



ევროკავშირი
საქართველოსთვის

GEORGIAN LEGISLATIVE INITIATIVE ON “FOOD LOSS AND FOOD WASTE REDUCTION, AND FOOD DONATION”

GENDER IMPACT ASSESSMENT

EU4GENDEREQUALITY
REFORM HELPDESK

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ABBREVIATIONS

CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women
GIA	Gender Impact Assessment
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations
HACCP	Hazard Analysis Critical Control Point
HORECA	Hotels, restaurants and catering
ISET	International School of Economics at Tbilisi State University (TSU)
ITU	International Telecommunications Union
NDI	National Democratic Institute
OXFAM	Oxford Committee for Famine Relief
RIA	Regulatory Impact Assessment
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UN Women	United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This Gender Impact Assessment (GIA) of the Georgian legislative initiative (hereinafter the draft law) on "Food Loss and Food Waste Reduction, and Food Donation" was assessed by a working group formed for this specific purpose. The group included committee members and personnel from the Permanent Parliamentary Gender Equality Council, the Agrarian Issues Committee and the Office of Environmental Protection and Natural Resources Committee. The research was conducted with the assistance of the EU4Gender Equality Reform Helpdesk project, funded by the European Union (EU).

Since February 2021, the Agrarian Issues Committee of the Parliament of Georgia has been actively working on the aforementioned draft law. During this time, meetings were held with hotels, restaurant and catering (HORECA) industry leaders, non-governmental, international and charity organisations, and state agencies. As a result, the draft law was developed with the active involvement of representatives of the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) and the involvement of experts.

The draft law aims to prevent and reduce food loss and waste at every stage of the food supply chain, and stimulate food donation, recovery and redistribution.

The study of the Georgian context revealed that the draft law has the potential to contribute positively to overcoming gender inequality. However, the State did not take gender factors into account during the initial stages of the law's development, when it established the initiative's primary directions.

To identify and analyse specific needs, the Gender Impact Assessment working group devised a unique methodology and identified research participants. The team also examined recent data and international practices, and conducted qualitative research. Finally, the working group analysed the statistical data gathered, alongside the findings of five in-depth interviews.

The research revealed that there are no gender-specific approaches to or normative frameworks for food loss, food waste reduction, and food donation in Georgia. Typically, regulatory documents in the field do not account for the needs of vulnerable groups or examine gender equality issues. The goals and outcomes of gender equality are not considered during strategic planning cycles.

Furthermore, women in Georgia have limited access to essential information, technology and infrastructure due to a lack of appropriate financial resources, on the one hand, and prevalent socio-cultural norms, on the other. These contribute to an increase in food loss and waste. At present, the state does not conduct public awareness campaigns to prevent and minimise food loss and waste. Similarly, relevant statistical and analytical data is scarce.

Finally, it is important to recognise that this baseline context severely impedes the development and implementation of policies that are effective, inclusive and gender-responsive. To overcome these shortcomings, the Gender Impact Assessment Working Group developed recommendations for the draft law and state policy.

In addition to drafting this report, most of the recommendations regarding the draft law were incorporated within the upcoming project initiative. Future consideration should be given to the second part of the recommendations, which pertain to the implementation of pertinent policies at the level of law enforcement – primarily by Georgia's Ministry of the Environment and Agriculture, and the municipalities. A substantial portion of the recommendations are dedicated to the importance of collecting and processing gender-disaggregated data.

CHAPTER I.

GENDER IMPACT ASSESSMENT CONTEXT

Georgia is actively implementing the principles of good governance and developing evidence-based policies. Accordingly, pilot studies are being drafted at the legislative and executive levels in preparation for the eventual institutionalisation of the Gender Impact Assessment (hereafter referred to as the GIA). In the context of the GIA, normative acts to be approved and enforced, policy documents, and programmemes have been analysed across multiple domains and levels, allowing the assessment to determine the extent to which a particular decision/initiative will have a positive or negative impact on gender equality. With regard to GIAs, the international community and donor organisations strongly urge the adoption of good governance principles, frequently assisting state agencies in the process of gender mainstreaming¹ through expert or technical assistance. Furthermore, through international agreements and treaties such as the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW)², the Georgia-EU Association Agreement and Agenda³, and United Nations Sustainable Development Goal 5 ('Gender Equality'), the country has committed to gender mainstreaming.

Since 2018, the gender impact of several legislative initiatives in the Georgian Parliament has been analysed. These include:

- The Assessment of the Gender Impact of Labour Legislation Reform (Gender Equality Council of the Parliament of Georgia, 2017).
- The Gender Impact Assessment of Georgia's Drug Reform (Gender Equality Council of the Parliament of Georgia, 2017).
- The Gender Impact Assessment on the draft law of Georgia on "Physical Education and Sport" (Parliament of Georgia, 2019).

Documents pertaining to the GIAs of the aforementioned legislative initiatives were developed with the support of the United States Agency for International Development's (USAID) Good Governance Initiative (GGI), the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the National Democratic Institute (NDI).

The Permanent Parliamentary Gender Equality Council supervises the incorporation of Gender Impact Assessments into the legislative process of the Georgian Parliament. In April 2021, a working group was established within the Supreme Legislative Body, comprised of members of the Gender Equality Council, representatives of donor organisations, the Advisor to the Prime Minister of Georgia on Human Rights Issues and representatives of the government administration. Several working meetings were held within the framework of the working group. With the technical assistance of the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN Women), a methodology was developed that envisions a two-stage process of Gender Impact Assessment. Specifically, the Council will perform the primary coordinating function and, using a so-called mandatory list, will determine which laws/initiatives require a comprehensive Gender Impact Assessment.

During the preparation of this report, the Permanent Parliamentary Gender Equality Council of the Georgian Parliament and the Committee on Human Rights' Protection and Civil Integration developed a proposal to amend the Georgian Organic Law "On Normative Acts." This was initiated to comply with one of the 12

¹ Gender mainstreaming is the systematic integration of the priorities and needs of women and men in the process of policy formation, implementation, monitoring and evaluation, in order to promote gender equality. See: <https://tinyurl.com/bdeeehn9>

² Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, UN General Assembly resolution 34/180 of 18 December 1979, <https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/cedaw.pdf>

³ Association Agreement between the European Union and the European Atomic Energy Community and their Member States, of the one part, and Georgia, of the other part, <http://tiny.cc/8852vz>

recommendations of the European Commission aimed at promoting gender equality. The legislative initiative requires the inclusion of gender equality impact assessment in the explanatory notes of the draft law and the bylaw. With this endeavour, Georgia presents a proclamation in principle regarding the significance of the GIA system in the current legislative process and in achieving substantive gender equality.

Furthermore, the Council's 2022–2024 Action Plan emphasises the importance of institutionalising the GIA methodology, outlined within activity 1.4 of the Action Plan. Moreover, indicator 1.4.2 states that in the 2022–2024 period, within the three committees of the economic bloc, trained employees of their apparatuses will assess the gender impact of each legislative initiative, under the mentorship of the Council (Gender Equality Council, 2022).

Within the framework of this commitment, the working group selected the Agrarian Issues Committee of the Georgian Parliament's draft law on "Food Loss and Food Waste Reduction, and Food Donation" (working title), to examine its gender impact. In May 2022, a working group comprised of members of the Permanent Parliamentary Gender Equality Council, the Agrarian Issues Committee of the Georgian Parliament, and the Committee on Environmental Protection and Natural Resources, as well as their staff members, was established for this purpose.

Expert technical assistance for the Gender Impact Assessment of the Georgian law on "Food Loss and Food Waste Reduction, and Food Donation" was provided by the EU4Gender Equality Reform Helpdesk, a partner project of the Council. The project is financed by the European Union and implemented by NIRAS in all six Eastern Partnership countries. Its objective is to assist the governments of the Eastern Partnership countries, and EU Delegations in these countries, to integrate gender equality principles in policy development and implementation.

1.1. Methodology

The goal of this specific GIA is to ensure that gender considerations are taken into account throughout the drafting phase of the proposed law on "Food Loss and Food Waste Reduction, and Food Donation." To achieve this objective, the working group researched the diverse demands, characteristics and behaviour patterns of the draft law's target groups, and analysed its impact on gender equality. As a result, the GIA identifies key concerns that must be incorporated into the legislation and processes of policy drafting, implementation and evaluation in this field.

The draft law was evaluated between July and October 2022. The process included the following stages:

a) **Preparatory work** – An introductory meeting was held between the EU4GenderEquality Reform Helpdesk team, representatives/staff of the Parliament of Georgia's Environmental Protection and Natural Resources Committee, the Agrarian Issues Committee, and the Permanent Parliamentary Gender Equality Council. Participants received information about GIAs and formulated an action plan accordingly. In addition, a working group was established, and the structure of its actions was decided upon.

b) **Desk research** – This stage consisted primarily of a literature review. In particular, the team analysed the following documents: national legislation regulating the areas of food loss, waste and donations; the Strategy of Agriculture and Rural Development of Georgia 2021–2027 and Action Plan 2021–2023; the National Waste Management Strategy 2016–2030 and Action Plan 2022–2026; and the Agriculture and Rural Development Strategy of the Autonomous Republic of Adjara 2021–2027. The group also reviewed international practice on the issue, including pertinent literature, articles and reports by international organisations (UN Women, the World Bank and the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), among others). In addition, the GIA team solicited and utilised the experiences/policies of other nations in the areas of food loss, food waste management and food

donation for comparative study. Finally, all major strategic and political reports of Georgia (of both general and sectoral significance) were reviewed.

c) **Qualitative research and analysis of existing data** – At this stage, the GIA team conducted five in-depth semi-structured interviews. The interviews were conducted with the FAO Gender Equality, Social Inclusion and Extension Officer; a representative of the Caritas of Georgia charitable foundation; a representative of the Association of Farmers of Georgia; representatives of the social service and free canteens in the Municipality of Samtredia; and researchers from the International School of Economics (ISET) at Tbilisi State University (TSU) Research Institute who prepared a Regulatory Impact Assessment (RIA) report for the draft law.

The purpose of the in-depth interviews was to: a) study gender inequalities, problems and their causes in the field of food loss, food waste and food donation; b) determine the potential impact of the proposed law on existing gender problems and challenges; and c) become familiar with the respondents' perspectives on addressing the identified gender disparities.

