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Gori Information Centre



Local Services in Gori Municipality Practice, Attitudes and Perceptions

GORI 2019

Local Services in Gori Municipality

Practice, Attitudes and Perceptions

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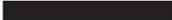
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Content

Tables and Diagrams	4
Introduction	5
1 Key Findings	7
2 Brief Overview of Gori Municipality	9
3 Methodology	11
4 Policy of Service Design, Planning and Provision in Gori Municipality	14
4.1. Legislation	14
4.2. Services Offered to the Population	14
4.3 Challenges of Service Provision	16
5 Municipal Services and Population	18
5.1. Relevance of the Municipal Services to the Local Needs	18
5.2. Level of Satisfaction with Services	20
5.3. Awareness of the Population of Services	23
5.4. Citizen Participation	28
5.5. Public Attitudes towards Self-Government	32
6 Cooperation of Local Self-Government with Civic Organizations in the Planning and Provision of Services	34
7 IDPs and Provision of Local Services	36
8 Conclusion	38
ANNEX 1 List of Municipal Services Studied during Quantitative Survey	40

Tables and Diagrams

Tables:

- Table 1. Population of Gori
- Table 2. General population, sampling and response rates
- Table 3. Primary sampling units (clusters)
- Table 4. Secondary sampling units (households)
- Table 5. Response distribution according to visits
- Table 6. Key demographic characteristics of respondents

Diagrams:

- Diagram 1. Population of Gori municipality 1994-2018
- Diagram 2. Budget expenditure of Gori municipality (I-III quarters of 2018)
- Diagram 3. Allocation of capital expenditure of Gori municipality, I-III quarters of 2018
- Diagram 4. Allocation of service financing in Gori municipality, I-III quarters of 2018
- Diagram 5. Local budget priorities, according to population
- Diagram 6. Priority topics for the population, according to types of settlements
- Diagram 7. Fields considered less of a priority by the population
- Diagram 8. Services that satisfy population, or result into more satisfaction than dissatisfaction
- Diagram 9. Services, which cause dissatisfaction, or more dissatisfaction than satisfaction of the population
- Diagram 10. Simplicity of procedures for receiving healthcare assistance
- Diagram 11. Level of satisfaction of population – healthcare programs
- Diagram 12. Issues raised by homeowners' associations with the municipality
- Diagram 13. Services that population is least aware of
- Diagram 14. Services never used by the population
- Diagram 15. Awareness level of the population on decisions of self-government
- Diagram 16. Awareness of the population on their rights – decision-making process
- Diagram 17. Awareness of the population on their rights – Initiative group
- Diagram 18. Level of awareness on rights according to age groups
- Diagram 19. Level of awareness according to types of settlements
- Diagram 20. Sources of Information
- Diagram 21. Sources of information according to types of settlements
- Diagram 22. Interest to engage in decision-making
- Diagram 23. Public referrals to different bodies of local self-government
- Diagram 24. Formats of population interaction with the municipality
- Diagram 25. Responding to requests of citizens by the municipality
- Diagram 26. Public engagement of citizens
- Diagram 27. Civic engagement according to age groups
- Diagram 28. Civic engagement according to education levels
- Diagram 29. Civic engagement according to types of settlements
- Diagram 30. The principle of cooperation between government and citizens
- Diagram 31. Relationships between government and citizens according to age groups
- Diagram 32. Public satisfaction with the work of central and local public services
- Diagram 33. Consideration of public opinion by local self-government
- Diagram 34. Assessment of self-Government (%)
- Diagram 35. Assessment of self-government by citizen according to age groups



Introduction

This report was prepared within the framework of Public-Civic Cooperation for Improved Service Delivery project implemented by Gori Information Centre with financial assistance from UNDP's Supporting Public Administration Reform in Georgia project. The purpose of the project was to support the provision of needs-based and effective services in Gori municipality through strengthening capacities of appropriate divisions of the local self-government and increased cooperation between public-civic partnership. Survey of municipal services was one of the key components of the project. Qualitative and quantitative research focused on assessment of local service provision in Gori municipality, identification of formats of cooperation between local government and civic organizations, and study of public attitudes. Fieldwork (focus group discussions, interviews and public opinion survey) were conducted by Caucasus Research Resource Center (CRRC) during August-October 2018, while the report was prepared by project experts, David Losaberidze and Lia Sanikidze.

It should be noted that **questionnaires for the quantitative research were prepared based on a participatory approach**, engaging the project team, invited experts and representatives of various divisions of Gori municipality Mayor's office. The project team believes such an approach, and especially the active engagement of the Mayor's office of Gori municipality, ensured not only diversification of the survey topics but also enabled local government to define issues to gather feedback on, with the purpose of significant improvement of the effectiveness of their efforts.

According to the purpose of the survey, project team and experts identified the following research areas:

1. **Policy of service design, planning and provision in Gori municipality:** More specifically, what is the policy and procedure for planning and implementing local service provision? What are the factors taken into consideration and to which extent is this process participatory?
2. **Coverage and accessibility of services:** Which part of the municipal population has access to municipal services? What are the factors preventing full coverage? Are there appropriate statistics and who is responsible for collecting data?
3. **Cooperation between municipal authorities and local civil society organisations:** Is there an established practice of service-related cooperation between the municipality and local organizations? If yes, how is it institutionalised? What problems, challenges and perspectives can be identified and how can this cooperation be improved?
4. **Level of awareness of the population of Gori municipality on services offered:** What are the channels for providing information to the population of the municipality on the services? Which sources of information are most effective and popular amongst citizens?
5. **Relationship between communities, local authorities and civic participation:** What is the level of civic engagement in the local decision-making process? How aware are the citizens of the municipality of the services offered? How frequent is the contact between municipal government and local communities?

The quantitative survey was fully dedicated to the study of public perceptions and attitudes. The population was able to express opinions on how well municipal services

meet their needs, whether their priorities are considered and whether they are happy with the services received. The study also explored **the level of awareness** of the population on municipal services, **sources of information**, as well as **willingness to engage in local self-government activities**.

This report is a result of analysis of qualitative and quantitative study of the project. The first section summarizes the key findings and emphasizes the challenges of municipal service provision, as well as public attitudes. The following section is dedicated to a brief description of Gori municipality, indicating the main activity of the population. Methodology and process of the study are described in section three.

The fourth section of the report is fully dedicated to the description of service provision policy of Gori municipality. It presents appropriate legislation and practice of service design and provision. Conclusions in this section are fully based on analysis of qualitative results and data gathered from Gori municipality.

Attitudes of the population towards self-government and its activities are described in section five. The level of satisfaction with the use of municipal services is assessed based on qualitative and quantitative surveys. The same section discusses the level of awareness of the population and willingness to engage in the activities of self-government.

Section six of the report discusses details of cooperation between Gori municipality and the NGO sector. It discusses forms of cooperation, results achieved and existing challenges. Section seven is dedicated to the issues of the IDP population. It talks about basic services that are less or not at all available to IDPs. It also identifies structural factors that prevent the IDP population from civic engagement or meeting their own needs. The last chapter of the report presents conclusions.

1

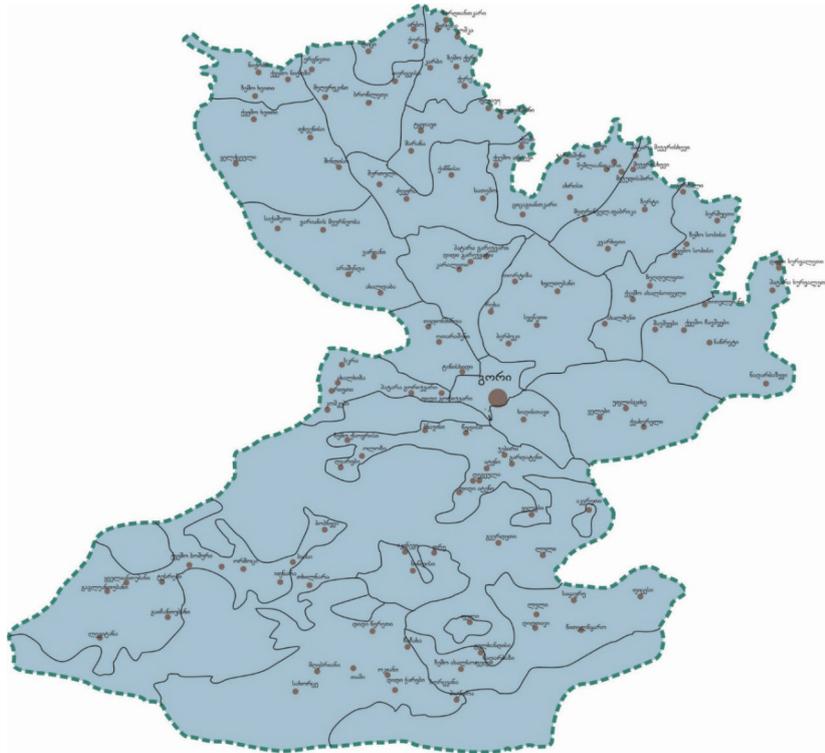
Key Findings

- The population of Gori municipality has unequal access to municipal services. While the municipality more or less successfully provides services to the population of the town, the situation is completely different in rural areas and IDP settlements. Here, provision of potable water, a sound sewage system and household waste management, needed for the dignified life of people, still remain unresolved.
- On the municipal level it is difficult to study and consider the needs of small settlements against the background of the problems of the town. Public servants do not have any guidelines to use for municipal budget-making. There is no structured methodology or comprehensive practice for identifying priorities. While planning the budget, employees of self-government base their decisions on superficial and non-systematic information, for example, their own (or friends') experiences, content of the requests coming to the municipality, surveys held with the help of their own limited resources, and information gathered from NGOs.
- Openness to the citizens of Gori municipality is ensured through simplified procedures of accepting and reviewing requests, as well as a quick response to such requests. 38.9% of the population (that have addressed the self-government administration with requests) believe the procedures of the municipality were easy for getting health-related assistance, while 38.7% believe it was somewhat difficult. At the same time, the majority of the population surveyed (53.3% of those referring to the municipal authorities) stated that the municipality responded (positively or negatively) to their applications within the deadlines described in the law – 10 business days.
- The rate of usage of municipal services by the local population is very low. 11 out of the 30 services studied within the framework of the survey have never been used by more than half of the population. The least used services are construction permits and visits to museums.
- The level of awareness of the population on the activities of self-government is very low. 49% of the population is completely unaware of the decisions made by the municipal government.
- The level of population awareness on possibilities for participating in self-government is also low. 45% of those surveyed know nothing about the right to engage in the decision-making process of self-government.
- The awareness level differs between the population of the town and villages. Inhabitants of the town have more information on their rights compared to those in the villages. The difference is 11.5%, on average.
- A large part of the population believes the practice of governance bodies giving due consideration to the interests of citizens is low. 42% of those surveyed stated that the self-governing body does not consider the opinions of the population.
- 40.7% of the local population believe that in Gori municipality staff are promoted through personal contacts, while 23.3% say corruption is present.
- Level of dissatisfaction among rural population towards municipal service provision is high. The level of nihilism is high and, therefore, willingness/desire to cooperate with local governance is low.

- The local NGO sector plays an important role in the provision of local services in Gori municipality. They mediate between local authorities and the population. For the past few years, fields of cooperation between NGOs and municipality employees have increased, which, in turn, increases the effectiveness of both sectors and public trust towards both. On a local level, NGOs vocalise the needs of various interest groups and engage in the development of program priorities. On the other hand, they actively participate in municipal co-funding schemes, which gives them additional sources of financing and supports organisational sustainability.
- IDPs living in Gori municipality state they have no or limited access to local services. The situation is complicated due to the remoteness of the central management body, especially since the Ministry of IDPs and Accommodation was merged with the Ministry of Labour, Health and Social Affairs.

2

Brief Overview of Gori Municipality



Map of Gori Municipality

Source: Gori Information Centre

Gori municipality is part of the Shida Kartli region. It is the largest administrative unit of the region and covers 53% of the territory (Gori municipality, 2018¹). The northern part borders with the region of South Ossetia, now occupied by the Russian Federation, and the villages adjacent to the Administrative Boundary Line (ABL) significantly determine local specifics – security issues of the region and special needs of the population of such villages.

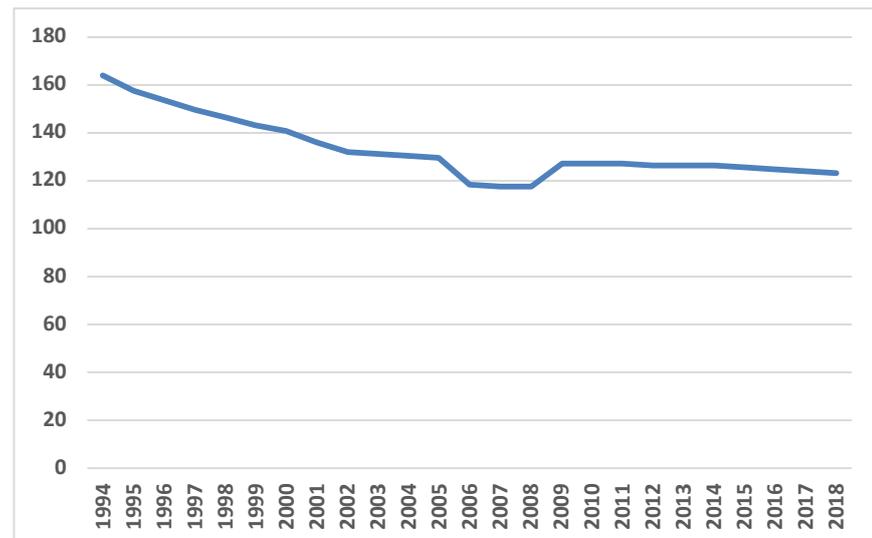
The majority of the population of the municipality (61.7%) lives in rural areas and is engaged in agriculture, industry and construction. Other sources of employment include service fields: transport, communication, trade, education and healthcare. There is a significant share of public servants, which is a result of the accumulation of territorial representations of central government and administration of the regional governor.

