **Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence**” obliges signatory states to take practical steps towards **prevention**. It entails fundamental changes in society’s attitude towards violence against women and girls, breaking gender stereotypes, and raising awareness within municipalities. On November 22, 2022, “GREVIO” (Group of Experts on Action Against Violence Against Women and Domestic Violence) published a baseline assessment report on the implementation of the Istanbul Convention by the Georgian authorities. The report draws considerable attention to strengthening preventive mechanisms. According to **the amendments to the „Law of Georgia on the Elimination of Violence Against Women and/or Domestic Violence, and the Protection and Support of Victims of Such Violence”**, which will come into effect from July 1, 2023, the role of **municipal bodies** in the implementation of preventive measures has been explicitly highlighted.

During the desk research, the municipal gender equality action plans for 2023-2024, local budgets, and other policy documents of the Gender Equality Council of the target municipalities related to the prevention of violence against women were examined. The qualitative study revealed four primary interrelated reasons contributing to violence against women:

- **Low level of education and awareness;**
- **Limited economic opportunities and high unemployment rates (leading to material deprivation);**
- **Substance abuse and gambling addiction, along with the socio-cultural environment influenced by prevailing stereotypes.**

The research has highlighted the significant gap in municipal programs, particularly in terms of incorporating effective measures and services for the prevention and protection against gender-based and domestic violence. Consequently, representatives of local authorities have to “adapt” existing programs designed for other vulnerable groups to meet the specific needs of survivors.

The current one-time assistance offered to strengthen victims, including the monetary aid provided, falls short of addressing their needs adequately. Despite the emergence of long-term result-oriented programs in certain municipalities, such as those focused on agriculture, craft learning, inventory procurement, and employment promotion, many beneficiaries/potential beneficiaries remain unaware of these opportunities.

Non-governmental organizations also implement programs to work together with individual municipalities to coordinate their efforts. However, the scale of this cooperation is insufficient and rather fragmented.

The main challenge is the shortage of qualified personnel in the field - such as a lack of social workers and psychologists or their geographical remoteness.

The complexity of the situation determines the response to incidents of violence within educational institutions. In some cases, intervention may involve a tutor or a resource officer, while in more severe cases, the patrol police might be involved. However, there is minimal cooperation between educational institutions and municipalities, and the engagement of social workers and psychologists remains insufficient. Nonetheless, certain schools are implementing parental training programs. This program educates parents about their child’s development stages and suitable parenting approaches for each stage. Despite individual municipalities conducting awareness-rising information campaigns to raise awareness concerning domestic violence and violence against women, the role of municipalities in addressing these issues and promoting local services, the response from school representatives is not consistently suitable. Particularly, in instances where domestic violence involving a child is identified, the response frequently only involves visiting the family. While certain cases exist where a teacher may appropriately engage a social worker or the police, such occurrences are exceptions rather than standard practice. Generally, the primary document guiding the school’s response to incidents of violence is the instruction provided by the Ministry of Education, which outlines the referral procedure.

Preschool institutions must enhance their communication and coordination with the Child Rights Protection and Support Departments operating at the municipal level (hereinafter referred to as the “Child Rights Protection Department”). Furthermore, educators and staff lack awareness about domestic violence matters, particularly in terms of recognizing

violence and responding adequately to such cases. Consequently, it is essential to enhance their awareness and involve them in training seminars.

One of the major challenges revolves around **establishing effective communication with the primary healthcare sector and addressing their law awareness level**. The lack of awareness hinders effective communication with beneficiaries and presents difficulties in formulating appropriate responses to cases of violence.

Several obstacles hinder the implementation of preventive measures against domestic violence. They include the absence of unified statistics and a predominant focus on addressing existing cases of violence rather than proactively prioritizing prevention. This imbalance is evident in the allocation of funding within municipal program budgets. The impact of stereotypes extends beyond the beneficiaries and affects representatives of municipalities and various agencies. Consequently, this leads to an insufficient understanding (or a complete lack of understanding) about their roles and functions.

Furthermore, a concern arises from low awareness among beneficiaries, resulting in limited access to municipal programs and services designed to address domestic violence against women. Additionally, the lack of services tailored to the specific needs of survivors and the absence of programs with long-term impact-focused approaches present substantial challenges. It is important to note that some participants of the research identified specific municipal programs that have positively impacted vulnerable families, contributing to the prevention and effective mitigation of domestic violence. For instance, there are programs dedicated to strengthening vulnerable families with children, providing economic and psychosocial support to families, offering housing assistance to women survivors, providing financial aid for accessing healthcare services, and facilitating children's involvement in extra-curricular activities. Moreover, some programs offer single meals in free canteens for vulnerable families, among other initiatives.

The beneficiaries of the aforementioned municipal programs express gratitude for the positive impact their participation had on their lives, significantly contributing to the prevention of domestic violence. However, they advocate for program diversification and the implementation of additional socio-economic empowerment initiatives that specifically target women. Such efforts are crucial in preventing violence against female victims, providing them with the resources to break free from abusive environments, and facilitating their journey toward independence and dignity.

Recommendations to the local government bodies and state agencies:

To municipalities - Strengthening coordination and cooperation with relevant referral mechanism entities; Enhancing the role of the mayor's representatives, Women's Rooms, and Child Rights Protection and Support Departments in preventing domestic violence against women, arming them with the necessary functions and resources, qualified staff, and psychologists; The necessity of providing trainings on gender equality issues, violence against women, and gender mainstreaming in local policy; The expansion of outsourcing practices; Organizing information and awareness-raising campaigns. Implementing long-term support programs for vulnerable individuals and victims of violence; Fostering stronger cooperation with educational institutions.

To Permanent Parliamentary Gender Equality Council - Establishing robust monitoring mechanisms for the measures implemented by relevant agencies at both national and local levels to achieve substantial progress in combating and preventing violence against women and girls in Georgia. Tailoring the support programs offered by the Government of Georgia to the specific needs of women victims of domestic violence; Promoting the institutionalization of interagency commissions on gender equality, violence against women, and domestic violence at the local level; Rising awareness and improving municipal employees' expertise on the issues related to gender equality and violence against women. Regular monitoring and assessment of their qualifications and gender sensitivity; Localizing Gender Impact Assessment (GIA) and ensuring its integration into local policies. Providing comprehensive training courses and familiarizing staff responsible for gender issues with the GIA methodology; Establishing a working group to critically analyze the existing violence prevention system and develop appropriate recommendations.

To Inter-agency Commission on Gender Equality, Violence against Women, and Domestic Violence - Promoting interagency cooperation, facilitating coordinated work and the institutionalization of local interagency commissions at the municipal level; Timely approval of the National Referral Mechanism document; Integration of more preventive mechanisms into all relevant national action plans to enhance the effectiveness of efforts in combating violence against women and domestic violence; Enhancing collaboration with the non-governmental sector and municipal representatives during discussions to address violence against women and domestic violence; Ensuring the regular evaluation and monitoring of measures and services preventing all forms of domestic violence against women. Promotion to improve existing practices based on these findings.

To Ministry of Internally Displaced Persons from the Occupied Territories, Labor, Health and Social Affairs - Increasing the number of social workers' training and determine specialization in domestic violence cases. Empowering social workers to play a more proactive role in identifying domestic violence cases and implementing preventive

measures. Raising medical staff awareness about their role in combating gender-based and domestic violence. Furthermore, it is necessary to develop and introduce normative documents for identifying domestic violence victims, communicating with them, standardizing documentation, and enhancing cooperation with referral entities. Improving the statistics of beneficiaries receiving state services for victims of violence, creating a unified database of beneficiaries according to gender, age, and regional affiliation, and ensuring the publicity of this data.

To Union of Kindergartens and the Ministry of Education and Science - Enhancing cooperation between the municipality, educational institution employees, and the entities of the referral mechanism operating in the local areas. Introducing the practice of holding information meetings with representatives of the resource center, teachers, parents, and students to prevent domestic violence. Developing violence prevention modules and including them in the national curriculum and textbooks. The active involvement of employees of territorial bodies of the Ministry of Education, particularly resource centers, in preventive measures against violence towards women and domestic violence. Proactive cooperation with all stakeholders within the local referral system. Providing continuous training for school and kindergarten employees on issues related to domestic violence and ensuring the regular implementation of the system for reporting violence in schools and kindergartens, along with monitoring teachers' compliance with instructions on responding to violence.

To Ministry of Internal Affairs - Strengthening cooperation with relevant departments of the municipality and ensuring the exchange of relevant information and statistics. Raising public awareness about issues related to violence against women and domestic violence and intensifying informational meetings with the population, working diligently on increasing trust in the police and raising its rating in society. Promoting and encouraging the increase in the number of female employees in the ranks of the patrol police. Carrying out appropriate work to identify risk groups of perpetrators, including by increasing the role of district inspectors and law enforcement officers to combat domestic violence.

METHODOLOGY

Qualitative research methods, such as desk research, in-depth interviews, and focus groups, were used in the monitoring process.

The study covered **ten target municipalities**: Chokhatauri, Tkibuli, Kobuleti, Bagdati, Vani, Terjola, Samtredia, Senaki, Zugdidi, and Tsalenjikha.

Target groups involved:

- Local authorities (representatives of the municipality's Gender Equality Council, representatives of interagency commissions, representatives of Child Rights Protection Departments, and mayor's advisers on gender equality issues);
- Non-governmental organizations focusing on violence against women;
- Ministry of Education (representatives of resource centers, resource officers, school administration, and teachers);
- Kindergartens (administration, educators);
- Ministry of Health (representatives of care and social service agencies and medical professionals);
- Beneficiaries (victims/survivors, individuals benefiting from social and economic empowerment programs) and legal aid service representatives.

The total number of respondents participating in the study was 117 (110 women, 7 men)

Number of in-depth interviews: 45

Number of focus groups: 9 (total number of participants - 72)

Fieldwork was conducted between February-April 2023

1. INTRODUCTION

Violence against women and domestic violence continue to pose significant challenges globally as well as within Georgia. Regrettably, they represent the most prevalent forms of discrimination against women. **The Constitution of Georgia** guarantees the protection of women from discrimination and upholds their entitlement to equal opportunities and rights equivalent to those of men¹.

Over the last three decades, Georgia has made significant progress in enhancing the policy and legislative framework related to gender equality and eliminating violence against women. In 1994, Georgia joined the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (**CEDAW**)², an international instrument aimed at protecting women's rights. In 1995, during the Fourth United Nations World Conference held in Beijing, Georgia, alongside other participant countries, adopted the **Beijing**

1 Constitution of Georgia, L11(3); available at - <https://www.matsne.gov.ge/ka/document/view/30346?publication=36>

2 Available at -[https://police.ge/files/IRD/Donorta%20koordinacia%20\(shesrulebuli%20proeqtebi\)/cedaw.pdf](https://police.ge/files/IRD/Donorta%20koordinacia%20(shesrulebuli%20proeqtebi)/cedaw.pdf)

Declaration and Action Platform. This platform underscored the imperative strategic goals of eliminating violence against women and advancing gender equality.

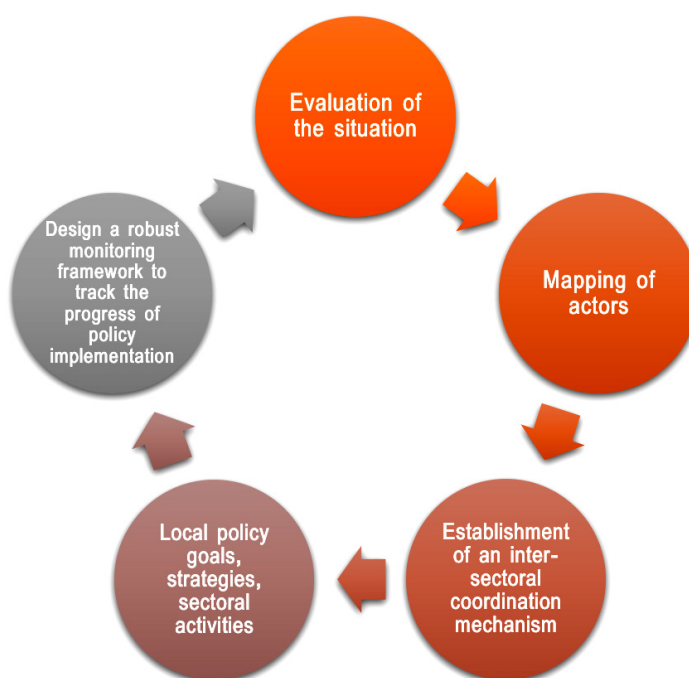
One crucial and indispensable approach to combat violence against women and domestic violence is implementing **a municipal policy emphasizing prevention and timely response** at the local level. This approach would facilitate the introduction and enhancement of services tailored to the specific needs of the local population, consequently improving accessibility to these essential services. Municipalities possess a more profound comprehension of the needs and obstacles faced by residents in their territory, including those related to gender³.

Moreover, empowering municipalities is a fundamental prerequisite for the effective execution of the decentralization policy pertaining to social services in Georgia.

While exploring preventive mechanisms at the local level, the approach and experiences of Latin and Caribbean countries emerged as particularly interesting. According to their valuable perspectives, a successful preventive local policy should encompass **four pivotal criteria**:

1. **Strengthening local initiatives and resources;**
2. **Enhancing the availability and quality of services;**
3. **Facilitating the development of technical skills;**
4. **Encouraging greater participation in the process.**

A multi-step mechanism is used to develop a policy for the prevention of violence against women and domestic violence⁴:



3 Commentary on the provisions of the Convention, Council of Europe, p.35. available at - <https://Rm.Coe.Int/Geo-Istanbul-Convention-And-Explanatory-Report-A4/16808d24c5>

4 Municipal Policies on Violence against Women (In English) - <https://www.paho.org/hq/dmdocuments/2009/englishfactsheet3.pdf>

What does each of them mean?

- **The evaluation of the situation** involves three critical components: analyzing the scope of violence against women, evaluating the local infrastructure and existing institutional response, and identifying the necessary measures for effectively eliminating violence;
- **Mapping of actors** encompasses various institutions, including state agencies, civil society organizations, the private sector, the church, international organizations, and the media, in forming local policies;
- **An inter-sectoral coordination mechanism** brings together various government agencies, civil society groups, and individuals interested in local policy development, implementation, and evaluation. This mechanism fosters intersectoral cooperation and leverages the skills and expertise of each actor towards a common goal;
- **Municipal policy - identifying tasks and strategies** entails outlining precise tasks and strategies in diverse sectors, such as healthcare, public security, education, and community groups. Within the healthcare domain, for example, this may encompass identifying violence through primary healthcare, implementing an accounting system, prescribing relevant standards and protocols, developing preventive measures, extending psychological assistance to victims, and conducting specialized training for medical personnel to handle cases of violence effectively;
- **Measures to ensure implementation of municipal policy** implies the existence of political will of state agencies and their joint participation in the planning and implementation of measures; allocation of appropriate resources; ensuring the involvement of women, including women victims of violence, at all stages of policy implementation; monitoring and evaluation of the progress of the implemented actions.

2. EXAMPLES OF INTERNATIONAL GOOD PRACTICE

AUSTRALIA

Based on the national strategy, Australia implemented a primary prevention campaign against violence, “**Stop it at the start**”. The campaign was based on in-depth research that revealed how people often overlook that the cycle of violence begins with the beliefs instilled in young girls and boys. Its objective was to assist parents, teachers, family members, employers, and others in reevaluating their attitudes and perceptions.

NORWAY

On behalf of the Norwegian Ministry of Justice and Public Security, the Norwegian Centre for Violence and Traumatic Stress Studies conducted a campaign on dealing with violence - focusing on school officials and health personnel in 2019 and the general population in 2020. The website “Duty to Prevent” was created within the campaign.

AUSTRIA

“Domestic Violence Intervention Centers” were established in the province of Austria. The state fully funded them, and non-governmental organizations provided various services. The center’s main task was risk assessment and developing safety measures/plans with the victim. The center offered survivors both short-term assistance (for instance, legal aid) and focused on medium and long-term assistance. In addition, the center conducted a training course for perpetrators and monitored their behavior.

ALBANIA

Albania’s local referral mechanism is a coordinated, intersectoral response to violence. With the help of international organizations, 29 out of 61 municipalities have established a “community-coordinated response system” consisting of three components:

1. A steering committee that specifies policy direction;
2. A multidisciplinary technical team in charge of specific cases;
3. Local Coordinator - Gender Equality Officer who leads and coordinates the technical team and the referral issue.

In addition, the monitoring of domestic violence cases was **digitized** - an online system was created (accessible only to specially trained persons, both at the national and municipal levels), where the local coordinator is responsible for collecting data and posting them online. The system is a kind of case-management tool and means of their monitoring⁵.

5 Good Practices in Responding to Domestic Violence: A Comparative Study. (In English). 2019, p. 11-39 https://eca.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/Field%20Office%20ECA/Attachments/Publications/2019/05/Bosnia%20and%20Herzegovina%20domestic%20violence/Good%20practices_ENG_final_compressed.pdf

3. LEGAL FRAMEWORK

3.1. INTERNATIONAL LEGISLATION AND STANDARDS

In 2017, Georgia entered a qualitatively new stage in the fight against gender-based and domestic violence with the ratification of the **Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (Istanbul Convention)**. It is the first international legal instrument that surpasses any other document to date in comprehensiveness. It outlines the most effective and potent actions to combat gender-based and domestic violence. One of its primary and ultimate goals is **to introduce an integrated approach to preventing and combating violence and to promote interagency cooperation**⁶. Article 7 of the Convention discusses this issue in more detail, which requires signatory states to implement **a comprehensive and coordinated policy**. On the one hand, this implies adopting necessary legislative or other measures by all relevant parties or agencies participating in the process, which, in unity, ensures a holistic response to the facts of violence against women (Article 7(1)). On the other hand, it necessitates effective **interagency cooperation** to implement the adopted policies and measures⁷.

Participating relevant parties and agencies should include state agencies, national, regional, and **local government bodies**, state and municipal institutions protecting human rights, civil society organizations, and others⁸.

The Istanbul Convention dedicates its third chapter to **prevention**, which, in the broadest sense of the term, requires signatory states to make fundamental changes in public attitudes, break gender stereotypes, and raise awareness, including at the municipal level⁹. In the preventive context, the Istanbul Convention also pays special attention to the **professional training of specialists**¹⁰. Raising awareness among professionals about the different forms of violence, its triggers, and consequences is an effective way to prevent violence since it facilitates a change in their views and attitudes towards the victims¹¹.