In addition, as part of the research, the team examined the food provision practices of municipal free canteens. In particular, the following issues were of interest: the selection criteria for beneficiaries, the dissemination of information on programmes, how well food provision is adapted to beneficiaries' needs, whether gender stereotypes and stigmas exist in the field of food donation, and how the programme is monitored, among other issues. To this end, the team conducted semi-structured interviews by telephone with the relevant departments of the municipalities of Zugdidi and Rustavi and obtained gender-segregated data on beneficiaries of free canteens and food subsidies in four major Georgian cities: Tbilisi, Kutaisi, Batumi and Zugdidi.

d) **Existing database analysis** – At this stage, gender-disaggregated data on the recipients of free canteens and food financing in four major Georgian cities (Tbilisi, Kutaisi, Batumi and Zugdidi) were requested and analysed.

e) **Gender Impact Assessment and report development** — During this step, the acquired data (at the last stage) was assessed from a gender perspective. The gender impact of the legislation was assessed using the following criteria:

(i) An analysis of norms and values, comprising the following components: identifying existing gender roles in the food loss and waste generation life cycle; examining the attitudes and associated behaviours of women and men concerning food waste, loss and donation; and identifying existing gender stereotypes.

(ii) An analysis of the gender composition of food donation programme recipients; examining the gender statistics of the population living in extreme poverty in the country, as well as the gender distribution of labour in the food production process; and analysing the participation of women and men in the decision-making process.

(iii) An analysis of the availability of resources (time, land, information, finances, economic power, education, etc.) from a gender perspective.

(iv) A gender discrimination and sensitivity analysis of the regulatory legislation/policy.

The subsequent phase involved the examination of gender impacts and the development of legislative recommendations.

The Gender Impact Assessment of the draft law revealed that, on the one hand, the inclusion of gender dimensions during the policy drafting process and the implementation of relevant mechanisms remains a

challenge for Georgia. On the other hand, Georgia has no food loss and waste management policy or food donation policy in place. In particular:

- **The area subject to regulation remains essentially ungoverned.** Food loss and food waste management, as well as food donation, are not expressly included in the studied strategic documents, such as the Waste Management Code and Plan. Consequently, neither gender-specific techniques nor appropriate frameworks for gender equality have been developed. In general, strategic planning cycles in Georgia do not take gender objectives and outcomes into account.
- **There is an absence of gender-disaggregated data.** The generation of gender-disaggregated data in food donations only began in 2021, and data requested/received in writing or via interviews from governments confirm this finding. As a result, there is no data on gender patterns in terms of food donation that pre-dates 2021. In the absence of such information, it is impossible to tailor policies and budgets to the distinct needs of men and women.
- **Stakeholders willingness to cooperate is low.**
- **There is limited knowledge and experience of gender equality issues in Georgia's food loss, food waste reduction and food donation sector.** The work process revealed that the small number of existing gender experts in the country do not specialise in food loss and waste management issues. Nationwide, an insufficient number of studies are conducted in this sector, and critical data is not collected.

As such, the present Gender Impact Assessment was not as comprehensive as it may have been due to the aforementioned limitations.

1.2. Policy objective of the draft law on Food Loss and Waste Reduction, and Food Donation

1.2.1. Situation analysis

Food loss⁴ and the generation of food waste⁵ is a significant issue on a global scale. In total, 14% of the food produced for human consumption worldwide, or over USD 400 billion, is lost at various stages of the value chain and never reaches the consumer (FAO, 2019). In 2019, around 931 million tonnes of food waste was generated, with 61% coming from households, 26% from food service facilities and 13% from sales networks. Based on these statistics, it appears that 17% of the food produced worldwide goes to waste (11% in households, 5% in the food service industry and 2% in the sales network) (United Nations Environment Programme, 2021). Every day, food that is still edible is discarded by business owners, particularly large retail chains. It is a regular occurrence for them to have excess food that cannot be sold and must be discarded (FAO). In Georgia, the rate of municipal garbage creation per capita was 261.1 kilos per year in 2020,⁶ with biodegradable (food/animal feed) waste accounting for a considerable portion. While a substantial amount of food is wasted, 17.5% of the Georgian population lives below the poverty line.⁷

The creation of food loss and waste is a multifaceted process comprising environmental and socioeconomic factors. Climate change and environmental pollution are impacted when 17% of available food is wasted. About 8–10% of greenhouse gas emissions may be attributed to food waste. Moreover, the creation of additional resources to compensate for losses substantially impacts climate change; it limits food availability and adds to the global rise in poverty (HLPE, 2014).

⁴ Food loss is a decrease in the quantity or quality of food caused by the decisions and actions of suppliers in the food supply chain; decisions of retailers, food service providers, and consumers are not included. Source: Georgia draft law on "Food Loss and Food Waste Reduction, and Food Donation".

⁵ Food waste is leftover food at a certain stage of the food supply chain due to the actions of participants in the food supply chain. Source: Draft law of Georgia on "Food Loss and Food Waste Reduction, and Food Donation"

⁶ National Statistics Office of Georgia, Environmental Statistics, <https://tinyurl.com/mw7xee3d>

⁷ National Statistics Office of Georgia, Share of the population below the absolute poverty line, 2021, <https://tinyurl.com/3v69vxzv>

Notably, food waste is not addressed in any Nationally Determined Contribution (NCD) documents developed by countries under the Paris Agreement.⁸ Thus, this issue is not addressed by Georgia's NCD (Georgian Government, 2021). These issues are also not included in the country's agriculture and rural development policy for 2021–2027.⁹ Moreover, there is no food loss and waste management (reduction and prevention) policy or strategy in place. The Waste Management Code and other pertinent policy documents (national and municipal regulations) govern general waste management, reduction and recycling, etc., but exclude food loss and waste. Such obstacles indicate that the issue is not receiving appropriate attention, which will have long-term detrimental effects on social, environmental and economic contexts (FAO, 2019).

Since there is no special legislation in Georgia to control food loss or waste and to encourage food donations, charitable organisations primarily provide their beneficiaries with purchased food. They believe that if they also receive food donations, they could double the amount of food supplied. For instance, 50% of the Caritas free canteen programme's budget is allocated to food purchases, even though these funds could be used to meet other beneficiary requirements if a food waste or loss management system, and a robust food donation system were in place (FAO, 2019). In addition, considerable costs are incurred for financing municipal free canteens. According to statistics collected from Georgia's four largest cities (Tbilisi, Batumi, Kutaisi and Zugdidi) for this assessment research, a total of 22.1 million Lari was spent on municipal canteens in 2021, and this figure increases annually. Free canteens acquire food and meals through public procurement and do not accept donations.

Reducing food loss and waste, and effectively coordinating and controlling this process, is crucial for environmental protection, food security and economic stability. Creating a sustainable model in this field, considering best practices from Europe and other nations, is essential for Georgia. However, current legislative norms do not fully address existing challenges.

1.2.2. Purpose of the draft law

At present, there is no legislative framework which regulates and promotes food donation in Georgia. According to tax regulations, food donation is not favourable for businesses. Since donated food is liable to sales tax (15%) and profit tax (18%), supermarkets refuse to give away excess food. It should be noted that current tax legislation also provides preferential conditions. In particular, the supply of goods to a charitable organisation during a calendar year is exempt from profit tax, which does not exceed 10% of the company's net profit from the previous calendar year (Article 983, Part 3, Subparagraph "a"). According to market participants, however, this criterion is ineffective and insufficient to stimulate food donation. Therefore, Georgia generates a substantial amount of food waste, which could be donated to the most vulnerable members of society (CENN, 2021).

Considering this context, **it is advisable to have a framework document that establishes the primary goals, objectives, principles and rules of the game in the food loss and waste management domain, and encourages food recovery and donation, rather than disposal.**

A law in Georgia is the normative act that defines obligatory guiding principles in a specific field and controls the principal rights and responsibilities of the persons involved. The Waste Management Code focuses primarily on reducing waste and processing it in an environmentally responsible manner; it does not prioritise food. As such, it is necessary to develop a separate law to articulate the fundamental importance of food loss and waste management.

Since February 2021, the Agrarian Affairs Committee of the Georgian Parliament has been actively working on the aforementioned legislative initiative. Throughout this period, meetings were held with industry leaders in

⁸ Paris Agreement, adopted on 12 December 2015 and entered into force on 4 November 2016, <https://tinyurl.com/2ahxe9uj> (for the ratified version of the agreement in Georgian, see: <https://tinyurl.com/2p9bszrk>)

⁹ Georgia's Agriculture and Rural Development Strategy 2021–2027 and Action Plan 2021–2023, <https://tinyurl.com/4mu6erx7>

the hotels, restaurant and catering (HORECA) sector, non-governmental and international organisations, charity groups and state agencies. As a result, with the active cooperation of FAO officials and expert, a legislative initiative was drafted. Therefore, in addition to this present Gender Impact Assessment, a Regulatory Impact Assessment (RIA) is being prepared for this legislative proposal.

During 22–28 August 2022, a Georgian delegation visited France and Belgium, where representatives of Georgia’s legislative, executive and local authorities familiarised themselves with existing practices and approaches. In addition, meetings were held with the government sector and food banks, as well as with private sector leaders that operate in the field of food loss, and with the Federation of European Food Banks. Consequently, the delegation analysed a model that was more suitable for Georgia. During the development of this report, policy-makers made relevant amendments to the draft law.

The purpose of the draft law of Georgia on Food Loss and Food Waste Reduction, and Food Donation is to prevent and decrease food loss and waste at every step of the food supply chain and to stimulate food donation, recovery and redistribution.

To prevent food loss and waste, while fostering social solidarity, the proposed legislation aims to:¹⁰

- Improve food security within the country.
- Encourage the distribution of surplus food to beneficiaries and the expansion of access to safe food.
- Promote the donation, distribution and utilisation of surplus food.
- Minimise and reduce negative environmental impacts.
- Develop and implement policies to reduce food loss and waste.
- Implement awareness raising activities, promotional initiatives and programmes for all food supply chain participants.

Prior to the implementation of the GIA, the list of primary objectives of the proposed law suggests that gender dimensions were not considered while formulating the main directions of the policy to promote social solidarity and reduce food waste. Although the proposed legislation's objectives are relatively broad, the policy in this area must be inclusive and gender-responsive.¹¹ Presuming that potential gender inequalities in food loss and waste, as well as the food donation sector, are acknowledged, and gender-specific policies are implemented, the proposed law can be reinforced with a gender perspective and thus become more inclusive.

