

**Needs and priorities of IDP and conflict-
affected women, living in Zugdidi
municipality, and the importance of their
integration into local policy**

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Introduction

Local self-government, as the closest branch of the government to the population, has to play a crucial role in achieving gender equality and inclusive/participatory democracy. The role of municipalities in promoting good governance, which means increasing accountability to the society, holding a democratic dialogue between the population and public officials, and maximizing the involvement of vulnerable groups with specific needs in the decision-making process, is also important.

A long-term cooperation of Fund “Sukhumi” with local governments shows, that a number of important initiatives have been taken by local governments in recent years to improve gender equality and the involvement of population in the decision-making process.

However, the introduction of gender-sensitive local policies, ensuring proper inclusiveness of vulnerable groups, especially IDP and conflict-affected women, in the local decision-making process, and implementing municipal programs tailored to their needs remains a problem. This is evidenced by the needs study of women and girls, conducted by Fund “Sukhumi” in 2020 along the ABL. The study identified that municipalities’ practice of gender analysis and study of specific needs of IDP and conflict-affected women along the Administrative Boundary Line (ABL) and reflection of these needs in the relevant local programs and budgets is particularly weak.¹

The present needs study was conducted within the framework of the project "Strengthening the Role of Women in the Process of Restoration of Sustainable Peace and Confidence" supported by the Swedish international women's organization "Kvinna till Kvinna" and implemented by Fund "Sukhumi". The objective of the project is to strengthen IDP and conflict-affected women in Zugdidi municipality, increase their effective involvement in local decision-making and promote their interests in local policy to efficiently implement the “Women, Peace and Security” agenda at the local level.

The needs study becomes even more relevant in times of the upcoming 2021 local elections, when, as a rule, the specific needs of IDP and conflict-affected women are usually left out of the political agenda and lost among general political promises to improve the difficult socio-economic situation in the country. It is noteworthy that, while women have quite interesting and important visions of social, economic, as well as local policy-making issues, their priorities are mixed in a list of general problems, and they are treated as objects of care rather than policy makers and active participants.

The specific needs of IDP and conflict-affected women are not, in fact, intergrated into political parties' pre-election programs, just as women themselves fail to present a social order deriving of their special needs and vulnerabilities, to political entities. At the same time, women not only

¹ „The Gender Dimension of the COVID-19 Crisis: Assessing the Efficiency of Pandemic Response”, Fund “Sukhumi“, December 2020, page 29, availability <http://www.fsokhumi.ge/index.php/en/news/publication>

make up the majority of the electorate, but also face the problems caused by faulty public infrastructure and inadequate social services to promote economic development.

The key findings, conclusions and recommendations identified within the framework of the women's needs study will be presented to local political party representatives, that will facilitate a full-fledged pre-election communication and dialogue between women and local political actors, and strengthen the relevant response and accountability of political parties before their constituents.

1. The needs study aim and methodology

The aim of the women's needs study is to identify and assess gender needs of IDP and conflict-affected women, living in Zugdidi municipality, and to conduct a political dialogue on the identified problems with the political entities participating in the local elections. In the short term, all these will serve to integrate women's priorities and needs into the programs of political parties, and in the long term, to tailor local programs to the needs of women and to integrate and implement the "Women, Peace and Security" agenda in local policy.

The needs study methodology: The needs study was conducted using quantitative and qualitative study methods. A structured questionnaire was developed for **the quantitative study**, which mainly consisted of close-ended questions. Respondents were given the opportunity to choose several answers and/or express their views on a number of issues. Focus group discussions and in-depth, individual interviews using a pre-designed structured questionnaire **were used for the qualitative study**.

The study location and target groups - the study was conducted in **six villages** of Zugdidi Municipality, adjacent to the ABL (Orsantia, Koki, Khurcha, Kakhati, Shamgona, Ingiri) and the town of Zugdidi. Respondents for the quantitative study were selected considering different socio-demographic characteristics of the citizens and the majority of them were represented by IDP and conflict-affected women and youth. The qualitative study was conducted among the representatives of local self-government, civil society organizations, professional circles (school administration, teachers, entrepreneurs, medical workers, etc.), community leaders and active women and men – civil society representatives. **A total of 299 people, living in Zugdidi Municipality, including 293 women and 6 men, participated in the study. 268 persons (all women) were interviewed through individual questionnaires and 31 persons, including 25 women and 6 men, through focus group discussions and individual interviews.**

Demographic and social characteristics of the quantitative study participants:

The study respondents's age ranged from 18 to 65, and was distributed as follows: 18-30 years of age - **18.3%**; 31- 45 years of age - **34.7%**; Under 46-65 - **35.4%**, and over 65 - **11.6%** (see **Diagram 1**)

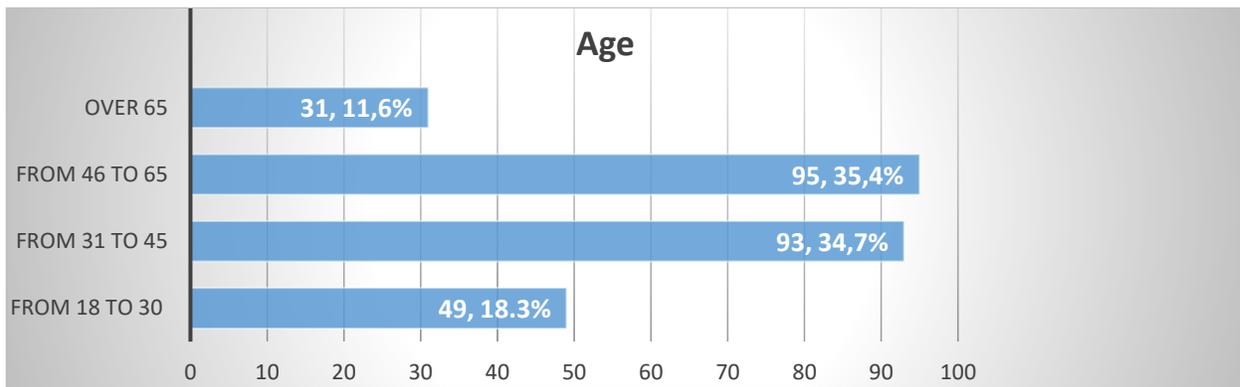


Diagram 1

The number of IDPs and locals participating in the study was equally distributed, in particular, 50% (134) - IDPs and 50% (134) - locals participated in the quantitative survey. 53% of the locals were represented by conflict-affected women, living along the Georgia-controlled conflict dividing line. According to the social status, 27.6% of the total number of respondents were socially vulnerable; 11.2% of single mothers; 6.3% of mothers with many children, 3.4% of persons with disabilities.

According to the place of residence, most of the women - 45% (118 women, 51% of whom were IDPs) were from Zugdidi, and the remaining 55% (150 women) represented population living in the villages adjacent to the ABL (see **Diagram 2** for the location of the respondents in detail):

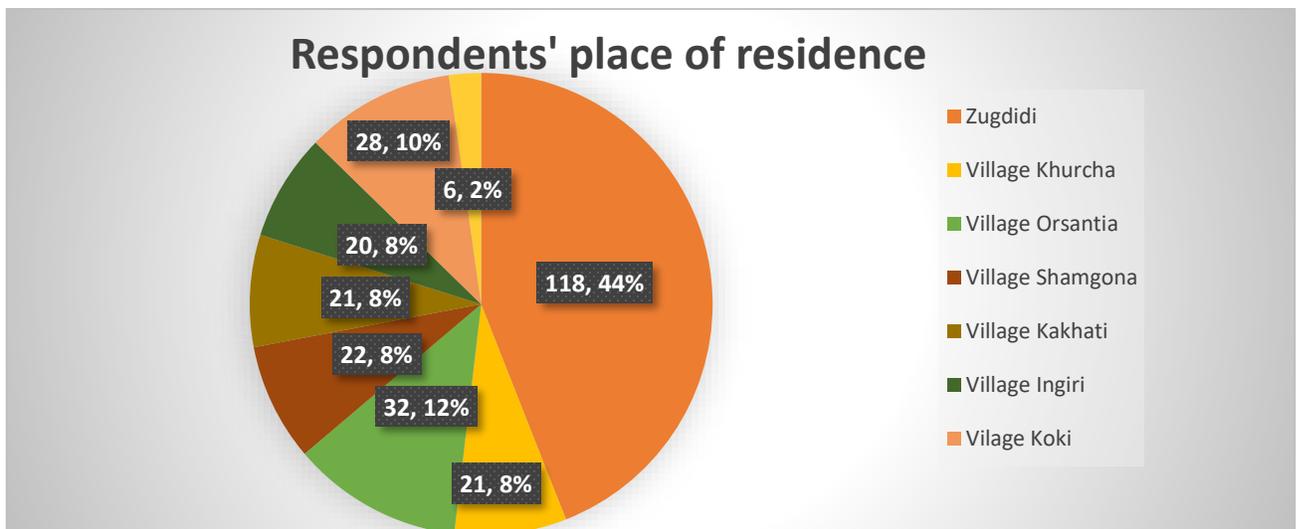


Diagram 2

According to employment status, the majority of respondents are unemployed - 38.1%; 24.3% are employed by the State; 12.7% are engaged in agricultural work. 10.1% are self-employed/engaged in private business (see **Diagram 3** for details).