6 Commentary on the provisions of the Convention, Council of Europe, p. 35-40, available at - <https://Rm.Coe.Int/Geo-Istanbul-Convention-And-Explanatory-Report-A4/16808d24c5>

7 *ibid*, p. 40

8 The Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence Against Women and Domestic Violence (Istanbul Convention), L7(3), available at - <https://matsne.gov.ge/ka/document/view/3789678?publication=0>

9 *ibid*, chapter III;

10 *ibid*, L.15

11 Commentary on the provisions of the Convention, Council of Europe, p. 49, available at - <https://Rm.Coe.Int/Geo-Istanbul-Convention-And-Explanatory-Report-A4/16808d24c5>

In addition, the Convention obliges the parties, in a separate article, to take all necessary measures to ensure that the confidentiality rules established by domestic law do not create obstacles for professionals (e.g., doctors, psychologists, social workers) who, in case of reasonable suspicion, are obliged **to notify the relevant authorities** about a severe case of violence that has already been committed or an imminent act of violence¹².

Since 2015, Georgia has nationalized sustainable development goals and is localizing these objectives. Sustainable Development Goal 5 addresses gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls, encompassing eliminating violence against women and girls in both public and private spheres¹³.

3.2. GREVIO (BASELINE) EVALUATION REPORT ON LEGISLATIVE AND OTHER MEASURES GIVING EFFECT TO THE PROVISIONS OF THE COUNCIL OF EUROPE CONVENTION ON PREVENTING AND COMBATING VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN AND DOMESTIC VIOLENCE (ISTANBUL CONVENTION) GEORGIA

The “Istanbul Convention” dedicates a separate chapter to the monitoring mechanism, which assigns the responsibility to a Group of Experts on Action against Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (GREVIO).

On November 22, 2022, “GREVIO” published a baseline evaluation¹⁴ report on the implementation of the Istanbul Convention by the Georgian authorities, in which particular attention is given to strengthening preventive mechanisms. Among the recommendations given by “GREVIO” to the Georgian authorities **regarding prevention**, the following issues are noteworthy:

- GREVIO encourages the Georgian authorities to continue their efforts to conduct awareness-raising campaigns on the different forms of violence against women covered by the Istanbul Convention by addressing all groups of women and girls, notably women belonging to national and/or ethnic minorities and women with disabilities;
- To ensure the involvement of civil society organizations in the implementation of the current legislation aimed at the prevention and protection of violence against women and domestic violence, as well as the development of policy documents and programs. In addition, promoting the expansion of services offered by non-governmental organizations;

12 *ibid*, p. 58. Available at - <https://Rm.Coe.Int/Geo-Istanbul-Convention-And-Explanatory-Report-A4/16808d24c5>

13 Sustainable Development Goals, available at - <https://sdgs.un.org/goals>

14 Council of Europe GREVIO report on the implementation of the provisions of the Istanbul Convention in Georgia, available at - <https://www.coe.int/en/web/istanbul-convention/-/grevio-publishes-its-report-on-georgia?fbclid=IwAR0tAr7xz2vcJoBtYxt5o2kKJsVr0jS4oU1V4SmuzxC503g2ktvd6m87jyY>

- To Promote the wide distribution of information about available services for women who are victims of violence and ensure maximum access to this information for vulnerable groups of women, including women with disabilities, national and ethnic minorities, displaced women, and women living in rural areas;
- To ensure that all women victims of violence covered by the Istanbul Convention have access to services facilitating their recovery and autonomy throughout the country, in particular, appropriate financial assistance and housing and employment programs, especially in areas lacking employment opportunities, such as in rural areas;
- To strengthen cooperation with the education sector and promote the establishment of principles of equality between women and men and non-stereotypical gender roles in school curriculums;
- Systematic and mandatory initial and in-service training on the prevention and detection of all forms of violence against women covered by the Istanbul Convention, equality between women and men, the needs and rights of victims, the multi-agency cooperation, and the prevention of secondary victimization, for all groups of professionals, in particular, those in law enforcement and the healthcare sector and social workers;
- To ensure inter-sectoral cooperation focused on the needs of women victims of violence, it is essential to create an institutional coordination mechanism that unites various state agencies, non-governmental organizations, and specialized service providers. Additionally, efforts should be made to improve coordination between national, regional, and local governments in implementing policies to prevent and combat violence against women;
- To enhance violent behavior correction programs, taking into account international best practices and human rights-based approaches and promoting existing programs;
- To take all appropriate measures against the spread of gender stereotypes and derogatory profiles of women by the media and encourage a sensitive approach in reporting the facts of violence against women;
- To cooperate with the private sector and encourage its adoption of self-regulatory standards for effective prevention of violence against women and effective fight against it, including sexual harassment;
- To ensure systematic assessment of risks and their management, through interagency cooperation, regarding all forms of violence against women and women and girls at risk of forced marriage at an early stage;

- To create appropriate guarantees for women victims of violence who need protection so that they do not have to return to places where their lives are at risk or where they may become victims of torture, punishment, and inhuman or degrading treatment¹⁵.

3.3. NATIONAL LEGISLATION AND STANDARDS

The international obligations assumed by the state are reflected in national legislation. In 2017, Georgia made amendments to 25 legislative acts to align with the Istanbul Convention. Among them, the scope of regulation of the **Law of Georgia on “Violence against Women and/or Domestic Violence, Protection and Support of Victims of Violence”** was significantly expanded. The second chapter of the law is dedicated to preventing violence against women and/or domestic violence, outlining specific preventive mechanisms and measures.

It's important to highlight that the most recent amendment to the Law on Violence against Women and/or Domestic Violence, Protection, and Support of Victims of Violence, set to take effect on July 1, 2023, **increases the role of municipal bodies** in implementing preventive measures¹⁶. As per the aforementioned law, social services are designated a distinct and crucial role in the preventive aspect. These essential services are administered by the Ministry of Internally Displaced Persons from the Occupied Territories, Labor, Health, and Social Affairs of Georgia, each operating within their respective areas of competence¹⁷.

As outlined in the current legislation, **social services encompass** the following:

- To study the causes of family disputes, relevant analysis, and assistance of family members in overcoming them;
- To undertake support measures for GBV survivors;
- To **identify the risk groups, including potential perpetrators**, and facilitate the resolution of the associated problems in collaboration with pertinent state bodies;
- To participate in the process of issuing protection orders;

15 GREVIO Evaluation Report, p.10-11, 2022, available at - <https://www.coe.int/en/web/istanbul-convention/-/grevio-publishes-its-report-on-georgia?fbclid=IwAR0tAr7xz2vcJoBtYxt5o2kKJsVr0jS4oU1V4SmuzxC503g2ktvd6m87jyY>

16 Law of Georgia on “Violence Against Women and/or Elimination of Domestic Violence, Protection and Support of Victims of Violence”, L.7(6); available at - <https://matsne.gov.ge/ka/document/view/26422?publication=22>

17 *ibid*, L.8(1)

- To be involved in issuing protection orders as required (the latter will come into effect on July 1, 2023)¹⁸.

The authority of municipalities to prevent domestic violence is also outlined in the Law of Georgia on “Social Work.” According to this law, municipalities are obliged to carry out social work within their operational territory, which includes **identifying domestic violence cases and responding appropriately**¹⁹; Identifying individuals facing social risks, assessing their needs, and providing relevant information to sectoral institutions²⁰; ensuring the inclusion of beneficiaries in the social services provided by Georgian legislation to mitigate potential dangers, and **promptly notifying** the relevant authorities about any critical situations to prevent harm²¹. **The Ministry of Regional Development and Infrastructure of Georgia** coordinates activities between municipalities and state authorities within the scope of competence²².

According to the 2017 amendment to the Organic Law of Georgia – the Local Self-Government Code, **the municipality is authorized** to implement measures to promote gender equality, **prevent violence** against women and/or domestic violence, and protect and assist victims of violence against women and/or domestic violence²³.

The role of municipalities in **identifying and preventing discriminatory practices on the grounds** is also outlined in the Law of Georgia on «Gender Equality»²⁴. As per the same law, the **Municipal Gender Equality Council** is established within a respective Municipal Council²⁵. Moreover, **a civil servant overseeing gender equality issues** is appointed in the City Hall to effectively introduce and consistently implement the gender equality policy within the municipality²⁶. The law highlights the imperative of formulating municipal budgets, socio-economic development priorities, and municipal programs and plans in a way that eliminates discrimination²⁷.

18 *ibid*, L.8(2)

19 Law of Georgia on “Social Work”, L.56(1, c), available at - <https://www.matsne.gov.ge/ka/document/view/4231958?publication=7>

20 *ibid*, L 56(1, a)

21 *ibid*, L56(1, b)

22 Ordinance No. 385 of the Government of Georgia of July 30, 2018 “On Approval of the Regulation of the Ministry of Regional Development and Infrastructure of Georgia”, L2(e); available at - <https://www.matsne.gov.ge/ka/document/view/4279362?publication=5>

23 Local Self-Government Code, L.16(4); available at - <https://matsne.gov.ge/ka/document/view/2244429?-publication=65>

24 Law of Georgia on “Gender Equality”, L.13(1); available at - <https://matsne.gov.ge/ka/document/view/91624?publication=10>

25 *ibid*, L.13(1¹)

26 *ibid*, L.13(1²)

27 *ibid*, L.13(2)

The Parliament of Georgia and the Government of Georgia oversee the protection of gender equality at the national level. By the Constitution of Georgia, international agreements, and other legislative and sub-legal normative acts of the country, the **Parliamentary Gender Equality Council** defines the main directions of state policy regarding gender equality, ensures the establishment and development of the legislative framework for gender equality, discusses and approves relevant strategies, and supervises gender equality matters concerning the activities of accountable bodies before the Parliament of Georgia.²⁸ To ensure a coherent and coordinated approach to gender-related issues, the Government of Georgia has established the **Inter-Agency Commission on Gender Equality, Violence against Women, and Domestic Violence**²⁹. The primary mandate of the commission is to coordinate, monitor, and evaluate the implementation of policies and measures aimed at preventing and eliminating all forms of violence within the scope of the Istanbul Convention³⁰.

In 2022, the Government of Georgia approved the 2022-2024 action plan for combating gender-based and domestic violence and protecting victims. This new plan is notably centered on strengthening preventive mechanisms, and it includes relatively detailed and practical measures aimed at prevention, in contrast to the previous plan³¹. In addition to the activities aimed at raising public awareness, the action plan includes the following key objectives: **the development and approval of a unified action plan** for the prevention of gender-based and domestic violence, the modification of program(s) designed to correct violent attitudes and behavior, and their provision to violent individuals during emergencies, including during a pandemic (Objective 1, Activities: 1.1.1, 1.1.4).

The updated document outlining the national referral procedures for identifying, protecting, assisting, and rehabilitating victims of domestic violence (National Referral Mechanism) has not been approved yet. The primary objective of this document is to establish a comprehensive set of measures that will effectively contribute to the prevention of violence against women and domestic violence. It aims to ensure the timely detection of incidents, offers support to victims of domestic violence, and encompasses various aspects such as protection, assistance, and rehabilitation. Furthermore, the document aims to facilitate

28 Ibid, L.12(1,2)

29 Ibid, L 12(6)

30 Ordinance No. 286 of the Government of Georgia of June 12, 2017, "On the creation of the inter-agency commission working on issues of gender equality, violence against women and domestic violence and approval of the statute", L.4(L); available at - <https://matsne.gov.ge/ka/document/view/3698004?publication=4>

31 Ordinance No. 509 of the Government of Georgia of October 26, 2022, "On the approval of the action plan of 2022-2024 for the fight against violence against women and domestic violence and the protection of victims". Objective 1. available at - <https://matsne.gov.ge/ka/document/view/5597108?publication=0&fbclid=IwAR1wAkW-NNcJTxqc1rOHYg6xXXmW3WbM4dr7R0OXrEtaYQ3rNynA38itGcQ>

prompt, coordinated, mutually agreed action among state bodies to address these critical issues.

The government's resolution **on approving child protection referral procedures** is in force. These procedures establish the framework for coordinated efforts between relevant state agencies, legal entities under public law, and municipal institutions to protect children from violence. The resolution outlines mechanisms for an effective and swift response in cases of child abuse, outlines the rights and duties of authorized bodies, and addresses matters related to protecting children's rights and best interests³².

In February 2023, the Government of Georgia adopted a resolution establishing temporary rules for authorizing preschool and educational institutions and suspending and terminating such authorization. Under this resolution, the municipality council was granted the power to determine the distribution of these powers, aimed at effectively delineating responsibilities between the non-entrepreneurial (non-commercial) legal entity established by the municipality³³. This document includes provisions for the institution's self-assessment, aiming to **assess the institution's conditions in alignment with the authorization standards**. The self-assessment process will help educational institutions identify their strengths and areas where specific measures need to be implemented to meet the particular requirements of the standard. Simultaneously with adopting the mentioned normative act³⁴, the target municipalities commenced retraining the staff of the N(N)LE Kindergartens Association and enhancing their qualifications on matters related to violence against women and/or domestic violence. This initiative will significantly contribute to the early identification of domestic violence within kindergartens and enable an appropriate response to violence cases.

32 Ordinance No. 437 of the Government of Georgia of September 12, 2016, "On Approving Referral Procedures for Child Protection", (1,1), available at - <https://matsne.gov.ge/ka/document/view/3394478?-publication=3>

33 Ordinance No. 76 of the Government of Georgia of February 21, 2023, "On the approval of the temporary rule for the authorization of the early education and/or preschool education and educational institution, and the suspension and termination of the authorization of the institution", (L1. (1,2)). Available at - <https://matsne.gov.ge/document/view/5727272?publication=0&fbclid=IwAR30hmMkJM6pDCj9FUN-pNjZDsz4JrgjQgfb3Vpij1TWcF31Qr5MJkRI8w70>

34 Tkibuli, Bagdati, Terjola, Vani, Samtredia, Chokhatauri, Tsalenjikha, Zugdidi, Senaki, Kobuleti

3.4. PREVENTIVE TOOLS ON ISSUES OF VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN AND/OR DOMESTIC VIOLENCE IN MUNICIPAL NORMATIVE ACTS

Within the desk research, Gender Equality Council action plans for 2023-24 of the target municipalities (Tkibuli, Bagdati, Terjola, Vani, Samtredia, Chokhatauri, Tsalenjikha, Zugdidi, Senaki, Kobuleti), municipal budgets and local policies related to the elimination and prevention of violence against women were studied.

Municipalities have the following tools to eliminate, prevent, protect, and support victims of violence against women and/or domestic violence:

- **The Municipal Gender Equality Council** in the Municipal Council (Sakrebulo in Georgian) is a deliberative-consultative body established under the Law of Georgia “On Gender Equality” and the Regulations of the City Council. Its primary role is to assess the condition of gender equality protection within the municipality. The council works towards developing proposals aimed at coordinating the development and implementation of appropriate measures to detect and eliminate discrimination in various locations and contexts³⁵;
- **The Public Servant responsible for gender-related issues in the City Hall** - The official appointed by the mayor is tasked with studying gender equality issues within the municipality. Their primary responsibilities include planning activities to be implemented and coordinating events related to gender equality³⁶;
- The **Gender-sensitive municipal budget** involves integrating gender perspectives into the local budget³⁷;
- The **Gender Action Plan for 2022-2023**, which is a municipal framework document and includes measures to be implemented in the direction of prevention and elimination of violence against women and domestic violence;
- The **Gender Equality Strategy for 2022-2025** aims to establish conducive conditions for equal rights, freedoms, and opportunities for both men and women. Its primary focus is preventing and eliminating all forms of discrimination and gender-based violence. The strategy operates within the municipality’s jurisdiction, and it collaborates closely with relevant state agencies, involving the civil and business sectors to combat gender inequality collectively³⁸;

35 Ordinance No. 37 of Zugdidi Municipality Council of March 22, 2018 “On the creation of the Zugdidi Municipal Gender Equality Council and approval of its regulations” (1,1); available at - <https://www.matsne.gov.ge/ka/document/view/4110205?publication=1>

36 Law of Georgia on “Gender Equality” (13,12), available at - <https://matsne.gov.ge/ka/document/view/91624?publication=10>

37 Note: Current year budgets of each municipality where programs or sub-programs have gender aspects

38 2022-2025 Gender Equality Strategy of Zugdidi Municipality

- The mayor established the **Interagency Commission** for the Prevention of Violence against Women and/or Domestic Violence in municipalities. It aims to ensure systematic and coordinated efforts in preventing violence against women and/or domestic violence within the municipality’s territory, as well as provide protection and assistance to victims of violence³⁹;
- The **Child Rights Protection and Support Departments** operate at the municipal level and are responsible for developing programs to protect and support children’s rights. These departments play a crucial role in managing and overseeing the implementation of these programs, serving as a powerful mechanism for preventing violence against women and/or domestic violence⁴⁰;
- The **“Women’s Room”** is a platform established by the local government to offer its residents, especially women and girls, additional information and advisory services. It also provides a free and open space for recreational and socio-economic activities.⁴¹;
- The **representatives of the Mayor in the Administrative Units** - The heads of administrative units sign an administrative contract with the City Hall (mayor) to exercise public legal authority. According to the rapid assessment report on the mayor’s representative needs by Fund «Sukhumi», the institution of the mayor’s representative emerges as one of the most crucial links in various aspects. It includes identifying cases, assisting victims, informing citizens about local and central services, and participating in the coordination system⁴².

