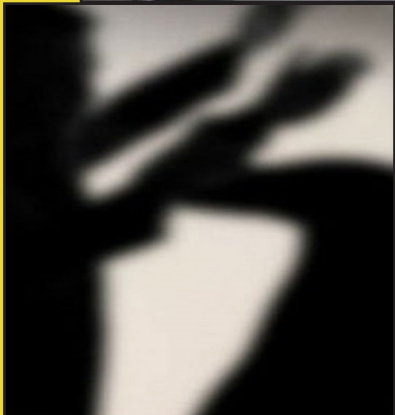




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**"HUMAN SECURITY:
ASSESSING PUBLIC AND PERSONAL SECURITY THROUGH
A GENDER LENS OF POPULATION NEEDS"
A CONSOLIDATED REPORT**



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2023
SEPTEMBER



CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION	3
PART I: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND DEMOGRAPHIC DATA.....	5
PART II: KEY RESEARCH FINDINGS	8
2.1. THE LEVEL OF POPULATION'S SENSE OF SAFETY AND SECURITY.....	8
2.2. DEFINING SECURITY IN THE EYES OF THE POPULATION.....	10
2.3. THE LEVEL OF COMMUNITY SECURITY	14
2.3.1. INFRASTRUCTURE CHALLENGES	14
2.3.2. SOCIAL ORDER AND CRIME INCIDENCE.....	17
2.3.3. POLITICAL POLARIZATION AND INTOLERANCE TOWARDS DIFFERENT VIEWPOINTS.....	19
2.3.4. ACCESSIBILITY OF SECONDARY AND HIGHER EDUCATION.....	19
2.4. PERSONAL SECURITY	22
2.4.1. ADDRESSING FAMILY VIOLENCE.....	22
2.4.2. PREVALENT FORMS OF FAMILY VIOLENCE	23
2.4.3. PUBLIC AWARENESS AND AVAILABILITY OF LEGAL PROTECTIONS AND SUPPORT SERVICES FOR FEMALE VICTIMS	24
2.5. IMPACT OF ELEVATED SECURITY RISKS AND SENSE OF INSECURITY ON THE POPULATION	25
2.5.1. REFERENCE TO STATE STRUCTURES FOR PROBLEM RESOLUTION	26
PART III: CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS.....	27

**This study is made possible by the generous
support of the American People through
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“THE HUMAN FAMILY WILL NOT ENJOY DEVELOPMENT WITHOUT SECURITY, WILL NOT ENJOY SECURITY WITHOUT DEVELOPMENT, AND WILL NOT ENJOY EITHER WITHOUT RESPECT FOR HUMAN RIGHTS.”

*KOFI ANNAN,
SECRETARY GENERAL OF THE UNITED NATIONS, 2005.*

INTRODUCTION

Peace is a multi-dimensional and intricate concept that extends beyond the mere absence of conflicts and wars. It is closely linked to the pursuit of a harmonious equilibrium across various facets of our existence, encompassing a sense of human safety and security, the assurance of adequate living standards and conditions for all citizens, the prosperity of families, and the overall well-being of society. True peace is achieved when these elements harmonize with principles of equality and justice, benefitting all.

The protracted and unresolved conflicts within the country, coupled with a diminished emphasis on the peace-making process and the absence of genuine perspectives and prerequisites for conflict resolution, exacerbated by a challenging socio-economic background of the population, weak healthcare guarantees, a surge in criminal incidents, and elevated levels of violence both within society and within families, collectively have a detrimental impact on the psycho-emotional well-being of the population, leading to feelings of nihilism, hopelessness, and apathy. The low level of human security significantly diminishes the population's engagement in the pursuit of social well-being and development, thereby weakening the overall state of peace and security within the country.

Ensuring human security stands as a paramount prerequisite for establishing enduring stability and peace within a nation. While approaches to national and human security occasionally align, they often diverge from one another (refer to Table 1).

National Security primarily concerns safeguarding the state's interests, with a strong emphasis on protecting territorial integrity, state borders, and state institutions from external threats; whereas, **Human Security** is primarily centered on the individual, focusing on their well-being and encompassing the security of both individuals and society as a whole. Human security is based on the pursuit of the following fundamental principles: ***to achieve freedom from fear, freedom from want and freedom from indignity.***¹ This comprehensive concept encompasses various dimensions, including economic security, food security, health security, environmental security, personal security, community security and political security.

Human security recognizes the interplay between peace, development, and human rights,

¹ Human Security Handbook, 2016, United Nations, p. 13, available in <https://www.un.org/human-security/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/h2.pdf>

emphasizing the need for a human security-oriented, all-encompassing, and proactive response. This response hinges on collaborative partnerships among governments, international organizations, academia, businesses, media, and civil society.²

Table #1

	National Security	Human Security
Aim	Centered on safeguarding national/state interests	Emphasizes the protection of individuals and communities
Actors	Primarily involves the security sector: army, police	Involves various stakeholders, including civil state institutions, army, police, and civil society
Focus	Targets specific individuals and groups as potential threats	Targets specific political, economic, and social structures as potential triggers of violence

The human security approach involves empowering the local population by equipping them with the appropriate knowledge and skills to identify human needs within distinct communities, assess their vulnerability and safety risks, and formulate effective strategies to enhance the current situation.

The research conducted by the Women Fund “Sokhumi” aligns with the aforementioned objective. Its primary goal is **to assess the human security level in six target municipalities³ and explore the sense of protection against various threats.** The primary objective of this research is **to delve into both community and personal security, with a particular emphasis on comprehending the underlying risks and identifying the specific needs that contribute to the perception of threat and insecurity within the population.** Based on the findings, it is planned to formulate comprehensive recommendations, develop strategies for responding to the problems, and advocate for positive change across local, national, and international contexts.

² Same source. p. 6

³ Zugdidi, Tsalenjikha, Senaki, Kutaisi, Tskaltubo, and Khoni municipalities.

PART I: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND DEMOGRAPHIC DATA

Methodology: The research employed a combination of **quantitative and qualitative research methods** and encompassed the population residing in **six municipalities**: Kutaisi, Tskaltubo, Khoni, Senaki, Zugdidi (including the villages of Koki, Khurcha, Didi Nedzi, and Orsantia), and Tsalenjikha (including the villages of Pakhulani, Tskoushi, Paluri, Lia, and Djvari). These municipalities are situated within **two regions, namely Imereti and Samegrelo**, located in Western Georgia. **In the municipalities of Zugdidi and Tsalenjikha, the primary focus was on the villages situated near the dividing line of the conflict.** As for the other target municipalities, the interviews extended primarily to locations where IDPs have settled (specifically, Khoni, Senaki, and Tskaltubo). Throughout the data collection phase, a total of 90 female and youth leaders from all six target municipalities were engaged in the process.

When investigating the issue of human security, our primary emphasis was placed on two key aspects: **personal security** (such as examining issues like violence against women or family violence, the accessibility of protective and support services) and **community security** (which encompassed concerns like infrastructural challenges, substance abuse, discrimination and intolerance within the community, political polarization, the risk of renewed conflict, the opportunity to pursue secondary or higher education, etc.).

A questionnaire/survey form was developed for **the quantitative survey**, primarily comprising closed-ended questions. This survey specifically addressed issues related to **Human Security problems falling solely within the domains of Personal and Community Security**. The population was surveyed online, and during the questionnaire completion process, respondents had the option to select multiple answer choices or provide alternative opinions. In total, **1,010 individuals participated in the survey, with 691 (68.4%) being women and 319 (31.6%) being men.**

The qualitative survey was conducted through two primary techniques: focus group discussions and in-depth individual interviews. In total, 24 focus group discussions and 24 in-depth interviews were carried out, mainly involving participants from local self-government and non-governmental organizations, as well as professionals and experts from various fields.

The focus group method engaged 157 participants, consisting of 128 women and 29 men. In contrast, **individual in-depth interviews were conducted with 24 respondents**, comprising 16 women and eight men. In sum, the qualitative research encompassed the insights of **181 individuals (with 144 being women and 37 being men).**

Overall, the survey engaged 1191 citizens (with 835 being women and 356 being men). The contingent included IDPs, locals, socially deprived and people with disabilities, single mothers and mothers with many children, teachers, doctors, entrepreneurs, community leaders, students, youth, pensioners, representatives of local self-government, and so on.

The survey was conducted during **the period of January to March 2023**.

The Socio-Demographic Profile of the Survey Participants: The age range of the interviewees spanned from 18 years to 65 years and beyond. The largest proportion of respondents (33.5%) fell within the 31-45 age span, followed closely by 32% in the 18-30 age group. Additionally, 25% of participants were aged between 46 and 65 years, while a smaller segment, specifically 9.6%, represented individuals aged 65 years and above.

Out of the respondents, 59.3% constituted the local population, while 40.7% were members of the IDP community. It's worth noting that **a significant portion of interviewees from Zugdidi and Tsalenjikha municipalities were from villages located in close proximity to the dividing line of the conflict**, making up just under a quarter (20%) of the total respondents.

Regarding **employment status, 45% of the interviewees are currently employed, while 33% are unemployed**. The remaining portion of respondents was distributed between **students (12%) and pensioners (10%)**, as illustrated in Diagram #1. The provided data is indicative of a symptomatic trend, highlighting the relatively low level of economic security among the population. Notably, a survey conducted by the Women Fund “Sokhumi” in the same municipality in 2022⁴, with a comparable number of respondents, revealed that the proportion of employed respondents stood at 55.1%, while the unemployed accounted for 19.2%. This indicates a significant shift, with a nearly 11% decrease in employment and a 13% increase in unemployment.

