





Baseline Study of existing social services in Samtskhe-Javakheti and Kvemo Kartli

(QUANTITATIVE AND QUALITATIVE RESEARCH FINAL WORKING VERSION OF THE ANALYTICAL REPORT)

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Introduction

The human rights-based approach (HRBA) is a conceptual framework developed on the basis of international human rights law, which can be used in advocacy, litigation, and the development of targeted programs¹. Through the HRBA approach, it is possible to reveal obligations, inequalities, vulnerabilities, and discriminatory approaches both in legal framework and in existing practices.

The human rights-based approach is based on five main working principles collectively known as PANEL (Participation, Accountability, Non-discrimination and Equality, Empowerment, Legality).

- Participation People have the right to participate in decision-making, when these
 decisions directly affect their rights and well-being and/or to involve others who can
 help them make such decisions. Participation should be active, independent, informed,
 and accessible, including access to information that is presented in a form and
 language understandable to the target groups.
- Accountability refers to the effective monitoring of human rights standards and the
 use of effective mechanisms to prevent human rights violations.
- Non-discrimination and Equality All forms of discrimination, including those based on age, gender identity, sexual orientation, ethnicity, health status, economic status, or any other grounds, must be prohibited. Particular attention should be given to people in vulnerable situations who face additional barriers to realising their rights.
- **Empowerment** Individuals and communities should understand their rights, and be fully supported to participate in the development of policy and practices, which are directly related to claiming their rights.
- **Legality** the universally recognized human rights should be harmoniously linked into national and international human rights law.

According to a 2021 study conducted by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), access to basic social services is limited in rural areas of Georgia, particularly in rural settlements. Socially vulnerable and marginalized communities in rural areas often lack access to essential communal services such as centralized water supply, gas supply, sewage and irrigation systems, waste disposal, cleaning, and other services. Access to health services and quality education is also problematic. The study further revealed that the lowest rates of use of social and healthcare services were observed namely in Kvemo Kartli and Samtskhe-Javakheti, with the majority of respondents either not using or unable to access these services:

- Municipal social services: Kvemo Kartli (65%), Samtskhe-Javakheti (63%);
- Municipal health services: Kvemo Kartli (94%), Samtskhe-Javakheti (93%).

¹ European Commission, Applying the Human Rights Based Approach to international partnerships, Brussels, 30.6.2021

 $^{- \}underline{https://international-partnerships.ec.europa.eu/system/files/2021-07/swd-2021-human-right-based-approach_en.pdf}$

The study revealed that a majority of respondents use centralized water supply (78.6%) and over half of them (55.1%) report the presence of a central sewage system in their settlements. Of those interviewed whose settlement has a central sewage system, the majority (95%) stated that their house is connected to the system. However, the study also highlights challenges with using communal infrastructure, as on average one-fifth of the users of central water supply in both Samtskhe-Javakheti (18%) and Kvemo Kartli (20%) reported almost always being dissatisfied with the water supply schedule.

The effective provision of state (central) and municipal services remains a challenge for the population, including those living in Samtskhe-Javakheti and Kvemo Kartli regions. Citizen involvement in local self-government decision-making is also low. According to the index of local self-government, in Kvemo Kartli, citizen participation in the process of local self-government decreased from 28% in 2019 to 15% in 2021. These results are due to the reduction of involvement of citizens in the activities of the City Hall and the City Council, with a decrease from 22% (2019) to 9% (2021) for City Hall and from 47% (2019) to 34% (2021) for City Council. In Samtskhe-Javakheti, the overall assessment of citizen participation has remained unchanged in the past two years (2019 – 15%, 2021 – 15%).

In the region in question, citizen involvement in the activities of the City Hall and the City Council varies. For the City Hall, the percentage of citizen involvement increased from 9% in 2019 to 13% in 2021, while for the City Council, citizen involvement decreased from 37% in 2019 to 21% in 2021. These results indicate that citizens generally do not participate much in the decision-making process, and that civic activism and public involvement are low.

The coronavirus pandemic had an impact on the aforementioned results. Citizen participation in local authorities was hindered by the state of emergency and quarantine measures. According to the 2020 research report "Challenges of Municipal Management During the COVID-19 Pandemic" by the National Association of Local Authorities of Georgia (NALAG) highlighted that tools for citizen engagement, such as the General Assembly of Settlements and the Mayor's Civil Advisory Council, could not work at full capacity during the state of emergency. Convening a General Assembly of Settlements was impossible due to the prohibition of public assembly/gatherings. As for the Advisory Council, due to the suspension of public transport, meetings of the council members became quite challenging. However no problems were identified in the operation of electronic participation tools during the pandemic.²

The need to involve the population arises from the impossibility of providing comprehensive services based solely on the needs and requirements of citizens under the conditions of centralized governance. Therefore, the distribution of authority between the central and local levels becomes particularly important. According to current legislation, various powers are

²National Association of Local Authorities of Georgia (NALAG), "Challenges of Municipal Management During the COVID-19 Pandemic", 2020

delegated to local self-government units. For instance, Article 36 of the Law of Georgia 'On Public Health' describes the delegated services, which include carrying out disinfection works, supervising compliance with sanitary norms in educational and public institutions, and implementing measures against the spread of infectious diseases. The financial resources required for these delegated powers are determined by the Law on the State Budget of Georgia for the relevant year.

In terms of accessing social services, the role of civil society organizations is crucial as they can help meet the needs of the population. The pandemic induced by the coronavirus has exacerbated existing difficulties, particularly for groups like ethnic minorities, people with disabilities, internally displaced individuals, and the elderly. The pandemic has underscored the importance of building a robust local civil society. By actively participating in local policy development and governance, these organizations can contribute to the creation of rights-based policies and ensure equal access to social services for all, especially the most vulnerable members of society.

The study focused on examining the current state of social, healthcare, and communal service provision within specific municipalities of the target regions. Furthermore, the study delved into the operations of civil society organizations and local self-governments, as well as the extent of community involvement in these entities' activities.

Methodology

The objective of this study was to investigate the current state of social service provision in Samtskhe-Javakheti and Kvemo Kartli, as well as to examine the involvement of civil society organizations and local governments in this process. The study assessed the accessibility of various social, healthcare, and communal services for residents in the target municipalities, and also evaluated their engagement, on the one hand, in the activities of local self-governments and, on the other hand, in the activities civil society organizations.

The study included both quantitative and qualitative components.

Quantitative research

The study targeted the regions of Samtskhe-Javakheti and Kvemo Kartli. In Samtskhe-Javakheti, encompassing two municipalities, Akhaltsikhe and Ninotsminda, while in Kvemo Kartli, it included six municipalities: Marneuli, Dmanisi, Bolnisi, Tsalka, Tetritskaro, and Gardabani. The quantitative research was conducted using face-to-face surveys involving individuals aged 18 years or older residing in these target municipalities.

The study employed a probability sampling method, specifically cluster sampling with primary stratification, in the municipalities of the Samtskhe-Javakheti and Kvemo Kartli regions. To achieve a margin of error less than 5% at a 95% confidence level, 600 interviews were conducted in each of the Samtskhe-Javakheti and Kvemo Kartli regions. The number of individuals to be interviewed in each municipality (stratum) was determined in proportion to the municipality's population.

After the stratification process, a clustering process was conducted, which involved identifying primary (PSU), secondary (SSU), and final sampling units (FSU):

- Primary sampling unit: Enumeration districts in rural and urban settlements of municipalities;
- Secondary sampling unit: Household;
- Final sampling unit: Individuals aged 18 years or older.

The selection of households was based on defining the interval between apartments/houses, which varied between rural and urban settlements. For selecting respondents within the households, the probability sampling method was used, specifically the Kish Table method.

A total of 1,200 respondents were interviewed within the scope of the study (see Table A).

Table A

	Number of interviews	Margin of error (95% confidence level)						
Samtskhe-Javakheti								
Akhaltsikhe	380							
Ninotsminda	220							
Total in Samtskhe-Javakheti	600	4%						
	Kvemo Kartli							
Bolnisi	110							
Gardabani	165							
Dmanisi	40							
Tetritskaro	45							
Marneuli	205							
Tsalka	35							
Total in Kvemo Kartli	600	4%						
Total	1200	2.8%						

The survey was carried out using a structured questionnaire. Given the ethnic makeup of the targeted regions, the questionnaires were translated into both Armenian and Azerbaijani languages.

Qualitative research

Focus groups:

As part of the research, eight focus groups were conducted with the population residing in six municipalities of Kvemo Kartli (Marneuli, Gardabani, Tsalka, Tetritskaro, Bolnisi, and Dmanisi) and two municipalities of Samtskhe-Javakheti (Akhaltsikhe, and Ninotsminda). The respondents took part in the focus groups remotely through the "Zoom" platform.

Four focus groups were conducted with ethnic Georgians (Tetritskaro, Dmanisi, Bolnisi, Akhaltsikhe), and 4 with ethnic minorities - Azerbaijanis (Gardabani, Marneuli) and Armenians (Tsalka, Ninotsminda).

The study recruited participants through a pre-designed recruitment form, and individuals had to meet specific eligibility criteria to participate in the focus groups. Specifically, they had to be ethnically Georgian, Armenian, or Azerbaijani and reside in the target municipalities. Half of the participants should have had experience using municipal, social, and health services, with one part being rural residents and the other part urban residents. Around half of the respondents should have belonged to vulnerable social groups, such as socially disadvantaged individuals, persons with disabilities, internally displaced persons,

war veterans, retirees, members of large families, single mothers, and others. In addition to these criteria, the focus groups were composed of individuals from various age groups, employment and marital status, and the gender balance of the participants was maintained. On average, eight respondents participated in each focus group, with a total of 64 local residents being interviewed. One focus group was conducted in each target municipality.

The focus groups lasted for approximately 1 hour and 30 minutes and were recorded using audio and/or video equipment. Prior to the start of the meeting, the participants were informed about the purpose and objectives of the study, as well as the protection of data confidentiality.

In-depth interviews:

17 in-depth expert interviews and 1 group interview were conducted as part of the research. The participants of 8 in-depth interviews were representatives of civil society organizations operating in the target municipalities, while another 8 interviews were conducted with local government representatives. The first interviewee was the head of the Social Protection Policy Department of the Ministry of Labor, Health and Social Affairs of Georgia.

Additionally, a group interview was conducted with representatives from the Agency for State Care and Assistance for the (Statutory) Victims of Human Trafficking, in which social workers from the municipalities of Marneuli, Bolnisi, Akhaltsikhe, and Ninotsminda took part.

In-depth expert interviews lasted approximately 1 hour and were audio/video recorded. Prior to the start of the meeting, the participants were informed about the purpose and objectives of the study, as well as the protection of data confidentiality.

Main findings

Identification of vulnerable people

Representatives of municipalities/local governments in Kvemo Kartli and Samtskhe-Javakheti stated during in-depth interviews that in order to identify vulnerable individuals who are eligible for targeted assistance, they mainly use a "social rating score", which is assigned to a family to measure their degree of social vulnerability. The respondents mentioned that oncology patients are an exception, as they are not required to have a social rating score in order to receive healthcare services.

According to representatives of civil society organizations operating in the target municipalities, inadequate knowledge of the Georgian language can be considered an additional criterion for vulnerability in regions densely populated by non-Georgians. Ethnic minorities who do not know or have limited knowledge of Georgian are in a vulnerable position, which creates problems of communication and integration with society. It was noted that a significant number of ethnic minorities living in Marneuli use Turkish and Azerbaijani sources to obtain information, which further deepens their alienation in Georgia. The low level of integration, in turn, gives rise to phenomena related to deprivation, such as unemployment, poverty, emigration, and so on. Social workers in the Kvemo Kartli region identified minor Azerbaijani girls as vulnerable individuals, due to the fact that the local community and tradition oblige them to marry early, which deprives them of the opportunity for education and economic independence.

Social and economic challenges of the population

According to representatives from the civil sector, many ethnic minorities express a desire to learn the Georgian language, but there are few opportunities available through public or free programs (such as the 1+4 program). The state program only serves non-Georgian youth who wish to receive higher education. In qualitative research, in particular in focus groups, the main social and economic problems identified were unemployment, poverty, increased prices of basic necessities such as food and medicine, and rising utility bills. Working-age individuals from ethnic minorities, especially young people, often seek employment and opportunities for self-realization abroad. Additionally, ethnically Georgian youth often choose to migrate to Tbilisi, especially those with higher education.

According to the assessment of one part of ethnic minorities who participated in the focus groups, they have fewer opportunities for employment compared to Georgians. The main reason for this is their lower degree of social integration, which is primarily due to their poor or lack of knowledge of the Georgian language.

In the focus groups, the main sources of income for the population were identified as wages earned from employment in both public and private services and state social assistance.

Socially vulnerable individuals participating in the discussions noted that they often seek informal employment opportunities, as formal employment may lead to the loss of their socially vulnerable status and result in a loss of a small but stable income.

As a rule, those in vulnerable situations lack the necessary knowledge, qualifications, and connections to find jobs that offer adequate pay.

Quantitative research data indicates that the population in the target regions is economically vulnerable, both subjectively and based on objective indicators such as family income. In particular, up to 70% of respondents in Samtskhe-Javakheti and every second respondent in Kvemo Kartli reported using their income only for basic needs like food and clothing. According to National Statistics Office data, the average family size in these regions is around 4 members, and the subsistence minimum for such families is approximately 340 GEL per month. Based on the mean family incomes (determined at 1070 GEL in Samtskhe-Javakheti and at 893 GEL in Kvemo Kartli), it can be concluded that most of the population in the target regions earn above the subsistence minimum, although their incomes do not reach the average level of economic well-being.

The results of the quantitative survey indicate that there is a higher proportion of employed people (45%) in the population of Samtskhe-Javakheti compared to the population of Kvemo Kartli (35%), including those who are self-employed. On the other hand, the proportion of unemployed people is higher in Kvemo Kartli (21%) compared to Samtskhe-Javakheti (16%). It is worth noting that these figures are in line with the 2021 data from the National Statistics Office, where the unemployment rate in Kvemo Kartli was reported to be 25% and in Samtskhe-Javakheti - 15%.

The quantitative survey results indicate that 6% of the respondents in Samtskhe-Javakheti and 18% of the respondents in Kvemo Kartli have socially vulnerable family status. Moreover, 0.5% of respondents in Samtskhe-Javakheti and 3% of respondents in Kvemo Kartli reported that their families have the status of internally displaced persons.

The impact of Covid-19 on the population

The focus groups revealed that the Covid-19 pandemic had a significant adverse impage the lon the economic situation of the population, particularly for those employed in the service sector. However, other areas were also negatively affected, including: a) agriculture, due to difficulties in selling products, and b) education, due to the decrease in the quality of education resulting from the shift to distance learning.

The focus group participants who are in vulnerable positions mentioned that they received one-time assistance from the local government during the pandemic, such as monetary aid and provision of food through local delivery, among others.

Generally, these vulnerable individuals expressed satisfaction with the attention and support provided by local authorities during the Covid-19 pandemic. However, some respondents noted that their needs were greater than what was provided by the government assistance during the pandemic.

Education

The quantitative research showed that in most of the municipalities studied, there are functioning pre-school and general education institutions, including public kindergartens (74%) and public schools (98%). However, the rate of use of these institutions is not high, possibly due to the fact that the families of the respondents who were interviewed do not have children of pre-school or school age. This trend remains the same when looking at the issue regionally. It is important to note that in Kvemo Kartli, the presence of public kindergartens is reported by a much smaller number (64%) compared to Samtskhe-Javakheti (84%). The rate of public kindergarten services is 18% in Samtskhe-Javakheti and 14% in Kvemo Kartli. Meanwhile, in Samtskhe-Javakheti, 41% of respondents use public school services, while in Kvemo Kartli, the figure is 44%. The majority of respondents who use public kindergartens or public schools are satisfied with the service.

In contrast to pre-school and general educational institutions, the majority of respondents reported that there are neither vocational schools (59%) nor state-funded higher education institutions (68%) in their municipality/city. Samtskhe-Javakheti stands out more than Kvemo Kartli in terms of professional and higher education institutions. Although the number of users is small (vocational school - 2.7%, N=13; higher education institution - 8%, N=24), most of them are satisfied (vocational school - N=8, higher education institution - N=15). Among the causes of dissatisfaction, the following were identified in some cases: qualifications of teachers, shortage of training programs, irrelevant training programs, governance, bureaucracy, and fees.

Awareness of municipal services

In the focus groups, several main sources of information about municipal services were mentioned: mass media, particularly local TV and radio broadcasters, social media platforms like Facebook, official websites of municipalities, and informal connections (exchange of information between relatives, neighbors, etc.).

However, there appears to be a lack of information about social and health services, especially among ethnic minorities like Azerbaijanis and Armenians, due to language barriers and less integration compared to Georgians.

In the quantitative research, only 17% of respondents reported having information about women's rooms, and 5% of them reported not using this service (3% in Samtskhe-Javakheti and 8% in Kvemo Kartli). The low level of awareness about this service may be attributed to

the fact that most respondents do not personally know anyone who has used women's rooms (73%).

Social services

The quantitative survey revealed that a significant majority of respondents (81%) do not use municipal social services, while a much smaller proportion (26%) do not use state (central) services. This trend is consistent across both the Samtskhe-Javakheti and Kvemo Kartli regions. The percentage of respondents not using any municipal social services is high in both regions, with 88% in Samtskhe-Javakheti and 75% in Kvemo Kartli. Regarding state services, approximately an equal number of respondents in Samtskhe-Javakheti (24%) and Kvemo Kartli (29%) reported non-use. Among the municipal social services used, as reported by the research participants, one-time (monetary or other) assistance (6%) and the support program for socially vulnerable children and newborns (4%) were most common. In terms of state (central) services, the most frequently used were the old-age pension (29%). state medical insurance (20%), and utility subsidies (18%). Overall, respondents generally receive timely assistance from both municipal and central services and, therefore, express general satisfaction with the services provided. The average satisfaction rate is 63% for municipal services and 70% for state (central) services. In terms of registration procedures for state services, the process of receiving pensions for persons with disabilities (including children) was identified as a significant challenge in both Samtskhe-Javakheti and Kvemo Kartli. In these regions, 27% and 33% of respondents respectively reported the registration procedure as very difficult or difficult.

Health services

According to the results of the quantitative research, the majority of respondents in both Samtskhe-Javakheti and Kvemo Kartli regions do not use municipal (89%) or state healthcare services (54%). This trend is consistent across both regions. A high percentage of respondents do not use any municipal services (94% in Samtskhe-Javakheti and 85% in Kvemo Kartli) or state healthcare services (61% in Samtskhe-Javakheti and 47% in Kvemo Kartli). The research showed that respondents highlighted free medicine provision (7%) as an important municipal service, and village doctors (19%) and emergency care (14%) as important state services. Respondents generally receive health services on time and are satisfied with the services provided at both the municipal (average rate - 65%) and state level (average rate - 72%). However, there were identified problems with rehabilitation and mental health services for children with autism spectrum disorder. The registration procedures for these services were found to be complicated, and the level of satisfaction of the respondents was low.

The focus groups showed that the representatives of the target municipalities are generally satisfied with the services of the municipal social and health services. Going through the existing procedures for obtaining them is not associated with significant difficulties.

Social and health care needs and challenges

The focus groups revealed that access to consultation from qualified medical specialists is one of the important needs of the population of the target municipalities. Availability of essential medicines was also identified as another need especially among respondents in vulnerable situations.

The focus group participants who had used municipal health services highlighted that postoperative rehabilitation is not covered by financing and that it poses significant financial challenges for the population.

It is evident from the research that there is a need to introduce specific services in municipalities to ensure the early development of children. Participants emphasized the need for speech therapist services, and there is also a demand for psychologists and occupational therapists for students with special educational needs. Additionally, families with many children require support in providing school supplies for their children.

The participants of the focus groups consider it important that the existing needs that are not currently being addressed by the municipal programs, should be taken into account in the future and funds should be allocated in the budget to address these needs.

It is worth noting that the majority of ethnic minority representatives who participated in the focus groups did not encounter any issues when accessing social and health services. However, during the focus groups conducted with ethnic minorities, it was expressed that these services are more easily accessible to Georgians than other ethnic groups. The primary reason for this is a lack of knowledge of the Georgian language or poor language skills. Respondents noted that older generations are more likely to face unequal access due to their lack of proficiency in Georgian. To receive services, applicants must fill out applications and provide documentation in Georgian, which can be challenging for ethnic minorities without the assistance of a Georgian language expert. Ethnic Georgians who participated in the focus groups found it difficult to discuss equal access to services as this issue did not pertain to them.

According to the in-depth interviews with representatives of the local authorities in the target municipalities, a part of the population that does not have a formal social vulnerability status (due to the lack of a corresponding rating score) actually needs various forms of assistance, particularly in the areas of employment and healthcare services. The current budget allocated for healthcare services is insufficient to fully meet the needs of the population, and there is a need to increase the municipal budget. This is particularly important for the provision of medical treatment during/in the postoperative period.

Social workers working in Kvemo Kartli noted that a barrier/obstacle in receiving services is created by the multitude of procedures that citizens have to go through to receive services. Representatives of local authorities have noted that the population prefers to submit an application for receiving financial assistance rather than expressing their desire to receive any specific service.

Neither local government nor civil sector representatives can any specific standards or guidelines that exist in the municipalities regarding social services, healthcare, infrastructure, education, and communal areas. According to them, municipalities do not follow written guidelines and instead, they act spontaneously, striving to assist the population as much as possible according to their ad hoc developed plan.

Other social problems

In the focus groups, the issue of young people's unproductive use of free time was highlighted as a concern. The support of the local government was identified as important in addressing this problem. Participants suggested that the municipality could assist outstanding and motivated young people through co-financing education, providing housing, and other forms of support.

The focus group participants suggested that municipalities should develop employment promotion programs such as contacting potential employers and organizing employment forums, etc. The respondents stressed that these activities should not have a formal character but rather be focused on achieving real results.

Communal infrastructure

The results of the quantitative research show that the vast majority of respondents (97%) have access to 24-hour **electricity** supply, with Samtskhe-Javakheti at 98% and Kvemo Kartli at 93%. Furthermore, the capacity of the electricity supply is reported to be satisfactory in both winter and other seasons.

The research shows that in the surveyed settlements, the **central gas pipeline** is mainly in operation (79% in Samtskhe-Javakheti and 88% in Kvemo Kartli). Most respondents are supplied with gas from the centralized system. However, for settlements without access to the central gas pipeline, a large proportion of respondents reported using gas cylinders throughout the year. Overall, the gas supply service was generally evaluated positively, with 78% of respondents reporting satisfaction (78% in Samtskhe-Javakheti and 78% in Kvemo Kartli).

More than half (53%) of the respondents in the quantitative research use tap water in their houses/apartments for household water supply (Samtskhe-Javakheti - 58%, Kvemo Kartli - 48%). More than a tenth of respondents use common tap water from a water company

located outside their house. Notably, every fifth respondent in Samtskhe-Javakheti uses water from the common tap of the water company located outside the house, while in Kvemo Kartli, the figure is only 7%. In Kvemo Kartli, wells are mostly used for water supply (19%), while in Samtskhe-Javakheti, less than 1% of respondents use wells. 48% of the respondents reported that drinking water does not come continuously (Samtskhe-Javakheti - 39%, Kvemo Kartli - 58%) and that the quality of the water is often poor (38%). However, the amount of water received for household use was assessed as sufficient, and the water fee was considered affordable.

The study found that in most settlements (72%), the centralized irrigation system is not functioning (85% in Samtskhe-Javakheti and 67% in Kvemo Kartli). However, among those who do receive the service, the system is considered to be working properly by 67% of them. As a result, their level of satisfaction with the service is relatively high, at 45% (44% in Samtskhe-Javakheti and 45% in Kvemo Kartli).

Similar to the irrigation system, the majority of respondents indicated the absence of a **central sewage system** (65%) (Samtskhe-Javakheti - 52%, Kvemo Kartli - 78%). The houses of 90% of the respondents with positive experience are connected to the mentioned system (Samtskhe-Javakheti - 96%, Kvemo Kartli - 77%). The system is generally assessed as functioning properly. Therefore, the majority of users are satisfied with the centralized sewage system (71%) (Samtskhe-Javakheti - 78%, Kvemo Kartli - 52%). (Samtskhe-Javakheti - 78%, Kvemo Kartli - 52%).

Ninety-two percent of the respondents have reported that collection and transportation of solid waste is carried out in their settlement/district (99% in Samtskhe-Javakheti and 85% in Kvemo Kartli). Additionally, almost one-third of the respondents indicated that waste is collected and transported daily with 34% in Samtskhe-Javakheti and 29% in Kvemo Kartli. Of those who use the service, 73% respondents expressed satisfaction with the collection and transportation of solid waste service.

One-third of the respondents reported that the streets in their settlement/neighborhood are cleaned, with 42% of them stating that it is done on a daily basis. In comparison to Kvemo Kartli (20%), Samtskhe-Javakheti (48%) has a higher rate of practicing street cleaning. Among the users of this service, 75% expressed satisfaction with it (79% in Samtskhe-Javakheti and 64% in Kvemo Kartli). The main reasons for dissatisfaction were the quality of service, compliance with hygiene norms, and frequency.