Among the target municipalities, **Zugdidi, Senaki, Chokhatauri, Baghdati, and Vani** stand out as having relatively effective preventive tools. **These municipalities have established an interagency commission for the prevention of violence against women and/or domestic violence, as well as the protection and assistance of victims of violence. Through these commissions, they ensure systematic and coordinated efforts in preventing violence against women and/or domestic violence.**

39 Regulations of the Interagency Commission for Prevention of Violence against Women and/or Domestic Violence, Protection and Assistance to Victims of Violence of Bagdati Municipality

40 Ordinance No. 08 of the Kobuleti Municipality Council of September 9, 2020, “On approval of the regulation of the health and social protection service of the primary structural unit of the Kobuleti Municipality City Hall” (L.7.1), available at - https://www.matsne.gov.ge/ka/document/view/4990458?publication=0&fbclid=IwAR0puTj18BKW1WLOfmP9dNAUOK6pcWuH5uhpUqrlotRUh3uR3U13JrN_7Ls

41 Women’s Room, definition, Available at - https://infokobuleti.wordpress.com/2016/11/12/%E1%83%A5%E1%83%90%E1%83%9A%E1%83%97%E1%83%90%E1%83%9D%E1%83%97%E1%83%90%E1%83%AE%E1%83%98-%E1%83%A3%E1%83%99%E1%83%95%E1%83%94-%E1%83%A5%E1%83%9D%E1%83%91%E1%83%A3%E1%83%9A/?fbclid=IwAR27kPrmkLQrElqfaQqEGCFKI4WhsFCv10Wlh-CHb5Act1J8PyYSE1_QJf9M

42 “Identifying the Needs of the Mayor’s Representatives in Target Municipalities” (Samtredia, Vani, Terjola, Bagdati, Tkibuli, Tsalenjikha, Zugdidi, Senaki, Kobuleti, Chokhatauri), p. 3, 2022; available at - <https://fsokhumi.ge/index.php/ka/publikacia/informatia-zaladobis-tsinaagmdog/item/12359-2022-05-07-08-06-30>

3.4.1. ZUGDIDI MUNICIPALITY

In the 2023 budget, Zugdidi Municipality has allocated 95 thousand GEL for a sub-program focused on **gender equality, strengthening families, and supporting children**, in addition to its existing social sub-programs⁴³. The subprogram provides for:

- One-time financial assistance ranging from 100 to 800 GEL. Individuals with the status of victims of violence against women and/or domestic violence, under the conditions of a restraining and protective order issued by the court and/or by the decision of the interagency commission working on issues of violence against women and/or domestic violence, are eligible for such financial assistance based on the validity period of the status;
- Financial support of the “Women’s Room”;
- Financial support for activities to be implemented on issues of gender equality and victims of violence against women and/or domestic violence;
- Supporting the functioning of the interagency commission for the prevention of violence against women and/or domestic violence, protection and assistance of victims of violence;
- The program also includes provisions for one-time financial assistance to support children’s social protection. Families with four children under 18 are eligible for 200 GEL. For families with five children, the assistance is 300 GEL. Socially vulnerable families (with a rating less than 65001 points) receive 200 GEL on the birth of their first and second child. In the case of twins, the assistance amount is set at 500 GEL. Additionally, orphaned children under 18 are entitled to receive monthly assistance of 100 GEL.

Zugdidi Municipality budget provides for other **programs/sub-programs** with gender aspects:

- The program on **funding the sports and youth events** (code 05 01 02) - Raising awareness of gender issues among young people;
- The **Program of providing food for socially vulnerable population** (code 06 02)
 - The program envisages the provision of free food and accommodation for deprived individuals, aiming to improve the demographic situation and offer assistance to large families. Additionally, it seeks to implement other programs that will improve the social conditions of the municipality’s population. The program also focuses on providing psychosocial support for single parents, women, and victims of domestic violence, aiming to promote gender equality and ensure their well-being. Furthermore, the program aims to extend economic and psychosocial support to socially vulnerable children who may conflict with the law or face serious health problems.

⁴³ Ordinance No. 44 of the Zugdidi Municipality Council of December 28, 2022 on the approval of the 2023 budget of the Zugdidi Municipality, code 06 02 03, available at - <https://matsne.gov.ge/ka/document/view/5674039?publication=2>

- **The Single Parent Social Security Program** offers one-time financial support of 200 GEL for families without a breadwinner with a child under 18. Additionally, the program provides monthly support of 50 GEL for single parents who are unmarried and have children under the age of 18.
- **The Holiday Assistance Program** aims to create a festive atmosphere during holidays by supporting various vulnerable groups. This support encompasses the provision of food products to participants of the Second World War (both local and displaced), orphaned children, single parents, large families, individuals over 100 years old, beneficiaries of canteens and social houses, as well as especially needy families during Christmas, New Year, and Easter celebrations. Additionally, the program provides financial assistance for organizing events commemorating the Day of Protection of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and the Elderly, observed on June 14, December 3, and October 1.
- **The Assistance Program for Individuals Rendered Homeless Due to Various Reasons** aims to establish basic living conditions for the homeless population, enhance their quality of life, and offer both financial and emotional support. This program encompasses the provision of apartments to homeless individuals.
- **The co-financing of projects** aims to support socially vulnerable families and groups. The program is designed to actively engage vulnerable groups, including socially vulnerable individuals, disabled persons, families with multiple children, victims of violence, individuals beyond the care system, and orphans, in various projects. Furthermore, the program endeavors to foster the growth of social enterprises within the confines of Zugdidi Municipality. The selection of projects for implementation is conducted by a designated commission established within the municipality's city hall. These projects are selected based on specific regulations and guidelines stipulated by the municipality. The program's ultimate objective is to enhance the social conditions of diverse citizen groups by executing projects facilitated by local authorities, various organizations, and individuals operating across various areas within the social sphere.
- **The sub-program for material assistance to socially vulnerable children** in extreme poverty offers monthly financial support to children exposed to social risks. This includes children with disabilities, victims of crime and/or violence, in conflict with the law, orphaned, socially vulnerable, living in difficult conditions, or dealing with severe health conditions. The support amount is 50 GEL per child per year and is provided until the specified period ends. This financial assistance is intended to cover expenses related to purchasing food products, hygiene items, and stationery for the children. The inclusion of families in this sub-program is determined based on the assessment and recommendation of a social worker, in conjunction with the decision made by an interdisciplinary team.

Municipality	Prevention Mechanisms
Zugdidi	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The Municipal Gender Equality Council in the City Council; 2. The Public Servant responsible for the gender-related issues in the City Hall; 3. The 2023 budget of Zugdidi Municipality; 4. Zugdidi Municipality Gender Equality Measures Action Plan for 2023-24 and UN Security Council Resolution 13/25 “Women, Peace and Security”, “Roadmap” for the localization of the National Action Plan in Zugdidi Municipality; 5. The Gender Equality Strategy of Zugdidi Municipality for 2022-2025; 6. The Interagency Commission for Elimination of Violence against Women and/or Domestic Violence, and the Protection and Support to Victims of Violence of Zugdidi Municipality; 7. The Child Rights Protection and Support Department; 8. The “Women’s Room”; 9. The representatives of the Mayor in Administrative Units.

3.4.2. CHOKHATAURI MUNICIPALITY

In the 2023 budget of Chokhatauri Municipality, a program with an allocation of 30 thousand GEL is dedicated to **gender equality**⁴⁴.

The program entails the implementation of the following measures:

- Considering gender approaches in the municipality’s staff policy;
- Promoting the consideration of gender equality basic principles during the inclusiveness of citizens in the decision-making process (public meetings, discussions, village assemblies, etc.);
- Raising the municipality employees’ awareness of gender issues;
- Studying women’s needs and priorities in the municipality;
- Developing gender-oriented municipal youth policy;

⁴⁴ Ordinance No. 31 of the Chokhatauri Municipality Council of December 27, 2022, on the 2023 budget of the Chokhatauri Municipality, program code - 05 05, available at - <https://matsne.gov.ge/ka/document/view/5669444?publication=1>

- Developing and implementing municipal programs and projects, taking into account gender aspects;
- Funding projects for the economic strengthening of women;
- Organizing a 16-day campaign against gender-based violence will take place from November 25 to December 10;
- Raising the awareness of schoolchildren, young people, and school teachers on women's rights and gender equality issues;
- Raising the awareness of religious minorities on gender issues;
- Prevention of early marriage;
- Issues covered by the municipality's 2022-2023 action plan for gender equality measures⁴⁵.

Chokhatauri Municipality has also allocated 20 000 GEL for a separate **program to provide organizational support to the activities of the Gender Equality Council.**

This program entails the following:

- Increasing the effectiveness of the Chokhatauri Municipality Gender Equality Council and facilitating the performance of its assigned functions;
- Promoting the consideration of gender equality basic principles during the inclusiveness of citizens in the decision-making process (public meetings, discussions, village assemblies, etc.);
- Raising the municipality employees' awareness of gender issues, studying the needs and priorities of women in the municipality;
- Organizing a 16-day campaign against gender-based violence will take place from November 25 to December 10.

Other programs/sub-programs provided by the budget of Chokhatauri Municipality and covering gender aspects:

- **Women's economic strengthening** (code 05 05 02) - announcement of a competition for women's economic strengthening for local female entrepreneurs, where they will receive appropriate funding as a result of winning the competition;
- **Promotion of the elimination of gender-based and domestic violence** (code 06 02 08) - the sub-program aims to promote the elimination of gender-based and domestic violence by contributing to the economic strengthening of women. In particular, funding/co-funding of represented projects;
- **Social protection of families and children** (code 06 02 07) - the following programs will be funded within the framework of the sub-program:
 - One-time monetary assistance for families with newborns;

⁴⁵ Chokhatauri Municipality 2022-2023 Action Plan for Gender Equality, available at - https://chokhatauri.gov.ge/wp-content/uploads/2023/05/gankarguleba-17-danarti.pdf?fbclid=IwAR3L7KKqINCDJ7W-Wh9E7JBYz68_EOgSQfz_TMPMA5BBDVr6t33-dgGOLJsw

- Monthly support for each child under 18 for families with many children;
- Monthly assistance for people suffering from kidney failure on dialysis;
- One-time monetary assistance for older people under and over 100;
- Monthly monetary support for orphan children aged 0 to 18;
- Monthly monetary assistance to persons with disabilities aged 0 to 18 covering utility bills;
- The program offers material support to veterans of the Second World War and widows of those who lost their lives in the war. This assistance is specifically aimed at helping them purchase heating for the winter season in commemoration of the 76th anniversary of the victory over fascism;
- Funeral services for the lonely deceased;
- Helping people with hemophilia, especially financial assistance for people with severe health conditions;
- Assistance to persons who have left the state care system;
- Helping people in need of protein-free products;
- Providing compensation to the population affected by the natural disaster in January 2023.
- **Co-funding of programs aimed at solving social problems and promoting the cultural and educational sphere** (sub-program code 06 02 09) - submitted projects to be implemented in Chokhatauri municipality by legal entities to solve social problems and develop the cultural and educational sphere are subject to co-funding by the municipality mayor:
 - Co-financing of the N(N)LE Education Centre (day center for persons aged 6 to 18, utility and food products);
 - The Red Cross will be financed;
 - Women for Women - initiative meetings in Guria;
 - Early childhood development sub-program;
 - Financing of women who have breast cancer;
 - Homecare program;
 - Studying the condition of disabled people of all ages and recreation at mountain and sea resorts.
- **Promotion of the education system** (program code 04 02) - It envisages supporting the functioning of primary and general education institutions on the municipality's territory. Several measures will be implemented to foster greater student engagement in public schools and encourage active participation. These initiatives aim to promote physical activity, facilitate transportation options, and introduce additional incentives for exceptional graduates, including gold and silver medalists.

Municipality	Prevention Mechanisms
Chokhatauri	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The Municipal Gender Equality Council in the City Council; 2. The Public Servant responsible for the gender-related issues in the City Hall; 3. Chokhatauri Municipality budget of 2023; 4. Chokhatauri municipality gender equality measures action plan of 2022-2023; 5. The Interagency Commission for Elimination of Violence against Women and/or Domestic Violence, and the Protection and Support to Victims of Violence of Chokhatauri Municipality; 6. The Child Rights Protection and Support Department; 7. The representatives of the Mayor in Administrative Units.

3.4.3. SENAKI MUNICIPALITY

In the 2023 budget, Senaki Municipality allocated 25 thousand GEL for a separate program for social adaptation and protection of victims of violence⁴⁶. The program provides financial assistance to promote independent living, social integration, and adaptation to support victims of violence and the following persons:

- Minors who have reached the age of 18 and were previously under the care of child care institutions, “foster care,” or “small family home” services within Senaki Municipality and who have not undergone reintegration are eligible for consideration;
- Within the framework of the sub-program, families who have been evacuated from dilapidated and dangerous buildings and who have become homeless for various reasons (such as the destruction, burning, or inhabitable state of their house, or due to damage or hazardous conditions resulting from a natural disaster, accident, or other circumstances), including women victims of violence, will be provided with living spaces (with compensation to cover apartment rent);
- Monthly Support of 200 GEL is provided to the biological families of reintegrated children registered in the territory of Senaki Municipality throughout the budget year;

⁴⁶ Ordinance No. 1 of the Senaki Municipality Council of January 20, 2023 “On Approving the Budget of Senaki Municipality for 2023” Regarding amendments to Senaki Municipality Council Ordinance No. 13 of December 23, 2022, code 06 02 07, available at - <https://www.matsne.gov.ge/ka/document/view/5697239?-publication=0>

- A citizen whose rights have been violated under the Law of Georgia on “Violence against Women and/or Domestic Violence, Protection and Support of Victims of Violence”, will be entitled to receive a one-time assistance of 300 GEL;
- Sub-program co-financing the costs of shelters for women and children victims of violence;
- Based on the memorandum of cooperation signed between the Senaki Municipality City Hall and the Association “Merkury”, if a person with the status of a victim of violence, registered in the Senaki Municipality, avails the services of the Association “Merkury” shelter for women and children who are victims of domestic violence, the daily cost of using the shelter (30 GEL) will be reimbursed.

Furthermore, the 2023 budget of Senaki Municipality includes a separate program - “Activities Centre for Promoting a Safe Environment and Life in Senaki.” The implementation of this project is planned to be co-financed by the “Georgian Red Cross Society” with a funding amount of 36.7 thousand GEL. Within the framework of the mentioned program, the operation of the activity center is planned with the participation of staff, volunteers, and beneficiaries. The program includes regular training sessions for volunteers and the establishment of mobile volunteer groups. An updated response plan for the municipality will also be developed as part of this initiative. The project aims to strengthen community resilience in dealing with accidents, diseases, epidemics, conflict, and crises. It envisages increasing access to healthcare services and promotes the development of center-based activities for vulnerable groups within communities, including older people and youth. The Senaki Municipality budget includes other programs/sub-programs with gender aspects:

- **Food provision program for those deprived of care** (code 06 02 01) - To improve the living conditions of the socially vulnerable and deprived population, the canteen at the N(N)LE Senaki Catering Centre for Deprived Population provides hot food to socially vulnerable beneficiaries once a day. The ration includes three types of ready-made food. According to the commission’s conclusion at N(N)LE Senaki Catering Centre for Deprived Population, changes and replacements in the food list of beneficiaries can be made as needed. The services will be available to families without care, single elderly individuals, people with single-parent status, individuals with disabilities, and people with the status of victims of violence.

Municipality	Preventive Mechanisms
Senaki	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The Municipal Gender Equality Council in the City Council; 2. The Public Servant responsible for the gender-related issues in the City Hall; 3. Senaki Municipality Budget of 2023; 4. Senaki Municipality Gender Equality Measures Action Plan of 2022-23; 5. The Inter-departmental Commission for the Prevention of Violence against Women and/or Domestic Violence, protection and assistance to victims of violence of Senaki Municipality; 6. The Child Rights Protection and Support Department; 7. The representatives of the Mayor in Administrative Units.

3.4.4. BAGDATI MUNICIPALITY

Bagdati Municipality has a separate program in the 2023 budget **promoting gender equality**⁴⁷. It is funded by 10 000 GEL. The Gender Equality Council implements the Gender Equality Promotion Program. The program aims to support all gender-sensitive groups residing in the municipality, including women victims of violence and/or at-risk groups, single and/or widowed parents (both women and men), young people with special needs, socially vulnerable families with multiple children, disabled individuals, and those requiring care. It also focuses on studying the needs of older people in need and developing and implementing budget proposals tailored to meet these specific needs.

Various educational and informational initiatives will be financed in 2023 within the program. These programs aim to promote equal representation, authority, responsibility, and participation of women and men in all areas of public life. The objective is to ensure equal rights, freedoms, and opportunities for men and women within local self-government bodies, implementing gender mainstreaming and working towards eliminating gender-based discrimination.

The Bagdati Municipality budget provides for the following programs/sub-programs with gender aspects:

- The **Assistance to Families in Need** (code 06 02 07) - Families registered and residing in Bagdati Municipality facing economic distress and/or unexpected crises will be eligible to receive one-time financial assistance not exceeding 200 GEL. To qualify for assistance, a family must meet at least one of the following criteria:

⁴⁷ Ordinance No. 1 of Bagdati Municipality Council of January 27, 2023, "On Approving the 2023 Budget of Bagdati Municipality" Amendment to Ordinance No. 22 of Bagdati Municipality Council of December 23, 2022, code 06 03, available at - <https://matsne.gov.ge/ka/document/view/5704233?publication=0>

- The family is registered in the unified database of socially vulnerable families, and its rating score does not exceed 150,000;
- There is a person with an oncological disease, a person with limited mobility, a mental disorder, or another severe illness in the family;
- There is a single older person, a disabled person, or two or more persons under the age of 18 in the family, or the family has lost its breadwinner;
- Family income is less than subsistence minimum;
- There is a person with the status of a victim of violence in the family (in the case of the mentioned person or his legal representative referral).
- **The Medical care costs** (code 06 02 01) - Citizens registered and residing in Bagdati Municipality whose rating score falls between 0 and 65 000, or those who submit a petition from the mayor's representative confirming their need for assistance, will be eligible for partial reimbursement of medical service costs. It includes medical examinations, surgeries, treatments, and chemotherapy expenses.
- **Funding free canteens** (code 06 02 04) - Helpless and socially needy citizens registered in Bagdati Municipality will receive a free dinner daily. The Bagdati Municipality City Hall "Social Events Financing Commission" will select the beneficiaries.
- **Social protection of families and children** (code 06 02 05) - Citizens registered in Bagdati Municipality who gave birth to their second or subsequent child between 2022 and 2023 will receive 200 GEL for the second child, 300 GEL for the third child, 500 GEL for the fourth and any subsequent children, and 800 GEL for twins.
- **Single parent support** (code 06 02 14) - Within the framework of the sub-program, citizens registered in Bagdati municipality who have been granted the status of a single parent will receive one-time financial assistance of 250 GEL;
- **The One-time financial assistance for large families** (code 06 02 15) - Within the framework of the sub-program, large families with four or more children under the age of 18, registered in Bagdati municipality, will receive one-time financial assistance of 50 GEL for each child;
- **The Funding for medicines** (code 06 02 17) - Citizens who are registered and currently residing in Bagdati Municipality and whose rating score falls between 0 and 100 000, or those who submit a petition from the mayor's representative, will be eligible to receive one-time financial assistance for the purchase of medicines.
- **The Purchase of food packages** (code 06 02 19) - The program was established with the primary goal of partially alleviating the economic hardships faced by families due to the measures taken to prevent the widespread transmission of COVID-19. It aims to provide food assistance to crisis families residing in the municipality. The identification of eligible families receiving assistance will be carried out through the mayor's representatives in the territorial units of the municipality.