1.2.3. Overview of the draft law on Food Loss and Waste Reduction, and Food Donation¹²

The draft law comprises the following essential elements.

The draft law will establish a new **food waste management hierarchy**, which mimics the hierarchy established by the Waste Management Code and adds a food-specific step, as illustrated in the table below.

№	Hierarchy of food waste management (draft law)	Hierarchy of waste management (Waste Management Code)
1.	Preventing food loss and waste generation at each step of the food supply chain	Prevention

¹⁰ Note: During the writing of this report, revisions to the statute were made as a result of a visit to France and Belgium. The views presented by the FAO Gender Team (which were shared) were also reflected in the draft law and are discussed in sub-section 3.2 of this report.

¹¹ Gender-responsiveness refers to a persistent, durable and systematic response to the disparities between men and women in society, with the objective of addressing structural gaps in gender equality. See: UN Women, Gender Impact Assessment Methodology 2021.

¹² Note: This chapter discusses the version of the proposed legislation prior to revisions, before the policy-makers took into account the recommendations provided by the FAO Gender Team and GIA report.

№	Hierarchy of food waste management (draft law)	Hierarchy of waste management (Waste Management Code)
2.	Donating, recovering and distributing surplus food in compliance with food safety and quality standards	
3.	Transforming surplus food into animal feed or other non-food goods	Preparation for reuse
4.	Recycling surplus food	Recycle
5.	Employing excess food to generate energy	Other types of recovery, including energy recovery
6.	Disposing of food waste at landfills	Placement

According to the proposed legislation, **the Georgian Ministry of Environmental Protection and Agriculture** is entrusted with developing and implementing appropriate supportive measures to promote food waste reduction and food redistribution. Measures include:

- The implementation of initiatives/programmes to raise **awareness** and encourage donations.
- The adoption of food waste and loss awareness campaigns and training programmes.
- The creation of food loss and waste training programmes.
- The preparation of a guideline on donation principles.

In the section on food donation, the proposed legislation emphasises charitable actions and food charity organisations (food banks). These organisations can accept donations of surplus food, preserve it and redistribute it to other food banks/charities, or directly to beneficiaries.

Food-related charitable operations are subject to authorisation, which will be the responsibility of the State Revenue Service, and the authorisation procedure will be established by an executive order. The proposed legislation imposes the following requirements on food banks (food charities):

- To redistribute surplus food in line with the requirements defined by the legislation.
- To adhere to food safety regulations established by law and to be guided by standards aligned with the Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Points (HACCP) system.
- To develop and approve an annual action plan and financial report.

The Tax Code must reflect the changes made by the legislative initiative, namely:

- A participant in the food supply chain who donates food to a charitable organisation is exempt from value added tax (VAT) under the law.
- A participant in the food supply chain who donates food to a charity organisation, free of charge, is exempt from profit tax.

Furthermore:

- The proposed legislation requires municipalities to incorporate the hierarchical principles of food waste management into their waste management plans.

- According to the proposed legislation, the National Statistical Office of Georgia is responsible for conducting statistical analyses of food loss and waste, and for processing pertinent data.
- The proposed legislation defines keywords, including food donation, food waste and loss, food distribution and recovery, excess food and food recycling.
- The draft law establishes a deadline for food donations. In particular, donation is permitted even after the expiration of the food's minimum term of validity (the "best before" date), provided that the food satisfies Georgian law's safety criteria.
- The proposed law specifies the minimum technical requirements for food donation, recovery and distribution. The Government of Georgia will be responsible for the adoption of the regulation.
- The legislative proposal amends the Food/Feed Safety, Veterinary and Plant Protection Code to penalise family production entities and company operators for violating the rules governing food charity, donation and distribution.
- Moreover, "food waste" will be added to the definition of terms in the code governing waste management. In addition, preparing a food waste management strategy will become compulsory, alongside an accompanying action plan.

1.2.4. National objectives of food loss and waste management, and food donation

To determine Georgia's national objectives, the working group reviewed international and domestic literature, reports and other documents on the subject. Consequently, a review of international and national thematic framework documents and plans was prepared, taking gender equality concerns into account.

Gender mainstreaming during policy planning and implementation is essential for achieving gender equality. This approach, in turn, requires that the State considers the distinct demands of women and men in key policy papers and laws, and evaluates their respective impacts. Therefore, while determining the purpose of a state policy or law, it is vital to assess the extent to which gender equality considerations are taken into account, and what impact a particular policy document or law has on the status of women and men.

International legal framework

In 2015, the Georgian government committed to align national policy with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). In 2020, the United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Agreement was signed, under which the Government of Georgia and the United Nations agreed to collaborate on achieving national development priorities, the SDGs and other international obligations.

The progress analysis of Georgia's achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals demonstrates that the country's development plan and association agreement cover 93% of its sustainable development targets (Government of Georgia, United Nations Georgia, 2020). Furthermore, according to the Global Report on the Sustainable Development Goals, Georgia has made significant progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals, ranking 73rd of 162 countries (Government of Georgia, United Nations Georgia, 2020).

SDG 12 (Responsible Consumption and Production) supports the reduction of food loss and waste. However, within this goal, only SDG target 12.8 has been focused on by Georgia ("By 2030, ensure that people everywhere have the relevant information and awareness for sustainable development and lifestyles in harmony with nature"). Other targets of SDG 12 are directly related to food waste and loss. In particular, SDG target 12.3 aims to halve per capita global food waste at the retail and consumer levels by 2030 and reduce food loss along production and supply chains, including post-harvest losses.

The table below presents SDGs relevant for food loss and food waste reduction, food donation, and gender equality, as well as targets established for Georgia.

Table 1. Sustainable Development Goals related to gender equality and the main tasks that Georgia has committed to

SDG	Target
SDG 1 (No Poverty)	Target 1.2: By 2030, reduce at least by half the proportion of men, women and children of all ages living in poverty in all its dimensions according to national definitions.
SDG 2 (Zero Hunger)	<p>Target 2.2: By 2030, end all forms of malnutrition, including achieving, by 2025, the internationally agreed targets on stunting and wasting in children under 5 years of age, and address the nutritional needs of adolescent girls, pregnant and lactating women and older persons.</p> <p>Target 2.4: By 2030, ensure sustainable food production systems and implement resilient agricultural practices that increase productivity and production, that help maintain ecosystems, that strengthen capacity for adaptation to climate change, extreme weather, drought, flooding and other disasters and that progressively improve land and soil quality.</p>
SDG 5 (Gender Equality)	<p>Target 5.1: End all forms of discrimination against all women and girls everywhere.</p> <p>Target 5.5: Ensure women’s full and effective participation and equal opportunities for leadership at all levels of decision making in political, economic and public life.</p> <p>Target 5.a: Undertake reforms to give women equal rights to economic resources, as well as access to ownership and control over land and other forms of property, financial services, inheritance and natural resources, in accordance with national laws.</p>
SDG 12 (Responsible Consumption and Production)	Target 12.8: By 2030, ensure that people everywhere have the relevant information and awareness for sustainable development and lifestyles in harmony with nature.

Source: Government of Georgia, 2019.

One of the five long-term outcomes of the United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Agreement, signed by the Government of Georgia and the United Nations in 2020, Outcome 3, is closely related to the issue of food loss, waste and food donation. It affirms that **by 2025, all individuals, without discrimination, will benefit from a sustainable, inclusive and resilient economy in Georgia.**

Figure 1. Long-term outcome of cooperation agreement: Outcome 3



Source: United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Agreement 2021–2025 (Government of Georgia and United Nations Georgia, 2020).

Although food loss and waste reduction/prevention are not explicitly listed in the list of targets of Outcome 3, this issue is crucial for attaining this outcome, alongside improving food systems and promoting equitable agricultural development.

The SDGs and Objectives for Georgia show that the targets set by the State in response to international commitments include managing food loss, waste and food donations, eradicating poverty, and reducing gender inequality.

National legislative framework

The key normative act at the legislative level is the **Food/Feed Safety, Veterinary and Plant Protection Code**.¹³ Its purpose is to "protect human life and health, consumer interests, animal health and welfare, and plant health, as well as to define the unified principles of state regulation and to form an effective system of state control in the fields of food/feed safety, veterinary and plant health" (Article 1, Section 1). With this code, the State prioritises

¹³ Food Products/Animal Feed Safety, Veterinary and Plant Protection Code, Legislative herald of Georgia, 25 May 2012, <https://tinyurl.com/zvtxthxm>

food safety control and the establishment of an effective system for the management and utilisation of food stocks. Furthermore, the **Waste Management Code**¹⁴ established a legal framework in the field of waste management "to implement measures that will facilitate waste prevention and its increased re-use, as well as environmentally safe treatment of waste." The Code defines biodegradable waste as "waste that may undergo anaerobic or aerobic decomposition, including **food/feed waste**, garden/park waste, paper and cardboard" (Article 3, Sub-paragraph "g"). In addition, it stipulates that the Ministry of Environmental Protection and Agriculture of Georgia must develop a 15-year national waste management strategy, a 5-year national waste management action plan, and a biodegradable municipal waste management strategy every five years. The Code also mandates municipalities to adopt municipal waste management plans. However, the Biodegradable Municipal Waste Management Strategy, required by the law, has not yet been prepared. This strategy should have identified goals and procedures to decrease the amount of biodegradable waste disposed of in landfills.

The legislative analysis indicates that Georgia has no explicit policy for regulating food loss and waste. The National Waste Management Strategy and accompanying Action Plan are two distinct policy documents concerning waste management, prevention, reduction, recycling and redistribution. They do not address food loss and waste management explicitly.

It is essential to highlight that the Waste Management Code's objectives do not explicitly address gender equality issues. The Gender Impact Assessment team analysed the National Waste Management Strategy 2016–2030¹⁵ and other pertinent documents (see Table 1). The analysis reveals that food loss and waste management is not being handled as a standalone issue, and its relationship to the Strategy and Action Plan is unclear. Strategies for waste management do not account for gender inequality in the industry, as well as the diverse requirements, roles and significance of women and men in food loss and waste management. When there is no distinct legislative framework in a country to decrease food waste or losses and to encourage food donation, and when this issue is viewed as part of a broader policy, it is very difficult to evaluate the gender-sensitivity of a policy in this area.