Focus groups conducted in all eight municipalities have indicated a general perception that the utility and road infrastructure have seen improvements in recent years. However, despite these advancements, certain problems were identified. Addressing these issues would significantly enhance the overall living conditions of the local population. For instance, a dysfunctional irrigation water system is a major concern for those engaged in agriculture, significantly impeding agricultural development. Additionally, a dysfunctional sewage system poses a significant problem, placing some settlements at risk of environmental threats.

The participants in focus groups conducted across all eight municipalities raised concerns about the lack of accessibility for people with disabilities in public facilities/spaces. Many respondents noted that while some newly built public institutions have been adapted for people with limited mobility, they are unsure to what extent the adaptation complies with existing standards, as they have not seen any individual with disabilities using these facilities.

Climate change and its resulting health problems

The majority of survey participants (71%) reported being aware of climate change, with slightly higher awareness in Samtskhe-Javakheti (74%) than in Kvemo Kartli (68%). Respondents identified the increased frequency of droughts, rains, and winds as the primary indicators of environmental change. In Kvemo Kartli, the increased frequency of droughts is prevalent (27%), while in Samtskhe-Javakheti increased frequency of winds is dominant (24%).

According to the majority of respondents, climate change does not cause negative health-related consequences such as the spread of various infections, the emergence or spread of viral diseases, an increase in cancer, or mortality. However, about one-third of the respondents believe that climate change causes an increase in heart disease (32%) and stroke (31%) due to a negatively changed environment.

The majority of respondents (60%) consider climate change to be an important issue for their region (49% in Samtskhe-Javakheti and 72% in Kvemo Kartli). However, it is worth noting that approximately every fifth person interviewed in Samtskhe-Javakheti evaluates environmental changes as insignificant.

Settlement planning / public improvements

A significant portion of the respondents (39%) expressed dissatisfaction with the planning of their settlement. The dissatisfaction was more pronounced among respondents from Kvemo Kartli (43%) than from Samtskhe-Javakheti (35%). The main reasons for their dissatisfaction were the poor condition of roads and sidewalks, the lack of public squares and sports facilities. Furthermore, it appears that the needs of people with disabilities were not adequately addressed in settlement planning, as according to 56% of respondents, there is either no environment adapted for people with disabilities, or they are unaware if such an environment exists (62% in Samtskhe-Javakheti and 50% in Kvemo Kartli). The lack of ramps, buildings not adapted for accessibility, and transportation issues for wheelchair users are among the noted problems.

Safety and security

According to respondents, their settlement's population is generally safe (58%) (62% in Samtskhe-Javakheti, 54% in Kvemo Kartli). Respondents largely report the absence of burglary (66%), drug use (59%), minor hooliganism (57%), domestic violence (61%), and early marriages (67%) in their living environment. Alcohol consumption, however, has the lowest reported absence rate (37%). This trend remains consistent even when examined in the regional context, with the majority indicating that these practices are not prevalent in their settlements. Notably, alcohol consumption appears to be more common in Kvemo Kartli (31%) compared to Samtskhe-Javakheti (13%). In most instances, the police are identified as the primary source of security. However, according to a third of respondents, the community itself plays a substantial role in maintaining order. This is more pronounced in Samtskhe-Javakheti (35%) compared to Kvemo Kartli (26%). Additionally, in Samtskhe-Javakheti, district elders are recognized as an alternative security source (4%), a sentiment less commonly shared in Kvemo Kartli (1%).

Electronic services

The survey results indicate that the vast majority of respondents do not utilize either state or municipal electronic services. Specifically, 90% of respondents in both Samtskhe-Javakheti and Kvemo Kartli regions reported not using state electronic services (cadastral database, information about property/income, etc.), while 96% of respondents do not use municipal electronic services (97% in Samtskhe-Javakheti, and 96% in Kvemo Kartli). However, among those who do use municipal electronic services, most have used the website of the Municipality's Mayor's Office and the Sakrebulo. Overall, most respondents who use electronic services express satisfaction with the services provided at both state and municipal levels, although the proportion of satisfied individuals is higher for state services (83%) compared to municipal e-services (64%).

Involvement of citizens in the process of making local self-government decisions

According to 40% of the respondents, citizens do not participate in the decision-making process at the local self-government level. The level of non-participation is much higher in Kvemo Kartli (53%) compared to Samtskhe-Javakheti (27%). On the other hand, at least every fourth respondent (27%) indicates that the said process does not meet the demands and needs of the population, with Samtskhe-Javakheti at 16% and Kvemo Kartli at 37%. However, they would like to see: a) more frequent meetings with the population; b) more funds allocated to solve the municipality's problems; and c) more information provided to the population on current processes. According to the assessment of every third respondent, measures aimed at increasing the involvement of ethnic minority representatives in the decision-making process of the local government are generally not being carried out.

During the qualitative research, it was found that in all focus groups there were participants who were unaware of the various forms of participation available in local government.

Some focus group participants expressed the view that the government lacks the willingness and desire to involve the population in the decision-making process. The main reason for non-participation, according to these participants, is a lack of awareness. They noted that the population does not have enough information about their rights, specifically how and in what ways they can be involved in the activities of the local government.

Respondents in a vulnerable position noted that, considering their challenging social and economic circumstances, they lack both the opportunity and the motivation to engage in the activities of the municipality.

It is worth noting that one of the significant obstacles to the rural population's engagement in local politics is the long distance to the city center. Additionally, a language barrier and a generally low level of integration were identified as contributing factors to the exclusion of ethnic minorities from participation. The marginalization of ethnic minorities from public life is one of the significant issues.

During in-depth interviews, representatives of the local government confirmed that the participation of the population in the decision-making process is low, with ethnic minority representatives and women being particularly passive. In the case of ethnic minorities, the reason for such low participation is their lack of knowledge or inadequate knowledge of the Georgian language.

Communication with local self-government structures

The results of the quantitative survey indicated that the population's communication with local self-government bodies is low, with the majority of respondents (82%) not having contacted them in the past 2 years to address specific issues (84% in Samtskhe-Javakheti and 80% in Kvemo Kartli). In contrast, there have been some cases during past 2 years where people have reached out to the municipality to address various issues such as improving the environment for vulnerable groups (persons with disabilities, children, elderly, homeless, internally displaced persons), infrastructural problems (gas supply, water supply, electricity, etc.), social issues (social assistance, unemployment, etc.), and issues related to healthcare services. However, it is imperative to note that 40% of respondents reported that local self-government did not resolve any of these problems.

Representatives of the civil sector also attribute the lack of population inclusion to the municipal government's responsibility, as they often fail to provide timely announcements about meetings. Even if such announcements are made, only a narrow circle of people are informed, as direct communication channels with the population are limited and formal channels (such as municipal websites) are underutilized. As a result, transparency regarding the preparation and spending of municipal budgets remains a significant concern for the civil sector. As a result, the transparency of both the preparation and spending of municipal budgets remains a significant concern for the civil sector.

The representatives of the local authorities, such as the Akhaltsikhe municipality, have stated that the system of social services has been digitized, providing residents the opportunity to submit an application and receive a response without visiting the office. However, there are challenges associated with electronic communication skills and access to appropriate technical support, especially in settlements with a higher population of elderly people.

Participation in public activities

Over the past year, the majority of respondents (57%) did not participate in any civic or public activities. This was especially prominent in Samtskhe-Javakheti (65%) and to a lesser extent in Kvemo Kartli (50%). The reasons for not participating varied and included a lack of time, the feeling that their activity would not bring any changes, etc.

Satisfaction with the work of local self-government bodies

Based on the existing experience, 39% of interviewees expressed satisfaction with the work of self-government bodies (48% in Samtskhe-Javakheti and 30% in Kvemo Kartli). However, some problems were identified, such as the level of qualification of employees, nepotism, and passive communication with the population, etc.

According to the regression model, respondents who: a) reside in urban areas; b) belong to the older age group; c) have requested health care services from the local self-government within the past 2 years; and d) participated in the general meeting of their community in the last year, tend to express higher levels of satisfaction with the municipality's activities.

Cooperation with civil society organizations

The majority of respondents in the quantitative survey (94%) reported that they did not have any information about civil organizations operating in their municipality, with 91% in Samtskhe-Javakheti and 96% in Kvemo Kartli. The majority of the respondents who were informed about civil organizations (59%) believed that the local population participated in their activities. However, none of the respondents reported having used the services provided by civil society organizations over the past year. The main reason for this as reported was that they did not have a need for such services. On the other hand, it was revealed that the informed respondents mostly use social services (19%), although notably, this experience was not shared by those interviewed in Kvemo Kartli. It was found that a majority of informed respondents, who were aware of civil organizations and their activities, perceived them as aligned with the demands and needs of citizens, and expressed satisfaction with their work (73% overall, with 89% in Samtskhe-Javakheti and 58% in Kvemo Kartli).

The focus group discussions also revealed that the participants had limited information about civil society organizations operating in the target regions. The respondents had mostly heard

about organizations that provide material assistance to needy families, and offer to ethnic minorities Georgian language courses, legal services, etc.

The participants of the focus groups generally gave positive feedback about the activities of civil society organizations as a whole. However, representatives from ethnic minorities also highlighted negative aspects of the activities of civil society organizations and noted that trust in some organizations is low, because they perceive the Azerbaijani community as "backward" due to its religious identity. Additionally, some respondents mentioned that certain segments of the population view civil society organizations as opposition to the government, and therefore avoid collaborating with them.

According to the focus group participants, the activities of civil society organizations should primarily focus on solving the problems of the local population. They emphasized the importance of civil society organizations strengthening their collaboration with mayors and municipal councils, and offering new ideas and solutions to address existing issues.

Chapter 1. Socio-economic situation of the population Identification of vulnerable people

In the framework of in-depth interviews with representatives of the local government of the Kvemo Kartli region, the types/categories of vulnerable people were defined. The respondents mentioned that they mainly use the so-called "social rating score" to determine the degree of vulnerability of families. The aid package includes two categories - social assistance and health program services. The social assistance is provided to elderly and lonely people, socially vulnerable individuals/families, orphaned and unaccompanied children, large families, war veterans, and displaced persons. The health care program services are provided to persons with serious and chronic diseases, persons in need of dialysis, persons with acute and significant disabilities, blind people, and people with oncological diseases.

The vulnerable groups identified by representatives of civil society organizations in the Samtskhe-Javakheti region include elderly individuals living alone, people with disabilities, ethnic minorities, and eco-migrants, who are families or individuals affected by natural disasters.

According to the representatives of the local government of Akhaltsikhe municipality, assistance is offered through the healthcare program, while social assistance is determined based on the rating score of social vulnerability as well as the status of the person, such as being a person with disabilities.

"The provision of healthcare assistance is highly determined by the rating score, while assistance in other areas is not solely based on the score, but also on other factors. For instance, if a person has a disability status, we provide them with monthly or quarterly financial assistance, in which case the score is not a determining factor/ the score has nothing to do with it." (representative of the local government from Akhaltsikhe).

Local government representatives in Akhaltsikhe municipality consider people who require regular support from the state as vulnerable individuals. According to the respondents, all programs in municipalities have specific criteria that determine who is classified as a vulnerable person. For instance, for individuals with oncological diseases, it is not necessary to rely on the Social Vulnerability Rating Score offered by the municipality.

The representatives of Gardabani municipality and civil society organizations in Kvemo Kartli consider members of ethnic minorities to be a vulnerable group due to the fact that a significant number of them do not speak or understand the Georgian language properly, which presents a major challenge for them.

"Ethnic minorities are facing a big challenge. The fact that they do not know the state language creates many problems" (Youth Center - Gardabani Municipality).

Social workers in Marneuli municipality have the same position - they consider ethnic minorities especially ethnic minority girls, and particularly minors, as vulnerable people. They are often forced into early marriages, depriving them of the opportunity to receive an education and live independently.

"I would certainly include ethnic minorities in vulnerable groups, specifically young girls who are forced to marry at an early age. And then they lose all the opportunity to live independently and receive an education" (social worker).

Revenues

In the focus groups conducted in all municipalities, the following sources of income were mainly identified:

- Remuneration of persons employed in public institutions, such as labor compensation received by employees in educational and medical institutions, municipal services, law enforcement agencies, etc.;
- Social benefits received from the state, such as old-age pension, social assistance, person with disabilitis pension, war veteran's pension, municipal one-time monetary benefits, etc.

"The main source of income for me is social assistance, as I have three minor children, and that's the reason we receive it. I don't have any other means of income." (34-year-old woman, socially vulnerable, ethnically Georgian, Akhaltsikhe)

Among the respondents, there were also those **who are employed in private companies.** Participants in the focus groups conducted with the population of Bolnisi, Tetritskaro, and Dmanisi municipalities noted that a portion of the able-bodied population is employed by the mining company RMG, which operates in these municipalities. Thus, for some families, the salary earned from employment with this company is their main source of income.

For a small portion of the respondents, their source of income comes from **remittances** sent by a family member from abroad. Representatives of ethnic minorities placed particular emphasis on the financial aid they receive from emigrants.

The rural population earns income from the sale of agricultural products. According to the people of Dmanisi, animal husbandry is especially developed in their municipality. In Gardabani and Marneuli municipalities, which are close to big cities like Tbilisi and Rustavi, the sale of agricultural products is significantly higher. In Ninotsminda, potato farming is the

main source of income. However, since agricultural income is seasonal, the socioeconomic situation of families involved in agriculture is often unstable.

The vulnerable individuals who participated in the focus groups mainly rely on social assistance provided by the state. They mentioned that they engage in informal, one-time activities whenever possible, as becoming officially employed would result in losing their socially vulnerable status and the small but stable income that comes with it. Those with socially vulnerable status typically work in positions such as cleaners, builders, loaders, and drivers. They believe that they would not be able to find a job that would make them give up their socially vulnerable status. Generally, individuals in vulnerable situations lack the necessary knowledge, qualifications, and connections to secure a job with adequate pay.

Internally displaced persons from the Tskhinvali region, who settled in the village of Koda in Tetritskaro municipality following the 2008 Russian-Georgian war, are facing particularly challenging social and economic circumstances. As per their assessment, a majority of them had a profession and a job while residing in the Tskhinvali region, but upon resettling in Koda, they were unable to secure similar employment opportunities.

"Most of them were employed in Tskhinvali. For example, they worked in schools, sports schools and so on. However, when we left, the schools here were already full, so many of those employed in Tskhinvali were unable to find work and became unemployed" (63-year-old woman, employed, Tetritskaro Municipality)

Notably, internally displaced persons lack access to agricultural plots, preventing them from growing their own agricultural produce even for personal consumption.

The income levels, and consequently the economic status, of the respondents' families were also evaluated as part of the quantitative survey.

The economic situation of the respondents was gauged using two approaches - qualitatively (through verbal responses) and quantitatively.

The qualitative assessment identified three dominant categories, each with an average rate of 28%:

- We have enough money for food 28.6%;
- We have enough money for food, but need to save or borrow money to buy clothes and shoes - 29.8%;
- We have enough money for food, basic clothing and shoes, but need to save or borrow money to buy nice clothes, a mobile phone, a vacuum cleaner and other household appliances - 27.1% (see table #2).

Table #2

Now I will introduce you to some provisions. Please indicate which phrase best describes yo family's situation? (N=1200)		
We have enough money for food	28.6%	
We have enough money for food, but need to save or borrow money to buy clothes and shoes	29.8%	
We have enough money for food, basic clothing and shoes, but need to save or borrow money to buy nice clothes, a mobile phone, a vacuum cleaner and other household appliances	27.1%	
We have enough money for food, basic clothing and shoes, but need to save or borrow money to buy a car or an apartment	11.3%	
We can buy anything we want at any moment	1.1%	
Prefer not to answer / I find it difficult to answer	2.2%	

In Samtskhe-Javakheti, more than a third of respondents (37.7%) reported that their family primarily spends money on food, while in Kvemo Kartli only 19.5% reported the same. In Kvemo Kartli, more than a third of respondents (33.3%) indicated that they have enough money for food, basic clothing, and shoes, but need to save or borrow money to purchase items such as good quality clothes, mobile phones, vacuum cleaners, and other household appliances. Meanwhile, 31.2% of respondents in Samtskhe-Javakheti reported having enough money for food but needing to save or borrow to buy clothes and shoes. A similar position was shared by 28.4% of respondents in Kvemo Kartli (see table #3).

Table #3

Now I will introduce you to some provisions. Please tell me which phrase best describes your family? (in terms of regions)	Samtskhe- Javakheti (N=600)	Kvemo Kartli (N=600)
We have enough money for food	37.7%	19.5%
We have enough money for food, but need to save or borrow money to buy clothes and shoes	31.2%	28.4%
We have enough money for food, basic clothing and shoes, but need to save or borrow money to buy nice clothes, a mobile phone, a vacuum cleaner and other household appliances	19.3%	34.9%
We have enough money for food, basic clothing and shoes, but need to save or borrow money to buy a car or an apartment	10.2%	12.3%
We can buy anything we want at any moment	0.8%	1.4%
Prefer not to answer / I find it difficult to answer	0.8%	3.5%

29.9% of the respondents either found it difficult to determine their monthly family income or refused to provide a specific amount. For those who did provide specific information, the

mean and median monthly family income indices were calculated. The mean monthly income for families was determined to be 983 GEL (1070 GEL in Samtskhe-Javakheti and 893 GEL in Kvemo Kartli). The median monthly household income was 700 GEL (805 GEL in Samtskhe-Javakheti and 600 GEL in Kvemo Kartli).

The quantitative research data indicate that the population in the target regions is economically vulnerable, based on both subjective perception and objective indicators such as family incomes. The majority of respondents in Samtskhe-Javakheti (up to 70%) consider their family's income sufficient to meet basic needs (food, clothing), while in Kvemo Kartli, every second interviewee has the same perception. However, when considering specific incomes, two factors should be taken into account: the average number of family members and the subsistence minimum. According to the National Statistics Service, the average family size in Samtskhe-Javakheti and Kvemo Kartli regions is about 4 members, and the subsistence minimum for this family size is approximately 340 GEL per month. When evaluating mean family incomes in this context, it can be concluded that the majority of the population in the target regions have incomes that exceed the subsistence minimum, although they fall short of the average level of economic status.³

Expenses

The expenses of the participants in the focus groups were found to be similar. The income available to families is mainly used to cover basic needs, such as:

- Food and groceries;
- Utility bills;
- Medications;
- Primary necessities (clothing, equipment, etc.);
- Bank loan/mortgage fee;
- Higher education tuition fees.

" This month's electricity bill came to 110 GEL. I had to resort to using the electric stove as I did not have any firewood. I am now trying to figure out how to pay this bill." (32-year-old woman, single mother, ethnically Armenian, Tsalka);

"My eldest daughter is enrolled in a paid faculty at Tbilisi State University. This is a considerable expense for us. Our second daughter is graduating from school this year, and we are preparing for her to follow in her sister's footsteps, which will further increase our expenses." (52-year-old woman, housewife, ethnically Armenian, Ninotsminda);

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³ The official information about the average monthly salary, which, according to the data of 2022, amounts to approximately 1450 GEL per month gives us an idea of the average level of economic conditions. see https://www.geostat.ge/ka/modules/categories/39/khelfasebi

"For example, I currently rely on my salary, but it is no longer sufficient to cover our expenses. When you go to the grocery store, prices have not just increased by 100%, but by 150%." (44-year-old woman, employed, mother of 4 children, ethnically Georgian, Dmanisi);

"I have diabetes and I spend money mostly on medicines, and I have no income because I am a pensioner and daily life is difficult, food is very expensive" (63year-old man, war veteran, ethnic Azerbaijani, Marneuli).

The rural population who engage in agricultural production face additional costs in acquiring the resources needed for cultivation, which poses a significant challenge for farmers. Respondents have particularly noted the significant increase in fuel prices, which has hindered their ability to carry out spring work effectively.

"Hay is very expensive, and fuel has become very expensive, now we need the tractor to work for sowing. The arable period has begun. This is our biggest expense" (62-year-old man, self-employed, ethnically Armenian, Tsalka).

Current challenges

During the focus group discussions on the social and economic situation, the participants highlighted unemployment as one of the major issues facing the population. The problem is particularly severe for young people who are unable to find opportunities for growth and development within their municipalities. Representatives of ethnic minorities shared that the working population, particularly young people, often seek employment abroad. For instance, ethnic Armenians primarily travel to Russian Federation, where the strong Armenian diaspora can assist them in finding employment.

Ethnic Georgian youth tend to migrate to Tbilisi in search of better opportunities. Those who receive higher education strive to establish themselves in the capital. However, some respondents who are employed expressed dissatisfaction with their low wages, as they are unable to meet their basic needs with their current level of pay.

"For instance, my sister studied psychology and was offered a job at a local school, but the offered salary was so low that she found it amusing. She said she would not consider returning for such low pay. She prefers to work in a different field unrelated to her profession." (35-year-old woman, employed, ethnically Georgian, Akhaltsikhe).

According to the feedback provided by some ethnic minority participants in the focus groups, they face fewer employment opportunities in comparison to the Georgian population. This is

primarily due to their lower degree of social integration, which in its turn, is due to their inadequate or nonexistent knowledge of the Georgian language. Another crucial concern raised by the focus group participants is the recent surge in the prices of essential goods. As a result of this price increase, they find it difficult to meet the basic needs of their families, such as food and medicines, with their current income levels.

"Everything has become more expensive, our income is not enough for anything, our salary is the same as 5 years ago, but the prices have tripled" (25-year-old woman, student, ethnically Georgian, Akhaltsikhe).

The increased utility bills are another important issue that adds to the financial burden of the population.

Representatives of the local government in Kvemo Kartli have identified two main problems that are the main concern for the indigenous population, and not only for the vulnerable population. These are unemployment and inadequate funding for healthcare services. During in-depth interviews, civil society organization representatives in the Samtskhe-Javakheti region highlighted that social services targeted towards vulnerable individuals are not effective enough, posing a significant challenge. Furthermore, the limited number of social workers remains a problematic issue.

"Armenian population needs home care, they have problems with physical movement, these programs are weak, we need professional social workers who will correctly convey information and empower people in need." (Association "Tolerant" - Samtskhe-Javakheti region).

According to the local government representatives of Bolnisi municipality in the in-depth interviews, the health services have the largest budget. Nevertheless, they mentioned that this budget volume is not sufficient to fulfill the needs of the population. They face challenges in fully financing the medical operations of people with diverse medical needs and subsequently providing them with necessary medicines.

"Based on my work experience, healthcare is a top priority for the population. It receives the most attention and the largest share of the budget, although it is still insufficient" (representative of Bolnisi City Hall).

According to representatives of the local government in the Bolnisi municipality, improvements in healthcare services are necessary in several areas, including increasing the financing for expensive operations, adding oxygen machines, and financing magnetic resonance research through the municipal budget.

Representatives of civil society organizations have highlighted that inadequate knowledge or a complete lack of knowledge of the Georgian language is a significant issue for the local population (except for persons in a vulnerable situation). The respondents note that the locals have a strong desire to learn the Georgian language, but they face significant obstacles in doing so.

"The locals want to learn Georgian. They enjoy living here. They have all the necessary conditions for a good quality of life. However, to fully settle down and integrate, they require proficiency in the Georgian language." (Inter-Ethnic Unity of Kvemo Kartli - Bolnisi).

The issue of not knowing the Georgian language was also raised by social workers in Marneuli, who noted that ethnic minorities face challenges in integrating into Georgian society due to language barriers. According to respondents, many ethnic minorities in Marneuli rely on Turkish and Azerbaijani sources for information, which further contributes to their sense of alienation from Georgian society.

"They are unable to integrate into Georgian society due to the language barrier. I have ethnically Azerbaijani neighbors who physically live in Georgia, but they are more informed about the life of Azerbaijani and Turkish society than Georgian' (social worker).

Representatives of civil society organizations in Kvemo Kartli have highlighted the issue of unemployment as a major challenge for local youth – "they often graduate from higher education but struggle to find jobs" (Orgaization of Inter-Ethnic Unity of Kvemo Kartli).

Social workers in Bolnisi municipality also highlighted the issue of employment as an acute problem. Unemployment creates a serious problem for a part of the local population in meeting their basic needs, such as, for example, food.

"Employment is a big problem, people have no income. Part of the population lives only on bread and soup. People don't have food, people are starving around us" (social worker).

According to a representative from Bolnisi City Hall, the population prefers to receive monetary assistance rather than specific services. The respondent stated that more than half of the applications received by the City Hall are for monetary assistance.

"Regarding the population, the main demand is for financial support. They are generally passive in terms of seeking services and prefer monetary aid. More than 15,000 applications are received per year, and approximately 7-8 thousand of them are specifically requests for financial assistance" (Bolnis City Hall representative).

The quantitative survey assessed:

- whether the households interviewed in the target regions held any status indicative of vulnerability, and
- the employment status of the respondents.