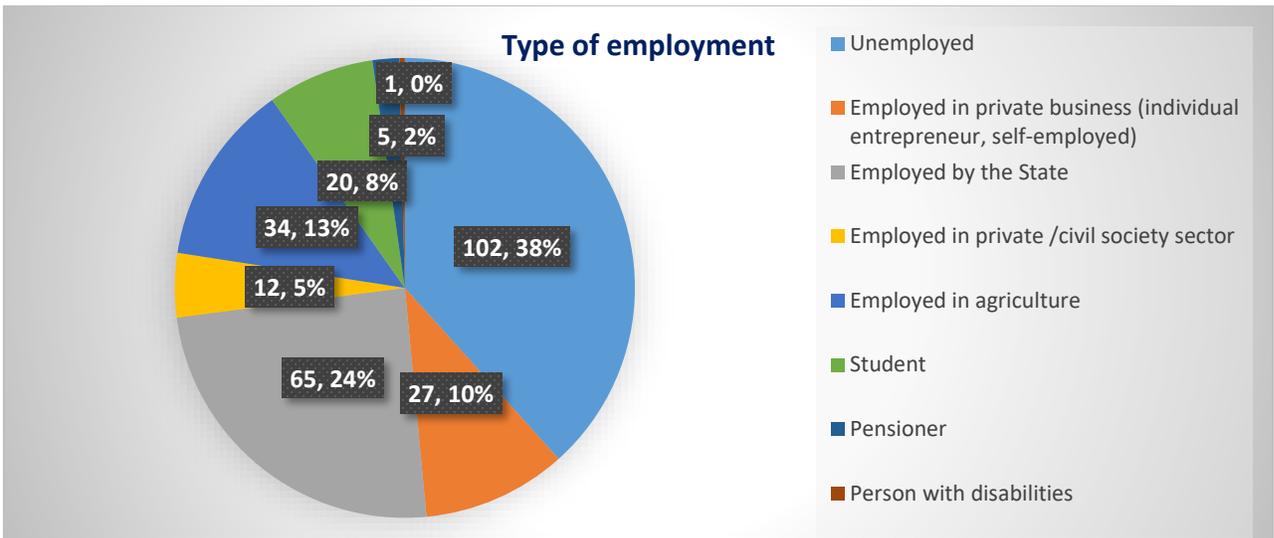


Diagram 3

Pension is the main source of income for the majority of the study participants – 34,3%. One third of the women also name benefits for socially vulnerable families (31.3%) and IDPs (29.1%) as their main source of income. Salary is indicated by 32.5%, or 87 out of 268 respondents (see **Diagram 4** for details). It is noteworthy that of those who emphasize salary as the main source of income (87 persons), the majority (65 persons), name other additional sources of income, such as pensions, help from relative, remittances from abroad, IDP allowance. This clearly indicates that available salaries are quite low and insufficient for the families to survive, which requires the mobilization of other additional financial resources from a citizen. It should also be noted that the majority of persons with salaries are local (59 out of 87 women are local), which indicates that IDP women have less access to paid positions.

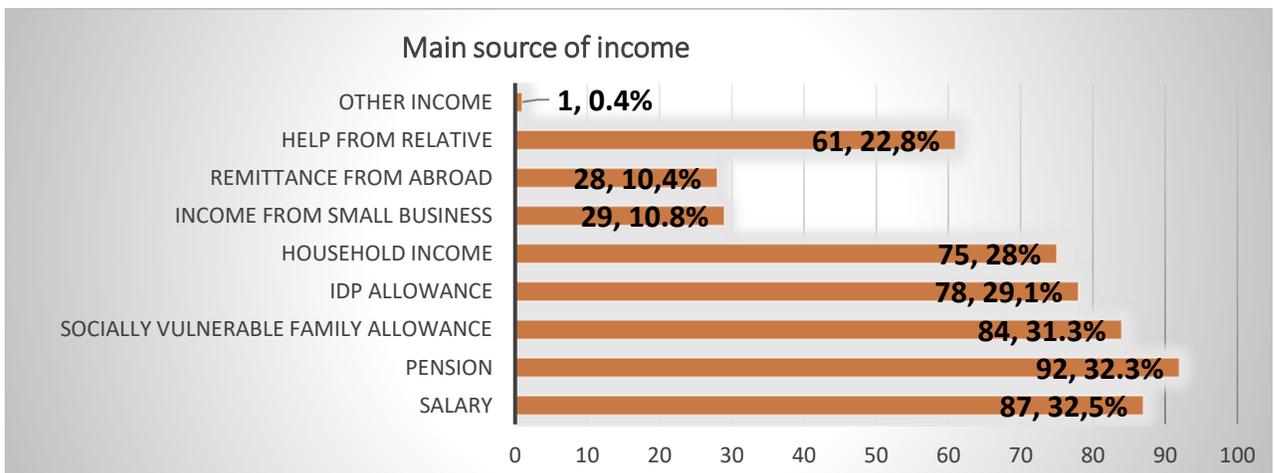


Diagram 4

2. Awareness and accessibility of women to local programs and services

2.1. Quality and channels of informing the population

Most women have only partial information about municipal programs and local processes - 52.3%. 31.7% are fully informed, while 16% of respondents do not have information about local programs. Deepening into the data one can observe that the share of uninformed women in rural areas is twice as high (21%) then in urban areas (9%).

The majority of the population indicated "television and radio" (54.9%) and "neighbors and acquaintances" (44.3%) as **the main source of information** on local programs. The role of non-governmental organizations (43.3%), municipal social networks (31%) and online media (35.4%) is also quite high in terms of information dissemination. Local deputies (29.1%) and Mayor's representatives in villages (21.3%) were less mentioned as the main source of information (see Diagram 5).

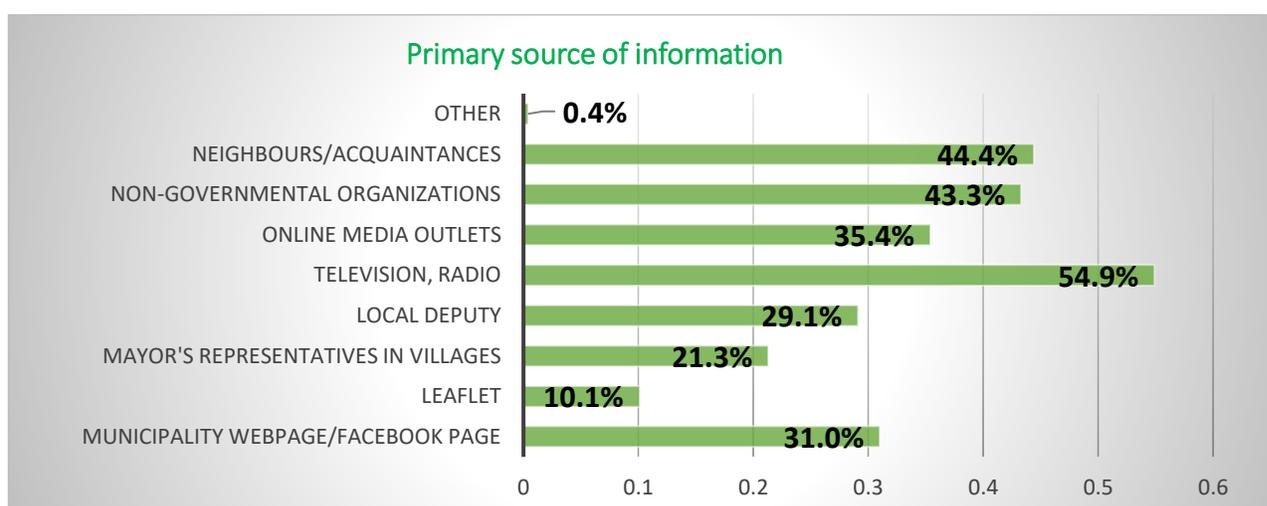


Diagram 5

According to the head of Zugdidi local self-government Social Protection Department, awareness raising of the population is one of the priority issues of the self-government, which is evidenced by the **quite diverse and orderly system established in the municipality for the dissemination of information about local programs**, including:

- **Awareness raising of Mayor's representatives and deputies.** Holding extended meetings with Mayor's representatives in the villages and deputies right after the City Council/Sakrebulo approves health and social protection programs, where they are provided with the detailed information (both printed and electronic) on the types of local programs and the stages of implementation. The purpose of the meeting is to disseminate information about local social programs among the population by the Mayor's representatives in the villages and to consult them if necessary;

- **The City Hall printed newspaper and information booklets**, which highlight all local social or health protection programs. The newspaper is widely distributed in the society, and the booklets are distributed among the citizens visiting the City Hall;
- **Door-to-door meetings of mobile groups with rural population** (especially used during the active phase of the Pandemic). During the meetings, the population was informed about the local programs and provided with explanations on all the questions they were concerned about. The meetings also served to explore the needs and priorities of local citizens;
- **Posting information about local programs on the municipality web page and Facebook page.** There is a web page in the municipality where information about local programs is posted. This resource played a special role during the COVID-19 pandemic, when information was posted electronically and e-applications were received from the citizens;
- **Consulting population through the "open window" principle**, when a consultant, on the first floor of the City Hall, provides a detailed consultation to the population about all local self-government programs - which specific agency one should apply in case of interest in the program and what documents should be submitted to apply for this or that program;
- **Cooperation with non-governmental organizations** - through regular meetings with non-governmental organizations, the self-government disseminates information on available social programs, which is further actively shared with the population, especially among vulnerable groups;
- **Creating a database on the social and economic State support programs and informing the population.**

It is noteworthy that the visibility of **non-governmental organizations is particularly high** in the villages adjacent to the ABL, **which are considered to be the main conduit of information to the population.** According to the quantitative survey, 49% of conflict-affected women receive information about local programs with through non-governmental organizations, while in Zugdidi - 34%, which shows the very active work of the third sector with women in villages remoted from the town and conflict-affected women –

"My source of information is always non-governmental organizations ... Vital issues are always discussed at the meetings with them, and the information they provide is about social problems and programs" (I.K., a local woman of 64, Association "Bzhalara", Zugdidi).

The study respondents mention: Although local deputies and Mayor's representatives in the villages *"should be the conductor of information between the population and the self-government and the mediator between the people and the government"*, this **communication is rather weak and insufficient** -

"It is the biggest problem that we do not have frequent and proper communication with the Mayor's representative of the village, who should know the population best, who should be the bridge between the population and the municipality" (R.M., IDP man of 21, student, Zugdidi).

This is evidenced by the quantitative data, according to which, a limited number of respondents: 29% living in the village of Kakhati, 25% in Koki, 23% in Shamgona, 0% in Ingiri indicate **Mayor's representatives in the villages as the first source of information**. The rates are relatively high in the villages of Orsantia (53%) and Khurcha (45%).

One of the most important sources of information dissemination about local programs among the population are **community leaders**, representatives of communities or community organizations in IDP settlements, who on their own initiative, seek information from the state or non-governmental sector and disseminate it in the community –

"For example, I am a mobilizer and I provide news to the community. This may be information from non-governmental organizations or state structures. All information is available in my community" (M.G., a local woman of 50, head of a CSO, school teacher, village Ingiri).

"I am a local. IDPs live in our village ... I would like to stress that neither the Mayor's representative in the village nor community representatives provide any information to the population. After I attended the budget discussion, I even informed my neighbours in a minibus.... I do it at my will, but I do not have access to everyone. Therefore, I think that the Mayor's representatives in the villages should provide information to the villagers. May be not everyone will apply this information, but there are those who would make good use of the help and opportunities" (I.A., a local woman of 50, unemployed, village of Chkaduashi).

It is noteworthy that the awareness of women, participating in the study, on socio-economic empowerment State programs (agricultural development, small business promotion) is also **quite unsatisfactory**. One third of the respondents - 32.8% do not have information about the State programs. According to an in-depth data analysis, the majority of those who indicated that they did not have **information about the State programs, were women, living along the ABL - 72.9%**.

The most well-known programs for the surveyed women are "Produce in Georgia" - 44% and programs of international/local non-governmental organizations - 31%. Awareness of women about the IDP livelihood program is quite low - 22.4% (see **Diagram 6** for details).

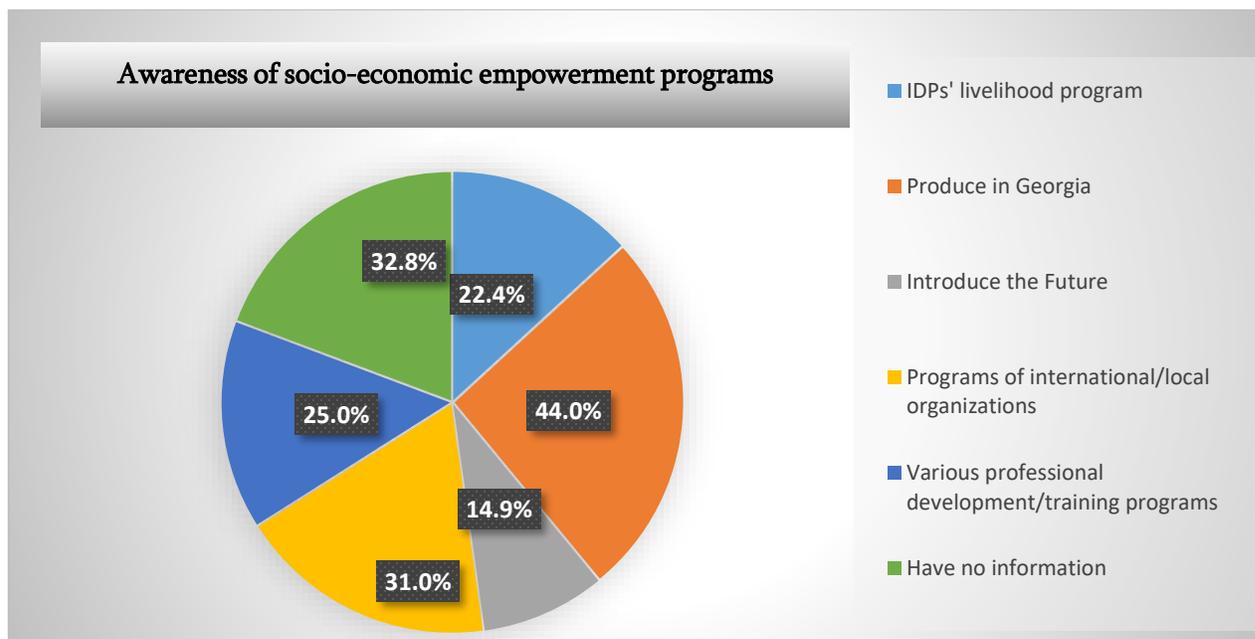


Diagram 6

Although a number of information channels have been launched at the municipal level, the study reveals that the population has **insufficient access to information, which is due to certain objective factors.**

2.2. Factors hindering the accessibility of the population to information

According to the quantitative survey, several **factors** hindering the accessibility to information were identified: insufficient communication with local self-government - 56.3%, lack of population's interest in programmes (19%), and limited access to the Internet (18.7%).

The qualitative survey confirms the lack of meetings by self-government representatives, both in terms of the **limited number of people involved and participating in the meetings as well as the limited number of meetings themselves.** According to the respondents, it is important that the self-government integrates frequent door-to-door awareness raising practice of the population and involves a wider segments of the population in the meetings -

"Women and most of the population do not have information. A certain number of activists (up to 50-100 people) attend the meetings of Mayor's representatives in the villages, City Hall representatives or deputies. Two meetings per year are not enough. Local self-government representatives should go door-to-door, talk to people about news and new projects every day..." (T.K., a woman of 34, IDP, Zugdidi).

"Basically, everything happens with the same people... The same people receive social assistance and information, the same people attend trainings" (I.B., a local man, a student of 20, Zugdidi).

The conversation focused on the **good practice of awareness raising, consulting and training of the population about the State programs, when there are pre-determined meeting days and an**

agenda, when the population can plan in advance the time to participate in the meetings and get interesting information -

"The regional offices of the Rural Development Agency hold meetings every Sunday, Wednesday and Friday. Wednesday is a door-to-door day. They go to all the villages and provide information on current agricultural projects.... Trainings are held on Fridays ... Any family can participate in the trainings they prefer ... At present, trainings on spring works are held and attendees can receive answers to all their questions" (I. J. a local woman of 60, employed, Zugdidi).

According to the respondents, the problem is not so much the provision of information but the lack of interest of the population in a specific program. Despite the fact that the population is provided with information through short text messages, either newspapers or newsletters, it is important to **raise the population's interest and train them for the involvement in the programs**

"Someone will not pay much attention to an sms. It would be more useful and more successful, in terms of awareness raising, if they come to everyone individually, talk to, and explain... and when people have more information, then they can say: "You know, you'll receive an sms and you should be ready to receive it and read", then people will pay more attention and be more interested" (I. B. an IDP man of 20, student, Zugdidi).

Indifference of the population and less acceptance of the information provided was also named as one of the important impediments in terms of delivering information to the target group. It was mentioned that women face so many everyday problems that they do not even show interest in information that is useful to them, they often have **mistrust and nihilism** -

"People have a very high rate of indifference ... There are many reasons why they are inert. They do not follow you in something... do not believe in something and, therefore, even if you offer, it is very difficult to make them receive information and use it... They have to live in very difficult conditions and it is hard for them to think about other things ... Certain projects do not have credibility and it is difficult for them to be interested in this direction" (M.Ch., an IDP woman of 31, a CSO representative, Zugdidi).

Restricted access to the Internet has also been named as one of the factors hindering access to information. A large part of the population is unaware of the e-service system introduced in the municipality, which is largely due to the limited internet coverage and weak signal in the villages adjacent to the ABL and the poor skills in using **technological devices and e-service systems**. Respondents emphasize the need to strengthen skills of using technologies and inform the public about e-services. In addition, it was identified that **e-services are offered in a rather complex form** for the population. E-services require considerable simplification and adaptation to a user-friendly format -

"Not all families have access to the Internet, i.e. not all villages are provided with internet... There are e-services, but a large part of the population does not have access to these programs.

This is especially true for vulnerable groups, who are unaware of the use of e-services. It is the category that needs training to use these technologies. So, it is possible to conduct training with vulnerable groups, where they will master the skills of using the Internet” (I.J., a local man of 27, youth worker).

“The City Hall web page contains the information on local programs, but despite the fact that I have been an employee of the City Hall for three years, even for me they are unclear. One has to click to several "fields", to find any information... This means that someone who is not well aware of the web page can not find any information” (I.J., a local man of 27, youth worker, village Kakhati).

The study results show that young people prefer social networks to get information -

“I am 23 years old and it is very easy to get information, if it is spread on social media ... Our generation is immersed in social networks” (G.J., 23, a local young man, unemployed, village Rikye).

However, for the majority of the population, the most acceptable form of getting information is still direct meetings with local officials, brochures and newspapers. Therefore, it is important to use differentiated methods to inform the local population, taking into account the location of the target audience, age and skills in using e-services.

“We call the twenty-first century the digital world, but it is very difficult for both IDP women and the host community, and particularly elderly people to use modern technologies... Internet access is limited, especially for IDPs. Therefore, I think that IDPs have less access to e-systems and information, so probably direct meetings with Mayor’s representatives in the villages or brochures etc. will be more acceptable to them than online information” (M.Ch., an IDP woman of 31, a CSO representative from Zugdidi municipality).

3. The main problems identified as a result of the study

In the process of the needs study, the respondents identified the most vulnerable category of the population in their community, which, due to the negative consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic, most needs the support of local self-government bodies. Among them were: large families - 57.8%, helpless elderly - 56.7%, people with disabilities - 51.5%, socially vulnerable people - 51.9% and families who lost their income during the pandemic - 41.4% (see **Diagram 7** for details).

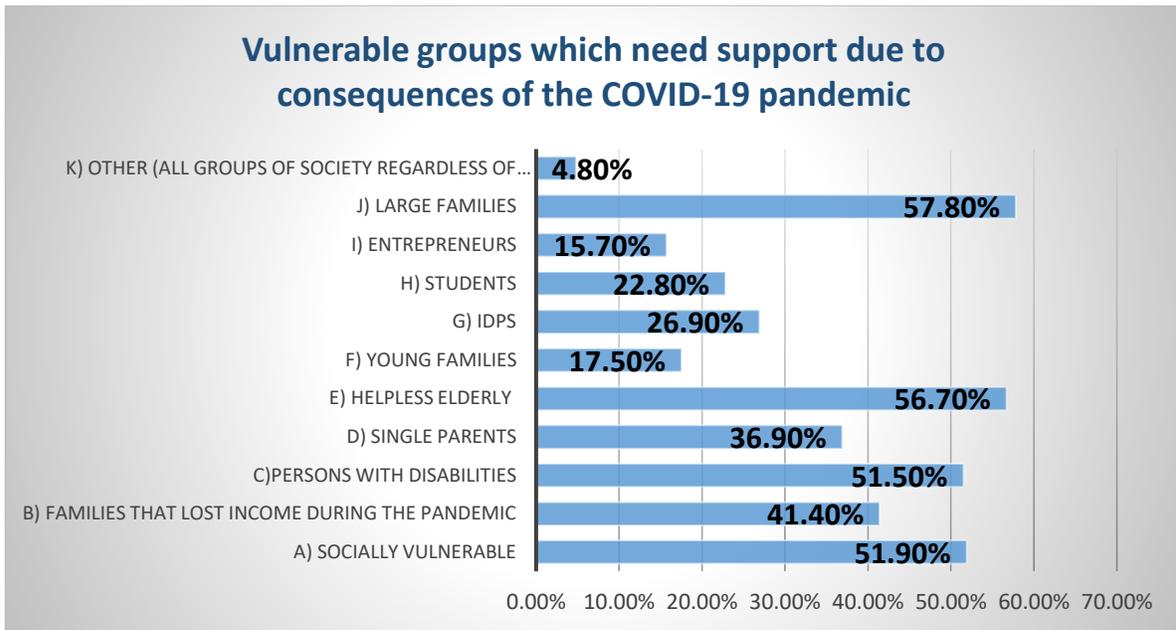


Diagram 7

According to the quantitative study results, the most priority and problematic issues among IDP and conflict-affected women are: **lack of household services in the villages** (salon, sewing workshop, etc.) - 51.1%, **damaged rural roads** - 42.9%, **lack of drainage channels** - 34 %, **lack of water supply system and unsatisfactory quality of drinking water** - 25.7%, **malfunction of outdoor lighting** - 25%, **damaged curbs and sidewalks for pedestrians** - 24.3% (for a detailed list see **Diagram 8**).

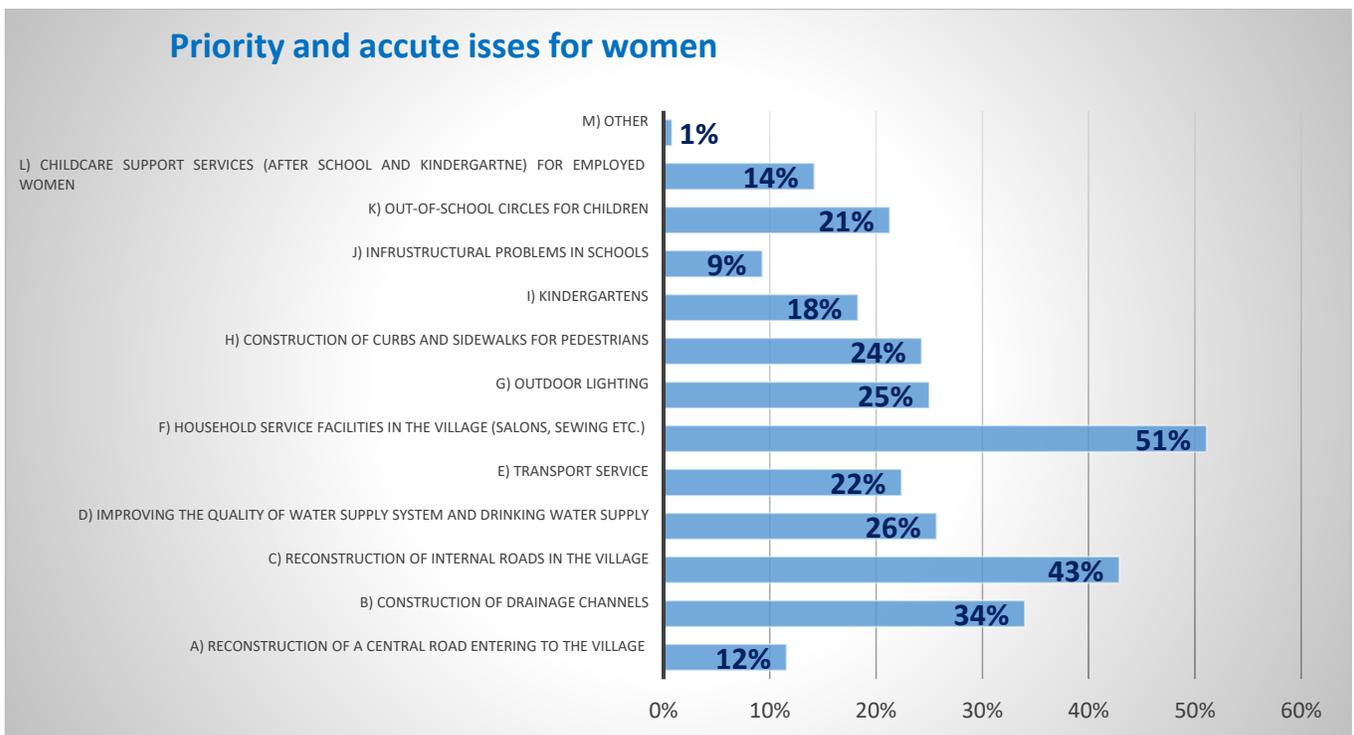


Diagram 8

3.1. The problem of women's economic empowerment and access to employment

In the process of the needs study, the problem of access to employment for IDP and conflict-affected women has become quite clear, which, in their opinion, is due to numerous obstacles.

According to the respondents, one of the obstacles to women's economic empowerment and employment, is **gender stereotypes** and the practice still firmly established in the society, according to which the primary duty of women is to take care of the family and children. Social inequality in the labor market has also been highlighted, when women have fewer employment opportunities because they are not always able to combine childcare responsibilities with a work schedule. It was also mentioned that employers are less motivated to employ women, they create fewer development opportunities for women, and offer unequal wages compared to men.

"If a woman is married, the family is first and foremost ... she cannot leave the house because she has children and has to take care of them. Additional family conditions, other problems. If she goes out of the house - society will look at her differently, they think so ... " (E. Kh. a woman of 39, unemployed, Zugdidi).

"I think a woman is more oppressed than a man. A man can do more in this society than a woman. A woman can also do what a man does, but she is limited, because employers, if they have a choice, always try to recruit a man rather than a woman. In some cases, a man has a higher salary than a woman, even if they hold one and the same positions..." (E.Kh., an IDP woman of 39, unemployed).

The study found that the perception of economically strong women by society, including by men, is also controversial. On the one hand, **women's economic empowerment is seen as a threat** that could undermine the male-dominated hierarchy within the family. On the other hand, men note that the **economic empowerment of women requires more courage from women themselves and it is necessary to demonstrate this need -**

"Stereotypes also often hinder the economic empowerment of women ... For example, some perceive it as a threat. They think that if a woman gains financial independence she will start talking in a different way" (I.J., a local man of 27, youth worker).

"There are stereotypes and stigmas that we have created ourselves, and the worst thing is that women are fighting, but not as much as they should ... There are some individual women, but in general, they are not fully involved, otherwise they can be at a much higher level today than they are. A man will never tell you, "come on, be the boss, come on, be financially independent". A woman should show this necessity and need" (R.M., an IDP man of 21, student).

The study process focused on several important factors and barriers hindering **women's participation in state economic programs**. According to the study, women refrain from engaging in economic activities often for **fear of losing their social status**. In an unpredictable business environment, the termination of the social security guarantee upon inclusion in an economic program significantly reduces the motivation of women to participate in these

programs. The study also showed that the problem is **an in-depth understanding of the programs and the desire to be involved in them**, which requires ongoing consultations for women, a detailed explanation of the terms and conditions of the competition, practical help in filling out applications -

"If one is dependent on a social status, it does not matter if he or she is an IDP or a local, a lot of such people refrain from finding a job, even from receiving grants, because they prefer to get this elementary monthly social allowance.... When I worked in "Produce in Georgia", we came to a final stage and were going to finance a beneficiary in the amount of 15 000 GEL, and warned her from the beginning that "if she receives 15 000 GEL to a bank account, her social allowance will be terminated". Finally, when the project was approved, she refused to implement it because she did not want to be deprived of her social allowance. A lot of work should be done to raise people's awareness, explain "how one can gain income from 15 000 GEL or what they can benefit from this project. All these should be explained to women" (M.Ch., IDP woman of 31, a CSO representative).

Restricted **criteria** for the involvement in the program, was named as a significant barrier, including age restrictions for the competition participants, as well as the requirement to belong to a specific social group (disabled, vulnerable or victim of violence, etc.), which according to respondents significantly limits the participation of many interested women in economic programs.

A major barrier hindering women from participation in the economic program is a criteria for **the ownership of land**, especially for IDPs, the majority of whom do not own the land. Also for women in general, who are much less likely to own land assets, especially in villages, where gender inequality is most prevalent -

*"The fact that women **do not own land** becomes a serious obstacle for them. This problem especially affects IDP women who do not own land and therefore have a much smaller chance of getting a grant. When you show that the land is registered in someone's name, either of your husband or father-in-law, it is difficult to get funding" (I.J., a local man of 27, youth worker).*

One of the problems that was outlined, is **training courses on how to win a grant**, organized in the city. Respondents said that time needed to travel and transportation costs often prevent women from enrolling in the program. Therefore, it is important to offer women, living in the villages adjacent to the ABL, programs which meet their needs and to maximize access to these programs -

"Probably, there are training courses in Zugdidi, but due to the lack of money needed for the transportation, women can not attend them. And, another problem is time needed to travel... Women can sit and study for an hour but then they have to spend two hours waiting for the transport and travelling to home" (T.K., a local woman of 47, community mobilizer, village Ganmukhuri).

The qualitative data also showed distrust and hopelessness towards economic programs. In addition, **the demand for co-financing**, which according to respondents, excludes participation of women's groups with limited resources in economic programs.

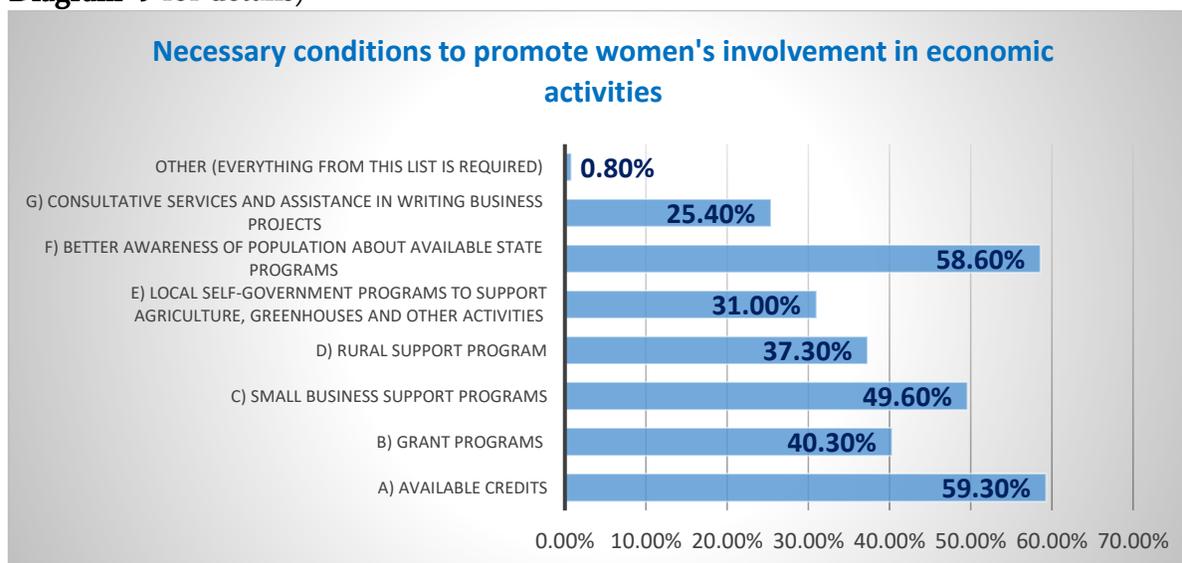
According to the quantitative survey, the main factors hindering the economic empowerment of women in the municipality were **the lower employment prospects** in the field - 56.3%, which was highlighted by 61% of respondents in Zugdidi municipality and 53% of women living along the ABL. A high rate was also observed for such answers as: **low financial income** - 47%, **high interest loans and credits** - 47.4%, **inflation and high prices for food, medicine, household items** - 50.4%.

The study highlighted that a large proportion of women, due to lack of prospects in the field, choose to **migrate abroad for work**, which is confirmed by the quantitative research as well. 40.7% of respondents indicated that the problem is **the forced migration of women abroad** –

"I see that everything around me has remained the same as it was years ago. Nothing is developing ... Many people are planning to go abroad, because they do not see a perspective and a solution here ... Unfortunately, they have to look for employment elsewhere" (I.E. local, 43, lecturer at Shota Meskhia State Teaching University).

Insufficient number of free of charge support services (absence of a prolonged childcare services in schools and kindergartens) was also cited as a barrier to women's employment. 22.4% of the surveyed women, including single (30%) and mothers with many children (18%) and socially vulnerable women (27%), mentioned this barrier.

It should be pointed out that in order to facilitate the involvement of women in economic activities and create favorable environmental conditions, the surveyed women highlighted the need for: the availability of affordable credit - 59.3%, increasing public awareness of available government programs - 58.6%; introduction of small business support programs (49.6%) (see **Diagram 9** for details)



50% of the respondents interrogated in Zugdidi municipality and 65% of rural women name the need to better inform women’s groups about the available State programs.

According to the respondents participating in the qualitative study, for the effectiveness of economic programs it is important to offer a training course focused on the **development of entrepreneurial skills** of beneficiaries and also to provide appropriate **financial resources** to help transform training inputs into the practice. The need to develop **social entrepreneurship** has been identified, which will contribute not only to the development of one particular business, but also to the creation of another business based on profit and to the employment of more people.

An emphasis was placed on the **importance of cooperation between local self-governments and organizations supporting business development and the availability of co-financing programs from the municipality -**

"Through the co-financing program, we supported IDP families and built houses for them, but they did not have their own household ... The Farmers' Association trained them in beekeeping and donated per one bee family; The IDP Association "Consent" also implemented a small project and provided high quality vegetable seeds to the beneficiaries. All these measures are aimed at strengthening the family household. We have more plans to further develop a small family farming" (G.R., Zugdidi municipality City Hall representative).

3.2. Problems identified in healthcare system

The quantitative study has identified **health care problems**. **High prices for medicines** (76.5%) and lack of **free medical examinations in rural areas** (53.4%) are the most priority issues for the majority of IDP and conflict-affected women. 40% of women reported low public awareness of **reproductive health**; 36.6% indicated that there are no targeted health care programs for IDP and conflict-affected women (see **Diagram 10** for details).

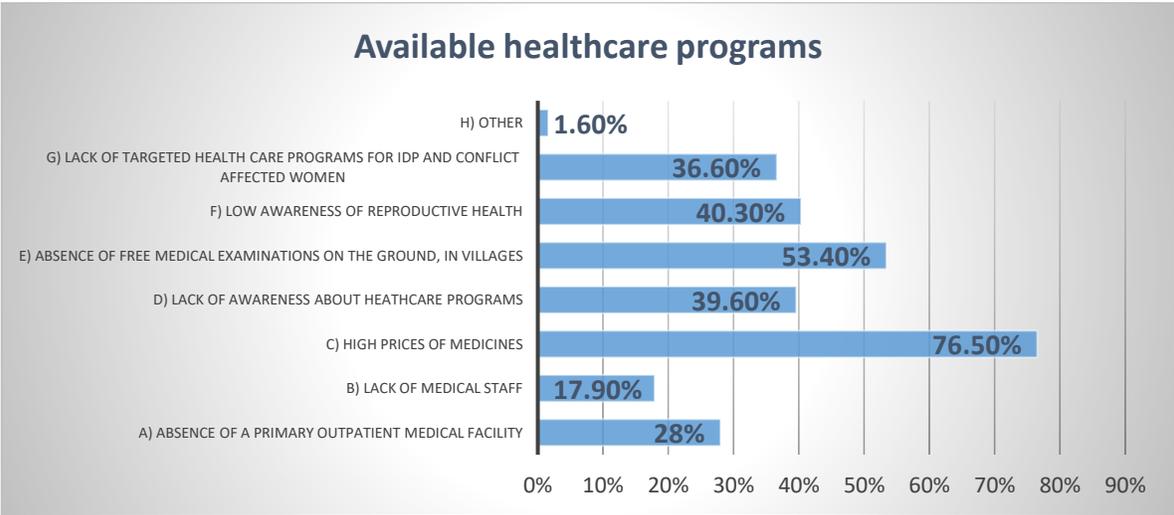


Diagram 10

According to the focus group participants, **infrastructural problems of the dispensaries in the villages adjacent to the ABL, the lack of technical equipment, medicines and on-site medical staff** represent major problems.

It was noted that the outpatient clinic in the village of Koki is in a rather bad condition and needs to be rehabilitated. In the village of Khurcha, a newly renovated but **dysfunctional and inactive outpatient clinic** is considered a problem. According to the residents, while there is a large number of elderly people living in the village, for whom on-site medical care is crucial, it is unfortunate that despite numerous promises, the village dispensary is still not equipped with adequate equipment and staff. Absence of an outpatient medical center was identified among the three priority issues in the villages of Koki (46%), Khurcha (45%), and Orsantia (34%). The **lack of pharmacies in the villages and access to medicines** is also a significant challenge for the population.

It is noteworthy that in the villages adjacent to the ABL, **no initiatives are implemented to raise awareness about women's reproductive health, including family planning services and contraceptive methods**, and awareness of IDP and conflict-affected women about both municipal and central government social and health programs.

The **need to introduce post-COVID rehabilitation programs for the COVID survivors** was identified. Respondents mentioned that COVID-19 had left a severe and negative mark on the health of a large part of the population, requiring continued treatment. Therefore, it is important to support vulnerable groups in this area –

"Currently, it is necessary to promote post-COVID rehabilitation programs, which are necessary to improve the condition of critical COVID patients. COVID treatment and rehabilitation cost a lot of money, which is not affordable to vulnerable and socially disadvantaged citizens" (G.M., Deputy Head of the NGO "My Abkhazia", Zugdidi).

4. The problem of domestic violence against women and local response programs

Although domestic violence remains a taboo and a hidden problem for a large part of women, the quantitative data have confirmed the acuteness of the topic for IDP and conflict-affected women in Zugdidi Municipality.

The majority of women, in particular 39.9%, emphasize that **the problem of domestic violence against women is acute in their community**. It is noteworthy that the urgency of the topic was almost equally confirmed by the women in the town of Zugdidi (57.1%), as well as women living in the villages adjacent to the ABL (52.3%). Extreme urgency of the issue was noted by 8.6% of women. 34.7% of surveyed women refrained from expressing their position. The majority (62.3%) of women are from the villages adjacent to the dividing line. This may be explained by the sensitivity of the issue and the traditional views of the villagers, the reluctance

of women to express their positions. The relevance of the topic was highlighted by 16.8% of women (see **Diagram 11**).