Table 2. Results of the gender assessment of strategic documents regulating food loss, waste and donation

Strategic document	Gender assessment results
Georgia's National Strategy for Agriculture and Rural Development for 2021–2027	<p>The strategy envisages the diversification and development of economic opportunities in rural areas, as well as the improvement of social conditions and living standards based on the principles of sustainable development. It encompasses three goals and 16 tasks.</p> <p>Goal 3 covers "Effective systems of food/feed safety, veterinary and plant protection". It encompasses the following four objectives:</p> <p>3.1. To align Georgia's sanitary and phytosanitary regulatory legislation to EU legislation.</p> <p>3.2. To ensure that products supplied to local and export markets comply with sanitary and phytosanitary standards.</p> <p>3.3. To develop laboratory capacities.</p> <p>3.4. Quality assurance of agricultural inputs.</p> <p>The strategy does not address problems concerning food management</p>

¹⁴ Waste Management Code, Legislative Herald of Georgia, 12 January 2015, <https://tinyurl.com/2v5jvx4n>

¹⁵ National Waste Management Strategy 2016–2030 and National Action Plan 2016–2020, <https://tinyurl.com/5dthfc6d>

Strategic document	Gender assessment results
	<p>systems. Furthermore, in the monitoring section, the Ministry's document only includes the following general entry: "<i>Gathering and processing of gender-disaggregated data will begin in stages.</i>" This entry cannot guarantee the identification of measurable results. In addition, specific indicators for the performance of the assigned task have not been provided.</p>
<p>National Waste Management Strategy 2016–2030</p> <p>National Waste Management Action Plan 2016-2020</p>	<p>The strategy's goal is to harmonise Georgia's waste management development process with European waste management policy.</p> <p>Georgia's vision for waste management is as follows:</p> <p>Georgia aspires to become a country focused on waste prevention and recycling, which will be accomplished through the following steps:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Implementing waste prevention, re-use, recycling and recovery measures. • Collecting municipal waste across all of Georgia's territory. • Separating waste at source (the point of waste generation). • Introducing full cost recovery. • Enacting broader obligations for producers. • Establishing public-private partnerships. <p>The waste management strategy and accompanying action plan do not address gender equality issues and do not account for the various waste management demands of women and men. None of the objectives and accompanying indicators of the strategy are gender-specific.</p>
<p>Agriculture and Rural Development Strategy of the Autonomous Republic of Adjara 2021-2027</p>	<p>The strategy prioritises a) economic, b) environmental protection and c) social objectives. The following sub-objectives relate to food loss, waste and donations in these three categories.</p> <p>a) Economy</p> <p>Sub-objective 6: Promoting food supply chain development, processing, marketing and animal welfare.</p> <p>b) Environment</p> <p>Sub-objective 4. Restoration and strengthening of ecosystems – agriculture and forestry.</p> <p>c) Social</p> <p>Sub-objective 6. Promotion of social integration, poverty alleviation and economic development in rural areas.</p> <p>The strategy does not distinguish between food waste and food loss. Food supply and waste management challenges are not specified as separate objectives or goals. Nonetheless, in the context of the economy, the chain of food product creation and the eradication of poverty in rural regions involves enhancing women's access and encouraging their involvement in</p>

Strategic document	Gender assessment results
	vocational training and programmes of the Autonomous Republic.

Research demonstrates that strategy documents and sectoral laws fully reflect international objectives at the national level. **However, these strategic documents do not reflect the objectives linked to these goals or indicators for their measurement.** Furthermore, the law does **not regulate food supply management**, which is only presented in a fragmented manner within the section on waste management. **The interests of vulnerable groups and gender equality challenges are not given sufficient consideration.**

1.3. Gender relevance of the legislative initiative on Food Loss and Food Waste Reduction, and Food Donation

Based on its goals, the legislative initiative on "Food Loss and Food Waste Reduction, and Food Donation" can substantially impact the state of gender equality in Georgia. Therefore, it is crucial to examine these issues while creating policies on food loss, waste reduction and food donation, as gender disparities are also a challenge in these areas.

This section outlines the significance of food loss, waste reduction and food donation from a gender perspective, as well as the present and potential relationships between policies adopted in this field and gender inequality. Gender equality compliance was evaluated across all three dimensions (loss, waste and donations) using international literature. The gender impact evaluation technique employs four criteria: (1) participation, (2) resources, (3) norms and values, and (4) rights.

1.3.1. Food loss

It is vital to analyse food loss through a gender lens since socio-cultural, economic and gendered interactions impact the position and role of women and men in the food value chain. Several factors contribute to food loss, including inefficient harvesting techniques and equipment, a lack of infrastructure and storage facilities, the failure of cooling systems and storage technologies, and a lack of expert knowledge. International experience indicates that gender stereotypes and socio-cultural norms exacerbate the problem of food losses. As a result, women have limited access to the food value chain and resources, such as infrastructure, information, technology and the labour market, resulting in a substantial increase in food losses (FAO, 2011).

Social norms define different processes in the food value chain (namely, who performs them, how, where, when and under what conditions) and influence how resources and benefits are divided among participants. Due to discriminatory attitudes and practices, gender inequality creates disparities between women and men in their ability to acquire and manage the resources necessary to conduct operations. This has a number of detrimental consequences on the efficiency of the food value chain (FAO, 2018).

In the global agricultural sector, nearly 37% of the workforce is comprised of women, highlighting the unique role women play in the food value chain (FAO, 2020). They play a key part in production and post-harvest operations, including sorting, processing and storing food in different regions around the world. According to data from 2020, women account for 36.6% of the individuals (90,300 persons) employed in Georgia's agriculture, forestry and fishing industry. Furthermore, according to the same source, 46.2% of self-employed women work for free in family businesses or on family farms, compared to only 14.4% of self-employed men (National Statistical Service of Georgia, 2021). Regardless of their employment status, women in Georgia dedicate three times as much time as men to unpaid household labour. Women report spending around 45 hours per week on household chores, compared to 15 hours per week spent by men (UN Women, 2018).

As such, when developing a policy designed to reduce food loss, it is essential to bear in mind the gender inequalities that exist in the food value chain in terms of access to crucial infrastructure, resources, technology and information. In addition, the employment rate of women and men in the food value chain and existing disparities should also be recognised. Thus, it is essential to examine gender perspectives on food waste and adjust policies to address current needs.

1.3.2. Food waste

Food waste is a major challenge worldwide. Its existence indicates that all the resources invested in food production, transportation and distribution processes have been wasted. In addition, composting food waste generates methane, a potent greenhouse gas that contributes to global warming. When many people live below the poverty line and lack sufficient food, food waste represents a missed opportunity to eradicate hunger and poverty. Consequently, the impact of food waste can be classified into three categories: environmental, economic and social (Seberini, 2020).

Therefore, the proper sustainable management of food waste is crucial. It should be noted that the role of women and men in this process is distinct. Accordingly, these disparities should be considered when developing a policy for managing food waste.

Households produce the majority of food waste. As stated at the outset of this assessment, according to estimates from 2019, 61% of the world's food waste is generated by households (United Nations Environment Programme, 2021). This highlights the importance of gender norms, values and the distribution of labour in the field of food waste generation.

To assess the relevance of gender for this issue, the following factors should be taken into account:

a) **Distribution of household chores.** In traditional societies such as Georgia, women are responsible for household management and food-related issues (e.g. food procurement, storage, preparation, household waste management, etc.). Due to these daily responsibilities, women play an important role in reducing food waste, recycling and altering related behaviour patterns (Brenner, 1995).

b) **Household responsibilities for waste disposal.** Gender is a major dividing factor when it comes to views regarding waste disposal, primarily due to the division of household chores. In Georgia, women undertake most family responsibilities, including on food-related matters. Consequently, it is only natural that women generate more waste.

According to recent studies, women are more inclined to purchase local and organic food because they are more concerned with the nutritional and sustainability-related qualities of food (Cholette, Ozluk, Ozsen, & Ungson, 2003). This minimises women's food waste because, according to research, consumers who buy local produce waste fewer vegetables, fruit and food in general (Jorissen, Priefer and Brautigam, 2015). On the other hand, men are less engaged in purchasing, storing and preparing food. Hence, they tend to pay less attention to the reduction of waste generation, separation and disposal of existing waste (Woroniuk and Schalkwyk, 1998).

Waste management policies must account for the distinct responsibilities of men and women in sorting and disposing of waste. Moreover, environmental messages are more successful when they are carefully tailored to their intended audience (women and men, respectively). If women are responsible for the disposal of organic waste, for instance, they should be the direct recipients of related messages. It may also be important to design specialised communication plans to ensure the effective delivery of information (Woroniuk and Schalkwyk, 1998).

c) How women handle waste depends on a range of factors. These include **contemporary socio-cultural processes, their level of education, environmental awareness, and women's involvement in societal**

affairs (Newberry, 2006). In addition, it is vital for women's empowerment that the State shows confidence in women and their abilities (Spaargaren, Oosterveer and Loeber, 2012).

d) Women tend to have less control over household finances, which can affect waste generation. For instance, a woman may wish to spend a substantial amount of money on waste disposal or recycling, whereas her husband may not see the need for it. At the same time, women are increasingly concerned about the impact of food waste on the family budget and often strive to avoid purchasing surplus food or products with a short shelf life (Cantaragiu, 2019). Thus, women are willing to dedicate more time to food selection and waste management, even though, on average, they have substantially less free time than men due to housekeeping responsibilities and unpaid care work (Woroniuk and Schalkwyk, 1998). Regarding the influence of gender on food waste management, researchers do not hold a unified position. According to some studies, women are less prone than men to turn food into waste (Principato, Secondi and Pratesi, 2015). Other studies suggest that single women produce more food waste than single men or couples (Koivupuro et al., 2012), while others indicate that young men and women produce equal amounts of food waste. Such contradictory findings imply that women's conduct may alter with age and marital status, resulting in a shift in their roles and responsibilities (Cantaragiu, 2019).

According to available research, women frequently feel guilty when they produce food waste or have to throw away food products, because they perceive it as a failure on their part to fulfill their domestic tasks and provide food for their families (Cappellini and Parsons, 2012). However, as people age, particularly when they are between the ages of 40 and 50, the discrepancy between women and men in this regard diminishes considerably (Cantaragiu, 2019). Gender is a crucial determinant in the generation and reduction of food waste (Everitt, Werf, Seabrook, Wray and Gilliland, 2022). Studies also show that during the COVID-19 pandemic, women paid more attention to food waste management and attempted to reduce it, and that women are in general more concerned about the negative impact of food waste and strive to reduce it (Iranmanesh et al., 2022).