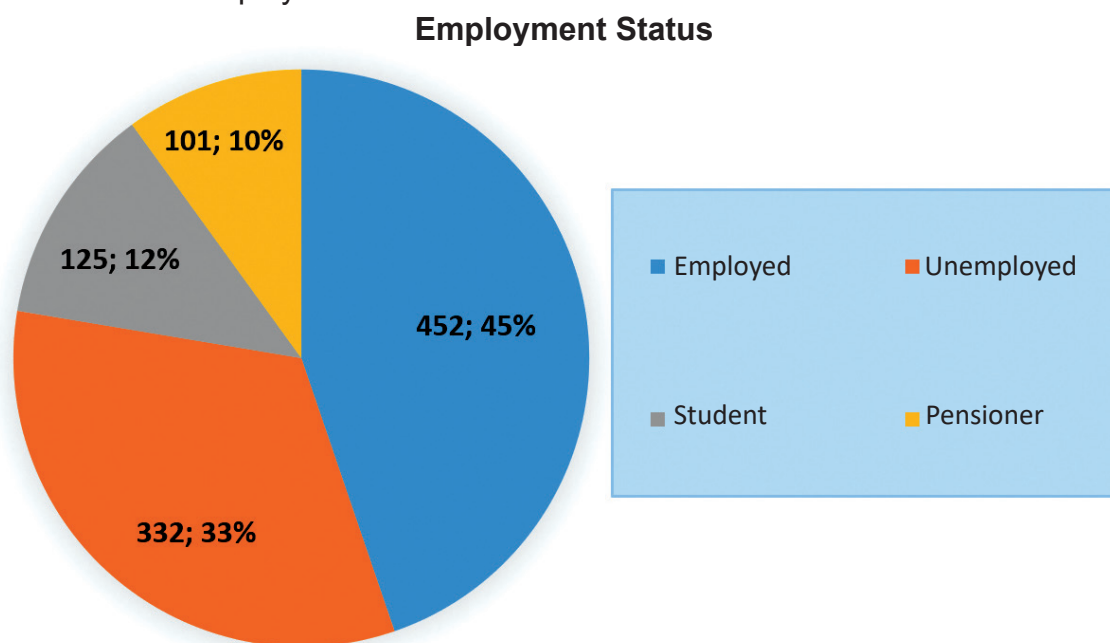


Diagram #1

⁴ View the 2022 research conducted by the “Sokhumi” Women’s Foundation titled “Female Participation in Social and Political Life and Economic Activities,” specifically on page 7. You can access this report at: <https://fsokhumi.ge/images/2022/09/pub/qalTa%20monawileoba%20sazogadoebriv%20da%20politikur%20cxovrebase%20da%20ekonomikur%20saqmianobashi.pdf>

In terms of gender composition, the majority of employed survey participants are women, accounting for **63.4%**, while employed men constitute **44.4%**. It is crucial to highlight that the survey data clearly underscore a significant unemployment rate among IDPs. **51%** of the interviewed IDPs are unemployed, with **58.2%** of unemployed individuals being men and **45.2%** being women among the IDP population.

A notably **high unemployment rate**, in comparison to other municipalities, is particularly conspicuous among the population residing **in the villages of Zugdidi and Tsalenjikha municipalities, situated around the dividing line of the conflict. In Tsalenjikha municipality, the proportion of unemployed interviewees reached 41.8%, while in Zugdidi municipality, the figure stood at 48%**. The unemployment rates in other municipalities were distributed as follows: Khoni at 31.5%, Tskaltubo at 27.8%, Senaki at 27.1%, and Kutaisi at 20%.

The quantitative research did not assess the income levels of the employed interviewees, nor did it evaluate to what extent citizens can satisfy their basic or minimal needs with their current incomes. However, the subsequent findings clearly highlight that **low income and an unstable economic environment** persist as significant threats to the human security of the survey participants (Please refer to the research findings below.)

PART II: KEY RESEARCH FINDINGS

2.1. THE LEVEL OF POPULATION'S SENSE OF SAFETY AND SECURITY

Safety and security form the cornerstone of well-being for population, representing fundamental needs for every individual. Regrettably, the sense of security among the populace is frequently called into question in various aspects of daily life, raising concerns about trust in the institutions responsible for ensuring the protection and safety of citizens.

The perception of safety and security among citizens is non-uniform. **When assessing the level of security on a 5-point scale, most respondents tended to select the neutral point, which is the 3rd scale** (refer to Diagram #2)⁵. Among the respondents, men (33.2%) were more inclined to choose the medium level #3 than women (29,4%).

According to gender-based data, an interesting trend emerges. The lowest level of security, indicated by 1 point, was more commonly chosen by men (21%) than by women (18.9%). Paradoxically, the highest level of security (the highest scale, 5 points) was more frequently associated with men (33.2%) than with women (29.4%).

Evaluation of Security Level

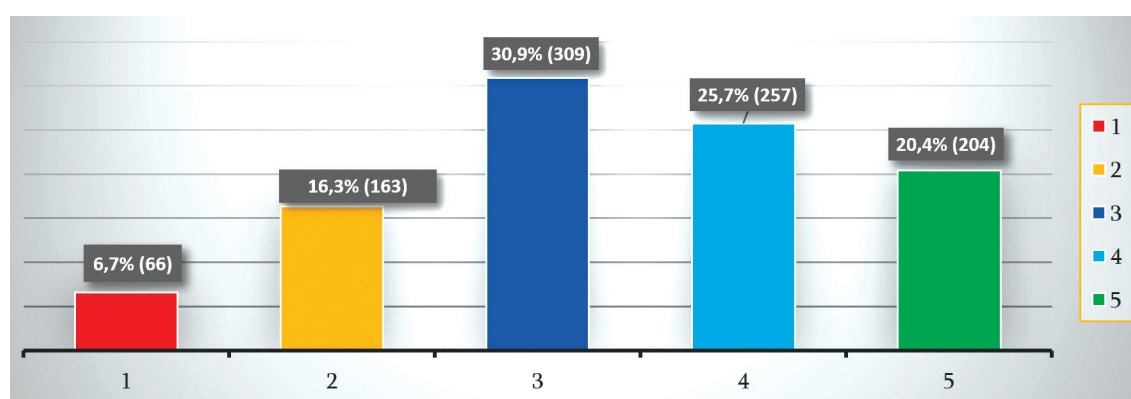


Diagram #2

It is noteworthy that when we compare different municipalities, we observe significant variations in the perception of security. **Tsalenjikha municipality shows the lowest sense of security, #1-10%; #2 – 42%** (refer to Table #2). **Conversely, Senaki municipality reports the highest levels of security, (#4 – 30,4%; #5 – 19,2%)**. The IDPs appear to experience a notably lower sense of security in comparison to the local population. Out of the 204 respondents who rated themselves as feeling safe and secure (on Scale 5), 142 (69%) are locals, while only 64 (31%) are IDPs.

⁵ The assessment is carried out using a 5-point scale, where “1” represents the lowest level of security, while “5” signifies the highest level of security. “3” serves as the neutral midpoint on the scale.

The Sense of Security according to Municipalities						
Low	1	2	3	4	5	High
Tsalenjikha	10%	42%	21%	18%	9%	
Zugdidi	7%	11%	35%	27%	20%	
Senaki	3,3%	8,66%	38,5%	30,4%	19,2%	
Khoni	9%	19%	34%	20%	9%	
Tskaltubo	5%	9%	24%	27%	5%	
Kutaisi	6%	8%	34%	30%	6%	

Table #2

The quantitative research has clearly underscored a significant correlation between the sense of security and employment status. Notably, the majority of those who rated their level of security as “5” on the scale are employed, accounting for 56% of this group. (For example, out of the 204 respondents, 115 individuals who marked “Scale 5” are employed).

The direct correlation between the sense of security and employment status is further substantiated by qualitative research data. The feeling of insecurity, primarily attributed to unemployment, was most consistently emphasized **by residents of villages located in close proximity to conflict-dividing line.**

“A safe environment cannot exist in poverty; many unemployed people in the village live in economic difficulties. Many women have gone abroad; the elderly and children are left without care. Pensioners, instead of using their meager pension on their needs, often have to support their entire families.”- P.G., a teacher, woman, village Pakhulani, Conflict-dividing line, Tsalenjikha municipality.

“Unemployment is the biggest problem in the community, especially for women, many women have left the village”- N.G., a family doctor, woman, village Pakhulani, Conflict-dividing line, Tsalenjikha municipality.

“I believe that the area along the occupation’s dividing line requires substantial support, as the people there often feel neglected. The primary issue they face is unemployment, which leaves them feeling unsafe and unfulfilled. For many, the only viable solution seems to be escaping the situation and leaving the place” - T. Belkania, Vice Mayor of Tsalenjikha municipality.

According to respondents, **the high rate of migration stems from a dual challenge: the scarcity of employment opportunities and a high level of insecurity.** -

The biggest problem is unemployment, which is the cause of all the troubles. When a person is unemployed, he looks at his hungry children, gets angry, and then all the problems follow. Unemployed people resort to drugs and alcohol, they become more aggressive, they are violent in the family. The state should protect people from these disasters” M.T., a community leader, woman, village Koki, conflict dividing line, Zugdidi municipality.

In addition to employment concerns, young respondents highlighted the issues of low wages and the underestimation of human labour, which contribute to a pervasive sense of injustice. - *“The most prominent problem is the problem of employment and remuneration. Even in positions that require a lot of work and effort, there is a noticeable lack of fair and adequate pay. This situation is, in my opinion, fundamentally unjust.”* E.Sh., a young female leader of the community, 19 years old, village Koki, dividing line of the conflict, Zugdidi municipality.