- The **Housing provision** (code 06 02 20) - Citizens registered in Bagdati municipality who have experienced damage or loss to their housing due to natural events or other objective circumstances will be eligible to receive support in the form of temporary housing rent and/or financing for construction and repair works, as well as materials for damaged houses.
- **Strengthening families with children** (code 06 02 22) - Families living in Bagdati Municipality who are in a crisis and/or need assistance will benefit from the sub-program. The family can be included in the program based on the referral of a citizen, mayor's representative, social worker, or other agency. Family needs assessment is conducted by a child and family social worker. The assessment and the social worker's conclusions and recommendations are then reviewed and considered by the Commission responsible for determining the financing of social events at the City Hall. Based on this evaluation, the Commission decides the necessary assistance for the family with children.
- **Provision of transport** (code 06 02 23) - In response to the population's request, the municipality will provide additional financing per the LLC's subsidy agreement. This funding will cover the cost of 200 liters of diesel fuel per month to increase the frequency of runs from 3 days to 6 days a week.

Municipality	Prevention Mechanisms
Bagdati	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The Municipal Gender Equality Council in the City Council; 2. The Public Servant responsible for the gender-related issues in the City Hall; 3. Bagdati Municipality Budget of 2023; 4. Bagdati Municipality Gender Equality Measures Action Plan 2023-24; 5. The Inter-departmental Commission for the Prevention of Violence against Women and/or Domestic Violence, protection and assistance to victims of violence of Bagdati Municipality; 7. Based on the order⁴⁸ of the director of the N(N)LE Union of Preschool and Out-of-school Institutions of Bagdati Municipality, the person in charge of protecting students from violence was appointed - the lawyer of the Union. 8. The Child Rights Protection and Support Department; 9. The representatives of the Mayor in Administrative Units.

48 Bagdati Municipality N(N)LE. Order of the director of the Union of Preschool and Out-of-school Institutions No. 330 " N(N)LE About the organizational issues of the Union of Preschool and Out-of-school Institutions"

3.4.5. VANI MUNICIPALITY

In the 2023 budget, apart from separate social sub-programs, the Vani Municipality has a particular program promoting gender equality⁴⁹. Five thousand GEL has been allocated for the program. The gender equality promotion program is designed to benefit all gender-sensitive groups residing in the municipality. It includes women who are victims of violence and/or at risk, single and/or widowed parents (both women and men), young people with special needs, socially vulnerable large families, disabled individuals, and older people requiring assistance. The program aims to study the needs of these groups thoroughly, develop appropriate budget proposals, and implement policies tailored to their specific needs.

Besides, the Vani Municipality has the following sub-programs with gender aspects:

- The “Assistance to Victims of Violence” program with the code 06 02 12 is designed to cater to the needs outlined under the “Violence against Women and/or Domestic Violence, Protection and Support of Victims of Violence” as specified by the law of Georgia. It provides one-time financial assistance of 300 GEL to citizens (victims) whose rights have been violated and whose status has been determined by the relevant service of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Georgia, a judicial body, or through the determination of the status of victims of violence against women and/or domestic violence by the interagency commission working on gender equality, violence against women, and domestic violence - victim identification group.
- **Provision of apartment rent** (code 06 02 13) - The sub-program aims to provide apartment rent for victims of domestic violence, along with their children, who do not have access to living space within the territory of Vani municipality.
- **Single parent support** (code 06 02 15) - The program offers monthly financial assistance to individuals with single-parent status. It provides a monthly allowance of 100 GEL for each child for whom the individual’s status as a single parent has been established.
- **Protecting and supporting the rights of the child** (code 06 02 16) - Within the framework of the program, financial assistance is provided to families with children facing various crises, such as families at risk of abandonment, families with disabled children, orphaned children, children with disabled parents, children who are victims of violence or have a parent who is a victim of violence, children whose health is deteriorating and their lives are in danger, impoverished families with children whose rating score is below 30 000, and families with children facing other social threats. The assistance is provided as follows: for a family with one child, the amount provided is up to 700 GEL; for a family with two children, the amount provided is up to 1200 GEL; for a family with three children, the amount provided is up to 1500 GEL; for a family with four or more children, the amount provided is up to 2000 GEL.

49 Ordinance No. 1 of the City Council of Vani Municipality of January 11, 2023, “On Approving the 2023 Budget of the Vani Municipality” Regarding Amendments to Ordinance No. 27 of the City Council of Vani Municipality of December 22, 2022, Code 06 03, available at - <https://matsne.gov.ge/ka/document/view/5690242?publication=0>

Municipality	Prevention Mechanisms
Vani	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The Municipal Gender Equality Council in the City Council; 2. The Public Servant responsible for the gender-related issues in the City Hall; 3. Vani Municipality Budget of 2023; 4. Vani Municipality Gender Equality Measures Action Plan of 2023-24; 5. Vani Municipality Gender Equality Strategy of 2022-25; 6. Vani municipality interagency commission for the prevention of violence against women and/or domestic violence, protection and assistance to victims of violence; 7. The Children’s Rights Protection and Support Department; 8. The representatives of the Mayor in Administrative Units.

3.4.6. TKIBULI MUNICIPALITY

In the 2023 budget, Tkibuli municipality has allocated 5 thousand GEL for a gender program to promote **gender equality** and its existing separate social sub-programs⁵⁰.

In the 2023 budget, there is a separate allocation of 3 thousand GEL (program code 06 02 16) dedicated to assisting individuals with the status of victims of domestic violence.

In addition, the Tkibuli Municipality has separate sub-programs where gender aspects are taken into account:

- **Medical Operating Cost Assistance Program** (program code 06 02 01) - Co-financing of planned and emergency inpatient and surgical operations of citizens registered in Tkibuli municipality, regardless of the profile:
- **Medical Operating Cost Assistance Program** (program code 06 02 01) - Co-financing of planned and emergency inpatient and surgical operations of citizens registered in Tkibuli municipality, regardless of the profile:
 - a. From the unified database of socially vulnerable families, those with up to 100 001 points are eligible to receive 70% funding of medical expenses.
 - b. From the unified database of socially vulnerable families, those whose points range from 100 001 to 200 000 are eligible to receive 50% funding of medical expenses.

⁵⁰ Ordinance No. 48 of the Tkibuli Municipality Council of December 23, 2022, “On Approving the 2023 Program Budget of the Tkibuli Municipality”, program code 06 04; available at - <https://matsne.gov.ge/ka/document/view/5657894?publication=3>

- c. When the evaluation of the socio-economic status of the family is stopped, and the family is not found in the unified database of socially vulnerable families, 40% of the amount payable by the patient is funded.
- **Family and Children Assistance Program** (program code 06 02 04)
 - a. Families with four or more children under 18 years of age, registered in Tkibuli municipality, are eligible to receive monthly monetary support. This financial assistance amounts to 40 (forty) GEL per child.
 - b. A single parent registered and currently residing in Tkibuli municipality can receive monthly assistance of 70 (seventy) GEL.
 - c. In the case of a child's birth, families can receive cash assistance amounting to 300 (three hundred) GEL.
 - **Social services - free canteen, social laundry** (program code 06 02 05) - The social service "Free Canteen" is dedicated to providing daily one-time meals to socially vulnerable elderly people, disabled individuals, and other vulnerable groups registered in Tkibuli municipality and currently residing in Tkibuli administrative unit. This service addresses the critical sustenance needs, ensuring the beneficiaries' existence and well-being. Moreover, the social service "Social Laundry" aims to enhance the sanitary and hygienic condition of the beneficiaries who access the free canteen. This additional support helps maintain a dignified and healthy environment for those who rely on the canteen service.
 - **Provision of school stationery** (program code 06 02 08) - Following the action plan (individual child support plan) drawn up based on the interdisciplinary review, the child and family social worker's assessment document identifies children who need to be provided with school and stationery items.
 - **One-time social assistance program** (program code 06 02 13) - Citizens registered in Tkibuli Municipality who cannot benefit from any point of the municipal social program and find themselves in a crisis will be eligible to benefit from the sub-program. The maximum amount of one-time assistance that can be provided to these individuals is 200 (two hundred) GEL.
 - **Child support program** (program code 06 02 15) - The program aims to address the specific needs of families identified through the action plan, formulated based on an interdisciplinary review and the child and family social worker's assessment document. These families do not currently qualify for support under the municipal social programs approved by the earlier resolution. However, the program recognizes that specific essential requirements are necessary to enhance the socio-economic condition of these families.
 - **Day care center for integrated activities** (program code 06 03) - It is devoted to the social support of the vulnerable population, disaster risk reduction, and response to it from the priority areas of the Georgian Red Cross Society within Tkibuli municipality. The day center of integrated activities opened with the participation of Tkibuli municipality works in two main directions: disaster management and youth center.

Municipality	Prevention Mechanisms
Tkibuli	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The Municipal Gender Equality Council in the City Council; 2. The Public Servant responsible for the gender-related issues in the City Hall; 3. Tkibuli Municipality Budget of 2023; 4. Child Rights Protection and Support Department; 5. The representatives of the Mayor in Administrative Units.

Challenge: At this stage, Tkibuli municipality does not have an inter-agency commission for preventing violence against women and/or domestic violence, protection and assistance to victims of violence, the **gender equality strategy of the municipality for 2022-2025**, **gender equality action plan for 2023-24** and the “**Women’s Room**”.

3.4.7. KOBULETI MUNICIPALITY

In the 2023 budget of Kobuleti municipality, a gender-sensitive program - the Economic Strengthening Support Program for women residing in Kobuleti municipality, has been introduced. Twenty thousand GEL has been allocated for this initiative.⁵¹ The program aims to encourage greater involvement and activation of women, promoting their development as full-fledged and equal members of society. The program aims to foster small entrepreneurship, provide incentives, and motivation, and serve as an example for other women to become more active and participate not only in targeted programs organized by the Municipality Hall but also in projects initiated by various non-governmental organizations and donors, enabling them to implement their ideas.

Within the cultural events financing sub-program (code: 05 02 05), Kobuleti Municipality aims to engage young people in cultural and creative activities, raise public awareness about gender equality issues, and promote the integration of disabled individuals into society. Additionally, the program seeks to enhance young people’s understanding of health-related matters and early marriage while establishing a non-violent and safe culture.

The health and social protection program (code: 06 01/06 02) incorporates a gender-sensitive approach, aiming to provide specific benefits and social assistance to diverse segments of the population residing within the territory of Kobuleti Municipality. It seeks to:

- Provide medicines and one-time free meals to beneficiaries belonging to vulnerable categories;

⁵¹ Ordinance No. 28 of the Kobuleti Municipality Council of December 27, 2022, “On Approval of the 2023 Local Program Budget of the Kobuleti Municipality”, Code 01 02 05, available at - <https://matsne.gov.ge/ka/document/view/5668042?publication=0>

- Assist large families to improve the demographic situation;
- The program envisages the promotion of patient transportation for those participating in the State. Dialysis Program and the Children’s Habilitation/Rehabilitation Program, along with other social measures aimed at enhancing the overall social well-being of the population. It advocates for the implementation of gender-sensitive social policies and considers the distinct needs of both women and men throughout the planning and implementation of social programs. The sub-programs are designed to provide diverse social services to children, disabled individuals, older people, women, and men, eliminating discriminatory practices.

Municipality	Prevention Mechanisms
Kobuleti	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The Municipal Gender Equality Council in the City Council; 2. The Public Servant responsible for the gender-related issues in the City Hall; 3. Kobuleti Municipality Budget of 2023; 4. Kobuleti Municipality Gender Equality Measures Action Plan of 2023-24; 5. The “Women’s Room”; 6. The Child Rights Protection and Support Department; 7. The representatives of the Mayor in Administrative Units.

Challenge: At this stage, Kobuleti municipality does not have an **interagency commission** for preventing violence against women and/or domestic violence, protection and assistance to victims of violence, and the **gender equality strategy** of the municipality for 2022-2025.

3.4.8. TERJOLA MUNICIPALITY

In the 2023 budget of the Terjola municipality, 10 thousand GEL has been allocated to promote gender equality. However, **the gender equality action plan for 2023-24** has not yet been developed.

There are other programs or sub-programs within the budget of Terjola Municipality that incorporate gender aspects:

- **Social protection** (program code 06 02 01) - This sub-program assists the socially vulnerable citizens living in the municipality with various living needs based on the social program approved by the Terjola Municipality Council and the Council’s various ordinances.

Municipality	Prevention Mechanisms
Terjola	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The Municipal Gender Equality Council in the City Council; 2. The Public Servant responsible for the gender-related issues in the City Hall; 3. Terjola Municipality Budget of 2023; 4. Terjola Municipality Gender Equality Strategy; 5. The Child Rights Protection and Support Department; 6. The representatives of the Mayor in Administrative Units.

Challenge: At this stage, the municipality does not have a **gender equality action plan** for 2023-24, an **interagency commission** for preventing violence against women and/or domestic violence, protection and assistance to victims of violence, and a **“Women’s Room”**.

3.4.9. SAMTREDIA MUNICIPALITY

Samtredia Municipality budget provides the following programs/sub-programs with gender aspects:

- Financial assistance to vulnerable families - Assistance is provided in the following cases:

Violence against children that affects the psycho-emotional state of the child - 200 GEL;

Violence against men and women; violence between family members - 200 GEL;

State of extreme poverty; inability of family members; lack of food and essential household items; state of extreme need; eldership (lack of support network) - 200 GEL;

- **Maternal and child support** (program code 06 02 03) - The program includes the following sub-programs: financial assistance for newborns and families with many children (4 or more children under 18);
- Financing of citizens’ medical services;
- Assistance for single parents;
- Student assistance;
- One-time assistance in special cases;
- **Red Cross co-financing-** To reduce and alleviate the helplessness experienced by socially isolated and vulnerable families, particularly the elderly over 60 years old and young individuals aged between 15 and 27 years old, it is crucial to leverage local resources effectively. The fundamental strategy is strengthening them by enhancing their skills and abilities and engaging them in various developmental activities. The ultimate goal is to boost their self-worth and self-confidence.

- **Child Rights Protection and Support Program** - The Child Rights Protection and Support Program budget is 10 000 GEL. The program’s primary goal is to assist families facing crises and having needy children.

Municipality	Prevention Mechanisms
<p style="text-align: center;">Samtredia</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The Municipal Gender Equality Council in the City Council; 2. The Public Servant responsible for the gender-related issues in the City Hall; 3. Samtredia Municipality Budget of 2023; 4. Samtredia Municipality Gender Equality Measures Action Plan of 2023-24; 5. The Child Rights Protection and Support Department; 6. The representatives of the Mayor in Administrative Units.

Challenge: The budget has an entry for the **Gender Equality Promotion Program**; however, no specific amount has been allocated yet. Currently, the municipality lacks a **gender equality strategy, an inter-agency commission** for preventing violence against women and/or domestic violence, protection and assistance to victims of violence, and a **“Women’s Room”**.

3.4.10. TSALENJIKHA MUNICIPALITY

Alongside the separate social sub-programs, in the 2023 budget, Tsalenjikha Municipality has included a gender equality promotion program⁵². An allocation of 10 thousand GEL has been assigned to support this initiative.

In addition, the municipality of Tsalenjikha has a separate sub-program (code 06 02 09) - **protection of victims of domestic violence and the prevention of violence**. An allocation of 3 thousand GEL has been designated to support this crucial initiative. This sub-program is intended to assist and support victims of domestic violence.

Tsalenjikha Municipality includes other programs/sub-programs with gender aspects:

⁵² Ordinance No. 4 of the Tsalenjikha Municipality Council of February 24, 2023 “On Approving the 2023 Budget of Tsalenjikha Municipality” regarding making changes to Ordinance No. 40 of the Tsalenjikha Municipality Council of December 30, 2022, code 06 09, available at - <https://matsne.gov.ge/ka/document/view/5734261?publication=0>

- One-time monetary assistance to citizens;
- One-time monetary assistance for families with newborns;
- Monthly financial support for minors in large families;
- Program for the promotion of internally displaced persons from the occupied territories;
- Co-financing of tuition fees for outstanding students;
- Provision of housing for the socially vulnerable;
- Provision of food for first graders in Tsalenjikha Municipality;
- Providing food to the socially vulnerable population.
- **Providing the population with transport** - In 2022, the municipality provided subsidies for transport services to residents living in the administrative units of Muzhava (Eristkali), Pakhulani (Tskoushi), and Jgali (Skuri). Starting from the 2023 budget year, the municipality has allocated additional subsidies to private buses operating along various routes. These routes include Chale and Muzhava, Tsalenjikha, village Sachino and Mazandara, Tsalenjikha and Chkvaleri, Tsalenjikha and Leshange, Tsalenjikha and town Jvari. The purpose of allocating the subsidy is to increase the intensity of the traffic on the routes mentioned above.

Municipality	Prevention Mechanisms
Tsalenjikha	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The Municipal Gender Equality Council in the City Council; 2. The Public Servant responsible for the gender-related issues in the City Hall; 3. Tsalenjikha Municipality Budget of 2023; 4. Tsalenjikha Municipality Gender Equality Measures Action Plan of 2023-24; 5. The Children’s Rights Protection and Support Department; 6. The representatives of the Mayor in Administrative Units.

Challenge: The municipality still does not have a **gender equality strategy**, an **inter-agency commission** for preventing violence against women and/or domestic violence, protection and assistance to victims of violence, and a **“Women’s Room”**.

4. KEY FINDINGS OF THE RESEARCH

4.1. FACTORS CONTRIBUTED TO DOMESTIC AND GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE

According to the qualitative study results, four main interrelated factors contributed to domestic and gender-based violence were identified:

- **Low level of education and awareness;**
- **Low economic opportunity/unemployment (material deprivation);**
- **Substance abuse/gambling addiction;**
- **Socio-cultural environment (impact of prevailing stereotypes).**

The low level of education and awareness encompasses not only the lack of information about one's rights but also the ignorance or neglect of such information. However, it is essential to note that even an educated and empowered woman can still become a victim of violence. As a result, other contributing factors, establishing and reinforcing domestic and gender-based violence, come into play.

