

WOMEN IN THE RURAL ECONOMY IN GEORGIA

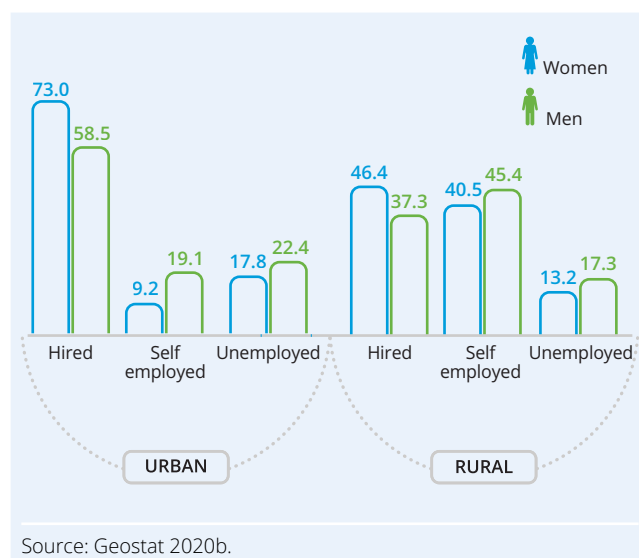
Rural Georgia is home to approximately 1,512,942 people, amounting to 40.6 per cent of the total population.¹ In 2018, three quarters of the country's rural population² was self-employed in agriculture, which accounts for 8.4 per cent of GDP.³ Women living in rural areas of Georgia constitute 51 per cent of the rural population, but many (66.5 per cent) neither work nor seek employment,⁴ while many others are vulnerably employed.

Economically active women in rural Georgia

In rural Georgia, the data show that 33.5 per cent of women are economically active. Of them, 13.2 per cent are unemployed, and 86.9 per cent are employed (Figure 1).⁵ Only 46.4 per cent of economically active women are hired by an employer, and 40.5 per cent of economically active rural women are self-employed. Hence, they are engaged in vulnerable employment.⁶

FIGURE 1

Distribution of economically active populations aged 15 and older, by settlement type, 2020 (percentage)



Rural women who are not working in agriculture mostly work in public service sectors—particularly education and health—that provide relatively low pay.

Self-employed women can be considered as either contributing family workers⁷ or own-account workers,⁸ and the majority of people in these two categories works in subsistence agriculture.⁹

In Georgia, 26.8 per cent of all employed women in 2019 were contributing family workers, while only 12.9 per cent of employed men were contributing family workers.¹⁰ Women with this status are not considered as unemployed, but they do not have regular working hours, nor do they receive a salary or benefits, such as leave and health care. Moreover, they are not covered by social protection schemes. On top of that, they suffer from a lack of basic services, which makes their contributing work even more difficult.

Reasons for the existing employment structure in rural Georgia

One of the reasons for the high rates of self-employment and economic inactivity is the general lack of jobs in rural areas. The economic growth rate in Georgia leads to relatively few jobs being created. Workplace growth elasticity worldwide is 34 per cent, while it is only 5 per cent in Georgia. One of the main reasons for this is that most of the newly created firms are small in size and, at most, grow to middle-sized firms, which create a relatively small number of jobs. At the same time, some companies go out of business.¹¹

Another reason for the weak labour market indicators is related to women's unpaid care work responsibilities. In Georgia, women are expected to take care of their family members and the household. The traditional gender distribution of labour keeps women at home, tasking them with cleaning, washing, cooking, taking care of the children and their education, and caring for

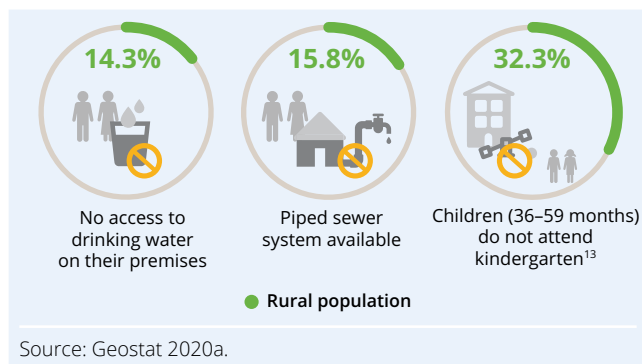
the health needs of all family members.¹² Quite often in rural Georgia, households consist of extended families, with grandparents and siblings living together under one roof, making unpaid care work a full-time job for women in those households.