The alarming **increase in the scale of migration rates** has raised concerns about the significant outflow of qualified labor and intellectual resources from the country. **The especially disheartening aspect of this trend is the substantial departure of young people.**

2.2. DEFINING SECURITY IN THE EYES OF THE POPULATION

The quantitative research has unveiled that, in the overwhelming majority of cases (88.6% of respondents), security is associated with **“the absence of the threat of war and stability within the country.”** The significant surge in attention among survey participants to the “threat of war” issue,⁶ can be attributed, on one hand, to the heightened regional threats following Russia’s aggression in Ukraine, and on the other hand, to the enhanced rhetoric

⁶ The mentioned data are significantly different from the results of the survey conducted in the same municipalities in 2021, during **which only 23.3% of the respondents considered the “danger of war/conflict renewal in Georgia” as a problem.** See the Consolidated Report on the Women’s and Young Adults’ Needs published in 2021 by the Women’s Fund “Sukhumi”, p. 8. Available at <https://fsokhumi.ge/images/2021/10/1/USAID-en.pdf>

from Georgian political leadership across various platforms, including the media, concerning “the risks of a second front opening in Georgia” or “attempt to draw Georgia into a conflict.”

It is noteworthy that among survey participants, men predominantly perceive the “**absence of the threat of war**” as a guarantee of safety and security, (95.6% of cases - men; 85.2% - women). The **priority significance** of this issue is clearly marked by the **unanimous multitude of IDPs** participating in the survey (100% of cases – IDPs; 84% - locals), caused by the immediate and severe influence of the outcomes of conflicts and wars on their lives. Data analysis according to separate municipalities makes it evident that residents of Tskaltubo municipality (95%), as well as those living along the dividing line of the conflict (Tsalenjikha municipality - 94.4% and Zugdidi municipality - 94%), display a higher level of sensitivity to the “absence of the threat of war” issue. In the remaining municipalities, the responses ranged from 79% to 85%, with the lowest percentage recorded in Kutaisi municipality.

The respondents’ second and third choices are “**family welfare**” (54.2% of cases) and “**public welfare**” (39% of cases). Additionally, 34.5% of survey participants highlighted “**freedom of movement**” as a crucial prerequisite for security, while approximately a third of the respondents defined “**low crime rate**” (32%) and “**freedom of speech and expression**” (30.2%) as key indicators of security (as illustrated in Diagram #3).

What Does Security Mean to You?

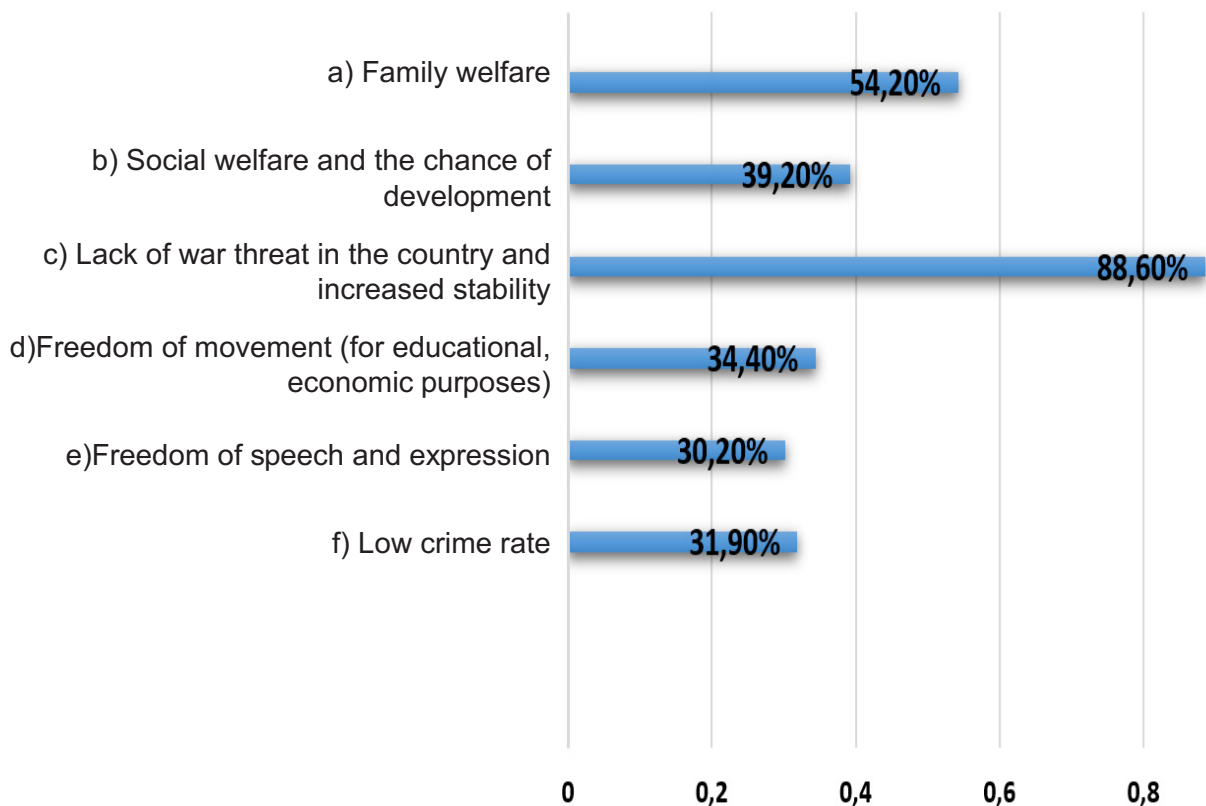


Diagram #3

Notably, “**freedom of movement**”, in comparison to other municipalities, carries the greatest weight among the population residing in villages along the dividing line within Zugdidi and Tsalenjikha municipalities(63.6% of cases). This can be attributed to two key factors: Firstly, the villages in these municipalities are situated at a considerable distance from urban centers, resulting in limited or unreliable transportation connections; Secondly, the population in these villages maintains more active human and business ties with the uncontrolled territory on the opposite side of the Enguri River, which leads to various challenges and obstacles when crossing and moving along the dividing line.

During the interviews conducted within the framework of qualitative research, women living along the border of the conflict highlighted three particularly important issues regarding freedom of movement.:

- 1. The problem of obtaining the necessary documents for movement at the so-called checkpoint for the people, connected with the Gali region** - The respondents noted that the population living in the neighboring villages on both sides of the dividing line with Abkhazia are quite closely connected with each other, through economic activities or family ties, and often have to cross the dividing line. **However, each passing year brings increasing challenges and obstacles to mobility in the region.** The restriction of movement of the Georgian population living on both sides of the Enguri in the Gali region is primarily due to the cancellation of **Form #9** by the de-facto government of Abkhazia from January 1, 2021, and to **the complicated and time-consuming procedures of issuing an alternative document for movement - Residence Permits.** Survey respondents have notably emphasized the challenges predominantly encountered by women as a result of these restrictions. For instance, due to the absence of the necessary documentation, women often find themselves compelled to take alternative routes, including crossing the Enguri River or navigating through forests during nighttime. These circumstances pose significantly heightened risks to their well-being and lives. To avoid detention by the so-called Russian border guards, and arrest for the so-called “illegal border crossing”, individuals opt to surrender themselves to Russian soldiers and pay fines for their release. This not only heightens their feelings of insecurity and psychological distress but also imposes a significant financial burden on each of them.
- 2. Control and restriction of cargo and household item transportation in the Gali region** - Respondents discussed the complicated procedures and constraints related to the transportation of goods and cargo at checkpoints, which are enforced by the Georgian government and affect the local population. For instance, there are regulations governing the volume and quantity of transported food products, household items, fruit and berry seedlings, poultry, and small livestock. These regulations often apply to items intended for the personal consumption of the local population and their agricultural farms. -

“I live in Zugdidi, but I have parents and relatives in the Gali region... You know how expensive everything is there, and I often have to transport food products, medicines or other household items, especially during holidays... If they restrict you from transporting more than 5 kilos of cheese and 10 liters of wine, whereas they don't help you with anything, can it be called taking care of the citizens in the occupied territory?!” N.D., woman, Koki, dividing line of the conflict, Zugdidi Municipality.

It was also emphasized that the practice of restricting cargo transportation is **fundamentally incompatible with the state's declared policy of reconciliation and peace-building, which is supposed to promote economic cooperation or even trade across the dividing line.-**

“When you talk about encouraging economic cooperation and trade between societies divided by conflict and do not create favorable conditions for this, it can only bring harm and introduce more alienation... The civil sector works hard to connect Abkhazian and Georgian entrepreneurs, We try in every way to help them in providing information or developing business plans to start joint businesses... We encourage Abkhaz entrepreneurs to come here, despite their multiple psychological barriers... However, when they try to do trade or cooperate economically, they face such barriers, especially at the “checkpoints” - in the form of interrogation, and problems for the transfer of cargo, that the question naturally arises - in the background of so many pressures and obstacles, how does this serve peace and prosperity?!” Peace activist, representative of a non-governmental organization.

- 3. The attitude of law enforcement officers towards the population moving along the dividing line at the “checkpoints”, which are situated along the dividing line of the conflict with Abkhazia.** - In interviews, women mentioned **how dejecting, uncomfortable, and frequently humiliating are the conditions they endure while in transit.** During these movements, the population is subjected to questioning and personal belongings are searched. These conditions adversely impact women, who make up the majority of those affected. **No female police officers are present on the scene, therefore the searches and interrogations are carried out by male law enforcement officers, which has a negative impact on the emotional state of women, causing fear and a sense of insecurity.** –

“We are interrogated as if we were criminals... It was insulting when a male policeman emptied my entire bag containing hygiene products... We already endure a lot of pressure and humiliation when crossing the “border”, and such treatment doubles our fear and stress.”- N.K. woman, village Pakhulani, dividing line of the conflict, Tsalenjikha municipality.