Various categories of respondents, including representatives from the vulnerable group - violence survivors, strongly emphasize the importance of **limited economic opportunities and material deprivation** (often stemming from unemployment) as key factors that provoke violence. Such circumstances can make a man feel like a “powerless person”, contributing to aggression.

Subsequently, the individual transfers his aggression toward family members, mainly directing it at their spouse/partner, and exhibits violent behavior. Respondents involved in the study predominantly mentioned psychological, economic, and physical violence as prevalent forms of abuse. It is worth noting that the perpetrator might also develop substance or gambling addictions, further intensifying the hostile atmosphere. Moreover, the issue extends beyond the mere absence or lack of employment. It also involves the perpetrator's refusal to accept offered work opportunities.

“As part of preventive efforts, we offered the perpetrator to work at the car wash, but he declined. He stated that he would not be comfortable washing our cars while we were sitting in our offices. However, during this period, his wife was already employed in a cleaning service. It appears they selectively target individuals they perceive as vulnerable and possess the ability to cause psychological distress” - a worker from the State Care and Assistance Agency for Victims of Trafficking in Samtredia.

The impact of environmental factors, mainly prevailing cultural stereotypes and overall mentality, plays a significant role in this context. The respondents from the qualitative study frequently highlighted this factor, emphasizing the prevailing lack of gender sensitivity within the environment. Women are often obligated to endure and uphold the family at any cost, particularly for the welfare of their children. On the other hand, men are assigned dominant positions as the main “recipients” of inheritance, the head of the family, and the immediate breadwinners. As a result, women are mostly related to subordinate roles, further perpetuating women's oppression.

All the factors mentioned above contribute to women's economic dependence on men. The combination of factors such as low social status, unemployment, poverty, and restricted access to education and transportation hinders women's opportunities for self-realization and empowerment. At the same time, these conditions create significant barriers for women who try to escape from abusive environments.

“The main reason is the lack of employment opportunities for women in rural areas. They lack adequate access to appropriate education and work opportunities. As a result, they feel compelled to return to places where they constantly face abuse. It creates a vicious circle from which not everyone can find a way out...” - S.K., a woman victim of violence in Zugdidi.

According to the respondents, constraining the potential for women's economic empowerment and growth enables men to exert more control over them. Additionally, this limitation significantly weakens women's self-confidence, resilience, and motivation for personal well-being.

“When a woman possesses her income, she gains independence and self-confidence, which some men may not favor, especially when the man is unemployed. I experienced this scenario. When a woman is unemployed, men tend to perceive her as more vulnerable and easier to manipulate. This dynamic is satisfactory for some men. However, on a local or broader scale, when a woman has access to economic and social programs, she stands more firmly on her feet” - a 31-year-old victim of violence, a mother of two children, working as a nurse in Kobuleti.

4.2. PROGRAMS AND MEASURES AT PREVENTING VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN AND DOMESTIC VIOLENCE: IMPLEMENTATION AND CURRENT CHALLENGES

The following table and diagrams below represent ongoing and forthcoming programs/projects implemented by the municipal and non-governmental organizations, alongside the challenges reported by the study respondents. Furthermore, they outline diverse aspects of including vulnerable women/ violence survivors in various programs as well as interactions with referral entities.

It is important to emphasize that beneficiaries must be officially registered within the target municipalities to access services and assistance⁵³.

53 An exception to the standard procedure is evident in the municipality of Khoni (which falls outside the scope of the study's target municipalities but it serves as a noteworthy example of a good practice). In Khoni, beneficiaries are not obligated to undergo mandatory registration in order to access services; their residency within the municipality proves sufficient. For instance, within a village, municipal assistance was provided based on a certificate provided by the mayor's representative, confirming the residency of the violence survivor within the Khoni municipality.

Municipality	Programs and Activities	Comment
Kobuleti	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - A specific program for preventing and protecting domestic and gender-based violence victims is currently absent. When victims seek assistance, they try to provide one-time monetary aid from the mayor’s fund. Based on the mayor’s decision, they try to “tailor” social and health care programs to victims if they do not have the required rating points. - The economic strengthening program has been implemented since 2022. As part of its efforts to enhance project writing skills, a relevant specialist was incorporated into the program to provide counseling for women. However, due to high demand, access to counseling services for women remains challenging. 20 000 GEL has been allocated for the funding of projects (used for different purposes, for instance, in agriculture and for the purchase of equipment). - Victims of violence are also included in the category of service beneficiaries in the healthcare program. - The municipality operates a housing program for targeting families in dire need (4 families benefited from this program). The budget for the mentioned program in 2023 has been significantly increased, enabling the program to provide support to 10 families. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The head of the municipality’s social and healthcare service is trying to include at least one program for vulnerable women in the new budget for next year. - The economic strengthening program for project financing has a range of 500 GEL to 5000 GEL, with co-participation of 10%; however, in cooperation with the Women Fund “Sukhumi”, rehabilitation of women survivors and their children from vulnerable families, provision of psychological support and legal assistance is carried out in the “Women’s Rehabilitation Centre” run by the organization.

<p>Tkibuli</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Budget provisions currently do not encompass preventive activities; - The municipality offers several one-time assistance programs for various cases. Notably, a distinct sub-program titled: “one-time financial assistance for women violence survivors” has been provided with one-time financial aid for 300 GEL. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - After the entry into force of the amendment to the law related to the revocation of victim status (July 2023), the municipality plans to adapt the criteria to the eligible beneficiaries so as not to hinder the use of municipal services for women who have experienced violence (**the status of a victim of violence was a prerequisite for receiving the service). - The Social Service and Child Rights Protection Department works in the direction of domestic violence. Currently, the municipality does not have staff responsible for gender equality issues. - In cooperation with the Women Fund “Sukhumi”, rehabilitation of women survivors and their children from vulnerable families, provision of psychological support, and legal assistance carried out in the “Women’s Rehabilitation Centre” run by the organization.
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<p>Bagdati</p>	<p>- The economic support program aims to strengthen the Child Rights Protection Department beneficiaries and their families by assisting them in agricultural activities. Under this program, families are assisted in purchasing work tools for their employment, taking into account the skills and abilities of the family members.</p>	<p>- The Gender Equality Council, the Interagency Commission, and the individual responsible for the Gender and Child Rights Protection Department engage in gender-based and domestic violence prevention. They organize information meetings where the population is provided with information about the services available in the municipality for women, single mothers, family strengthening programs, and victim assistance programs.</p> <p>- There is a commission in the City Hall with a composition similar to the interagency commission. This commission is responsible for addressing both children's rights and the issue of violence against women. <i>"The interagency commission, established a few months ago, actively shares information about incidents of violence during their meetings. The members of this commission are dedicated to finding timely and effective strategies to respond to these challenges. This approach will serve as a valuable mechanism for prevention and is currently being introduced"</i> - Sophiko Natriashvili, Secretary of Gender Equality Council of Bagdati Municipality.</p> <p>- In cooperation with the Women Fund 'Sukhumi', the 'Women's Rehabilitation Centre' run by the organization carries out the rehabilitation of women survivors and their children from vulnerable families. The center also provides psychological support and legal assistance.</p>
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<p>Zugdidi</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The municipality's budget includes the range of assistance from 100 to 800 GEL intended for victims of violence. The allocation of this assistance is determined by the evaluation of each case by the relevant commission. - Currently, an apartment rent provision program is provided as well. - There is also a co-funding component that supports financing initiatives and projects that can be initiated by an NGO and an initiative group and serves to provide services to vulnerable groups. - In the referral part, the municipality cooperates with various agencies and non-governmental organizations through an inter-agency commission. - There is a Women's Room, where various meetings are held for local women, for instance, providing information on state programs for economic empowerment. - A database for job seekers has been established to promote the empowerment of women in vulnerable families. This database registers not only the needs of these women but also features potential employers. Due to this initiative, there has been a significant connection between the community and qualified individuals or agencies, leading to the successful employment of 87 people. Furthermore, a closed social media group for job seekers has been established. - The Women's Room has 35 information consultants per community who systematically disseminate information throughout the villages. - The Gender Equality Department conducts needs assessment studies. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Active work is being carried out in various villages to raise awareness, introduce programs, and assess needs. This effort is being undertaken by both the Child Rights Protection Department and the Social and Health Department. - An information campaign and door-to-door communication in the village have been started (with particular emphasis on villages located along the Administrative Boundary Line - ABL). The visits to schools and kindergartens are conducted every week. Every Friday, meetings are organized with the participation of parents and various specialists, such as pediatricians, psychologists, and other experts. These sessions focus on subjects like positive parenting and other issues to prevent violence. The Child Rights Protection Department is actively involved in these initiatives. - In cooperation with the Women Fund 'Sukhumi', the 'Women's Rehabilitation Centre' run by the organization rehabilitates women survivors and their children from vulnerable families. The center also provides psychological support and legal assistance.
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<p>Senaki</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The municipality does not have a specific program aimed at prevention. However, it actively collaborates with non-governmental organizations to implement campaigns focused on public awareness-rising. For instance, a women’s support center has been established since 2009, providing information and education. This initiative results from a collaboration between the Women Fund “Sukhumi” and the local self-government. Besides, in 2022, during the 16-day campaign against gender-based violence organized by the inter-departmental commission, information campaigns were conducted in 24 schools with the active involvement of the Women Fund “Sukhumi” and the Education Resource Centre. - Some victim support programs provide apartment rent coverage and one-time assistance to individuals affected by violence. The municipality actively supports its citizens by providing information and guidance for grant competitions. Specifically, an exhibition has been organized for women entrepreneurs. Moreover, in July, a project aimed at empowering displaced women through access to digital technologies will be launched. Up to 60 women are scheduled to undergo training at the Zugdidi Technopark. - It is planned to increase the population’s internet accessibility by installing “smart chairs” in the park, equipped with internet connectivity. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The municipality utilizes the resources available through social programs to improve the situation, assist women survivors, and support their children. - In cooperation with the Women Fund “Sukhumi”, rehabilitation of women survivors and their children from vulnerable families, provision of psychological support, and legal assistance carried out in the “Women’s Rehabilitation Centre” run by the organization. <p>A memorandum of cooperation has been signed between the municipality and the association “Merkury”, which operates a shelter for victims of violence in Zugdidi. According to this agreement, the municipality will co-fund the services provided to the victims at the shelter. Eligible beneficiaries who are residents of the Senaki municipality will receive financial assistance amounting to 30 GEL per day. To avail themselves of this assistance, beneficiaries must submit an invoice for the services they received at the shelter.</p>
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<p>Samtredia</p>	<p>- Since 2022, the Gender Equality Council has initiated a protection and assistance program for victims of domestic violence. The program offers a one-time assistance of 200 GEL. Remarkably, there's no need for a restraining order, victim status, or any additional documentation to qualify for this assistance, an approach considered as a good practice. To access the aid, it's sufficient for victims to submit a statement to the municipality. After this submission, the city hall's social service or a social worker, and if necessary, a village mayor's representative, evaluates the family's situation and verifies instances of violence within the household. To date, the municipality has extended this one-time assistance to two beneficiaries.</p> <p>- Women and families who are vulnerable primarily receive benefits from health care and social programs - If necessary, partial financial support is provided for medical services and apartment rent expenses.</p> <p>- Victims of violence and single mothers were included in the category of beneficiaries of the social program (they can use the food service without the necessity of having a rating score).</p>	<p>- No innovations have been included in this year's budget. However, some measures focus on prevention, such as having a curator within the social and health care service and the newly established Child Rights Protection Department.</p> <p>- In cooperation with the Women Fund «Sukhumi», rehabilitation of women survivors and their children from vulnerable families, provision of psychological support, and legal assistance are carried out in the «Women's Rehabilitation Centre» run by the organization.</p>
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<p>Tsalenjikha</p>	<p>- In the 2023 budget, a health care and social security program has allocated provisions for 'financial support for victims of domestic violence.' Citizens who have experienced domestic violence are eligible to benefit from this program. It offers a yearly one-time assistance of 500 GEL. Notably, only two beneficiaries were identified to receive this support last year.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Developing a program for preventing violence against women and domestic violence is underway. - The Gender Equality Council plans to strengthen its collaboration with various agencies and organizations that emphasize a preventive approach. - "In the past, a dedicated staff member was responsible for addressing gender-related issues and responding to instances of violence. However, to eliminate redundancy, these responsibilities have been transferred to the Child Rights Protection Department. Subsequently, the Child Rights Protection Department was merged with the Social Department, consolidating its functions. Now, within this unified department, a social worker handles gender-related matters." - In cooperation with the Women Fund "Sukhumi," the "Women Rehabilitation Centre," managed by the organization, is dedicated to rehabilitating women and their children from abused or vulnerable families. The center provides essential services, including access to psychologists and lawyers, who support and assist those in need.
<p>Vani</p>	<p>The City Hall Social Service's program to support victims of violence includes two main components: one-time financial assistance amounting to 300 GEL and provisions for covering apartment rent.</p>	<p>- In cooperation with the Women Fund «Sukhumi», rehabilitation of women survivors and their children from vulnerable families, provision of psychological support, and legal assistance carried out in the «Women's Rehabilitation Centre» run by the organization.</p>

<p>Terjola</p>	<p>At this stage, there are no distinct programs targeted explicitly at prevention. Instead, social programs are focused on addressing domestic violence. Under the mentioned social program, individuals have the opportunity to access one-time financial assistance as well as support for apartment rent. No additional initiatives are currently planned in this area.</p>	<p>- The Child Rights Protection and Social Departments work together to address the needs of and provide support to vulnerable families.</p> <p>In cooperation with the Women Fund «Sukhumi», rehabilitation of women survivors and their children from vulnerable families, provision of psychological support, and legal assistance are carried out in the «Women’s Rehabilitation Centre» run by the organization.</p>
<p>Chokhatauri</p>	<p>- Child Rights Protection Departments can be regarded as mechanisms for preventing domestic violence and strengthening families. However, these departments are still in the initial stages of complete implementation.</p> <p>- The municipality has initiated economic strengthening programs and offered assistance for apartment rent.</p> <p>- Additionally, there is a support program for individuals with disabilities and their parents.</p> <p>- A program is being implemented as part of the gender equality budget. This program provides funding for travel expenses for women who are taking part in project writing courses organized by non-governmental organizations and residing outside the district center.</p> <p>- The municipality also has a “Rehabilitation Program for Victims of Violence Against Women and Domestic Violence”. This program provides financial assistance tailored to the specific needs to be identified by the applicant.</p> <p>- Providing funding for transportation to receive free psychologist services.</p> <p>- In the budget for the year 2023, 40 000 GEL has been allocated to support the activities outlined in the municipal action plan for gender equality. This funding is primarily focused on the prevention of violence.</p>	<p>- Recipients of the “Rehabilitation Program for Victims of Violence against Women and Domestic Violence” have benefited from the program for various purposes. These include managing a household, purchasing school supplies, covering the costs of psychologist services, etc.</p> <p>- In cooperation with the Women Fund «Sukhumi», rehabilitation of women survivors and their children from vulnerable families, provision of psychological support, and legal assistance carried out in the «Women’s Rehabilitation Centre» run by the organization.</p>

4.3. THE PATH FOR VICTIMS OF VIOLENCE TO ACCESS MUNICIPAL SERVICES⁵⁴

Below, the tables provide some examples of the ways and stages that victims of violence go through before becoming recipients/beneficiaries of municipal programs and/or assistance services.

Zugdidi:

- Victim of violence initially addressed the police;
- The police referred the victim to the “Mercury” shelter;
- The shelter’s social worker assessed the beneficiary. As a result of the social worker’s efforts, the representatives of the City Hall health and social services and the Child Rights Protection Department social worker were involved;
- The victim/beneficiary received apartment rent and one-time benefits.

Senaki:

- Victim of violence initially addressed the police;
- The police referred the victim to the municipality;
- After communicating with the municipality, the victim received a one-time assistance of 300 GEL;
- The municipality referred the victim to the Child Rights Protection Department, where she received services and consultations from a psychologist and a social worker. In the subsequent stage, the Department facilitated the victim’s referral to the Women Fund “Sukhumi” rehabilitation center. At the rehabilitation center, she received treatment from a psychologist, a social worker, and a legal advisor, providing comprehensive support and assistance.

⁵⁴ The beneficiary/victim of violence in Bagdati has suffered from years of abuse. The mayor’s representative made several attempts to address the situation, including verbal communication with the victim’s husband, but unfortunately, significant changes did not occur. The victim herself was against involving the police. In the most recent incident of violence, when the victim sought refuge with neighbors, the mayor’s representative strongly emphasized the importance of leaving the house. Eventually, the beneficiary reluctantly agreed to the representative’s suggestion.

Bagdati:

- The mayor's representative reported the case of domestic violence to the mayor's social service.
- To extend support to victims of violence and explore available resources, the head of the social service initially asked the mayor's representative for a list of families with many children (considering the victim is a mother with many children). Subsequently, based on this information, the victim/beneficiary was approved for social assistance.

Vani:

- The victim of violence initially contacted the police;
- The police referred the victim to a shelter;
- The social worker of the shelter referred her to the Child Rights Department's social worker;
- Consequently, the victim received the following municipal assistance/services:
 - a) one-time assistance to victims of violence (400 GEL);
 - b) Support for apartment rent assistance;
 - c) enrolled in the family strengthening program - 900 GEL per year.The Child Rights Protection Department representatives distributed this amount to the beneficiary every month.

Terjola:

- After being physically assaulted by her spouse, the victim's child promptly contacted the police. It's important to note that the victim had been hospitalized in the past due to physical abuse from the same spouse. However, during those previous incidents, she chose to hide the abuse and did not disclose the identity of her attacker. The police issued a restraining order;
- A social worker from the Social Protection Agency referred the victim to the Child Rights Protection Department;
- Consequently, the victim became a beneficiary of various programs directly or indirectly related to economic strengthening or assistance (for example, a free medication program, a program for socially vulnerable people, etc.).

Tsalenjikha:

- Following the physical violence by the husband, the victim's child promptly contacted the police, leading to the issuance of a restraining order.
- Subsequently, the Social Assistance Agency referred the victim to the Child Rights Protection Department.
- As a result of this intervention, the victim gained access to the following assistance and services:
 - a) One-time financial assistance (500 GEL);
 - b) Participation in a home repair program funded by the City Hall;
 - c) Healthcare services with financing for treating a child with an autistic spectrum disorder.