¹ Source: Gori municipality. Available at: <https://www.gori.gov.ge/galerea/geografia-da-buneba> (Last accessed: January 22, 2019)

Table 1. Population of Gori municipalitySource: Gori municipality, 2018²

Population	126 100 ³
Urban	48 300
Rural	77 800
IDP population	12 259

For the past two decades, the population of Gori municipality has decreased. The main population decrease occurred in the 1990s and, most probably, is linked to massive migration of the country, which, in its turn, was associated with the heavy social and economic crisis of that period. There is a noticeable increase of the population in 2009, which can be explained by the resettling of the IDP population after the 2008 war.

Diagram 1. Population of Gori municipality in 1994-2018 (thousand people)Source: National Statistics Office of Georgia⁴

Gori municipality covers 21 administrative units⁵. The sakrebulo (municipal council) is its legislative body, comprised of 15 majoritarian and 20 proportional members. The mayor's office is an executive body of the municipality, comprised of 9 structural units. The mayor's office is headed by the municipal mayor, elected through direct elections.

2 *ibid.*

3 According to government statistics, population is 144 000. Source: government of Georgia. Available at: <http://shidakartli.gov.ge/ge/municipalities/index/2> (Last accessed: January 22, 2019).

4 2014-2017 data of Gori town is included in the municipal head count.

5 Berbuki, Karaleti, Shavshvebi, Mejvriskhevi, Mereti, Skra, Tirdznisi, Tiniskhidi, Variani, Kvakhvrelis, Shindisi, Dzevera, Zegduleti, Akhalubani, Ateni, Nikozi, Mgebriani, Sakavre, Boshuri, Tkviavi, Khidistavi.

3

Methodology

Research on services provided by Gori municipality comprised qualitative and quantitative components.

The qualitative component of the survey included focus group discussions and in-depth interviews. 4 focus group discussions were held (August 23-24, 2018):

1. Inhabitants of Gori town – 8 participants
2. Inhabitants of villages (Kvakhvrelis and Mejriskhevi) of Gori municipality – 8 participants
3. IDP population of Tskhinvali, displaced during both conflicts (Gori Kombinati Settlement and Khurvaleti IDP settlement) – 8 participants
4. Representatives of NGOs working in Gori municipality – 6 participants.

Gender and age balance were kept while recruiting participants for the focus groups (except the 4th group).

Together with focus group discussion, in-depth interviews were conducted as part of the qualitative component of the research. A total of seven in-depth interviews were conducted (during the period of August 23 – September 12, 2018). Three of the interviews were conducted with representatives of Gori municipality and four with experts working on self-governance topics.

Focus group discussions and in-depth interviews helped identify and fine-tune indicators and formulations for understanding the awareness level of the population on municipal services and its assessment, which was later used for adopting a qualitative questionnaire.

The quantitative part of the study envisaged sample survey of the population of Gori municipality using a structured questionnaire. 1,057 respondents were surveyed during the period of 5-22 October 2018.

The survey consisted of 46 questions, with 235 variables in the database. The majority of questions were structured, while several semi-structured questions were also presented for respondents to be able to select “other” option and indicate their answer. The questionnaire consisted of several blocks dedicated to civic engagement in the activities of self-governance, level of awareness of municipal services, and demographic characteristics of the respondent. The average duration of the interview was 21 minutes.

A three-stage stratified clustered probability sampling was used for the selection of survey participants. The general population was the adult population of Gori municipality (18 years and older). The sample was distributed across two strata: Gori town and the villages of Gori municipality. To ensure equal precision within each stratum for the purpose of comparability, equal distribution was used and the targeted number of responses were set as 500 within each stratum. Considering the expected non-response level (based on similar surveys of CRRC Georgia), the size of the sample was selected, which would ensure a targeted number of responses. A higher number of responses was received than expected. General population size, sampling and response levels are provided in Table 2.

Table 2. General population, sample and response level

Stratum	General population	Targeted responses	Sample	Actual responses	Response rates
Gori town	41896	500	960	537	56%
Villages	69836	500	648	520	80%
Total	111732	1000	1,608	1,057	66%

The sampling process consisted of three stages. During the first stage electoral precincts (clusters) were selected. The number of clusters was defined based on logistical and statistical precision factors. All 32 electoral precincts were selected in Gori town, while another 27 precincts (out of 73) were selected in the villages of the municipality (Table 3). Electoral precincts were selected randomly, using Probability Proportional to Size (PPS) principle. The number of voters registered in the polling stations was used as a measure of size.

Table 3. Primary sampling units (clusters)

Stratum	Number of polling stations	Number of selected stations	Number of households selected in each of the polling stations
Gori town	32	32	30
Villages	73	27	24
Total	105	59	

During the second sampling stage households were selected using a random-walk principle. According to this method, the interviewer began moving from a starting point, following predefined instructions of moving to the right or left and counted households. Within each cluster, the order number of the first sampled household from the starting point and a step size for sampling every following household was defined (Table 4).

Table 4. Secondary sampling units (households)

Stratum	Number of households selected at each of the stations	Number of the first selected households	Step size
Gori Town	30	1 – 4	4
Villages	24	1 – 4	3 or 4

In each of the households the interviewer would select one respondent using Kish's randomized grid method, which excludes the interviewer's personal factors during the selection process and ensures gender and age balance. To prevent bias resulting from non-response, substitution of selected households was not allowed. The interviewer would visit each of the households three times, if nobody was at home, or if the selected respondent was not at home. The response rate was the following during visits:

Table 5. Response distribution according to visits

Stratum	Response during first visit	Response during second visit	Response during third visit	Total Responses
Gori town	345	167	25	537
Villages	406	102	12	520
Total	751	269	37	1,057

To define responses, CRRC used the AAPOR⁶ standard, which defines an interview as complete if the respondent gave valid answers (excluding "refuse to answer" option) to at least 50% of the questions.

The data was weighted according to the combination of inverse probability of sampling and demographic data. According to the latter, with each stratum (Gori town and villages), the population was distributed among 6 demographic groups according to gender and age, and probability weights were corrected proportionally to the distribution of the demographic groups within the general population. To avoid extreme weight

6 American Association for Public Opinion Research standards. Available at: <http://www.quantitativeskills.com/sisa/calculations/resprhlp.htm> and http://www.aapor.org/Standard_Definitions2.htm#.UoYIROJ5uuJ

coefficients, the so-called Raking Method was used, during which weight coefficients beyond the 1st and 99th percentiles were corrected, and residuals were distributed among all respondents. Using weight coefficients, sample distribution was made more similar to the distribution of the general population (Table 6).

Table 6. Key demographic characteristics of respondents

Stratum	Gori town			Villages			Total		
	# of respondents	Unweighted %	Weighted %	# of respondents	Unweighted %	Weighted %	# of respondents	Unweighted %	Weighted %
Gender									
Man	164	31%	44%	214	41%	48%	378	36%	47%
Woman	373	69%	56%	306	59%	52%	679	64%	53%
Total	537	100%	100%	520	100%	100%	1057	100%	100%
Age									
18-34	133	24.8%	32.9%	94	18.1%	29.0%	227	21.5%	30.5%
35-54	179	33.3%	37.7%	183	35.2%	35.4%	362	34.2%	36.2%
55+	225	41.9%	29.4%	243	46.7%	35.7%	468	44.3%	33.3%
Total	537	100.0%	100.0%	520	100.0%	100.0%	1057	100.0%	100.0%

4

Policy of Service Design, Planning and Provision in Gori Municipality

4.1. Legislation

Provision of services by the local self-government to the population is regulated through the organic law of Georgia. The authority of municipalities is described in Chapter 3 of the Local Self-Governance Code of Georgia, which defines two groups of responsibilities: **own responsibility**, which rests solely with municipalities, and delegated responsibilities, gained from the central or regional governance body with appropriate financial or material support. Municipal competencies extend to fields such as development/maintenance of local infrastructure, pre-school education, non-formal education, healthcare, social provision, and organisation of cultural and sports activities. Own as well as delegated responsibilities of the local self-government is detailed in articles 16 and 17 of the Code.

At the same time, the municipality is entitled to implement activities to support employment, agriculture, tourism, environmental protection, public education, gender equality, maintenance of local archives, creation of safe health environment, attract investment, and other purposes. According to article 17 of the Local Self-Governance Code, state authorities may delegate additional responsibilities to the municipality, which can be more effectively implemented on a local level. Delegation takes place in line with the law or special agreement.

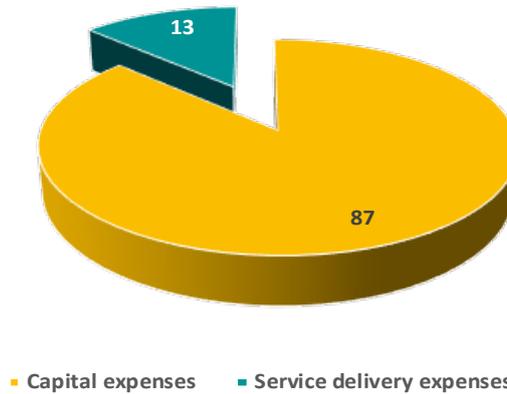
According to gradual provisions of the Code, current legislation was to be harmonized with the organic law. In April 2016 the Parliament initiated discussion of the bill of law (changes to 174 laws), but the review process was put on hold at the end of 2016. As a result, local self-governments still do not have an effective legal framework to ensure practical implementation of rights granted to the municipalities.

4.2. Services Offered to the Population

Gori municipal authorities consider implementation of infrastructural projects, social assistance to vulnerable groups, one-time medical service financing, pre-school education service and organizing cultural and sports to be priority areas of their work. Activities under these priority areas are implemented through respective divisions. Employees of these units prepare specific programs and sub-programs, submit them to the head of the unit and the deputy mayor in charge of the sector. In case of a positive decision, projects are sent to the legal department and are sent to the town council (sakrebulo), reviewed by the appropriate committee and, based on the results of revision, are submitted to the municipal council/sakrebulo for approval.

Diagram 2. Budget expenditure of Gori municipality (I-III quarters of 2018)

Source: Gori municipality



According to the information provided by Gori municipality, the majority of funds spent during the first three quarters of 2018 (87%) was used for capital expenditures (Diagram 2). Most funds were allocated for rehabilitation of roads and streets. A significant amount was also spent on rehabilitation of water and sewage systems, but the difference between these two main expenditures is quite big. 72% of the capital expenditures were used for road rehabilitation, while only 17.6% were used for water and sewage system rehabilitation. An even lower amount was allocated for the arrangement of sports grounds and the funding of pre-school education. Only 13% of the budget allocations were used for service provision (see Diagram 4 for the list). In this case as well, almost one third of the budget (31%) was spent on road maintenance, while another third (34%) was allocated for outdoor lighting. The rest was distributed for financing sports (16.3%) and cultural (8.3%) events and funding projects submitted by homeowners' associations (5.3%). (Diagrams 3 and 4).

Diagram 3. Allocation of capital expenditure (%) of Gori municipality, I-III quarters of 2018

Source: Gori municipality

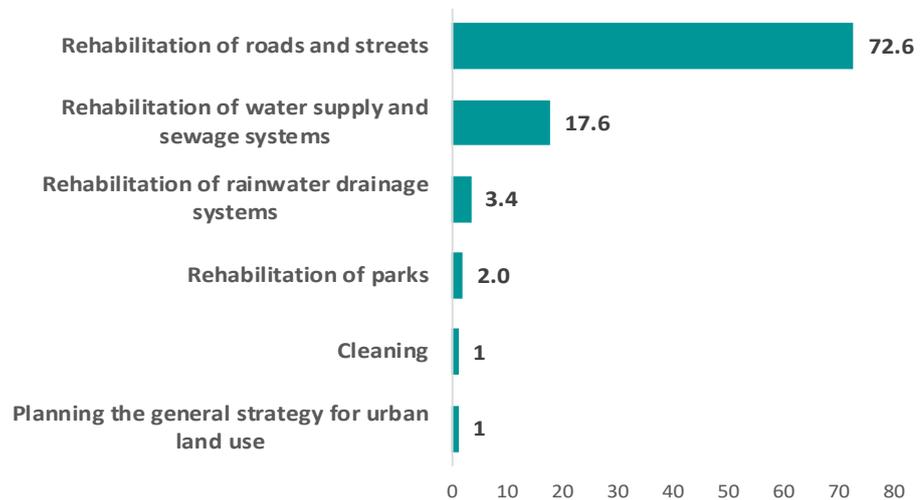
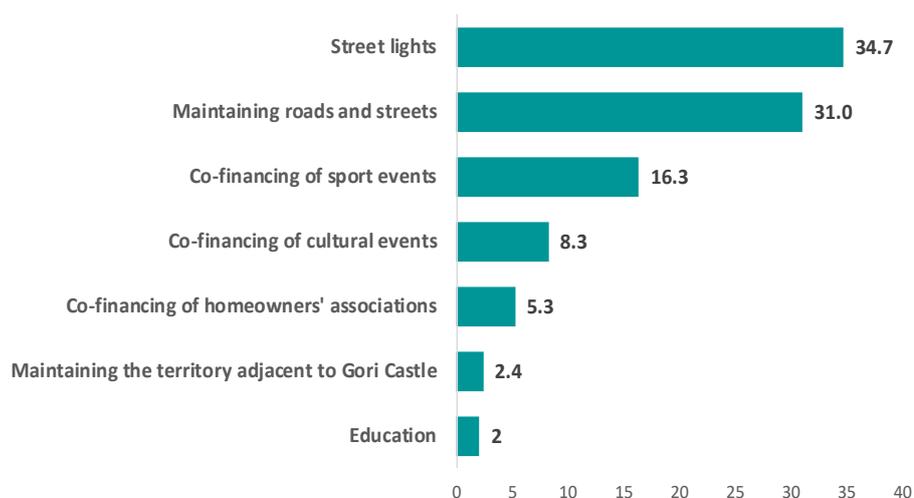


Diagram 4. Allocation of service financing (%) in Gori municipality, I-III quarters of 2018

Source: Gori municipality



4.3 Challenges of Service Provision

Gori municipality does not have any **guidelines or methodological instructions** (indicating indicators and criteria) **for preparing programs**. Programs are prepared based on previous experience and the existing situation. It should be noted that the draft of the Decentralization Strategy⁷ envisages establishment of minimal standards for service provision across the country and improvement of the quality of service.