In addition, household responsibilities are made more difficult for rural women in Georgia because of poor access to basic services, such as water, waste disposal, toilets, public transportation, local roads and healthcare facilities. Garbage bins are located on main roads that connect households to cities but are quite long distances away from residential areas. As a result, only those with cars can afford to reach the bins, while others just dispose of their garbage anywhere nearby, thus creating environmental and health problems.

Poorly maintained roads and a lack of public transportation are problematic for all rural people who must commute to obtain educational and healthcare services. The shortage of local healthcare services and the lack of an adequate public transportation infrastructure make it difficult for rural women to obtain such services from urban centres.

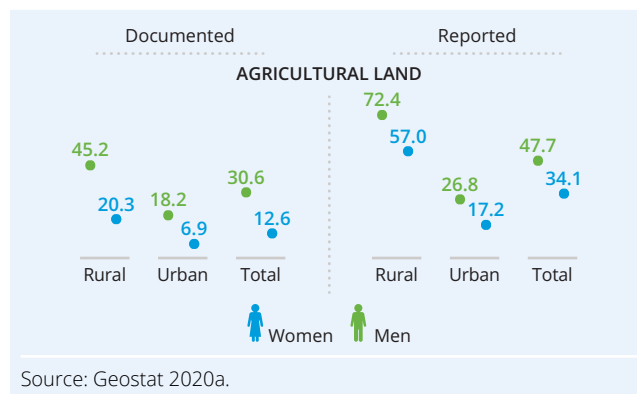
In villages, there is an inadequate number of day-care centres as well as health facilities. The lack of kindergartens is another reason why women with children are not as economically active. Where kindergartens do exist, their poor condition and/or long distance from homes are additional barriers preventing parents from taking their children to kindergarten. Moreover, shortages in the water supply affect women, as they use water for everyday household activities. Some of these shortages are indicated in Figure 2.

FIGURE 2
Share of the rural population's access to basic services



Disproportional land ownership is another reason for economic inactivity in rural Georgia. In this regard, there are no direct data available for SDG indicator 5.a.1, which most closely addresses this issue: (a) the proportion of total agricultural population with ownership or secure rights over agricultural land, by sex; and (b) the share of women among owners or rights-bearers of agricultural land, by type of tenure. However, the available data do show disproportionate ownership of land in Georgia. When considering land size, the data are even starker, with women in a highly disadvantaged position, owning less than 20 per cent of the country's land. As a result, women have limited access to economic opportunities. Notably, data from 2015 suggest that at the national level, only 12.6 per cent of women have documented agricultural lands, while 34.1 per cent report having ownership.¹³ The same figures for men stood at 30.6 per cent and 47.7 per cent, respectively. In rural areas, these figures stood at 45.2 per cent and 72.4 per cent for men and 20.3 per cent and 57.0 per cent for women. This shows large gender gaps in landownership, specifically 24.9 percentage points for documented landownership and 15.4 percentage points for reported landownership. As a result, women can face barriers to taking out loans and applying for agricultural credit¹⁴ as they lack their own income or property.