Chokhatauri:

- A woman victim of violence received information about economic empowerment programs through a social network;
- She sought assistance from the Deputy Chairman of the Gender Equality Council in project design. It is worth mentioning that she had prior experience in drafting projects and participating in various programs.
- After a comprehensive assessment of her situation:
 - a) The municipality provided one-time funding distributed in three installments- 500 GEL, 800 GEL, and 1000 GEL;
 - b) Additionally, the municipality facilitated the connection of a violence survivor with the organization "Women for Women," which offered financial support enabling her to purchase various items and equipment;Currently, the individual is engaged in working with polymer clay.

Kobuleti:

- After divorcing from the abusive spouse, the victim of violence relocated from Batumi to Kobuleti;
- Due to not being registered in Kobuleti Municipality, the victim encountered difficulties accessing local programs;
- However, despite her lack of registration, the Kobuleti Municipality City Hall extended an offer for her to participate in the apartment rent program (300 GEL);
- At present, the woman survivor has submitted an application to be included in the socially vulnerable program and is awaiting the allocation of assessment points.

4.4. PREVENTIVE MEASURES IN EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS

“To effectively prevent and eradicate domestic violence, the approach with the greatest impact is early prevention, focusing on shaping positive human consciousness during the formative stages of personal growth. Attaining this crucial objective requires the equal and active participation of all relevant institutions, particularly in the context of the well-being and development of adolescents” - K. S. Chairman of Tsalenjikha Municipality Council and Gender Equality Council.

Preventive measures against domestic violence in educational institutions are largely centered on addressing bullying and conflict resolution. However, a significant number of respondents in the study either overlooked incidents of violence, conflicts, or bullying in schools or emphasized their rarity. Instead, their discussions leaned more toward methods of resolving conflicts. The research thus underscored that the primary challenge is not just the occurrence of violence but also a pervasive lack of awareness about it in educational settings. Contributing factors include cultural stereotypes, misconceptions held by parents or teachers about violence, and insufficient communication with referral entities.

Different conflict management practices and resolution strategies were observed in various educational institutions within the target municipalities. In cases where conflicts were not severe and the situation did not require the involvement of resource officers or law enforcement, the issues were resolved through the teacher’s intervention. However, it was also noted that some cases emerged where the teacher had no alternative but to involve a resource officer to address the problem. Depending on the complexity of the case, the resource officer assessed the need for further involvement of the police in the resolution process. During the focus group discussions, the teachers revealed an example of good practice. In the village of Rokhi (Bagdati municipality), with the assistance of World Vision, a **security committee** was established comprising parents, students, teachers, and administration. This committee works towards the prevention and elimination of conflicts/bullying.

Furthermore, the training program is implemented for parents, providing them with information about the various stages of their child’s development and appropriate parenting techniques for each stage. A similar training initiative is conducted for teachers as well. However, some teachers often need help to grasp the subject matter covered in the program and maintain the belief that students must unquestionably adhere to their instructions. These training programs are facilitated by the Office of Resource Officers of Educational Institutions, both of which are available in almost all major cities. Parents who avail of these services find themselves better equipped to manage their relationships with their children and effectively communicate with school staff.

The study findings indicate that addressing and resolving within educational settings cannot solely rely on training programs, teacher interventions, or resource officers. One of the challenges identified by teachers is the difficulty in accurately **identifying instances of violence within educational institutions**. Therefore, there is a need to **enhance the involvement of specialists working with adolescents**, as this will facilitate the early detection of violence:

“Some measures have been implemented to address bullying and violence; unfortunately, these cases still exist, mainly among students... We sought the assistance of a psychologist from the Women Fund “Sukhumi” and arranged for psychological consultation. After the interviews, I was surprised to discover that some children had been victims of violence within our school. These children felt insecure, and many left the psychologist’s office in tears. When the idea of inviting a psychologist first came to me, I consulted with the children, and many of them expressed a strong desire for such support. It became evident to me that these children were carrying burdens they felt unable to share with us or even their parents”- M. M., a teacher at a school near the ABL in Tsalenjikha municipality.

Based on the information provided, schools need to engage in active communication with various stakeholders, including self-government social workers and psychologists, as well as with educational institutions, Office of Resource Officers of Educational Institutions, and non-governmental organizations providing psychological services.

The study revealed a significant practice of referring cases of violence to the relevant agencies. Focus group participants described a case in which the school suspected child abuse and subsequently discovered that the child was a victim of physical abuse by the grandmother and uncle. Following this revelation, the case was reported to a social worker, who took appropriate action by referring the abusers to the relevant authorities. Consequently, the abusers were subjected to legal consequences, receiving a suspended sentence, and were legally prohibited from approaching the child (Bagdati).

The representative of the educational resource center in the target municipality (Tkibuli) pointed out that when it comes to family conflicts, the primary referral destination is the Office of Resource Officers of Educational Institutions. However, it was noted that 90% of parents refuse to receive services in Kutaisi due to the considerable distance.

Which agencies do educational institutions refer to in case of suspicion of violence? Which document are they guided by?

- ✓ **In a school context, the main guiding document is the instruction provided by the Ministry of Education, where the referral rule is outlined. This document is accessible** only to the director, the resource officer, or the person in charge of security. It specifies which agency should be involved in a particular case and how the incident unfolded. Referrals are typically directed to a social agency handling the follow-up procedures. In more complex cases, law enforcement agencies may become involved. The privacy and confidentiality of the teenager is strictly protected.
- ✓ **In the context of a preschool institution, referrals are directed** toward the social worker or the Child Rights Protection Department. Kindergartens often appoint a manager responsible for addressing issues related to domestic violence and identifying potential cases of child abuse. They respond accordingly to such situations. However, the survey results indicated that many respondents lacked information regarding the specific referral standards or regulations.

4.5. COOPERATION WITH VARIOUS AGENCIES/ORGANIZATIONS TOWARD ELIMINATING VIOLENCE

Almost all participants involved in the study emphasized the positive outcomes of their cooperation with various agencies and organizations. In particular, most respondents highlight the fruitful collaboration with the Women Fund “Sukhumi” and other non-governmental organizations.

However, each municipality has faced unique experiences, often fraught with significant challenges.

The head of the regional center of the Agency of Zugdidi State Care and Assistance for the (Statutory) Victims of Human Trafficking indicates less involvement of schools. The study revealed **insufficient cooperation, information exchange, and coordination among the subjects within the referral mechanism:**

“Several months ago, Fund “Sukhumi” organized a round table event, which was attended by representatives from the Ministry of Internal Affairs, social workers, and teachers. During the meeting, it came to light that the Ministry of Internal Affairs was unaware of our provision of one-time assistance to women victims of violence. Consequently, the victims were not receiving information about this specific service, highlighting a concerning lack of information dissemination and coordination. The municipality should take a more proactive approach in addressing these issues.” - E.B., Tsalenjikha Municipality City Hall Legal Department.

The lack of information and coordination is leading to delays in responses from referral entities. A major challenge highlighted is the communication gap with primary healthcare agencies and their limited awareness of identifying domestic violence cases.

The low level of awareness within the population creates difficulties in reaching out to potential beneficiaries and identifying domestic violence cases. For instance, citizens may decline to participate in various programs and receive services due to prevailing stereotypes, or family members may hold negative attitudes towards involving a potential beneficiary in such programs.

Another problem is the insufficient efforts to implement early-stage intervention practices for perpetrator’s violent behavior change. There is a lack of sensitivity toward the issues of violence against women and domestic violence. Additionally, there seems to be diminished trust in law enforcement agencies. Integrating the apartment rental service into the municipal program and Kobuleti budget is challenging.

The main aspects of cooperation among various municipal agencies are outlined below:

<p>Senaki</p>	<p>The municipality actively cooperates with schools, resource centers, kindergartens, and state-funded social workers. Additionally, it cooperates with non-governmental organizations, like the Women Fund “Sokhumi”, and has established a collaborative relationship with the local Red Cross. An interagency commission has been established within the municipality, facilitating active communication with state agencies dedicated to addressing violence against children, women, and domestic violence.</p> <p>Significantly, the victims of violence identified by the interagency commission or the relevant municipal services become beneficiaries of the services offered by the Women Fund “Sukhumi” following referrals from the municipality. A substantial number of beneficiaries have been redirected to the women’s rehabilitation center and have received services. Ongoing monthly meetings with psychologists and lawyers ensure continuous support. The Women Fund “Sukhumi” women’s support centers actively disseminate information on available support services for victims of violence across various cities and villages in different municipalities. The “Digital Resource Centre” created by the Fund «Sukhumi» is a significant source of information. <i>“The initiatives carried out in 24 schools throughout the Senaki municipality on the commission’s initiative during 16 active days played an essential role in informing the public. This work exemplifies successful cooperation between agencies and sectors. For instance, the education resource center took responsibility and actively engaged in conducting a campaign within schools involving students, parents, and other family members. This effort enabled us to reach approximately 5600 individuals, significantly raising their level of awareness”</i> - N. Kh., Head of Social and Healthcare Service of Senaki City Hall.</p>
<p>Bagdati</p>	<p>The interagency commission established within the municipality cooperates with local referral entities. They actively communicate with schools, kindergartens, police, outpatient clinics, and representatives of the local trafficking agency. The Gender Equality Council facilitates the establishment of communication between agencies. The Child Rights Protection Department regularly communicates with schools and kindergartens, hosting information meetings. The municipality maintains communication with outpatient clinics and social agencies. Additionally, they have formed partnerships with the Fund “Sukhumi” and World Vision and maintain close communication with NALA, the Parliament Gender Equality Council, and the Public Defender. An important practice introduced by the Gender Equality Council involves inviting law enforcement and social workers to their meetings to provide statistics and information on domestic violence.</p>

Kobuleti	On the initiative of the municipality’s Gender Equality Council and the Women Fund “Sukhumi,” frequent meetings with representatives of the healthcare system are organized in schools, villages, and kindergartens. There are no significant problems in terms of communication and cooperation between the self-government and referral entities. The Child Rights Protection Department actively identifies vulnerable families and refers them to the relevant state agencies or municipal services ⁵⁵ .
Zugdidi	<p>The municipality needs more communication and cooperation problems, as referral entities actively refer beneficiaries to them. They do not have any “weak links” in their collaboration. Moreover, the municipality cooperates with many non-governmental organizations following the principle of outsourcing.</p> <p>An essential mechanism of cooperation involves the Gender Equality Council and the Interagency Commission, which is the first of its kind in Georgia, focusing directly on interagency cooperation. The Gender Equality Council brings together state agencies and non-governmental organizations. For instance, they partner with organizations such as “Merkury” and SOS Children’s Village, which involve vulnerable families in various programs. The most important service is the daycare center, enabling vulnerable women to leave their children after school and work. The daycare center provides children with a safe environment and four daily meals.</p>
Samtredia	<p>The municipality is currently confronted with several challenges:</p> <p>a) Communication with local law enforcement agencies has become problematic, as the police consistently refuse to participate in meetings. b) Another issue the municipality faces is the lack of statistical information regarding domestic violence and violence against women, making it difficult for representatives to access relevant data. <i>“ A suicide occurred in one of the villages within our municipality during the spring when a young girl took her life. It was later revealed that domestic violence was the underlying reason. If we had been aware of the situation earlier and collaborated, we could have helped her.”</i> - the head of the social and healthcare service of Samtredia municipality.</p> <p>Cooperation within the municipality primarily revolves around two key entities: the Atipfund and the Women Fund “Sukhumi.” However, the level of collaboration with schools on the issue of violence is relatively weak. There have been instances in which conflict situations arise within schools. When these issues were brought to the municipality’s attention, the mayor’s representatives intervened to help resolve the problems.</p>

55 Following the completion of the study, information meetings (aimed to introduce the primary results and findings of the study at the municipal level) highlighted a challenge related to primary healthcare agencies. The issue revolves around a child with special needs (e.g., autistic spectrum, etc.) whom a doctor qualifies as “healthy.” The low awareness and acceptance of the problem on the part of the parents further complicate this situation. Parents often object to the advice of kindergarten teachers, who suggest the child needs a consultation with an appropriate specialist. It is essential to address this matter seriously, as disabled children belong to a vulnerable category regarding domestic violence. These mentioned problems are significant barriers to identifying and preventing cases of violence.

<p>Tsalenjikha</p>	<p>The municipality cooperates with the LEPL Agency for State Care and Assistance for the Victims of Human Trafficking Samegrelo-Zemo Svaneti Regional Centre territorial unit Tsalenjikha branch and Women Fund “Sukhumi”. Monthly information meetings are held with various target groups, including women’s groups, vulnerable families, parents of disabled persons, etc. Fund “Sukhumi” organizes meetings with local entities of referral every year.</p> <p>The Women’s Room has established a robust and proactive partnership with the business sector. The businesses involved have shown considerable sensitivity and a strong sense of social responsibility. This commitment was evident through their efforts to employ women from vulnerable categories. Additionally, the Atipfund has played a crucial role in identifying and supporting victims of violence. These individuals received valuable assistance in the form of a one-time financial aid amounting to 500 GEL.</p>
<p>Vani</p>	<p>The municipality maintains communication channels with key entities, including the Ministry of Internal Affairs, schools, and kindergartens, with the Gender Equality Council and the Child Rights Protection Department leading these efforts. They actively engage with these agencies, requesting the submission of relevant statistics and specific information. Additionally, they cooperate with the Women Fund “Sukhumi”. <i>“It would be better to make cooperation with the internal affairs agencies more proactive. I cannot recall direct communication or contacting the municipality to inquire about available programs for victims”</i> - the mayor’s assistant in charge of gender issues.</p>
<p>Terjola</p>	<p>The Child Rights Protection Department of the municipality is actively involved in identifying cases of child neglect. They communicate with the Social Service Agency, the Ministry of Internal Affairs, and the Women Fund “Sukhumi”. The self-government introduced the 2023 program for strengthening families with children in Terjola. This program targets families with more than four children and low economic opportunities as beneficiaries. Furthermore, the program extends its support to families experiencing crises. A sum of ten thousand GEL was allocated from the municipal budget to fund the mentioned initiative. This program is being launched as a pilot project to prevent domestic violence within the community.</p>

Tkibuli	Cooperation between agencies and organizations is not commonly observed in the current setup. Only isolated instances have been reported, such as occasional collaboration between the Social Services Agency and the Child Rights Protection Department. When violence-related cases are referred to the relevant agencies, they have provided a correct and valid response. For instance, beneficiaries received services from a psychologist and a lawyer to address their specific needs.
Chokhatauri	The municipality maintains close cooperation with the Ministry of Internal Affairs. However, apart from the Fund “Sukhumi”, no other non-governmental organizations operate within the municipality. In the direction of prevention, mainly informative and educational meetings are held with kindergartens and schools. Under a project supported by USAID, the Women Fund “Sukhumi” aims to establish and strengthen women’s initiative groups in collaboration with the Gender Equality Council. In Chokhatauri, the organization “Women for Women” was founded to assess the needs of parents with disabled family members. Furthermore, an interagency commission was set up at the City Hall. This commission consolidates representatives from all relevant state agencies dedicated to addressing domestic violence against women.

Local **non-governmental organizations** actively cooperate with the social and health care services, local police, and gender council. They have reported that they do not face significant difficulties in cooperation with these entities. Findings from qualitative studies reveal **that it is desirable to strengthen the cooperation between the non-governmental sector and municipalities. Respondents preferred joint implementation of activities based on co-financing, which should be allocated in advance in the municipal budget.**

4.6. RAISING AWARENESS AND INCREASING COMPETENCE ON ISSUES OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

Most of the respondents involved in the study emphasized the significance of training and workshops in raising awareness, increasing competence, and disseminating information. Various state agencies, including local and international non-governmental organizations, the Gender Equality Council, the Ministry of Education, World Vision, USAID, Women Fund “Sukhumi,” and the Professional Development League, were recognized as providers of these training sessions.

Most teachers from educational institutions involved in the research indicate **they have participated in specialized training** programs focused on domestic violence issues. In general, almost all participants in the study have received at least one training related to violence issues. However, **the primary healthcare doctors participating in the study are an exception. They have not undergone such training on domestic violence issues.**

Respondents believe trainings must be systematic, with a strong emphasis on monitoring and evaluating the application of acquired knowledge. Additionally, there’s **a consensus that these trainings should be both cyclical and intensive.**

Educational training is required to complete the accreditation program for kindergartens and to ensure they meet the requirements. These trainings cover various thematic issues, including but not limited to gender equality, identification of domestic violence cases, and cooperation with referral entities.

However, several challenges have been identified in this context: the relatively low priority given to gender issues by self-governments when it comes to kindergartens. Another critical challenge is the low level of awareness among kindergarten administration and representatives regarding gender and domestic violence issues, as well as the entities involved in the referral mechanism. For example, more information about the Child Rights Protection Department and the importance of communicating with this unit is needed. Additionally, there is limited awareness about family strengthening programs and support programs for victims, vulnerable individuals, and families. **In general, it has been revealed that research participants perceive a particular need to increase the awareness of self-government representatives regarding domestic violence prevention. They highlight the importance of early identification of crisis and vulnerable families to prevent domestic violence effectively.**

4.7. VICTIM IDENTIFICATION AND RESPONSE STRATEGIES

The table below outlines methods for identifying vulnerable families/victims of violence, according to target municipalities, along with corresponding strategies for responding to violence cases:

Municipality	Identification of vulnerable families / victims of violence	Is there a guideline for conducting the assessment?	In case of identification - the agency strategy (which document guides their action)
Senaki	Referrals can come from several sources, including self-referral, neighbors, relatives, mayor's representatives, referral entities such as social services and trafficking agencies, as well as schools and kindergartens. Following information meetings held in schools and kindergartens, the police made a referral to the Social and Health Service of the City Hall.	Instruction that was provided during the establishment of the Child Rights Protection Department. A guideline for social workers assisting victims of violence.	X
Zugdidi	Referral methods include self-referral, referrals by members of the Gender Equality Council, the mayor's representatives, referral entities, anonymous reports, and referrals from the police.	Instructions were provided during the establishment of the Child Rights Protection Department. Guidelines for social workers assisting victims of violence.	The interdisciplinary team deliberates on strategies to strengthen families and defines the municipality's role and level of involvement. Specialists from the municipality work directly with vulnerable families. If further assistance is required or when the municipality can no longer address specific needs, other referral entities and individual non-governmental organizations step in.