During the research, the correlation of the priority of **“freedom of speech and expression”** with the age category was also clearly revealed. “Freedom of speech and expression” was emphasized the most by young people aged 18-30 (out of 305 highlighted answers, 135

answers belong to respondents aged 18-30 - 44.3% of cases, which represents 41.8% of young people participating in the study).

The findings from the quantitative research align with those from the qualitative research. In the group discussions and in-depth interviews, participants link the sense of security to various factors, such as “rule of law and protection of human rights”; “a peaceful and non-violent family environment”; “protection from criminal elements and trust in law enforcement”; “Creation of conditions that prevent the necessity of leaving one’s country, separating from families and children, due to challenging economic circumstances and overwhelming bank obligations”; “existence of civic self-awareness, understanding of not only rights, but also responsibility by the population”; “Health care security”; “non-discriminatory and inclusive environment for persons with disabilities and other vulnerable groups”; “environmental, ecological, health and food security”; “reduction of youth addiction to alcohol and drugs”; “appreciation of human labor and intellect and creation of decent working conditions for citizens in places” etc.

A detailed analysis of the threats related to the community and personal security of citizens and the challenges they face is presented in the following chapters.

2.3. THE LEVEL OF COMMUNITY SECURITY

In the frames of this study, the assessment of societal safety for the population was conducted by evaluating the presence of suitable infrastructure and accessibility to fundamental services in the designated municipalities. The study focused on examining the factors and risks that, in the view of the population, represent the most significant threats to public safety. Additionally, the research included an analysis of citizens’ attitudes toward the criminogenic situation in society, the safeguarding of public order, issues related to discrimination, and the level of tolerance.

2.3.1. INFRASTRUCTURE CHALLENGES

The top priority infrastructural concern for the majority of respondents in the surveyed municipalities is the “**improvement of transport services**”(38.9% of cases). The second most significant issue on the list of concerns was “**road maintenance,**” (27.8%). To “**regulate internal village roads**” (25.7% of cases) as a priority need consider residents of Zugdidi and Tsalenjikha municipalities (51.5% of cases). The respondents emphasized the importance of “**the provision of water supply system and access to quality drinking water**” (26%); “**setting up drainage channels**” (22.4%), “**setting up the sewage system**” (as illustrated in Diagram #4).

Which Issue is the Top Priority for Both You and the Women in Your Community?

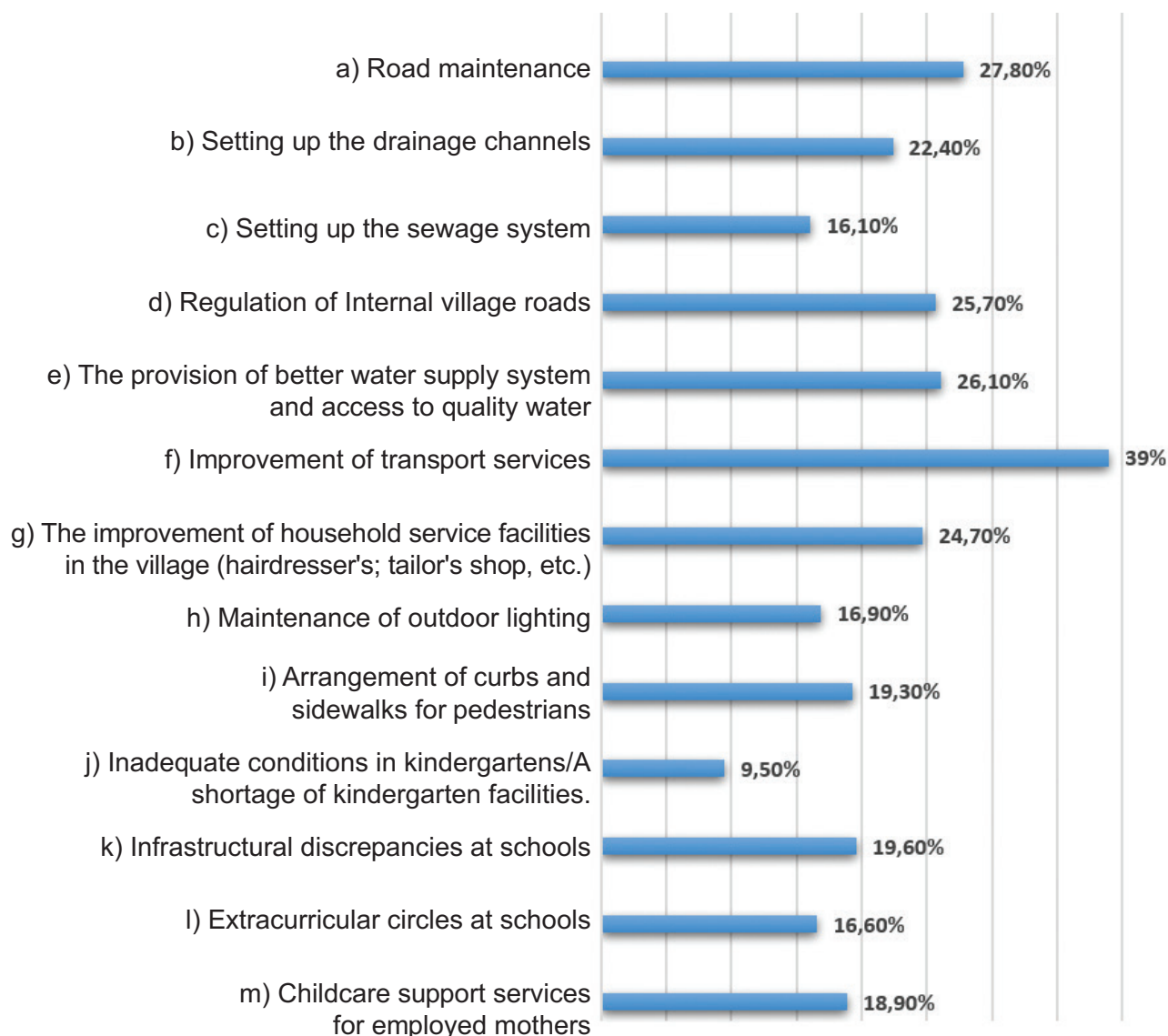


Diagram #4

The severity of the problem of **limited access to clean and drinking water** was mostly emphasized by the residents of Tsalenjikha municipality villages, adjacent to the conflict-dividing line (51% of cases). According to the respondents, the problem of drinking water is especially alarming in the summer, when the wells dry up, which is a particularly heavy burden for women. In addition to the fact that in the absence of water, women have to fetch water from afar, this significantly complicates their family activities, which has a negative impact on their psychological condition and health. **The problem of faulty water supply system** was also highlighted in **Senaki municipality**. Respondents have reported frequent instances of emergency water shut-offs and have also mentioned that after the conducted repair work, using the drinking water becomes nearly impossible. The residents of Senaki and Zugdidi municipalities place significant emphasis on the issue of **malfunctioning drainage and sewage systems**. During periods of heavy rainfall, these issues lead to the flooding of streets and houses in both urban and rural areas, resulting in the destruction of a substantial portion of the harvest and the loss of small livestock, etc.

Women residing in rural areas, connected to nearby cities with essential services (grocery and household stores, markets, hospitals, pharmacies, and workplaces), are particularly concerned about **the restricted transport schedules or the absence of public transportation**. These limitations hinder their mobility and heighten their vulnerability. There was a notable focus on **the absence of municipal internal transport within Tsalenjikha Municipality** and the restricted schedules for private vehicles, often leaving taxis as the sole transportation option. The mentioned issue not only places a financial burden on the population but also frequently hinders their employment perspectives and serves as a significant barrier to accessing essential services.

In Tsalenjikha municipality, the residents of Tchvele, which is actually located along the dividing line of the conflict, painfully perceive the issue of not granting the village the status of **“Administrative Boundary Line (ABL)”**. Due to this fact its population remains outside the state support program for the residents of the dividing line villages (free wood supply, free gasification, funding of higher education for students, possibility of participation in various training programs and contests for economic empowerment). Village Tchvele, according to its geographical location, belongs to Pakhulani community, which comprises the villages Pakhulani, Kalagali, Tskoushi, Tchvele, and represents a dividing line of the conflict, where **the degree of vulnerability of the population is equally high**. Accordingly, **the exclusion of the said village from the state support program** without any reasonable justification **is unfair**. The problem is exacerbated by the fact, that currently, there is **no official normative document that clearly outlines the criteria for granting a village the status of “adjacent to the dividing line” or provides an up-to-date list of villages with this designation**.

As per the current procedure, the selection of villages eligible for state support programs is conducted by **the Interim Governmental Commission for Responding to the Needs of the Affected Population** in villages adjacent to the dividing line (hereinafter referred to as the “Interim Governmental Commission”). Notably, the decision-making process of this commission does not include input from the non-governmental sector or involvement of the population directly affected by the conflict. The commission is largely guided by a list of needs provided by local governments. The majority of the interviewed residents mention that they hardly remember the practice of research/assessment of their needs by municipalities and highlight the fact that **within state support programs, there is a tendency to overlook the solutions to critical issues and the responses to ongoing needs raised by the population year after year while engaging with the civil sector**. Consequently, it is deemed essential to ensure active participation of civil society and affected population at the meetings of the **“Interim Government Commission”** and in the elaboration of state support programs.