Programs prepared by the municipality are usually short-term and focused on one budget year. According to experts, there are rare cases of mid-term (for example, 3-year) projects, while long-term plans are almost never made. Moreover, there is often lack of coordination between different services. According to the local population and NGOs, such practice hinders sustainability of results achieved and minimizes effectiveness. For example, while organising internal roads, drainage channels are not installed, or, installation/maintenance of communal infrastructure is not considered: “This is strange – they lay asphalt, and then remember that water needs to be installed there; remove the asphalt and lay it again. When you build it, do those things first, and then lay the asphalt!” (Gori resident, participant of focus group). As a result, works conducted are quickly damaged and additional funding is required.

For Gori municipality, just like other self-government units, **financial security** and property management problems still remain a significant challenge.⁸ Moreover, **centralisation of the procurement system** and prioritization of low costs as key indicator undermines process transparency as well as quality of the work conducted. **There is very little municipal asset**. The majority of public assets (land, forests, etc.) are under the management of the state (Ministry of Economy and Sustainable Development) and the process of handover of part of the assets to the municipalities is prolonged, even though such handover was to be completed several years ago, as per the 2013 state strategy and organic law. **Management of local museums and cultural monuments**, which is important for Gori municipality, fall under state government. However, local authorities are willing to engage actively in maintenance-management and keep income from operations locally. “If [cultural monuments] are transferred to local government for management, they would at least start maintenance. For example, in the case of Gori Castle, there would not be so much grass, it’s almost a forest there.” (NGO participant of focus group).

Lack of local needs assessment and incomplete statistics are other issues. Social, healthcare and educational programs require a comprehensive database (for example, indicating births, persons with oncological diseases, or people with disabilities) that would enable service units prepare more targeted projects and budgets for number of kindergartens needed and amount of co-funding for vulnerable groups, etc. Since there is no centralised methodology to prepare such data and provide to municipalities, at this point Gori municipality is trying to find information through its own efforts, however,

⁷ In 2018 the Ministry of Regional Development and Infrastructure started coordination of working on the strategy of decentralization. The process also engages NGO sector.

⁸ It should be noted that since 2019, 19% of VAT instead of equalizing transfers are distributed across the municipal budgets. This way, finances received from the central to local budget will increase. However, experts argue that the new system does not generate municipalities’ own income and the latter are still dependent on transfers from the center.

the process is incomplete and cannot fully reflect the existing situation. It is necessary to note that there is an inconsistency between official data as well. For example, the Office of the Governor of Shida Kartli, municipal authorities and the National Statistics Service have different data on the population of Gori municipality.

Another significant challenge is **the low discretion of local self-governments** while implementing self-governance. Even though public servants state there is no direct pressure from the central government (line ministries), lack of by-laws and regulation norms, as well as lack of finances, leaves the municipality in a difficult position. The local population and public servants often recall examples of the water supply system, for example, which, according to the law, is the sole responsibility of the self-government, but the sector is managed by the state in a way that does not even duly inform self-governments about planned activities.

Within the framework of the study, **the lack of a qualified workforce** was identified as one of the additional challenges, hindering local government from implementing its tasks in an effective manner. The reason is the politicisation of the public service: each change of the party leadership and management results in a high turnover of public servants and an increase or decrease of employed in local self-governments. Due to low salaries, there is frequent staff migration to different sectors. As per observation of the population, there are frequent cases of nepotism. There is no appropriate state strategy and specific action plan on how to increase the exclusive competences of self-government (in education, culture, and other fields, for example) or how to ensure the hiring of qualified personnel.

Finally, it should be noted that almost all interest groups engaged in the study (population, experts, public servants) underlined **the negative effects of enlarging municipalities and increasing a gap between municipal authorities and their constituencies**. International experts, unlike public servants, are more negative in their assessment of the abolishing of self-governing towns and argue that it has not led to any economic efficiency or other positive outcomes. They also believe that local self-governments have become more distant from people, while the quality of service provision remains unsatisfactory. Implementing programs is often problematic due to the large size of the population:

“I’ve come across long lines in the hall, when one of the public servants has visiting hours. The lines are disorganized. I believe this is a result of merging municipalities and there are more people to be served now.” (NGO participant of focus group).

Moreover, consideration of the specific needs of villages has become far more complicated than it was under the previous system whereby rural and urban communities operated as separate self-governing units: “The budget is common now – it only focuses on large services and small ones are lost.” (NGO participant of focus group). While the town prioritises the issue of stray dogs and municipal transport, internal roads are a priority for villages, alongside water provision and/or agriculture support. However, reaching out to the self-government body, which is now distant from the population, as well as understanding the specifics of a particular topic – is now more difficult. The population and governing units are distant not only in the structured sense, but also in spatial terms, which, naturally, has become an additional barrier to service provision:

“One key problem that people face is territorial distance. The building is located in a less accessible area – even I hesitate going for any meetings there. When a person comes from the village, they have to change several means of transport to reach the place; then spend the whole day; then go to another place – public service hall, social agency. It’s inaccessible in terms of transport. They have to come back, walk another kilometer to reach the transport.” (NGO participant of focus group).

5

Municipal Services and Population

Employees of central government and experts believe municipal service provision to be unequally distributed in Georgia. Access to services and diversity is more noticeable in centres, and less in remote areas. The difference is in coverage as well as quality. Reasons such as lack of finances, human and technical resources are often complemented with low activeness of the population. The latter is especially important as the country faces a lack of systemic collection and analysis of information. Therefore, experts believe increased engagement of the local population (provision of information, participation in decision-making processes and feedback) may lead to a breakthrough in improved service provision.

5.1. Relevance of the Municipal Services to the Local Needs

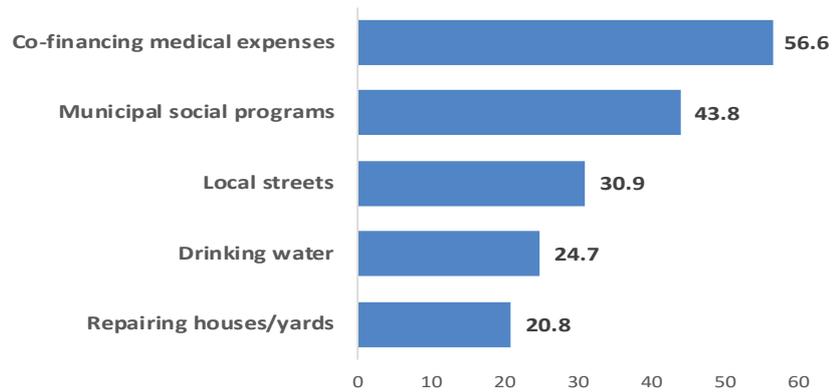
Service provision in Gori municipality is fully consistent with the general patterns in the country. According to public servants engaged in local structures, considering the needs of the local population is important for them while planning services and programs. Regardless of this, they do not have an established and detailed methodology to guide them through the process. Moreover, public servants have no access to statistical data as official data collected at a national level and often incomplete, are scattered across various agencies of the central authorities. Access to accurate and reliable statistical data is of great importance for identifying priorities and distributing budget costs. To fill such an information gap, once a year they conduct public surveys at local expense to study problems and needs. At the same time, they try to organize regular meetings with public and local NGOs: *“Programs are approved differently each year. We have annual meetings with representatives of the public and NGOs. We consider their ideas, recommendations... try to make programs perfect.”* (Employee of Gori municipality, interview).

Public servants try to consider recommendations of the population as well as NGOs while planning the budget, within the scope of the municipality’s authority and budget. For example, previously funding was allocated for talented youth to take part in activities and events on the territory of Georgia, but now international visits can also be funded.

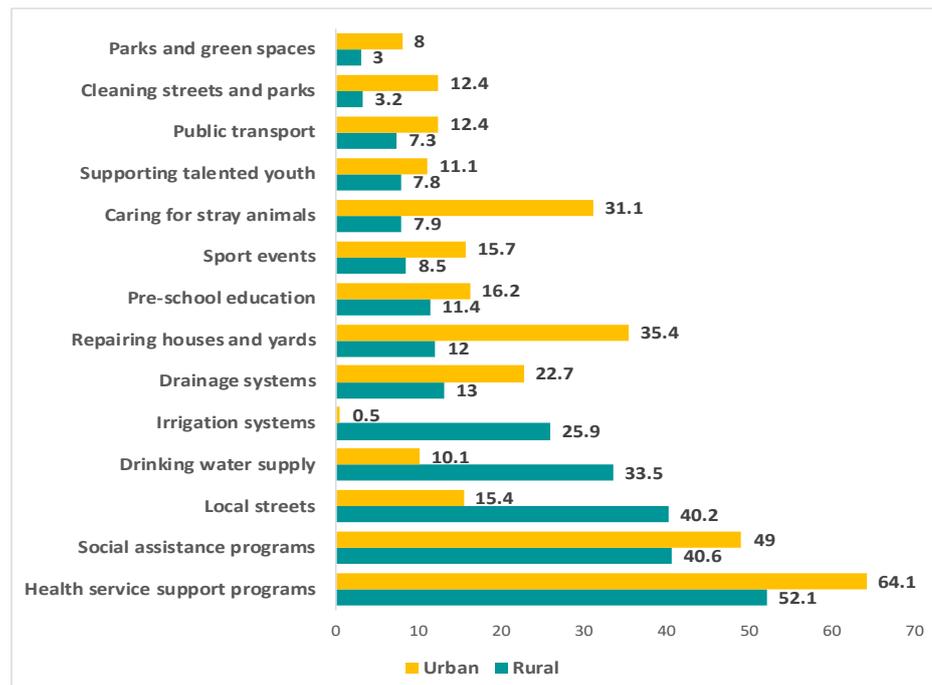
Regardless of such initiatives, the survey results show certain discrepancy between priority costs of Gori municipality and the needs of the population. As noted above, a large portion of the local budget is spent on infrastructural projects and only a small amount is allocated for social assistance and health, even though the latter is the most important for the population. More than half of those surveyed (56.6%) believe that priority of the local budget should be financial assistance to health services, while 43.8% names social assistance as a priority, whereas less than one third (30%) consider internal roads as a priority (Diagram 5). As more than half of the population name medical services and social assistance as main priorities, it indicates difficult social conditions of the region as well as the more important issue of access to healthcare across the country. Therefore, it is important for the local self-government not only to increase social/health program funding, but also to work towards the creation of an environment encouraging economic development and increased access to healthcare, together with central government.

Diagram 5. Local budget priorities, according to the population

What should be the top priority for your local self-government budget? (%)

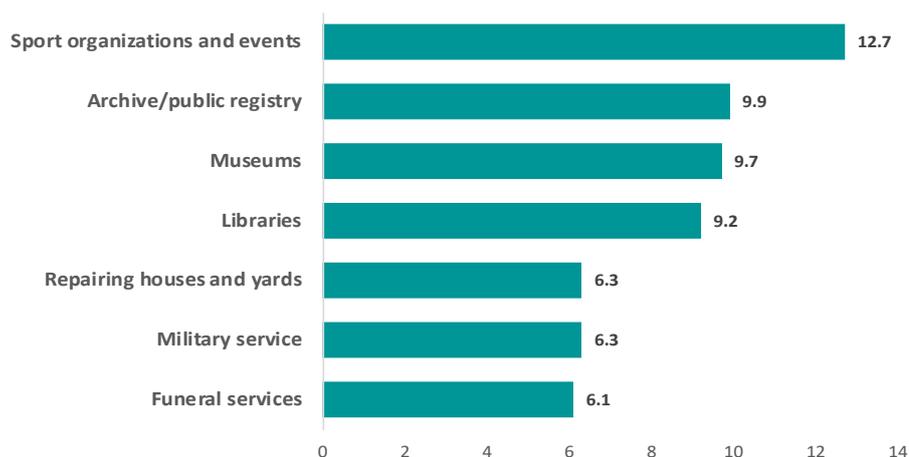


Out of the priorities, the population desires the improvement of irrigation (14.6%) and potable water (14.2%) systems. Based on needs, the rural and urban population have different priorities. For example, increased quality of potable water is a higher priority for the rural population (33.5%) compared to the urban population (10.1%). The same applies to the maintenance of internal roads. This is a main concern of 40.2% of the rural population, and only 15.4% of urban inhabitants. The picture is different regarding stray animals and maintenance of living areas (Diagram 6).

Diagram 6. Priority topics for the population, according to types of settlements (%)

During the survey, together with selecting suggested responses, the population was able to name the service they consider as important. Of the additional responses, installing speed control barriers (16.8%), rehabilitation of swimming pool (15.1%) and ensuring spaces for public events (13.5%) were named most frequently.

The population found it difficult to name fields to reallocate money for increasing funding for priority programs. However, several services were named more often, which give valuable information on the priorities of the population. Out of the services under this study, over 5% of the surveyed named only 7 services for which they would save financial resources. Such services include sports organisations and activities (12.7%), archive/public registrar service (9.9%), museums (9.7%) and libraries (9.2%) (Diagram 7). Services providing persons with disabilities with adapted environment (0.3%), functioning of medical institutions (0.7%) and outdoor lights (1.3%) were named least of all for budget cuts.

Diagram 7. Fields considered less of a priority by the population

The rural and urban population have different opinions on budget savings. The urban population would save money on military service (urban – 12.6%, 2.6% – rural), support for cultural events (urban – 8.3%, 1.4% – rural) and the civic budget program (urban – 8.3%, 2% – rural). The rural population side with reduction of financing of the public registry and other legal services (rural – 11.8%, urban – 6.5%), museums (rural – 13.8%, urban – 3.0%) and libraries (rural – 13.1%, urban – 2.8%).

Representatives of civil society organisations and public servants agree that local self-government does not have sufficient financial resources to meet all needs of the population and respond to challenges of the municipality. The majority of the population (39.6%) do not know about the existing situation in the municipality; one third (34.2%) thinks that local government has sufficient resources, while 18.4% have no clear idea on this topic. *“People think Gori has no budget, as nothing really works. We’re funded from Tbilisi, so I don’t know what we can ask for”* (Urban participant of the focus group).

5.2. Level of Satisfaction with Services

The study, while looking at the relevance of municipal services, looked at the level of satisfaction of citizens. Of the services offered by the municipality that scored highly on public satisfaction, waste management, local roads, outdoor lights and transport were named to be the most important (Diagram 8). However, there is a clear difference between the attitudes of respondents living in rural and urban areas. For example, municipal transport service is evaluated as negative by the residents of rural areas and IDP settlements. They believe that minibuses, which are the only means of long-distance travel, only serve one or two routes a day. At other parts of the day citizens have to walk several kilometres. Furthermore, the vehicles are in poor state of repair, and often dangerous.

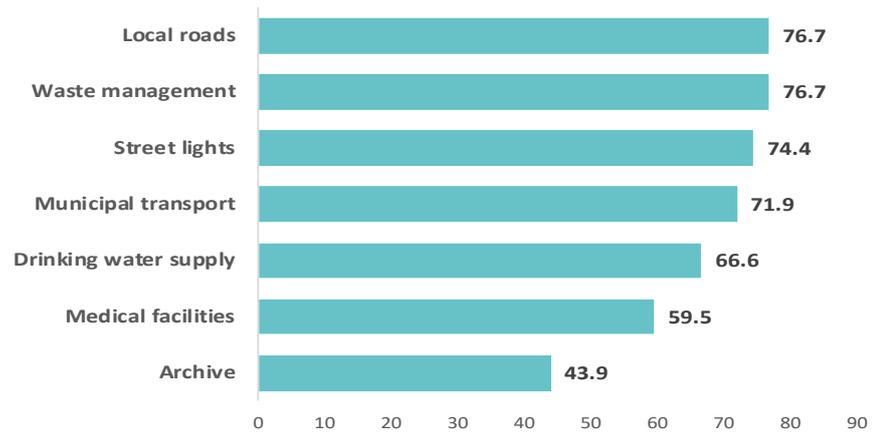
“I live near the centre of Mejvriskhev, and the conflict zone is 2 kilometers away from my house. There is an Ossetian village after mine. No transport travels here. It’s very difficult both in winter and summer – cold and heat. We placed several requests for a minibus to come by at least twice a day” (Village participant of focus group)

Differences in attitudes can be explained by the different needs of the rural and urban population. For the village population, transport is important for reaching the centre of Gori, which is a hub for important infrastructure: markets, bus stations, the public service hall and others. However, such transport may be an additional discomfort for the town population, due to heavy traffic and increased pollution.

Unlike the urban population, the majority of the rural population is unhappy with waste management practices. According to the rural inhabitants, despite timely payment of taxes, waste is moved very rarely, which results in poor sanitary conditions. There is a lack of waste bins in the villages, due to which the population tries to avoid walking long distances and dumps garbage locally. As for the administration, respondents even complained about the delayed reception of bills:

“The waste bill does not reach everyone on time, so payment is not collected in time. For example, I received bills for 6 months together, while my colleagues have not even received their bills yet, and this could add up to 50 lari. Naturally, a person would not be able to pay such an amount all at once, so it’s better to regulate this.” (Village participant of focus group)

Diagram 8. Services that satisfy the population, or result in more satisfaction than dissatisfaction (%)⁹



The survey shows that stray animals, the creation of access for people with disabilities, and social programs cause the highest dissatisfaction of the population (Diagram 9). There is once again a difference between the rural and urban population. The issue of stray dogs concerns the inhabitants of Gori town: *“There is an issue with regard to stray dogs. I am scared of dogs, and therefore, I was unable to perform a work assignment”* (Gori inhabitant, NGO participant of focus group). According to the population and public servants, the cause is the rural population neglecting to care for their pet dogs and leaving puppies at the entrance of the town, which makes the problem more acute, as the town has only one municipal shelter for stray animals.

Unlike the inhabitants of Gori town, the rural population and IDPs mainly complain about limited water supply and deteriorated internal roads. While Gori town population is happy with local roads, the attitude is different in villages and IDP settlements: *“Local roads are in such a bad condition that one rainfall is enough to make them impassable”* (Village participant of focus group). The rural population also has a limited potable water supply. They complain about the schedule of the water supply, and indicate worsening of the conditions as time passes:

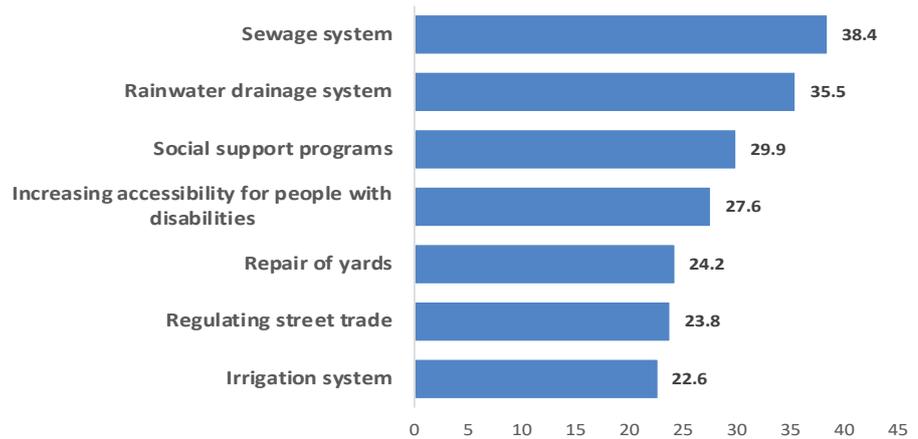
“There is a huge water problem in Mejvriskhevi, which has not been sorted out for years now. Wells were installed, but the water is supplied once every five days only, which cannot be used on the next day” (Village participant of focus group).

“We used to get potable water once every three days. Now they’ve thought of something new. It’s only once every five days, and for an hour only. If you manage, you fill your tanks. If not – not possible. The bad thing is that it’s been going on for years, and people have to drag water from different places by hand.” (Village participant of focus group).

For the rural population, regulation of fertilizers provided by the municipality for agricultural purposes is also important. *“Chemicals are counterfeit, and it’s a huge issue”* (NGO participant of focus group). He says there are frequent cases of selling low quality fertilizers to locals, which damages the harvest and leaves the rural population without income.

⁹ Based on the list of municipal services, respondents assessed satisfaction with quality of service, using the following potential answers: (1) satisfied, (2) more satisfied than dissatisfied, (3) more dissatisfied than satisfied, (4) dissatisfied, (5) unaware of such service, (6) have not used such service, (7) have used, but hard to assess, and (8) refuse to answer.

Diagram 9. Services, which cause dissatisfaction, or more dissatisfaction than satisfaction of the population (%)



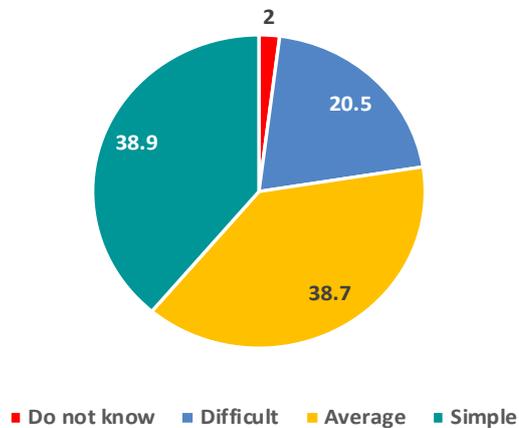
Employees of public services state the biggest demand falls on social assistance programs. However, interestingly, 2.6% of the municipal population addressed local self-government for assistance (17.6% of those who filed a request, received such assistance). Even though service procedures are quite easy (Diagram 10), dissatisfaction is still quite high. A key reason for such a negative attitude is lack of transparency surrounding the existing social points system and unfair treatment. “As I mentioned before, the social points system is the most closed one, it’s dark and vague, and the result is visible” – says a village representative. The population is well aware that the social assistance system is centralized and does not fall under the authority of the municipality, but to improve the situation, they request transparency of the process and responsibility of social agents:

“I wish the principles of assessment were accessible so that a person knows why this person received assistance and not that person, what is given a priority [in the assessment]” (Village participant of focus group)

“I don’t know how assessment takes place and I wanted to get an answer: why isn’t there responsibility of the social agent that removes social assistance from a person in need. This should be under strict consideration. Loss of job [by a social agent] is a small relief. In my neighborhood people with real need were left without assistance, they did not have any food. Really!” (Village participant of focus group)

Diagram 10. Simplicity of procedures for receiving healthcare assistance

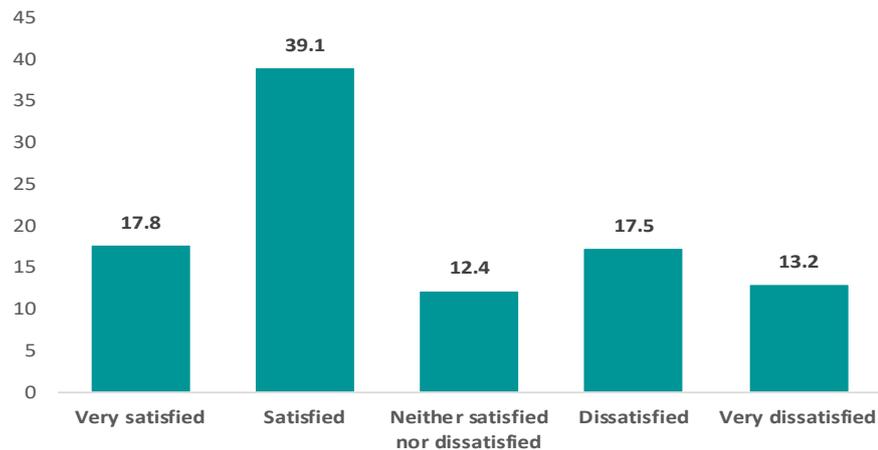
How difficult/simple were the procedures you experienced to get aid for healthcare? (%)



The local population is more or less happy with one-off financial or material support from the municipality for health services. Over the past 12 months, 9.1% have applied to the municipality for assistance. The procedures seemed simple for 38.9%, and difficult for 20,5%. The population is mainly happy with the services received, which is noted by 56.9% (Diagram 11).

Diagram 11. Level of satisfaction of population – healthcare programs

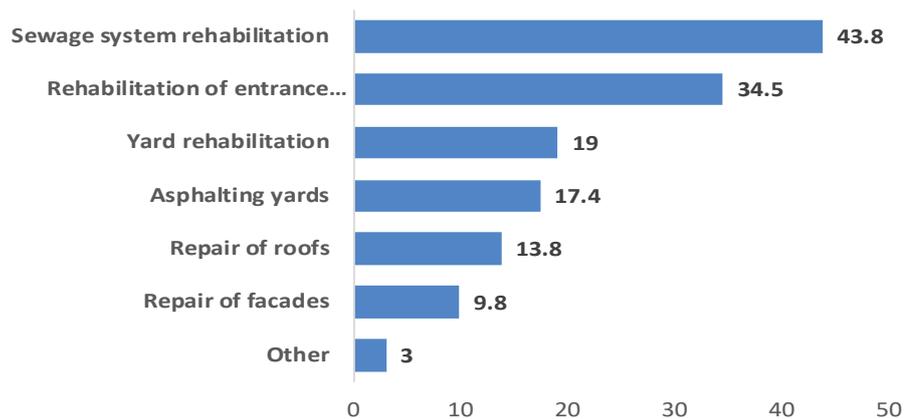
How satisfied are you with municipal support for healthcare issues? (%)



Co-funding of homeowners' associations is a service targeted at the urban population, and 5% of those surveyed have used it. For the past two years the main directions of this service were rehabilitation of house entrances and sewage systems, with less rehabilitation of façades and roofs (Diagram 12).

Diagram 12. Issues referred to the local authorities by homeowners' associations

Which issue did your fellowship raise with Municipality? (%)



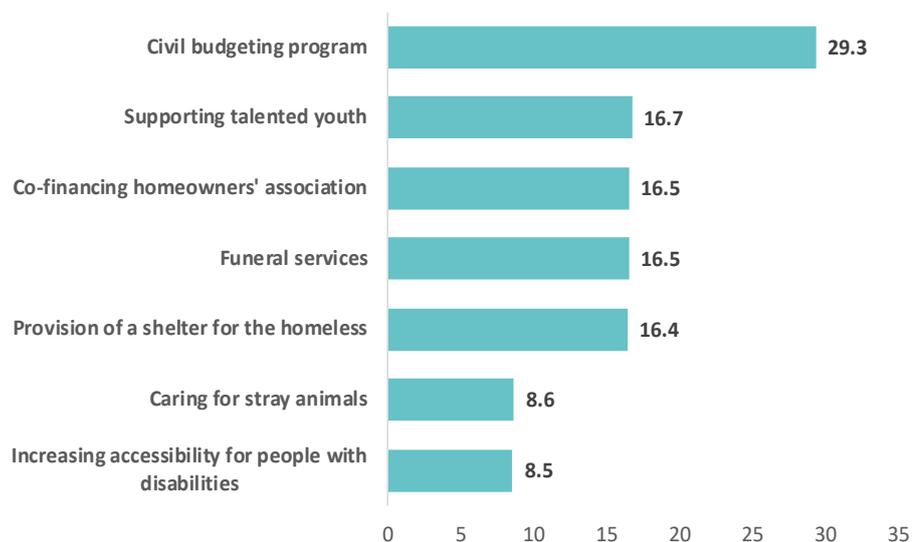
The population has a relatively positive attitude towards the pre-school education service. Kindergartens are easily accessible for 48%, on average accessible for 30.5%, and less accessible for 15.7%. In general, the distance to kindergartens is not an issue in areas where they exist. Focus group members noted that citizens are mostly satisfied with this service: *"I can say it's quite good, since it's like a competition for who runs a better kindergarten in Gori. They work well, and the union of kindergartens works well"* (NGO participant of focus group).

Findings of the qualitative survey suggest that the rural population is less satisfied with municipal services, than the urban population. The services that are a subject of concern for the urban communities, cause even stronger discontent among the rural population. Such an attitude can be partially explained since some services are fully or partially concentrated in the town (for example, co-funding of homeowners' associations, museums, parks, water supply, etc.). It is evident that the rural communities need to receive services, even to a minimum extent, which function in urban areas with varying degree of effectiveness. Satisfaction levels of the rural population exceed those in the urban population only in cases when specific services are focused on rural areas (irrigation is a good example).

5.3. Awareness of the Population of Services

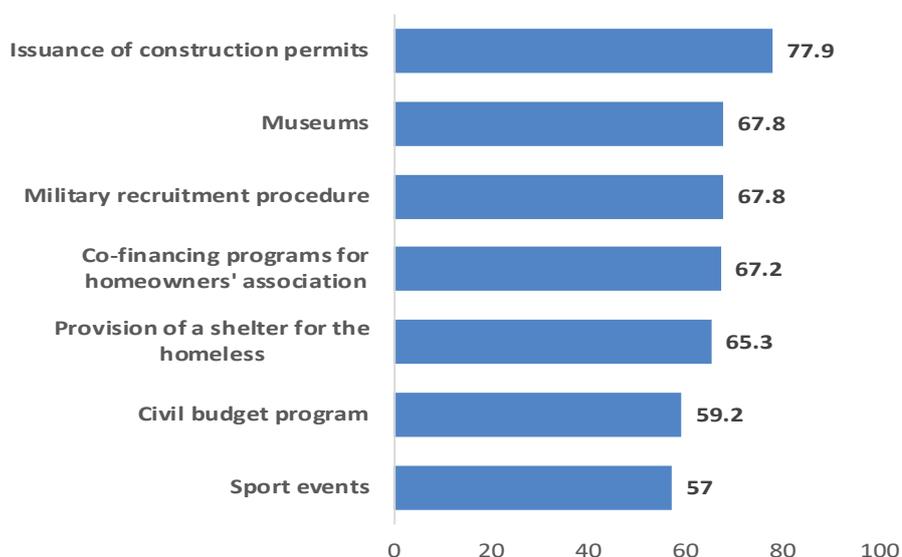
The process of municipal service provision requires raising awareness of the local population about such services, which, according to the findings of the survey, is quite low in Gori municipality. Out of 30 services¹⁰ studied within the framework of this survey, almost one third of the population (29.3%) has not heard of the civic budgeting program. Over 16% of the locals do not know about the programs for shelter for the homeless, ritual service and support to talented youth (Diagram 13). Almost all of the respondents know that the municipality is responsible for providing services such as outdoor lighting, potable water supply, waste management and ensuring the functioning of medical points and public transport.

Diagram 13. Services that the population is least aware of (%)



The survey results show that out of 30 services studied, more than half of the population has not used 11 services. The population has least used services related to issuing construction permits, libraries, museums, military service, and co-funding services for homeowners' association fellowship co-funding services (Diagram 14).

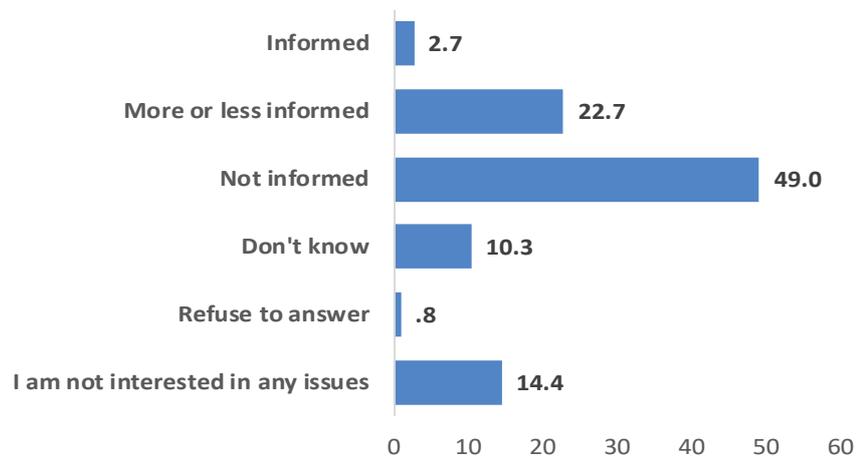
Diagram 14. Services never used by the population (%)



The population believes the lack of information is due to the municipality not engaging sufficiently. According to the survey participants, public servants and political parties only become active before elections, when they meet the population and make promises. Between elections, no meetings are organised with the population and, therefore, no information is shared. Thus, almost half (49%) of the local population are not at all informed about the decisions of the municipality (Diagram 15).

Diagram 15. Awareness level of the population on decisions of self-government

How well are you informed on the decisions of self-government? (%)



Article 85¹ of the Local Self-Government Code tasks municipalities to provide information about its authority: “To ensure citizen participation in the exercise of local self-government, municipal bodies shall be obliged to take measures to inform the population of the municipality of their activities and on the possibility of citizens to participate in the exercise of local self-government.” Even though self-government bodies are responsible for publishing information about the decisions made on the activities of legal entities of public law, within 10 days of making such decisions, they have not yet elaborated on most relevant sources for sharing such information.

In practice, Gori municipality uses several sources of information: the official web-page (for publishing information about services); social networks (Facebook) and presenting bi-annual reports to the *sakrebulo*, which is also attended by NGOs who can “disseminate information as appropriate” (Gori municipality representative, interview). At the same time, municipal service units try to hold presentations for interested groups. For example, on education and cultural programs they organize meetings in schools, libraries and the university. The work of the municipality and the services offered are often covered by two local TV channels and two radio stations:

“We often have to speak on TV, and every time I try, even though the topic could be different, to also somehow include these topics. They sometimes tell me not to talk about that, but I don’t go unless they allow me to say something about these topics as well, so there might be a lack of information, but in general, the population does have information and it is obvious, since people come to address us.” (Gori municipality employee, interview).

However, existing practice is still not adequate to inform the public appropriately, and this is confirmed by the results of the quantitative study.

Together with existing municipal services, the population has quite a low level of awareness of their rights. 45% of the population know nothing about their rights of engagement in decision-making at a municipal level (Diagram 16). However, some differences can be observed according to fields. For example, the right to run for advisory council is the least known among the respondents (35.8%). Most of the respondents (75.6%) know about their right to request coverage for their medical expenses. The awareness level of the population on other topics ranges from 39% to 69% (Diagram 17).

The level of awareness of the population is different according to age group. Young people and the middle-aged have more information about their rights than the elderly (Diagram 18). Even though senior residents are less informed about the mechanisms for engagement in the decision-making process, knowledge of this age group is quite high about services that are of direct interest to them. More specifically, 69.9% of the citizens above 55 know that they are entitled to address local self-government with requests for co-funding healthcare costs.

Diagram 16. Awareness of the population of its rights – decision-making process

How well do you know your rights during the local government decision-making process? (%)

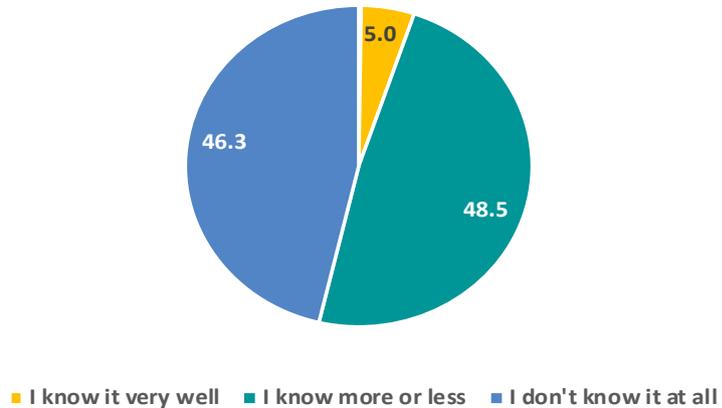
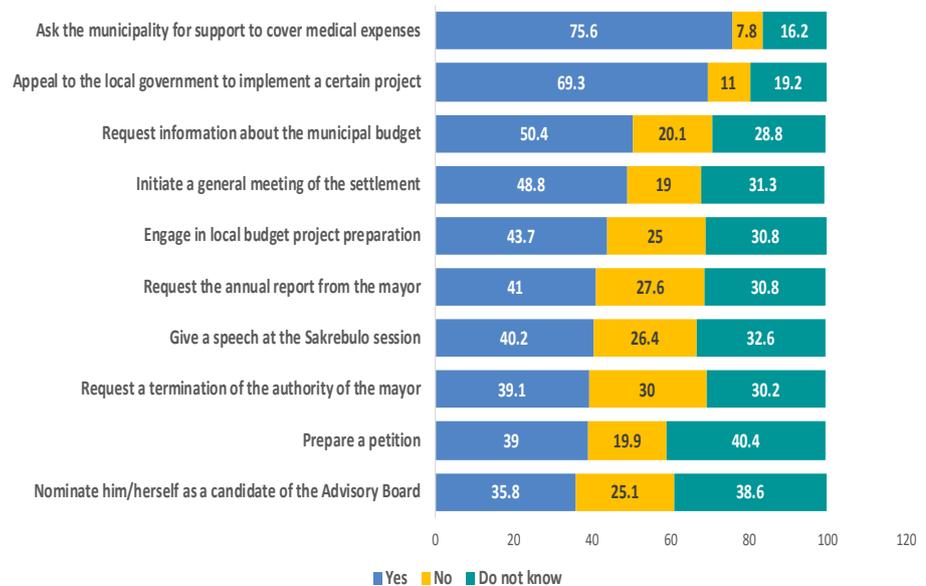


Diagram 17. Awareness of the population of its rights – Initiative group

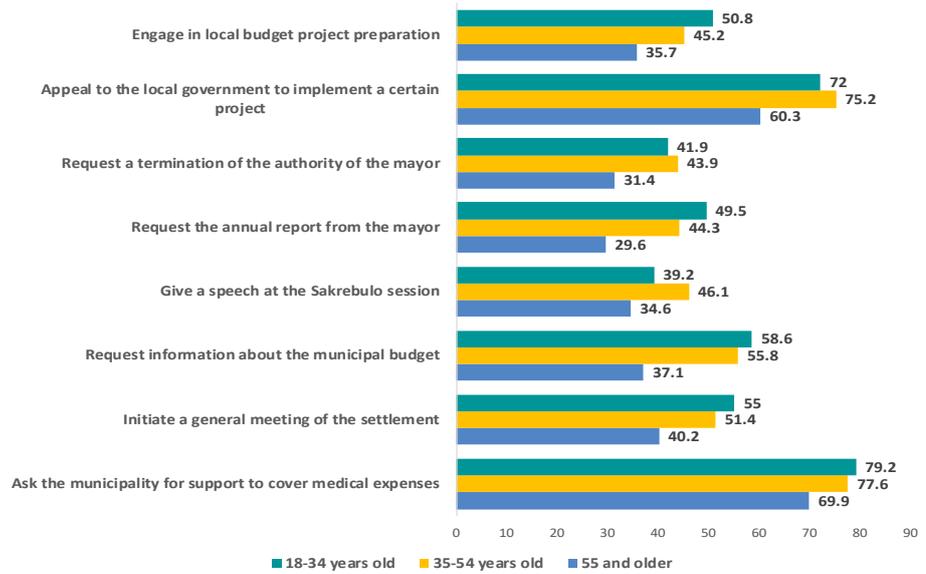
What rights do citizens/initiative groups have?



The level of awareness of the population is different according to age group. Young people and the middle-aged have more information about their rights than the elderly (Diagram 18). Even though senior residents are less informed about the mechanisms for engagement in the decision-making process, knowledge of this age group is quite high about services that are of direct interest to them. More specifically, 69.9% of the citizens above 55 know that they are entitled to address local self-government with requests for co-funding healthcare costs.

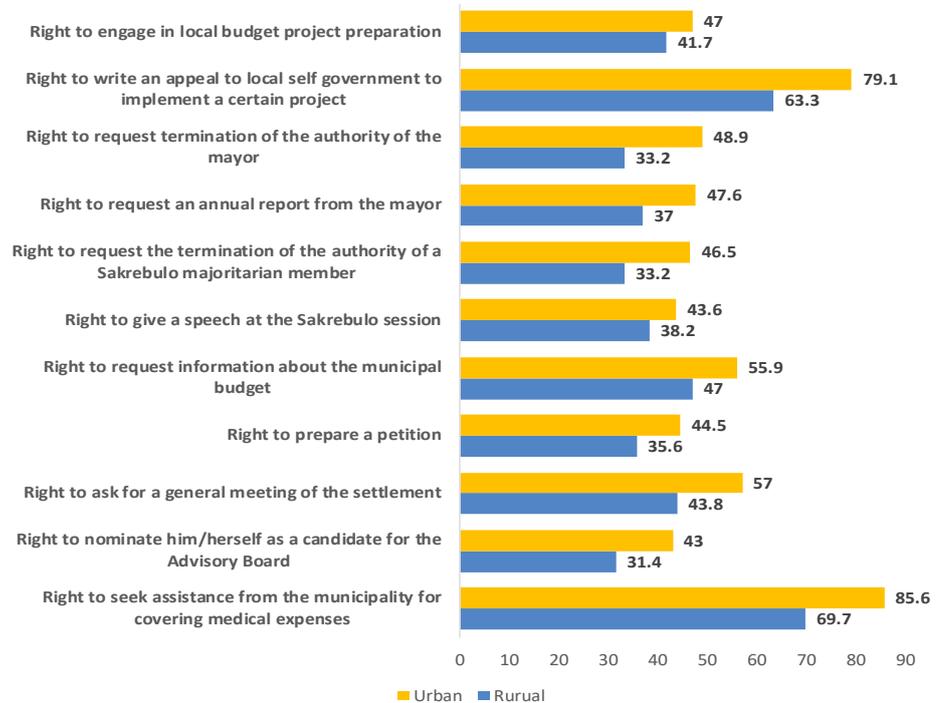
11 From a Russian word *Биржа*. The term literally means 'stock exchange' but in the post-Soviet countries it is frequently used with its alternative meaning to denote a place for male street socialization in neighbourhoods both urban and rural

Diagram 18. Level of awareness on rights according to age groups (%)



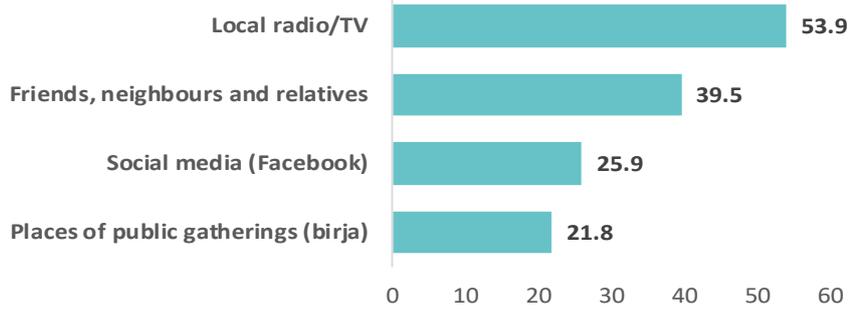
The level of awareness on rights is high among the employed population. More employed than unemployed individuals are aware of the activities of the municipality, as well as the right to engage in the decision-making process and to address self-government with requests. The study identified a difference in the levels of awareness in rural and urban areas. The urban population has more information about their rights than the rural population (Diagram 19). The difference between rural and urban settlements is on average 11.5%.

Diagram 19. Level of awareness according to types of settlements (%)



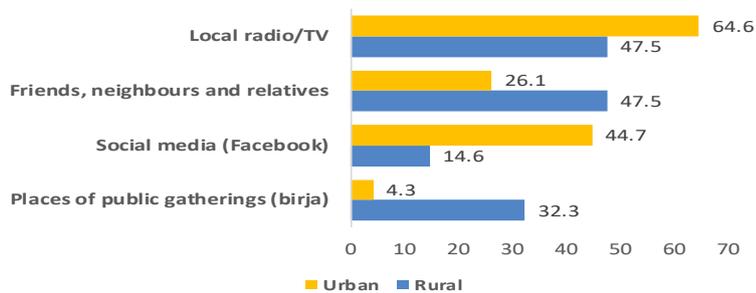
The main sources of information for the respondents are the local TV channels and people they know. However, social networks and public gathering places also play a significant role (Diagram 20). Preferred sources of information differ across different groups of population. Those with the highest education prefer social networks together with radio and TV. Respondents with secondary and incomplete education prefer face-to-face contacts with other people (friends, 'birzhas'¹¹). Similar to people with the highest education, employed citizens also primarily use electronic sources of information (56.5% – TV and radio, 36.3% – Facebook). It could be assumed that this category of respondents does not have much time for social relations.

Diagram 20. Sources of Information (%)



The survey results also identified a difference in the sources of information used by settlements of different types. The urban population mainly hears news about the work of the municipality through social networks and TV. In rural areas, informal sources of information are of more important. Here, news is usually spread through personal contacts (Diagram 21).

Diagram 21. Sources of information according to types of settlements (%)

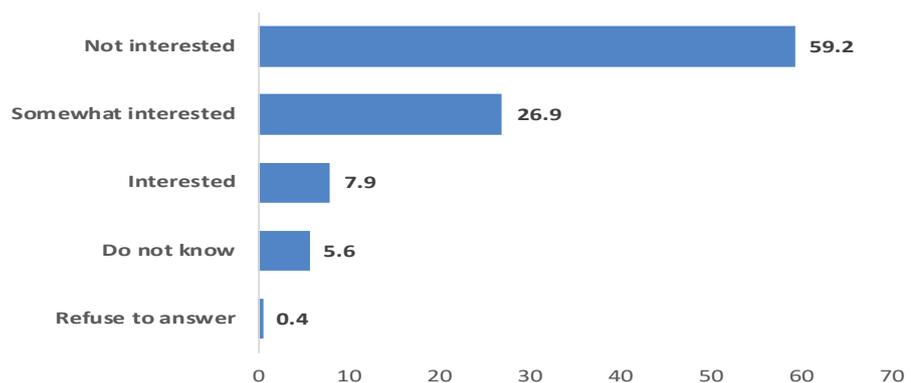


5.4. Citizen Participation

The presence of Information channels and the awareness of citizens about their rights do not necessarily guarantee their engagement in the work of the municipality. Civic participation in local governance is regulated under Chapter 9 of the Local Self-Government Code. Article 85.4 of the Code determines the following five forms of citizen participation: (1) general assembly of a settlement; (2) a petition; (3) the council of civil advisors; (4) participation in sessions of the municipal sakrebulo and its commissions, and (5) hearing reports on the work performed by the mayor of the municipality and by a member of the municipal sakrebulo.¹² The Code also sets forth rules and conditions for using the above rights. At the same time, the municipality is entitled to introduce other forms of civic engagement that do not contradict with the legislation of Georgia.

Regardless of the presence of appropriate legislation, the level of civic engagement in the activities of the municipality and the decision-making process is quite low. Interestingly, the majority of surveyed participants (59.2%) are not at all interested in participating in decision-making with only 7.9% expressing a wish to do so. The employed population is more interested in engaging in decision-making. 42.5% of the employed population is interested or somewhat interested, unlike the unemployed, where willingness for engagement was expressed by 29.5% only.

Diagram 22. Interest in engaging in decision-making

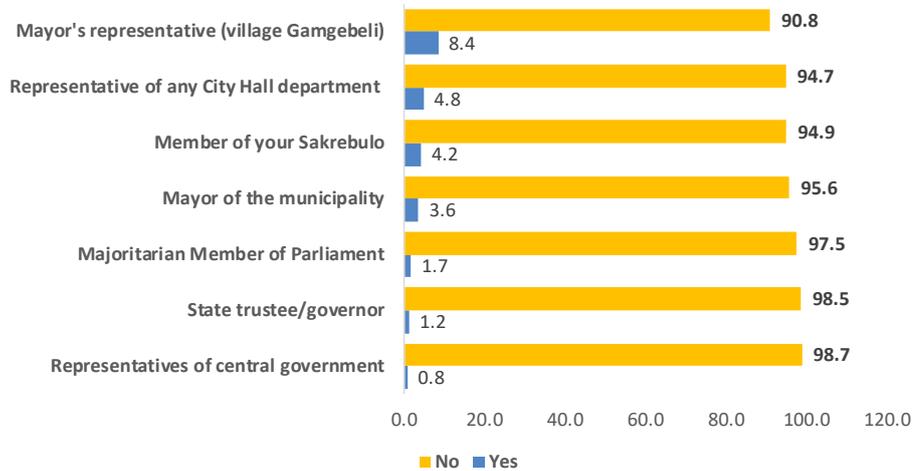


¹² Source: Local Self-Government Code.

One of the indicators of low interest of the population towards the activities of the local self-government is that only 1.5% of the population attend the work of sakrebulo or its committees. Referral to other branches and structures of the government. Referral to the representatives of the mayor’s office is relatively higher (8.4%) (Diagram 23).

Diagram 23. Public referrals to different bodies of local self-government

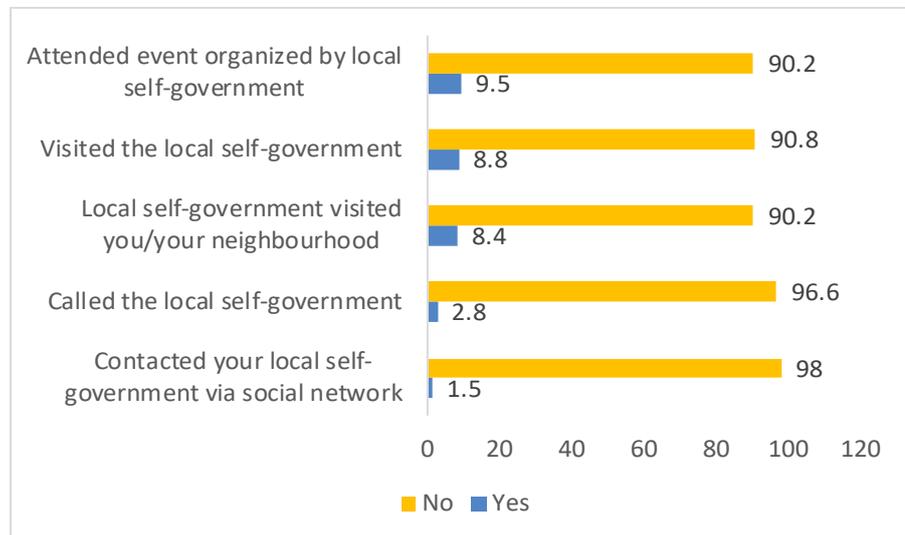
During the last 12 months have you addressed any of the following officials? (%)



There are rare cases of using other means of communication with self-government. Only in exceptional cases does the population contact self-government bodies through social networks or by phone. There is a higher share of face-to-face interaction at meetings or events. However, this does not exceed 9.5% of the total respondents (Diagram 24).

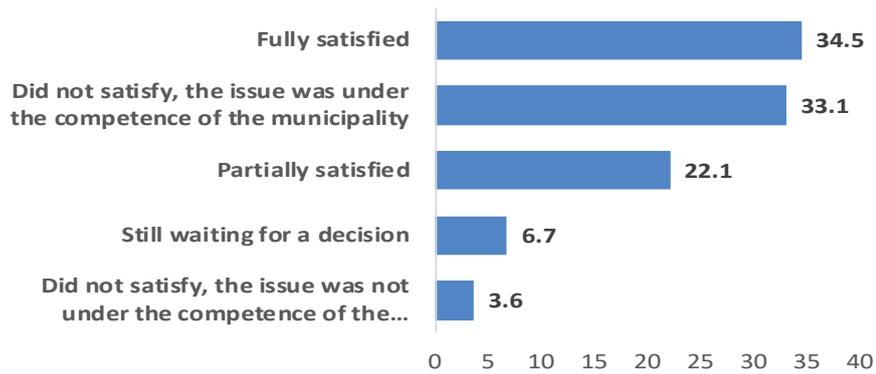
Diagram 24. Formats of population interaction with the municipality

Have you dealt with the local self-government in the last 2 years?(%)



Lack of citizen referrals to the local self-governing bodies can be explained by a poor record of successful cooperation. Of 13.1% of those surveyed that have addressed the municipality through different means, one third (33.1%) did not have their request satisfied, 22.1% – only partially. Only 34.5% have a positive experience of working with local government (Diagram 25). At the same time, 53.3% of those surveyed confirm that the municipality reacted to their requests (positively or negatively) within 10 business days, as stipulated by the law.

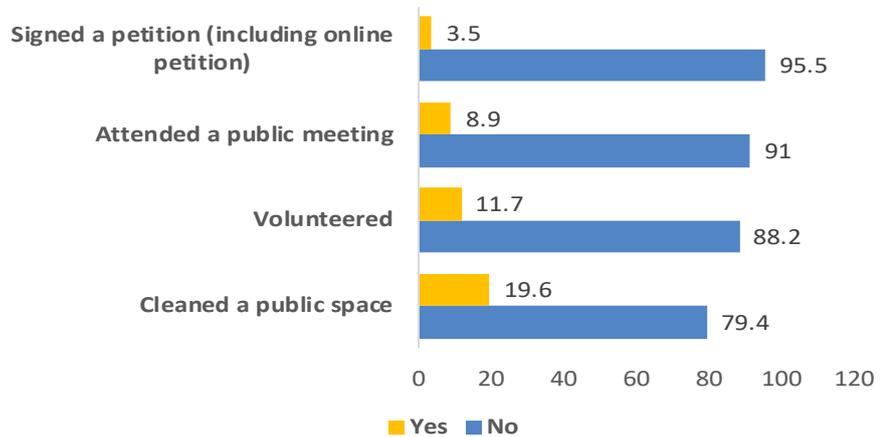
Diagram 25. Responding to requests of citizens by municipality
How did the municipality meet your request?



It should be noted that the low level of interaction with local self-government is not only due to lack of trust towards municipal structures. In general, the level of civic engagement is also low.

Diagram 26. Public engagement of Citizens

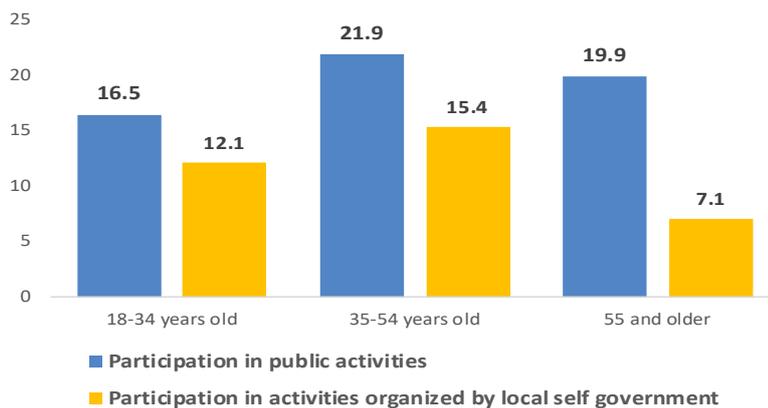
Which of the following activities have you participated in over the past 6 months? (%)



The findings of the survey indicate that public engagement in different forms of civic activism is very low. The most popular form of engagement is cleaning public spaces (19.6%),¹³ while the least popular is signing petitions (including electronic) and submission of collective letters (3.5%) (Diagram 26). In parallel with low civic activism, there are rare cases of neighbours discussing neighbourhood problems. 37.4% of the surveyed have never, or almost never, publicly discussed issues of their settlements. Only 31.2% of the population is active in this direction.

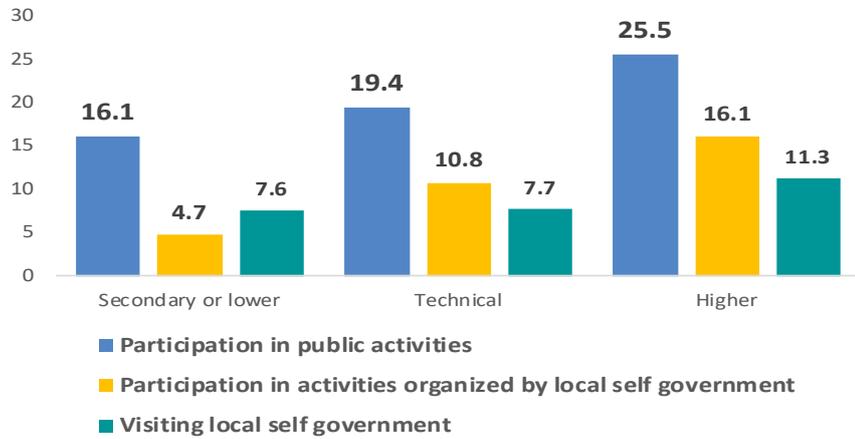
The level of engagement in the work of self-government and civic activities differs according to age groups. The middle-aged population (35-54) is more active than young people (18-34) or elderly (55 and above). (Diagram 27).

Diagram 27. Civic engagement according to age groups (%)



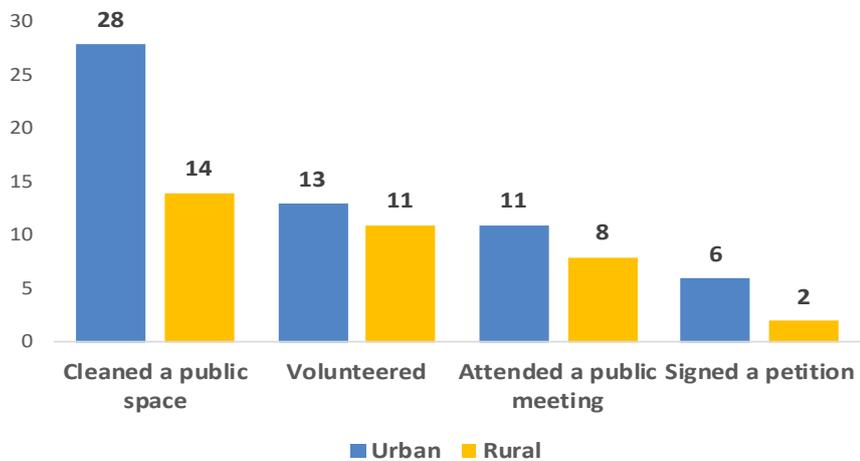
The survey results show that respondents with higher education are more engaged in public activities than those with secondary or vocational education (Diagram 28). Civic activism is relatively higher amongst the employed population. It is interesting that a greater number of employed persons participate in cleaning public spaces and public meetings than unemployed. Moreover, the former seem to be actively engaged in volunteering and signing petitions.

Diagram 28. Civic engagement according to levels of education (%)



The rural and urban population show similar tendencies of civic engagement. However, the urban population is more active in all forms of civic engagement. The difference is significant when it comes to cleaning public spaces and signing petitions. The survey results show that collecting signatures and cleaning public places is more common in urban areas than in rural ones (Diagram 29).

Diagram 29. Civic engagement according to types of settlements (%)



Finally, low civic engagement is also a result of citizens' attitudes towards governance in general. Diagram 30 shows that the number of respondents, who believe the government should take care of people, like parents care for children, is much higher than the number of respondents who support the idea of citizens controlling the government (agree/fully agree). The survey results show that almost one third of all age groups believe that control of government activities is necessary (Diagram 31). Young respondents are less likely to think of population as "child" (45.5%) while the elderly represent the age group with the strongest inclination to think so (57.4%) (Diagram 31). However, analysis of focus group discussions and general observations suggest that, compared to previous years, there is a significant increase in the number of people who perceive government as a body elected by people and who believe it should serve the voters, while the latter control its work.

Diagram 30. Principles of cooperation between government and citizens (%)

Which of the statements below do you agree with ?

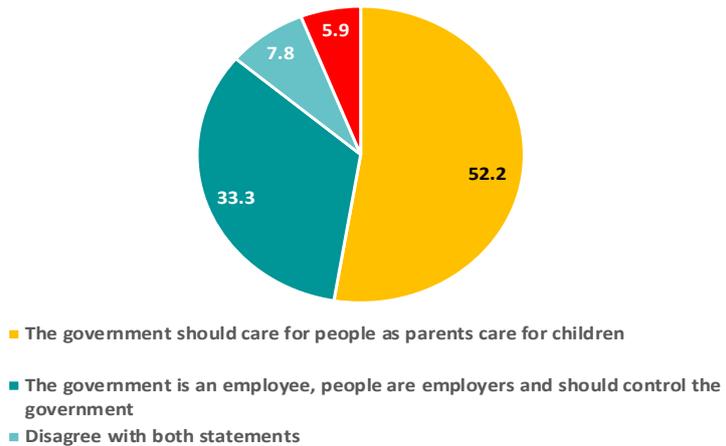
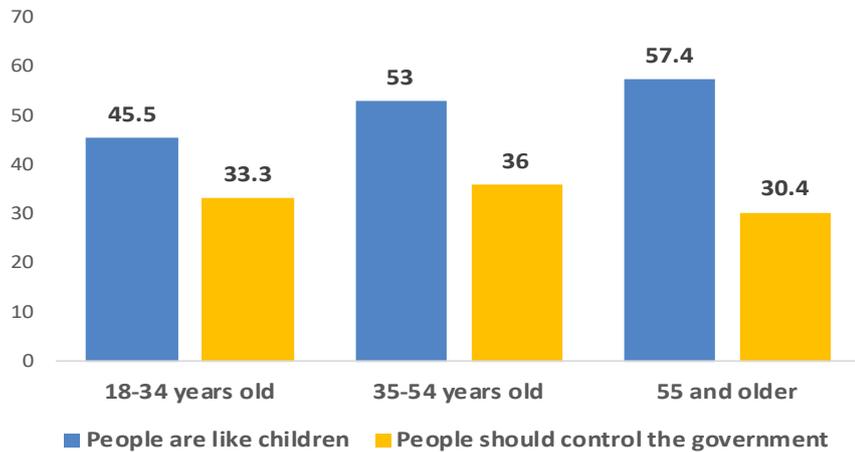


Diagram 31. Relationship between government and citizens according to age groups (%)

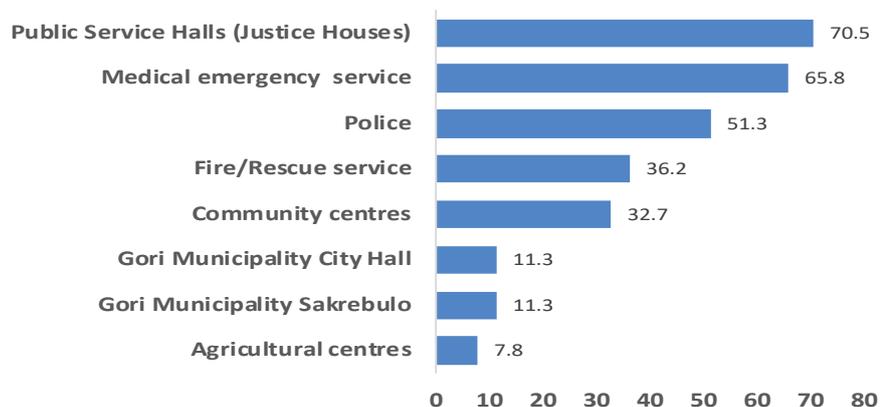


5.5. Public Attitudes towards Self-Government

In general, the population has a quite negative assessment of the services provided by Gori municipality, especially compared to the services of central government. Only 11% of those surveyed are happy with the work of the mayor’s office and sakrebulo, while the work of the Public Service Hall, ambulance and police are assessed positively by the majority (Diagram 32).

Diagram 32. Public satisfaction with the work of central and local public services

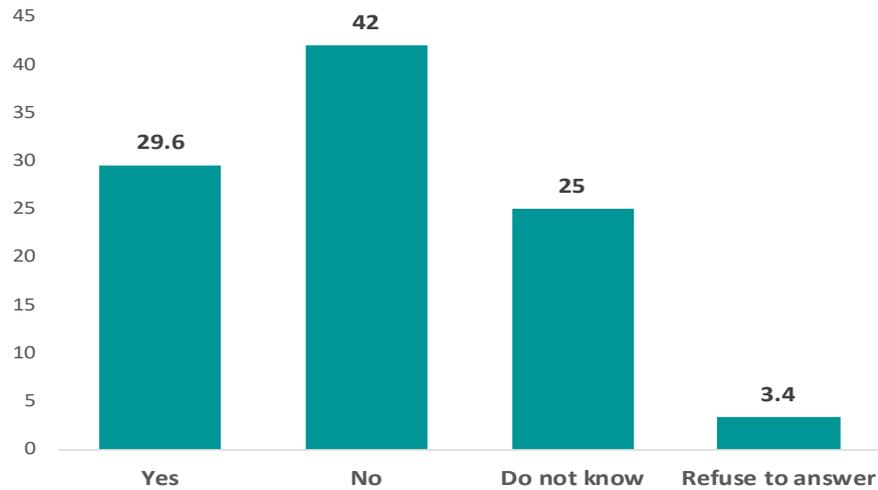
To what extent are you satisfied with the work of following agencies (satisfied and very satisfied)? (%)



Interestingly, a large portion of the population (42%) believes Gori municipality does not consider their opinions (Diagram 33). Only 29.6% of the population surveyed believe their voices are heard by the governing bodies.

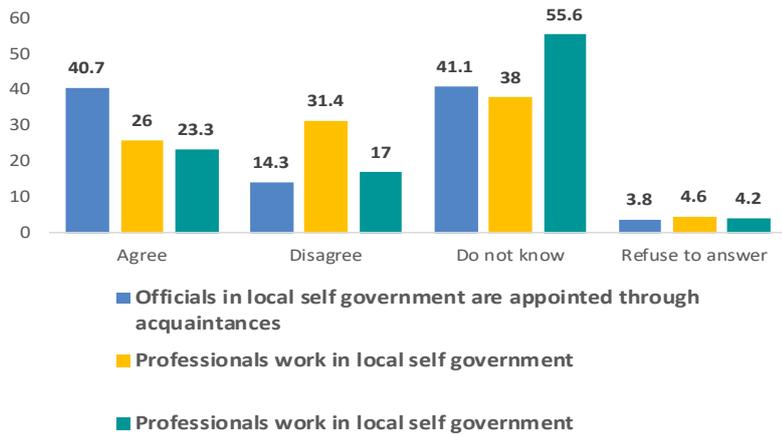
Diagram 33. Consideration of public opinion by local self-government

Does local self-government consider people's opinions? (%)



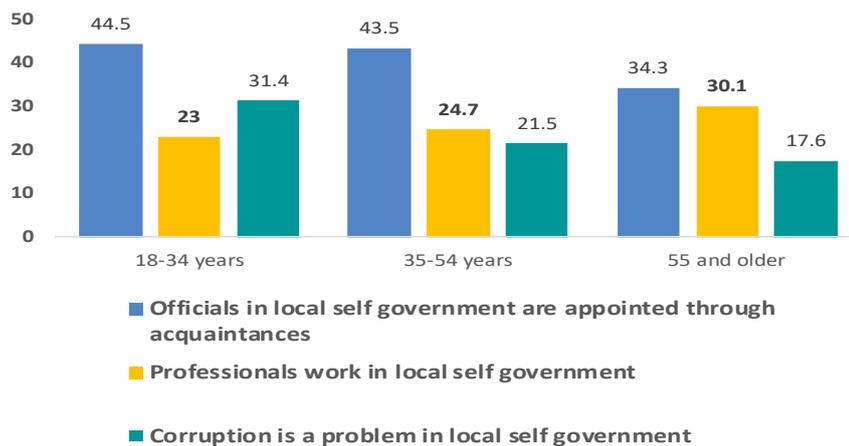
Indifferent and negative attitudes towards self-government could be due to lack of knowledge of a large part of the population on how to assess the work of the municipality, while another part believes there is corruption, nepotism and lack of qualified personnel (Diagram 34).