Kobuleti	Self-referrals come from schools and kindergartens during informational meetings, as well as from pediatricians.	Instructions were provided during the establishment of the Child Rights Protection Department.	They collaborate with agencies such as the care agency for shelter placement and the police for issuing restraining orders, among others.
Bagdati	Referrals can come through self-referral, mayor's representatives, or a designated referral entity. After potential beneficiaries are observed during the application process for various programs, their needs are comprehensively assessed and identified. In schools, a specific form is completed and then submitted to both the Atipfund and the Ministry of Internal Affairs. Subsequently, the Children's Rights Protection Department forwarded a referral to the Atipfund.	Regulation of the Interagency Commission: When a victim seeks a service offered by the municipality, such as apartment rental or financial assistance, a designated procedure for assistance is outlined." Instructions were issued during the establishment of the Child Rights Protection Department. Guidelines for social workers assisting victims of violence.	X
Tkibuli	Information is disseminated through social networks, self-referrals, and details shared by family members. Identification can also come from neighbors, relatives, or representatives from another municipality, such as the mayor's representatives . Additionally, the Gender Equality Council facilitates and coordinates cooperation with the Child Rights Protection Department.	Instructions were given during the establishment of the Child Rights Protection Department.	Due to limited awareness, individuals frequently struggle with determining the right contact or agency for assistance. Consequently, the municipality only becomes involved when someone informed initiates contact, which, in practice, is rare.

Samtredia	Referrals to the municipality's health and social services can come from the mayor's representatives or through <i>self-referral</i> .	Guidelines for social workers assisting victims of violence. Instructions were given during the establishment of the Child Rights Protection Department. Guidance from all legal documents adopted by the government concerning gender-based and domestic violence issues.	Rapid response and advocacy with relevant agencies. A specific strategy is identified based on the individual case.
Tsalenjikha	Referrals can come from self-referral through applications or phone calls, from the mayor's representatives, or the district representation of the Ministry of Internal Affairs to the trafficking agency.	Instructions were provided during the establishment of the Child Rights Protection Department. Guidelines for social workers assisting victims of violence.	While the action plan and strategy are generally vague, they are determined based on individual cases.
Terjola	The mayor's representatives identify Crisis Families. Additionally, the Child Rights Protection Department recognizes such families through referrals from the trafficking agency. Self-referral is another avenue for families to seek assistance.	Guidelines for social workers assisting victims of violence. Instructions were given during the establishment of the Child Rights Protection Department.	Based on the social worker's evaluation document, items are purchased for the beneficiaries (with a budget of 10 000 GEL).
Vani	Referral by the Child Rights Protection Department representatives; self-referral.	Instructions were provided during the establishment of the Child Rights Protection Department. Guidelines for social workers assisting victims of violence.	X

Chokhatauri	Referrals can be made by the Ministry of Internal Affairs, the mayor’s representative, kindergarten or school representatives, social agents, or representatives of the Child Rights Protection Department. Self-referral is another method.	Instructions were provided during the establishment of the Child Rights Protection Department. Guidelines for social workers assisting victims of violence.	X
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Most of the beneficiaries/victims of violence indicated that they were mainly identified by representatives from the Child Rights Department, the social service agency, or a social worker/psychologist.

4.8. CHALLENGES IN IDENTIFYING VICTIMS OF VIOLENCE/ VULNERABLE FAMILIES

The qualitative study revealed the obstacles that hinder the identification and treatment of victims of violence/ vulnerable families, and these problems act as **barriers to implementing preventive measures**. They are as follows:

- ✓ **Impact of stereotypes** - Victims of violence may choose not to disclose the fact of violence for various reasons. For instance, they could be financially dependent on the abuser, lack the necessary qualifications to support themselves independently, or fear that disclosing the abuse might escalate the situation. Additionally, shame might be associated with publicly admitting their “victimhood”. Furthermore, there are instances where representatives of relevant agencies may perceive intervening in cases of violence as “interference in family affairs”;

“In a small municipality where everyone is familiar with each other, people tend to avoid addressing their problems openly. This becomes problematic when, for instance, the police receive 6-7 reports per year, yet none of these individuals has reached out to us for assistance. Many additional cases remain hidden or unspoken, as victims may experience a psychological barrier – they lack hope in receiving support from anyone.” – the Legal Department of the Tsalenjikha Municipality City Hall.

- ✓ **Representatives of the referral entities have not fully grasped their responsibilities and specific roles in combating domestic violence. Cultural stereotypes strongly influence some of them.** Based on the frequent staff turnover in the municipality and City Hall, it is necessary to provide periodic retraining on domestic violence issues;
- ✓ **Low public awareness** of domestic violence issues and support programs and services for victims of violence;
- ✓ **Insufficient awareness or minimal awareness among primary health care providers regarding their role in detecting and responding to domestic violence;** primary health care doctors may be apprehensive about retaliation from the abuser;

“To officially declare and document the incident independently of the victim, we would need to report it to the police, but I’m certain she won’t make a declaration. It turns out that the doctor might make an incorrect medical assessment. We cannot compel any steps until the woman decides to take action. We can only provide advice and support, although it’s challenging when there’s limited substantial assistance available. Even with fragmented support, victims often hesitate to leave their families, fearing the unknown.” – family doctor, Terjola.

- ✓ **Lack of support services tailored to the specific needs of victims of violence** presents a significant challenge in enabling victims to achieve independence and safety after escaping an abusive environment;
- ✓ **Limiting the provision of services by municipalities to victims of violence registered within their administrative unit.** It is a common situation that victims of violence may not be registered in the municipality where they seek access to municipal services and programs.
- ✓ **Lack of specialized professionals, such as social workers, psychologists, mental health specialists, etc., in the region.**

4.9. COORDINATED WORK IN DOMESTIC VIOLENCE PREVENTION

For the most part, the involvement of the Municipal Gender Equality Council, the Mayor’s representative, and the Child Rights Protection Department was highlighted in addressing domestic violence issues. However, their activities are primarily limited to **participating in information and awareness-raising campaigns.**

In terms of responding to violence cases against a child within the family, the role of

the social worker from the Child Rights Protection Department of the municipality was highlighted. For instance, the social worker intervened in a situation when the grandmother and uncle's physical violence against a child was detected. The teacher of village Koki school in Zugdidi municipality emphasized the significant role of the Women Fund "Sukhumi" and the Women's Room at the city hall in responding to cases of domestic violence. These organizations are crucial in educating teachers and raising awareness about domestic violence through information meetings and training sessions.

The Civic Activity and Equality Centre (Zugdidi) representative and the social worker from the Atipfund have both emphasized their successful cooperation with the municipality mayor's office. This collaboration involves raising awareness of the community and participating in round table discussions to address pertinent issues effectively.

Local government representatives **indicate good practices of cooperation with various organizations/agencies:**

- ✓ Active cooperation with non-governmental organizations, including the Women Fund "Sukhumi", the association "Mercury", and the Red Cross, is the municipality's most common collaboration. Civil organizations provide rehabilitation services to identified victims, including psychological and legal consultations. Additionally, they conduct joint awareness-raising campaigns and other initiatives aimed at addressing and preventing domestic violence effectively;
- ✓ Active cooperation between the municipality and the Imereti Development Centre has been instrumental in establishing the program for strengthening children and families. Together, they communicate with vulnerable families, particularly following needs assessments conducted by the municipality social worker. Various projects are implemented through co-financing, including initiatives facilitated through joint efforts with the Women Fund "Sukhumi" (Bagdati);
- ✓ Cooperation with the Agency for State Care and Assistance for the (statutory) Victims of Human Trafficking involves various activities, including information meetings with target groups and referring beneficiaries to participate in various programs that promote their inclusion and provide support, etc.;
- ✓ Referral to the Gender Equality Council: It's essential to include beneficiaries in programs and consider offering one-time assistance to those in dire need. Furthermore, collaboration with non-governmental organizations is crucial to tap into the expertise of psychologists, lawyers, and other professionals. Additionally, it's imperative to secure funding for shelter services to ensure consistent and readily available support for those in need.

The study includes **respondents who have been informed about municipal family strengthening/support programs as well as support services for victims of domestic violence within their respective municipalities.** However, it has been observed that **certain representatives from Terjola, Tsalenjikha, Chokhatauri, and Vani display low awareness of these programs and services.**

“More information should be provided in the direction of prevention. It should be a continuous and ongoing process. Conducting awareness campaigns should not be a one-time event; it should be an ongoing process. Our experience has shown that it’s a mistake to consider our work complete after a single effort. A segment of the population still exists for whom this topic remains unavailable/unfamiliar. Hence, it is crucial to broaden the dissemination of the information on these topics to reach a wider audience” - N.Kh., Head of the Senaki City Hall Social and Health Care Service.

Internet pages and social networks are the primary sources of information. Additionally, the Child Rights Protection Department and the Municipal Gender Equality Council are also mentioned as significant sources.

The study revealed that **representatives of primary healthcare facilities and the beneficiaries have a low level of awareness concerning violence against women, including the role of referral entities and the accessibility of support services.** Furthermore, there is an emphasized **need for improved information dissemination among teachers.**

According to an individual respondent, most beneficiaries receive relevant information or acquire knowledge when encountering a problem, and the referral subject communicates specific information about the existing issue.

The respondents expressed **the need to inform the relevant state agency representatives about issues related to domestic violence against women and to enhance their competencies and skills.**

“The level of awareness in our municipality regarding domestic and gender-based violence is very low. I believe that this is a matter of great concern. It should be noted that training is needed for all relevant agencies, including representatives of the mayor’s office, kindergarten and school teachers, medical personnel, and the police. Periodic training should be mandatory for every self-government employee” - V.G., Samtredia Municipality mayor adviser.

Some respondents identified non-governmental organizations and their representatives as relatively more informed entities. The necessity of enhancing information dissemination among the population in the villages, including those in the neighboring areas along the conflict divide line, was emphasized - “Even though non-governmental organizations often conduct information meetings along the

conflict divide line, at least 10 out of the 14 administrative units still lack comprehensive information” - Tsalenjikha Municipality City Hall legal department representative.

The respondents identified women’s economic strengthening and rehabilitation programs for victims of violence as the most essential initiatives. These programs aim to assist victims in breaking free from the vicious cycle of violence.

4. 10. THE MOST EFFECTIVE MUNICIPAL PROGRAMS TO SUPPORT/ ASSIST WOMEN VICTIMS OF VIOLENCE - CURRENT CHALLENGES

Focus group participants note **that all programs are essential**. However, the table indicates the municipal programs respondents notably **identified as effective**.

Municipality	The most effective program	Challenges	What factors enhance the better functioning of the municipal program?	What factors impede the program’s functioning (in the direction of prevention)?
Senaki	The City Hall has existing programs- the service of the catering center, where free meals are provided to vulnerable families.	One-time programs have no long-term effect on the well-being of the beneficiaries.	Training of school and kindergarten staff to raise awareness	The small coverage area of the program (need to deliver services to more locations, e.g., rural expansion); Lack of social housing for beneficiaries. Lack of work/ programs with the perpetrator/ potential perpetrator at an early stage.

<p>Zugdidi</p>	<p>Therapy program for children with special needs; English language learning course for socially vulnerable children and children of large families; - Women's Room service - providing information about economic programs, promotion of employment; - Economic strengthening co-funding programs; - programs for the provision of apartment rent; -financial assistance to victims of violence.</p>	<p>Lack of personnel and financial resources within the Child Rights Protection Departments.</p>	<p>Programs focus on services and support for families and children. Zugdidi municipality is involved in the study of children's needs organized by NALA. The study was carried out throughout the municipality, which formed the basis of several important programs, e.g., English language courses (funded by the City Hall). The research revealed challenges in informing the population, and the City Hall actively conducts awareness-rising meetings in the villages.</p>	
<p>Kobuleti</p>	<p>The medicines and free meals programs offer food services to socially unprotected and vulnerable families (including victims of violence) throughout the city.</p>			<p>The limited coverage of the program (needs expansion to include more locations, e.g., rural areas).</p>

<p>Bagdati</p>	<p>A program aimed at strengthening families with children is designed for long-term effectiveness. Vulnerable families with children or needing assistance residing within the municipality are eligible to participate. The financial support provided to each family does not exceed 2000 GEL, with the specific amount determined by a special commission. A child and family social worker conducts assessments and identifies needs.</p>	<p>One-time assistance programs are not focused on long-term outcomes.</p>	<p>Clarifying how the funds are spent and whether they are appropriately distributed is significant. For instance, in the case of one-time support granted upon the birth of a child, it is not transparent whether the designated amount was used for the child's needs or the parent diverted it for other purposes. It is crucial to revise the existing program and enhance monitoring measures.</p>
<p>Tkibuli</p>	<p>Free catering services are only available within the city. Housing provision program (acquiring housing for families of the most vulnerable category. Most are beneficiaries of the child rights protection program.).</p>		<p>The limited coverage area of the program (needs to be expanded to include more locations, particularly rural areas); "Attaching" programs to social scores.</p>

Samtredia	Programs providing housing, rent, and health services.			Low awareness of the program and no needs study was conducted.
Tsalenjikha	Financial support program for victims of violence.	A limited one-time assistance amount.	Development/ implementation of programs promoting non-violent behavior in educational institutions for preschool children and school students; teacher training and qualification enhancement based on these programs.	
Vani	Apartment rental provision program.	A limited amount of one-time assistance.		
Chokhatauri	Programs supporting vulnerable groups; Transportation assistance program for the beneficiary children attending different sports, arts activities or participating in such activities; Women's Economic Empowerment Program; Program for Enhancing Economic Opportunities for mothers of disabled children.	Lack of programs promoting women's employment.		Lack of information campaigns.

Beneficiaries have shared that the existing programs have profoundly transformed their lives, emphasizing that they would have remained trapped in abusive environments without these initiatives. However, it should be noted that the beneficiaries participating in

the study were not provided with information about a wide range of programs. They were only given the necessary information to address an immediate need, such as assistance with rent or one-time financial support. Consequently, some beneficiaries expressed dissatisfaction, stating that the current programs are insufficient and require expansion and reinforcement. For example, there have been appeals to broaden the geographical availability of psychological services, expand the housing program, and provide more support for victims of violence seeking to establish their businesses. Additionally, the need to fund medical services for children with diabetes and to cover transportation expenses for children with disabilities seeking access to rehabilitation centers was mentioned.

According to respondents, **municipal programs** should be better **tailored to the specific needs of vulnerable families and focused on long-term results and benefits**.

4.11. INFORMATION MEETINGS ORGANIZED BY LOCAL GOVERNMENTS

The Child Rights Protection Department meets with beneficiaries, educational institutions, and women to assess their needs. **Typically, meetings in municipalities are primarily conducted in the form of presentations of the mayor's reports. However, meetings aimed at engaging target groups are infrequent.**

Many study participants mention the joint meetings organized by self-governments and the Women Fund "Sukhumi", including **informative meetings, "Positive Parenthood" workshops**, etc.

In Vani municipality, meetings to introduce municipal programs are held at the **community center**. Additionally, the Child Rights Protection Department and the Gender Equality Council are actively involved in these initiatives.

Representatives from Tsalenjikha, Terjola, Senaki, Zugdidi, Chokhatauri, and Bagdati state **that the meetings are organized during the budget planning phase. These meetings serve a dual function: firstly, to identify local needs and secondly, to validate existing programs by the citizens.** However, at the same time, it was noted that there is a need to enhance the participation of citizens, civil society organizations, and various agencies in the budget review process.

Chokhatauri and Bagdati representatives indicate that they organize meetings in schools and kindergartens.

The coordinator of the Child Rights Protection Department and the head of the city hall's social service ensure the arrangement of meetings between local self-governments and citizens within individual municipalities. Additionally, during the planning of social programs, deputies and the mayor's representatives facilitate meetings with the community.

Throughout the research, attention was directed toward identifying **the challenges that hinder the more frequent and effective meetings with the local population**. For

example, the representative of the Chokhatauri self-government emphasized **the issue of inadequate meeting spaces** in the villages. This obstacle impedes efforts to get closer to the community and positively communicate with them. *“We have included in commission the deputy mayor (as the chairman), a gender advisor, the Child Rights Protection Department, a community social worker, the head of the social service, the head of administration, the culture department, the head of the deputy’s bureau, a social worker, a representative of the public defender, the director of the crisis center, and the head of the resource center - encompassing all those who were considered in the referral process. The goal is to establish close communication with this specific group, provide them information and education and identify their problems so that we can ensure as many people as possible receive assistance from the standpoint of social justice”* - M.P., the person in charge of the gender issue of Chokhatauri City Hall.

Beneficiaries point out that with the Women Fund “Sukhumi” support, Child Rights Protection Department representatives are actively involved in information meetings with the public.

The study highlighted the significance of interagency meetings and **their positive impact on the outcomes of anti-violence interventions**. These meetings facilitate not only **the sharing of information** but also foster the **development of a unified approach to enhance the effectiveness of preventive mechanisms**.