Women who participated in the study highlighted particular concerns regarding **infrastructure issues**, notably **the issues of malfunctioning pedestrian sidewalks** (19.2%) and **dysfunctional /missing outdoor street lighting** (16.9%). They expressed that these issues pose significant threats to their personal, as well as their children’s, safety - affecting their health and overall well-being. Importantly, these problems are equally relevant across all the municipalities included in the study.

Residents of Khurcha village in Zugdidi municipality have highlighted the issue of **inadequate street lighting**. According to their statement, **there is not a single outdoor lighting pole installed anywhere from the police station at the entrance of the village to a distance of several kilometers around the village perimeter**. The residents of the village frequently find themselves walking at night, primarily due to the limited availability of public transportation during the evening hours. This situation elevates fear and stress levels within the community. According to the village residents, the installation of lighting poles is crucial to mitigate the already heightened sense of danger and instability among the population residing near the conflict line.

The absence of household service facilities (hairdresser's, tailor's shop) is considered a problem by the respondents (24%), the majority of whom are women residing in conflict-divided areas, specifically within the municipalities of Tsalenjikha and Zugdidi. These women often find themselves needing to travel to nearby cities for essential household services. Given the constraints of limited transportation options, this becomes a significant burden that adversely impacts their financial situation. In addition, they highlighted the unsatisfactory conditions of school infrastructure (19.6%); lack of child care support services (18.9%), including the absence of extended services in schools and kindergartens, extremely limited number of child care day and evening centres; lack of after-school clubs for the children (16.6%).

During the qualitative research, special attention was focused on the lack of trash cans in the villages (Tsalendzhikha municipality, village Pakhulani). This deficiency results in the proliferation of landfills and ecological issues in the area.

2.3.2. SOCIAL ORDER AND CRIME INCIDENCE

During the research, three main problems were highlighted by the interviewees: **an increase in crime; alcohol and drug addiction problems; and political polarization/high degree of intolerance towards people with different political views**.

A substantial majority of respondents (58.3%) have expressed concern about **the rising crime rates**. This heightened criminogenic situation is a source of worry for residents across all the municipalities surveyed. Notably, this issue is most prominently highlighted by respondents residing in the **municipalities of Zugdidi (67.5%), Kutaisi (67.3%), and Khoni (66.7%)**, while it is mentioned to a lesser extent by residents of Tsalenjikha municipality (40.6%). When the data is broken down by gender, it becomes clear that women involved in the study tend to exhibit higher level of attention and concern regarding the rise in crime, with 69.8% expressing worry, as opposed to 55.8% of men.

A substantial portion of respondents, at 44.3%, regard **the issue of alcoholism and drug addiction** as pressing. While this concern is widely acknowledged by the population across

nearly all target municipalities, it is particularly emphasized by residents of **Khoni** (55.6%), **Senaki** (55%), **Tskaltubo** (49.7%), and **Zugdidi** (46.1%) municipalities. In Kutaisi, only 42.7% of respondents view the mentioned problem as a priority. It's worth noting that although the surveyed population in Tsalenjikha municipality highlights the issue of alcoholism and drug addiction the least (20%), respondents in the qualitative research consistently **express their concern about the alarming rise in alcoholism, drug addiction, and gambling addiction within society**, recognizing the severe social consequences that accompany these issues. The study also demonstrated that the issue of alcoholism and drug addiction **is highly pertinent for IDPs** (46.7%), surpassing the concern expressed by the local population (43.9%).

According to participants in the qualitative research, the issue of alcoholism and drug addiction is primarily attributed to living in an unstable and constantly threatening environment, a challenging socio-economic situation, a lack of employment opportunities, and restricted access to fundamental services. Consequently, these factors contribute to heightened tension, stress, and aggression within the population, leading to excessive alcohol and drug abuse among men and youth. Furthermore, it was observed that **the consumption of marijuana has reached alarming level** in recent times. **This trend is largely attributed to the absence of accompanying educational and informational campaigns following the “decriminalization” process.** Such campaigns are needed to raise awareness about the harmful effects of so-called “weed,” and to promote a healthier lifestyle.

The residents of Kutaisi, Khoni, and Tskaltubo municipalities regard **the continual rise in the population of homeless/stray dogs and their unrestricted presence on the streets** as a top security concern. They emphasize that the city streets and municipal roads are overrun with stray dogs, a majority of which are hungry and sick. The substantial presence of these stray dogs poses a danger for pedestrians and cyclists, leading to frequent instances of people being bitten. Addressing the aforementioned problem necessitates **the arrangement of more shelters, the development of the vaccination program for homeless animals and the provision of timely vaccination, the development of the anti-rabies vaccination program, and the greater awareness of the population about the potential harm to health.**

A 25% of respondents express concerns **about the risk of an escalation of the conflict in Georgia.** This concern is relevant for both displaced individuals (27%) and the local population (24%), with only a slight difference between the two groups.

Malfunctioning road traffic was identified as another factor posing a threat to public safety (20.2% of cases). In the qualitative research, respondents went further to describe **traffic safety** as alarming, underscoring its significance as a pressing issue. Respondents raised the acute issue of the frequency of road accidents due to excessive speed, which makes parents afraid to send their children to school alone. As they mentioned - *“There are no video cameras, no patrolling crews in motion, and no swift response to speed violations, which contributes to a sense of insecurity.”*- Focus group discussion, Tsalenjikha municipality. In

addition, significant attention was directed toward **the frequent incidents of drunk driving and the growing sense of impunity among drivers**. These factors pose a threat to the physical safety of citizens.

2.3.3. POLITICAL POLARIZATION AND INTOLERANCE TOWARDS DIFFERENT VIEWPOINTS

A substantial proportion of survey participants have expressed concern regarding **political polarization and the reluctance to embrace diverse perspectives** (25.6% of cases), which, according to the participants of the qualitative research, hinders the resolution of economic and social problems and the implementation of important reforms in the country. Thus, it harms and undermines the prospect of the country's development, the perspectives of the population's welfare, and the public's trust in both democratic and administrative institutions. Furthermore, the decrease of public trust in state institutions contributes to increased levels of aggression, hopelessness and apathy among the population. These sentiments, in turn, pose additional risks of heightened tension and potential destabilization within the country.

Respondents have cited several instances of discrimination based on political viewpoints, a concern substantiated by the findings of the quantitative research. In this research, it is evident that a significant portion of respondents, approximately a quarter, are deeply troubled by "the high levels of intolerance and discrimination in society." (23%).

The respondent of the qualitative research in Tsalenjikha municipality expressed the opinion that the **political polarization can be constructively channeled into processes that foster healthy competition and progress** *"where everyone controls each other and stands by each other in doing work"* T. Belkania, Vice Mayor, Tsalenjikha municipality.

2.3.4. ACCESSIBILITY OF SECONDARY AND HIGHER EDUCATION

The study placed particular emphasis on education-related issues, assessing both the accessibility of secondary and higher education for the population and the overall quality of education being offered.

In terms of access to secondary education, more than half of the respondents (55.8%) believe that their children, grandchildren or acquaintances have only partial access to quality secondary education. 35.3% of the respondents evaluate the quality of access to education positively, and 8.8% - negatively.

According to the majority of respondents, access to high-quality secondary education is hindered by:

low quality of education - 44.5%; Inadequate technical equipments and lack of

specialized subject cabinets in schools - 36.7%; malfunctioning school infrastructure (outdated school building in dire need of repair, malfunctioning system, lack of clean and drinking water, etc.) - 31.4% (the mentioned problem especially concerns the population living along the dividing line of Tsalenjikha municipality (63% of cases); **lack of professionalism among teachers - 24%. Low -quality Internet - 21.8 %.**

The youth and their parents who participated in the qualitative research emphasized **the absence or insufficient availability of municipal programs aimed at fostering and enhancing the development and leadership qualities of young individuals.** Residents of Senaki, Tsalenjikha, and Zugdidi municipalities underscored **the absence of adequate spaces for youth** where young people could congregate, make productive use of their leisure time, and access informal educational opportunities. –

“The problem for young people of my age is that there is no entertainment in the city, where you can spend time and have fun. We don’t have a cinema where we can watch a movie together. There are no places where we can gather, sit and discuss some elementary topics. All this affects the increase of internal and external migration from rural areas. Many of my peers have the goal of leaving the country, this is a serious problem that requires immediate attention”- N.Sh., a young man, 18, local, student)

Respondents highlighted the inadequate infrastructure of libraries in rural areas and stressed the significance of improving these facilities. There was a strong emphasis on the need to establish **open sports fields for children and young people and on the importance of cultural centers or after-school multi-profile art clubs in villages,** particularly in communities with IDPs and in the villages, located along the conflict-dividing line.

The residents of Tskoushi village, within Tsalenjikha municipality,⁷ have consistently highlighted the longstanding deplorable conditions (outdated building, cracked walls and floor, non-functional sewage and water system) of their public school, which served up to 80 children every year. In 2022, following a decision by the Ministry of Education, a positive resolution was reached regarding the construction of a new school. Subsequently, the old school building was dismantled, and plans were made for the construction of a new facility. During the interim period before the completion of the new school, the students of Tskoushi Public School have been attending Pakhulani Public School #1.

It’s important to highlight that the public school in Tskoushi holds a unique and significant role due to its continued service to children residing in the village of Saberio, located in the occupied Gali district. Despite numerous challenges, these students make a daily journey through a checkpoint to attend school in Tskoushi and receive a Georgian education. On average, between 12 to 14 children commute to study at Tskoushi public school from Saberio, an occupied village in the Gali district. However, since the school does not offer education up to the 12th grade, students must relocate to schools in more distant villages, such as Pachulani or Lia after completing the 9th grade.