1.3.3. Food donation

Food donation is among the most preferred methods for avoiding food waste. Donations permit society to prevent food waste, on the one hand, and to contribute to eradicating severe poverty and improving food security, on the other. FAO's definition of food insecurity is as follows: *"A person is food insecure when they lack regular access to enough safe and nutritious food for normal growth and development and active and healthy life. This may be due to the unavailability of food and/or lack of resources to obtain food"* (FAO, 2022). Consequently, food security is a broad concept that greatly affects the people's well-being, as it encompasses the physical and economic availability of food, alongside stable consumption.

Women and girls are especially susceptible to food insecurity due to the close relationship between food insecurity and gender inequality. In 2019, FAO estimated that more than 2 billion people (690 million people – 8.9% of the world's population) suffered from moderate and severe forms¹⁶ of food insecurity, with women and girls accounting for 60% of these persons (CARE, 2020). According to a 2017 study, a significant portion of the Georgian population is malnourished and does not consume a balanced diet. In addition, a substantial proportion of the population is at risk of losing food security¹⁷ due to unstable weather and fluctuations in production (OXFAM, 2017). Gender discrepancies in food and nutrition security are substantially greater among impoverished, less educated, unemployed and marginalised populations (Keulertz, Mulligan and Allan, 2020). In

¹⁶ Note: A moderate form of food insecurity refers to malnutrition, which can lead to a number of disorders (such as stunting in children, a lack of calcium and vitamins, or obesity in adults), while people who suffer from a severe form of food insecurity are on the verge of starvation and hardly eat. See: <https://tinyurl.com/2tajw26e>

¹⁷ Food security refers to the physical and economic access of all people to healthy food in the quantity and nutritional value necessary for an active and healthy life. See: FAO, Food Security Policy Brief, <https://tinyurl.com/3www4yf7>

addition, women are more likely than men to live in extreme poverty. After the pandemic, UN Women, UNDP and the Frederick S. Pardee Center for International Futures anticipated that in 2022, more women and girls (388 million) than men and boys (372 million) will be living in extreme poverty (UN Women, UNDP and the Frederick S. Pardee Center for International Futures, 2020).

According to the global Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI), 19.1% of the global population, or 1.2 billion people, lived in extreme poverty in 111 countries in the 2020–2021 period. Half of these people (593 million) are children under the age of 18, about 83% (964 million) of these persons reside in rural areas, while 17% (198 million) live in urban areas. One in every six low-income families is headed by a woman (United Nations Development Programme and Oxford Poverty and Human Development Initiative, 2022).

Human health and well-being, including physical, mental and social well-being, are adversely affected by food insecurity. Notably, this effect is more pronounced in girls and women than in boys and men due to several environmental factors (Belachew et al., 2011). Specifically, research indicates that girls and women who consume unhealthy foods are more likely than boys and men to become ill, have poor health and feel fatigued, regardless of their nutritional status, dietary diversity and socio-economic factors (Belachew, et al., 2013). In addition, the distribution of food and care demands among family members is influenced by social norms that favour boys over girls. Women and girls consume less nutritious food due to their subordinate position in the family (OXFAM, 2019). Therefore, in different contexts, social norms can disadvantage women and girls, resulting in gender stereotypes manifested in limited access to healthcare and the unequal distribution of nutritional resources (Belachew et al., 2013).

Poverty in women-headed households affects nutrition. Due to their decreased ability to purchase or grow high-quality, diverse food, women-headed households tend to shift to cheaper, less varied diets, which frequently lack essential nutrients required by pregnant women and young children (OXFAM, 2019). As a result, in 2019, according to the World Health Organization, one-third of all women of reproductive age had anaemia, typically caused by an iron-deficient diet. This also threatens their children's health and long-term development (WHO Global Anaemia Estimate, 2021).

In terms of food security, financial, economic and other crises make the population – and women in particular – more vulnerable. The COVID-19 crisis is an excellent example of this. The pandemic has drastically decreased the number of families that can purchase food regularly. It has also disturbed the food supply chain, causing food prices to skyrocket. In the context of soaring prices, the promotion of donations becomes more vital. In addition to strengthening society in general, food donation can have a favourable effect on gender inequality in the most disadvantaged segments of the country. According to figures from 2021, 17.5% of Georgia's population lives below the poverty line (a total of 652,316 people, including 330,268 women and 322,048 men).¹⁸

Analysis of existing gender roles and needs, gender differences in access to technology and relevant information, and the different involvement of women and men in the food production chain, indicates that the development of food donation and waste reduction mechanisms is a gender-relevant issue that can have a multi-faceted impact on gender equality.

¹⁸ The authors' calculations are based on the data of the National Statistical Service of Georgia.

CHAPTER II.

GENDER ANALYSIS OF THE LEGISLATIVE INITIATIVE ON “FOOD LOSS AND FOOD WASTE REDUCTION, AND FOOD DONATION”

2.1. Existing gender disparities in food production

In a comprehensive gender study, the Gender Impact Assessment Working Group examined the gender distribution of the primary target groups of the draft law and the gender inequality trends in food loss, food waste and food donation. The next step involved comparing the proposed modifications to existing trends and summarising the impact of the proposed law on gender equality.

In the scope of this study, the team investigated the gender distribution of agricultural employment and the associated norms and values as they impact national food loss.

According to data for 2020 from the National Statistical Service of Georgia, 16.5% of employed women in Georgia (90,300 women) are engaged in agriculture, forestry and fish farming. The corresponding figure for men is 22.4% (156,000) (National Statistical Service of Georgia, 2021). **Women are primarily responsible for cultivating family-owned properties. However, this has little impact on their economic and social standing because of the following factors:**

- a) **Women typically perform unpaid labour.** According to data from 2020, 46.2% of self-employed women work for free on family farms or in family businesses, while the figure for men is only 14.2% (National Statistical Service of Georgia, 2021).
- b) **It is less common for women to own agricultural or non-agricultural land.** According to data from 2021, the proportion of male agricultural landowners (67.9%) is significantly higher than that of female landowners (32.1%). Regarding the gender distribution of agricultural land owned by households, 80.7% of the total area is owned by men, while women own 19.3%.¹⁹

Georgian law places women and men on an equal footing in terms of property ownership and inheritance. **Nonetheless, women own less real estate due to discriminatory inheritance practices, gender stereotypes and restricted economic activity.** In addition, prevalent social standards frequently limit women's inheritance rights after marriage. Therefore, they have limited access to real estate owned by both their biological family and their husband or his family. Furthermore, women have restricted access to financial and credit products due to this practice. Therefore, just 19% of women have taken out loans backed by real estate. In Georgia, 61.5% of men and 26.4% of women inherit or receive real estate as gifts or inheritance, respectively (UN Women, 2018).

Women in rural Georgian communities **rarely identify as farmers** since they view their labour as a family obligation (FAO, 2018). In most situations, women's labour is unpaid and informal, as the majority of the population (including these women themselves) view women as family helpers. In addition, women are paid less than men in all agricultural industries where they are engaged. In 2020, the average salary of women working in agriculture, forestry and fisheries was GEL 630.7, which was 70% of the income of men in the same sector (National Statistical Service of Georgia, 2021). **General gender statistics indicate that men in Georgia hold higher managerial positions and earn more in the agricultural sector**, where far fewer women than men are formally employed (FAO, 2018).

In Georgia, **women have less access to transportation infrastructure than men.** The issue is especially pertinent for women living in rural areas (Public Defender of Georgia, 2021). Transportation issues are one of the causes

¹⁹ National Statistical Service of Georgia, Distribution of agricultural farms and their land area, <https://tinyurl.com/2p6mmev2>

of food loss and waste generation (Lipinska, Tomaszewska and Koozyn-Krajewska, 2019). Women who produced agricultural goods during the pandemic reported a significant drop in sales due to acute isolation and a lack of public transportation, according to ISET. Female producers usually use public transport to reach municipal markets, which was impossible due to the ban on traffic during the pandemic and strict isolation. As for male producers, they were able to deliver their goods using private vehicles and minibusses (ISET-PI, 2020).

According to a study conducted by the Public Defender of Georgia, women in the country do not have equal access to different modes of transportation, highlighting problems in public transportation and road infrastructure. Due to transportation system deficiencies, women's mobility rate differs significantly between urban and rural areas. In addition, a considerable percentage of them leave home not for their own needs but for the needs of their dependent family members (Georgian Public Defender, 2020).

Currently, a subject-based study on the accessibility of infrastructure (roads, transit, the internet and water) for women and girls is being conducted on the initiative of the Permanent Parliamentary Gender Equality Council. Its preliminary research findings are as follows:

- Despite the progress made in previous years, women's access to infrastructure resources remains a concern.
- The absence of public transport and the arbitrary work of private companies operating in the sector are noteworthy. This frequently results in hectic and unpredictable travel schedules and reduces the accessibility of municipal transit for those who rely on it.

In Georgia, **women and men have different levels of access to digital technologies**. According to a recent study on the production process, digital technologies are one of the most influential variables affecting food loss (Benyam, Some and Fraser, 2021). According to data from 2019 from the International Telecommunications Union (ITU), the percentage of women who use the internet in Georgia is 61.2%, while the share of men is 64.5%. While the gender disparity in mobile phone ownership is only 3%, the disparity between rural and urban areas is considerable (UN Women, 2020). The International Telecommunications Union reports that in 2021, 86% of households had an internet connection, 64% had a home computer, while 74% of households in rural areas had access to the internet. In Georgia, 76% of women and 77% of men use the internet, and 93% of men and 90% of women own a cell phone.²⁰

In terms of digital skills, the gender gap is even more significant within vulnerable groups (persons living in poverty, with low levels of education, who lack formal employment, or live in close proximity to border lines). In addition, women spend less time using digital technology and enhancing their skills because they devote more time to housework and have less time for other activities and studies. At the same time, gender stereotypes and violent family interactions impede them from using digital technologies. Typically, the abuser (often a man) restricts the victim's mobile phone usage (usually a woman). Women's access to technology is partially hindered by gender stereotypes, such as the belief that technology is exclusively for men (UN Women, 2018).