Diagram 34. Assessment of Self-Government (%)



Young people are most critical towards local government. Compared to other age groups, more young people believe self-government appoints staff through personal contacts. Also, the share of those respondents who are convinced that public service is compiled of professionals is the smallest among the surveyed youth (Diagram 35). Moreover, almost one third (31.4%) believes there is corruption in self-government.

Diagram 35. Assessment of self-government by citizen age groups (%)



6

Cooperation between Local Self-Government and Civic Organizations in the Planning and Provision of Services

The local NGO sector plays a significant role in the provision of municipal services in Gori, as it brings together active citizens and has a mediation role between the municipality and the population. NGO representatives participate in public meetings and within the scope of their work vocalize the needs and interests of different groups; they collect information on services offered by the municipality and distribute it among their beneficiaries.

Together with information sharing, NGOs actively participate in co-funding programs offered by the municipality: they prepare projects and participate in competitions. Compared with organizations, the engagement of physical entities in these programs is quite low:

“We had a competition announced on project funding, where the municipality would allocate 1,000 GEL in the first stage to encourage a physical or legal entity to win the project. We had to award 10 projects, but only three proposals were submitted.”
(Employee of Gori municipality, interview)

Observations by NGOs and public servants suggest that the population is mostly active in getting individual services. There is a high rate of reference to self-government, when it comes to social programs and/or one-off cases of health assistance. Individual physical entities are less active in engagement in a topic or interests of specific groups.

The participation of the NGO sector in co-funding programs is beneficial for the municipality as well as organizations themselves. Self-government bodies increase access to services and the engagement of civic organizations, while such partnership is an additional source of income for NGOs, which helps to meet the requirements of international donors (such as co-funding, working with municipality) and ensures their sustainability.

Representatives of NGOs and the municipality agree that such cooperation increases the effectiveness of their work. They believe that pooling resources impacts not only effectiveness, but also trust and engagement of the population:

“When we work together, and we address citizens together, those projects are much more successful. The reason is that there is an NGO, who people know very well already, and next to it there is a municipality, the government, which was elected by these people, so there is more trust and more active engagement in different projects. This is very important.” (NGO representative of focus group)

It is interesting that according to the assessment of NGOs, Gori municipality is open to working with various actors: “I believe the municipality works actively with all interested

parties and entities” (NGO participant of focus group). Even more so, representatives of the third sector believe that the municipality often considers their suggestions and recommendations: “11 changes were made to the regulations of issuing social assistance, based on our recommendations” (NGO participant of focus group).

Representatives of NGOs and the municipality believe their cooperation has become simpler and more effective over the years. According to NGO representatives, there have been some issues in the past, but lately, the only difficulty is bureaucracy. However, eventually they have come to learn how to easily handle red tape issues. Access to public information has also improved: “If you mean provision of public information – it has been organised quite well; the electronic format is also much better organised” (NGO participant of focus group).

Endless reforms of self-governing bodies, regular structural changes and the accompanying processes were named as the most significant barrier for the cooperation between the two sectors. Reorganization and frequent staff turnover do not always allow effective work:

“The governor could be in the same situation. He is removed before he learns the issue. Before he learns where the village is on the map, and orientates himself, he is removed from the position.” (NGO participant of focus group)

“Almost everyone, all the way to the cleaner, is changed, so for us, representatives of NGOs, it is very difficult to have focal persons change constantly, since not everyone feels obliged to know who works on what, why, and what are the issues people face in the town, region or the villages.” (NGO participant of focus group)

Unequal distribution of responsibilities hinders effective work of the municipalities. Members of the public and organizations often have to wait in long lines to make sure they meet the person who can make decisions: “*This has to be resolved, if, for example, there is additional staff, or resources are distributed properly, as Laura cannot handle it all by herself*” (NGO participant of focus group).

7

IDPs and Provision of Local Services

The specifics of Gori municipality are very much defined by its proximity to the conflict region and the presence of compact settlements of the IDP population in its territory. Currently, Gori municipality is home for 12,259 IDPs that had to leave their homes during the conflicts in 1990 and the war in 2008.

The IDP population has almost the same needs and issues as the rural population of Gori municipality. They have limited or no access to the basic municipal services that are important for the daily lives of people. These are water provision and transport. They believe the potable water system is damaged: *“the water brings worms and some green stuff”* (IDP participant of focus group). Internal roads in the IDP settlements are also damaged: *“There is no road within the village, large stones lie on the roads, you exacerbated by transport issues as well: “Scarcely-moving minivans, where parts, bolts and wheels fall off. I just took that kind of minivan on my way here, and I was scared of falling off somewhere”* (IDP participant of focus group). The transport service only provides two rides a day and if a person needs to travel at other times of the day, he/she has to walk to the highway.

The IDP population has limited access to other state services as well. For example, one of the participants from the IDP settlement said that the school is 4 kilometres away from the settlement, which makes it difficult for children to attend school in bad weather. The emergency medical assistance is also an issue. Participants stated that the ambulance sometimes needs one or even two hours to reach its destination, so if needed, people go to the hospital themselves. One-time social assistance programs have also been reduced:

“There were times when even vouchers were distributed, firewood was also provided at least in winter, but now no firewood, no gas vouchers; there is only so much you can do with those 45 Laris – you need to pay for gas, electricity.” (IDP participant of focus group)

Regardless of similar issues and needs, the IDP population indicates different attitudes towards them. They believe the attitudes of state institutions were different in 90-ies and are different after the 2008 war. Mobilisation of state funds and provision of IDPs with living conditions were better organized and more effective after the last conflict, while the IDPs of 1991 did not receive any assistance:

“We’ve experienced so much hardship over these 27 years, lived in difficult conditions, had no assistance, nor compensation; they only came during the election period, for PR purposes, when they needed people’s votes; they would simply take a look, show pity, then leave and close the door behind them.” (IDP participant of focus group)

According to the “old” IDPs¹⁴, the situation has not significantly changed for them. Even though they were given new space for living, the buildings provided meet just basic housing standards and everything needs to be installed at their own expense. Those who do not have such funds or skills still live in an old tourist base. IDPs think only one third of the inhabitants of the old tourist base have moved to the new settlement, and the majority (about 60%) are concerned with construction faults, including water leakage. The situation is made even worse by the informal practice of tax collection. More specifically, these include taxes for outdoor lighting and water, which are not officially tracked and result in mistrust among the population.

The different approach between “old” and “new” IDPs is also apparent during implementation of other social programmes. Focus group participants note that mainly “new” IDPs participate in organised activities, including summer camps, while “old” ones sometimes don’t even have information about such opportunities.

The qualitative survey results show that of all the groups living in Gori municipality, IDPs score highest on nihilism and disappointment towards municipal and central government. Such an attitude is greatly determined by the limited provision of services and unfulfillment of promises:

“They’ve come many times, heard what we need; they promised water five years ago, and have come back 8-9 times since then, but we’re still the same.” (IDP participant of focus group)

Relations between the IDP population and the municipality are somewhat complicated by the vague distribution of competences between local self-government and central government. There are frequent cases of prolonging resolution of issues due to poor coordination between the two entities. For example, there is no water supply in the new housing of the IDP population. When the population addresses the municipality for provision of such service, the latter refrains from responding to such request, as the building is enlisted as the central government’s property and it waits for completion of the handover process, which has been going on for a year now.

“[IDP issues] are put aside, and the reason given is that the IDP population allegedly used services of two entities at the same time – one was the local municipality of Gori, and another was the IDP ministry. They kept blaming each other – the municipality said they could not resolve the issue since there is an IDP ministry, while our representatives would go to the IDP ministry and they would be told to address local entities at the place of residence, and so on. This was like tossing the ball from one corner to another, resulting in stopping the issue.” (IDP, NGO representative, interview)

The situation is more complicated since IDPs do not have representation in the municipality. They say that even though IDPs participate in local elections, they do not have representatives in local self-government to vocalise the needs of IDPs during the decision-making process. This is further complicated by the reform of the executive government, where the IDP ministry was merged with the ministry of labour, health and social affairs.¹⁵ This structural change has distanced the central government from the population even more.

The IDP population has poor access to information about municipal services. Information often reaches them as rumour, and it needs to be verified with official sources. As a result of communication problems, the population gets information with considerable delay, often when implementation of the programme is already completed.

14 “old” and “new” are used to differentiate between the two waves of IDPs in Georgia. Old IDPs are those displaced during the conflict in the 1990s while new IDPs were forced to leave their homes as a result of the August 2008 war.

15 Now Ministry of Internally Displaced Persons from Occupied Territories, Health, Labour and Social Affairs of Georgia

8

Conclusion

Even though Georgia has a centralized system of governance, local government plays an important role in the daily lives of the local population. Provision of basic services, including potable water supply, sewage system, waste removal, etc, is the responsibility of municipal authorities. Local self-government is also responsible for maintenance/development of the local infrastructure, implementation of social and healthcare programs, and support to cultural and sports activities. It is quite difficult to assess the activities of the municipalities in terms of service provision. There is no appropriate database (central or local) that would enable researchers, experts or public servants themselves to analyse the existing situation, assess risks and problems, and identify opportunities. The purpose of this report was to identify existing practice in Gori municipality, study public opinion and share with stakeholders.

Analysis presented in the report shows that service provision in Gori municipality does not significantly differ from that in other regions of Georgia: Majority of projects to be implemented at a local level are supported by international assistance channelled through state programmes and the central budget. Against the backdrop of the centralised governance approaches used in various regions (regardless of their geographic, demographic, economic, social or other types of differences) are identical (see study reports of 2013, 2015 and 2017 on citizen satisfaction with public services in Georgia commissioned by UNDP and conducted by ACT).

Service provision is more effective in the municipal centre – Gori town, and less in villages. Therefore, the provision of various public services is assessed differently by citizens. In fields where self-government is more active, satisfaction of beneficiaries is higher as well. There is a significant difference between the priorities of the rural and urban population. While stray dogs are of one of the high priorities for the population of Gori town, village inhabitants mostly complain about the quality and limited provision of potable water, lack of appropriate roads and irregular removal of waste. While assessing this situation, experts agree that the population of the municipality has unequal access to basic services. Moreover, against the background of the issues of the town, concerns of rural communities are not given due attention and projects implemented by local self-government are less adjusted to the needs of villages.

The survey results also indicate that the level of awareness of municipal services is quite low. The population does not know about all the services offered by the local self-government. Moreover, they do not know about the possibilities of engaging in the local decision-making process. Desire to participate in civic activities is also low. Willingness to engage is lower in villages and the IDP communities than in the urban population. Analysis of focus group discussions suggests that in rural areas people tend to have stronger nihilism and disappointment towards government (both central and local).

The survey also showed that citizens usually address the municipality with individual issues. Based on personal needs, citizens seek information, go to different entities and prepare letters. The majority of individual applications take place within the framework of social and one-time health co-funding programmes. Participation of physical entities in social activities is quite low. NGOs are most active in this regard. They often act as mediators between the municipality and the population: collect information from citizens and try to lobby their interests with local self-government.

The conclusions presented in this report indicate achievements and gaps in service provision in Gori municipality. It emphasizes issues (priorities of citizens, level of awareness, willingness for engagement), which should be addressed by experts and public servants so that special municipal programs are appropriately planned and implemented. Moreover, in case of initiating reforms of self-governance, it will be important to share existing experience and consider public attitudes.

Finally, the study once again identified the need for regular surveys, information collection and analysis.

ANNEX 1: List of Municipal Services Studied during Quantitative Survey

1. Social assistance of the municipality
2. Financial assistance linked to medical services
3. Fixing deteriorated houses and yards / maintenance of façades
4. Pre-school education
5. Archive / public registrar service
6. Museums
7. Libraries
8. Sports organisations and events
9. Street lighting
10. Drainage channels
11. Sewage system
12. Potable water system
13. Irrigation water
14. Roads to settlements
15. Public transport
16. Waste management
17. Cleaning streets, squares, gardens
18. Ritual services (i.e., maintenance of cemeteries)
19. Care for stray animals
20. Provision of temporary shelter if needed
21. Issuing construction permits
22. Regulation of outdoor trade
23. Parks and vegetation
24. Creation of adapted environment for people with disabilities
25. Procedures related to mandatory military service
26. Medical establishments
27. Supporting cultural activities
28. Financing of homeowners' associations (90/10%)
29. Civic budgeting program (implementation of projects proposed by the society)
30. Support and co-funding of talented youth