⁷ Tskoushi is a village adjacent to the conflict-dividing line. At the end of Pakhulani-Tskoushi is located a so-called checkpoint of Saberio-Pakhulani.

This requirement not only adds complexity to their already challenging commutes but also exacerbates the psychological and emotional stress associated with transitioning to a new school. **Accordingly, it is important to grant the status of a general education 12-level secondary school to the public school of Tskoushi, which should be taken into account when designing a new school.**

The teachers of the Tsoushi school also mentioned **the difficulties of involving students from the village of Saberio in the educational process, which is related to the complicated and slow issuance of documents, allowing the freedom of movement, by the de-facto Abkhazia government.-**

“In the 2022-2023 school year, up to five children from our school had to be suspended from the educational process for several months due to relocation documentation. The existing ones have expired, and they don’t issue the new ones. Thus, the parents of these children had to leave Saberio, split their families, rent rooms in Tskoushi or Pakhulani, move in with relatives or into abandoned houses, so that their children could continue to receive education in a Georgian school. We already know that a few more students will face a similar problem from next year.” M.M., woman, teacher, village Tskoushi, conflict-dividing line, Tsalenjikha municipality.

Accordingly, it is important for the state to support the children/students who moved to Georgia for education and their families, and to provide rent for an apartment as needed.

Accessibility of higher education: The majority of interviewees have observed that their family members and acquaintances have only limited access to quality higher education (49.9%), while 41.7% believe they have such access, and 8.4% believe they lack access to higher education.

Among the factors hindering access to higher education, the following was highlighted: **the unavailability of free housing in the city for students from the region**, with 35.9% emphasizing this concern. Lack of university dormitories for students; **the rising apartment rental prices** have presented a significant challenge, and in some instances, have rendered it impossible for students from regional/rural areas to afford living and studying in cities. The necessity to secure additional resources for city living has compelled students’ families **to resort to loans**, creating a significant financial burden for them. Furthermore, the overwhelming costs associated with education fees, apartment rent, and living expenses have driven some mothers to seek employment abroad, leading to family separations. Additionally, a number of enrolled students have had to take an academic year off to find employment in the cities in order to sustain their livelihoods.

32.1% of the respondents are concerned about high tuition fees; 9.3% emphasized the low quality of education. It should be noted that one of the barriers to obtaining higher education was the lack of professional orientation courses in schools, which prevents entrants from choosing the right profession - 21.5%.

2.4. PERSONAL SECURITY

In the present study, the quality of personal safety was evaluated by studying the relevance and magnitude of domestic violence against women in the target regions, identifying the most commonly encountered forms of violence, the population's awareness of existing services for protection against violence as well as the availability of these services.

2.4.1. ADDRESSING FAMILY VIOLENCE

Most of the interviewees, namely 62%, recognize **the urgency and seriousness of the problem of domestic violence**, of which 15% consider the issue **extremely acute**. 26% of respondents refrain from taking a position on the problem (“I don't have an answer”), and 22% consider the issue of violence against women not relevant in their community (see diagram #4). The data shows that the issue of domestic violence remains a taboo and undisclosed problem.

How acute is the problem of domestic violence for you or your community?

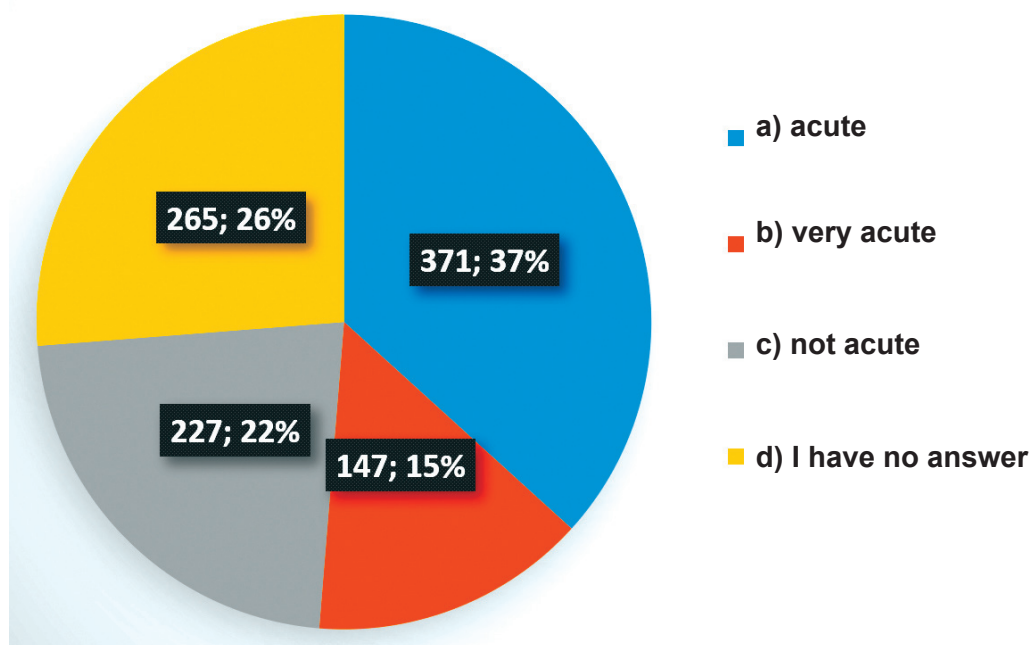


Diagram #4

Interestingly, men (54.5%) appear to acknowledge the relevance and seriousness of the issue of domestic violence against women more than the interviewed women (49.8%). On the one hand, this observation suggests increased public awareness and acknowledgment of the problem, especially among men. However, it also underscores **the ongoing challenges faced by women who are often reluctant to openly admit the issue or share their personal experiences of violence due to the prevalent societal pressures, judgment, and stigma they more frequently encounter.**

“It is difficult for women to talk about domestic violence, because unfortunately, in most cases, women victims become the subject of gossip, are judged and sometimes even ostracized.

The society has no sense of tolerance towards them. “Maybe she deserved it” - such phrase can even be heard. This makes their situation even worse.” In most of our society, there is still the mentality that discussing family matters in public is tantamount to shaming the family. Therefore, domestic violence is the most closed topic”- K.B., a driver, man, 57, Didi Nedzi.

The study data demonstrates that domestic violence against women **is more prevalent within the IDP community** (56.8%) compared to the local population (49.8%). Interestingly, **there isn't a significant disparity** in public awareness of this issue **across different age groups**. Representatives from all age groups participating in the research perceive the problem to be equally severe (18-30 age group - 51.4%, 31-45 age group - 50.9%, 46-65 age group - 52.4%, and above 65 age group - 49.5%). Furthermore, there is a higher recognition of the problem among those who are employed (53.5%) in contrast to the unemployed segment of the population (45.8%).

It must be noted that the severity of the problem is mostly admitted in **Zigdidi** (65,7%), **Khoni** (61,5%) **Tskaltubo** (58,8%) **municipalities**, thus, demonstrating the increased public awareness on violence against women, the tendency of shattering the stereotypes and the readiness for bold discussions. In **Tsalenjikha (49,4%)** and **Senaki (49,7%)** **the outcomes are nearly the same**. The problem of the domestic violence against women is regarded **as the least severe** by the inhabitants of Kutaisi municipality (37,7%).

2.4.2. PREVALENT FORMS OF FAMILY VIOLENCE

A significant portion of the respondents (53.7%) identified psychological violence as the most prevalent form of violence. Additionally, **economic violence was mentioned by 24.8% of respondents**, while **physical violence was acknowledged by 19%**. **However, only 2.6% of respondents acknowledged sexual violence**. This observation underscores the taboos surrounding discussions on sexual violence - moreover, on its forms - and suggests a lack of information and awareness, as well as insufficient recognition of this issue within the population. Qualitative research data highlights that, despite the gradual deterioration of women's subordinate roles within families, in some communities - particularly in rural and remote areas far from urban centers - outdated customs and beliefs continue to persist. These customs perpetuate distinct behavioral expectations for women and men, assigning the role of the unequivocal decision-maker in all family matters to men, while expecting women to adopt a submissive, patient, and accommodating demeanor.

In addition, qualitative studies revealed that women's reluctance to disclose domestic violence, in addition to traditional approaches and avoidance of possible public pressure, is largely related to the fear of how a woman can live independently and support her dependent children. Women have pointed out that the limited duration of women's stays in shelters, the state's provision of only short-term or one-time support, and the limited opportunities for economic empowerment and employment are inadequate for women to embark on an

independent life. These challenges often compel women to endure violence due to the lack of viable alternatives.

2.4.3. PUBLIC AWARENESS AND AVAILABILITY OF LEGAL PROTECTIONS AND SUPPORT SERVICES FOR FEMALE VICTIMS

Nearly a third of the surveyed respondents (29.8%) are informed about the existence of victim support services, including details about the types of services offered, their locations, and contact information. However, it's worth noting that a significant portion of research participants, approximately **42.7%**, **are only aware of some of these services**. It's noteworthy that **a relatively high percentage of individuals, specifically 27.5%**, **have no information at all** about victim support services and legal mechanisms available for protection from violence. **The municipalities of Tskaltubo (40.6%), Khoni (34.6%) and Zugdidi (31.4%) are the most informed, and the least informed are the Tsalenjikha (20.6%), Kutaisi (25, 6%), and Senaki (27.2%) municipalities.**

Among the existing protection mechanisms and support services for women victims of domestic violence, **the hotline (116 006) is best known to the population - (61.9%). The second most well-known service for the population is non-governmental organizations working on issues of violence and the services they offer (49.8%).**

21.2% of respondents have information about **state shelters**, 20.3% are aware of the existence of **crisis centers**. The population is **the least familiar with municipal victim support services and programs (19.3%) and services offered by the state legal service (18.4%)**. Although the provision of information to the population about state and municipal support services is still insufficient, it is significantly higher than the results of the research, conducted in the same municipalities in 2021, which clearly indicates the implementation of more active information campaigns aimed at informing the population and its positive effect.⁸

49.9% of respondents name **social networks as the most common source of information**. Although a large number of respondents confirm the openness and availability of information on social networks and on the web pages of relevant state agencies and civil society organizations, in qualitative studies **they focused on the problem of the population's access to electronic and digital resources**, especially in villages and settlements, far from large cities.