4.12. PREVENTIVE MEASURES AGAINST GENDER-BASED AND DOMESTIC VIOLENCE - THE IMPORTANCE OF THE INCLUSIVENESS OF DIFFERENT PROFESSIONAL GROUPS

- In terms of involving specialists, **the roles and importance of social workers, psychologists, lawyers, and primary health care doctors** in preventing violence were highlighted. Additionally, there was an emphasis on the necessity to strengthen the role of psychologists in providing psychological consultations;
- **Everyone agrees on the crucial role of self-government in violence prevention and rapid response** since they have the closest communication and direct access to citizens and possess vital information about the needs of vulnerable families. **The role of the mayor’s representatives in preventing domestic violence** was highlighted. Respondents expressed a high level of trust in these representatives from the population. Through effective communication and engagement, they can identify at-risk groups of violence within vulnerable families at an early stage. Additionally, they can provide appropriate information, make referrals, and establish connections between citizens and relevant agencies or service providers, thereby preventing the escalation of serious events;

- **The study also highlighted the significance of inter-municipal cooperation** for the effectiveness of violence prevention. For example, municipalities must agree on ensuring that victims who relocate to another municipality can easily access services regardless of where they choose to seek help;
- **There was a strong emphasis on the need for the involvement of citizens and various segments of society** in the combat against gender-based and domestic violence: *“Participatory efforts in combating against gender-based violence will be much more effective when representatives from various fields and wide range of groups in the society, including civil activists, are actively involved. To identify, prevent violence, and establish a safe environment, it is crucial to disseminate more information to the public”* - I.K., Head of Ozurgeti State Crisis Centre;
- Increasing the **human and financial resources of local self-government is essential**;
- Improving awareness among the population, especially women, through self-government initiatives is crucial. **Providing victims and potential victims with information about their rights and legal protection mechanisms is paramount** - *“If I had been aware of the information that the lawyer provided me during my stay in Kutaisi, I would not have come to terms with my situation... I simply would not have tolerated it for so long”* - Victim of violence, Terjola;
- Awareness-raising campaigns should be **gender-balanced** (ensuring equal involvement of women and men);
- **Increasing the number of municipal social workers, and psychologists and allocating appropriate financial resources for their activities**;
- Retraining of mayor/self-government representatives **several times a year** on prevention-related topics;
- **The need to develop a unified strategy for coordination and communication of agencies** - *“All relevant agencies, within the scope of their expertise, should be represented in a coordinated manner to implement effective preventive measures. Partnerships must be established, involving families, schools, municipalities, police, social workers, and religious institutions, to ensure cooperation”* - K. S., Chairman of the Tsalenjikha Municipality Council and the Gender Equality Council. *“A comprehensive approach is needed to utilize all municipal services available, including the administrative unit (where a specific victim may be from); the mayor’s representative and their office; the Child Rights Protection Department and the associated social worker. Although we lack a psychologist within the municipality, we rely on the services provided by the Fund “Sukhumi”* - Lia Shakarishvili, Chairman of the Kobuleti Municipality Gender Equality Council, Chairman of the Kobuleti Municipality City Council Commission of Education, Culture, Sports, Tourism and Youth Affairs;

- Those in charge of gender issues should be relieved of all other related obligations and concentrate exclusively on the planning and implementation of an effective gender policy, as well as directing their efforts toward violence prevention and providing an effective response to it;
- It is crucial to establish long-term municipal services and support programs. **“Offering the victim with at least one year of support is essential since it provides her with the opportunity to build strength and effectively address the challenges she faces.”**;
- **Working with young people** and increasing their awareness and sensitivity to issues of violence against women - **“More work efforts with young people is essential. They should have various approaches to discourage supporting a bully. I am experiencing a painful situation in this regard. My 15-year-old son strongly opposes my decision to separate from my abusive husband, and we are going through a challenging period. In my opinion, at the age of 15, he should comprehend the challenges of living in an abusive environment. The involvement of a psychologist is crucial. It is particularly challenging for me that psychologist services are unavailable in Vani. Both women and men must be better informed that violence is punishable by law... Children in such families often develop various complexes, like my son, who is protesting my decision.”** - N.D., a victim of violence, Vani;
- The municipality should take responsibility for **women’s economic empowerment, employment, and training. This can be achieved through collaboration with non-governmental organizations; later, the municipality should have the capacity to manage these initiatives independently.**
- **Strengthening the activities of the interagency commission for domestic violence prevention, including a particular focus on increasing public awareness;**
- Disseminating more information about municipal programs in schools and kindergartens;
- Increasing remuneration for specialists involved in identification and response to domestic violence, which will be proportional to their assigned obligations;
- **Improving the comprehension of the role and significance of local self-government while expanding their responsibilities and functions in combating gender-based and domestic violence - “The role of local self-government in this process is paramount. Unfortunately, it appears that this significance is not yet fully grasped. Within the self-government, a representative in every administrative unit possesses information about all the families in their community. Utilizing and directing this valuable resource is important to uncover relevant facts promptly. In addition to conducting informational meetings, an annual action plan should be formulated, incorporating tangible steps rather than solely relying on discussions.”** - E.B., Tsalenjikha Municipality City Hall Legal Department;
- **Evaluation and continuous monitoring** of programs aimed at violence prevention.

5. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The study reveals that, despite implementing numerous municipal programs to combat gender-based and domestic violence, preventing domestic violence remains the “weakest link”. The awareness and sensitivity regarding the referral mechanism for domestic violence and violence against women are inadequate. Moreover, their cooperation, information exchange, and coordination with municipalities are insufficient and fragmented.

“We allocate more resources to dealing with murders and crimes than to prevention. There is a lack of unified statistics regarding at-risk groups, and necessary interventions are not carried out at early stages - both for victims and perpetrators. The full extent of the issue remains hidden until an incident occurs. Additionally, certain cases are covered, particularly those involving psychological aspects, go unreported” - the Women Fund “Sukhumi” Terjola mobilizer.

“I believe that our country is still lagging in terms of prevention. Mere enactment of laws and imposing symbolic punishments on perpetrators will not yield meaningful results. Instead, we need early detection of perpetrators who engage in psychological and economic violence. They should have access to consultations with social workers and psychologists in specialized institutions to facilitate rehabilitation. We must establish a comprehensive support system for all vulnerable families, focusing on assisting women before violence escalates uncontrollably.

Furthermore, we should create municipal-level spaces for women, offering them appropriate services and rehabilitation opportunities. Additionally, we need to challenge and overcome stereotypes to enhance public acceptance. Establishing a coherent chain of interconnected initiatives is crucial to ensure the effectiveness of prevention efforts “ - G.M., the environmental and ecological organization “DEA”.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR MUNICIPALITIES

- Coordination with relevant agencies should be deepened to identify vulnerable families, exchange information, share experience, and conduct consultations effectively;
- The role of mayor's representatives should be strengthened in terms of communication with citizens regarding issues of domestic violence against women; in the direction of identifying early signs of violence in vulnerable families, providing information, and connecting them to relevant service providers;
- The role of representatives from the Child Rights Protection Department should be strengthened, especially social workers and psychologists, to better identify vulnerable families and implement preventive measures against domestic violence against women;
- The departments responsible for children's rights protection in individual municipalities should be staffed with qualified social workers, psychologists, and other specialists. These departments should also provide opportunities for continuous professional development. It is crucial to enhance the role of psychologists in providing psychological and therapeutic services to beneficiaries. The functions of psychologists should not be limited solely to concluding (they should actively engage in providing support and therapy);
- Long-term programs aimed at economic strengthening and employment of the beneficiaries should be introduced. These programs will focus on enhancing the well-being of families and providing them with sustainable sources of livelihood. Such initiatives are effective prerequisites for preventing domestic violence;
- To strengthen the role of the Women's Room in municipalities, it is essential to improve the population's access to information and consulting services. This enhancement should encompass both geographical access and effective dissemination of information within the community/population;
- Cooperation with educational institutions such as schools and kindergartens within municipalities, particularly with Child Rights Protection and Support Departments, should be intensified. The main objective is to identify vulnerable families, provide them with information about the available services in the municipality, and make appropriate referrals as needed;
- Cooperation among municipalities and the exchange of information should be strengthened. A coordinated effort with various entities within the referral mechanism, including the Ministry of Internal Affairs, social service agency, state care, Atipfund, educational resource center, office of resource officers, etc., is also essential;

- The practice of providing continuous training to the city hall and self-government representatives on the issues of domestic violence against women and gender equality should be introduced. Additionally, measures should be taken to monitor the implementation of the acquired knowledge in practice;
- A memorandum of cooperation should be signed between service-providing non-governmental organizations and municipalities. Moreover, the practice of delivering municipal services through outsourcing should be reinforced;
- Programs tailored to the individual needs of beneficiaries should be introduced (e.g., vulnerable families, women victims of violence);
- Beneficiaries should be provided with information on relevant social, medical, and preferential services along with guidance on how to access and engage with these services;
- Local self-government should develop a plan and organize information campaigns addressing issues of gender-based violence as well as central and municipal services available to women who are victims of domestic violence;
- The beneficiary should have the opportunity to receive related services without encountering barriers when relocating to another municipality based on their current location. Consequently, it is necessary to enhance cooperation between municipalities on this issue.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE PERMANENT PARLIAMENTARY GENDER EQUALITY COUNCIL

- Within the framework of the mandate of supervision over the Government of Georgia, the Parliament of Georgia should ensure continuous monitoring of the measures taken by relevant agencies to eliminate and prevent violence against women and girls in the country, encompassing both the national and local levels;
- Within the framework of the supervisory mandate over the government, it is essential to promote the maximum alignment of the support programs provided by the Government of Georgia with the specific needs of women who are victims of domestic violence;
- Promote the institutionalization of interagency commissions focusing on gender equality, violence against women, and domestic violence at the local level by amending the relevant legislative act;
- It is essential to facilitate the raising of awareness and expertise among individuals at the municipal level regarding gender equality and violence against women. This should be accompanied by regular monitoring and evaluation of their qualifications and gender sensitivity.;

- It is crucial to ensure the localization of Gender Impact Assessment (GIA) and its implementation at the local level and incorporate it into local policies. It is advisable to familiarize the representatives of the Gender Equality Council of Municipalities and the individuals responsible for gender-related matters with the GIA methodology and provide them with the relevant training courses to achieve this goal;
- The Gender Equality Council of the Parliament of Georgia should initiate the establishment of a particular working group consisting of representatives from relevant agencies and civil society organizations. This working group will be responsible for conducting a critical analysis of the existing system for preventing violence against women and domestic violence. Subsequently, the group will develop appropriate recommendations to strengthen and enhance the effectiveness of preventive measures.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE GOVERNMENT OF GEORGIA – INTER-AGENCY COMMISSION ON GENDER EQUALITY, VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN AND DOMESTIC VIOLENCE:

- It is essential to promote the institutionalization of interagency commissions in municipalities as an effective mechanism for preventing gender-based and domestic violence;
- It is advisable to facilitate the cooperation and information exchange between the interagency commission working on the issues of gender-based and domestic violence with municipalities and the Government of Georgia by involving them in the commission working groups;
- Efforts should be directed toward the timely approval and implementation of the National Referral Mechanism document;
- It is advisable to promote the integration of more preventive mechanisms into National Action Plans to eradicate violence against women and domestic violence;
- It is essential to prioritize and strengthen cooperation with the non-governmental sector and representatives of municipalities in addressing issues related to violence against women and domestic violence;
- It is crucial to establish the mechanisms for monitoring and evaluation and services designed to prevent and eliminate all forms of violence against women and domestic violence. Additionally, efforts should be directed toward enhancing existing practices based on the findings obtained through this monitoring and evaluation;
- It is advisable to promote the strengthening of municipalities' autonomy and the decentralization of social work. This can be achieved by granting more powers to local authorities, transferring financial resources, and appropriately defining responsibilities between central and local authorities.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE MINISTRY OF INTERNALLY DISPLACED PERSONS, LABOR, HEALTH AND SOCIAL PROTECTION

- It is necessary to ensure an increase in the number of social workers addressing issues of violence against women and provide them with adequate training;
- It is crucial to promote the increased role of social workers in identifying cases of domestic violence and implementing preventive measures;
- It is essential to promote awareness-raising efforts among medical personnel, specifically regarding women and their role in combating domestic violence;
- It is necessary to ensure the development and practical implementation of the relevant normative document for the primary healthcare sector. This document should address the identification and detection of victims of violence, the approach to providing support, the standard for documenting violence cases, and the guidelines for collaboration with referral agencies;
- It is crucial to improve the statistics of beneficiaries receiving state services for violence victims. This improvement should include the establishment of a unified database of beneficiaries categorized by gender, age, and regional affiliation, as well as ensuring the transparency and accessibility of this data;
- It is necessary to compile statistics from the 116 006 hotlines, categorized by gender, age, and region. Additionally, it is essential to ensure the availability and public accessibility of this data for interested parties.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE MINISTRY OF EDUCATION AND SCIENCE

- It is essential to promote increased communication and strengthen cooperation among the employees of educational institutions, the municipality, and the entities operating within the referral mechanism in their respective locations;
- It is advisable to promote the organization of informational meetings with representatives of the resource center, teachers, parents, and students, aiming to prevent domestic violence;
- It is crucial to ensure the development and incorporation of violence prevention modules in the national curriculum and textbooks;
- It is necessary to actively involve employees of the territorial bodies of the Ministry of Education, especially those working in resource centers, in preventive measures against gender-based and domestic violence. They should proactively cooperate with all stakeholders within the local referral system;
- It is crucial to ensure continuous training of the employees of educational institutions on issues related to domestic violence;

- It is necessary to ensure the introduction of the system for reporting violence cases in schools, along with monitoring the execution of instructions on how teachers should respond to such incidents, etc.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE UNION OF KINDERGARTENS

- It is necessary to promote the strengthening of cooperation between municipalities and kindergartens, including the Child Rights Department;
- It is essential to ensure the training of kindergarten employees on issues related to domestic violence, with a primary focus on the detection of domestic violence and appropriate responses to such cases;
- It is necessary to ensure the proper implementation of a system for reporting domestic violence in kindergartens, including monitoring the implementation of instructions on how employees should respond to violence cases, etc.;
- It is essential to promote the introduction of the practice of holding informational meetings with parents of kindergarten students to prevent domestic violence.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE MINISTRY OF INTERNAL AFFAIRS

- It is necessary to promote cooperation with the relevant services of the municipality and ensure the provision of statistics on domestic violence against women;
- It is essential to ensure the creation of an efficient on-site coordination mechanism and enhance cooperation with the entities of the referral process, including teachers and healthcare personnel. Additionally, introducing an information exchange system is crucial;
- It is vital to ensure that regional police departments periodically request information from local authorities about municipal victim support services. This practice will enable the police to make suitable referrals and provide necessary information to victims when required;
- It is essential to promote the increase of gender sensitivity among police officers, particularly in the regions, through training courses. Additionally, it is crucial to establish an internal monitoring system to evaluate their qualifications;
- It is vital to ensure the raising of public awareness regarding the issues of violence against women and domestic violence, as well as the intensification of information meetings with the population;

- It is essential to promote and encourage the recruitment of more female patrol officers, particularly in regions where traditional norms, fear of stigma, and women’s lack of trust in male police officers are still firmly rooted;
- It is vital to ensure appropriate efforts to identify risk groups of perpetrators, including enhancing the role of district inspectors and law enforcement officers in combating domestic violence, etc.;
- It is essential to increase trust in the police and improve its rating in society. To further strengthen the partnership between the population and law enforcement, introducing a “neighborhood hour” is necessary. This initiative entails organizing informal meetings in specific districts led by district inspectors or law enforcement officers. During these gatherings, citizens will have the opportunity to receive information on issues of violence against women and share any existing problems. Implementing this practice will foster greater trust in law enforcement agencies and establish harmonious relationships between the police and the community;
- It is crucial to compile statistics on calls to 112 related to incidents of violence against women, including data on the use of the “silent alarm” button. These statistics should be categorized by gender, age, and regions/municipalities, and the information should be easily accessible;
- It is essential to compile statistics on restraining orders issued in cases of gender-based and domestic violence, categorized by the municipality, and ensure that this information is easily accessible.

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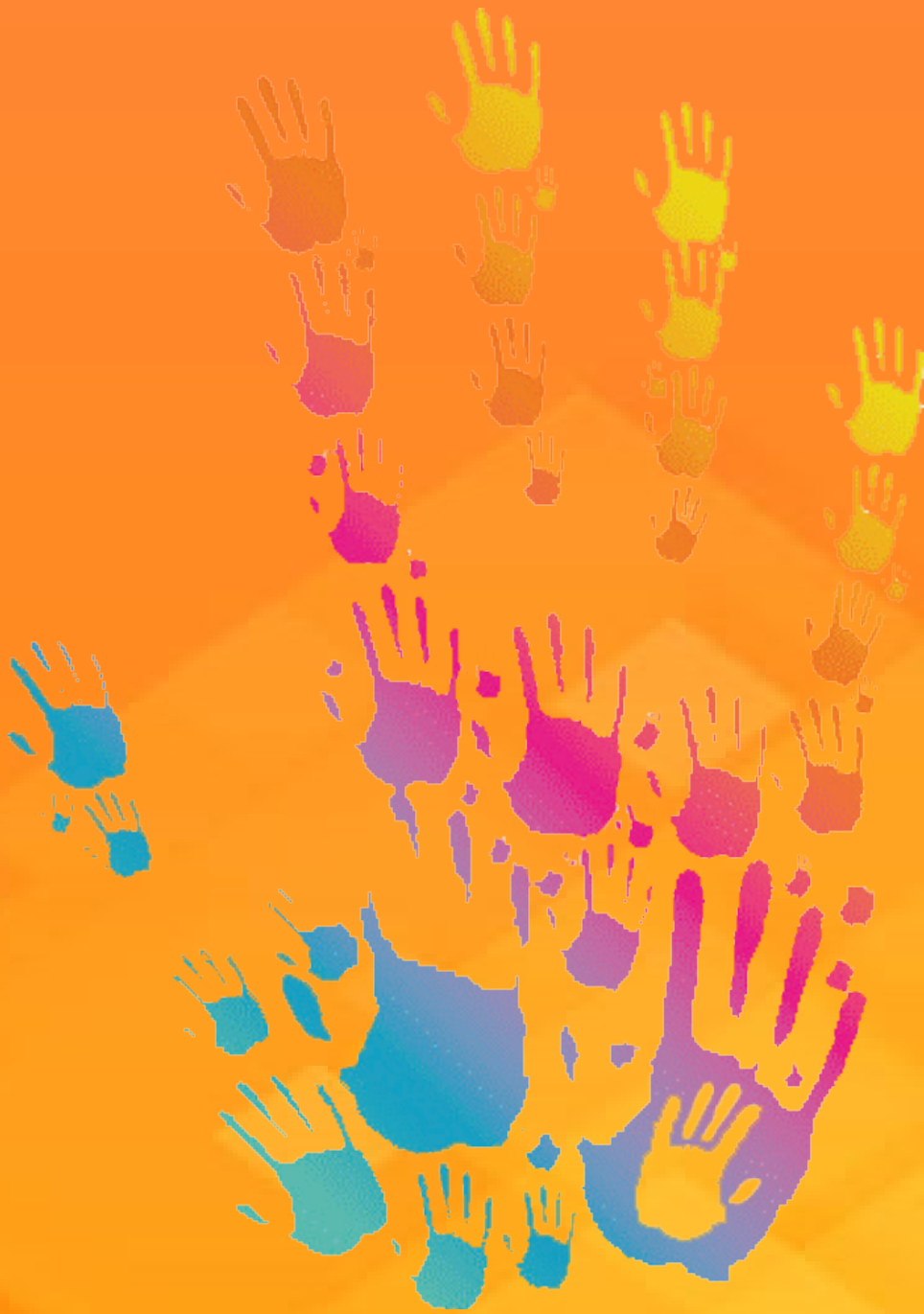
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