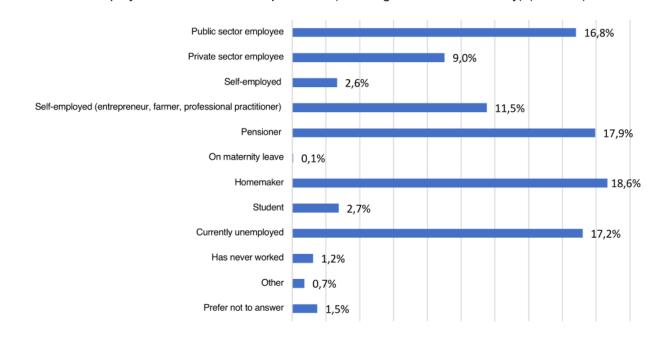
The results indicate that 11.9% of the respondents' families had the status of 'socially vulnerable', with a higher percentage in Kvemo Kartli (17.7%) compared to Samtskhe-Javakheti (6.1%). Only 1.8% of the respondents had the status of' internally displaced person', with a higher percentage in Kvemo Kartli (3.1%) compared to Samtskhe-Javakheti (0.5%). In most cases, no status had been assigned to the family (85.5%). The survey also found that only 6.5% of the respondents reported having a family member with disabilities, while the majority (93.5%) did not have a similar status (92.8% in Samtskhe-Javakheti and 94.2% in Kvemo Kartli).

When identifying the primary occupations of the study participants, the following dominant categories emerged:

- Public sector employee 16.8%
- Private sector employee 9%
- Self-employed (entrepreneur, farmer, professional practitioner) 11.5%
- Pensioner 17.9%
- Homemaker 18.6%
- Currently unemployed 17.2% (see Diagram #1).

Diagram #1

Employment status of the respondents (referring to their main activity) (N=1200)



Based on the employment status of respondents in Kvemo Kartli, homemakers (22.7%), those currently unemployed (18.8%), pensioners (17.5%), and those employed in the public sector (15.1%) are most prominent. Among respondents in Samtskhe-Javakheti, pensioners (18.5%) and those employed in the public sector (18.5%) are almost equally represented. During the survey period, 15.6% of respondents in this region were unemployed (see Table #1).

Table #1

Employment status of the respondents (referring to their main activity) (regional context)		
Public sector employee	18.5%	15.1%
Private sector employee	12.7%	5.4%
Self-employed (employer)	3.4%	1.9%
Self-employed (entrepreneur, farmer, professional practitioner)	10.8%	12.2%
Pensioner	18.4%	17.5%
Being on maternity leave	0.1%	-
Homemaker	14.6%	22.7%
Student	3.9%	1.6%
Currently unemployed	15.6%	18.8%
Has never worked	0.6%	1.9%
Other	1.4%	-

Employment status of the respondents (referring to their main activity) (regional context)	Samtskhe- Javakheti (N=600)	Kvemo Kartli (N=600)
Prefer not to answer	-	3%

Based on the survey data, it can be seen that the percentage of employed individuals in the population of Samtskhe-Javakheti (45.4%) is significantly higher than that in Kvemo Kartli region (34.6%), which includes self-employed individuals. Consequently, the unemployment rate in Kvemo Kartli (20.7%) is higher than in Samtskhe-Javakheti (16.2%). It is worth noting that these unemployment rates are similar to the 2021 figures of the National Statistics Office (Kvemo Kartli - 25.2%; Samtskhe-Javakheti - 14.9%).⁴

Impact of Covid-19 on the population and assistance from local authorities

Among the participants in the focus groups, there were respondents who had moderate or severe Covid-19 infections, and some had relatives or loved ones who died from the virus. The pandemic has caused a significant deterioration in the economic situation of the population, particularly in terms of job loss. The pandemic hit the service sector particularly hard, and self-employed individuals had to stop their activities due to the problems created, leading to their impoverishment. The Covid-19 pandemic had negative impacts on all areas, including agriculture, where problems with selling products arose, and education. Distance learning was not accessible to a significant part of the population due to the lack of appropriate technical equipment (such as a computer, Android phone, etc.), lack of access to internet (due to poor internet connection, high cost of the internet), and lack of space for students to attend classes without interruption (this was particularly challenging for large families). Due to these factors, the situation created by Covid-19 had a negative impact on the overall quality of education.

The vulnerable respondents who participated in the focus groups reported receiving one-time assistance from the local government during the pandemic, which included social assistance in the form of monetary and economic aid, as well as the provision of food products through local delivery. The participants also mentioned the international organization "Red Cross," which provided food and hygiene products to vulnerable individuals. Local government representatives were actively involved in the assistance process, primarily in logistics planning and delivery. The private sector also provided assistance to vulnerable individuals, particularly the elderly, by providing food. Overall, participants in the study felt that vulnerable people benefited from the attention shown by local authorities during the Covid-19 pandemic and were generally satisfied. However, some respondents reported facing more needs during the pandemic than the government's assistance provided.

⁴Unemployment indicators https://www.geostat.ge/ka/modules/categories/683/dasakmeba-umushevroba

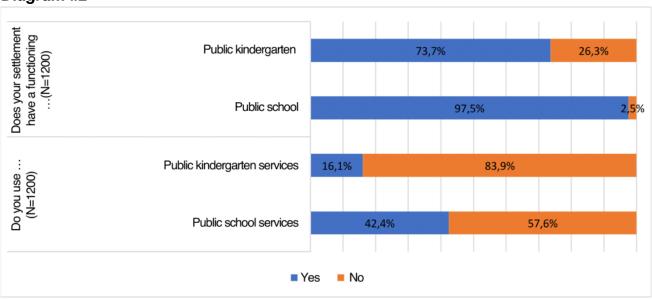
Regarding support from the central government during the pandemic, socially vulnerable families received 100 GEL monetary assistance for 6 months. People with disabilities noted that their pensions have increased. Co-financing of utility bills during the pandemic was also an important benefit for the respondents.

Chapter 2. Education

Preschool/General Education

The vast majority of participants in the research (97.5%) reported the presence of a public school in their settlement. A smaller percentage of respondents reported the existence of a public kindergarten, with only 73.7% indicating its presence, and a significant 26.3% reporting the absence of one. Despite the availability of preschool and general education institutions in the settlements, the majority of respondents do not make use of them, with 83.9% not using public kindergartens and 57.6% not using public schools (see diagram #2).

Diagram #2



The overall trend remains consistent when analyzing the issue separately by region, both in Samtskhe-Javakheti and Kvemo Kartli. The majority of respondents reported the existence of public kindergartens and public schools, but the usage of these services is relatively low, particularly for public kindergartens, with only 18% in Samtskhe-Javakheti and 14.2% in Kvemo Kartli indicating use. It is worth noting that in Kvemo Kartli, a much smaller proportion (63.5%) reported the presence of public gardens compared to Samtskhe-Javakheti (83.7%). (see Table #4)

Table #4

(Regional context)		Samtskhe- Javakheti (N=600)	Kvemo Kartli (N=600)			
Does your settlem	ent have a	a functioning				
Public kindergerten	Yes	83.7%	63.5%			
Public kindergarten	No	16.3%	36.5%			
Public school	Yes	98.1%	97%			
Fublic Scriool	No	1.9%	3%			
Do you use						
Public kindergerten convices	Yes	18%	14.2%			
Public kindergarten services	No	82%	85.8%			
Public school services	Yes	40.9%	44%			
Fubilic Scribor Services	No	59.1%	56%			

Those respondents who use the services of public kindergarten or school evaluated their satisfaction with various aspects of these educational institutions using a 5-point scale, where 1 indicated "extremely dissatisfied" and 5 indicated "extremely satisfied." The respondents positively evaluate the services of both the public school and the kindergarten - the majority were satisfied with the following aspects (scoring 4 or 5):

- Accessibility: public kindergarten 78.9%, public school 73.9%;
- Infrastructure: public kindergarten 82.9%, public school 66.8%;
- Management: public kindergarten 83.9%, public school 75.1%;
- Registration procedures (ease): public kindergarten 83.1%, public school 78.4%;
- Qualification of teachers: public kindergarten 84.6%, public school 74.1%;
- Safety: public kindergarten 82.9%, public school 79.5%.

•

Regarding the food component, 70.8% of the users of kindergarten services were satisfied. As some public schools may not provide food services, a large number of respondents (42.1%) refused to answer, and more than a quarter (26.8%) were dissatisfied with the food (see Table #5).

Table #5

Table #3						
How satisfied are you with the following aspects?	extre mely dissat isfied	dissa tisfie d	neither satisfie d nor dissatis fied	sat isfi ed	extre mely satisf ied	Prefe r not to answ er
Public Kinderga	rten (N=	193)				
Accessibility	3.5 %	5.1 %	12.1 %	49. 3 %	29.6 %	0.4 %_
Infrastructure	1 %	1.4 %	14.2 %	59. 6 %	23.3	0.4 %_
Management	0.9 %	2.7 %	12.1 %	57. 8 %	26.1 %	0.4 %_
Registration procedures (ease)	-	3.1 %	11.5 %	61. 4 %	21.7 %	2.4
Food	2.6 %	6.3 %	13.7 %	48. 3 %	22.5 %	6.6 %
Qualification of teachers	1 %	2.4 %	11 %	57. 3 %	27.3 %	0.9 % _
Safety	2 %	3.2 %	11.1 %	57. 4 %	25.5 %	0.9 %_
Public school	(N=5 1	9)				
Accessibility	1.4 %	4 %	19.8 %	55. 6 %	18.3 %	0.9 %_
Infrastructure	2.5 %	8.5 %	22.2 %	52. 2 %	14.6 %	-
Management	0.6 % -	4.3 %	18.5 %	55. 3 %	19.8 %	1.5 %
Registration procedures (ease)	1.2 %	1.8 %	15.2 %	60. 6 %	17.8 %	3.4 %
Food	7 %	19.9 %	12.9 %	12. 8 %	5.4 %	42.1 %

How satisfied are you with the following aspects?	extre mely dissat isfied	dissa tisfie d	neither satisfie d nor dissatis fied	sat isfi ed	extre mely satisf ied	Prefe r not to answ er
Qualification of teachers	1 %	3.6 %	19.9 %	55. 9 %	18.3 %	1.3 %
Safety	1 %	2.9 %	15.7 %	59. 6 %	19.9 %	0.9 %_

Professional and higher education

Contrary to pre-school and general education institutions, the majority of respondents (59.2%) indicate that there is no vocational school or state-funded higher education institution (67.6%) operating in their municipality or city. Significant differences were found between the regions or target municipalities, with Samtskhe-Javakheti having more institutions operating at a professional and higher level than Kvemo Kartli. The majority of respondents in Samtskhe-Javakheti indicate that both a vocational school (56.9%) and a state-funded higher educational institution (56.9%) operate in their municipality or city. In contrast, in Kvemo Kartli, most respondents indicate the absence of such institutions: vocational school - 75.9%, state-funded higher educational institution - 92.5%, In the case of the latter, the remaining 7.5% refused to answer.

It was found that a very small percentage of respondents use vocational schools (2.7%, N=13) or state-funded higher education institutions (8%, N=24). Among those who use vocational schools, 8 respondents are satisfied with the service (scores 4 and 5), while 5 are neutral (score 3 - "neither satisfied nor dissatisfied"). Among users of state-funded higher education institutions, 15 respondents are satisfied with the service (scores 4 and 5), while 3 are dissatisfied (scores 1 and 2), and 6 respondents have a neutral position (score 3). Some individual cases of dissatisfaction with state-funded higher education institutions included issues such as teacher qualifications, lack of relevant training programs, governance, bureaucracy, and fees.

Chapter 3. Awareness of municipal services

In the focus groups, several main sources of information about municipal services were mentioned, including mass media, mainly local TV and radio media, social networks (especially Facebook), official websites of municipalities, and informal connections such as relatives, neighbors, and friends who exchange information. Only a small number of respondents receive information about the services by attending information meetings with the mayor and the village representative or by visiting the municipality directly. Among the focus group participants, it was discovered that they have inadequate and incomplete information about municipal services.

"A lot of people don't know about the services, and I think the information they have might be inaccurate" (63-year-old woman, teacher, ethnically Georgian, Bolnisi)

The lack of information about social and health services is particularly notable among ethnic minorities such as Azerbaijanis and Armenians, who have limited opportunities to receive information due to language barriers and lower integration compared to Georgians. As a result, informal channels are predominantly used to obtain information about services. The population seeks information from individuals who had used the services or who have a possibility to access complete information within municipal bodies. Local media outlets that broadcast in the languages of ethnic minorities were also mentioned as sources of information about services in the focus groups. However, it was also noted that information about services is not systematically disseminated through the media, and it may not always provide comprehensive information. In Tsalka and Ninotsminda, residents named specific media outlets, including "Parvana" TV and Radio "NOR". Ethnic Azerbaijanis rely on Radio "Marneuli," actual.ge website, and Marneuli TV for information. In the Marneuli focus group, residents mentioned that they mainly get information about the municipality's activities through social media platforms like "Facebook."

"Marneuli Municipality provides information on its Facebook page in two languages: in both Azerbaijani and Georgian languages. Apart from that, there is no information in the Azerbaijani language" (28-year-old woman, employed, ethnically Azerbaijani, Marneuli)

If a citizen applies to a municipal body in Azerbaijani language, there is a high chance of not receiving a response. Therefore, as per current practice, citizens who do not know Georgian language ask for help from someone who does in order to apply to the municipality. The people of Ninotsminda mentioned that they sometimes have to sign documents written in Georgian, which they do not understand. In Ninotsminda municipality, the majority of employees in municipal bodies are ethnic Armenians, and the language barrier poses a significant problem for employees.

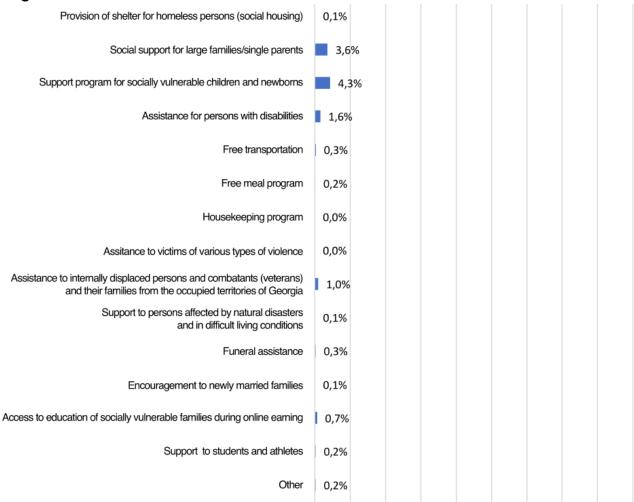
The villagers who participated in the focus groups highlighted the importance of municipal employees holding presentations and personally providing information about the available services to the local population. This need for information is particularly pressing in ethnic minority settlements where opportunities to receive information are limited. Another way to disseminate information is through the distribution of brochures written in minority languages.

The focus group participants also noted that during information meetings with municipality representatives, mostly the same people who already have information about the municipality's activities are present. Therefore, it is important to provide information to those segments of the population who do not have access to information.

Chapter 4. Social and Health Services Social services

As part of the research, respondents were presented with a list of both municipal and state (central) social services. The majority of respondents (81.2%) reported that they or their family members did not use any municipal social services. Only 6.4% reported receiving one-time (monetary or other) social assistance, while 4.3% were beneficiaries of the program supporting socially vulnerable children and newborns. Notably, none of the respondents reported benefiting from the home care program or assistance for victims of various types of violence (see diagram #3).

Diagram #3



The utilization rate of municipal social services is low in both Samtskhe-Javakheti and Kvemo Kartli regions. The majority of respondents in both regions reported that they or their family members have not used any services: 87.8% in Samtskhe-Javakheti and 74.9% in Kvemo Kartli. However, the total percentage of users of various social services in Kvemo Kartli is somewhat higher. Additionally, in Kvemo Kartli, almost one in ten respondents benefit from one-time (monetary or other) social assistance, while in Samtskhe-Javakheti, the proportion

of beneficiaries of the support program for socially vulnerable children and newborns is relatively higher (see table #6).

Table #6

Do you or any of your family members use any of the following municipal social services? (Regional context)	Samtskhe- Javakheti (N=600)	Kvemo Kartli (N=600)
None	87.8%	74.9%
One-time (monetary or other) social assistance	3%	9.6%
Provision of shelter for homeless persons (social housing)	-	0.1%
Social support for large families/single parents	1.7%	5.4%
Support program for socially vulnerable children and newborns	4.8%	3.9%
Assistance for persons with disabilities	2%	1.2%
Free transportation	-	0.6%
Free meal program	0.3%	-
Housekeeping program	-	-
Assitance to victims of various types of violence	-	-
Assistance to internally displaced persons and combatants (veterans) and their families from the occupied territories of Georgia	0.3%	1.6%
Support to persons affected by natural disasters and in difficult living conditions	-	0.1%
Funeral assistance	-	0.5%
Encouragement to newly married families	-	0.1%
Access to education of socially vulnerable families during online learning	-	1.3%
Support to students and athletes	-	0.5%
other	0.1%	0.2%

It was revealed that the majority of respondents receive the above-mentioned municipal social assistance/services on time and find the registration procedures easy. This trend is consistent in both Samtskhe-Javakheti and Kvemo Kartli. At the same time, the majority of respondents, using different services, find the registration procedures required to obtain the service easy, as indicated by their rating of 3 or 4 points on a 4-point scale. For individual services, over 65% of users have reported a similar experience with the registration process. However, when evaluating the free meals program, the percentage of users who find the registration process easy drops to 57.9%. It's worth noting that every third respondent who uses the services for persons with disabilities indicates that the registration procedure is difficult (34.5%, N=7). Additionally, nearly one-fifth of them rate the registration procedure required to receive one-time (monetary or other) social assistance and social assistance for large families/single parents as difficult, scoring 1 or 2 points on a 4-point scale (see Table #2).

Overall, considering the current situation, the respondents have expressed satisfaction with the basic social services provided by the municipalities, with a satisfaction rate exceeding 57% (4 and 5 points on a 5-point scale). However, for some services, the respondents expressed a neutral position, scoring 3 on the satisfaction scale. Specifically, the satisfaction indicators for the most frequently used services are as follows:

- One-time (monetary or other kind) social assistance 76% (N=79)
- Socially vulnerable children and newborns support program 89.8%, N= 55
- Social support for large families/single parents 71.4%, N= 43

(see Table #7 for detailed data)

Table #7

		stratio	would y n proce unicipal (%	dure re social	equired		How satisfied are you with the social services provided by the municipalities? (%)						
	e x t r e m e l y d if fi c u lt	d fi c u lt	e a sy	e x t r e m e l y e a s y	R e gi st r at io n p r o c e d u r e s d o n ot a p pl y	- donotknos	e x t r e m e l y d i s s a t i s f i e d	d i ssatisfied	n e it h e r s a ti s fi e d n o r d i s s a ti s fi e d	s a t i s f i e d	e x t r e m e l y s a t i s f i e d	d i f f i c u l t t o a n » » e r	
One-time (monetary or other) social assistance (N=79)	2.6	16	61.5	11. 5	7	1. 3	1	9.5	13. 6	62. 2	13. 8	-	
Provision of shelter for homeless persons (social housing) (N=1)	-	ı	100	-	1	-	-	-	1	10 0	-	-	
Social support for large families/single parents (N=43)	2.1	16. 7	66.2	15	-	-	-	2.1	24. 7	60. 8	10. 6	1. 8	

		stratio	would y n proce ınicipal (%	dure re social	equirec		ial ser	sfied a vices p nicipali	orovid	ed by		
	e x t r e m e l y d if fi c u lt	d fi c u lt	e a sy	e x t r e m e l y e a s y	R e gi st r at io n p r o c e d u r e s d o n ot a p pl y	- donotkno\$	e x t r e m e l y d i s s a t i s f i e d	d i ssatisfied	n e it h e r s a ti s fi e d n o r d i s s a ti s fi e d	s a t i s f i e d	e x t r e m e l y s a t i s f i e d	d i f f i c u l t t o a n s e r
Support program for socially vulnerable children and newborns (N=55)	6.7	12. 5	59.2	15. 1	-	6. 4	1. 3	1.7	7.2	73. 1	16. 7	-
Assistance for persons with disabilities (N=21)	-	34. 5	57.9	7.6	-	-	-	10. 6	53. 9	30. 6	4.9	-
Free transportation (N=5)	-	-	63.5	36. 5	-		-	-	-	55. 3	44. 7	-
Free Meal Program (N=2)	-	-	57.9	-	-	42 .1	-	-	42. 1	57. 9	-	-
Assistance to internally displaced persons and combatants (veterans) and their families from the occupied territories of Georgia (N=14)	-	-	70	12. 6	-	17 .5	13	8.2	53. 8	25	-	-
Support of persons affected by natural disasters and in difficult living conditions (N=1)	-	100	-	-	-	-	-	-	100	-	-	-
Funeral assistance (N=3)	-	-	69.7	30. 3	-	-	-	-	-	-	10 0	-
Encouraging newly married families (N=1)	-	100	-	-	-	-	-	-	100	-	-	-

		stratio	would y n proce unicipal (%	dure re social	equirec		How satisfied are you with the social services provided by the municipalities? (%)						
	e x t r e M e I y d if fi c u lt	d fi c u lt	e a sy	e x t r e m e l y e a s y	Registration procedures donotapply	I donotknov	e x t r e f e l yd i s s a t i s f i e d	d i ssatisfied	n e it h e r s a ti s fi e d n o r d i s s a ti s fi e d	s a t i s f i e d	e x t r e m e l y s a t i s f i e d	difficulttoanswer	
Access to education of socially disadvantaged families during online learning (N=8)	9.1	-	37.8	53. 1	-	-	-	-	9.1	50. 2	40. 7	-	
Support to students and athletes (N=3)	1	1	100	-	-	-	ı	1	-	10 0	ı	-	
Other (N=2)	42. 3	-	57.7	-	-	-	-	-	-	10 0	-	-	

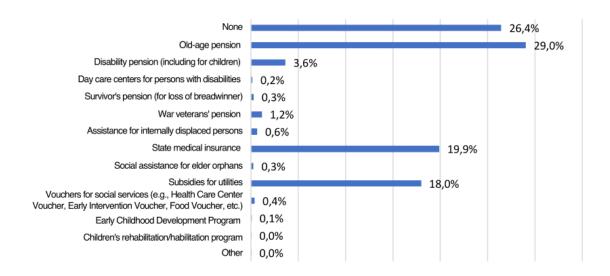
Regarding the registration procedures in a regional context, different experiences were revealed during the discussion. Although there were some exceptions, the majority of the interviewees in both Samtskhe-Javakheti and Kvemo Kartli regions believe that the registration procedures required to receive a service are easy. In Samtskhe-Javakheti, 41.7% of the respondents reported, based on their experience, that the process of registering for one-time (monetary or other) social assistance is extremely difficult or difficult, scoring 1 and 2 points on the satisfaction scale. This experience may be a contributing factor to the low user rate of this service (3%). While in Kvemo Kartli, only 11.6% of respondents believe that the registration procedure required to receive this service is difficult, scoring 1 and 2 points on the satisfaction scale. Conversely, in Kvemo Kartli, the use of the support program for socially vulnerable children and newborns was identified as a problematic issue, with 24.9% of respondents reporting that the registration procedures are difficult or very difficult, scoring

1 and 2 points on the satisfaction scale. The majority of respondents in Samtskhe-Javakheti express satisfaction with receiving individual services, with a satisfaction rate exceeding 57% for each service (scoring 4 and 5 on the satisfaction scale). In Kvemo Kartli, over 71% of respondents are satisfied with the individual services provided. The satisfaction rate for the assistance provided to persons with disabilities is an exception in both regions. Only 29% of respondents in Samtskhe-Javakheti and 44.3% in Kvemo Kartli reported satisfaction with this service.

After this, the experience of using state (central) social services was evaluated, and it was revealed that 26.4% of the respondents, neither they nor their family members, use any service. However, 29% have experience benefiting from old-age pension, 19.9% from state insurance, and 18% from utility subsidies (see Diagram #4).

Diagram #4

Do you or any of your family members benefit from any of the state (central) social services listed below?) (N=1200)



In both Samtskhe-Javakheti and Kvemo Kartli regions, a significant portion of the respondents stated that they use the following central social services:

- Old-age pension: 29.2% in Samtskhe-Javakheti and 28.8% in Kvemo Kartli;
- State medical insurance: 21.1% in Samtskhe-Javakheti and 18.6% in Kvemo Kartli;
- Utility subsidies: 20.1% in Samtskhe-Javakheti and 15.8% in Kvemo Kartli.

However, it is worth noting that on average, 26% of respondents do not receive any state services, with 23.9% in Samtskhe-Javakheti and 29.1% in Kvemo Kartli (see Table #8).

Table #8

Do you or any of your family members benefit from any of the state (central) social services listed below? (regional context)	Samtskhe- Javakheti (N=600)	Kvemo Kartli (N=600)
None	23.9%	29.1%
Old-age pension	29.2%	28.8%
Disability Pension (including for children)	3.7%	3.6%
Day care centers for persons with disabilities	-	0.3%
Survivor's pension (for loss of breadwinner)	0.1%	0.4%
War veterans' pension	1.3%	1%
Assistance for internally displaced persons	0.2%	1.1%
State medical insurance	21.1%	18.6%
Social assistance for elder orphans	0.2%	0.4%
Subsidies for utilities	20.1%	15.8%
Vouchers for social services (eg: Health Care Center Voucher, Early Intervention Voucher, Food Voucher, etc.)	0.1%	0.7%
Early Childhood Development Program	-	0.1%
Children's rehabilitation/habilitation program	0.1%	-
Other	-	0.1%

The study revealed that beneficiaries are receiving state social services on time, with the rate exceeding 80% for each service, except for the use of day care centers for people with disabilities. While 63.6% receive appropriate services on time, more than a third (36.4%) have reported the contrary. When evaluating a particular service, the majority of respondents found the registration procedures required to receive the service to be easy. Over a third (36.4%) had a difficult experience of registration for using day care centers for people with disabilities. With regards to social assistance for elder orphans, 31.3% of respondents reported not going through the registration procedure to receive the service (see table #3).