Accordingly, the need to disseminate information in printed form, as well as to hold direct meetings with the population, especially women, is clearly evident. 23.7% of respondents **received information from television and radio**, and 14% - **during meetings with**

⁸ See See the Consolidated Report on the Women's and Young Adults' Needs published in 2021 by the Women's Fund "Sukhumi", p. 12. Available at <https://fsokhumi.ge/images/2021/10/1/US-AID-en.pdf>

non-governmental organizations. 4.1% get information **from announcements and information sheets provided in public places.** It should be noted that **meetings with representatives of local government (4.3%) and central government (3.4%) are the least mentioned sources of information.**

Access to victim support services appears to be a notable problem, with the majority of respondents (55.9%) perceiving the existing services **as insufficiently available.** Furthermore, 10.7% of respondents believe that these services are **entirely unavailable.** A third of respondents (33.4%) indicate that they **have access to services.** It is significant that among the interviewees who **pointed out the unavailability of services, the majority are residents of the villages of the Tsalenjikhha municipality, the dividing zone of conflict (51%).**

Respondents also expressed their opinion on **the adequacy of existing support services for victims of violence against women.** **52.2%** of the respondents believe that the existing services are only **“partially sufficient”**, **35.2%** believe that **“they are not sufficient at all”**, and **12.6%** emphasized that **“the existing services are sufficient”**.

The qualitative research **clearly identified** the need to **diversify** existing victim support programs and introduce **long-term support services for victims,** as **one-time assistance does not provide the opportunity for victims to start an independent life in a long-term perspective.**

According to a part of the respondents, **it is important ,firstly, to extend the period of the victim’s stay in the shelter,** allowing them the necessary time to adapt to their new environment and adequately prepare for independent living. **Secondly, to facilitate the reintegration of victims into society and provide them with jobs, it is essential to provide relevant vocational training programs and actively promote their employment** (e.g. contacting a potential employer, giving grants to start an entrepreneurial activities). In addition, they mentioned **the provision of care services for the dependent young children of abused women,** both during their stay in the shelter and after leaving it, so that the woman could confidently seek employment.

2.5. IMPACT OF ELEVATED SECURITY RISKS AND SENSE OF INSECURITY ON THE POPULATION

The results of the quantitative research **revealed the negative impact of increased human security risks and threats on the life of the population.** The majority of respondents mostly emphasize *increased stress and tension* (50.2%); increase in migration (40.8%); probability of occurrence of psychological problems (36.6%); The participants in the study also associate the feeling of insecurity with **“deterioration of health”** (29.1%); the sense of hopelessness among citizens and fear of the future (27.6%); cases of domestic conflicts and violence (24.5%) (Diagram #5).

The Impact of Elevated Security Risks on Population

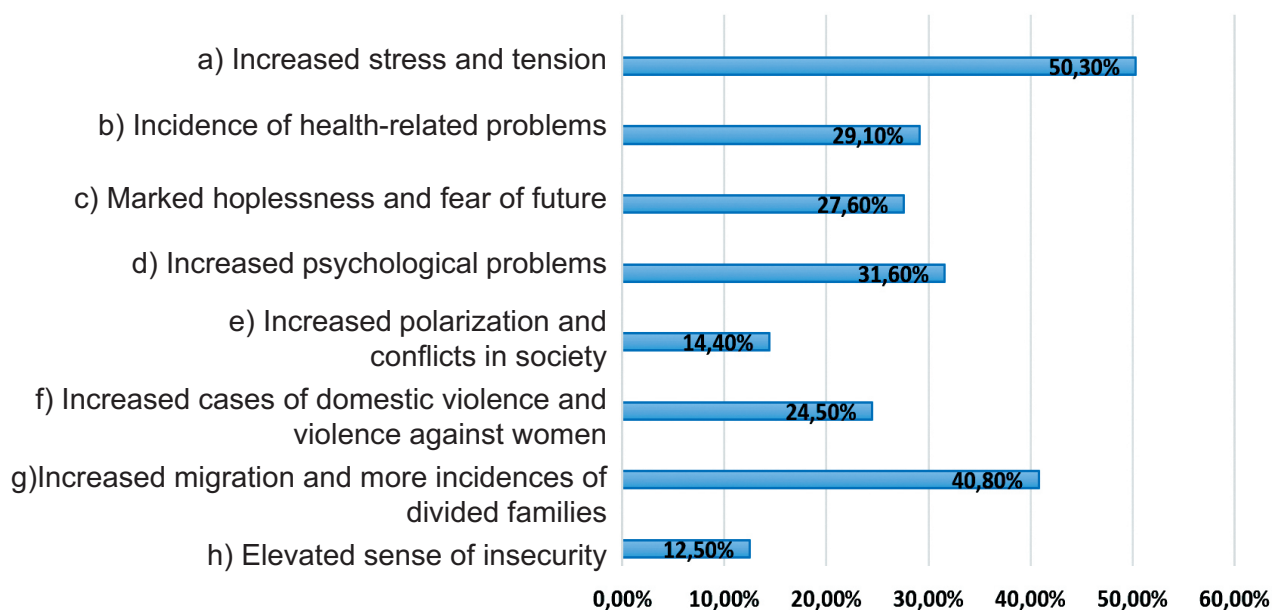


Diagram #5

2.5.1. REFERENCE TO STATE STRUCTURES FOR PROBLEM RESOLUTION

The reference to governmental structures to solve personal or public problems is relatively low, which is partly caused by mistrust and nihilism. Among the surveyed respondents, 25.4% appealed to the local government, and only 4.5% appealed to the central government, in order to solve the problem. The majority did not appeal to any governmental structure (70%), and among them 16.2% did not appeal because they do not believe in the appropriate response.

“People have a nihilistic attitude that no matter how many times they appeal to state structures, their problem will not be solved. In order to ensure that the needs of the vulnerable category are met, it is important that the self-government engages in a constant dialogue with these groups and their opinion is taken into account during the development of the budget” – N.R. female, 51 years old, teacher, Senaki municipality.

PART III: CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

CONCLUSION

The given study revealed a rather high degree of vulnerability of the population in relation to personal and community security in the target municipalities. **The majority of respondents participating in the research do not feel safe and secure.**

While evaluating the quality of security with a five-point scale, the respondents **mostly emphasized the third scale**. The feeling of danger and insecurity is manifested to the highest degree **among the population living close to the conflict-dividing line**, which is deepened due to the proximity to the “occupation line” and the fear of conflict escalation. **When comparing municipalities, it is apparent that residents of Tsalenjikha municipality tend to feel the least safe among the surveyed areas**. Additionally, a significant finding is that IDPs have a notably lower sense of security compared to local residents.

➤ **Community Security:**

The comparison of municipalities reveals that the low level of human security is most pronounced in the villages located along the conflict dividing line. In these areas, the population faces multiple challenges, including high unemployment rates, infrastructural deficiencies, and limited access to essential services. The problem of free movement and mobility in general is quite severe in the mentioned locations. On the one hand, this is due **to the distance of villages from cities, and limited or faulty transport communication** (e.g. municipal transport does not operate in Tsalenjikha municipality, and the movement of existing commercial mini-vans is limited in time; public transport functioning in the villages of the dividing line of Zugdidi municipality operates on a limited schedule); On the other hand, this is due to the more intensive connections of the population from the mentioned villages with the uncontrolled territory on the other side of the Enguri, and **the barriers created when crossing the dividing line and moving around**. (e.g. the problem of obtaining the necessary documentation to move through the checkpoint; restrictions on food and household products transportation; questioning and checking of persons moving in the territory, adjacent the dividing line, etc.) Residents of Tchvele village in Tsalenjikha municipality are persistently raising the issue of **not being granted the “status of ABL”**.” This lack of recognition has significant consequences, as it means the population in this village remains ineligible for important state support programs. (e.g. residents cannot benefit from such programs as free firewood, free gasification, inclusion of students in higher education funding programs, and participation in training programs or various economic empowerment contests).

The participants of the survey noted the tendency of **increased political polarization and non-acceptance of different viewpoints in the municipality, which, in their opinion, reduces the right to speech and free expression, promotes discrimination, hinders the democratic development of the country** and the implementation of important reforms in the country.

There is a noticeable and clear trend of **overseas labor migration, especially from rural areas**, leading to an increasing outflow of skilled labor and intellectual resources from the country. This phenomenon not only impacts the country's workforce but also results in a higher number of divided families and children left without parental care.

In the target municipalities, infrastructural problems that have not been solved for years are acute: in a number of municipalities, **the issue of gasification and water supply** is still unresolved. In the village of Tskoushi of Tsalenjikha municipality, due to lack of water, the inhabitants have to fetch drinking water from a long distance, which has a heavy impact on their health and psycho-emotional condition. Most of the interviewees are worried about **problematic internal roads in their settlements, faulty sewage system, malfunction of internal municipal transport and other issues**.

The scale of **consumption of narcotic drugs (including marijuana) and alcohol** by the population was assessed as quite alarming. Respondents have also highlighted issues related to excessive vehicle speed, (particularly in areas near schools and gardens where preventive measures, such as speed bumps (sleeping policemen) and absence of video surveillance cameras).