FIGURE 3
Incidence of Agricultural Land Ownership by Sex, Location and Type of Ownership (percentage)



Aside from landownership, data indicate that men hold 79.3 per cent of lands operated under agricultural holdings, while only 20.7 per cent of women owned lands under agricultural holdings. In contrast, women managed 32.2 per cent of these lands under agricultural holdings, while men managed 67.8 per cent.¹⁵

Not being a landowner creates the additional risk of being excluded from village development programmes and, correspondingly, from decision-making processes.¹⁶ Because of traditional gender stereotypes, women are not included in public activities, and they rarely participate in decision-making affecting their own village or town's development,¹⁷ including environmental issues.¹⁸

Notably, all of the above is occurring in a context in which the agricultural population earns significantly less than the general population. The national average income in 2020 was GEL 1,191, while for people employed in agriculture, the corresponding figure was GEL 819. The raw, unadjusted gender wage gap was 70 per cent in agriculture, with women earning GEL 630.74 and men earning GEL 899.89.¹⁹ Data that look at the agricultural population more generally provide an even lower income level.



The average monthly income of the agricultural population by household from employment or the sale of agriculture products was GEL 483.10 in 2020.²⁰ (country-specific indicator 2.3.2.1)

COVID-19 exacerbated the economic situation of rural women. One assessment suggests that women agricultural producers experienced a significant downturn in sales due to pandemic-related restrictions: without access to public transport, female producers could not reach agricultural markets. In contrast, men are more likely to own a car or minibus and, as a result, were more likely to be able to sell their crops.²¹

Relevant legislation in Georgia

Overall, Georgia's legislation is prone to being gender-blind. The Social-economic Development Strategy of Georgia (2020) and the Organic Law of Georgia on Agricultural Land Ownership (2019) do not address gender issues. The Law on Agricultural Cooperatives also lacks gender mainstreaming. The 2018–2021 Regional Development Programme of Georgia is based on the EU-Georgia Association Agreement, establishes five priorities and mentions gender equality and social inclusion as one of its objectives. Likewise, all regional development strategies mention gender equality. However, they do not include specific effective measures to address the issue. The 2017–2020 National Disaster Risk Reduction Strategy and the corresponding action plan include one paragraph on gender equality.²²

The Agriculture and Rural Development Strategy for the period 2021–2027 and its corresponding action plan for the 2021–2023 period is a notable improvement on the above-noted documents. The document has a full sub-chapter that analyses the situation related to gender, which points to such weaknesses as the limited access to information, technology and agricultural resources, as well as the limited access to agricultural lands, finances and other assets.²³ However, this document leaves much to be desired as it lacks objectives, activities and indicators in its action plan that are focused on gender.

The 2021–2025 Small and Medium-sized Enterprise (SME) Development Strategy of Georgia is a good example of including gender in state policy. The strategy provides a situation analysis of gender gaps in relation to SMEs. It highlights that a minority of people that benefited from Enterprise Georgia (45.1 per cent) were women. Similarly, the Preferential Agrocredit Programme is shown to have had only 7.6 per cent female beneficiaries between 2014 and 2019. In this context, the strategy's sixth main priority is "promoting the development of women[s] entrepreneurship," through popularizing the Women's Empowerment Principles.²⁴

Although the infrastructure development strategy forgets to mention gender issues, the corresponding National Action Plan (NAP) includes plans to rehabilitate or build 70 kindergartens. The 2014–2020 National Human Rights Strategy and corresponding NAPs, as well as the Strategy for Agricultural Development in Georgia and its corresponding NAP, call for supporting women in cooperatives. The Strategy of Market Formation and its NAP fail to mention gender issues. Overall, these documents would benefit from more comprehensive consideration of gender equality principles.²⁵ State programmes, tailored towards supporting rural women in their skills development and access to finance, still await implementation.²⁶

How to raise women's economic activity in rural Georgia

Legislation needs the more consistent application of gender impact assessments and the subsequent introduction of necessary changes to the laws, regulations and corresponding NAPs, as well as introducing a deeper gender equality approach to the corresponding documents of the regional development strategies. In this regard, the Government should continue to expand

efforts towards ensuring gender equality and its inclusion in legislation and policy. For rural women, it is particularly important that sectoral laws include these lenses. At the same time, it is critical that implementation of the legislation be monitored for quality and enforcement. To do this, data that can be disaggregated, particularly on vulnerable groups such as people with disabilities (the majority of whom are women) and ethnic minorities, are crucial.