As for the services received, the majority of respondents are satisfied with the social services provided by the state, but there is a noteworthy share of those who are dissatisfied with some services. While the majority (64.4%) are satisfied with the services of day care centers for people with disabilities, more than a third of respondents (35.6%) express dissatisfaction (score 2). Additionally, 42.7% of respondents are very unsatisfied or unsatisfied with the assistance service for internally displaced persons provided by the state (scores 1 and 2) (see Table #9).

Table #9

	prod	cedure central	l you ra require) social	ed to re	ceive s	tate	How satisfied are you with the social services provided by the state? (%)							
	e xt r e m el y di ffi c ul t	di ffi c ul t	e a s y	e xt r e m el y e a s y	r e gi st r a ti o n p r o c e d u r e s d o n o t a p pl y	l d o n o t k n o w	e x t r e m e l y d i s s a t i s f i e d	di s s a ti sf ie d	n eith er s at is fi e d n or di s s at is fi e d	s a ti sf ie d	e xt r e m el y s a ti sf ie d	D i f f i c u l t t o a n s w e r		
Old age pension (N=494)	-	2.8	64.6	25.2	3	4.4	2.6	6.4	15.3	67.8	6	1.9		
Disability Pension (including for children) (N=61)	10.9	18.7	47.8	14.2	2.3	6.3	5.6	15.3	24.2	42.8	12.2	-		
Day care centers for people with disabilities (N=3)	-	36.4	63.6	-	-	-	-	35.6	-	64.4	1	-		
Survivor's pension (N=5)	-	-	42.5	57.5	-	-	-	41.5	-	42.5	16	-		
War veterans' pension (N=22)	-	-	77.9	22.1	-	-	8.3	10.5	12.2	60.4	8.6	-		
Assistance to internally displaced persons (N=12)	-	-	71.5	9. 1	-	19.4	7.2	35.5	9.8	47.5	-	-		
State medical insurance (N=331)	0 .2	8. 0	72.3	17.9	6.3	2.5	-	2	12.8	74.8	5.9	4.6		
Social assistance for elder orphans (N=5)	17.3	16.7	17.3	17.3	31.3	-	-	17.3	16.7	66	-	-		
Utility subsidies (N=301)	-	0 .7	77.9	10.1	4.9	6.4	-	8. 0	10.4	80.5	8.3	-		

	prod	cedure central	require	te the led to re	ceive s	tate	How satisfied are you with the social services provided by the state? (%)						
	ехге E e y di ffi с u t	di ffi c ul t	e a s y	e xt r e m el y e a s y	r e gist r a ti o n p r o c e d u r e s d o n o t a p pl y	l d o n o t k n o w	e x t r e m e l y d i s s a t i s f i e d	di s s a ti sf ie d	n ei th er s at is fi e d n or di s s at is fi e d	s a ti sf ie d	e xt r e m el y s a ti sf ie d	Difficulttoanswer	
Vouchers for social services (eg: health care center voucher, early intervention voucher, food voucher, etc.) (N=7)	-	-	42.4	40.7	-	17	-	-	-	46.5	53.5	-	
Early childhood development program (N=1)	-	-	100	-	-	-	-	-	-	100	-	-	
Children's rehabilitation/habilitation program (N=1)	-	-	100	-	-	-	-	-	-	100	-	-	
Other (N=2)	-	-	100	-	-	-	-	-	100	-	-	-	

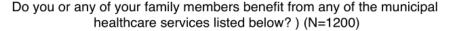
In general, the registration procedures required to receive separate state (central) social assistance are considered easy in the regional context. However, the process of receiving pensions for persons with disabilities (including children) is a problematic category. A large portion of respondents in both Samtskhe-Javakheti (26.5%) and Kvemo Kartli (32.7%) reported that the registration procedure was very difficult or difficult. Interestingly, while only

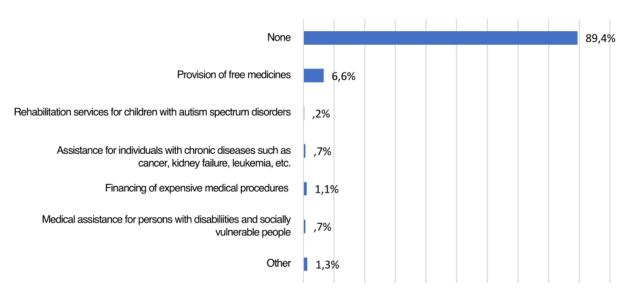
one recipient in Samtskhe-Javakheti did not undergo the registration procedure for receiving social assistance for elder orphans, two respondents in Kvemo Kartli highlighted the difficulty of the registration process for the same service. Despite these difficulties, the majority of people interviewed in Samtskhe-Javakheti expressed satisfaction with the services received, with rates exceeding 70% in individual cases.

Health services

Like in the case of social services, the respondents rated both municipal and central health services. The study revealed that a significant majority of respondents (89.4%) reported not using any municipal healthcare services for themselves or even for their family members. Out of the few services that were mentioned, receiving free medicines (6.6%), and financing expensive medical procedures such as computed tomography, esophagogastroduodenoscopy (EGD), coronary angiography, breast cancer genetic research, etc. (1.1%) were the most notable (see diagram #5).

Diagram #5





In comparison to social services, the proportion of respondents who reported not using municipal health services is significantly higher: 93.9% in Samtskhe-Javakheti and 85% in Kvemo Kartli. However, among the specific categories mentioned, providing free medicines is a relatively common service, with 3.8% of respondents from Samtskhe-Javakheti and 9.4% from Kvemo Kartli reporting its usage (see Table #10).

Table #10

Do you or any of your family members benefit from any of the municipal health services listed below? (Regional context)	Samtskhe- Javakheti (N=600)	Kvemo Kartli (N=600)
No, none of them	93.9%	85%
Provision of free medicines	3.8%	9.4%
Rehabilitation services for children with autism spectrum disorders	0.4%	0.1%
Assistance for individuals with chronic diseases such as cancer, kidney failure, leukemia, etc.	-	1.3%
Financing of expensive medical procedures, such as computed tomography, esophagogastroduodenoscopy (EGD), coronary angiography, breast cancer genetic research, etc.	0.5%	1.7%
Medical assistance for persons with disabilities and socially vulnerable people	0.9%	0.4%
Other	0.5%	2%

The majority of respondents reported receiving each of the aforementioned services in a timely manner, with a rate of over 94% in most cases. However, the area of rehabilitation services for children with autism spectrum disorders recorded a relatively low result, with 26.7% of respondents reporting not receiving help on time, though the majority still had a positive experience. Additionally, in some cases, the majority of respondents found the registration procedures required to receive the service to be easy, with a rating of 3 or 4 points on a 4-point scale. However, the registration process for the rehabilitation of children with autism spectrum disorder was relatively problematic, with 26.7% of respondents rating it as difficult. Similarly, 40.1% of respondents rated the registration process necessary for helping individuals with various chronic diseases as difficult (see Table #4).

Overall, based on their existing experience, the majority of respondents are generally satisfied with the healthcare services provided by the municipalities. This trend has remained consistent, with the exception of those who received rehabilitation services for children with autism spectrum disorders, as 26.7% of them expressed dissatisfaction. In addition, 40.1% of respondents did not provide a clear opinion on the services provided for individuals with various chronic diseases, rating the municipalities' services as neutral (see table #11).

Table #11

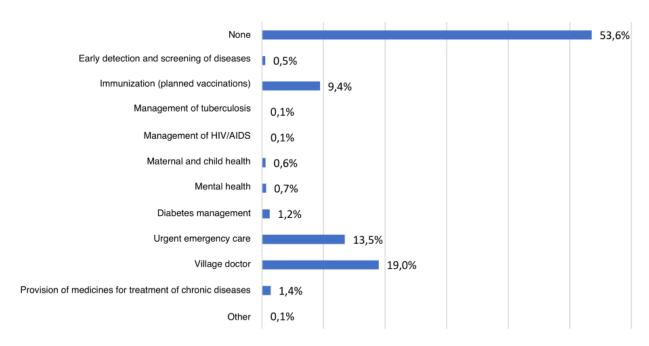
	p	v would procedu nicipal l	ire requesting	uired t	o recei	ve	How satisfied are you with the healthcare services provided by the municipalities? (%)							
	extremelydifficult	di ffi c ul t	e a s y	e x t r e m e l y e a s y	r e gi st r at io n p r o c e d u r e s d o n ot a p pl y	l d o n o t k n o W	ex tre m el y di ss ati sfi ed	di s a ti sf ie d	neo the r sati sfie d nor dis sati sfie d	s a ti sf ie d	e xt r e m el y s a ti sf ie d	d i f f i c u l t t o a n s w e r		
Provision of free medicines (N=85)	4.8	6.4	73.9	3.4	2	9.4	-	8.2	26.9	64.9	-	-		
Rehabilitation services for children with autism spectrum disorders (N=4)	-	26.7	73.3	-	-	-	-	26.7	49.2	24.1	-	-		
Assistance for individuals with chronic diseases such as cancer, kidney failure, leukemia, etc. (N=10)	-	40.1	59.9	-	-	-	-	-	40.1	59.9	-	-		
Financing of expensive medical procedures (N=15)	-	5.7	72.3	7.9	14.1	-	-	5.7	22.7	71.5	-	-		
Medical assistance for persons with disabilities and socially vulnerable	-	-	66.5	9.3	-	24.1	-	-	9.9	80.8	9.3	-		
people (N=9) Other (N=16)		6.3	93.7						19.8	60	20.1			

In Kvemo Kartli, respondents reported relatively complicated registration procedures for accessing various services, such as assistance for people with chronic diseases (40.1%, N=4) and provision of free medicines (13.3%, N=7). Similarly, in Samtskhe-Javakheti, a beneficiary of the rehabilitation program for children with autism spectrum disorders (35.7%, N=1) highlighted the complicated procedures for receiving the service. Despite this, in Samtskhe-Javakheti, the satisfaction rate for individual services received exceeds 63%, while in Kvemo Kartli, the rate drops to 56% for some services. The only exception is rehabilitation services for children with autism spectrum disorders in both regions, where satisfaction rates are lower. In Samtskhe-Javakheti, 32.3% of respondents are satisfied, and 35.7% are dissatisfied (score 2). In Kvemo Kartli, the respondent using this service takes a neutral position (score 3).

The survey results revealed that the majority of respondents (53.6%) did not take advantage of state (central) health services either. Almost one-fifth used the services of a village doctor, while 13.5% used emergency medical care. Almost a tenth of the respondents did not benefit from immunization services (scheduled vaccinations). (See Diagram #6).

Diagram #6

Do you or any of your family members benefit from any of the state (central) healthcare services listed below? (N=1200)



Similar to municipal healthcare services, the majority of the population in Samtskhe-Javakheti (60.7%) and Kvemo Kartli (46.6%) do not use state healthcare services, although the rate is lower compared to the services provided at the municipal level. Among the respondents in Samtskhe-Javakheti, the number of people who use emergency help services (11.5%) and village doctors (17.5%) exceeds one-tenth. In Kvemo Kartli, the situation is similar, with an

average of 18% using these services. However, it was also revealed that more than one-tenth (11.7%) receives immunization services (scheduled vaccinations) (see Table #12).

Table #12

Do you or your family member benefit from any of the state (central) healthcare services listed below? (Regional context)	Samtskhe- Javakheti (N=600)	Kvemo Kartli (N=600)
No, none of them	60.7%	46.6%
Early detection and screening of diseases	0.1%	0.9%
Immunization (planned vaccinations)	7.1%	11.7%
Management of tuberculosis	0.1%	-
Management of HIV/AIDS	-	0.1%
Maternal and child health (treatment of high-risk pregnant women, parturient and postpartum women, early detection of genetic pathologies, screening examination of newborns' hearing, and provision of medicines to pregnant women, etc.)	-	1.2%
Treatment of patients suffering from drug addiction	-	-
Mental health	0.7%	0.7%
Diabetes management	0.7%	1.8%
Urgent emergency care	11.5%	15.3%
Village doctor	17.5%	20.4%
Provision of medicines for treatment of chronic diseases	1.4%	1.4
Other	0.1%	-

The vast majority of respondents reported receiving state (central) healthcare services on time, with rates of 100% in most cases (where N, the number of respondents, is small), and ranging between 91%-97% in some cases as follows:

- Mental health 91.7%
- Diabetes management 91.8%
- Urgent emergency care 96.1%
- Village doctor 96.5%
- Provision of drugs for the treatment of chronic diseases 96.4%

The majority of respondents found the registration procedures required to receive central health services to be easy (scores 3 and 4), except for mental health services where every second person reported difficulty (scores 1 and 2). However, 49.6% of respondents still found the registration process for mental health services to be easy (see table #5).

Reflecting on this experience, respondents typically rated state healthcare services favorably - the majority were pleased with the services received. However, it's worth noting that when evaluating the program for early detection and screening of tuberculosis, the dominant response leaned towards neutrality (score 3 – "Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied"). In addition,

half of the respondents expressed dissatisfaction with the mental health services provided by the state (score 2) (see table #13).

Table #13

	proc	edure intral) he	you rat require ealthca	d to rec	eive st	tate			service	are you es prov ? (%)		
	e xt r e m el y di ffi c ul t	di ffi c ul t	e a s y	e xt e m el y e a s y	re gist a ti o n pr o c e d ur e s d o n ot a p pl y	l d o n o t k n o v	e x t r e m e l y d i s s a t i s f i e d	di s s a ti sf ie d	ne othersatisfied nordissatisfied	s a ti sf ie d	e xt r e m el y s a ti sf ie d	difficulttoanswer
Early detection and screening of diseases (N=8)	-	-	76	10.8	13.1	-	-	-	55.2	33.9	10.8	-
Immunization (planned vaccinations) (N=134)	-	-	75.3	18.8	5.1	0 .8	-	0 .7	3.1	88.3	7.9	-
Management of tuberculosis (N=1)	-	-	100	-	1	-	-	-	100	-	-	-
Management of HIV/AIDS (N=1)	-	-	100	-	-	-	-	-	-	100	-	-
Maternal and child health (treatment of high-risk pregnant women, parturient and postpartum women, early detection of genetic pathologies, screening examination of newborns' hearing, and provision of medicines to pregnant women, etc.) (N=8)	-	-	100	-	-	-	-	-	-	100	-	-
Mental Health (N=7)	42.1	8.3	39.7	10	-	-	-	50.4	-	49.6	-	-

	proc	edure intral) he	you rat requirece althca	d to rec	ceive s	tate	How satisfied are you with the healthcare services provided by the state? (%)						
	e xt r e m el y di ffi c ul t	di ffi c ul t	e a s y	e xt r e m el y e a s y	re gist ra ti on pr ocedures donot apply	l d o n o t k n o ð	e x t r e m e l y d i s s a t i s f i e d	di s s a ti sf ie d	n e o t h e r s a ti sf ie d n o r di s s a ti sf ie d	s a ti sf ie d	e xt r e m el y s a ti sf ie d	d i f f i c u l t t o a n s w e r	
Diabetes management (N=20)	4.2	19.6	71.8	4.4	-	-	-	17	9.4	73.6	-	-	
Urgent emergency care (N=192)	-	5.7	74.1	15.3	4	0 .9	-	3.1	9.4	78.6	8.9	-	
Village doctor (N=283)	-	2.3	79.9	12	2.9	2.9	0. 6	3.4	6.1	76.5	12.6	0 .8	
Provision of medicines for treatment of chronic diseases (N=20)	12.2	11.1	51.3	20.2	-	5.3	-	3.6	11	68.1	17.3	-	
Other (N=1)	-	-	-	100	-	-	-	-	-	100	-		

Interestingly, none of the respondents interviewed in Samtskhe-Javakheti found the registration procedures for mental health services to be difficult, while all individuals (N=5) who used these services in Kvemo Kartli described the registration process as difficult or very difficult. Similarly, 33.4% of respondents in Kvemo Kartli found the registration procedures for diabetes management to be complex (scores 1 and 2), compared to those in Samtskhe-Javakheti. The majority of respondents in Samtskhe-Javakheti reported a difficult registration process to receive medicines for chronic diseases (59.6%, N=5), and 22.2% (N=2) of those surveyed in Kvemo Kartli shared a similar position. The level of satisfaction with the received service is generally high among the interviewees in Samtskhe-Javakheti for each service, with individual data exceeding 85%. However, some respondents using mental health services in Kvemo Kartli expressed dissatisfaction with the service.

* * *

The qualitative research included focus groups where participants named the social and healthcare services they used. Regarding social services, one-time material assistance, financing of children's participation in artistic circles such as music and painting, and ritual services were mentioned. As for healthcare services, participants mentioned the (co-)financing of health examinations, surgeries, and medicines. They also discussed healthcare services covered by universal insurance.

The representatives of the Akhalkalaki municipality, who participated in an in-depth interview, listed the various types of assistance provided to vulnerable individuals. They mentioned that the assistance is diverse and includes the provision of medicines, financial aid (either one-time or regular, depending on the person's status), coverage of funeral expenses, assistance with food packages, transportation between cities, provision of firewood, provision of wheelchairs for persons with disabilities (with the support of international organizations), and other forms of aid.

The focus group participants evaluated the social and healthcare services and funding procedures provided by the municipality. Overall, they expressed satisfaction with these services, and did not report significant difficulties with the procedures. The participants emphasized the importance of programming the provision of existing needs and allocating funds purposefully in the municipal budget.

"I am classified as socially vulnerable and I have used the services. I've had several surgeries that were 100% funded, and certain medications are also covered. Acquiring this funding was a straightforward process, as I simply submitted the medical documents to the local municipality and they financed me" (32-year-old man, self-employed, ethnically Georgian, Akhaltsikhe)

"My son required surgery. We received a positive response from the municipality. I just had to fill out an application at the municipal office and submit "Form 100". It was easily financed" (63-year-old woman, teacher, ethnically Georgian, Bolnisi);

"I have cerebral palsy and was undergoing therapy in Tbilisi. There were several instances when I needed financial aid, so I reached out to the municipality and they funded a 10-day course for me" (19-year-old male, student, ethnically Georgian, Tetritskaro).

Focus group discussions also touched on instances where municipal funding was denied. The typical reason given for such refusal was insufficient funds. Additionally, those who had utilized municipal healthcare services expressed their dissatisfaction due to the lack of funding for **post-operative rehabilitation**, which entails significant costs for the population.

According to the participants, this is an area where they need more assistance from the municipalities. It is worth noting that the representatives from ethnic minority groups participating in the focus groups reported no issues in terms of accessing social and healthcare services.

During in-depth interviews, representatives from local governments mentioned that the assistance/services package provided across all municipalities comprises two categories: a) social assistance and b) health care program services. As civil society organization representatives emphasize, many individuals receive support through these social and health care programs. However, the number of people seeking help and those in need remains higher.

"People receive funds for medication, they incur charges for treatments, and there is considerable aid available in Bolnisi due to budget allowances. However, all of this is still insufficient." (Inter-ethnic Unity of Kvemo Kartli - Bolnisi).

The representatives of the local government discussed the central and municipal social services that are currently available. They also mentioned that each municipality has its own specific services. For instance, in the highland settlements of Akhaltsikhe, the municipality provides financial support to families for each newborn. Furthermore, if the birth rate decreases, the government provides monthly financial assistance for the third newborn.

"When the birth rate declines compared to the previous year, a program automatically kicks in. Starting from the third newborn, the state offers incentives to families and provides monthly financial assistance" (local government representative from Akhaltsikhe).

Local government representatives state that the population's access to social services in the municipalities is satisfactory. The local community is consistently updated by municipality representatives about the available social services, any modifications, and new services, all in an effort to raise awareness about these services.

"Services are available as citizens are informed about what we offer. The information is not only disseminated by representatives of the local government; members of the commission themselves also maintain regular contact with the citizens" (Mayor's representative from Tetritskaro).

Contrary to the views of local government representatives, social workers in Kvemo Kartli state that while social services are somewhat accessible to the local population, a significant hurdle to receiving these services is the extensive procedural requirements citizens must navigate.

"There's a great deal of bureaucracy involved. The large number of documents that the population has to submit and fill out creates a barrier to service access" (a social worker).

Local government representatives cite insufficient funding for assistance/services as a key issue. They suggest that current social services could be improved with an increased budget, as the existing budget only marginally meets the needs of the local vulnerable population.

"Everything can be improved when the budget allows it, but when resources are scarce, you operate within those constraints. We currently wish to open a day center for children, but I'm uncertain how much we'll be able to achieve," (Municipality representative from Tsalka).

Some local government representatives find it challenging to single out one specific program with which beneficiaries are particularly satisfied. Certain respondents have noted exceptional satisfaction among beneficiaries with one-time financial assistance and healthcare services. Representatives of civil society also highlight the effectiveness of healthcare programs. However, they point out that the funding for healthcare services is insufficient and occasionally, there are issues regarding budget transparency.

"The healthcare programs are exceptional. More often than not, citizens receive funding for surgical procedures, which is highly beneficial. However, funding for diagnostic tests is frequently not provided and these costs can be burdensome for the population" ("Association "Tolerant" - Samtskhe-Javakheti region).

Local government representatives find it challenging to pinpoint any specific obstacles that citizens encounter when accessing social services. "I don't believe they have any objections to using our program" (Akhaltsikhe Municipality representative). According to the respondents, if any non-systemic or situational barriers arise, the staff of the relevant municipal service does their utmost to resolve the issue.

Local government representatives are unable to identify any specific standards or guidelines that exist in the municipalities regarding social services, healthcare, infrastructure, education, and communal areas. They indicate that they don't follow written guidelines and instead, they act spontaneously, striving to assist the population as much as possible according to their ad hoc developed plan.

"This is exactly the issue that no guidelines have been developed. A non-governmental organization began the process and assured us they would assist us in this direction, but there are no results yet. It would be greatly beneficial if progress was made in this regard. Only an annual strategy document is developed, nothing more" (Mayor's representative from Bolnisi).

Similar to local government representatives, civil society organization representatives also find it difficult to identify any specific standards or guidelines that municipalities follow. During in-depth interviews, respondents mentioned only the economic development plan and the financing approach for emergency medical procedures within healthcare services.

In the context of these in-depth interviews, both local government and civil society representatives identified the most and least successful programs implemented or ongoing within the last three years. Additionally, they examined gaps in service delivery.

Among the successful programs named were: the rent provision program, healthcare programs, and the free canteen program. Respondents discussed the added value of each successful program. For example, free meals enable beneficiaries to save on groceries and utility costs.

"They don't have to cook at home. In fact, one of the citizens who was included in free food programme, asked us to replace this aid with a canteen (free meal) service, as it would help them save on utility bills" (representative of Akhaltsikhe municipality).

Representatives of civil society organizations list healthcare programs, the civil budget program, as well as COVID-19 vaccination and testing during the pandemic as successful programs.

"During the COVID pandemic, we also participated in conveying to people the importance of vaccinations and tests. Tests are still conducted on a weekly basis. Everything related to COVID was handled well, and I would give it a positive assessment" (Peace Charter - Ninotsminda).

Local government representatives found it challenging to identify less successful programs. "You know, the flaws are probably more visible from the outside" (mayor's representative Tetritskaro). A representative from the Akhaltsikhe local government singled out the financial assistance program for citizens over 99 years old as one of the less successful initiatives. According to the representative, only one person is currently using this service, which is the reason they consider the program less successful.

Representatives of civil society organizations working in different municipalities have differing views on successful and unsuccessful programs. For instance, one respondent views the insufficient funding of the healthcare program as a significant shortcoming. The respondent refers to a case where a beneficiary received only one-fifth of the required amount, preventing them from receiving full treatment. Furthermore, a representative from a Marneuli civil society organization pointed out that there are programs that exist only formally on paper and are not put into practice. "All those programs that are written and not implemented, that exist only formally, are unsuccessful" (Center of Democratic Engagement of Marneuli).

According to a representative from the Akhaltsikhe local government, the social service system has transitioned to a digital format, which involves receiving and responding to applications electronically. This transition enables local residents to access services remotely. The respondent suggests that this approach allows the community to save both time and money.

According to a representative of the Tetritskaro City Hall, they changed the rules for assigning homeless status in 2018. The respondent stated that as a result of this change in approach, the issue of homelessness was completely resolved in their municipality - "It has been four years since the City Hall developed the rules for assigning homeless status. After that, our citizens do not live on the streets, and we no longer have homeless people in the municipality" (Tetritskaro City Hall representative). A representative of the civil society organization "Dmanisi" noted that the municipality's recent approach is focused on promoting a healthy lifestyle. Specifically, the local government created football and rugby clubs and built appropriate stadiums.

Representatives of the local government believe that in order to enhance the social services system, an increase in municipal funding is necessary. This would enable a broader response to the diverse needs of the population - "we need a larger budget to provide more benefits to our citizens and, to some extent, improve the services we currently offer" (representative of the local government from Gardabani). Conversely, according to a representative of the Tetritskaro City Hall, social services can be improved by intensifying cooperation with non-governmental organizations.