The issue of access to quality secondary and higher education for young people is a pressing concern for the population (for example, malfunctioning school infrastructure and scarce technical equipment;

non-availability of free housing in the city and increased rent for students, coming from rural areas; absence of programs and youth spaces focused on the development and strengthening of leadership skills of young people living in the village; absence or scarcity of open sports fields, cultural centres, or after-school multi-profile art clubs for children and youth in villages.

➤ **Physical Security**

The given study confirms that the low level of human security significantly increases tension, stress, aggression among the population, stimulates and intensifies the practice of drinking alcohol and excessive use of narcotic substances by men, which in many cases results in frequent conflicts and violence in the family. The majority of the interviewees acknowledge the wide scale of violence in their society, which on the one hand indicates the raising of public awareness and understanding of the problem. However, it was also revealed that for many, domestic violence is a closed and taboo topic, which they are reluctant to discuss outside the narrow circle of the family. The abused women particularly refrain from talking about the violence: the victims **are not ready to speak out about their personal experience of violence, because they are the ones, most confronted with pressure, judgment and stigma in society**.

The research has underscored a substantial lack of awareness within the population residing in the target regions, especially in villages located along the dividing line. This lack of awareness encompasses not only issues related to violence against women but also extends to a limited understanding of the legal mechanisms established for protection against violence and the accessibility of support services.

Insufficient awareness among the population regarding state or local programs is a notable concern, as is the low level of citizen consultation and participation at both national and local levels.

In response to the challenges identified in the study, the following actions are recommended:

RECOMMENDATIONS

PROVISION OF SOCIETAL SECURITY

- Provision of continuous water supply and safe drinking water for the population of the municipality (Tsalenjikha municipality, Tskoushi-Pakhulani village, Senaki municipality);
- Promotion of the sanitary conditions improvement in the target villages and cities (maintenance of sewage systems and drainage pipes, in order to avoid the special danger of flooding during the heavy rainfall; increase in the number of garbage cans and garbage trucks and the enhanced intensity of garbage removal);
- Improvement of municipal roads and internal roads within the district;
- Installation of “smart cameras” and speed bumps (“sleeping policemen”) in villages and cities, especially near schools/kindergartens and densely populated areas, to ensure traffic safety; Strengthening the monitoring function of the municipality on the issue of traffic safety in cooperation with appropriate agencies and interested parties, in order to promote safe movement for citizens;
- Improvement of road and transport infrastructure, especially in rural areas. Ensuring the functioning of public transport (in Tsalendzhika municipality). Also increasing the number and frequency of public transport (movement with more frequent intervals);
- Arrangement of active educational and informational campaigns (especially targeting teenagers and young people) on the harmful effects of alcohol and narcotic substances and promotion of a healthy way of life;
- Enhancement of the monitoring on the continuous increase in the number of homeless/stray dogs and their uncontrolled movement in the streets. Arrangement of shelters for homeless animals; development of a vaccination program, ensuring timely vaccination; implementation of an anti-rabies vaccination program, and provision of the population with more information about possible health hazards;
- Increase/strengthening of the availability/coverage of programs and services, related to the mental health of the population. Provision of the population with more information about the mentioned programs; coordinated collaboration with the non-governmental sector;

- Maximum provision of information about central and municipal programs through local television, radio, municipality websites and social networks. And for those members of society, who find access to electronic platforms challenging, provision of relevant information in printed form in shops, pharmacies, markets, administrative buildings, etc.);
- Special emphasis on consultations and cooperation with vulnerable groups at all stages of planning, implementation and evaluation of priority projects for the local community; Integration of the needs and priorities of vulnerable groups, including conflict-affected and displaced women, youth, people with disabilities, into local policies and projects;
- Understanding the role of the municipality in avoiding the polarization within a society, provision of a healthy and constructive dialogue and exchange of ideas around issues of local importance to address prominent societal challenges and problems.

ADDRESSING THE SPECIFIC NEEDS OF THE POPULATION FROM VICINITIES ADJACENT TO THE DIVIDING LINE OF THE CONFLICT

- More cooperation from the representatives of the interim governmental commission to address the needs of the affected population in the villages adjacent to the dividing line and arrangement of consultative meetings with profile civil society organizations, displaced and conflict-affected women, and their families to identify their needs and develop programs tailored to those needs; facilitate information exchange, conduct discussions, address existing challenges, and determine appropriate strategies to overcome these challenges;
- Introduction of clear and precise definition of the criteria for designating rural areas with the “ABL status” in the relevant legal document and provision of the list of such villages to the public and the civil sector; It is crucial to substantiate why Tchvele, a village geographically located within the conflict-dividing line and belonging to Pakhulani community, is not designated as a “ABL status”, remaining beyond the access to the state support programs;
- Enhancement of the sensitivity of security sector representatives at conflict checkpoints in matters related to gender, confidence-building, and conflict transformation; demonstration of more empathetic approach toward persons moving across the divide, recognizing their vulnerability and the unique challenges they face in their living conditions; It is desirable to increase the skills, competence and awareness of security sector representatives on the importance of confidence building/peace building and existing state policies;

- It is desirable for the representatives of the European Union Monitoring Mission (EUMM) to carry out constant monitoring of the movement of the population at the checkpoint to control/document the restrictions imposed on the movement of cargo, to control/document the interrogation or inspection process, and to inform the relevant state structures and the civil sector about all the mentioned facts;
- It is important to develop and offer special support mechanisms to help the population along the dividing line, prevented from participating in educational programs due to the complications with displacement documentation. (e.g. support for children/students (and their families) who travel from the village of Saberio to receive Georgian education; in case of necessity, provision of a rented apartment for those who are unable to cross the checkpoint every day due to documentation problems; and support in the inclusion of children in the educational process);
- The actors involved in the Incident Prevention and Response Mechanism (IPRM) process and the Geneva discussions, including the representatives of the United Nations, the European Union, and the Georgian authorities, should use the political and financial leverage at their disposal and conduct a continuous dialogue with the de facto authorities, to ensure the removal of barriers limiting the freedom of movement of the population (including the complication of issuing movement documentation).

ENHANCED ACCESSIBILITY OF EDUCATION

- Equipment of regional centers and rural schools with appropriate technologies and computer equipments and provision of appropriate sectoral cabinets; Organization of digital and computer skills training courses for teachers of regional schools in order to make it possible for them to fully utilize technological equipments and computer resources;
- Assessment of infrastructural condition of rural school buildings and appropriate rehabilitation of outdated buildings. as well as assessment and improvement of water supply, sanitation and hygiene conditions;
- Providing appropriate internet packages for teachers and students in areas with weak internet coverage and simultaneously working actively to solve the problem of introducing powerful internet to the mentioned settlements;
- Implementation of computer hardware or smartphone distribution programs for students with low socio-economic status’
- Construction of student dormitories and/or offering free or half-price housing for students depending on their successful academic performance and taking into account the social status of their families (co-financing, voucher system for excellent students); It is also desirable to properly assess the conditions of the existing dormitories and study how safe and adapted the existing infrastructure is for women and girls;

- Arrangement of open sports grounds for children and youth in district centers and villages, opening multi-professional after-school clubs , and solving infrastructural problems of libraries and cultural centers in villages;
- Creation of youth spaces in villages, where young people will have the opportunity to gather and spend their free time productively, and/or receive informal education;
- Encouragement of youth involvement in local governments and diversification/implementation of youth development programs.

ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT

- Estimation of the scale of citizen migration and its social consequences, implementation of correspondent measures to prevent migration; cooperation with organizations conducting social reintegration programs for migrants and ensuring their availability to citizens;
- Provision of training courses on entrepreneurial and project-management skills and business development grant programs for the purpose of women's economic empowerment and better access to employment;
- While developing women's economic empowerment programs, highlighting the needs of vulnerable groups and the obstacles that hinder women's participation in economic projects;
- Creation of a favorable business environment for the promotion of women's small and medium-sized businesses (e.g. exemption from taxes within one year of starting a business, maintenance of social status, cancellation of the request for co-financing, etc.);
- In order to inform women about economic programs and to motivate their participation in the projects, relevant consulting service centers should be introduced in the municipality; the centres will provide information about state or local economic programs, explain the conditions of the competition in details, and practically assist in filling out the application;
- Creation and development of appropriate child care services in order to stimulate women's employment, (development of day and evening child care centers, opening of extended and summer groups in kindergartens and schools);
- Encouragement and support of social entrepreneurship, cooperatives and business incubators and enhancement of the municipality role in this matter.

PREVENTION AND EFFECTIVE RESPONSE TO VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

- Development of long-term support programs for women victims of violence, involving the component of their professional development/retraining and employment, and active provision of information to the population about existing services and programs;
- Increasing the length of stay in the shelter for abused women to allow them to adapt to the new environment and properly prepare for an independent life. Provision of appropriate professional training programs for women, affected by violence and promotion of their employment (e.g. connection with potential employers, inclusion in grant programs for starting an entrepreneurial business). In addition, the provision of care services to the women's dependent minor children both during and after their stay in the shelter will enable these women to freely seek employment;
- Introduction of professional and independent experts in the commission that is responsible for discussion and decision-making on funding women victims of violence through the municipal program (with the participation of non-governmental organizations working on the issue of violence against women, psychologists, lawyers);
- Enhancement of the gender awareness of local officials, increasing their sensitivity to gender equality, which should respectively be manifested through the introduction and implementation of gender equality issues in local policies and programs;
- While developing programs for victims of violence, provision of active consultations with relevant non-governmental organizations and with women victims of violence themselves.



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