The living conditions of the rural population should be improved by providing full access to water on household premises and at kindergartens and schools; upgrading sewage systems and waste collection systems in villages; and expanding transportation and healthcare services. These issues can be identified and prioritized at the local level through such initiatives as gender-responsive planning and budgeting.

Current programmes and project proposals in the sphere of agriculture and environmental protection should support women-initiated and implemented rural projects; should have gender impact and social inclusion assessments; and should develop a gender equality and social inclusion checklist.

The central government and local governments should ensure women's inclusion in decision-making processes,

as well as disaggregated data collection that enables them to adequately plan, implement and monitor projects.

Given the challenges that women face in accessing the resources noted above, it is crucial that the Government launch programmes that support female landownership. This can take the form of land registration drives, which would increase women's access to finance—and in turn other resources. This, however, will not fully reduce the gap in female landownership. As a result, it is crucial to provide alternative forms of access to credit for women who are unable to provide landownership documentation. A further step that will reduce issues around access to resources is investing in quality vocational education for women.

Disaster risk reduction is a fundamentally gendered phenomenon. In this regard, the Ministry of Environmental Protection and Agriculture should ensure mainstreaming of gender within the forthcoming strategy on disaster risk reduction. Local trainings focused on disaster risk reduction should incorporate gender components of the issue. More broadly, gender should be considered within environmental policies and strategies.

ENDNOTES

- 1 Geostat 2020d.
- 2 MEPA 2019.
- 3 Geostat 2021.
- 4 Geostat 2020b.
- 5 Ibid.
- 6 A person is considered in vulnerable employment if they are “self-employed workers without employees (own-account workers), members of producers’ cooperatives and contributing family workers (also known as unpaid family workers).” For more on the definition of vulnerable employment, see <https://databank.worldbank.org/metadataglossary/world-development-indicators/series/SL.EMP.VULN.ZS>.
- 7 According to the World Bank, “contributing family workers are those workers who hold ‘self-employment jobs’ as own-account workers in a market-oriented establishment operated by a related person living in the same household.” A more extensive definition is available at <https://databank.worldbank.org/metadataglossary/millennium-development-goals/series/SL.FAM.WORK.MA.ZS>.
- 8 According to the World Bank, “own-account workers are workers who, working on their own account or with one or more partners, hold the types of jobs defined as ‘self-employment jobs’ and have not engaged on a continuous basis any employees to work for them. Own account workers are a subcategory of ‘self-employed.’” A fuller discussion on this definition is available at <https://databank.worldbank.org/metadataglossary/jobs/series/SL.EMP.OWAC.ZS>.
- 9 UN Women and CRRG 2018.
- 10 UN Women 2020.
- 11 Posadas et al. 2018.
- 12 UNFPA 2020.
- 13 Geostat 2018.
- 14 OECD 2019.
- 15 Geostat 2020a.
- 16 GEC 2018.
- 17 UN Women, SDC and ADC 2018.
- 18 Women's Fund in Georgia 2017.
- 19 Geostat 2020e
- 20 Geostat 2020c.
- 21 CARE and ISET-PI 2020.
- 22 MEPA 2019.



- 23 Ibid.
24 MoESD 2021.

- 25 UNDP and GEC 2018.
26 Margvelashvili 2017.

