

# COMMISSIONED STUDY WOMEN'S NEEDS AND PRIORITIES IN HIGH MOUNTAINOUS REGIONS OF GEORGIA



2014, Tbilisi

Center for Social Sciences (CSS)  
for UN Women / EU Project (Innovative Action for Gender Equality)



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UN Women supports UN Member States as they set global standards for achieving gender equality, and works with governments and civil society to design laws, policies, programmes and services needed to implement these standards. It stands behind women's equal participation in all aspects of life, focusing on five priority areas: increasing women's leadership and participation; ending violence against women; engaging women in all aspects of peace and security processes; enhancing women's economic empowerment; and making gender equality central to national development planning and budgeting. UN Women also coordinates and promotes the UN system's work in advancing gender equality.

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# FOREWORD



Global experience shows that in many countries women and girls living in rural and isolated areas lack access to education, gainful jobs, control over land and other productive resources, have limited access to health care, social and legal services, as well as to the opportunities for active participation in the public life.

In 2013 UN Women Georgia with support of the European Union Delegation to Georgia and in cooperation with the Tbilisi based Center for Social Sciences conducted a study on the needs and priorities of women and girls residing in isolated mountainous settings of Georgia. The study has focused on women's economic situation, employability and access to the existing governmental social, legal, and economic services and programmes. The findings confirm that women living in isolated mountainous settings in Georgia are confronted with challenges similar to those of women in many other parts of the world. These include, among others, lack of formal employment, lack of property and other economic resources, low income (social assistance and old-age pensions constituting

the primary sources of household income), and limited access to health care facilities in terms of distance and quality of roads in wintertime. Prevailing gender stereotypes, in addition, hinder women's active involvement in community decision-making.

The primary goal of the study is to provide information about the needs and priorities of women and girls residing in isolated mountainous settings and offer recommendations to the decision-makers for evidence-informed policymaking. The findings are quite informative on the level of this segment of citizens' awareness and accessibility to the existing state services and programmes. And last but not least, we believe that the study provides valuable inputs for further advocacy work around the enhancement of gender equality and women's empowerment in isolated mountainous areas of Georgia, and will contribute to adequate policy responses.

**Erika Kvapilova**

UN Women Representative in Georgia

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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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UN Women in the framework of the EU-funded program “Innovative Action for Gender Equality in Georgia” (IAGE) contracted the Center for Social Sciences to conduct a study of the needs and priorities of women residing in isolated mountainous settings of Georgia. The end goal of the study has been to identify the social and economic needs of the population residing in high mountainous regions of Georgia and to use its results and recommendations for advocacy purposes with relevant authorities for the improvement of identified policy and service provision gaps and challenges.

Quantitative, as well as qualitative research methods were applied for data collection. Four hundred persons (259 women and 141 men) were interviewed within the quantitative research component in the high mountainous regions of Samegrelo-Zemo Svaneti, Racha-Lechkhumi-Kvemo Svaneti, Mtskheta-Mtianeti and Adjara. The number of survey participants represents a sample of the entire population of Georgia’s mountainous regions. Taking into consideration the specificity of women’s social needs and problems, in the frames of the qualitative research, 40 in-depth interviews were conducted with women of different ages, and marital and employment statuses, residing in the same regions.

The results of the quantitative research revealed that employment and low-scale income are the most acute problems for the population of Georgia’s high mountainous regions. Only 22% of respondents are

employed in paid jobs. Household income amounts to up to GEL 250 for the majority (35%) and pensions and state assistance have been named as a major household income (51%). Accordingly, the majority of respondents (34%) name assistance in finding employment as their number one need. Against the background of aforementioned poverty, as gas supply is the main problem for high mountainous regions, the use of firewood as a source of heating in winter for almost the absolute majority of respondents (92%), becomes an additional expenditure for households.

The study of respondents’ health has revealed that heart-related issues (67%) are the most widespread, together with back/spinal (46%) and eyesight problems (40%).

When assessing socio-economic conditions, it should be emphasised that, compared to male respondents, the number of female respondents who possess real estate is significantly low (60% males and 34% females), which, on its own, is related to the inheritance problem – according to the majority of male (50%) as well as female (39%) respondents’ opinion, property should be inherited by sons.

Generally, gender stereotypes, which determine women’s primary social roles to be in the family, while paid employment outside the household and managing businesses is a significant priority for men, are dominant among the mountainous populations.

# 1. INTRODUCTION

The study entitled “Women’s Needs and Priorities in High Mountainous Regions of Georgia” represents a general assessment of the social needs and priorities of women residing in relatively remote and vulnerable areas of Georgia. The research was conducted between September and December 2013 by the Centre for Social Sciences as commissioned by UN Women.

The research covered mountainous areas in four regions in Georgia – Samegrelo-Zemo Svaneti, Racha-Lechkhumi-Kvemo Svaneti, Adjara and Mtskheta-Mtianeti. Quantitative [representative survey] and qualitative [in-depth interviews] research methods were used. A total of 400 people were interviewed using a semi-structured questionnaire, and descriptive statistics have been applied to analyse the data. Qualitative data were collected through 40 in-depth interviews.

The aim of the research was to assess the needs and priorities of high mountainous urban and rural populations from the selected regions in the following areas:

- Respondents’ economic performance – according to their employment status, personal/household income and consumption expenditure;
- Evaluation of households - poverty, consumption levels, living conditions and infrastructure, as well as identification of basic needs and the accessibility of social services;
- Evaluation of health;
- Identification of gender attitudes and stereotypes.

The main tool of the quantitative research was the semi-structured questionnaire, which was aided with reference to the Caucasus Barometer 2012,<sup>1</sup> the 2013 report entitled ‘Economic and Social Vulnerability in Georgia’<sup>2</sup> conducted within the framework

of UNDP and the 2003 report entitled ‘Health and Social Needs’.<sup>3</sup> The quantitative study population comprised of persons aged 18 and over residing in the selected regions [both women and men; total number: 262, 914]. The study sample population consisted of 400 respondents of which 134 were from urban areas and 266 were from rural areas. The standard deviation in the results did not exceed 4%.

Women belonging to different categories of age, marital, employment, and social statuses had been selected to participate in the qualitative study in order to provide a comprehensive picture of women’s living conditions in mountainous areas. Therefore, 40 respondents were classified as follows:

- Married women, 1-2 children, unemployed (5 respondents)
- Married women, 1-2 children, employed (5 respondents)
- Married women with many children (5 respondents)
- Divorced women with grandchildren (5 respondents)
- Widows (5 respondents)
- Single girls/women, 16-25 years of age (5 respondents)
- Single women over 45 (5 respondents)
- Women taking care of disabled or elderly family members (5 respondents)

The present study covered the following regions:

- 1) Lentekhi District (villages: Kheledi and Babili)
- 2) Martvili District (village: Gurdzemi)
- 3) Adjara (town of Keda, villages: Vaio, Eknara)
- 4) Ambrolauri District (Ambrolauri, villages: Sadmeli, Dziragouli)
- 5) Tsageri District (villages: Orbeli, Lailashi)
- 6) Mestia District
- 7) Tianeti District
- 8) Dusheti District

1 Source: Caucasus Barometer, 2012 Questionnaire <http://www.crrcenters.org/store/files/documentation/CB2012%20questionnaire%20Geo%20with%20var-names%2028022013.pdf> [accessed on September 7, 2013]

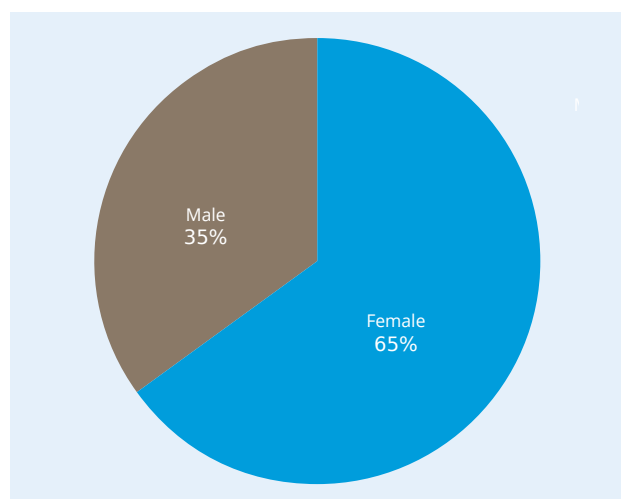
2 Source: Francesca Gasman, et al; Economic and Social vulnerability in Georgia, UNDP, 2013

3 Source: Caerphilly Health & Social Needs Study, Gwent Health Authority Caerphilly County Borough Council, 2003 [http://www2.nphs.wales.nhs.uk:8080/hiatdocs.nsf/1f8687d8da97650980256fa30051b0be/3110f0c1d7fb13268025738b002f977a/\\$FILE/20071105\\_CaerphillyStage3\\_DF\\_MJW\\_V2a.pdf](http://www2.nphs.wales.nhs.uk:8080/hiatdocs.nsf/1f8687d8da97650980256fa30051b0be/3110f0c1d7fb13268025738b002f977a/$FILE/20071105_CaerphillyStage3_DF_MJW_V2a.pdf) [accessed on September 7, 2013]

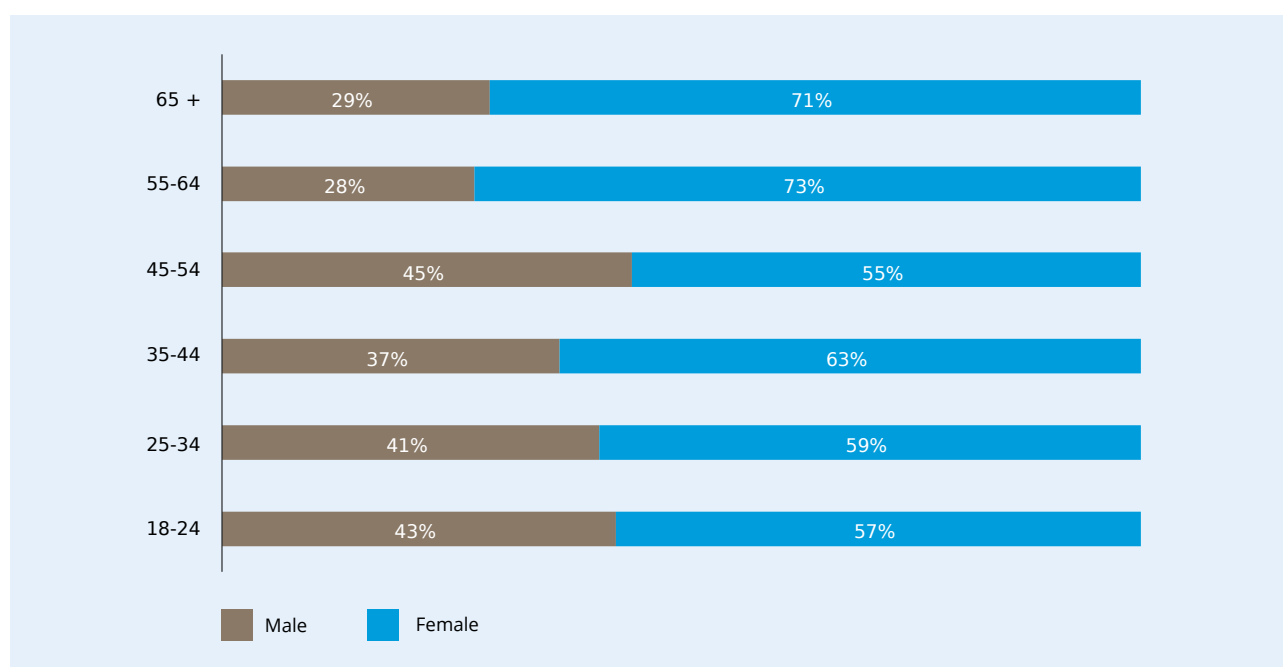
## 2. DEMOGRAPHIC VARIABLES: GENDER AND AGE

According to the gender distribution, out of the 400 surveyed respondents, 65% are female and 35% are male. The majority of surveyed women residing in mountainous regions [73%] fall under the 55-64 age category, whereas the greatest percentage of surveyed men [45%] were of the 45-54 age group. Among the survey participants, the number of male respondents aged over 55 decreased significantly compared to women [Diagram 2.2]. This is a possible explanation for the unequal distribution in terms of gender between respondents.

**Chart no. 2.1:**  
Gender of Respondents



**Chart no. 2.2:**  
Distribution of Gender by Age



### 3. RESPONDENTS' ECONOMIC PERFORMANCE – ACCORDING TO THEIR EMPLOYMENT STATUS, PERSONAL/HOUSEHOLD INCOME, AND CONSUMPTION EXPENDITURE

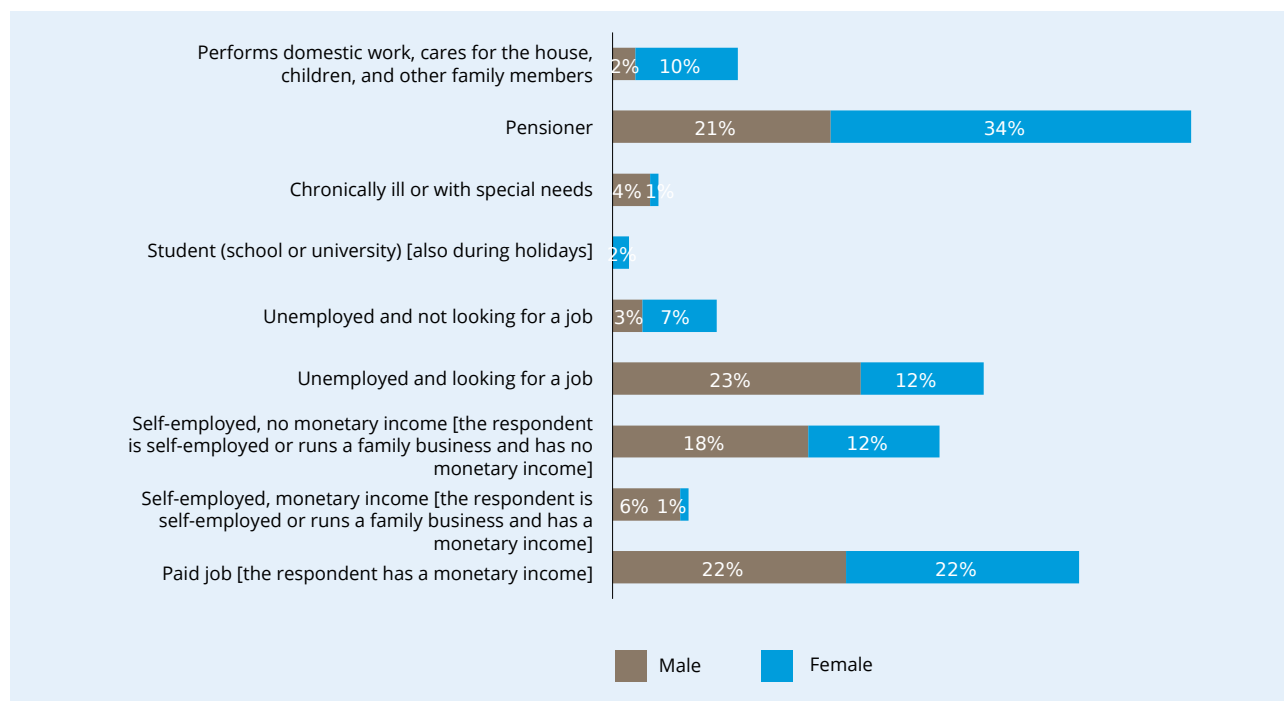
Unemployment and low-scale income were identified as the most acute problems for the population of high mountainous regions. Roughly an equal number of men and women are employed in paid jobs, but more men are economically active and searching for a job compared to women.

Of the survey participants, 29% are pensioners and only 22% are employed in a paid job. A total of 16% of the respondents are unemployed and searching for a job. As for self-employed respondents, only 3% receive some monetary income whereas 15% have no income at all. These data represent diverse groups of people in relation to economic performance: those who are employed in paid jobs, those who are self-

employed with or without monetary income, unemployed individuals not looking for a job and those who are economically active and looking for a job. Hence, it is observed that the total percentage of interviewees with no monetary income is 37%. Looking at gender distribution, more women [34%] than men [21%] surveyed are pensioners. An equal number of surveyed women and men [both 22%] are employed in a paid job, and among self-employed respondents receiving income, 6% are male and only 1% are female. More unemployed men [23%] are seeking jobs compared with women [12%], whereas of the survey participants performing unpaid work (taking care of the household and other family members) - 10% are women.



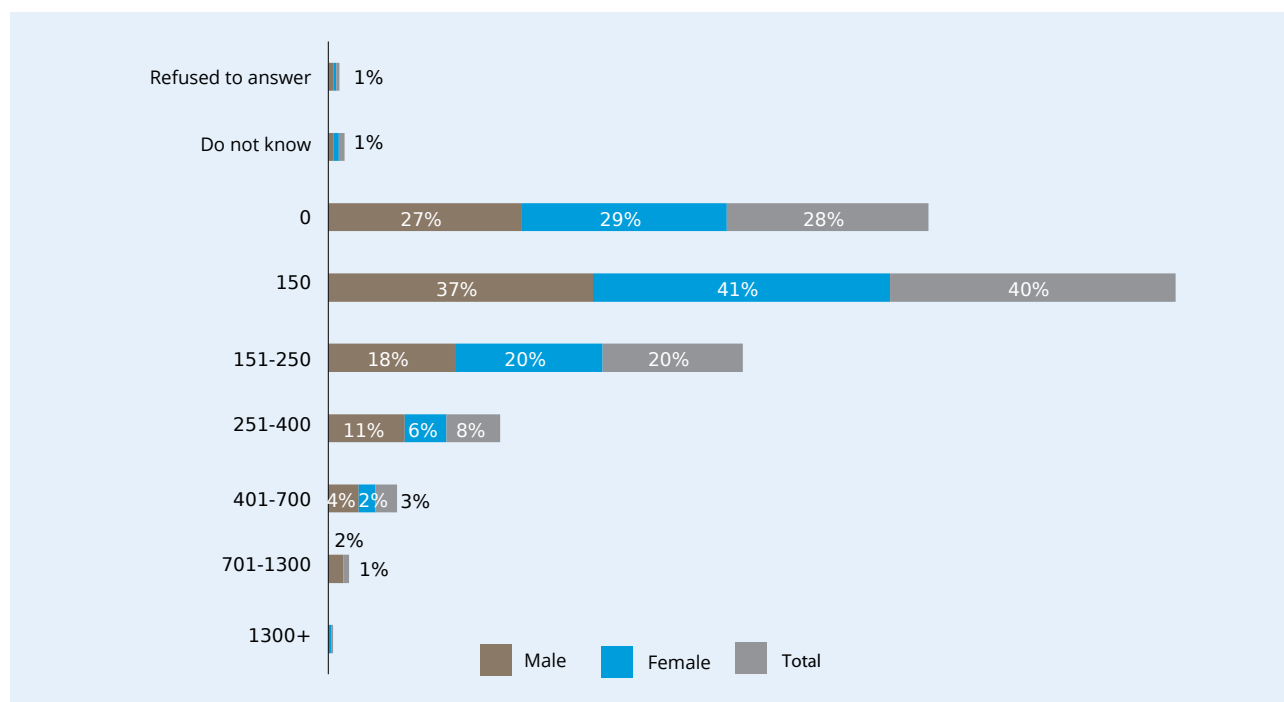
**Chart no. 3.1:**  
Employment Status



For the majority [40%] of respondents the monthly personal income constitutes GEL 150 (according to data from November 2013, minimum subsistence

wage amounts to GEL 150.80 monthly), while 28% of the surveyed population has no personal income at all (See Charts 3.2. and 3.3.).

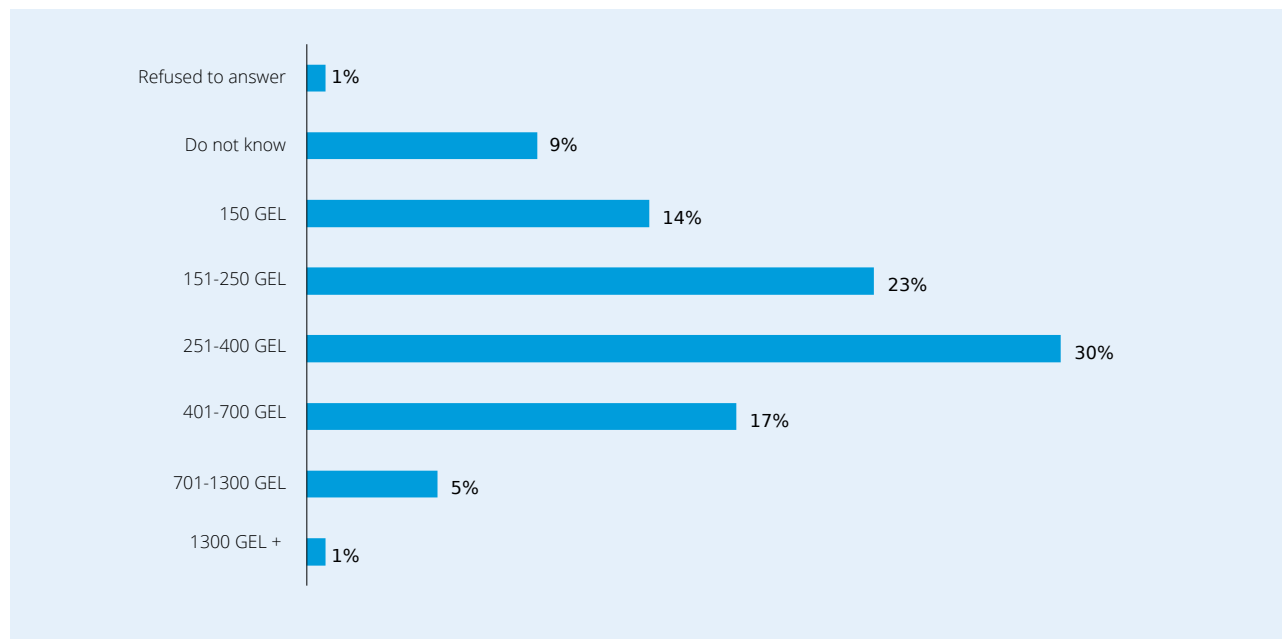
**Chart no. 3.2:**  
Personal Income in GEL



The household income for 36% of respondents barely reaches GEL 250 and in the case of 34% of respondents, the monthly household income amounts to GEL 400.

Overall consumption expenditures amounted to GEL 250 for 37% of households and around GEL 400 for 30% during the month prior to the survey (See Chart 3.4).

**Chart no. 3.3:**  
Household Expenses during the Month Prior to the Survey



For 51% of respondents, their main income includes pensions and government financial aid. A total of 34% of respondents mentioned that their main income is the sum of all family members' wages excluding anything earned from selling agricultural products. Only 10% of the surveyed population earns money from selling agricultural products. Qualitative research has demonstrated that if a household has a monthly income other than pension (small business, social assistance or public sector salary), then the pensioner spends this amount on his/her personal needs (medication, items of personal use). But in families, where pension is the only income, it is spent on most essential products (flour, salt, sugar):

"Data, my grandfather, distributes his pension and doesn't interfere with tax payments. My mother Mzia's income is nearly GEL 150, mine is GEL 135. Data's pension has been increased to GEL 100. Mzia and I spend money together..." /Woman, widow, employed, aged 42/.

In terms of credit, 44% of male and 53% of female respondents report that they have never used a bank loan service. Similarly, a total of 43% of male and 43% of female respondents stated that they had never encountered problems with bank debt repayments. As the survey results show, 5% of male and 2% of female respondents stated that they are unable to pay their bank loans while 7% of male and 2% of female respondents were unable to cover their loan payments on time.

Qualitative study findings highlight that women's economic status in the high mountainous regions depends on several factors:

- Social assistance, pension;
- Employment of women within the public/private sector;
- Income gained from selling products;
- Remittances from family member migrants;
- Employment of family members within the public/private sector;

- Financial assets or other assistance provided by the relatives of the woman or her family;
- Short-term credits;

Most of the interviewed women have no property of strategic value. They live in the houses of their fathers or husbands and are not considered as legal owners. They do not distinguish between such categories as “family income” and “woman’s income”; “family property” and “woman’s property”. Most women spend their personal income not on their own needs but on the needs of other family members. For married women, their children’s wellbeing (education, marriage, and comfort at home and in society) is the number one concern. The primary purpose of the economic activities of single girls and women is dealing with the problems and needs of other family members and ensuring their welfare.

Most women negatively evaluate their economic status and classify themselves as poor or having lower than average income, as their average monthly income varies from GEL 100 to no more than GEL 300-400. This amount is spent to satisfy the basic needs of family members or to pay the interest accrued on bank loans, which means that making even small savings is not possible. Those women whose monthly income is GEL 1,000 or above spend it primarily to support their children, their education and family business (e.g. trade, tourism) development. These women use bank credits more frequently, are credible debtors and have some savings.

Most families have the experience of using short-term credit. Due to low monthly incomes, women who acquire short-term credits do so for the procurement of wheat flour and firewood and take long-term loans for their children’s needs (e.g. launching a business, marriage, purchase of a car or apartment) and repay these loans over a period of multiple years. Attitudes towards their economic futures are less clear for most women. They do not expect significant improvements in this regard. They believe that nothing will change and that the common family income will

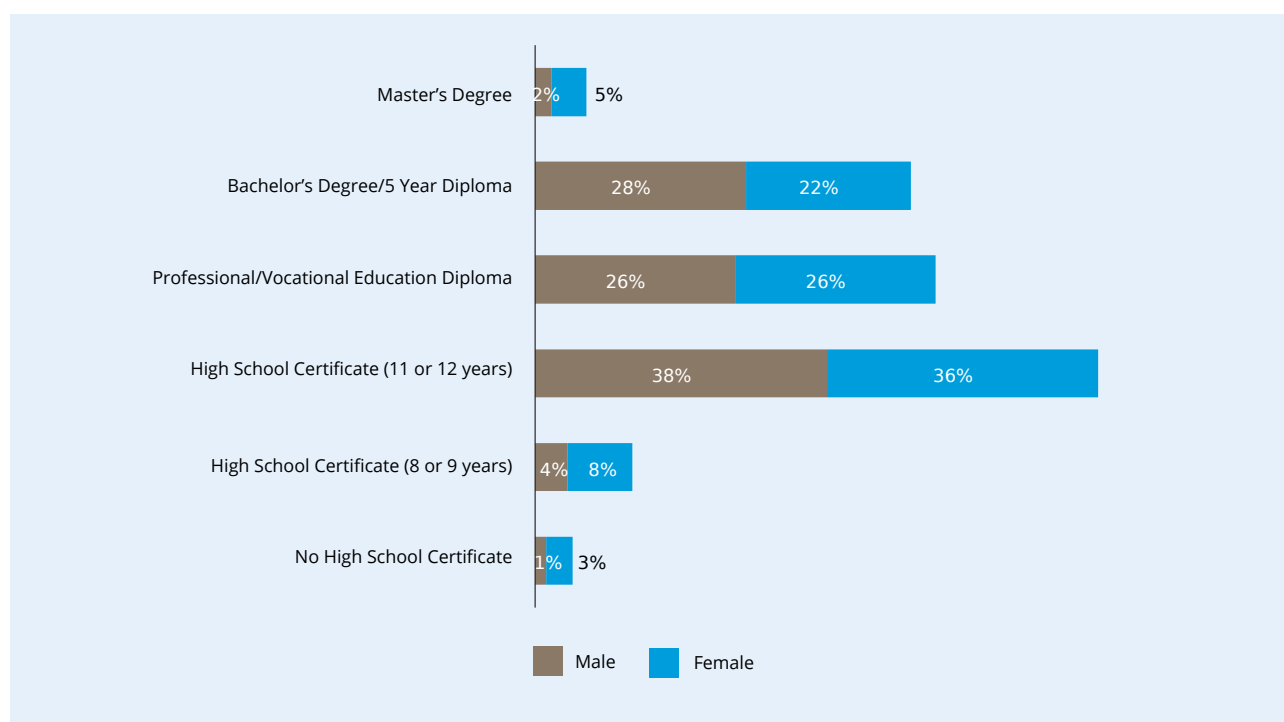
not increase. In the long run, women hope that their children will become employed. They associate their personal wellbeing, emotional stability and satisfaction with their children’s success. The hopes of single women are linked to the wellbeing of other family members and relatives.

Women and girls consider that the state should be the main guarantor of economic stability, development and sustainability of the regions, their families, and their citizens. The state should provide a strategy for employment and regional development; and offer it to the population, including to women who ensure the survival of their families in the post-Soviet period. The interviewed women outline that they are driven and able to contribute to the advancement of the local economy and to the development of tourism and business. Generally, they consider the process of women’s socioeconomic and political strengthening to be important.

For most women and girls interviewed, education is of immense importance. Parents, irrespective of the economic situation in the family, attempt to provide their children with higher and/or vocational education. For this purpose, they collect the family income and prepare their children for the national examinations even though there are many cases in which young people have to terminate their education due to their families’ inability to pay the tuition fees. This is less applicable to the students who have been awarded 50%, 70% or 100% state scholarships. In such cases, the parents ensure the completion of their children’s education though bank credits and selling products.

Quantitative data shows that the majority of the population in mountainous regions [56% of men and 53% of women] have obtained higher or professional education. Men slightly outscore women in post-secondary education. Overall, no significant differences between the education level of surveyed women and men are observed.

**Chart no. 3.4:**  
Education Level



However, in the qualitative study it was mentioned that it is difficult to gain employment in specific jobs in accordance with the education level. Girls who return to their families after studying at university in large cities usually get involved in household activities. They rarely find employment, be it in trade, catering, or public service such as village schools, kindergartens, culture centres, the village council, and administration.

Nothing is done with respect to the continued education and re-training of the women whose education and work experience are superfluous to the local labour market as it is not a priority issue for the state. Relatively prosperous women and girls from finan-

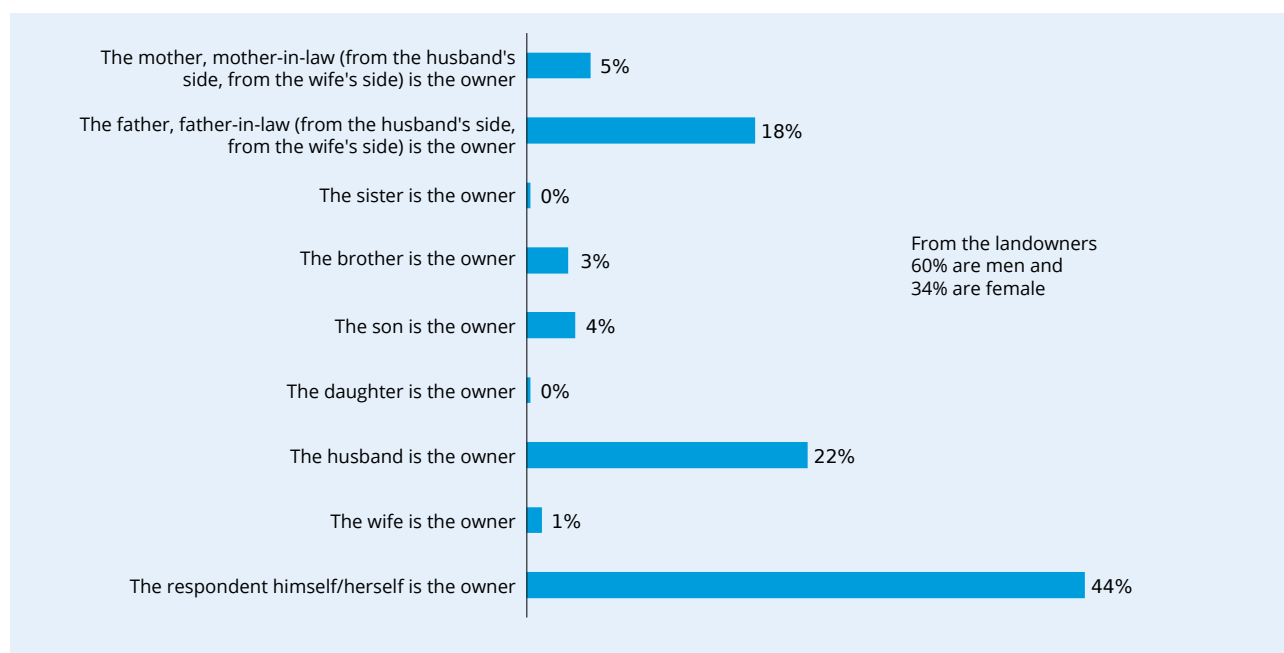
cially secure families are able to improve their qualifications or take up professions and ensure good employment opportunities in, for example, accounting, computer technologies, English language, business, formation of NGOs and project development. Most of the interviewed women and girls would welcome the implementation of projects and programmes intended to provide them with competitive and professional knowledge and assist them in gaining employment in their regions. Trainings, education programs and re-training courses arranged by international organizations are not available for most of them and, as a consequence, they believe that such activities should be organised on a broader scale for longer durations.

## 4. EVALUATION OF HOUSEHOLD ECONOMIES, POVERTY, CONSUMPTION, LIVING CONDITIONS AND INFRASTRUCTURE, ACCESSIBILITY TO SOCIAL SERVICES AND BASIC NEEDS

The employment and income rates show that the majority of the population residing in high mountainous regions have economic problems and live in poverty. This situation is evidenced by both the quantitative and qualitative study data.

In total, 86% of respondents report that they own agricultural land. Of the large proportion of respondents [44%] who identify themselves as landowners - 60% are male and 34% are female. Moreover, 60% of the surveyed population tend to cattle [e.g. cows, buffalo, bulls], while 58% also have poultry [e.g. chickens, turkeys] at their farms.

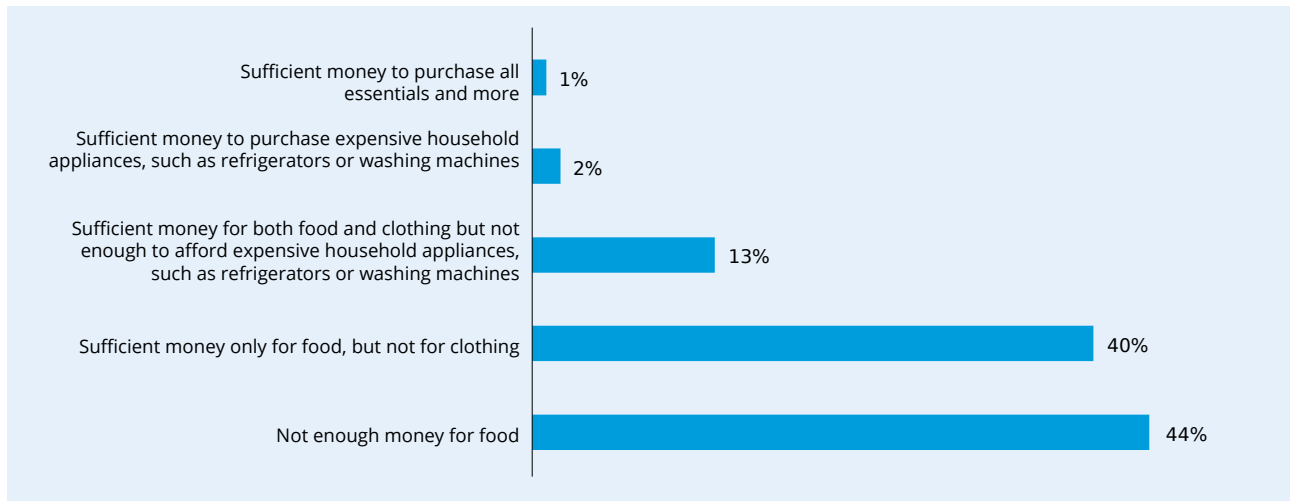
**Chart no. 4.1:**  
Agricultural Land Ownership



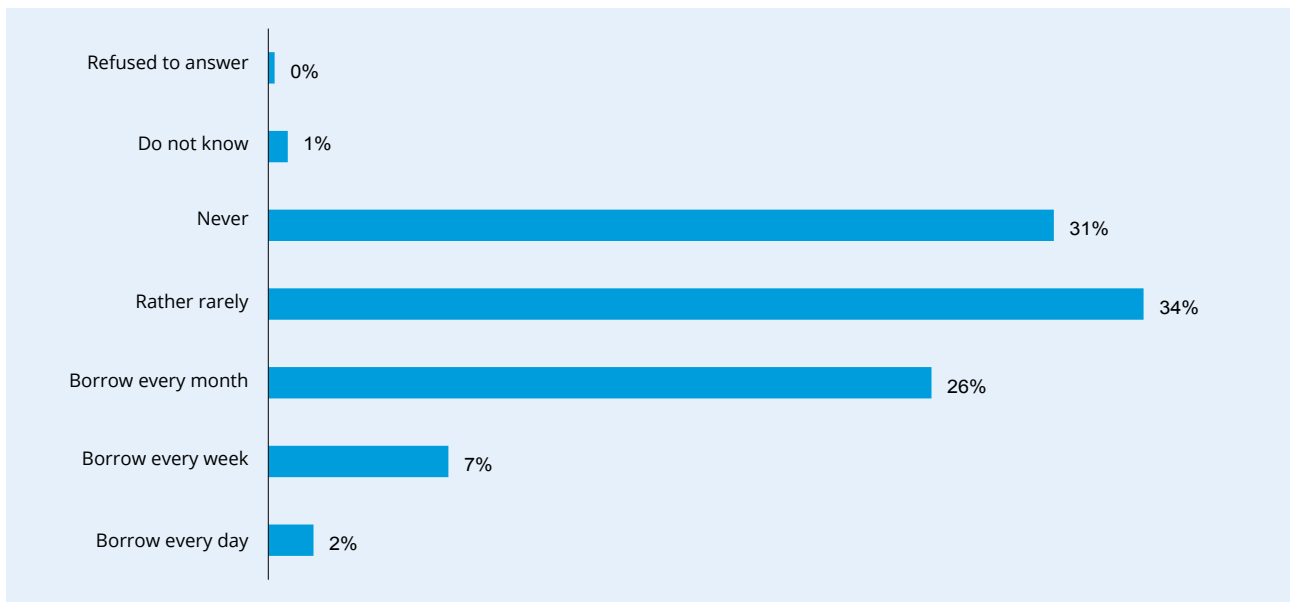
The chart below shows that 40% of the surveyed population has only enough money to afford food products, while 44% cannot afford for food (See Chart 4.2). Moreover, 26% of this population has to borrow money for food every month and 7% do so every week (See Chart 4.3). According to the qualita-

tive study data, the greatest share of family incomes is usually spent on food products, medicine, education and procurement of household appliances, organisation of religious/traditional rituals (funerals, weddings, celebrations, etc.).

**Chart no. 4.2:**  
Household Economic Conditions



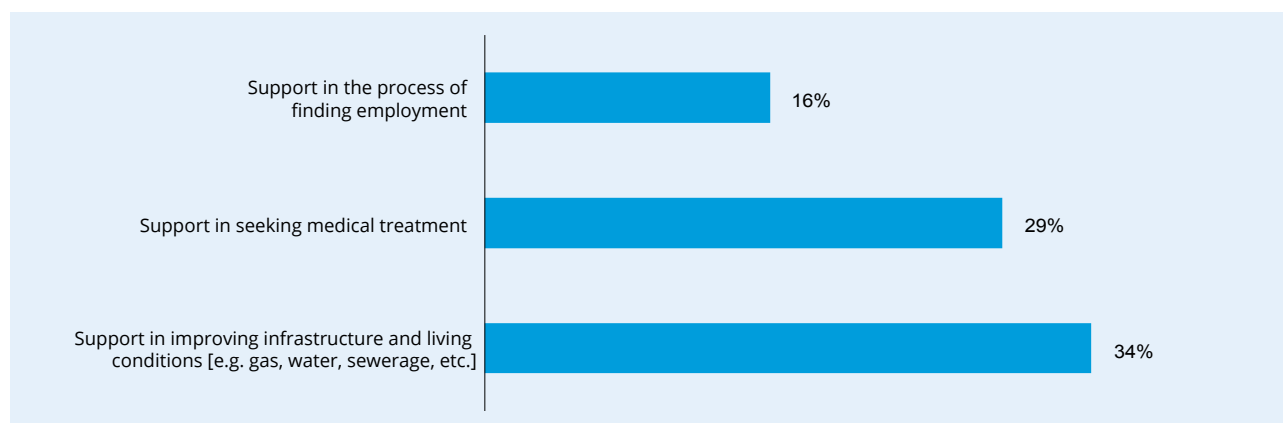
**Chart no. 4.3:**  
Statistics on whether the Household Has Sufficient Money for Food and the Frequency with which Households Borrow Money for Food



For 34% of respondents, the most desirable means of support is assistance in gaining employment. For 20% of respondents, it is important to receive some

health care while 16% named infrastructural improvements as being most important

**Chart no. 4.4:**  
The First Choice for Possible Support



Regarding infrastructural issues, the majority of respondents (81%) report that they have problems with the natural gas supply. Accordingly, 92% of respondents use firewood as a source of heating in winter, which constitutes additional expenditure for families. Only 6% of respondents use a gas heater and 1% use electric heaters. Seventy-four percent of respondents are dissatisfied with the remote location of their houses, as they have limited access to employment opportunities.

It was recorded that 38% of respondents are still not receiving any financial aid for socially-unprotected families who are in need of this kind of social support. In total, 5% of respondents report that they have not received their pensions to which they are entitled. According to the data, 13% of respondents are not included in the universal health insurance programme even though they need it.

**Table no. 4.1:**  
Social Services and Financial Aid

Financial services for socially unprotected families	Do use	22%
	Do not use, but do need	38%
	Do not need	41%
Pension	Do use	48%
	Do not use, but do need	5%
	Do not need	47%
Health Insurance	Do use	80%
	Do not use, but do need	13%
	Do not need	7%
Social services for persons with disabilities and persons with special skills	Do use	1%
	Do not use, but do need	8%
	Do not need	91%

Support from a social worker during family conflicts or social problems	Do use	%
	Do not use, but do need	2%
	Do not need	98%
Kindergarten for children or grandchildren	Do use	6%
	Do not use, but do need	3%
	Do not need	91%

It should be mentioned that out of 91% of respondents who report that they have no need for a kindergarten, only 16% have a child younger than 6 years. When assessing the need in kindergarten services, several factors should be taken into consideration: in rural settlements, in contrast with urban settlements, kindergartens are not the only means for socialisation – this function is assumed by the families of neighbours and relatives. Besides, in the majority of villages, children get involved in housework from an early age. This does not necessarily imply hard, physical labour, but constitutes at least a minor part of household chores: taking livestock to the fields, feeding poultry, fetching spring water, taking food to parents gone to work, caring for elder family members, running errands at their relatives' or neighbours', etc. The issue of kindergarten infrastructure, which is very problematic in these regions, is also worth considering. These arguments can explain the probable lack of respondents' awareness of the need for kindergartens.

According to the survey, 8% of women and 5% of men have migrated abroad to seek employment.

The majority of women participating in the qualitative study appraised women's migration negatively as they consider it to be the basis for family breakdown, psychological/emotional problems for the children left at home, depression of the migrant women and demoralisation of their family members (particularly spouses). Women migrate abroad for long periods and often do not return home even when they have invested significantly in the future of their children as they will often be required to then support their grandchildren's wellbeing. It is also possible that migrant women gain some emotional satisfaction and

advancement on their self-esteem by being economic donors of the families and guarantors of the financial stability of their children. This might be why they prefer to stay in host countries and continue earning money instead of coming back to find minimal opportunities, potentially doing unpaid and/or unappreciated work in their own countries.

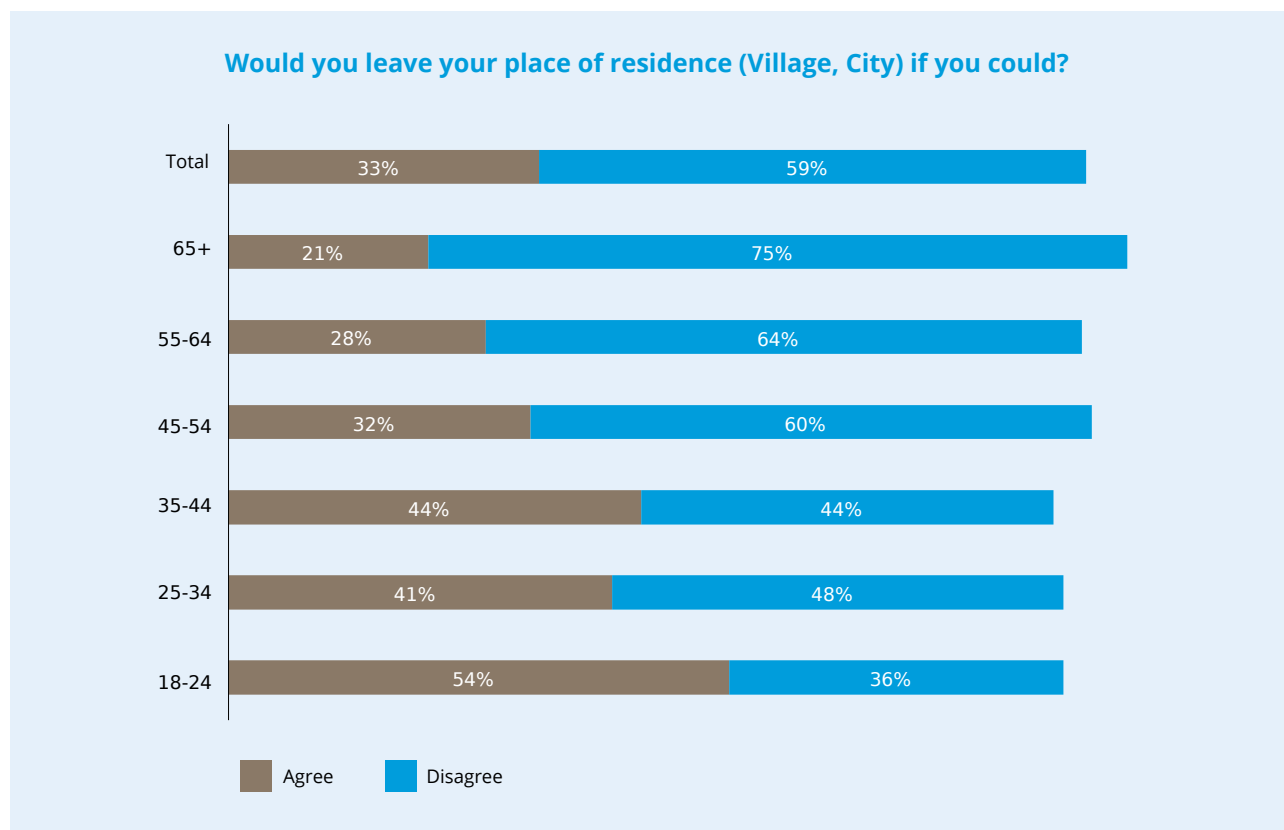
Men often leave their homes to engage in seasonal work and return home within a few months. Many of them use the money earned for their own needs and rarely spend it for the needs of other family members.

According to qualitative data, respondents' concerns with the issues of internal migration are mostly related to children and other family members. The major aim of internal and external migration is employment, but there can be another reason as well, such as education, which is a major reason for the population of remote mountainous regions of Georgia to migrate to the cities.

The concerns of middle aged women/mothers are also related to these issues. They fear that children migrating to the cities to work or study will not come back. "My main concern is family and the children of course, but I'm concerned with the common situation as well. What I want most is for us to be socially secure, so that my children wouldn't be willing to escape from here... so that they would want to stay here with us... I wish the region would develop, I wish something was done for my village. I could sacrifice my private wellbeing to stand for it. Nothing makes sense if the general situation doesn't improve". / Woman, mother of two, Lentekhi District, Kheledi/.



**Chart no. 4.5:**  
Satisfaction with the Place of Residence



The will of youth to migrate has also been revealed as a result of quantitative research. The majority of respondents aged 18-24 state that they are prepared to leave their places of residence if the opportunity arises. Among respondents older than 24, the will of migration is significantly lower.

Most girls see their futures being outside the region. They believe that they need education and employment, which, in their opinion, could be achieved only in Tbilisi and other large cities as there are no municipal or public programmes for education and gaining employment. Hence, most of them do not plan to re-

turn to their families and contribute to the development of the region. However, there are some who do not want to leave and wish to establish trade, catering or entertainment companies for children, young people and women.

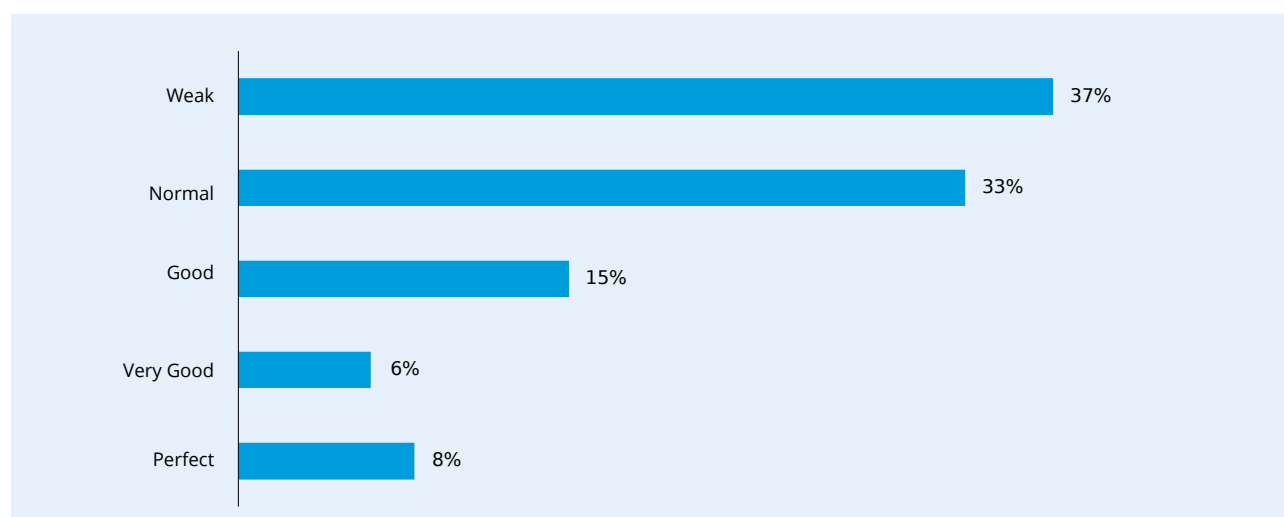
“There are no cafés or entertainment centres where you could go with friends. There are no educational centres either, or at least English courses. It is very difficult to find an English teacher. We have some of them here, but they are not well-qualified.” /Girl, aged 16, Lechkhumi District, Tsageri/.

## 5. HEALTH CARE

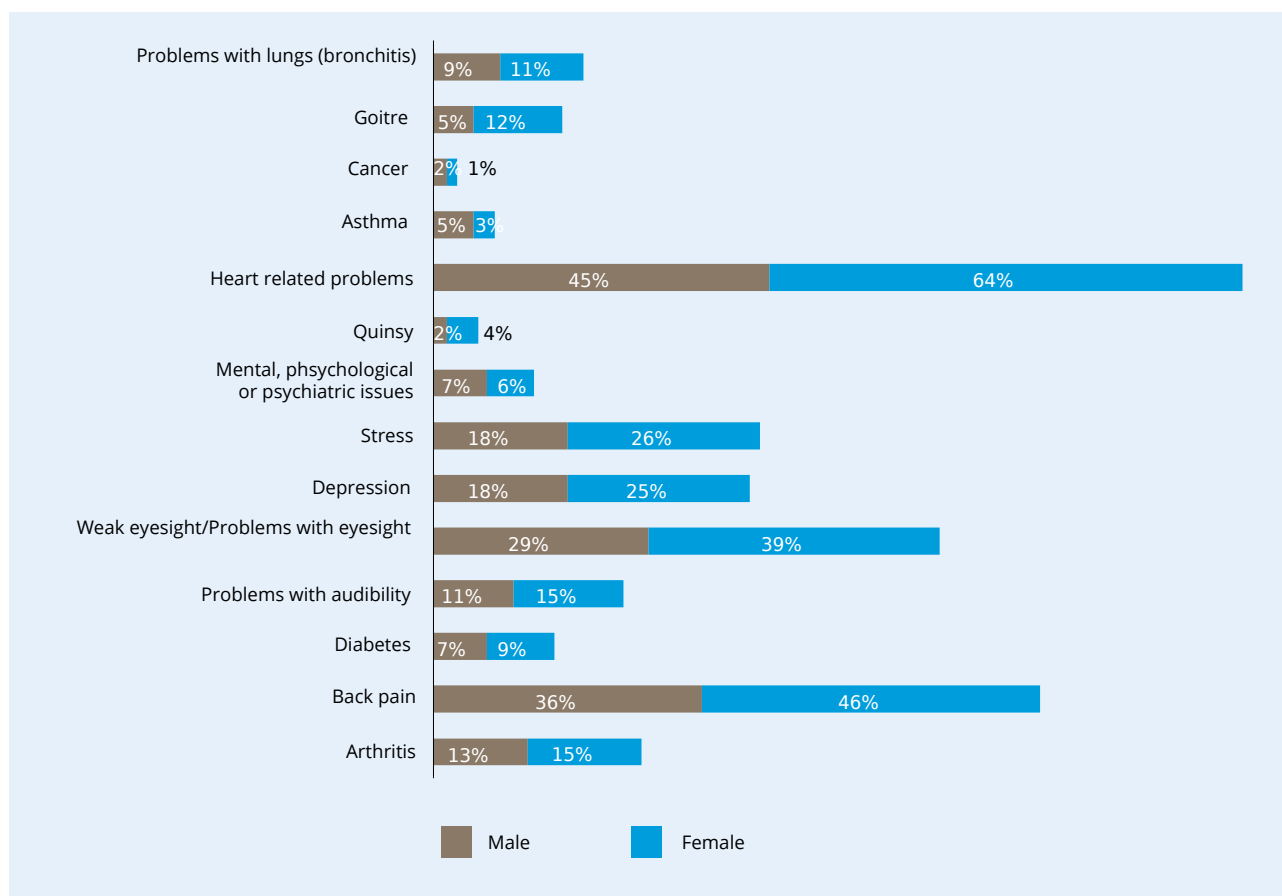
More male [61%] than female [45%] respondents say that they do not have chronic diseases and problems regarding health. More women [55%] compared to men [39%] report that they do have some health problems and/or chronic diseases.

Only 13% of respondents reported the date when they last visited a doctor. The majority (39%) visited the doctor in the period of April-October 2013, which coincides with the enactment of the universal health insurance programme since March 1, 2013. The majority of respondents (37%) negatively evaluate their general health condition and only 29% give a positive self-assessment.

**Chart no. 5.1:**  
Evaluation of Own Health Condition



**Chart no. 5.2:**  
Health Problems



The results show that the most widespread health problems among the respondents are heart-related issues [64% female and 45% male], back/spine problems [46% female and 36% male], and eyesight problems [39% female and 29% male]. Also, 26% of women and 18% of men respondents mentioned that they have anxiety/stress and depression. It is noteworthy that generally more women suffer from heart disease, depression, back and eyesight problems than male respondents.

The qualitative research findings highlight that most women residing in the high mountainous regions, particularly those over 40, have significant health problems. Irrespective of such problems, they rarely visit a doctor and never apply for preventive screenings. The high cost of medical services and severe economic conditions are the main reasons for not undergoing medical examinations.

The female beneficiaries of the state health insurance visiting the clinics are mostly: 1. women of pension age; 2. women with serious health problems requiring surgical intervention or other emergency measures; 3. women taking care of disabled children or other sick family members (e.g. mother, father, mother-in-law, father-in-law). Hospitals located in the regional centres mostly offer minimal preventive diagnostic services and examinations. For more accurate examinations and diagnoses, women have to visit medical centres in Tbilisi or other large cities. Most doctors working in the village ambulatories are locals but because of an absence of medical equipment and medicines, there is no guarantee of high quality medical assistance. Nevertheless, most village doctors are very helpful in urgent and first aid cases. Married women usually visit the doctor regarding reproductive issues in cases concerning pregnancy or infertility. Therefore, middle-aged women would

recall their last visit to a doctor by stating the age of their children. For most women, discussing abortion is unpleasant and typically they give short and unclear answers such as “I don’t know”, “before it happened more frequently” and “I have not been subjected to it and I have not heard from others”. Cardiovascular diseases and pathologies of the joints and the musculoskeletal system are also widespread among women. Pathologies of the thyroid gland, as well as breast and uterine tumours in high mountain regions are associated with iodine deficiencies, a high frequency of abortions, and an absence of a culture or tradition of preventive screening among women.<sup>4</sup> This is further aggravated by heavy work and stresses caused by unstable situations.

Most women state that they are aware of modern methods of contraception but that they are mostly only used by young mothers [oral contraceptive pills and intrauterine devices (IUDs)]. Middle-aged women rarely use contraception. In the highest mountainous areas, urbanisation is leading to an aging demo-

graphic. Problems encountered by elderly women could be regarded as one of the main problems of such regions. Most of them, particularly those living in rural areas, heavily rely upon state assistance and ambulance services. It was mentioned, however, that due to the long time it takes for an ambulance to arrive, they usually rely on village doctors and paramedical staff.

The situation of women with serious health problems is particularly alarming. The state provides them with two types of assistance: 1. pension amounting to GEL 125 for people with acutely expressed disabilities; and 2. assistance for persons with significant disabilities amounting to GEL 100. These amounts are wholly insufficient for the women taking care of their disabled children, elderly or other family members. Most surveyed women stated that even these amounts are awarded unfairly as people are frequently included in the category of socially vulnerable, not according to their real needs but rather by their political preferences.

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4 Interview conducted by Lela Gaprindashvili with medical health professionals in 2010

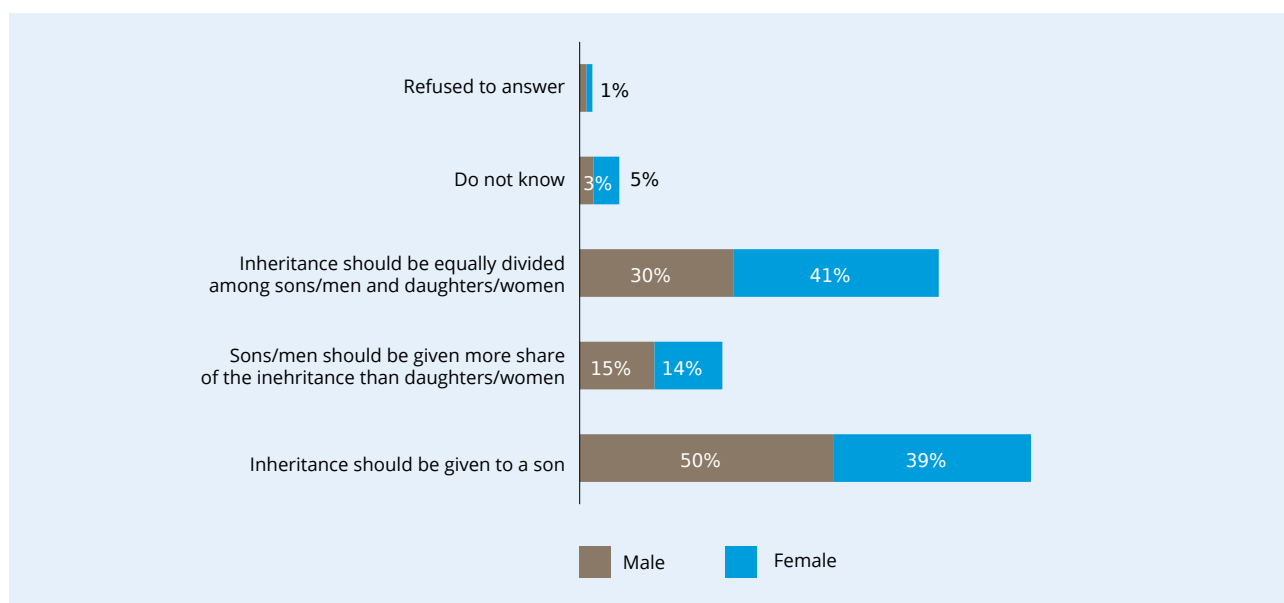
## 6. GENDER ATTITUDES, TRADITIONAL NORMS, FAMILY CONFLICTS, VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN, AND EMOTIONAL STATE OF WOMEN

Both quantitative and qualitative data show that traditional gender attitudes and views prevail in high mountainous regions in Georgia, which hinder women's economic advancement, chances to own prop-

erty while restraining resource management fronted by women. These perspectives have an impact on family power relationships and women's psychological state.

**Chart no. 6.1:**

Gender Attitudes: Distribution of Family Inheritance



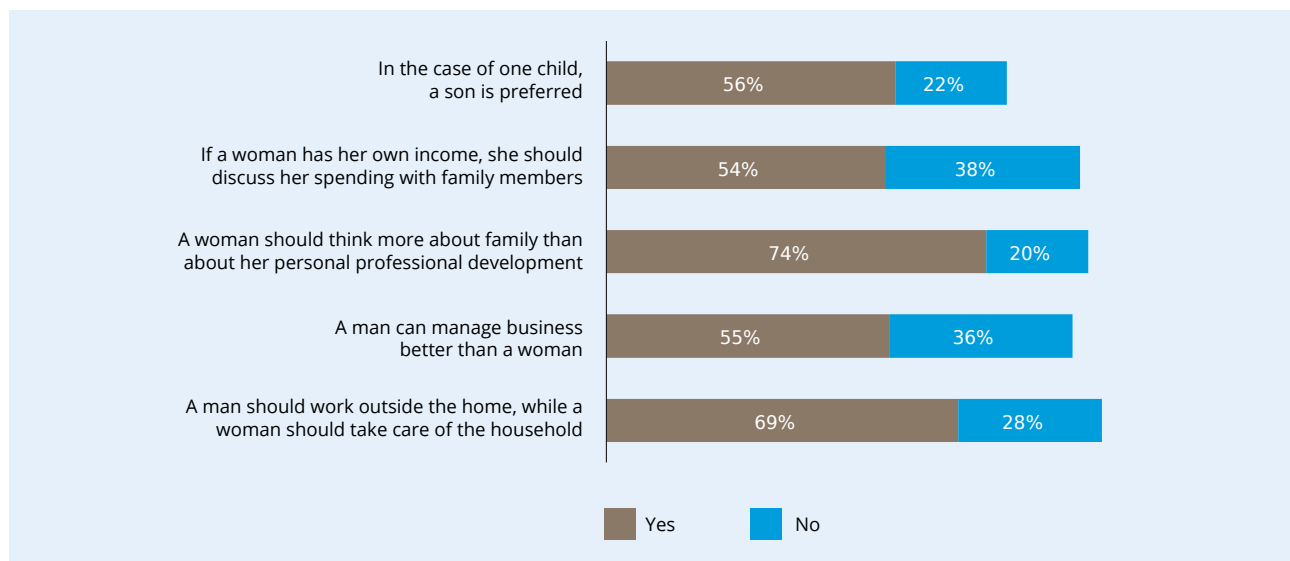
According to the survey, the majority of respondents state that family inheritance should be delivered to the son, hereby, more female than male respondents state that inheritance should be equally distributed among heirs (see Chart 6.1.). The qualitative research showed that most families in high mountainous regions consist of two generations. Women and girls

mostly live in the houses of their fathers or husband's parents. Sons are regarded as the heirs of their fathers' houses/property who would sustain the family while girls are prepared for marriage and move to stay with their husbands' families.

*"I have one brother and I love him more than anyone. It is right that a girl should get married and leave. If a girl builds a career and does not get married, she can live with her brother, that's acceptable as well". / Girl, single, aged 16/*

*"If I could leave, I would have done so, how could I go to my father's house with my children?! I couldn't put my brother's fate and future at risk. Who wants a sister-in-law who has returned to her parents' with her children?! If I had my own house, it wouldn't have been a problem, I wouldn't let anyone get on my nerves, but what can you do when that is not the case..." /Woman, married, unemployed, aged/*

**Chart no. 6.2:**  
Gender Attitudes



The results of the quantitative research reveal that in the high mountainous regions of Georgia, the distribution of functions in or outside the family and the autonomy of individuals is strictly determined based on gender (see Chart 6.2.). The majority of respondents (69%) support the traditional views that men should be working outside the family and women should lead the household. The opinion that men can manage business better than women (55%) and that even if women had a personal income they should not be spending it independently (56%), prevails among the respondents. In addition, it should be mentioned that gender hierarchy, where men enjoy unequivocal priority, is revealed in the majority of surveys (56%), which, at the same time, demonstrate a preference of a son over a daughter in case of having one child.

In the framework of the qualitative research, women also spoke about the issues of marriage. Most of the interviewed women named love as the main motivation for marriage, though many elderly and middle

aged women stated that their marriages were based on family arrangement or bridal kidnapping. Divorce is culturally unacceptable and takes place only in extreme cases (e.g. violence against women, adultery from the husband's side). Women have to withstand permanent conflicts and humiliation for the sake of their children's wellbeing with the absence of a father considered to be a serious problem. They rarely discuss the apparent lower social status of divorced women, or the impossibility of returning to their fathers' families.

*"Divorce was not much accepted in Svaneti...I used to constantly think that I would leave in a day or two...he turned out to be a very careless and irresponsible man, I thought he'd change but the years went by..." /Woman, divorced, aged 34/*

*"Cases of divorce are not frequent, but there are many unstable families on the brink of ruin, it's better to divorce than have a family like this"/Woman, unemployed, single, aged 28/*

Women and girls are reluctant to discuss marriages based on bride kidnapping, as this custom is seen as backward. The respondents prefer to outline that this kind of marriage practice was more widespread in the past and that currently the main motivation for marriage is love. However, in conversations it transpired that although the number of cases had decreased, the bride kidnapping practice is still widespread in the mountain regions and is regulated by cultural norms (deals and agreements between the relatives). Women and girls have no power against this practice as they are economically fully dependent upon their parents and emotionally they would not dare to contradict this discriminative practice. Even though in the post-Soviet period many women living in the district centres and rural areas took the role of the family's main breadwinner, men are still considered as economic providers and female dominance in economic performance is not perceived as normal. But, at the same time, the respondents mention women's economic empowerment as necessary in contemporary Georgia. As social demands consistently grow, women's contribution to the household economy is strongly needed. Women and girls gave a positive evaluation of women's political participation as they regard women to be more prudent, careful, and diplomatic, as well as more socially sensitive. As such, they claim that their involvement in political processes would make politics more fair and humane.

Women are reluctant to discuss family conflicts and domestic violence as they believe doing so would "feed the rumours" and they would want to receive sincere sympathy and support. Nevertheless, most of them believe that "sharing" is a fundamental human requirement and without friends and colleagues, with whom they are able to express their worries, their lives would be unbearable. Women share their secrets mostly with their female friends or daughters. Very few women named their spouses as emotional supporters and advisors. To share their problems and express emotional distress, young girls mostly communicate with their close friends and rarely with family members. As for causes of family conflicts, the interviewed women underscore economic hardships and the irresponsible attitudes of their husbands, as well as shared family or children-related problems. Similar shortcomings in men were also identified as the main factor for women's labour migration.

Most women avoid discussions on experiences of violence, though their stress and nervousness at the moment of conversation provides a basis to suppose

that they might have experienced significant psychological and emotional traumas in the past and may well still be subjected to discrimination and oppression.

The main characters of the conflicts in the home involve daughters, mothers-in-law, sons, fathers and sisters-in-law; rarely does conflict occur between mothers and daughters or grandchildren and grandparents. Conflicts between brothers and sisters are also rare as for most sisters, their brothers' wellbeing is of immense importance. Sisters-in-law usually avoid conflicts between each other and "entrust" the resolution of conflicts to their spouses. If there are two daughters-in-law in the father's house, the families make efforts to split up, as, in many cases they cannot live together.

The majority of interviewed women, irrespective of their marriage or social status, outline that they do not feel happy and are permanently stressed because of their children: if the children study and are physically far away from their mothers, the women feel uncomfortable, and if they live together with their children, the mothers continuously worry about their future and lack of opportunities. Most parents/mothers are convinced that their children, who have left for the cities and have succeeded there, would never return and that they would be left alone and in need of care.

Most of the girls believe that there is nothing in the districts and villages what would stimulate them to return (e.g. education or entertainment centres or institutions required for and encouraging development). In addition, girls feel that the limitations imposed by cultural norms apply strictly to them. Therefore, they perceive leaving their parents' families and villages as an important means of finding freedom and identifying new, interesting opportunities for personal development.

The majority of women in the high mountainous settings are not aware of the key directions of state policies, relevant programmes and strategic views oriented towards dealing with the problems of the mountainous regions and their development. This concerns both local self-governments and legislative and executive authorities. Women respondents are not informed about their rights to possess or request information on the policies, programmes and the region's budget. Moreover, the local government has an obligation to deliver such information to them.

# 7. RECOMMENDATIONS

The needs and priorities identified by the study lead to the following recommendations:

## **a) Recommendations for advancing women's socioeconomic status**

- Provision of supplemental education programmes for local women in small- and medium-sized business planning, management and administration;
- Allocating mini-grant programmes to promote the establishment of women-fronted initiative groups/organizations aimed at women's advocacy for policy change to the local municipality;
- Offering mini-grant programmes to support women's business activities in agricultural production, developing the local industry and their cultural initiatives;
- Stimulating business loans instead of consumer loans. This issue is especially important for women, as research has shown that real estate proprietors are mostly men. Hence, women have less chance to use real estate as a guarantor of a business loan;
- Developing youth-oriented education centres;
- Raising awareness of public health insurance to increase access to the state health programmes: the research has shown that despite existing health problems, only a small share of respondents (13%) reports recent visits to the doctor's. Besides, transport infrastructure and location is a significant hindrance for transportation. Under such conditions, access to qualified medical consultation in district centres and villages of mountainous regions will be a promotional factor for improving the population's health condition;

mountainous regions will be a promotional factor for improving the population's health condition;

- Solving energy supply problems – according to the quantitative research, 92% of the population use firewood as a source of heating, and only 6% use gas heaters. Under such conditions, increasing access to natural gas or implementing energy efficient technologies to ensure energy provision is crucial.

## **b) Recommendations for the elimination of gender-based practices**

- Provision of special awareness-raising programmes for local women regarding violence against women and girls and domestic violence; dissemination of information on existing services in cases of domestic violence;
- Funding local women-fronted initiative groups for gender awareness raising and reducing gender discrimination practices in regional centres and villages;
- Supporting the organisations working on women's issues in sharing local and international experience in combating violence against women with women residing in mountainous areas;
- Allocating funding for local women to establish continuous education centres and to enrol in current educational networks and coalitions;
- Supporting women's political advancement – developing skills to increase the local women's political participation and their involvement in local government elections. Stimulating political parties to increase women's political participation.



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