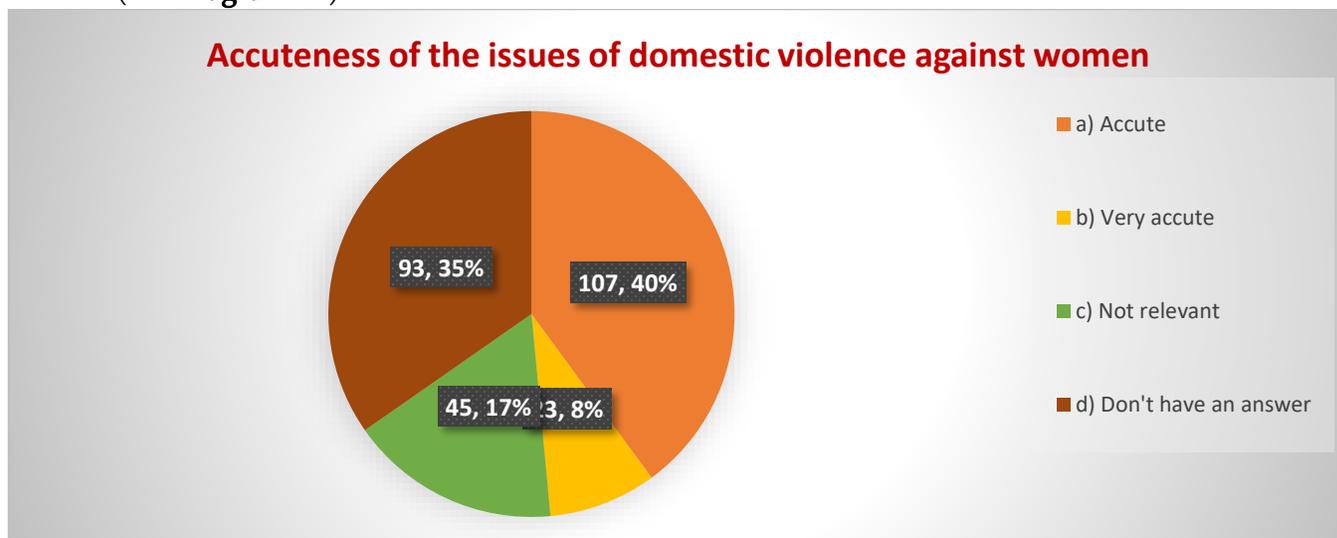


Diagram 11

The severity of the problem is also confirmed by the qualitative data, where women, living in villages adjacent the ABL, have stated that **violence is a part of women's daily life, and it is unacceptable to speak out aloud about it and disclose it publicly** –

"Domestic violence is widespread in the village, especially in these difficult times, when people have lost their jobs and are full of aggression ... A Georgian woman endures everything until the last minute and only speaks and calls for help if she has no other salvation ... but is this help enough?" (N.B., woman of 65, village of Khurcha).

"We see best the situation in our community, we see who is in what situation and, despite everything, women are silent, they do not address anyone and refrain from declaring violence, and this is first of all, a matter of mentality ..." (M.G., a local woman of 50, head of a CSO, school teacher).

It should be stressed, that **Zugdidi Municipality is the one among the rare exceptions where multi-year and multilateral approaches to the prevention and response to domestic violence against women are introduced**. The Crisis Center for Victims of Violence operates with the support of the self-government, the social program provides a one-time assistance of 800 GEL for victims of violence and an apartment rent program. An apartment rent program is available for a victim as well as an abuser if a victim of violence and her minor children remain in the family and it is necessary to isolate the abuser from them. It is noteworthy that in order to improve coordination and exchange of information between representatives of all state responsible agencies and civil society organizations at the local level, the first local inter-agency commission in Georgia was established at Zugdidi City Hall.

According to the head of the Social and Gender Equality Department of Zugdidi Municipality, the active work of the municipality from year to year increases the number of appeals from victims and accordingly the facts assistance provision by the self-government –

"When we created the first program to support victims, in 2015 we had only 3 cases of reporting violence, in 2016 - 2, in 2017 - 3 ... But when awareness increased and women started to talk about cases of violence, in 2018 the number of complaints increased up to 38, in 2019 there were 46 complaints. In 2020, 25 applications were submitted, the actual number would have been even more, if the number of beneficiaries had not been distributed between the NGO-run Centre for Victims of Violence and the self-government".

Although it has been clear over the years that Zugdidi Municipality has made progressive steps to establish an institutional mechanism to respond to violence against women and to introduce municipal services, according to the quantitative survey, the majority of respondents (34.7%) believe that programs should be **diverse and responding to specific needs of women victims of violence**. 27.6% of the surveyed women believe that **the programs implemented by the self-government to respond to violence against women are insufficient**. 23.5% of the surveyed women do not have information about local programs. This was basically highlighted by the women living along the ABL (80.7%). Only 14.2% indicated that **municipal programs to support victims of domestic violence are sufficient**. According to the qualitative survey, a majority of women do not have **information about the legal mechanisms and services offered by the State to women victims of violence**. According to the respondents, it is necessary to increase the role of local self-government in conducting an information campaign about the services available to victims –

"In many cases, victims of violence do not have information about available services: assistance and benefits ... they do not know about shelters where they can be isolated and safe ... more awareness is needed" (I.J., a local woman of 60, Zugdidi).

The qualitative study has clearly identified the need for diversity of existing victim support programs and the introduction of long-term victim assistance services. According to the respondents, **one-time benefits do not allow the victim to start an independent life in the long run**. Therefore, it is important to offer appropriate vocational training programs for the employment of victims, as well as to help them find jobs –

"I would call the local self-government bodies to do more, because I think that it is not enough to help people only in physical survival... There is a one-time assistance of 800 GEL for victims of violence while a person may need more than just a financial assistance ... a one-time assistance of 800 GEL does not mean anything to victims. It would be more efficient if the municipality provides a decent assistance, even in the field of employment, so that they can receive professional training and employment ... This should not only be done by NGOs and

international organizations, but local municipalities should allocate resources to let women victims continue living a decent live” (T.K., an IDP of 34, Zugdidi).

“Many women endure violence because they have nowhere to go, no money, no job, they have two or three children, where to take children, how to feed them?! They are beaten and still stay at home ... that is why the economic situation of women victims of violence must be improved” (M.G., a local woman of 50, head of a CSO, school teacher).

It was emphasized that due to **the lack of long-term economic empowerment programs for women victims, some women are forced to return to their abusive husbands and continue living in a violent environment –**

“If there was support in employment, it would be better ... A woman may be supported in the short run, but nothing is done in the long run ... She remains addicted and many women return to the abuser and family, because they have no ability to feed their children, they will not kill them of hunger” (E.D., a local woman, victim of violence, 41 years old, mother of many children).

To ensure the effectiveness of the fight against and prevention of domestic violence, respondents noted the need to strengthen work with **perpetrators at an early stage of violence through the introduction and implementation of appropriate municipal behavior correction programs –**

“In my opinion, local programs are not enough, because they mostly focus on victims, while no less work should be carried out with an abuser as well. Today there is less work done with abusers and that’s why the situation is getting worse” (M.G., a local woman of 50, head of a CSO, school teacher).

The qualitative survey participants also highlighted the need to adhere to high ethical standards in the delivery of municipal services, especially when the issue relates to women victims of violence. Concerns were expressed about **the ironic and frivolous attitude of individual self-government officials towards violence against women and the violation of the confidentiality of beneficiaries’ “cases”**, which is one of the main reasons why victims of violence often refrain from addressing the local government. According to the respondents, the commission set up for responding to issues of the victims of violence should be composed of independent professionals well-aware of the issue and not of the self-government and different political parties representatives -

“We had studies when a beneficiary stated that her confidentiality was violated when she came to the City Hall to ask for help. She said that Zugdidi is a small town and the information about her situation was disseminated all over the town. That’s why it is important that one who meets a person, coming to ask for help for the first time, to be sensitive and able to accept the problem that bothers the person ... We still have a lot to do in this regard” (N.T., non-governmental organization - head of the Association "Mercuri").

"Many women do not apply for help to the local City Hall, City Council, because their information may become open to public. Even if it is not a degrading information, it is confidential... I don't want anyone to know the reason of a conflict or violence in my family... I don't want to get financial assistance of 800 GEL if it could cost me my whole life. I have a protective or a restraining order, and it is not necessary to discuss and publicize the issue... Then someone discusses your live, everyone know even in the street and you hear - "Here is this woman". The commission should be composed not of political party representatives, but of professionals working in non-governmental organizations" (T. K., an IDP woman of 34, Zugdidi).

4.1. Youth priorities

The young participants of the qualitative survey expressed the position that the municipality's policy is not tailored to the needs of different groups of young people and does not affect their long-term development prospects.

Respondents focused on **the need for more support for ideas initiated by young people** and creating opportunities for co-financing of already launched initiatives. It was expressed that it is important to establish municipal programs for **youth development and leadership skills development**, which would help create a new resource for young people –

"If there are 10 meetings held in Zugdidi in one month, 5-7 meetings are attended by the same people. And what does this mean? This means, that there is a bound group of young people, who always attend meetings and are always involved. And the group composition does not change, no new members join. A young person can do a lot, a young person thinks innovatively. An environment adapted to young people must be created allowing us to develop and use our potential for the country" (R.M., an IDP man of 21, student).

The young people emphasized the **lack of youth spaces**, especially in the villages, adjacent to the ABL, where they would have the opportunity to gather, spend their free time productively or receive a non-formal education. Respondents also focused on the deplorable infrastructure of libraries in the villages and the importance of their development. An opinion was expressed that libraries should become a space for young people where they can gather and develop, and the staff working in libraries should be charged with the function of youth development –

"There are no spaces in the villages where young people would gather. Yes, someone might say why they do not get together at school, but at school a child will never be so free as she or she might be in an informal environment. A library can well ensure this informal environment, but here we face an even bigger problem, because rural libraries are in a catastrophic state. Consequently, young people are not able to gather there either, and even if they do so, librarians do not have the skills needed to motivate a young person. Today, the librarian has unfortunately

taken on the role of a bookkeeper, while he/she can have a very broad function" (I.J., a local man of 27, youth worker).

Speaking to women, the need to set up **open-air sports grounds for children and young people, cultural centers or multi-profile art circles in the villages** was emphasized.

4.2. Specific problems of people with disabilities

The results of the study show that persons with disabilities are deprived of the opportunity to participate in policy-making and decision-making processes at the local level, which is largely due to the difficulties of access to the environment. Most of the institutions, including buildings of the City Hall and City Council/Sakrebulo and NGOs, are not adapted for moving of people with disabilities. In case the buildings have an external ramp, movement inside of the building is restricted –

"NGOs are mostly operating in a rented space, sometimes on the second or third floor. Suppose, that people with disabilities want to attend an informational meeting. How should they manage, if they have difficulties in moving? The local self-government does not care about ramps and infrastructure either, so that people with disabilities can move freely on the upper floors and participate in meetings ... this should be the number one issue" (i.e., a local woman of 64, Association "Bzhalara", Zugdidi).

Access to the environment for people with disabilities mainly means ramps and buildings equipped with elevators, although blind, deaf-mute and people with other disabilities are generally not considered in the process of local needs identification and policy making. People with disabilities also face the problem of using a municipal transport not only within the city but also in the villages, as municipal transport is not adapted for the people with disabilities. Consequently, restriction of access to the physical environment, visible or invisible barriers force a person with disabilities to stay at home and refuse public activity and involvement –

"Although there is a government decree to create an adapted environment for people with disabilities, we all see that it is not implemented everywhere. Probably, more should be demanded, so that buildings and infrastructure are adapted for people with disabilities, this is very important" (I.J., local, aged 60, , Zugdidi).

Municipal programs for the support of the people with disabilities provide co-financing for rehabilitation treatment, utility costs, as well as transportation costs for children with disabilities involved in a day-care sub-program and their accompanying persons, caregiver for bed-patients and persons using wheel-chair, one-time financial assistance for children with disabilities under 18 and those with severe chronic diseases, one-time financial assistance for people with disabilities and socially disadvantaged sportsmen. According to the respondents, despite available programs, it is important to have more programs and initiatives for the integration and inclusion of people with disabilities in the society -

"Of course, in our municipality there are programs and sub-programs for the people with disabilities, either for those using a wheelchair or bed-patients or people with such a status in general, and these programs include one-time assistance, involvement in various meetings, or support for their families ... However, it is not enough ... The state must find ways to integrate these people so that they feel like full-fledged citizens" (I.K., an IDP woman of 49, Koki, self-government representative).

4.3. The problem of integration of IDP and conflict-affected women's needs and priorities into municipal programs

The study showed that **the municipality programs and existing services are largely tailored to the general needs of the population, and there are very few programs or initiatives that specifically address the particular needs of IDP and conflict-affected women.** It is mainly non-governmental organizations that work to raise the awareness of the IDP and conflict-affected population. Problematic issues are advocated with municipalities through non-governmental organizations.

It is important to note that since 2018 the process of localization of the UN Security Council Resolution on Women, Peace and Security 2018-2020 Action Plan has been launched in 10 municipalities of Georgia, including Zugdidi, within the framework of the pilot project.² The aim of the process was to improve the dialogue and cooperation between local self-government bodies and IDP and conflict-affected women and their active involvement in the local decision-making process to reflect women's priorities and needs in local policies and programs.

According to the local government, as a result of the pilot project, the UN Security Council Resolution 1325 Action Plan was elaborated and approved in Zugdidi Municipality, and a number of programs to support IDP and conflict-affected women were introduced.

"Targeted programs were implemented in 9 villages adjacent to the ABL. Among them is an economic project "Women's Space". Women were financed with 6000 GEL, public transport movement in the village of Khurcha was regulated. Within the frames of the "House" project, 29 houses were built in the villages adjacent to the ABL. During the winter, elderly people from 83 families were assisted in all nine villages. The Women Farmers' Union, in cooperation with the municipality, trained 29 women from the same village" (G.R., Zugdidi Municipality City Hall representative).

² The project was implemented in 2019 by the CSO Coalition – IDP Women Association “Concent”, Women’s Information Center, and Cultural-Humanitarian Fund “Sukhumi”, with the support of the UN Women and the U.S. State Department, in 10 municipalities of Georgia – Dusheti, Gori, Kareli, Kaspi, Khashuri, Sachkhere, Stepantsminda, Tsalenjikha, Tskhaltubo and Zugdidi.

Despite the activities carried out, the majority of the surveyed women state that **the specific needs of IDP and conflict-affected women and girls are insufficiently integrated into local programs** - 36.6%. 36.2% found it difficult to answer this question, which may be conditioned by the lack of awareness of women about the programs. 18% of the surveyed women think that the needs of IDP and conflict-affected women are mainly taken into account in the local programs, while 9.3% think that the needs are not taken into account in the local programs (see **Diagram 11**).

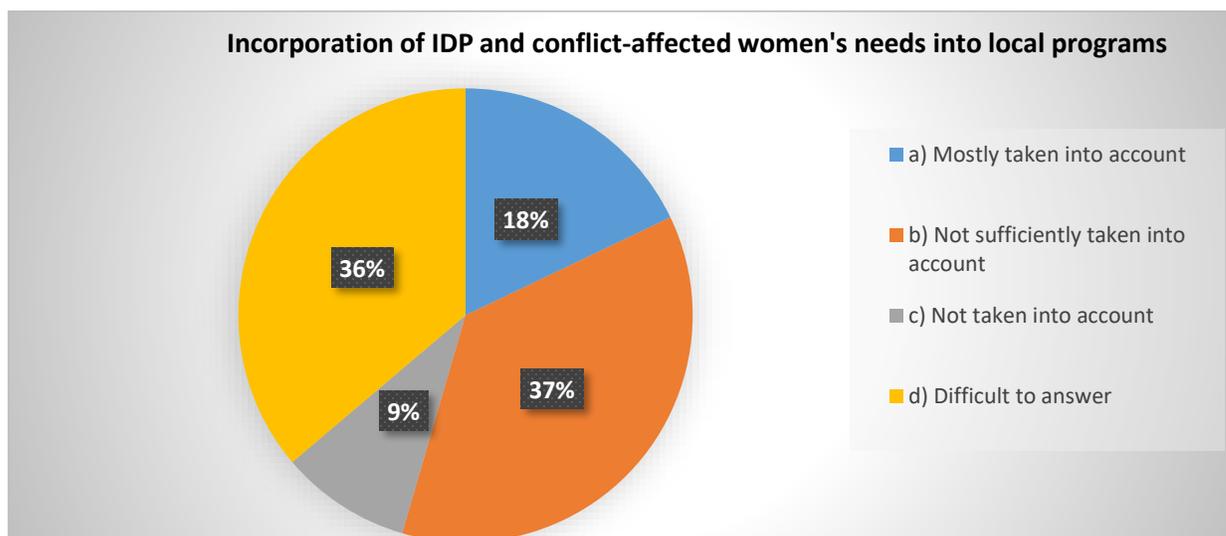


Diagram 11

The specific problems of IDPs, living in Zugdidi Municipality, were revealed during the conversation with the respondents:

- Delayed resettlement of IDPs from depreciated and damaged buildings;
- Poor sanitary and hygienic conditions in the IDP settlements, which has a particularly negative impact on the health of women, children and the elderly;
- Insufficient access to livelihoods and employment for IDPs in new IDP settlements;
- Delaying the process of legalization and transfer of ownership of lands owned by IDPs for years;
- Limited access to Internet;
- Problems of transportation and water supply;
- Limited access to health care services, including the lack of dispensaries and pharmacies in the villages;
- The need for psychosocial rehabilitation programs to eliminate the continuing trauma of IDPs.

According to IDPs, it is important **for municipalities to take more responsibility in responding to the problems of the IDP population**. It was mentioned that it is desirable to delegate more power to the municipality from the central government to equip it with the prerogative to respond to the problems of IDPs and with adequate financial resources, which, according to

respondents, would help to solve problems more efficiently and in a timely manner. Respondents expressed dissatisfaction with the legitimate government of Abkhazia and negatively evaluated their work to improve the situation of IDPs and solve the problems they face -

"IDPs needed help during the COVID-19 lockdown, but the government of Abkhazia was not very much worried, so my personal opinion is that the government of Abkhazia should not solve the IDPs' issues. The City Hall should have the prerogative to take care of not only locals but also of us, as we've been living here for years. Not only the government of Abkhazia should solve our issues" (M.Ch., an IDP woman of 31, representative of a non-governmental organization).

5. The impact of local programs on vulnerable groups

34.3% of women participants of the quantitative survey believe that **local programs address the specific needs of vulnerable groups**. **24.3%** of respondents think **the opposite**. The majority of respondents (41.4%) believe that **the practice of assessing the specific needs of vulnerable populations as well as assessing their satisfaction with programs is not introduced**. It is noteworthy that according to the socio-demographic status, the fact that "programs do not reflect the specific needs of individual vulnerable groups", was indicated by 27% of single mothers, 24% of socially vulnerable women and 6% of mothers with many children.

The majority of respondents involved in the qualitative survey highlighted **the visibly improved practice of Zugdidi Municipality** in terms of conducting the population's needs survey as well as developing programs based on these surveys.

"They work very well. They don't work in a style as if they just elaborated a program and submitted it to anyone, on the contrary, they first met with population, studied and received information and then elaborated a program which meets the needs of beneficiaries and is useful for them. In recent years, these programs have been complemented, diversified, and today Zugdidi Municipality has, arguably, one of the best services and a great practice of dealing with various vulnerable groups" (I.J., a local man of 27, youth worker).

Nevertheless, insufficient integration of the priorities and needs of individual groups into municipal programs has been identified, including: **IDP and conflict-affected women, women victims of violence, large families, single mothers, schoolchildren, youth and people with disabilities**.

When asked **about the impact of municipal programs on the lives of the population**, the majority (**64%**) believe that available programs **have a short-term effect / do not have a significant impact on their lives**. **23.5%** claimed that **"the services they received improved their situation"**, while 4% said that the **programs have no effect**. Qualitative research data also demonstrate the need for long-term programs aimed at empowering vulnerable groups. According to the majority,

one-time benefits only have a short-term effect and can not provide an effective solution to the problems of vulnerable groups.

6. Citizen participation and involvement at the local level

The survey data revealed a low degree of citizen communication and engagement with local government representatives. The majority of respondents in Zugdidi Municipality (36.3%) have never used any form of citizen involvement. One of the most frequently used forms of citizen participation defined by the Law, is **General Assembly of a settlement**. The majority of respondents - 42.7% - participated in General Assemblies of a settlement. The other forms of participation are practically not applied by the population (see **Diagram 12**).

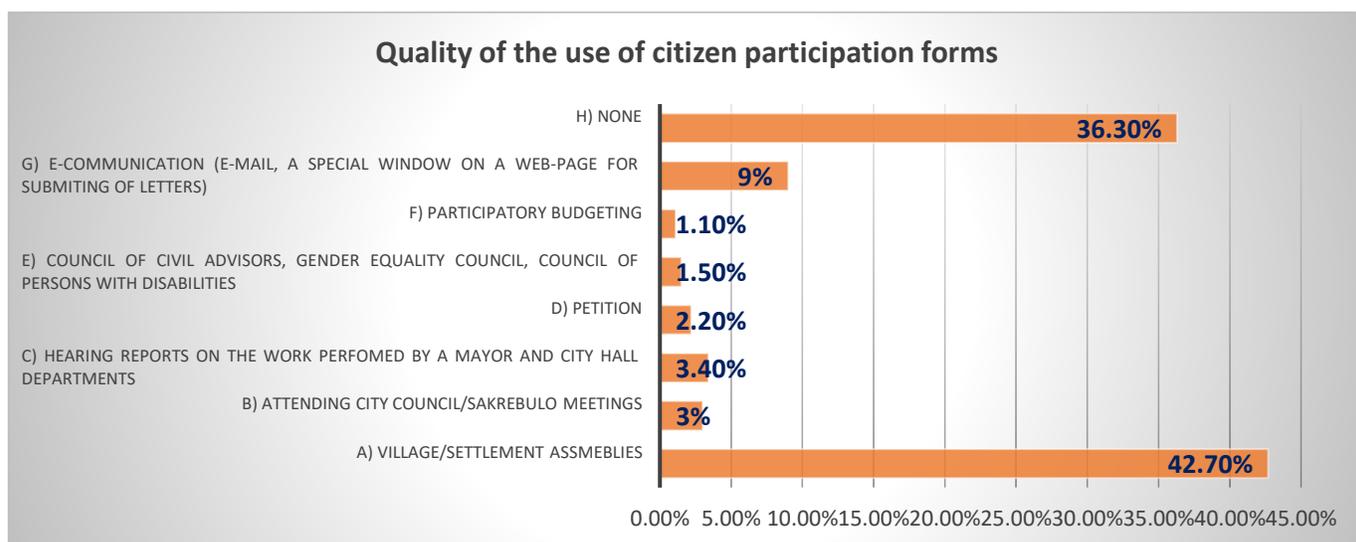


Diagram 12

The qualitative survey has shown that the use of this or that form of involvement is facilitated by pre-work with the population, mobilization and campaigns to promote forms of participation. Respondents also pointed out **the role and importance of NGOs in communicating with local self-governments**. It was mentioned that the involvement of the non-governmental sector in the meetings strengthens the accountability of local officials and response to the problems of the population –

"I think that non-governmental organizations have a very big role ... Officials, be it the Mayor or the Deputy Mayor, it does not matter, try to be very careful when meeting with non-governmental organizations. And, usually what is voiced during these meetings is implemented" (M.G., a local woman of 50, head of a CSO, school teacher).

Among the issues that are most frequently addressed by the population to self-government were health-related issues, including requests for surgery or medication funding (42.2%), social assistance (41.4%), and land registration problems (38.8%) (see **Diagram 13**).

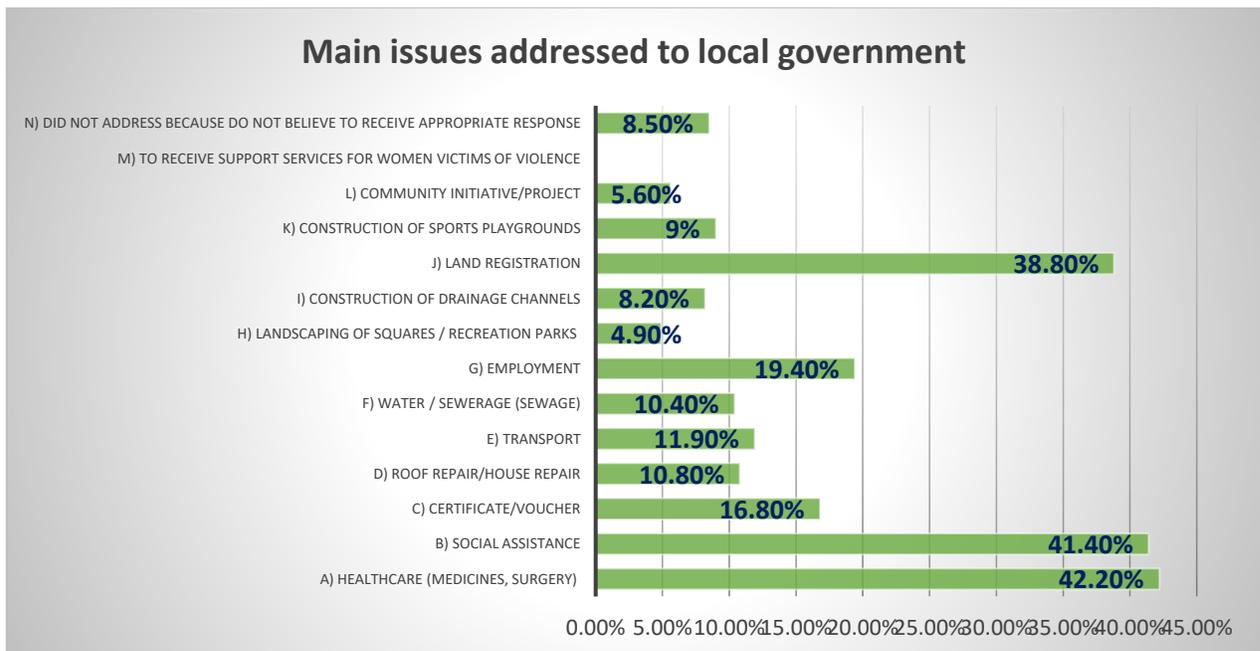


Diagram 13

7. Conclusion and recommendations

The results of the needs study revealed that **the level of awareness of IDP and conflict-affected women about local programs is quite weak**, which is largely due to insufficient meetings and communication with the population by the self-government representatives, and limited access to e-services. Poor internet coverage in Zugdidi municipality villages adjacent to the ABL, high cost of internet fees, lack of access to technical facilities (computers, smartphones) and insufficient skills in the use of technology significantly hinder the dissemination of information about programs and services.

Insufficient practice of assessing the needs of specific vulnerable groups (IDPs, youth, women victims of violence, persons with disabilities) and consulting with the population hinders the implementation of effective services tailored to specific needs of citizens.

The population’s involvement in the **municipality activity and decision-making process** and the use of the available forms of participation are rather weak.

The necessity of long-term programs for the empowerment of vulnerable groups and rather small and short-term effects of one-time assistance offered by self-governments were identified.

It is recommended to take certain actions in response to the challenges identified in the study.

Recommendations

To representatives of political parties and local self-government

Women's economic empowerment

- Offer trainings to develop entrepreneurship and business project management skills and business development grant programs for the economic empowerment of women and ensure their access to employment;
- When developing programs for women's economic empowerment, pay special attention to the needs of vulnerable groups and the factors that hinder women's participation in economic projects;
- Create a favorable business environment (tax exemption, maintaining social status, abolishing co-financing, land ownership requirements, age restrictions) for the promotion of small and medium-sized businesses for IDP and conflict-affected women;
- Set up relevant consultative service centers in the municipality to inform women about economic programs and raise their interest for the involvement in projects to ensure dissemination of information on state or local economic programs, detailed, thorough explanation of competition conditions, and practical assistance in filling out of applications;
- Establish appropriate childcare services and develop existing ones (develop day and evening childcare centers, open extended and summer groups in kindergartens and schools) to promote women's employment;
- Encourage and support social entrepreneurship, cooperatives and business incubators in IDP communities and increase the role of the municipality in this regard.

Healthcare accessibility

- Assess the infrastructural, technical and human resource needs of outpatient clinics in the villages adjacent to the ABL and take appropriate measures for their smooth operation;
- Develop a reproductive health policy; provide IDP and conflict-affected women with information on family planning services and contraceptive methods; unimpeded access to services, which also includes training of doctors, especially current staff in rural dispensaries, and raising women's awareness;
- Based on the specific situation of IDP and conflict-affected women (living in high-risk areas, poor sanitary and hygienic conditions in IDP settlements, etc.) assess their specific health needs and develop special health care programs tailored;
- Evaluate the consequences of continuing trauma of IDP and conflict-affected women and offer appropriate psychosocial rehabilitation programs.

Youth support programs

- Arrange open sports grounds, open multidisciplinary circles of art and culture and solve infrastructural problems of libraries for children and youth in IDP settlements and villages adjacent to the ABL;
- Create youth spaces in villages, where young people will have the opportunity to gather and spend their free time productively and/or receive non-formal education;
- Promote the implementation of youth ideas and initiatives by offering relevant grant programs;
- Stimulate youth involvement in local self-government and diversification of youth development programs;
- Promote the development of schools for young leaders with consideration of gender equality aspects.

Prevention and effective response to violence against women

- Elaborate long-term programs to support women-victims of violence with inclusion of a component of professional development/retrainings and employment;
- Recruit a commission composed of a group of professionals and independent experts (non-governmental organizations working on the issue of violence against women, psychologists, lawyers), responsible for discussing and making decisions on funding for women victims of violence through the municipal program;
- Raise the gender awareness of local officials, increase their sensitivity to gender equality, which, accordingly, should be reflected in the introduction and implementation of gender equality issues in local policies and programs;
- Ensure active consultation with relevant non-governmental organizations and women victims of violence in the process of developing programs for victims of violence.

Creation of an adapted environment for the involvement of people with disabilities

- Elaborate relevant programs for social integration, participation in decision making process and promotion of socio-economic development of people with disabilities.

General recommendations

- Integrate the specific needs and priorities of IDP and conflict-affected women into local policy and projects;
- Introduction of gender budgeting at a practical level and implementation of targeted programs aimed at improving women's rights;
- Pay special attention to consulting and collaborating with vulnerable groups at all stages of planning, implementation and evaluation of priority projects for the local community to ensure women's participation and involvement.



Cultural-Humanitarian Fund “Sukhumi”

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**(IDP Women Association “Imedi”, Fund of Women-Entrepreneurs, Teacher’s Union
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