REFERENCES

- CARE and ISET-PI (International School of Economics at Tbilisi State University – Policy Institute). 2020. "Policy Paper: Challenges and Prospects for SMEs, Particularly Women-led Businesses, during and after the COVID-19 Pandemic." ISET Policy Brief Series.
- GEC (Gender Equality Council of the Parliament of Georgia). 2018. Thematic Survey on Women's Participation in State Economic Programmes.
- Geostat (National Statistics Office of Georgia). 2018. Pilot Survey on Measuring Asset Ownership and Entrepreneurship from a Gender Perspective. Tbilisi: Asian Development Bank. <https://www.geostat.ge/media/21027/EDGE-Report-ENG-Final.pdf>.
- _____. 2020a. "Agriculture and Food Security Database."
- _____. 2020b. "Employment and Unemployment." Accessed 8 December 2021. <https://www.geostat.ge/en/modules/categories/683/Employment-Unemployment>.
- _____. 2020c. "Household Incomes and Expenditures Survey." Accessed 8 December 2021. <https://www.geostat.ge/en/modules/categories/128/databases-of-2009-2016-integrated-household-survey-and-2017-households-income-and-expenditure-survey>.
- _____. 2020d. "Population as of 1 January by Regions and Urban-Rural Settlements." Accessed 8 December 2021. <https://www.geostat.ge/en/modules/categories/41/population>.
- _____. 2020e. Wages. Available at: <https://www.geostat.ge/en/modules/categories/39/wages>
- _____. 2021. "Agriculture and Food Security Database."
- Margvelashvili, K. 2017. Women's Economic Empowerment in Georgia: Analysis of Existing Policies and Initiatives.
- MEPA (Ministry of Environmental Protection and Agriculture of Georgia). 2019. Agriculture and Rural Development Strategy of Georgia for 2021–2027. <https://mepa.gov.ge/Ge/PublicInformation/20395>.
- MoESD (Ministry of Economy and Sustainable Development of Georgia). 2021. SME Development Strategy of Georgia 2021–2025. <http://www.economy.ge/?page=ecopolitic&s=45&lang=ge>.
- OECD (Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development). 2019. Monitoring Georgia's SME Development Strategy 2016–2020. Paris: OECD Publishing.
- Posadas, J., M. Makovec, R. F. Jaef, C. Gruen and M. I. Ajwad. 2018. Georgia at Work: Assessing the Jobs Landscape. Washington, DC: World Bank. <https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/handle/10986/29955>.
- UN Women (United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women) and CRRG (Caucasus Research Resource Center). 2018. Women's Economic Inactivity and Engagement in the Informal Sector in Georgia: Causes and Consequences. Tbilisi: UN Women and SDC. <https://georgia.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2018/12/womens-economic-inactivity-and-engagement-in-the-informal-sector-in-georgia>.
- _____. 2020. Analysis of the Gender Pay Gap and Gender Inequality in the Labour Market in Georgia. Tbilisi: UN Women. <https://georgia.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2020/03/analysis-of-the-gender-pay-gap-and-gender-inequality-in-the-labor-market-in-georgia>.
- UN Women (United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women), SDC (Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation) and ADC (Austrian Development Cooperation). 2018. Gender Assessment of Agriculture and Local Development Systems in Georgia.
- UNDP (United Nations Development Programme) and GEC (Gender Equality Council of the Parliament of Georgia). 2018. Gender Equality in Georgia: Barriers and Recommendations.
- UNFPA (United Nations Population Fund). 2020. Men, Women, and Gender Relations in Georgia: Public Perceptions and Attitudes. Tbilisi: UNDP and UNFPA Georgia. <https://georgia.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/pub-pdf/unfpa-research-eng.pdf>.
- UNICEF (United Nations Children's Fund) and Geostat (National Statistics Office of Georgia). 2018. Georgia MICS (Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey). <https://www.unicef.org/georgia/reports/2018-georgia-mics-multiple-indicator-cluster-survey>.
- Women's Fund in Georgia. 2017. Situation Analysis and Recommendations on Environmental Justice and Women's Rights in Georgia: Phase 1.

This brief was developed by UN Women Georgia Country Office in the framework of the UN Women projects "Women's Economic Empowerment in the South Caucasus" funded by the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC) and the Austrian Development Cooperation (ADC) and "Good Governance for Gender Equality in Georgia" supported by the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs.