

Information by the Government of Georgia on the implementation of the CSW61 agreed conclusions on 'Women's economic empowerment (WEE) in the changing world of work'

Strengthening normative and legal frameworks

Gender Equality Machinery in Georgia brings together the Gender Equality Council at the Parliament of Georgia, the Inter-Agency Commission on Gender Equality, Violence against Women and Domestic Violence under the Prime-Minister's Human Rights Council and Gender Equality Department at Public Defender's Office. The Inter-Agency Commission's job is to respond to the ongoing challenges in the field of gender equality and gender-based violence, including raising awareness, providing information on the public/state services, developing the state policy documents and progressing the functioning of the nine thematic task forces within its framework. One of the thematic task forces is working on the area of women's economic empowerment.

In the beginning of 2021, in line with drafting the National Human Rights Strategy, the Human Rights Secretariat of the Government of Georgia commenced the work on two stand-alone national action plans having gender aspects in common: National Action Plan on Realization of UN Resolutions 1325 on Women, Peace and Security and the NAP on Prevention and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence.

The mentioned policy documents take into account the specific chapters and activities that the state will continue to carry out in order to promote women's economic empowerment and their inclusion in public and political life, to encourage to make them engaged in the formal paid work and education, entrepreneurship, ICTs and related professions, to combat gender-based violence, etc.

Annex XXX of the EU Association Agreement with Georgia includes a list of EU directives, which the Georgian labor and employment legislation had to be aligned with. In 2019, directives related to discrimination and equal opportunities were transposed to the Georgian legislation and amendments were made to the Labor Code of Georgia, the Law of Georgia on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination, Law of Georgia on Public Service, and the Law of Georgia on Gender Equality.

According to the amendment approved in 2019 legal framework of Georgia now includes the definition of Sexual Harassment. In order to create an internal mechanism to prevent sexual harassment in the workplace the process of drafting relevant internal legal acts in nine state agencies was ongoing with the close cooperation of the inter-agency commission and UN Women in 2020. As a result, all nine state entities established sexual harassment response mechanisms up to this day.

In 2020, Georgia has declared its aspirations towards joining the Equal Pay International Coalition (EPIC) and launched the appropriate procedures to accession. The process has been completed in September 2021 and the country has joined the Equal Pay International Coalition (EPIC) and once more has underlined the need for equal pay for equal work.

Georgia is among countries, providing the Universal Healthcare to its citizens. Launched in 2013, the program was re-designed in 2017, introducing principles of social justice in needs-oriented services.

In 2018, the Law of Georgia on Occupational Safety was adopted that became organic law in 2019. The new Law improved occupational safety standards and increased the responsibility of employers. The law applies to every sector of economic activities, and an inspection authority is entitled to inspect any working space subject to inspection procedures and conduct inspections of occupational safety any time without the court permission and prior notification. A full-fledged Labour Inspection Service is in place as of January 1 2021.

In 2020, a list of hazardous works for pregnant, breastfeeding women and women recently given birth was adopted by the Decree of the Minister of IDPs, Labour, Health and Social Affairs of Georgia

On September 29, 2020, the Parliament of Georgia voted for amendments to the Organic Law of Georgia “Georgian Labour Code” and adoption of the new Law of Georgia on “Labour Inspection”. Amendments to the Labour Code outstandingly strengthen the legal framework for the protection of the labour rights of Georgian workers. The amendments include prohibition of direct and indirect discrimination, the list of grounds for discrimination was extended, principle of equal opportunities and equal treatment - provision on equal pay for equal work was introduced; higher standards of maternity and parental leave introduced, etc.

In order to protect human rights (and to avoid the unequal aggravated impacts of natural disasters on women) from adverse effects and adapt to climate change, Georgia started a nation-wide process for integrated climate risk management approach centred around risk reduction, prevention, and preparedness through the establishment of a multi-hazard early warning system and enhanced use of climate information in planning and decision-making across all sectors.

As a result of the specific reform to simplify procedures for the land registration and the targeted program, participation in the program has increased five times ensuring more women to own a property and generally allowing better protection of property rights in Georgia.