According to a representative of the civil public organization "Dmanisi", it is crucial to conduct studies within the municipality to gain a deeper understanding of the needs and challenges faced by the local population. Moreover, the respondent emphasizes the necessity of active communication between the representatives of the local government and the community.

"First of all, when you do something, it is necessary to conduct research to understand the existing needs and the rationale behind the specific project. Therefore, we will adhere to the research findings and frequently interact with people. We will discuss their problems regularly, and all services will undoubtedly improve" (Organization "Dmanisi" - Dmanisi municipality).

According to a representative from the "Women's Room" organization operating in the Tsalka municipality, enhancing public awareness across various sectors is crucial for improving services and increasing efficiency. For instance, the representative notes that there are cases where persons with disabilities are concealed by their families due to a prevailing perception that having such a family member is a disgrace. This tendency to stigmatize disability stems from low democratic awareness.

Health and social security needs

Focus group participants discussed their health and social needs, highlighting the importance of access to consultations with qualified medical specialists. As mentioned by the participants, while qualified doctors are occasionally available on site when called from Tbilisi, while the cost of a consultation presents an additional barrier - "Each visit to the doctor is quite expensive; a two-minute consultation costs 80 GEL" (30-year-old self-employed woman, ethnically Georgian, Akhaltsikhe). Another need identified among respondents in vulnerable situations is the unavailability of essential medications. According to participants, the list of medicines needs to be expanded. Municipalities should finance the purchase of medications that are critically important for individuals with health problems. During the focus groups, the viewpoint was expressed that certain health services should not be accessible only to the socially vulnerable, as healthcare is an expensive service and those without a socially vulnerable status should also have access to it.

Parents of minors participating in the focus groups noted that municipalities should introduce certain services for children's early development, including access to speech therapists. There is also a need for psychologists and occupational therapists for students with special educational needs. In large families, equipping children with school supplies is a pressing need. According to the participants' evaluation, the challenging situation due to the pandemic highlighted the necessity of developing social programs for students to increase the motivation of those living in vulnerable families to pursue education. This could take the form of providing textbooks or other necessary items.

According to the representative of the Samtskhe-Javakheti municipalities participating in the in-depth interview, one of the main needs of vulnerable individuals is social interaction and the development of adaptation skills. These skills are not only a prerequisite for employment but also a result of being employed.

"They need to be socially adaptable. They should maintain appropriate relationships with society, have decent living conditions, and work. The municipality should assist in facilitating employment," (A local government representative from Akhaltsikhe).

Another necessity mentioned was the productive utilization of free time for young people, where local government support is desirable. In the focus groups, the significant role of municipalities in promoting professional and higher education was emphasized. Specifically, the municipality should aid high-achieving and motivated young people, which could be expressed through co-financing education, providing housing, and so on.

Municipalities need to develop programs that promote employment. This could involve liaising with potential employers, organizing employment forums, etc. Respondents emphasized that these types of activities should not be merely formal but should aim to achieve tangible results. Study participants noted that compensation for employment should be commensurate with the socio-economic situation in Georgia - "If monthly expenses are 830"

GEL and we're offered a job that pays 500 GEL, how are we supposed to live?!" (35-year-old male, unemployed, ethnic Azerbaijani, Marneuli).

According to a representative of Akhaltsikhe's local government who participated in the indepth interview, a state program already exists that addresses unemployment⁵, and it aims to assist socially vulnerable individuals in finding employment.

"Unemployment is likely a significant issue. Indeed, there's now a state program that focuses on supporting the employment of the socially vulnerable population, which, in my view, is a great stride forward" (representative of Tetritskaro City Hall).

The role of local government and the civil sector

Local government representatives discussed the role of municipal services in delivering and enhancing services to the public. According to the respondents, municipal services are geared towards the needs of beneficiaries and are continually striving to improve the services they offer. The respondents noted that municipal structures operate on a demand-supply principle: the demand for social and healthcare programs is the highest, so these areas receive special attention.

"Primarily, social matters are the most sought after, along with healthcare assistance. We are striving to ensure that our municipality stands with the local population, providing help in every possible way" (representative from the Gardabani municipality).

According to representatives of civil society organizations, their primary role is to inform the population about available services and to advocate for the needs of the local population within governmental structures. They assert that conducting relevant studies within municipalities is essential as this can provide a clearer understanding of the needs of the local community. Additionally, representatives of the civil sector focus on initiatives such as raising awareness among citizens, rehabilitating individuals released from penitentiary institutions, advocating for women's rights, making infrastructure more accessible for people with disabilities, and implementing educational projects. As per the representative of the Tetritskaro Youth Center, their organization equipped four ambulatory clinics with various essential equipment for medical personnel last year. Furthermore, they provided food and basic necessities to over 170 families during the COVID pandemic.

Both sides discuss the collaboration between local government representatives and the civil sector, although the intensity and effectiveness of this cooperation varies by region. For instance, the representative from the Center of Democratic Engagement of Marneuli suggested that cooperation isn't stable and needs to be fortified. The respondent further stated that the intensity of cooperation largely depends not on the institutional framework of

⁵ Programs implemented by the State Employment Support Agency.

collaboration, but on the individuals occupying roles within the local government. As an example, they noted that the previous mayor's administration actively collaborated with the civil sector, while the new administration has been less proactive in this area.

"Previously, when we had the old mayor, he was very active in communicating with citizens, even encouraging us to organize meetings with them. This is no longer the case, as the City Hall no longer initiates contact with us" (Center of Democratic Engagement of Marneuli).

According to representatives of local government from the Bolnisi and Tetritskaro municipalities, civil society organizations are actively involved in various areas and their contribution to the development of social services is significant. They discussed the contributions of CSOs in such areas as: protecting the rights of people with disabilities, improving kindergartens, equipping medical clinics, and training medical personnel.

Furthermore, representatives of civil society organizations highlighted their contributions in areas such as: raising public awareness, organizing free medical consultations for locals, and offering free psychological support to women who are victims of violence and single mothers. According to the representative from the Tetritskaro Youth Center, they are not able to consistently provide support and implement projects, as civil society organizations do not have a stable income and depend on grants. This circumstance hinders the activity of civil organizations - "Civil organizations are financially dependent on grants issued by donor organizations" (Tetritskaro Youth Center).

Chapter 5. Access to other services (except health and social)

During the focus group discussions, ethnic minority representatives expressed a lack of information regarding state educational, economic, and agricultural services/programs. Some respondents even discovered the existence of various programs for the first time during these discussions, such as "Enterprise in Georgia" and "Preferential Agrocredit." The discussions revealed that ethnic Georgians have benefited from various state programs more frequently than other ethnic groups.

The educational Programme "1+4" is highly favoured among ethnic minority representatives as its purpose is to enhance their proficiency in the state language, which, in turn, increases their chances of getting admitted to Georgian universities. Moreover, some municipalities offer vocational education. For example, a vocational school "Modus" was opened in Marneuli, which provides ethnic minority representatives with the opportunity to receive vocational training.

The majority of those who have utilized the service of women's rooms express satisfaction with the service they received (68.8%), among them, 62.4% are extremely satisfied. More

than a fifth of the respondents (23.6%) take a neutral position, while 7.6% are extremely dissatisfied.

During the quantitative research, respondents also evaluated their level of satisfaction with other services, such as: community planning/improvement and accessibility for people with disabilities.

It was revealed that 39.1% of respondents expressed dissatisfaction with the planning and public improvements of their communities (scoring 1 and 2 on a 5-point scale), while 35.6% were satisfied (scoring 4 and 5). Regarding accessibility for people with disabilities, it was found that in most cases either such accessibility does not exist in the respondents' community, or they were unaware if it does, with 56% indicating this. Of the 23.4% of respondents who believe that their community is adapted for people with disabilities, they have a neutral opinion - being neither satisfied nor dissatisfied (scoring 3). It appears, based on the respondents' views, that the needs of individuals with disabilities are not sufficiently considered in community planning, as 40.8% of respondents are dissatisfied with the level of accessibility (see Table #14).

Table #14

How satisfied are you with your community's	planning/public improvements (N=1200)	environment adapted for persons with disabilities (N= 529)
Extremely dissatisfied	16%	21.8%
Somewhat dissatisfied	23.1%	19%
Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied	24.7%	23.4%
Somewhat satisfied	21.2%	20.8%
Extremely satisfied	14.4%	15.1%
Prefer not to answer /Difficult to answer	0.7%	

When analyzing the issue in regional context, it was found that people in Samtskhe-Javakheti expressed higher satisfaction with the planning and public improvements of their communities (42.1%) compared to those in Kvemo Kartli (29%) (scores 4 and 5). Conversely, the majority of respondents in Kvemo Kartli expressed dissatisfaction, with 42.9% (scores 1 and 2). Interestingly, nearly half of the respondents in Kvemo Kartli (49.9%) stated that there is no adapted environment for persons with disabilities in their community or they are unsure if it exists. This figure is 62% in Samtskhe-Javakheti. Among those in Kvemo Kartli who indicated the existence of an adapted environment, 32% had a neutral opinion (score 3). Dissatisfaction was predominant in Kvemo Kartli, with 51.2% (scores 1 and 2). In contrast, Samtskhe-Javakheti yielded different results. According to respondents, it appears that the needs of people with disabilities are more taken into account in settlement planning in Samtskhe-Javakheti. 61% of respondents in Samtskhe-Javakheti believe that their community has an adapted environment for persons with disabilities and therefore express satisfaction (scores 4 and 5). (See Table #15).

Table #15

How satisfied are you with your	planning/public improvements		environment adapted for persons with disabilities	
community's (regional context)	Samtskhe- Javakheti (N=600)	Kvemo Kartli (N=600)	Samtskhe- Javakheti (N=231)	Kvemo Kartli (N=298)
Extremely dissatisfied	12.7%	19.3%	12.1%	29.2%
Somewhat dissatisfied	22.6%	23.6%	14.9%	22%
Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied	22.1%	27.3%	12%	32%
Somewhat satisfied	23.7%	18.7%	28.3%	15.1%
Extremely satisfied	18.4%	10.3%	32.7%	1.8%
Prefer not to answer /Difficult to answer	0.5%	0.8%		

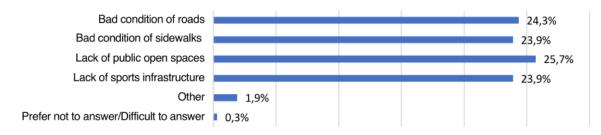
It was found that the respondents expressed nearly equal levels of dissatisfaction with various aspects of their settlement planning/public improvements, including:

- Bad condition of roads 24.3%
- Bad condition of sidewalks 23.9%
- Lack of public open spaces 25.7%
- Lack of sports infrastructure 23.9%

Other factors such as street lighting, absence of speed bumps, distance of transport, dilapidated buildings of educational institutions, lack of drainage channels, and more, collectively account for less than 2% of dissatisfaction among respondents (see Diagram #7).

Diagram #7

In particular, what aspects are you dissatisfied with in relation to planning/pubic improvements in your settlement? (N=459)

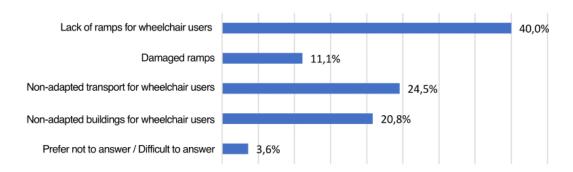


The top reason for dissatisfaction with the adapted environment for persons with disabilities in the settlement is the lack of ramps for people using wheelchairs (40%). Almost a quarter

of respondents highlight the issue of non-adapted transport (24.5%), and one-fifth of respondents name non-adapted buildings as a problem (20.8%) (see Diagram #8).

Diagram #8

In particular, what aspects are you dissatisfied with in relation to the adapted environment for persons with disabilities in your settlement? (N=220)



Identical problems emerged in the regional context as well. These were particularly noticeable in the context of planning problems:

- Road Conditions: Samtskhe-Javakheti 25.3%, Kvemo Kartli 23.7%
- Pavement Conditions: Samtskhe-Javakheti 22.3%, Kvemo Kartli 25%
- Shortage of Public Open Spaces: Samtskhe-Javakheti 25.3%, Kvemo Kartli 26%
- Insufficient Sports Infrastructure: Samtskhe-Javakheti 25.3%, Kvemo Kartli 23%

Conversely, the lack of wheelchair ramps poses a significant challenge in creating environments that are accessible for persons with disabilities (Samtskhe-Javakheti - 35.3%, Kvemo Kartli - 42%). Furthermore, the primary sources of dissatisfaction among the inhabitants of these two regions, as highlighted by the study, are non-adapted buildings for wheelchair users (Samtskhe-Javakheti - 26.3%, Kvemo Kartli - 18.5%) and inadequate transportation facilities (Samtskhe-Javakheti and Kvemo Kartli both at 26.2%) (see Table #16).

Table #16

In particular, what are you dissatisfied with in relation to the planning/public improvements of your settlement? (regional context)				
	Samtskhe- Javakheti (N=211)	Kvemo Kartli (N=248)		
Condition of roads	25.3%	23.7%		
Condition of pavements	22.3%	25%		
Lack of squares	25.3%	26%		
Lack of sports infrastructure	25.3%	23%		
other	1.6%	2.1%		
Prefer not to answer / Difficult to answer	0.3%	0.2%		

In particular, what are you dissatisfied with in relation to the planning/public improvements of your settlement? (regional context) Samtskhe-Kvemo Kartli Javakheti (N=248)(N=211)In particular, what are you dissatisfied with in relation to the adapted environment for persons with disabilities in your settlement? (regional context) Samtskhe-Kvemo Kartli Javakheti (N=65) (N=155)42% Absence of ramps for wheelchair users 35.3% 12.6% 10.5% Damaged ramps Non-adapted transport for wheelchair users 20.8% 26.2% Non-adapted buildings for wheelchair users 26.3% 18.5% other Prefer not to answer / Difficult to answer 5.1% 2.9%

In focus groups conducted across all eight municipalities, participants expressed a strong desire for more information about existing state programs. Residents wish to receive tailored information based on their interests and fields of activity. For example, farmers are interested in services/support programs for agriculture, while young people seek information on both formal and informal education as well as employment opportunities. Individuals with disabilities want to learn about social programs that can assist them in living independently, and small entrepreneurs are keen to find out about business support programs, etc.

Chapter 6. Equal Access to Services

In qualitative research, it was insightful to gauge the population's opinions regarding the degree to which ethnic Georgians and representatives of other nationalities (Azeris, Armenians) have equal access to state services. In the focus groups conducted with ethnic minorities, the prevailing sentiment was that existing services are more accessible to Georgians than to other ethnic communities.

"I can't point to anything specific, but I believe that Georgians avail themselves of every opportunity, wherever they go. But we don't know our rights" (62-year-old man, unemployed, ethnically Armenian, Tsalka)

Azerbaijanis residing in Kvemo Kartli pointed out that municipal bodies primarily employ ethnic Georgians, making it challenging for those who don't speak Georgian to access information. To avail themselves of services, they need to submit applications in Georgian and gather documents, requiring assistance from **someone proficient in the Georgian language**. Focus group participants highlighted that this issue of equal access primarily affects older individuals who do not speak or have limited proficiency in Georgian. However, through the "1+4 educational program," an increasing number of ethnic minority youths are learning Georgian to a level sufficient to access information and services. Despite this, a significant information gap remains among middle-aged and older representatives of ethnic minorities who do not speak Georgian.

"I worked in a bank, and when Armenians came in, they recognized me as Armenian, and they all came to me because they didn't know the Georgian language. If I didn't work at the bank, I am not sure if they would come to seek information. In my opinion, the main problem is not knowing the language" (27-year-old man, ethnically Armenian, employed, Tsalka)

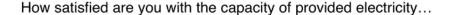
Ethnic Georgians participating in the focus groups found it challenging to discuss equal access to services, as this issue is not relevant to them, especially for those who do not interact with representatives of different ethnic groups. "I'm unaware, I don't know anyone facing any issues, as far as I know, they avail themselves of everything we do" (50-year-old woman, unemployed, ethnically Georgian, Akhaltsikhe).

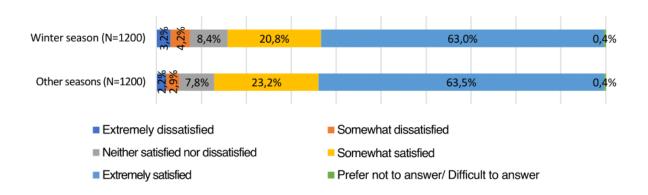
According to several Georgian participants in the focus groups, ethnic minorities are actively supplied with information about programs/services in their native languages, and hence there are all preconditions for accessing these programs/services.

Chapter 7. Communal infrastructure *Electricity*

The majority of respondents in the study (96.6%) reported having daily access to electricity, with 24-hour availability (99.7% in Samtskhe-Javakheti and 93.4% in Kvemo Kartli), while 3.4% reported unscheduled availability of electricity and often experiencing power outages (0.3% in Samtskhe-Javakheti and 6.6% in Kvemo Kartli). The respondents rated their satisfaction with the electricity supply in winter and other seasons on a 5-point scale, where point 1 represented the category "extremely dissatisfied", and point 5 represented the category "extremely satisfied". Almost an equal number of respondents reported being satisfied with the electricity supply (points 4 and 5) both in winter (83.8%) and other seasons (86.7%) with a small percentage (6%) reporting dissatisfaction (see Diagram #9).

Diagram #9

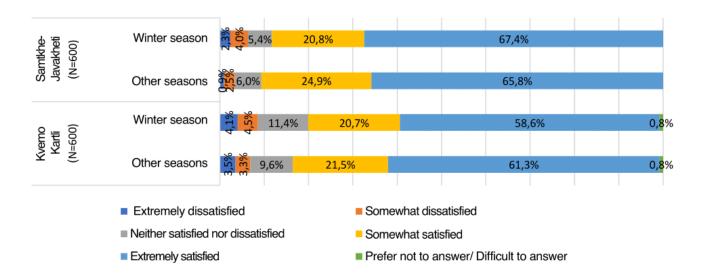




Residents in both regions generally express satisfaction with the capacity of their electricity supply. However, this sentiment is more pronounced in Samtskhe-Javakheti, considering both winter and other seasons (see Diagram #10).

Diagram #10

How satisfied are you with the capacity of provided electricity... (regional context)



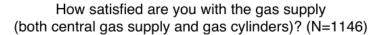
Gas supply

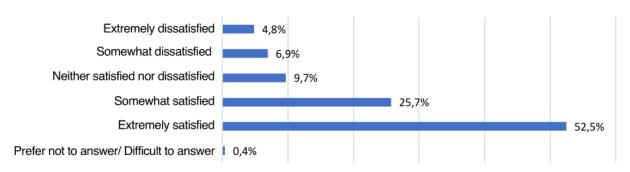
83.5% of the respondents reported that the central gas pipeline is functioning in their settlement. The vast majority, specifically 98.6%, receive gas supply from the centralized system all year round. Only a small portion, which is 0.8% or equivalent to 9 respondents (N=9), receive gas supply seasonally. Additionally, based on the feedback from four individuals, their families are not supplied with gas from the centralized system. In the Kvemo Kartli region, a higher proportion of respondents, which is 88.1%, reported that the central gas pipeline is functioning in their settlement (79% in Samtskhe-Javakheti). In both regions, an average of 98% of the respondents receive gas supply from the centralized system throughout the year.

According to 16.3% of respondents, their settlements lack a central gas pipeline. A significant portion of these respondents (46.5%) use gas cylinders year-round, while nearly a quarter (24%) use them seasonally. 29.5% of respondents whose settlements don't have a central gas pipeline reported that they don't use gas cylinders either. In Samtskhe-Javakheti, 72.3% of respondents without central gas supply use a gas cylinder either seasonally or throughout the year, compared to 67.7% in Kvemo Kartli.

The survey revealed that the majority of respondents (78.2%) are satisfied with their gas supply, whether it comes from a central pipeline or gas cylinders (rated 4 or 5). The percentage of dissatisfied individuals slightly exceeds a tenth (11.8%) (see Diagram #11).

Diagram #11





Despite varied experiences with gas usage, 78% of respondents from both Samtskhe-Javakheti and Kvemo Kartli expressed satisfaction with their gas supply (scores 4 or 5). However, it's worth noting that over a tenth of respondents in Kvemo Kartli show a neutral position - 11.8%. In Samtskhe-Javakheti, this rate was lower at 7.5% (see Table #17).

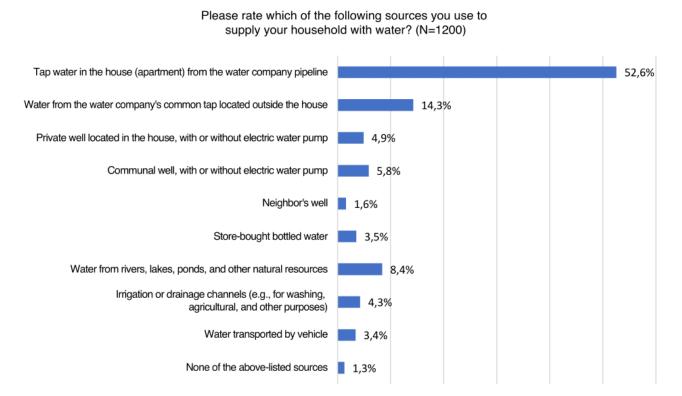
Table #17

How satisfied are you with the gas supply (meaning both central gas supply and gas cylinders)? (regional context)	Samtskhe- Javakheti (N=567)	Kvemo Kartli (N=579)
Extremely dissatisfied	4.5%	5.1%
Somewhat dissatisfied	9.2%	4.7%
Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied	7.5%	11.8%
Somewhat satisfied	29.4%	22.1%
Extremely satisfied	49%	55.9%
Prefer not to answer /Difficult to answer	0.3%	0.4%

Water supply

The majority of respondents (52.6%) use tap water in their homes (or apartments) for their domestic water needs, sourced from the water company's pipeline. Over a tenth of them mentioned that they rely on water from a communal tap provided by the water company, located outside their homes. 8.4% of respondents source their household water from rivers, lakes, ponds, and other natural resources (see Diagram #12).

Diagram #12



This general trend persists in both Samtskhe-Javakheti and Kvemo Kartli. The majority of respondents in Samtskhe-Javakheti (58.3%) reported using tap water at home for domestic water supply, compared to 47.8% in Kvemo Kartli. Notably, while every fifth respondent in Samtskhe-Javakheti uses water from a communal tap located outside their home, the rate in Kvemo Kartli drops to 7.4%. In contrast, in Kvemo Kartli, wells (either private or communal) are more commonly used for water supply, with nearly a fifth of respondents using this source. Meanwhile, in Samtskhe-Javakheti, well users make up less than 1% (see Table #18).

Table #18

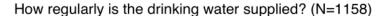
Please rate the following sources based on their use for your household water supply (Regional context)	Samtskhe- Javakheti (N=600)	Kvemo Kartli (N=600)
Tap water in the house (apartment) from the water company pipeline	58.3%	47.8%
Water from the water company's common tap located outside the house	22.5%	7.4%
Private well located in the house, with or without electric water pump	0.7%	8.4%
Communal well, with or without electric water pump	0.1%	10.6%
Neighbor's well	0.4%	2.5%
Store-bought bottled water	0.6%	6%
Water from rivers, lakes, ponds, and other natural resources	10.8%	6.4%
Irrigation or drainage channels (e.g., for washing, agricultural, and other purposes)	3.7%	4.8%
Water transported by vehicle	0.3%	6%
None of the above-listed sources	2.6%	0.2%

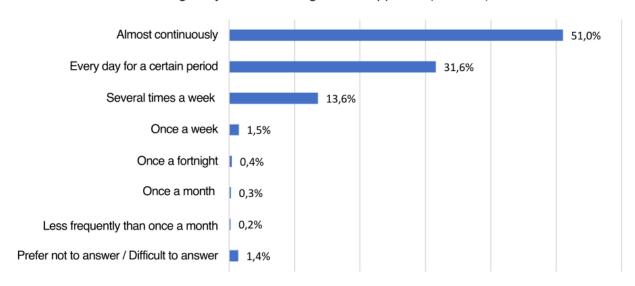
The following questions were answered only by respondents who use the following sources for their household water supply:

- Tap water in the house (apartment), from the water company's pipeline
- Water from the water company's communal tap located outside the house
- Private well located in the house (or building), with or without an electric water pump
- Communal well, with or without an electric water pump
- Neighbor's well
- Water from rivers, lakes, ponds, and other natural resources

According to half of these respondents (51%), drinking water is available almost continuously. About a third reported that they receive drinking water every day for a certain period. The proportion of those who receive drinking water several times a week exceeds a tenth (13.6%). There were only 6 respondents who stated that they receive drinking water once a month or less frequently (see Chart #13).

Diagram #13

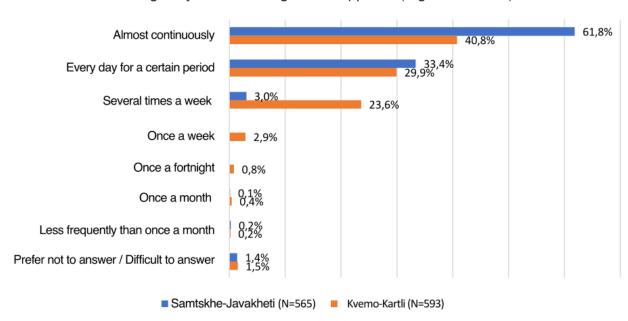




In Samtskhe-Javakheti, respondents reported a more consistent supply of drinking water: a majority (95.2%) stated that drinking water is available almost continuously or at least daily for a certain period. In Kvemo Kartli, this figure drops to 70.7%, and nearly one in four respondents indicated that drinking water is supplied several times a week (23.6%) (see Chart #14).

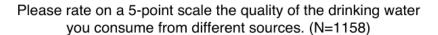
Diagram #14

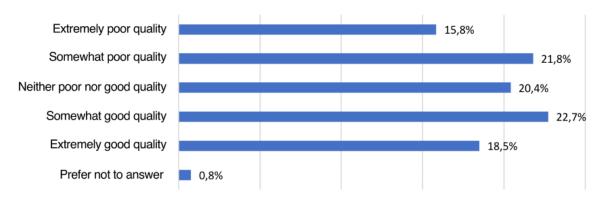




The same respondents rated the quality of drinking water on a 5-point scale (with 1 indicating "very poor quality" and 5 indicating "very high quality"). 41.2% of the respondents ranked their drinking water as high quality (scores of 4 and 5) (Samtskhe-Javakheti - 41.4%, Kvemo Kartli - 41%). However, more than a third (37.6%) believed the water quality to be poor. A fifth held a neutral position (see Diagram #15).

Diagram #15

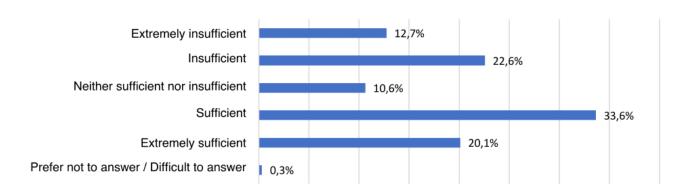




In the next phase, all respondents using any of the listed sources for household water supply assessed whether the supplied water was sufficient for their household needs. It was determined that, according to 53.7% of respondents, the water supply was adequate (scoring 4 and 5), while 35.3% gave a negative assessment (scoring 1 and 2). Every tenth respondent held a neutral position (scoring 3) (see Diagram #16).

Diagram #16

Please indicate if the water provided is enough to meet your household needs (N=11800)

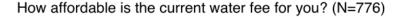


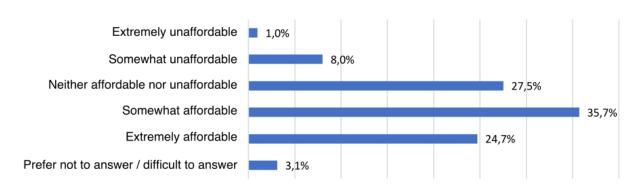
It was discovered that 35.5% of respondents' households do not pay for water, while for 34.9%, the fee is calculated according to meter usage, and for a quarter (25.6%), it is determined by the number of family members (3.1% had difficulty to answer or chose not to answer).

When analyzing the data by region, it was found that 40% of households in Samtskhe-Javakheti do not pay water fees, as well as nearly a third of respondents from Kvemo Kartli. In Kvemo Kartli, half of the respondents are billed for water according to the meter (49%), and 17.3% are billed based on the number of household/family members. Conversely, in Samtskhe-Javakheti, more than a third of respondents (34%) pay according to volume, and every fifth respondent pays according to the meter (20.5%).

The majority of those paying water fees indicated that the current fees are affordable for them (scores of 4 and 5 on a 5-point scale). Less than a tenth (9%, scores of 1 and 2 on a 5-point scale) deemed the current fees unaffordable, while more than a quarter (27.5%) held a neutral position (score of 3) (see Diagram #17).

Diagram #17

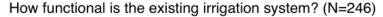


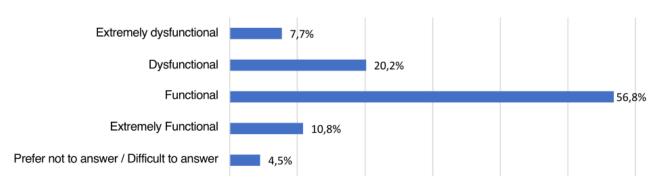


Irrigation system

The majority of the study participants (71.6%) indicated that the centralized irrigation system is not functioning in their settlement (Samtskhe-Javakheti - 84.9%, Kvemo Kartli - 67.2%). Only 21.8% have a positive experience with this (Samtskhe-Javakheti - 13.6%, Kvemo Kartli - 30%). According to 67.6% of them, the irrigation system is effective (scores of 3 and 4 on a 4-point scale) (see Diagram #18).

Diagram #18

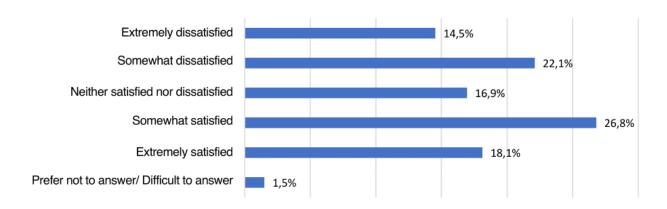




A large proportion of respondents (44.9%) in whose settlements a centralized irrigation system is operating are satisfied with the existing system (scores of 4 and 5 on a 5-point scale), with nearly a fifth being completely satisfied. On the other hand, more than a third of respondents (36.6%) are dissatisfied (scores of 1 and 2 on a 5-point scale) (see Diagram #19).

Diagram #19

How satisfied are you with the existing irrigation system in your settlement? (N=246)



In Samtskhe-Javakheti, 44.3% of respondents are satisfied with the existing irrigation system in their settlement (scores of 4 and 5). A similar sentiment is held by nearly the same number

- 45.2% - in Kvemo Kartli (including respondents in settlements where a centralized irrigation system is in operation). The proportion of dissatisfied individuals is equal in both regions, exceeding a third (an average of 36%) (see Table #19).

Table #19

How satisfied are you with the existing irrigation system in your settlement? (regional context)	Samtskhe- Javakheti (N=78)	Kvemo Kartli (N=168)
Extremely dissatisfied	13.8%	14.9%
Somewhat dissatisfied	22.7%	21.8%
Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied	19.3%	15.9%
Somewhat satisfied	33.7%	23.7%
Extremely satisfied	10.5%	21.6%
Prefer not to answer	-	2.2%

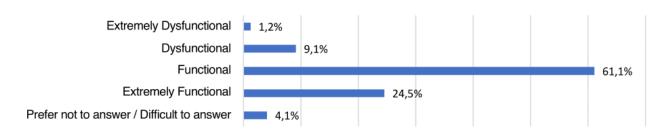
Sewage system

The majority of study participants (65.1%) indicated that there is no central sewage system in their settlement. This situation is more severe in Kvemo Kartli (where 77.9% reported the absence of a central sewage system) than in Samtskhe-Javakheti (52.4%). Slightly more than a third reported the existence of such a system in their settlements (34.7%) (Samtskhe-Javakheti - 47.3%, Kvemo Kartli - 22.1%). If a sewage system exists, the homes of 89.8% of respondents are connected to the central sewage system (Samtskhe-Javakheti - 95.6%, Kvemo Kartli - 77.3%).

Of those respondents using the central sewage system, 85.6% indicate that the system is effective (scores of 3 and 4 on a 4-point scale), and 10.3% report that the system is ineffective (see Diagram #20).

Diagram #20

In your opinion, how functional is the existing centralized sewage system? (N=384)



The general trend is consistent in both Samtskhe-Javakheti and Kvemo Kartli. Notably, in Samtskhe-Javakheti, 89.3% of respondents indicate that the centralized sewage system is ineffective, while this percentage drops to 75.8% in Kvemo Kartli (see Table #20).

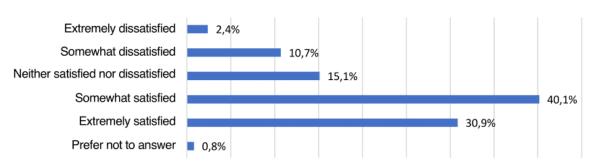
Table #20

In your opinion, how functional is the existing centralized sewage system? (regional context)	Samtskhe- Javakheti (N=276)	Kvemo Kartli (N=108)
Extremely dysfunctional	0.3%	3.5%
Dysfunctional	6.1%	17.2%
Functional	57%	72%
Extremely Functional	32.3%	3.8%
Prefer not to answer / Difficult to answer	4.3%	3.5%

71% of the respondents are satisfied with the existing centralized sewage system (4 and 5 points on a 5-point scale), including 30.9% who are extremely satisfied (score 5). The share of dissatisfied respondents equals 13.1% (scores 1 and 2) (see diagram #21).

Diagram #21





Although the majority of respondents in both Samtskhe-Javakheti (78%) and Kvemo Kartli (52.4%) are satisfied with the centralized sewage system (scores of 4 and 5), the proportion of dissatisfied respondents in Kvemo Kartli (26%) is significantly larger compared to Samtskhe-Javakheti (8.2%) (see Table #21).

Table #21

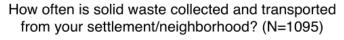
How satisfied are you with the centralized sewage system? (regional context)	Samtskhe- Javakheti (N=276)	Kvemo Kartli (N=108)
Extremely dissatisfied	0.9%	6.4%
Somewhat dissatisfied	7.3%	19.6%
Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied	12.7%	21.6%
Somewhat satisfied	44.1%	29.7%
Extremely satisfied	33.9%	22.6%
Prefer not to answer	1.1%	-

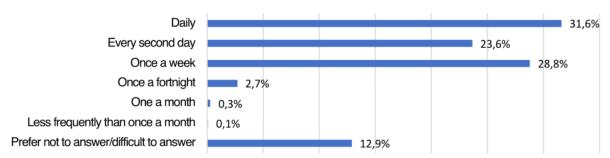
Solid waste collection and transportation

According to 91.8% of the respondents, solid waste is collected and transported from their settlement/district (Samtskhe-Javakheti - 98.7%, Kvemo Kartli - 84.8%). Only 6.1% responded negatively (12.2% in Kvemo Kartli, no negative answers were given in Samtskhe-Javakheti (1.3% refused to answer)).

Nearly one-third of the respondents from settlements/neighborhoods where solid waste is collected and transported indicate that this is done daily (31.6%). 28.8% mention that solid waste is collected and transported from their neighborhood/settlement once a week, and 23.6% estimate that it occurs every other day. More than a tenth of respondents (12.9%) found it difficult to answer or refused to answer (see Chart #22).

Chart #22

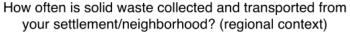


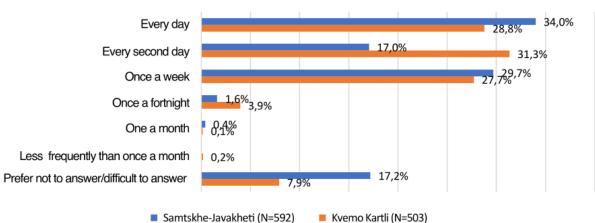


The general trend is consistent across the regions. The frequency of solid waste collection and transportation appears as follows:

- Every day: Samtskhe-Javakheti 34%, Kvemo Kartli 28.8%
- Every other day: Samtskhe-Javakheti 17%, Kvemo Kartli 31.3%
- Once a week: Samtskhe-Javakheti 29.7%, Kvemo Kartli 27.7% (see diagram #23)

Diagram #23

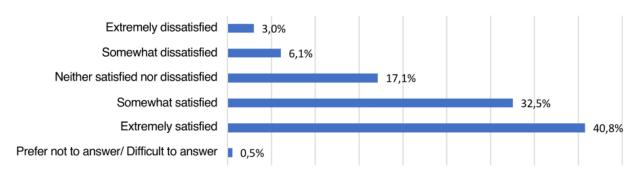




73.3% of the respondents using solid waste collection and transportation service are satisfied with this service (scores 4 and 5 on a 5-point scale), with 40.8% being extremely satisfied (score 5). The share of dissatisfied respondents does not even reach 10% (see diagram #24).

Diagram #24

How satisfied are you with the solid waste collection and transportation service? (N=1095)



According to 47.8% of the respondents, there is a landfill in their municipality. The situation is notably better in Samtskhe-Javakheti (61.9%) than in Kvemo Kartli (31.3%). More than a quarter of the respondents (27.7%) indicated the absence of a landfill in their municipality, with 21.5% in Samtskhe-Javakheti and 34.9% in Kvemo Kartli. (It should also be noted that more than a fifth of the respondents (23.7%) found it difficult to answer, and 0.8% refused to answer).

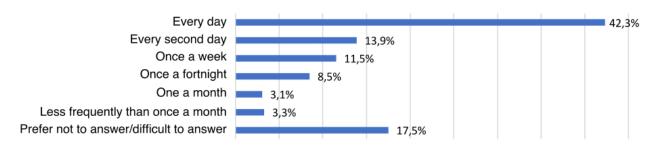
Cleaning of public spaces

According to 65.9% of the study participants, the streets in their settlement or district are not cleaned. (This situation is notably worse in Kvemo Kartli, where 79.9% of respondents reported this issue, compared to 51.9% in Samtskhe-Javakheti.) Only a third of total respondents (33.7%) indicate that street cleaning takes place in their area (19.5% in Kvemo Kartli and 48% in Samtskhe-Javakheti).

Among those who report that the streets in their settlement or district are cleaned, 42.3% stated that the streets are cleaned every day. Over a tenth reported cleaning occurs every other day (13.9%) or once a week (11.5%). 17.3% of respondents had difficulty specifying the frequency of street cleaning in their area (see diagram #25).

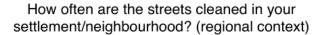
Diagram #25

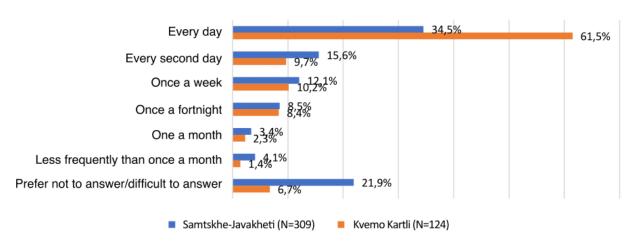
How often are the streets cleaned in your settlement/neighbourhood? (N=415)



The survey reveals that although (as it was mentioned) street cleaning is less frequent in Kvemo Kartli compared to Samtskhe-Javakheti, the frequency of cleaning in those settlements or districts where it does occur is generally higher in Kvemo Kartli. There, 61.5% of respondents reported that street cleaning happens every day, while this figure drops to 34.5% in Samtskhe-Javakheti. More than a fifth of respondents in Samtskhe-Javakheti had difficulty determining a specific cleaning frequency, and 15.6% reported that streets are cleaned every other day (see diagram #26).

Diagram #26

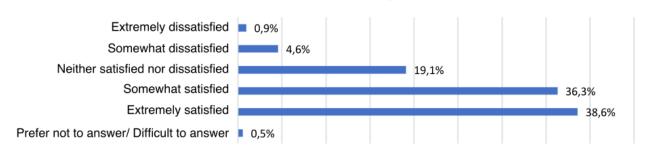




Among the respondents utilizing the cleaning service, 74.9% reported satisfaction with the service (scores 4 and 5 on a 5-point scale), and almost a fifth took a neutral position (19.1%, score 3). Only slightly more than 5% of respondents expressed dissatisfaction with the cleaning service (scores 1 and 2 on a 5-point scale) (see diagram #27).

Diagram #27

How satisfied are you with the cleaning service? (N=415)



In both Samtskhe-Javakheti (79.2%) and Kvemo Kartli (64.3%), the majority of respondents were satisfied with the cleaning service (scores 4 and 5). However, the percentage of respondents dissatisfied with the service was higher in Kvemo Kartli (8.9%). Notably, none of the respondents in Samtskhe-Javakheti were extremely dissatisfied with the cleaning service (score 1) (see table #22).

Table #22

How satisfied are you with the cleaning service? (regional context)	Samtskhe- Javakheti (N=291)	Kvemo Kartli (N=124)
Extremely dissatisfied	-	3.2%
Somewhat dissatisfied	4.1%	5.7%
Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied	16.5%	25.5%
Somewhat satisfied	41.3%	23.9%
Extremely satisfied	37.9%	40.4%
Prefer not to answer	0.3%	1.2%

Among those respondents who expressed dissatisfaction with the cleaning service, and discussed the reasons for this, 42.7% were unhappy with the quality of the service, nearly a third were unhappy with compliance to hygienic norms (32.6%), and a quarter were unhappy with the frequency of service (24.7%).

* * *

As part of the qualitative research, focus groups conducted in all eight municipalities echoed the opinion that utility and road infrastructure in the municipalities has improved in recent years. However, despite these improvements, problems were identified that, if solved, could significantly improve the overall conditions for the local population.

A dysfunctional irrigation water system was identified as a major concern for those engaged in agriculture, significantly impeding agricultural development. However, it was also mentioned that work is being done to address this issue, and the problem of irrigation water could be resolved in the near future. The problem of drinking water in Kvemo Kartli is particularly noticeable during the summer months. Additionally, a dysfunctional sewage system poses a significant problem, placing some settlements at risk of environmental threats. Residents pointed out that old landfills are left unsupervised and that the new landfill was built too close to residential areas.

Internally displaced persons (IDPs) living in compact settlements in the village of Koda, in the Tetritskaro municipality, highlighted that the access road to their settlement is in poor condition. They are unable to use public transportation or have to walk long distances.

The participants in focus groups conducted across all eight municipalities raised concerns about the lack of accessibility for persons with disabilities in public facilities/spaces. Many respondents noted that while some newly built public institutions have been adapted for people with limited mobility, they are unsure to what extent the adaptation complies with existing standards, as they have not seen any person with disabilities using these facilities.

"The work on the issue of adaptation has been ongoing for several years. Several buildings and environments have been made accessible, but I am unsure to what extent they meet the standards. I haven't seen a person with disabilities there" (32-year-old woman, employed, ethnic Georgian, Bolnisi).

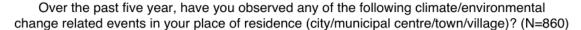
A respondent with disabilities participating in the Marneuli focus group, who is a student of "Modus" vocational school, noted that the school is adapted for persons with disabilities.

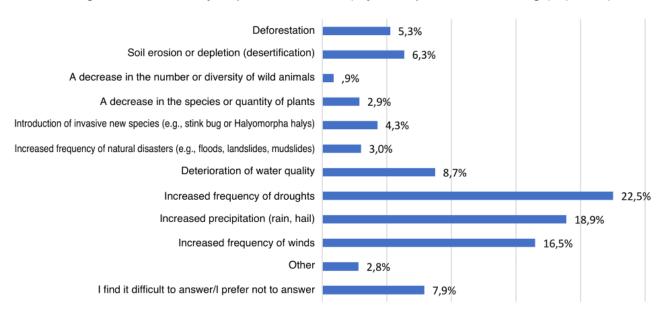
Chapter 8. Climate change and health problems caused by it

The survey assessed respondents' awareness of climate change, revealing that the majority of them (71%) have heard about the issue (74% in Samtskhe-Javakheti and 68% in Kvemo Kartli). However, the percentage of uninformed respondents remains relatively high, with 30% in Kvemo Kartli and down to 23.6% in Samtskhe-Javakheti.

Of those informed about climate change, an average of one in five respondents reported observing an increase in droughts (22.5%) and precipitation (rain, hail) (18.9%) in their place of residence during the past five years. 16.5% indicated an increase in the frequency of winds, and 8.7% reported a deterioration in water quality in the context of climate change (see Diagram #28).

Diagram #28





In both Samtskhe-Javakheti and Kvemo Kartli, the above-mentioned categories are dominant. It is worth noting that, according to more than a quarter of the informed

respondents in Kvemo Kartli, droughts have increased in their place of residence during the past five years (27.1%). Meanwhile, in Samtskhe-Javakheti, almost a quarter of respondents noted an increase in the frequency of winds (24.3%) (see table #23).

Table #23

Have you observed any of the following climate/environmental change related events in your place of residence (city/municipal center/township/village) In the past five years? (region specific)	Samtskhe- Javakheti (N=448)	Kvemo Kartli (N=412)
Deforestation	4.9%	5.7%
Soil erosion or depletion (desertification)	5.5%	7.2%
A decrease in the number or species of wild animals	0.9%	0.9%
A decrease in the number or species of plants	1.3%	4.5%
Introduction of invasive new species (e.g., stink bug or Halyomorpha halys)	3.1%	5.5%
Increasing frequency of natural disasters (floods, landslides, mudslides).	3.8%	2.2%
Deterioration of water quality	7.1%	10.5%
Increased frequency of droughts	18.3%	27.1%
Increased precipitation (rain, hail).	19.7%	18.1%
Increased frequency of winds	24.3%	8%
Other	2.4%	3.3%
I find it difficult to answer/prefer not to answer	8.7%	7.1%

Furthermore, informed respondents assessed whether climate change has negative health-related consequences in their place of residence. A 5-point scale was used, with 1 representing "does not cause at all" and 5 representing "unequivocally causes." The majority of respondents believe that environmental changes do not cause the following health problems (scores 1 and 2):

- The spread of various types of infections, transmitted by insects and invertebrates (for example, malaria, etc.) – 57.2%;
- Viral diseases (influenza, hepatitis C, chickenpox, etc.) 48.9%;
- Increase in cancer cases caused by a negatively changed environment (polluted water, air, food, high heat, etc.) – 31.4%;
- Increase in mortality 34.8%.

Conversely, around one in three respondents believe that climate change causes an increase in heart disease (31.9%) and stroke (31.3%) due to a negatively changed environment (scores 4 and 5) (see table #24).

Table #24

In your opinion, does climate/environmental change in your place of residence (city/municipal center/township/rural) cause any of the following adverse health effects? (N=860)	It doe s not cau se at all	2	3	4	une qui voc ally cau ses	Diff icul to ans wer / pref er not to ans wer
The spread of various types of infections, transmitted by insects and invertebrates, such as malaria among others.	30.1%	27.1%	16.8%	6.4%	8.1%	11.5%
Origin/distribution of viral diseases (influenza, hepatitis C, chicken pox, etc.)	25.2%	23.8%	21.3%	7.3%	11.2%	11.2%
Increase in heart disease cases caused by a negatively changed environment (polluted water, air, food, high heat, etc.)	15%	17.6%	28.6%	17.1%	14.8%	7%
Increase in stroke cases caused by a negatively changed environment (polluted water, air, food, high heat, etc.)	13.9%	16.6%	28.7%	18.5%	12.9%	9.5%
Increase in cancer cases caused by a negatively changed environment (polluted water, air, food, high heat, etc.)	15.4%	16.1%	31.5%	13.6%	12.2%	11.3%
Increase in mortality rates	15.5%	19.3%	26.6%	13.8%	11.1%	13.6%

From a regional context, the majority of respondents believe that climate change does not cause the spread of different types of infections (scores 1 and 2): 56.6% in Samtskhe-Javakheti and 57.8% in Kvemo Kartli. Similar assessments are found for viral diseases, with most respondents believing that climate change does not cause such health problems: 45.5% in Samtskhe-Javakheti and 52.7% in Kvemo Kartli. It is logical that in the regional context, there is a relatively high rate of agreement in those categories that are related to the changed environment, including polluted water, air, food, high temperature, etc. In both regions, a significant portion of respondents believe that climate change causes an increase in heart disease (32.6% in Samtskhe-Javakheti and 31.1% in Kvemo Kartli) and stroke (32.4% in Samtskhe-Javakheti and 30.1% in Kvemo Kartli) (scores 4 and 5) (see table #25).

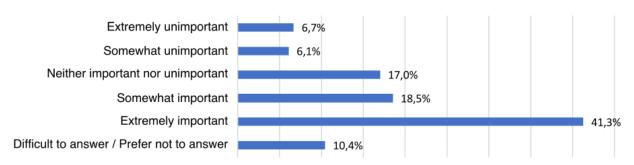
Table #25

In your opinion, does clima change in your place of res (city/municipal center/town any of the following advers (regional context)	idence ship/rural) cause	It do es not ca us e at all	2	3	4	un eq uiv oc ally ca us es	I fin d it diff icu It to an sw er/ pre fer not to an sw er
The spread of various types of infections, transmitted by insects and	Samtskhe-Javakheti (N=448)	28.8%	27.9%	16%	6.7%	9.7%	11%
invertebrates, such as malaria among others.	Kvemo Kartli (N=412)	31.6%	26.2%	17.6%	6.1%	6.4%	12%
Origin/distribution of viral diseases	Samtskhe-Javakheti (N=448)	24.9%	20.6%	20.6%	7.4%	15%	11.4%
(influenza, hepatitis C, chicken pox, etc.)	Kvemo Kartli (N=412)	25.5%	27.2%	22.1%	7.1%	7.1%	11%
Increase in heart disease cases caused by a negatively changed	Samtskhe-Javakheti (N=448)	16.2%	15.7%	28.8%	14.8%	17.8%	6.7%
environment (polluted water, air, food, high heat, etc.)	Kvemo Kartli (N=412)	13.7%	19.6%	28.4%	19.6%	11.5%	7.3%
Increase in stroke cases caused by a negatively changed environment	Samtskhe-Javakheti (N=448)	15.2%	17%	26.6%	17.2%	15.2%	8.7%
(polluted water, air, food, high heat, etc.)	Kvemo Kartli (N=412)	12.5%	16.2%	30.9%	19.9%	10.3%	10.3%
Increase in cancer cases caused by a negatively changed environment	Samtskhe-Javakheti (N=448)	19.3%	19.5%	24.7%	12.1%	15.7%	8.7%
(polluted water, air, food, high heat, etc.)	Kvemo Kartli (N=412)	11.1%	12.3%	39.1%	15.2%	8.4%	14%
Increase in mortality rates	Samtskhe-Javakheti (N=448)	18.2%	24.5%	19.6%	13.5%	12.8%	11.5%
Increase in mortality rates	Kvemo Kartli (N=412)	12.5%	13.7%	34.3%	14.2%	9.3%	15.9%

While summarizing the issue, it was assessed how important respondents consider the issue of climate change for their region. The importance was rated on a 5-point scale, where 1 denotes "not at all important" and 5 signifies "very important". The majority of respondents (59.8%) consider the issue of climate change important (scoring 4 and 5), including 41.3% who regard it as very important (score 5). The proportion of those who deem the issue as unimportant (scoring 1 and 2) is slightly more than a tenth (12.8%). Additionally, about one in ten respondents either had difficulty answering or chose not to respond (see diagram #29).

Diagram #29

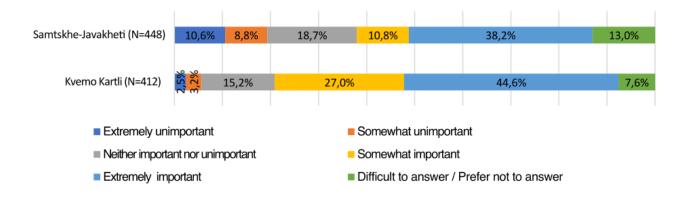
Please rate how important climate /environmental change is to your region (N=860)



The general trend holds true for both Samtskhe-Javakheti and Kvemo Kartli. However, it's worth noting that climate change is seen as more significant in Kvemo Kartli than in Samtskhe-Javakheti (scoring 4 and 5): Kvemo Kartli - 71.6%, Samtskhe-Javakheti - 49%. Conversely, roughly one in five respondents from Samtskhe-Javakheti perceive climate changes as insignificant (19.3%); in Kvemo Kartli, this figure decreases to 5.7% (see diagram #30).

Diagram #30

Please rate how important climate /environmental change is to your region (N=860)

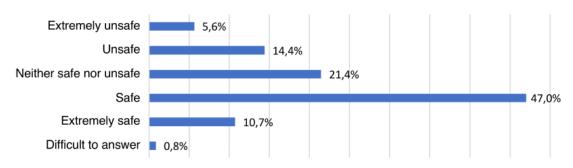


Chapter 9. Safety and Security

In the next phase, respondents were asked to evaluate the degree to which they feel their community is safe. Using a 5-point scale, with 1 being "extremely unsafe" and 5 being "extremely safe", the survey reveals that the majority of respondents (57.7%) believe their community is safe, while 20% consider their community to be unsafe (see diagram #31).

Diagram # 31





A majority of respondents in both Samtskhe-Javakheti (61.9%) and Kvemo Kartli (53.5%) believe their communities are safe (scoring 4 and 5). Thus, a sense of insecurity is relatively rare among respondents, although it is notable that feelings of insecurity are more prevalent (scoring 1 and 2) among those surveyed in Kvemo Kartli (27.1%). Only 13% of respondents in Samtskhe-Javakheti share a similar sentiment.

The respondents' perceptions of safety are corroborated by their report that, according to the majority, the following incidents are uncommon in their communities:

- Burglary/robbery 66.3%
- Drug use 58.5%
- Minor hooliganism 57.4%
- Domestic violence 60.6%
- Early marriage 67%

•

According to 38.5% of respondents, alcohol consumption is uncommon in their community, and 36.7% reported it's very uncommon. On average, about a tenth of respondents found it difficult to comment on the prevalence of drug use and domestic violence (see table #26).

Table #26

How common in your community is	Very unco mmo n	Unc om mon	Com mon	Very com mon	Prefe r not to answ er	Diffic ult to answ er
Burglary/robbery (N=1200)	66.3%	26.1%	5.3%	1.1%	0.3%	0.9%
Drug use (N=1200)	58.5%	16.7%	9.1%	4.2%	1%	10.5%
Alcohol consumption (N=1200)	36.7%	38.5%	17.3%	4.7%	0.3%	2.5%
Minor hooliganism (N=1200)	57.4%	32.5%	5.7%	1%	0.2%	3.3%
Domestic violence (N=1200)	60.6%	23.7%	3.9%	1.6%	0.8%	9.4%
Early marriage (N=1200)	67%	23.8%	4.7%	1.2%	0.4%	2.8%

The general trend persists even when considering the issue in a regional context. In both Samtskhe-Javakheti and Kvemo Kartli, the majority of respondents describe it as uncommon in their respective settlements.

- Burglary/robbery: Samtskhe-Javakheti 68.2%, Kvemo Kartli 64.4%
- Drug use: Samtskhe-Javakheti 66.9%, Kvemo Kartli 50%
- Minor hooliganism: Samtskhe-Javakheti 62.1%, Kvemo Kartli 52.7%
- Domestic violence: Samtskhe-Javakheti 55.7%, Kvemo Kartli 65.4%
- Early marriage: Samtskhe-Javakheti 67.4%, Kvemo Kartli 66.6%

Regarding alcohol consumption, it appears to be more prevalent in Kvemo Kartli. Approximately one-third of the respondents (31.1%) indicate that alcohol consumption is frequent or very common in their respective settlements. In contrast, only 12.9% of respondents in Samtskhe-Javakheti report such experiences (see Table #27).

Table #27

How common in you (regional conte		Exte mel y unc om mon	Unc om mon	Com mon	Ext re me ly co m mo n	Pr efe r not to an sw er	Diffi cult to ans wer
Burglary / robbery	Samtskhe-Javakheti (N=600)	68.2%	27.3%	2%	1.2%	0.4%	0.9%
Durgiary / Tobbery	Kvemo Kartli (N=600)	64.4%	24.9%	8.6%	1.1%	0.1%	0.9%
Drugues	Samtskhe-Javakheti (N=600)	66.9%	19.3%	3.7%	2.4%	1.5%	6.2%
Drug use	Kvemo Kartli (N=600)	50%	14.1%	14.5%	6%	0.5%	14.8%
Alcohol	Samtskhe-Javakheti (N=600)	44.7%	39.6%	7%	5.9%	0.5%	2.3%
consumption	Kvemo Kartli (N=600)	28.7%	37.4%	27.6%	3.6%	0.1%	2.6%
Minor hooliganiam	Samtskhe-Javakheti (N=600)	62.1%	32%	3.3%	1.1%	0.1%	1.4%
Minor hooliganism	Kvemo Kartli (N=600)	52.7%	32.9%	8.1%	0.8%	0.2%	5.2%
Domestic violence	Samtskhe-Javakheti (N=600)	55.7%	31.8%	3.9%	2.8%	0.8%	5%
Domestic violence	Kvemo Kartli (N=600)	65.4%	15.6%	3.8%	0.4%	0.8%	13.9%
Early marriage	Samtskhe-Javakheti (N=600)	67.4%	24.6%	3.9%	1.6%	0.5%	2%
Early marriage	Kvemo Kartli (N=600)	66.6%	23.1%	5.6%	0.9%	0.2%	3.6%

The research findings show that, according to respondents, the police ensure citizens' safety in most cases (62.3%). Nearly one-third believe that the community itself plays a significant role in this process (30.2%). Other potential sources of security such as local criminal authorities, religious leaders, and self-reliance do not collectively reach 5%. 4.3% of respondents struggled to answer or declined to do so. This general trend persists when examining the issue regionally - the police, viewed as the main security provider, is cited more often in Kvemo Kartli (71.2%) than in Samtskhe-Javakheti (53.5%). In Samtskhe-Javakheti, the role of the community is more pronounced (34.6%) than in Kvemo Kartli (25.7%). Furthermore, in Samtskhe-Javakheti, district elders are identified as an alternative security source (3.8%) in contrast to Kvemo Kartli (0.9%) (see table #28).

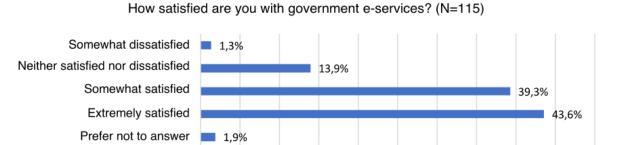
Table #28

Who ensures citizens' safety in your place of residence? (regional context)	Samtskhe- Javakheti (N=600)	Kvemo Kartli (N=600)
Police	53.5%	71.2%
District elders	3.8%	0.9%
District Criminal Authorities	-	0.1%
The population itself	34.6%	25.7%
Religious leaders	0.8%	0.7%
Other	0.2%	0.1%
Prefer not to answer / Difficult to answer	7.2%	1.3%

Chapter 10. Electronic Services

In the next stage of the survey, we evaluated the practice of using state and municipal electronic services. It appears that the majority of respondents (90.4%) do not use state electronic services (such as the cadastral database, information about property/income, etc.) (Samtskhe-Javakheti - 90.3%, Kvemo Kartli - 90.4%), and only about one in ten has similar experience. Of those who use state electronic services, 82.8% are satisfied with the services provided (scoring 4 and 5 on a 5-point scale). Interestingly, none of the respondents expressed extreme dissatisfaction with the state's e-services. Only 2 respondents (1.3%) are somewhat dissatisfied (see diagram #32), citing reasons such as the portal being difficult to navigate, not functioning consistently, and not being regularly updated.

Diagram #32



The majority of respondents in both regions are satisfied with state electronic services, although the satisfaction rate in Samtskhe-Javakheti (scoring 4 and 5) is higher at 89.3%, compared to 76.5% in Kvemo Kartli. It's also important to note that relatively dissatisfied respondents are only found in Kvemo Kartli (2.7%), while such sentiment is not present among respondents in Samtskhe-Javakheti (see table #29).

Table #29

How satisfied are you with government e-services? (regional context)	Samtskhe- Javakheti (N=60)	Kvemo Kartli (N=55)
Extremely dissatisfied	-	-
Somewhat dissatisfied	-	2.7%
Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied	10.7%	17.1%
Somewhat satisfied	55.2%	23.4%
Extremely satisfied	34%	53%
Prefer not to answer	-	3.7%

Similar to state electronic services, the majority of respondents (96.4%) do not utilize municipal electronic services. Only a small percentage (3.2%) have experience using these services. Among this small group, nearly half (47.6%) have utilized the municipality mayor's office website to access services, while over a fifth (22.6%) have used the municipality council's website. Approximately 29.7% of respondents found it difficult to specify a particular source.

In terms of utilizing municipal electronic services, both regions reported little experience: 96.9% in Samtskhe-Javakheti and 95.9% in Kvemo Kartli. However, the sources used to access these municipal electronic services differ between the regions. In Samtskhe-Javakheti, 66.1% of service users have used the municipality mayor's office website, and 30.3% have used the city council's website. In contrast, in Kvemo Kartli, a majority find it difficult to name a specific source (54.1%). Additionally, 30.4% of respondents in this region have used the city hall's website, and 15.5% have used the city council's website.

The majority of municipal electronic service users (64.1%) are satisfied with the services provided, including 25.1% who are extremely satisfied. More than a third adopt a neutral position, indicating that they are neither satisfied nor dissatisfied.

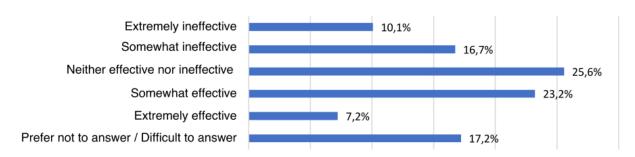
Chapter 11. Participation in municipal government management and public activities

Involvement of citizens in decision-making process at the local selfgovernment level

According to the survey results, one part of the respondents (30.4%) believed that the decision-making process at the local level responded to the demands and needs of citizens (given a rating of 4 and 5 points on a 5-point scale). However, it should be noted that almost the same number of respondents (26.8%) evaluated the current situation negatively and did not see a connection between solutions and needs (given a rating of 1 and 2 points) (see diagram #33).

Diagram #33

In your opinion, how effective is the decision-making process at the local level in meeting the demands and needs of citizens? (N=1200)



In the regional context, differences in experiences were observed. Over a third of the surveyed population in Samtskhe-Javakheti (36.7%) reporting a compatibility between locally adopted decisions and citizens' demands. Conversely, in Kvemo Kartli, a more negative assessment was noted, with 37.3% of respondents believing that adopted decisions do not meet the needs of the population (see table #30).

Table #30

How effective is the decision-making process at the local level in meeting the demands and needs of citizens? (regional context)	Samtskhe- Javakheti (N=600)	Kvemo Kartli (N=600)
Extremely ineffective	5.4%	14.7%
Somewhat ineffective	10.9%	22.6%
Neither effective nor ineffective	29.3%	21.8%
Somewhat effective	26.5%	19.9%
Extremely effective	10.2%	4.2%
Prefer not to answer / Find it difficult to answer	17.7%	16.7%

The respondents identified areas in which local self-government bodies could improve to better meet their needs. The top categories included:

- Organizing more frequent meetings with the population 25.2%
- Allocating more funds to solve the problems of the municipality 27.3%
- Informing the population about ongoing processes 14.8%

The other individual directions mentioned did not even reach 10%. About one-tenth of the respondents mentioned raising the qualifications of employees as particularly important, and 6.3% thought that it was necessary to pay greater consideration to the needs of the elderly in decision-making (see table #31).

Table #31

In what areas should local government bodies improve their work to better meet your needs' (N=1200)	?
Organizing more frequent meetings with the population	25.2%
Allocating more funds to solve the problems of the municipality	27.3%
Raising the qualifications of employees	9.1%
Informing the population about ongoing processes	14.8%
Greater consideration should be given to the needs of people with disabilities in decision-making	5.4%
Greater consideration should be paid to the needs of minorities (ethnic, religious, sexual) in decision-making	2.9%
Greater consideration should be given to the needs of women in decision-making	2.5%
Greater consideration should be paid to the needs of internally displaced persons in decision-making	1.2%
The needs of the elderly population should be given more consideration in decision-making	6.3%
Other	0.6%
Prefer not to answer / I find it difficult to answer	4.7%

The overall trend remains consistent within the regional context. The main categories, identifying the needs for improvement by local self-government bodies are the same in both regions:

- Organizing more frequent meetings with the population: Samtskhe-Javakheti 24.3%, Kvemo Kartli - 26%
- Allocating more funds to solve the problems of the municipality: Samtskhe-Javakheti
 29.1%, Kvemo Kartli 25.7%
- Informing the population about ongoing processes: Samtskhe-Javakheti 14%, Kvemo Kartli 15.5% (see table #32).

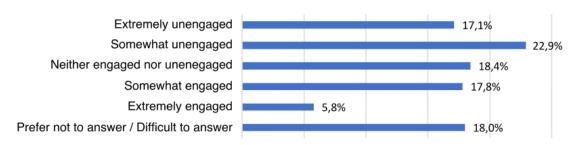
Table #32

In what areas should local government bodies improve their work to better meet your needs? (regional context)	Samtskhe- Javakheti (N=600)	Kvemo Kartli (N=600)
Organizing more frequent meetings with the population	24.3%	26%
Allocating more funds to solve the problems of the municipality	29.1%	25.7%
Raising the qualifications of employees	9%	9.3%
Informing the population about ongoing processes	14%	15.5%
Greater consideration should be given to the needs of people with disabilities in decision-making	5.5%	5.3%
Greater attention should be paid to the needs of minorities (ethnic, religious, sexual) in decision-making	3.5%	2.4%
Greater consideration should be given to the needs of women in decision-making	1.3%	3.5%
Greater consideration should be paid to the needs of internally displaced persons in decision-making	1.4%	1.1%
The needs of the elderly population should be given more consideration in decision-making	4.2%	8.2%
Other	0.3%	0.8%
Prefer not to answer / I find it difficult to answer	7.4%	2.4%

Respondents rated the involvement of citizens in the local self-government decision-making process on a 5-point scale, where point 1 corresponds to "not participating at all" and point 5 corresponds to "participating fully." The findings show that 40% of respondents believe citizens do not participate in this process (scores 1 and 2), while almost a quarter (25%) hold the opposite view and believe citizens are actively involved (scores 4 and 5). The fact that approximately 18% of respondents found it challenging to select a specific position or refused to answer also suggests a relative lack of activity (see Diagram #34).

Diagram #34

To what extent citizens are engaged in the decision-making process at the local self-government level? (N+1200)



The study has revealed that citizen involvement in the decision-making process of local self-government in Kvemo Kartli is significantly lower compared to that of Samtskhe-Javakheti. Only 26.7% of respondents in Samtskhe-Javakheti indicated that the population does not participate in the process, while in Kvemo Kartli, this figure increased to 53.4%. Furthermore, only 13.1% of respondents in Kvemo Kartli reported citizen participation (see table #33).

Table #33

To what extent citizens are engaged in the decision- making process at the local self-government level? (regional context)	Samtskhe- Javakheti (N=600)	Kvemo Kartli (N=600)
Extremely unengaged	7.6%	26.6%
Somewhat unengaged	19%	26.8%
Neither engaged nor unengaged	19.2%	17.7%
Somewhat engaged	24.4%	11.2%
Extremely engaged	9.6%	1.9%
Prefer not to answer / Find it difficult to answer	20%	15.8%

The study also separately evaluated to what extent the local government is focused on increasing the participation of ethnic minority representatives in decision-making processes. According to the respondents, events with such objectives are generally not organized, as indicated by 33.6%. Over a quarter (27.1%) reported positive experiences. However, it's noteworthy that 39.3% of respondents either declined to answer or found it difficult to do so (with 37.8% found it difficult to answer).

Regionally, the data suggests that in terms of local government involvement of ethnic minorities in decision-making processes, the situation appears better in Samtskhe-Javakheti (26.7%) than in Kvemo Kartli (40.4%). In addition, more respondents in Samtskhe-Javakheti found it difficult to express their opinion on this issue (46.6%) than in Kvemo Kartli - 31.9%.

The survey reveals that 78.6% of respondents are unaware of the state's activities aimed at promoting local businesses (81.8% in Samtskhe-Javakheti, 75.4% in Kvemo Kartli), with only a fifth (19.2%) expressing awareness. 2% declined to answer. Among those who are aware of such activities, it was further clarified whether they had heard about programs/initiatives specifically aimed at the economic empowerment of women. It appears that only 11% have heard about such initiatives (88.6% lack this information), and they typically identify programs such as Agroloans, "Produce in Georgia", and TASO Foundation as examples. Awareness of projects aimed at the economic empowerment of women is higher in Kvemo Kartli (15.6%) compared to Samtskhe-Javakheti (4.5%).

The proportion of respondents who have heard about business promotion activities targeted towards the economic empowerment of people with disabilities is significantly smaller (4%)

(4.4% in Samtskhe-Javakheti, 3.8% in Kvemo Kartli). "Produce in Georgia" was once again mentioned as a specific program. Additionally, one respondent specifically mentioned benefits for admission to higher education and inclusive education in general.

It appears that only 6.5% of the respondents who are informed about state business promotion activities (2.1% in Samtskhe-Javakheti, 9.6% in Kvemo Kartli) have heard about programs/projects aimed at the economic empowerment of ethnic minority representatives (93.2% do not have such information). Specific initiatives mentioned include language learning programs, support for starting various businesses, funding for a weaving enterprise, and providing necessary financing for agricultural development.

* * *

Similar to the quantitative research, one of the tasks of the qualitative research, specifically the focus groups, was to gauge the level of public participation in local government activities. It is worth mentioning that in all focus groups, there were participants who were unaware of the various ways they could be involved in local government. For instance, they were unaware that they were allowed to attend municipal council meetings, ask questions, discuss the budget, and participate in drafting petitions, etc.

A part of the participants did not perceive any enthusiasm or intent from local authorities to involve the public in the decision-making process. They believed this was because public involvement could potentially complicate and delay the process, something the local government would likely want to avoid.

"I personally thought that only people working there could attend, and now I am hearing it from you for the first time" (30-year-old woman, self-employed, ethnically Georgian, Akhaltsikhe).

Focus group participants emphasized the need for youth engagement in local government activities. They expressed concerns about the current situation of young people in their municipalities. While they were aware of the existence of youth councils at City Hall, they lacked information about their functions.

It was interesting to hear from the participants of the focus groups the reasons for non-participation of the population in the activities of the local government. Lack of information was identified as a primary reason for public non-participation in local government activities. For instance, they often received information about Sakrebulo (the local council) sessions after they had occurred, rather than in advance.

"There is nothing on the Facebook page either. I am looking at photos of the sessions that have already been held" (30-year-old woman, self-employed, ethnically Georgian, Akhaltsikhe).

Citizens lacked information about their rights, specifically how they could participate in local government activities.

Some focus group participants were skeptical about public participation in local government activities. According to their assessment, participation often had a formal character and it was challenging to make a real impact. Nihilism was also cited as a reason for non-participation. The prevailing idea among many people was that the government knows best and public interference was unnecessary. "There is such an opinion that the government knows better and why should I interfere?!" (32-year-old man, employed, ethnically Georgian, Tetritskaro).

Lack of time was another reason for public non-participation. This part of the participants believed that they did not have the time or opportunity to be active. Particularly vulnerable respondents, considering their difficult socio-economic circumstances, felt that they had neither the ability nor motivation to engage in municipal activities due to their daily struggles.

Focus group participants suggested that alongside government representatives, public organizations need to increase their activity in order to stimulate public interest in participating in local government. "The population needs to be encouraged and to see that their participation may bring results. Organizations should be activated" (22-year-old man, employed, ethnically Georgian, Dmanisi). Notably, the long distance to the center was identified as a significant barrier for rural population engagement.

The focus group results indicate that those who are interested in local government activities and are willing to participate are primarily concerned with health services and infrastructural issues, such as: construction of public open spaces, arrangement of road infrastructure, building sports halls, drainage system arrangement, etc. This suggests that the public associates local government activities with addressing health and infrastructure issues.

The issue of inclusion of ethnic minority groups in local government activities is also noteworthy. Key factors identified for their lack of participation include language barriers and generally low levels of integration, leading to exclusion from public life. "Such an environment has been created, everyone thinks that their place is not there" (37-year-old man, employed, ethnic Azerbaijani, Gardabani). Among ethnic minority representatives, the perception exists that mainly those close to the government are involved and active, while there is no promotion of involvement from the local government for those who are neutral or critical.

It should be noted that some ethnic Azerbaijani focus group participants had signed an online petition to declare Kurban-Bayram, an Islamic religious holiday, an official holiday.

During the in-depth interviews, local government representatives assess the engagement of the population in the decision-making process differently, depending on the regions and municipalities. For instance, a representative from the Tsalka municipality noted that their population is very active and participates in all processes if they have information, while a representative from Bolnisi City Hall stated that their population is generally passive and does

not participate in decision-making, especially among ethnic minorities and women. "We have a very passive population. In many cases, they do not like to be involved in the decision-making process. There are ethnic minority groups and women here, they are not involved in the decision-making process" (Mayor's representative from Bolnisi).

Local government and civil sector representatives held differing views on public involvement. Municipal service representatives claimed that public participation in decision-making had increased over the past three years, while civil society representatives felt no significant changes had been observed. They suggested that public participation is hindered by a lack of information or delayed provision of information.

"Nothing has changed at all in recent years, it's still the same. There is never information about the exact meetings and why a person would be interested in it. They usually write about the session at the last minute" ("Center for Democratic Engagement" - Marneuli).

Social workers in the Kvemo Kartli region report that there is communication between the local government and the population. Municipal representatives meet with the public and implement projects that reflect their needs. However, due to limited budgets, the number of projects is restricted, and not all problems that concern the population can be addressed.

"I cannot say that local government representatives do not meet the population. When making decisions, the interest of the population is more or less taken into account. It is not possible to finance many projects from the budget, and the population chooses which one is more necessary, and then the selected project is financed by the municipality" (social worker).

To enhance the engagement of the population in the decision-making process, both local government members and civil society organizations emphasize the significance of providing relevant information to the public. According to the respondents, conducting meetings of general assembly of a settlement is a crucial tool to accomplish this objective. These meetings should serve as the primary platform for active communication with the population.

A representative from the Gardabani municipality noted that the growth of public involvement in decision-making processes is hampered by a lack of, or inadequate, knowledge of the Georgian language. According to a representative from the "Association "Tolerant", the population does not feel that their opinions will be taken into account by the local government.

"The population thinks that the government prepares the budget as it should. The authorities wonder why the population does not come to the meetings. This is the fault of the lack of information, no one provides complete information to the population" ("Association "Tolerant" - Samtskhe-Javakheti).

According to the representatives from Akhaltsikhe local government, increasing public awareness requires more active meetings organized by village trustees and a more strategic use of media sources, including social networks, to disseminate information. On the other hand, representatives of civil society organizations emphasize that the key to increasing citizen involvement is the willingness of the local government to invite the population to participate in decision-making processes and to take appropriate actions to facilitate this. The representative from the Civic Engagement Center in Marneuli noted that the local government takes a passive stand in mobilizing citizens, as they prefer to make decisions privately within a narrow circle, and does not announce meetings in a timely manner, sharing information only within a small circle of people.

"The self-government can be more willing to involve the population in the processes. They don't know how to do it, maybe they don't even want to, they don't say in advance that there will be a meeting on this and that day, if they say, they only tell a close circle and not everyone" (The Center of Democratic Engagement of Marneuli).

According to the representative of the Tetritskaro City Hall, in order to increase the involvement of the population, a youth center was established with the support of the municipality, which holds educational and cultural events. According to the representative of Akhaltsikhe municipality, there is a gender department in the municipality, which contributes to the economic empowerment of women, raising awareness about rights and increasing their involvement. According to the respondent, non-governmental organizations also actively participate in the mentioned activity - "We have a gender department, which is quite active. It travels throughout the countryside and city, providing information to citizens from various perspectives. The non-governmental sector is also involved and they are quite active" (municipality representative from Akhaltsikhe). In contrast, according to the representative of the civil organization "Women's Room", the Tsalka municipality is not active in promoting the economic empowerment of women. Furthermore, the respondent stated that the budget of the said municipality is not "gender sensitive".

Communication with local self-government structures

The study revealed that the participants did not have active communication with the local self-government structures. The majority of respondents (81.8%) did not appealed them to solve a specific issue in the last 2 years (83.7% in Samtskhe-Javakheti and 80% in Kvemo Kartli). Only 17% of respondents reported having appealed to them (while 1.2% refused to answer). Furthermore, the survey specified the specific issues for which they had sought help from the local self-government. Among the respondents who had sought help, the following categories were reported as the most prevalent:

- Improvement of the environment for various social/vulnerable groups (such as persons with disabilities, children, elderly, homeless, internally displaced persons) 13.7%;
- Infrastructure problems (such as gas supply, water supply, electricity, etc.) − 21.8%;
- Social issues (such as social assistance, unemployment, etc.) − 28%;
- Issues related to healthcare services 19.3%.

Furthermore, 7.7% of respondents reported they appealed to the local self-government regarding the development of the territory, while 3.8% sought assistance with the registration of their house/land. Other categories included specific issues such as water problems, the issues of stray animals, and construction of a garage, among others (see Table #34).

Table # 34

In the past two years, what issue(s) have you addressed to the local government? (N=215)	
Improvements to the environment for various social/vulnerable groups (persons with disabilities, children, the elderly, the homeless, internally displaced persons	13.7%
Infrastructure problems (gas supply, water supply, electricity, etc.)	21.8%
Territorial improvements (collection and transportation of solid waste, landscaping, etc.)	7.7%
Social issues (social assistance, unemployment, etc.)	28%
Issues related to healthcare services	19.3%
House/land registration	3.8%
other	5.3%
Prefer not to answer /Difficult to answer	0.4%

The issues that were most commonly addressed by respondents to local self-governments in the last 2 years are similar in both regions and include:

- Infrastructure problems (gas supply, water supply, electricity, etc.): Samtskhe-Javakheti - 27.6%, Kvemo Kartli - 16.8%
- Social issues (social assistance, unemployment, etc.): Samtskhe-Javakheti 33.1%, Kvemo Kartli -23.5%
- Issues related to healthcare services: Samtskhe-Javakheti 15.3%, Kvemo Kartli 22% (see table #35).

Table #35

In the past two years, what issue(s) have you addressed to the local government? (regional context)	Samtskhe- Javakheti (N=98)	Kvemo Kartli (N=117)
Improvements to the environment for various social/vulnerable groups (persons with disabilities, children, the elderly, the homeless, internally displaced persons	15.2%	12.4%
Infrastructure problems (gas supply, water supply, electricity, etc.)	27.6%	16.8%
Territorial improvements (collection and transportation of solid waste, landscaping, etc.)	5.8%	9.4%
Social issues (social assistance, unemployment, etc.)	33.1%	23.5%
Issues related to healthcare services	15.3%	22.8%
House/land registration	1%	6.3%
other	1.3%	8.9%
Prefer not to answer /Difficult to answer	0.8%	-

Of those who reported various issues to local self-government bodies, more than a third (39.6%) stated that none of their problems were resolved (36.4% in Samtskhe-Javakheti and 42.3% in Kvemo Kartli). Around 23.5% of respondents said that some of their problems were

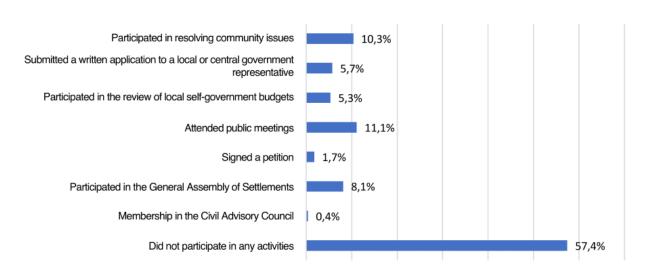
resolved, while 5% reported that all of their issues were resolved by the local self-government. More than a tenth of respondents stated that the local self-government attempted to address their issue but was unable to resolve it. About 2.1% found it difficult to answer (see diagram #37).

Participation in public activities

The study revealed that during the last one year, only 11.1% of the respondents participated in public meetings and 10.3% were involved in resolving settlement issues. Additionally, 8.1% of respondents participated in the General Assembly of Settlements. It should be noted, however, that the majority of respondents (57.4%) did not participate in any of these activities (see diagram #35).

Diagram #35

Have you participated in any of the following activities in the past one year? (N=1200)



On average, one-tenth of the respondents in both Samtskhe-Javakheti and Kvemo Kartli regions reported participating in public meetings. Additionally, residents of Kvemo Kartli region were more likely to participate in solving settlement issues (12.4%). However, it is important to note that citizen participation in some regions was low, with the majority reporting no participation in any activities in the last one year (65.4% in Samtskhe-Javakheti and 50.3% in Kvemo Kartli) (see table #36).

Table #36

Have you participated in any of the following activities in the past one year? (region specific)	Samtskhe- Javakheti (N=600)	Kvemo Kartli (N=600)
Participated in resolving community issues	8%	12.4%
Submitted a written application to a local or central government representative	2.4%	8.6%
Participated in the review of local self-government budgets	2.9%	7.5%
Attended public meetings	11.3%	10.9%
Signed a petition	0.6%	2.7%
Participated in the General Assembly of Settlements	9.2%	7.1%
Membership of the Civil Advisory Council	0.2%	0.5%
Did not participate in any activities	65.4%	50.3%

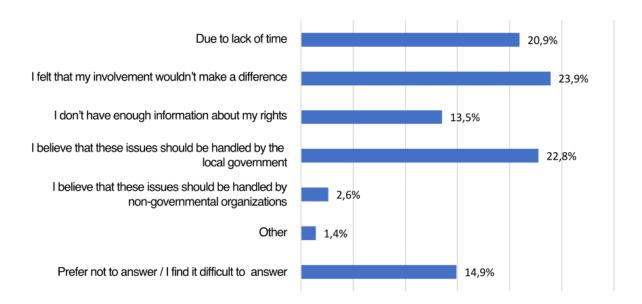
The primary reasons for not participating in civic activities in the past one year were identified as follows:

- Lack of time 20.9%
- Feeling that their participation would not bring any change 23.9%
- Belief that local government should handle these issues 22.8%

At the same time, more than one-tenth of respondents reported not having enough information about their rights (13.5%). It is worth noting that 14.9% of respondents either found it difficult to answer or refused to answer (see diagram #36).

Diagram #36





In both Samtskhe-Javakheti and Kvemo Kartli, more than a fifth of the respondents cited the following reasons for not participating in civic activities:

- They felt that their participation would not bring about any change: Samtskhe-Javakheti – 24%, Kvemo Kartli – 23.8%
- They believed that the responsibility for addressing these issues lay with the local government: Samtskhe-Javakheti 20.7%, Kvemo Kartli 25.2% (see table #37).

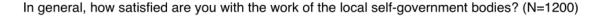
Table #37

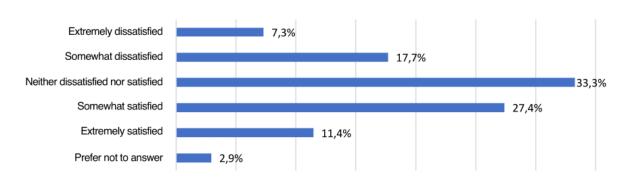
Why do you think you have not participated in any civic activities in the last 1 year? (regional context)	Samtskhe- Javakheti (N=384)	Kvemo Kartli (N=302)
Due to lack of time	16.3%	26.5%
I felt that my involvement wouldn't make a difference	24%	23.8%
I do not have enough information about my rights	17.5%	8.8%
I believe that these issues should be handled by the local government	20.7%	25.2%
I believe that these issues should be handled by non-governmental organizations	4%	1%
other	1.8%	0.9%
Prefer not to answer / I find it difficult to answe	15.7%	13.9%

Satisfaction with the work of local self-government bodies

All participants in the study provided a positive evaluation of the work carried out by local self-government bodies. The evaluation was based on a 5-point scale, where category 1 represented "extremely dissatisfied" and category 5 represented "extremely satisfied". The findings indicate that 38.8% of the respondents were satisfied with the activities of the municipalities (scored 4 and 5), and a third (33.3%) held a neutral position (scored 3) (see diagram #37).

Diagram #37





A regression model was developed to identify the factors that influence the performance of local self-government bodies, based on the satisfaction levels of respondents. It was revealed that the following groups are highly satisfied with the activities of the municipality:

- City residents;
- Individuals belonging to the upper age group;⁶
- Those who have contacted the local self-government regarding healthcare services within the past 2 years;
- Individuals who have participated in a general Assembly of the settlement over the past one year (see table #38)

Table #38				
	Satisfaction with the work of local self-			
	government bodies			
	Beta	Standardized CI	Sig	
Type of settlement (urban / rural)	-0.382	-1.8170.481	0.001	
Age	0.285	0.008 - 0.048	0.007	

⁶ The older the respondents, the more satisfied they are with the work of local self-government bodies

-

Appeal to local government regarding healthcare service related issues	0.361	0.359 – 1.558	0.002
Participation in the general meeting of the settlement	0.291	0.257 – 1.682	0.008

It is noteworthy that the satisfaction level with the performance of local self-government bodies is higher in Samtskhe-Javakheti (47.5%) compared to Kvemo Kartli (30.2%) (scores 4 and 5). In both regions, on average, one-third of the respondents hold a neutral stance; however, in Kvemo Kartli, the proportion of dissatisfied individuals with the performance of the municipality is higher at 35.5% (see table #39).

Table #39

In general, how satisfied are you with the work of local self-government bodies? (regional context)	Samtskhe- Javakheti (N=600)	Kvemo Kartli (N=600)
Extremely dissatisfied	3.7%	10.9%
Somewhat dissatisfied	10.7%	24.7%
Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied	36%	30.5%
Somewhat satisfied	37.1%	17.7%
Extremely satisfied	10.4%	12.5%
Prefer not to answer	2%	3.8%

Based on the regression model, the satisfaction level of interviewees in Kvemo Kartli is mainly influenced by two factors: the type of settlement and whether they have contacted self-governments for various issues. The study revealed that the following groups are highly satisfied with the performance of the municipality:

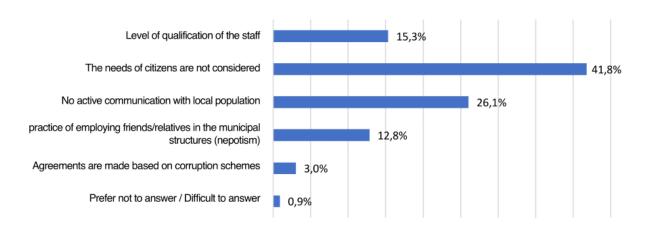
- city residents;
- Respondents who have not addressed a local or central government representative in writing within the past 2 years;
- Respondents who have addressed self-government on matters related to healthcare (see Table #40)

Table #40	Satisfaction with the work of local self- government bodies (Kvemo Kartli)		
	Beta Standardized CI Sig		
Type of settlement (urban / rural)	- 0.328 _	-2.1700.239	0.016
Addessing by a written application a local or central government representative	- 0.357 _	-1.8450.385	0.004
Appeal to the local self-government regarding issues related to health care services	0.271 _	0.031 – 1.579	0.042

Failure to take into account the needs of citizens (41.8%) was identified as the primary cause of dissatisfaction with the performance of local self-government bodies. Additionally, over a quarter of respondents believe that there is insufficient communication with the local population, with 15.3% stating that the level of employee qualifications is problematic. More than one in ten respondents cited nepotism as the reason for their dissatisfaction (see diagram #38).

Diagram #38

Why are you dissatisfied with the work of local self-government bodies? (N=298)



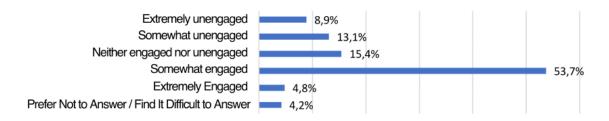
Chapter 12. Cooperation with civil society organizations

The majority of participants in the research (93.8%) do not have information about civil society organizations in their municipality (Samtskhe-Javakheti - 91.3%, Kvemo Kartli - 96.3%). Only 5.5% of respondents reported being aware of such organizations (0.6% refused to answer). When asked to name specific organizations, many found it difficult to do so, but some mentioned 'Tolerant', 'Union of Democrat Meskhs', 'Democrat Women's Organization, and community centers.

The majority of respondents who are informed about civil society (58.5%) believe that the local population is involved in the activities of civil society organizations, scoring 4 or 5 on a 5-point scale. More than one-fifth (21.9%) indicate low participation or non-participation, scoring 1 or 2 on the scale (see diagram #39).

Diagram #39

How engaged are citizens in the activities of civil society organizations? (N=71)



The overall trend persists when the issue is examined across different regions. In both Samtskhe-Javakheti (57.9%, N=30) and Kvemo Kartli (60.1%, N=11), the majority of those aware of civil society organizations believe that the community is actively involved in these organizations' activities (points 4 and 5). However, a larger number of individuals in Samtskhe-Javakheti - 23.5% - have a negative assessment on this matter (see table #41).

Table #41

How engaged are citizens in the activities of civil society organizations? (Regional context)	Samtskhe- Javakheti (N=53)	Kvemo Kartli (N=18)
Extremely unengaged	9.8%	6.1%
Somewhat unengaged	13.7%	11.2%
Neither engaged nor unengaged	15%	16.7%
Somewhat engaged	55.2%	49.3%
Extremely Engaged	2.7%	10.7%
Prefer Not to Answer / Find It Difficult to Answer	3.6%	6%

During the study, we assessed the usage of specific services offered by civil society organizations over the past year among respondents who are aware of civil society. The most commonly utilized service was social services, accounting for 18.7%. It's worth noting that this service is only used in Samtskhe-Javakheti (25.5%), while respondents in Kvemo Kartli had no similar experiences. The usage rate for other individual services scarcely reaches 3%: projects aimed at empowering women accounted for 2.9%, and projects targeted at integrating ethnic minority representatives comprised 2.7%. In Kvemo Kartli, one in ten respondents does not participate in projects aimed at empowering women.

The study revealed that even respondents who are aware of civil society organizations do not engage with these organizations - 62.1% have not utilized any services in the past year (57.7% in Samtskhe-Javakheti and 74.4% in Kvemo Kartli). The main reason given for this was the absence of a need to use these services (67%). The percentage of those who either lack information about the activities of civil society organizations or have have not benefited due to complex registration procedures exceeds 5%.

Table #42

In the past one year, which services offered by civil society organizations have you used? (N=71)		
Social services	18.7%	
Healthcare services	1.3%	
Projects targeting the integration of persons with disabilities	2.3%	
Projects targeting the integration ethnic minority of representatives	2.7%	
Projects promoting the participation of the elderly in socio-cultural activities	1.5%	
Projects focused on empowering women	2.9%	
I have not used any services	62.1%	
Prefer not to answer / I find it difficult to answer	8.6%	

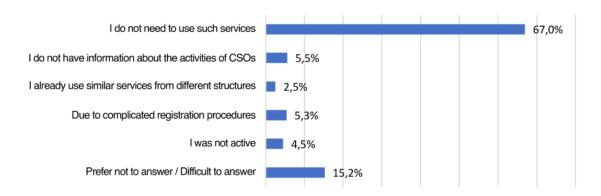
Table #43

During the past 1 year, which services offered by civil society organizations have you used? (region specific)	Samtskhe- Javakheti (N=53)	Kvemo Kartli (N=18)
Social services	25.5%	-
Healthcare services	1.7%	-
Projects targeting the integration of persons with disabilities	3.1%	-
Projects targeting the integration ethnic minority of representatives	1.7%	5.4%
Projects promoting the participation of the elderly in socio- cultural activities	-	5.4%

During the past 1 year, which services offered by civil society organizations have you used? (region specific)	Samtskhe- Javakheti (N=53)	Kvemo Kartli (N=18)
Projects focused on empowering women	-	10.9%
I have not used any services	57.7%	74.4%
Prefer not to answer / I find it difficult to answer	10.3%	3.8%

Diagram #40

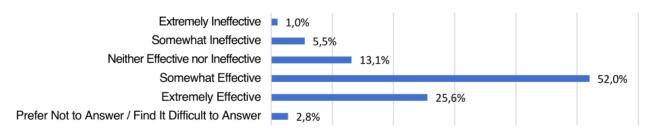
Please indicate the reasons why you have not used the services offered by the civil society organizations (CSOs) over the past year? (N=43)



According to the majority of respondents who are aware of civil society (77.6%), the activities of such organizations align with the demands and needs of citizens (rated 4 and 5 on a 5-point scale), of which a quarter believe they fully meet the needs (25.6%). Only 6.5% of respondents held a negative view (rated 1 and 2) (see Diagram #41).

Diagram #41

In your opinion, how effective are civil society organizations in meeting the demands and needs of citizens? (N=71)



In a regional context, the overall trend persists - the majority of those informed about CSOs in Samtskhe-Javakheti (90.9%) believe that the activities of civil society organizations align with the demands and needs of citizens (scores 4 and 5). In Kvemo Kartli, this belief still

predominates, although the rate has dropped to 38.8%. More than a third of respondents surveyed in this region (38.6%) evaluate the issue neutrally (score 3) (see table #44).

Table #44

In your opinion, how effective are civil society organizations in meeting the demands and needs of citizens? (Regional context)	Samtskhe- Javakheti (N=53)	Kvemo Kartli (N=18)
Extremely Ineffective	1.4%	-
Somewhat Ineffective	1.7%	16.6%
Neither Effective nor Ineffective	4.4%	38.6%
Somewhat Effective	68.4%	4.3%
Extremely Effective	22.5%	34.5%
Prefer Not to Answer / Find It Difficult to Answer	1.7%	6%

In line with the aforementioned assessment, it is logical that 73.2% of respondents, who are aware of civil society organizations, express satisfaction with the work of these organizations within their municipality (scoring 4 and 5 on a five-point scale). The proportion of those who are dissatisfied accounts for only 4.2% (see Diagram #42).

Diagram #42

In general, how satisfied are you with the work of civil society organizations in your municipality?



In Kvemo Kartli, most respondents who are aware of civil society organizations (57.9%) take a neutral stance when assessing the work of these organizations in their municipality. In contrast, only 8.8% of respondents in Samtskhe-Javakheti share this neutral viewpoint. A significant 88.2% of informed respondents in the latter region express satisfaction with the work of civil society organizations. In Kvemo Kartli, however, this sentiment is shared by only 29.4% (see table #45).

Table #45

In general, how satisfied are you with the work of civil society organizations in your municipality? (regional context)	Samtskhe- Javakheti (N=53)	Kvemo Kartli (N=18)
Extremely dissatisfied	1.4%	6%
Somewhat dissatisfied	-	6.7%
Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied	8.8%	57.9%
Somewhat satisfied	51.4%	18.7%
Extremely satisfied	36.8%	10.7%
Prefer not to answer	1.7%	

* * *

In the context of qualitative research, focus groups also revealed a lack of awareness among participants about civil society organizations operating in the region. They mentioned some public civil organizations that operate in Kvemo Kartli and Javakheti. Residents of Kvemo Kartli were aware of organizations advocating for women's rights, given that early marriage is a prominent issue in their region. Vulnerable respondents were familiar with organizations providing financial assistance to needy families.

"In Ninotsminda, I know of an organization called "Serek" that does commendable work. For example, they visited my home during New Year's and, as we are a socially vulnerable family, they brought New Year gifts for my young children" (44-year-old man, unemployed, ethnically Armenian, Ninotsminda).

The non-profit organization "Nuri" is well-known in Ninotsminda, providing free translation and legal services to the local community.

The Marneuli Center for Democratic Engagement, established in 2011, has made a significant contribution to strengthening civil society organizations in Marneuli. It has provided a space for local initiative groups and organizations to plan and conduct activities. However, the people of Marneuli also highlighted a negative aspect of some civil organizations' activities, noting a lack of trust in certain groups. This is primarily because these organizations tend to perceive the Azerbaijani religious community as backward.

"One of the organizations released a video that was unacceptable to the religious community. It is necessary that they take into account the situation on the ground while working and be less radical" (29-year-old woman, employed, ethnically Azerbaijani, Marneuli).

One participant from the focus group mentioned that a certain segment of the population views civil society organizations as **being in opposition to the government, and as a result, they prefer to keep their distance** from these organizations. It's crucial to change this perception and build more trust within the community towards these organizations.

In the focus groups conducted in Tsalka and Gardabani, no one reported having any contact with local civil society organizations. However, a Georgian language learning center and university preparation center were mentioned in Tsalka, which are used by the locals.

From the focus group conducted in Bolnisi, it became clear that several active civil society organizations are operating in the municipality. These include the Bolnisi Youth House, Bolnisi Education and Employment Promotion, and Adult Education Centers. Here, young people have opportunities not only for employment but also to learn skills like knitting and cooking. Community organizations offering Georgian language courses to residents of Azerbaijani villages are also noteworthy. Additionally, respondents noted that the "Red Cross" operates in Kazreti, working to inform the local government about various issues in the area.

During the focus group session with the residents of Dmanisi, the population identified the organization "Dmanisi". This organization provides one-time material assistance to families with various needs - "Dmanisi" has helped needy people - individuals and children with goods. I, too, commend this group and its efforts" (49-year-old man, unemployed, ethnically Georgian, Dmanisi). "Dmanisi" is a charitable organization that supports families with health and social needs. The organization receives donations from the local population and the private sector.

Respondents from Tetritskaro identified the following civil society organizations - Koda Community Education Center, Youth Center, "Kodori 2013", and "Garisi". Participants in the focus group noted that the Kodi Community Education Center also operates within the healthcare sector, specifically, inviting various specialty doctors to the municipal center. In addition, they invite trainers who conduct workshops for the local population on a variety of subjects and topics.

The participants of the focus groups **positively evaluate the activities of the civil society organizations as a whole.** However, they would like to know more about their activities, in particular about their goals and target groups. According to the respondents of the focus groups, the activities of public organizations should be aimed primarily at solving the problems of the local population. As already mentioned, solving the difficult social and economic situation in the municipalities is vital for the population. In this regard, it is necessary for public organizations to provide assistance to the local population, for example, to help increase specialization and qualification, which will partially contribute to the reduction of the unemployment level. Computer training, resume writing and cover letter assistance are also services that community organizations can provide. The people involved in the focus groups note that the support of public organizations is important in terms of increasing the opportunity to receive non-formal education, both among school-aged children and young people. According to one part of the participants, it is desirable that civil Community organizations should strengthen their work with municipal mayors and councils, and offer them new ideas and solutions to overcome existing problems.

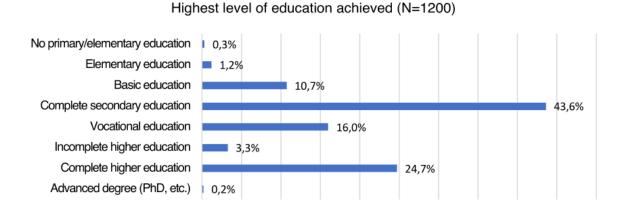
Chapter 13. Some socio-demographic characteristics of the respondents

The study participants consisted of 52.7% women and 47.3% men. The respondents were categorized into the following age groups:

- 18-24 years old 13.1%;
- 25-34 years old 20.3%;
- 35-44 years old 15.7%;
- 45-54 years old 18.1%;
- 55-64 years old 15.6%;
- 65 years or older 17.2%.

The majority of respondents have completed secondary education (43.6%). Almost a quarter of respondents had completed higher education (24.7%). The percentage of respondents with basic education (10.7%) or professional education (16%) as their highest level of education combined, accounted for over one-tenth of the total (see diagram #43).

Diagram #43



The majority of respondents identified as Georgian by nationality (47.9%). Ethnic Armenians and Azeris were almost equally represented - 25.1% and 26.2% respectively. Single cases of participation of representatives of other Caucasian ethnic groups (Abkhaz, Lek, Ossetians, etc.) or Russians were identified in the research.

Baseline Study of
existing social services in
Samtskhe-Javakheti and
Kvemo Kartli