Strengthening education, training, and skills development

The main goal of the ongoing education system reform in Georgia is to make it more flexible, modern and oriented at quality educational outcomes. In order to achieve these goals, the educational system has to be accessible to everyone providing all citizens with equal opportunities to achieve high-quality sustainable results. A special funding system has been developed to support inclusive education at all levels in aim to ensure integration of students with special educational needs. In 2018, within the framework of the program “Supporting Inclusive Learning”, informational databases have been developed to collect information on persons with disabilities, including girls with disabilities in education to improve the quality of their engagement in the formal education system.

LEPL Georgia’s Innovations and Technology Agency (GITA) is prompting the vocational education to strengthen the skills of the labor force, meeting the demand from the private sector and to ensure that workers are globally competitive. From 2019, with the support of World Bank, GITA launched the program for 3000 advanced IT specialists in highly demanded professions, ensuring their certification and licensing. The involvement of women and girls in the courses has increased significantly and currently, at least 45% of the beneficiaries of the Agency’s ICT courses are women. From 2019, GITA is running STEAM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Art & Design, and Mathematics) boot camps where participants are chosen following the strict gender balance (50% male-50%female).

Supporting Access to Employment, Economic Development

Since 2015, the Government of Georgia has been implementing active labor market policy through programs supporting employment. The program is composed of several components: short term training and re-training courses, career guidance and professional consultations, development of core competencies (courses) and internships in places of employment. The vulnerable groups have priority when applying for the program.

The state program for Employment Support Services aims at developing and implementing active labor market policies and the employment promotion services in the country. The program envisages various activities. Women and the representatives of ethnic minorities residing in the regions densely populated by ethnic minorities are beneficiaries of this program and have a priority when applying.

One of the objectives of the national strategy for labor and employment is to increase access to employment for women and to enhance their socio-economic conditions and opportunities. In order

to support employment of population LEPL State Employment Support Agency was established in 2019 and is operational since January 1, 2020.

In order to provide for decent working conditions free of discrimination, the amendments were made to the Georgian legislation on 19 February 2019. The amendments introduced the employer's obligation to observe the principle of equality not only in the contractual labor relations, but also during pre-contractual relations: this makes it inadmissible to discriminate on any grounds during publication of job announcement and the job interview. At the same time, the awareness raising activities are being carried out. The information is provided in minority languages to support women's employment in rural and minority populated areas and to raise awareness on labor rights.

A wide-scale door-to-door information/awareness raising campaign is being carried out, through which information on human rights, civic integration policy, education, women's rights, domestic violence, as well as on Georgia's integration into European and Euro-Atlantic structures is being provided to the general public. Hundreds of meetings are held each year about social-economic programs and the respective services.

Implementing economic and social policies for women's economic empowerment

So far, the Government has adopted and rolled out four waves of the Anti-Crisis Plan that included social compensation for various vulnerable groups and people who have lost income amid COVID-19. Women are heavily represented in each of those groups, not only as income-earners in official and gig- economies, but also as parents of children with disabilities, families with three or more children, and so forth.

The Human Rights National Action Plan contains a section on GEWE addressing women's economic empowerment, to be achieved through business education and capacity development support, including in agriculture and agro-business, increasing women's participation in agricultural cooperatives and ensuring their involvement in rural development. A specially designated working group under CGE is also working on WEE issues.

Women's Economic Empowerment through small grants and economic programs also continue to have significant impact on women's lives. To mitigate the socio-economic effects of COVID-19, the Ministry of Economy and Sustainable Development has expanded economic support programs, such as Enterprise Georgia. Women applicants receive extra points during the assessment process of the micro grant competition.

In 2016, the Government approved the SME Development Strategy of Georgia 2016-2020 and related Action Plans. Supporting women entrepreneurs and their economic empowerment was one of the important directions of the strategy. The Government of Georgia has been implementing a number of programs aimed at promoting women's entrepreneurship. These programs offer women entrepreneurs important tools such as improving access to required finances, which, in turn, ensures sustainable development of enterprises and job creation; creating a specific, sustainable financial product for women-run small and medium-sized enterprises; assisting women-owned small and medium-sized enterprises with access to consulting services and know-how, and etc. With the purpose of female entrepreneurship development and identification of their needs, Government has set up a platform - Sub-Council for Promotion of Women Entrepreneurship, with the aim of identifying and developing relevant recommendations regarding women entrepreneurship development. In 2021, the Government adopted a new SME strategy 2021-2025. The aim of the strategy is to harness the economic potential of women by promoting the development of women's entrepreneurship.

The law of Georgia on Public Service was amended in 2017 obliging public entities to take measures to ensure equal treatment of persons employed and to include provisions prohibiting discrimination in internal rules and other documents and to ensure their enforcement.

Following the recent amendments to the Labour Code (September 2020) higher maternity and parental leave standards were introduced meaning that maternity paid leave of absence is in the amount of 126 calendar days while 57 days child care paid leave can be granted to a father (overall 183 days). Also, child care leave for 604 calendar days (including 57 days paid leave) can be fully or partially used by either father or mother. The Law on Public Service of Georgia further allows employees to take time off work for prenatal care, while the Labor Code prohibits termination of employment during maternity leave and considers terminating labor relations to be inadmissible during the period of maternity, newborn adoption leave of absence, and child care additional leave of absence after a female employee notifies the employer about her pregnancy.

In 2017, the Government approved the National Maternal and Newborn Health Strategy for 2017-2030 that aimed to decrease maternal and new-born morbidity and mortality and improve access to the reproductive services.

Noticeably, Georgia's Rural Development Strategy lists its three priorities. It references women in its priority area: social conditions and living standards. The accompanying NAP foresees 70 newly constructed or rehabilitated kindergartens. Provision of affordable kindergarten schools is vital to encourage more women to enter the formal market.

In 2014 the Ministry of Economy and Sustainable Development (MESD) in association with the MEPA launched the state program "Produce in Georgia" (government resolution 365) aimed at promoting entrepreneurship in Georgia.

The MEPA, and its Non-profit (non-commercial) legal entity Rural Development Agency (RDA) has been working on strengthening the role of women in agricultural cooperatives.

The MEPA is implementing a number of projects aimed at protecting women's rights in rural areas. A series of training, seminars and conferences were organized on organizational development, business project development, women's economic leadership, women and food safety, budget planning and grant application writing skills, financial planning, project management, budgeting, and business planning and related issues. MEPA also delivers a number of educational programs in the municipalities on farmer cooperation principles, business planning and financial management, agricultural technologies and environment protection.

It has to be noted that the Women Farmers' Association was established in 2013 currently uniting 150 farmers from almost all spheres of agriculture. The WFA is providing support to women engaged in farming in rural areas.

In November 2015, the Ministry of Justice launched a project Gender and Property aimed at informing the public about the principles of gender equality and equal rights in the distribution of property. The Ministry of Justice has opened community centers across Georgia to increase access of the rural population to more than 200 public sector and some private sector services. Apart from the municipal administration offices, the community centers offer special spaces for civil engagement free internet access, computers and videoconference equipment and modern electronic library services. Currently, 88 community centers are operating across Georgia.

State provides social protection service "Mother and Child Shelter" for mothers in need of this service (with children). The program includes: providing 24-hour shelter, providing food, clothing appropriate for age, gender and season and items necessary for personal hygiene, promoting vocational and non-formal education, organizing outpatient and inpatient medical care in case of emergency; the services of a psychologist and more.

Addressing the growing informality of work and mobility of women workers

The Ministry of Internally Displaced Persons from the Occupied Territories, Labour, Health and Social Affairs of Georgia dynamically works on deepening interstate cooperation aimed at agreeing on relevant legal labour migration schemes, as well as on further development and improvement of internal state regulatory system of labour migration. Nowadays Georgia has already signed four agreements and agreed on relevant schemes. Negotiations to sign such agreements with number of EU member states are underway. Target group of the mentioned circular migration schemes is the entire population of Georgia (regardless of gender and other distinguishing marks).

Managing technological and digital change for women's economic empowerment

Freedom of Speech and Expression, Information and Means of Mass Information and internet are protected under the constitution of Georgia. The constitution also guarantees equality as general and the equality between men and women in all areas.

One of the priorities of the Ministry of Economy and Sustainable Development of Georgia is to address the gender digital divide and support internet access to all the citizens of the country despite their dwelling area. In particular, it should be noted that for the implementation of the "National Broadband Development Strategy (NBDS) 2020-2025", which was adopted by the Government of Georgia in 2020 and which sets ambitious goals for the sector in line with the EU's Gigabit Society targets, the Government of Georgia along with the World Bank started the "Log-in Georgia Project". The project supports the construction and activation of fiber networks under the "State Programme for Broadband Infrastructure Development" that will bring high quality, high-capacity services to the selected rural settlements, other policy and regulatory activates under this component will improve the enabling environment for digital development. Specific effort will be made to address gender disparities. Effort will be made to address the differences in how men and women engage with digital services, the Project will support engagement with women's groups at the local level, ensure the mobilization of communities to increase support for women using technology and digital services, and delivered at the local level to maximize participation and inclusion. Specific effort will be made to ensure the participation of women entrepreneurs in these activities.

Internet is being provided to the very far-reaching mountainous villages and municipalities of the country through which half a million of persons are going to get the benefits of receiving, seeking and expressing or spreading information.

There are specific activities laid down in the Human Rights National Action Plan concerning supporting women to increase engagement in ICT sector and related professions.

Women's empowerment is one of the main priorities of Georgia's innovative ecosystem. From 2014, GITA promotes industry development and supports women's participation through various programs (fem-tech sector development, incentives, STEM Projects, etc.). In 2021, Georgia's Innovation and Technology Agency (GITA) in cooperation with the UN Women and with the support of the Embassy of Norway in Tbilisi, prepared and approved "Gender Equality Action Plan 2020-2022". The Action Plan aims to promote the integration and mainstreaming of the state policy on gender equality in the activities of the Agency and to implement the recommendations identified by the gender audit.

From 2017, GITA is providing Access to Finance for innovative projects, also supports R&D commercialization and technology transfer. In this regard, GITA provides access to finance by different types of grant programs by providing the pre-seed and seed stage financing for startups, covering the risks and enhancing their skills for further investment opportunities (through the grants programs approximately 30% are women beneficiaries).

Strengthening women's collective voice, leadership, and decision-making

Georgia has long history of women in politics. As early as 1918 the country had 5 female parliament members and was one of the first countries in the world to give women the right to vote in elections.

On the basis of the constitutional amendments, adopting quotas at central and local levels was important milestone in supporting women's political participation. (Parliamentary elections - One in 4 candidates has to be of a different sex; Municipal Elections - One in 3 candidates has to be of a different sex). The aim was to support ensuring women's full and effective representation in parliament and local elections. At the moment, there are 30 officially elected female parliament members, which is 20 percent of the whole composition. 60% of Georgian population support increased participation of women in politics.

In 2018, the first women president was elected. For today, 4 out of 11 members of the Government are women. However, women are duly represented in the legislative body.

In 2011, The Central Election Commission established a Gender Equality Council responsible for creating and implementing a Gender Equality Policy of the Election Administration and supporting implementation of gender equality related recommendations elaborated by the GoG and international organizations. The administration drafts a Strategic Plan and the annual action plans. One of the strategic objectives is to support the development of an environment with greater gender equality, through the implementation of a gender equality policy, encouraging women's participation in political and public life.

Georgia's gender oriented policies have stable and promising results. For example, World Bank Group has recently released Women, Business and the Law 2021 index, where the overall score for Georgia is higher than the regional average observed across Europe & Central Asia (83.4). Also, the empowerment gap between women and men, as measured by the Gender Inequality Index (GII), is narrowing year by year.