The draft law on "Food Loss and Waste Reduction, and Food Donation" intends to undertake food loss awareness campaigns and training activities, as well as to enhance the data collection system. The existence of a defined legislative framework in this area is a step forward in reducing food losses. Nonetheless, the **proposed law is relatively generic and does not take gender discrepancies in food loss into account**. Consequently, the framework law and accompanying normative acts must take into account gender inequalities related to the agricultural sector and food losses, such as women's low participation in paid activities, unequal land ownership, and unequal access to information, technologies and transportation. In this context, the proposed legislation (and subsequent legislation) will have a favourable effect on gender equality and minimise current disparities. **Therefore, it is important for the draft law to specify that food loss awareness efforts should be tailored and based**

²⁰ International Telecommunication Union, Digital development data, <https://tinyurl.com/4dnms7fp>

on an analysis of the current situation of the individual needs and capacities of men and women. In addition, when organising these efforts, the discrepancy in women's and men's access to digital technology should be considered.

Food waste and loss contribute to the continuation of food security. However, given that the food security of smallholder farmers in Georgia remains precarious, the cost of food loss can substantially affect their socio-economic standing (Georgia Farmers Association, 2020).

Data on food loss must enable gender-based analysis of the issue, for example, identifying where the most considerable losses are, which parts of the value chain are critical, whether this is related to existing gender disparities, etc. **Therefore, the availability of relevant data and monitoring current trends are prerequisites for implementing gender-responsive food loss reduction initiatives.**

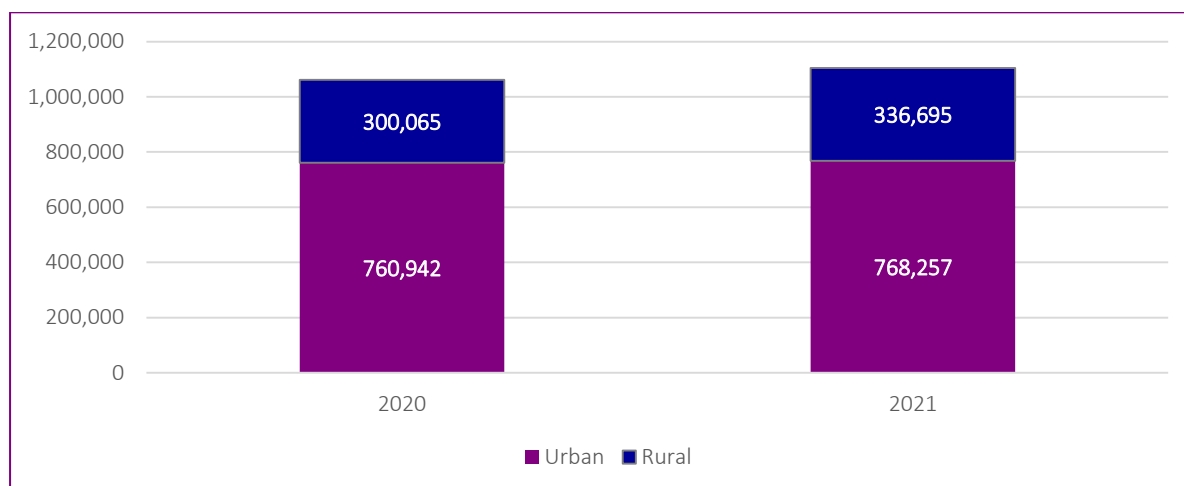
2.2. Primary challenges of food waste management

Without concrete policies in this field, it is challenging to discuss gender equality in the context of food waste management. The GIA team analysed relevant field research and existing data, which reveals that **food waste and gender linkages are not generally addressed in the waste management policy area. There is practically no research conducted in Georgia in this regard, and the gender-sensitivity of relevant policy-makers is extremely low.** In addition, there is a lack of information regarding food waste in general. Therefore, it was determined that the baseline scenario would provide an overview of the broad trends and concerns associated with food waste management.

According to the National Waste Management Strategy 2016–2030 and National Action Plan 2022–2026, the calculation of municipal waste generated in the cities and rural settlements of Georgia for 2020 and 2021 was based on the amount of municipal waste collected and placed in landfills, as well as a population-based waste generation index. According to estimations, the Waste Generation Index in Georgia in 2020 for **urban** areas averaged **0.95 kilogrammes per capita per day** (kg/m/day), excluding the number of visitors, and **0.54 kg/m/day for rural communities**. By comparison, waste generated per capita per day in EU Member States in 2020 was 1.38 kg on average. According to Eurostat, Denmark had the highest Waste Generation Index value in 2020 (2.32 kg/m/day), while Romania had the lowest (0.78 kg/m/day) (Eurostat, 2022). It is noteworthy that waste management in Georgia differs significantly from the five-step approach developed in the European Union. In the EU, prevention is considered the best solution, followed by reuse, recycling and other forms of repurposing, while landfilling is regarded as the worst form of waste disposal. Since Georgia's municipal waste management systems continue to prioritise landfills and only a minimal fraction of waste may be reused or recycled, Georgia's Waste Generation Index value may be considered to be high.

Compared to 2020, the total amount of municipal waste generated increased in 2021 (see Figure 1). According to 2020–2021 estimates, nearly 70% of such waste was produced in urban areas. As a result, the total volume of municipal waste was 1,061,007 tonnes in 2020 and 1,104,952 tonnes in 2021 (Ministry of Environmental Protection and Agriculture of Georgia, 2022).

Figure 1. Total amount of municipal waste generated in Georgia (tonnes)



Source: Ministry of Environment Protection and Agriculture of Georgia.

To determine the typical composition and proportion of waste components, their composition in 2021 was examined, revealing that organic waste, which includes food waste, accounts for 54.7% of municipal waste (see Table 3).

Understanding the World Bank's economic development criteria concerning the aforementioned indicator is telling. In particular, according to the data, as well as the development of the parameters of economic prosperity and income growth, the proportion of organic waste decreases (to roughly 32% in nations with high incomes) while the amount of paper, plastic and other waste increases. Waste separation is also responsible for the substantial drop in organic waste that accompanies a rise in income (World Bank, 2018). Due to non-systematic separation and low income relative to EU Member States, it is clear that the percentage of organic waste in Georgia's municipal waste, which is nearly 55%, should be viewed as a high indicator.

Table 3. Composition of municipal waste, 2021

Composition of municipal waste	Share
Organic waste	54.7%
Plastic waste	13.8%
Paper and cardboard	10.6%
Textiles	4.1%
Construction and demolition waste	2.5%
Glass	2.3%
Metal	1.4%
Other waste	11.0%

Source: Ministry of Environment Protection and Agriculture of Georgia

There are currently no **developed source separation systems** for municipal waste in Georgia. Therefore, the only components of the current waste management system are collection and disposal. According to recent data, the overall municipal waste collection and service coverage rate is 88.89%, ranging from 97.56% in urban areas to 63.5% in rural regions (Ministry of Environmental Protection and Agriculture of Georgia, 2022).

Following the Waste Management Code, and the National Waste Management Strategy and Action Plan, municipalities should have begun **gradually introducing waste separation systems** in 2019. However, no significant steps have been taken in this regard (unless we count one-off pilot projects in Tbilisi and Adjara, and the regions of Kakheti, Kvemo Kartli, Samegrelo, Shida Kartli, and Imereti).

Although the National Waste Management Policy promotes waste prevention and **recycling**, most municipal waste collected across Georgia is currently disposed of in landfills and not recycled. In addition, few municipalities collect and/or process biodegradable waste (Tbilisi, Kutaisi and Marneuli).

In Georgia, there is **no centralised collection and treatment infrastructure for biodegradable waste** (including food waste). At present, such waste is deposited in landfills and collected/processed solely through independent initiatives (projects). In Tbilisi, Kutaisi and Marneuli, partial composting facilities have been established, but with limited capacity. Therefore, modern biodegradable waste management methods need to be designed and implemented.

According to data from 2020, the rate of **biodegradable waste** produced in Georgia is between 45% and 60% of municipal waste. As noted above, this is a high indicator. Total national biodegradable waste amounted to 517,055 tonnes, 403,119 tonnes of which were produced in urban areas, while 113,937 tonnes were generated in rural regions (Ministry of Environmental Protection and Agriculture of Georgia, 2022).

According to the National Waste Management Action Plan for 2022–2026, the primary waste management concerns in Georgia are:

- The refinement of legislation and ensuring its complete alignment with EU regulations.
- The provision of complete municipal waste collection services to all communities.
- The implementation of a separate collection system for municipal household waste.
- The establishment of new landfills and transfer stations in line with international standards and the dismantling of outdated facilities.
- The development and deployment of systems for the collection and processing of construction and demolition debris.
- The enhancement of capabilities for hazardous waste management.
- The development and implementation of systems for biodegradable waste collecting and processing.
- The formulation and implementation of a tariff policy based on the "polluter pays" principle.
- The introduction of modern waste recycling technologies.
- The enhancement of the capacities and awareness of the involved parties.

The Gender Impact Assessment process revealed that the Government of Georgia does not conduct awareness raising on the reduction of food waste and the reduction of waste generation. According to the Environmental Information and Education Centre (a legal entity under the public law of the Ministry of the Environment and

Agriculture of Georgia),²¹ the sole goal of these campaigns and informational gatherings is to promote the implementation of enhanced producer obligations.

In an interview, a FAO representative revealed interesting findings. The respondent repeatedly emphasised the problem of a lack of gender-sensitivity among state legislators and the distinct vulnerability of women along the entire food chain. It is also important to note that just 23% of women have access to modern waste management technologies and information (FAO, 2018). In 2019–2020, for instance, with the assistance of the organisation and extension centres, over 100 personnel were trained, the vast majority of whom were men. Therefore, it is essential to implement training and approaches that emphasise women's economic participation and empowerment.

The waste management policy analysis demonstrates that gender mainstreaming has not been applied. The Action Plan does not address the diverse needs and approaches of women and men in the field of waste management, and campaigns to raise awareness do not include gender-responsive approaches. Georgia's waste management policy is gender-blind. This impedes sustainable development and the attainment of long-term goals related to waste management and gender equality.

Introducing an appropriate management hierarchy through a legislative initiative to increase the focus on food waste and its reduction is undoubtedly a step in the right direction. However, for the draft law to positively impact existing gender inequality, food waste policy must be gender mainstreamed. First, research should be conducted, and gender differences in the generation of food waste and losses should be analysed. Next, gender-responsive ways to reduce and prevent waste generation should be implemented, considering the barriers identified.

Poverty in terms of gender and age

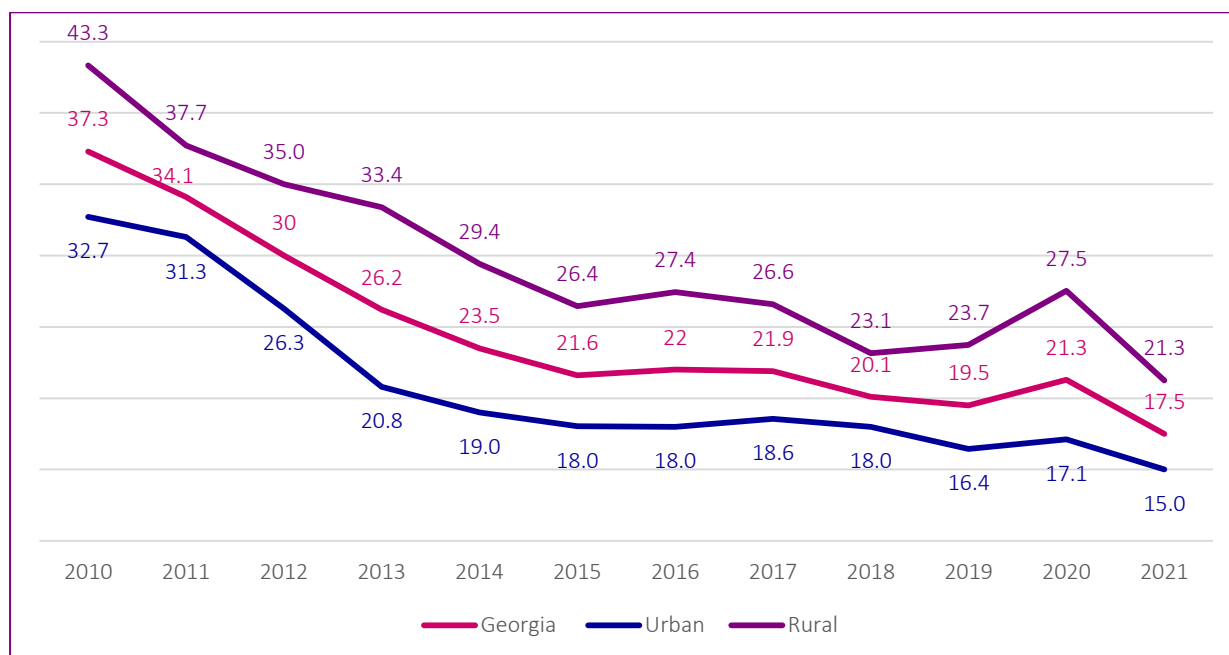
One of the most crucial tasks of the legislation is to promote food donation across Georgia. Consequently, it is vital to assess national poverty rates and the gender distribution of potential recipients of food donations.

In Georgia, the **poverty gap between women and men has narrowed drastically** over the past decade, with the national absolute poverty rate falling considerably between 2010 and 2021 (from 38.8% to 17.5%). Both urban and rural areas have experienced a decline in poverty (see Figure 2). However, it fell significantly more in rural areas than in urban centres between 2010 and 2015. Moreover, due to the pandemic, the country's poverty rate rose from 19.5% to 21.3% in 2020.

Despite overall positive trends in poverty reduction, **17.5% of Georgia's population continues to live below the absolute poverty line** (as of 2021). **From 2007 to the present, the poverty rate in rural areas has been higher than in urban areas (on average, by 7.8 percentage points)**. According to figures from 2021, 21.3% of Georgia's rural population and 15% of the urban population lived below the absolute poverty line.

²¹ The Environmental Information and Education Centre works in the following directions: promoting public environmental and agrarian education and raising awareness, encouraging public participation in environmental decision-making, and providing access to environmental and agrarian information.

Figure 2. Share of the population living below the absolute poverty line in Georgia, in urban vs rural areas (%)

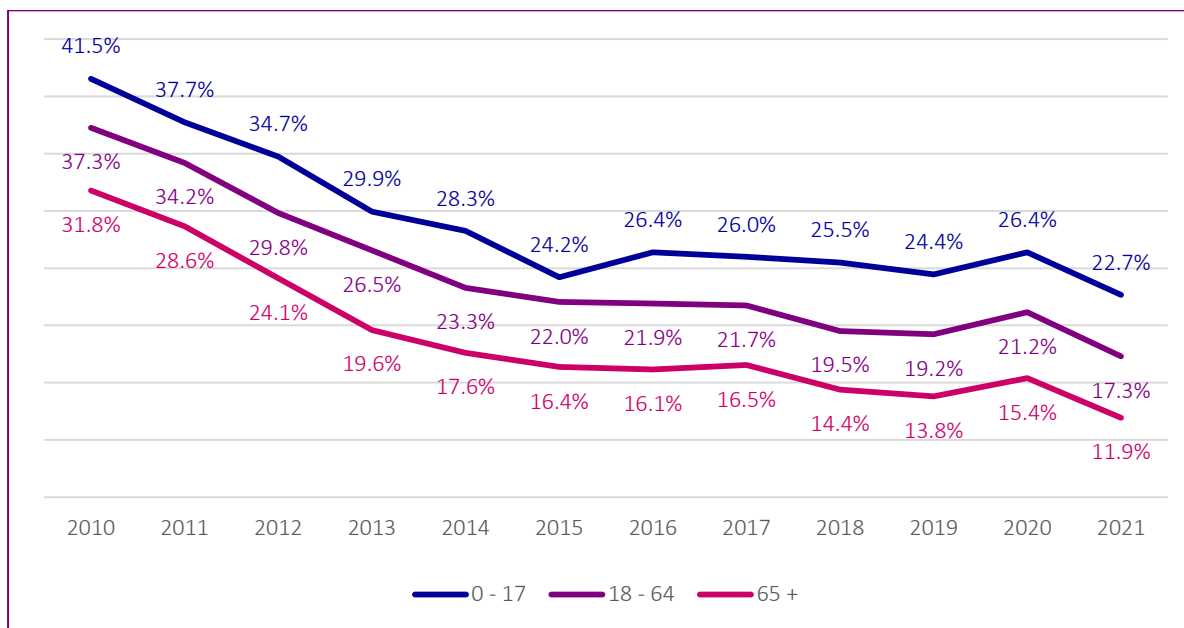


Source: National Statistical Service of Georgia, Share of the population below the absolute poverty line.

An age and gender analysis of people living below the absolute poverty line reveals that:

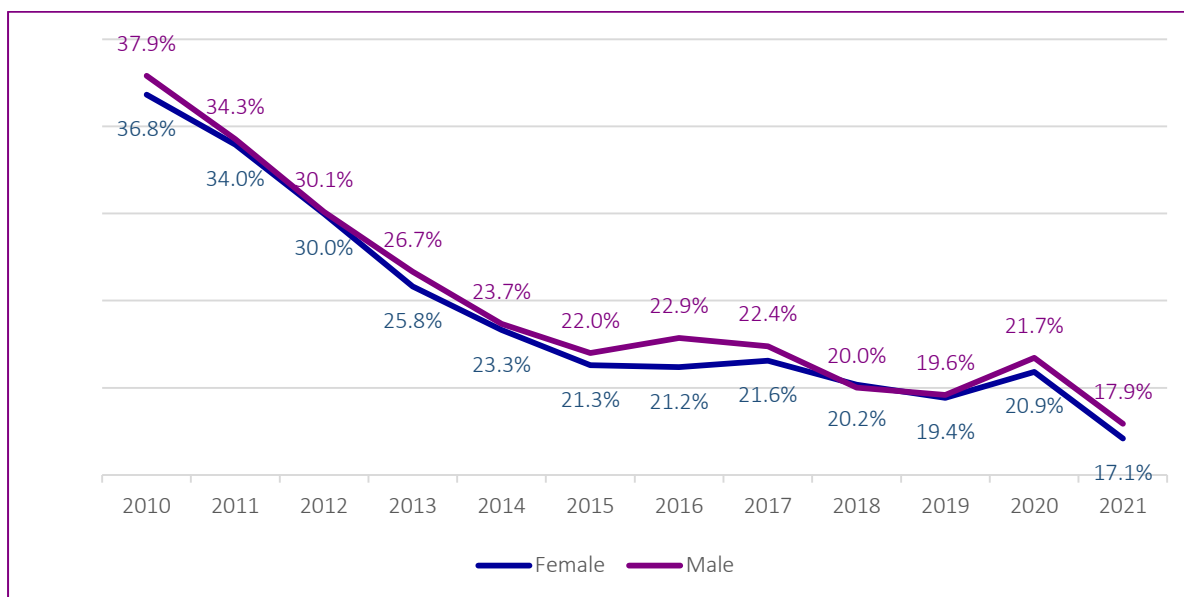
- Poverty reduction has had an equal impact on all age groups. However, children are the most vulnerable to poverty.** The proportion of the population below the absolute poverty line is always greater in the 0–17 age group compared to the 18–64 and 65+ age groups. In 2021, the poverty rate for the 0–17 age bracket was 22.7%, compared to 17.3% for the 18–64 age bracket and 11.9% for the 65+ age bracket (see Figure 3).
- The percentage of women and men living below the poverty line in Georgia is consistent from year to year, and follows a comparable downward trend.** It should be noted that a slightly higher percentage of men are living below the poverty line than women. Between 2004 and 2021, there was an average difference of 0.4 percentage points between the poverty rates of men and women (see Figure 4).
- Despite similar poverty rates, in terms of quantity, **more women are living below the poverty line in Georgia than men**, as the number of women in Georgia in general exceeds the number of men, particularly among the elderly (see Figure 5). It is important to note that this discrepancy was much larger several years ago. For example, in 2004, almost 60,000 more women were living below the poverty line than men in the country. Alongside the general trend of poverty reduction, this disparity has been decreasing since 2010.

Figure 3. Distribution of the population living below the absolute poverty line by age groups (%)



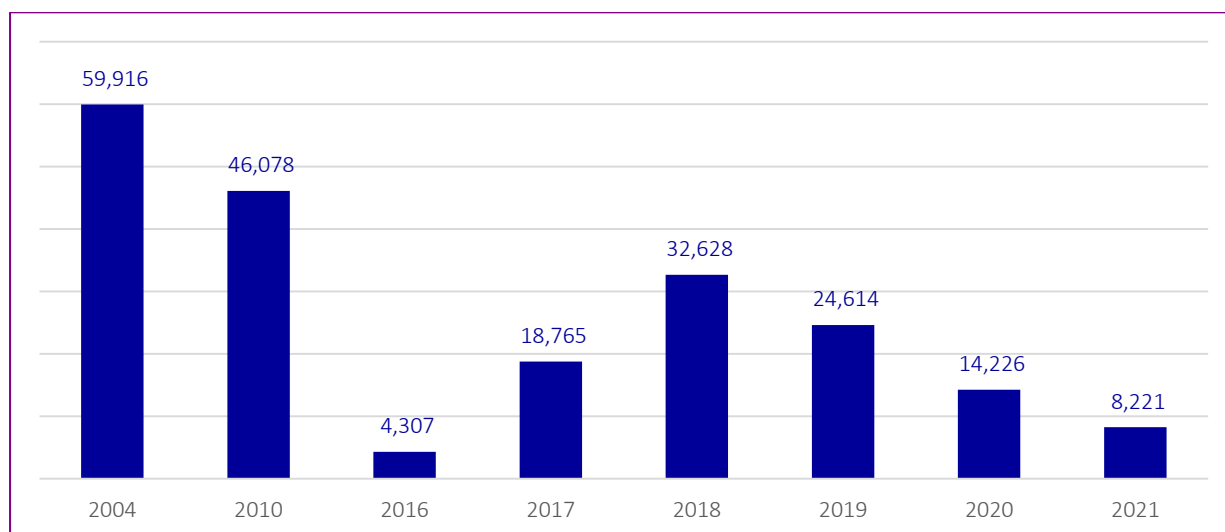
Source: National Statistical Service of Georgia, Share of the population below the absolute poverty line.

Figure 4. Distribution of the population living below the absolute poverty line by gender (%)



Source: National Statistical Service of Georgia, Share of the population below the absolute poverty line.

Figure 5. Difference between the number of women and men living below the absolute poverty line



Source: Authors' calculations based on the data of the National Statistical Service of Georgia.

Even though the national poverty rate is virtually identical for men and women, a deeper analysis reveals that this indicator differs for different groups of women and men. According to estimates by the World Bank based on Georgia's 2018 Household Income and Expenditure Survey (World Bank, 2021):

- The likelihood of living in poverty is much higher in households where **all adult members are women**. Analysis of 2018 data reveals that **39.3% of people living in all-women households live below the poverty line**. This is significantly higher than the 2018 national average of 21.3%. Remarkably, the comparable indicator for all-male households – that is, when all adult family members are men – is 19.7%.
- The probability of poverty is **3 percentage points higher** for households headed by women compared to those headed by men.
- **Families whose members have disabilities (26.0%) and/or children between 0 and 14 years old (23.9%) or between 0 and 17 years old (23.4%) have a higher rate of poverty than the national average.**
- **Divorced women are 10 percentage points more likely** than married women **to live in poverty.**
- **Education determines poverty levels.** Women who have not completed their secondary education are three times as likely to be poor than women with a university degree. This pattern also holds true for men.
- **Girls (between 0 and 14 years old) are the most susceptible to poverty.** In 2018, 26% of them were living below the poverty threshold.

It should be emphasised that the aforementioned estimates cannot provide a comprehensive picture because the evaluation of household incomes and expenses does not enable the determination of resource distribution between household members. Existing socio-cultural norms significantly influence this aspect. Even though women and men in Georgia experience the same levels of poverty, the World Bank study demonstrates considerable differences between groups.

Despite a general downward trend in poverty over the past few years, **the aggression of the Russian Federation towards Ukraine poses unique threats to food security**. According to the World Bank, the costs of agricultural goods whose production is driven by Russia and Ukraine are increasing at a record rate, as are the prices of fertilisers that rely on natural gas. From 2022 onward, a 20% yearly increase in agricultural commodity prices is anticipated. The accuracy of these projections is contingent on the duration of the current war and the

imposition of sanctions. Thus, they may be adjusted in light of future developments. Notably, wheat prices are expected to rise by more than 40% (World Bank, 2022). Russia and Ukraine together account for 25% of the global grain market. Wheat and corn prices have increased by 48% and 28%, respectively, since early February 2020, and by 79% and 38% year on year due to anticipated shortages. These circumstances promote local market inflation and diminish the population's purchasing power (World Bank, 2022). Without mitigating measures, these trends will increase food insecurity and poverty in the future and further exacerbate gender disparities in this area.

According to the current version of Georgia's draft law, charity organisations will be one of the primary links in the chain of food donations, and the transfer of food to them will be tax-exempt. Based on stakeholder consultations, these tax incentives are expected to increase food donations and reduce food waste in the retail chain.

As the baseline case study demonstrated, promoting food donation has a significant gendered impact. This is significant in Georgia because, as noted above, more women than men live below the poverty line and the probability of poverty is higher in families where a) all family members are women, b) the household is headed by a woman, c) the household includes children aged 0–14 or 0–17 and/or persons with disabilities. The likelihood of living in poverty is also greater among divorced women (compared to married women) and among girls aged 0 to 14. Given the influence on these vulnerable groups, it may be anticipated that increasing food donations will minimise the disparity in poverty rates between men and women. In light of the Russian Federation's aggression towards Ukraine and the global increase in food prices, the significance of this issue is heightened.

2.3. Gender-related challenges of municipal free canteens and catering practices

The Gender Impact Assessment team examined municipal free canteens and catering programmes in selected municipalities. Throughout the process, the team emphasised issues such as the gender distribution of programme beneficiaries, the criteria for participation, the methods for disseminating information about the programme, the degree to which the provision of food is adapted to the beneficiaries' needs, the existence of gender stereotypes and stigmas concerning food donation, and how the programme is monitored, etc. To this end, the team conducted semi-structured telephone interviews with relevant departments in the municipalities of Zugdidi and Rustavi, and obtained gender-disaggregated statistics on the beneficiaries of free canteens and food subsidies in four of Georgia's major cities: Tbilisi, Kutaisi, Batumi and Zugdidi.

Based on these interviews and relevant public information, it is clear that it remains difficult for municipalities to **compile gender-disaggregated statistics** on free canteens. In particular:

- Gender-disaggregated data on free canteen beneficiaries is not collected or processed with the subjects participating in the research.
- Six facilities provided gender-disaggregated beneficiary data to the research team, going back at least five years. Three provided comparable data for the preceding one to three years, whereas four provided only the overall annual number of recipients. One self-governing unit did not provide any data regarding free canteens to the working group.

The absence of gender-disaggregated data in this field demonstrates that municipal beneficiaries are viewed as a single homogenous group, which significantly impedes the implementation of gender-responsive policies.

Despite sending identical letters to all municipalities, the project team was unable to collect comparable data from all municipalities within the scope of the study. Consequently, for analytical purposes, the team grouped the data available based on the following criteria:

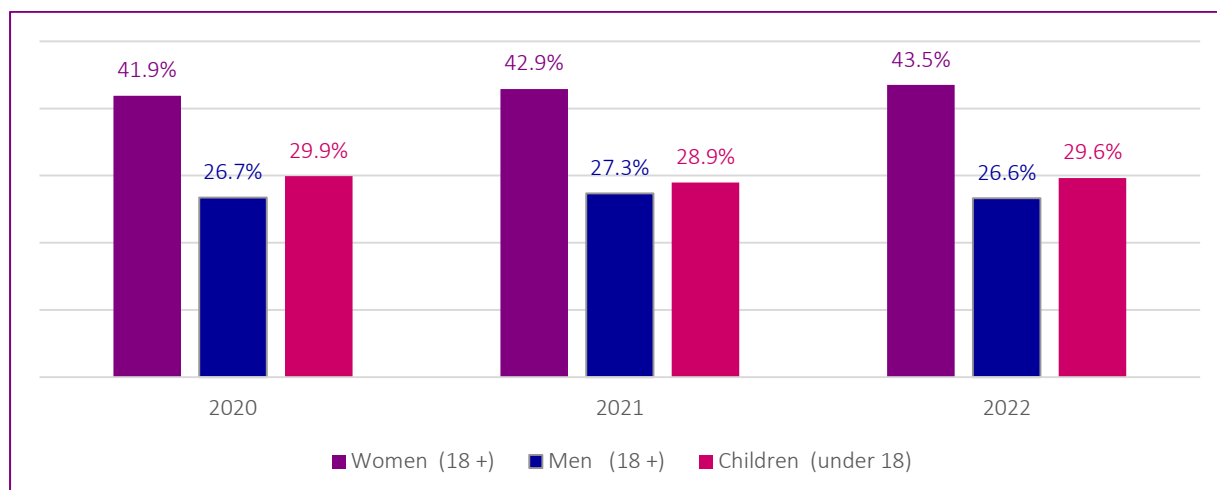
- Data where the number of adult female beneficiaries, adult male beneficiaries and minors (up to 18 years old) was distinguished.
- Data indicating the number of women and men among the beneficiaries (including children under 18).

According to the data assessment in which children were disaggregated into a distinct category, the **number of adult women using free canteens exceeds that of adult men. Children make up a sizeable proportion of beneficiaries.**

Analysis of the data, where it was impossible to disaggregate children (under 18 years old) reveals that, on average, **55-65% of the recipients were female.**

a) Based on data analysis of three districts in Tbilisi that were able to provide statistics disaggregated by gender and age, it is clear that, on average, **the number of adult women among free meal users exceeds the number of adult men – exceeding 40%. Children account for roughly 30%²² of beneficiaries.** This distribution has been relatively constant over time.

Figure 6. Share of beneficiaries of free canteens in three districts of Tbilisi – women and men (18+ years old), and children (under 18 years old)



Source: Information requested from Tbilisi districts.

b) According to records from the municipality of Zugdidi, the percentage of female (66%) and male (34%) beneficiaries has not changed drastically between 2011 and 2021. Female beneficiaries predominate in the municipality of Kutaisi, although the gender gap being relatively small. Thus, from 2011 to 2021, women accounted for around 55% of beneficiaries, while men accounted for 45%.²³

Notably, **the total number of beneficiaries utilising free canteens in the four cities covered in the study rose from 2014 to 2021, surpassing 50,000.** Surprisingly, this increase coincides with a drop in poverty rates, demonstrating that the demand for free canteens continues to outweigh supply.

²² The current statistics do not permit a gender distribution analysis of children.

²³ The data from Zugdidi and Kutaisi also includes children under 18 years old.

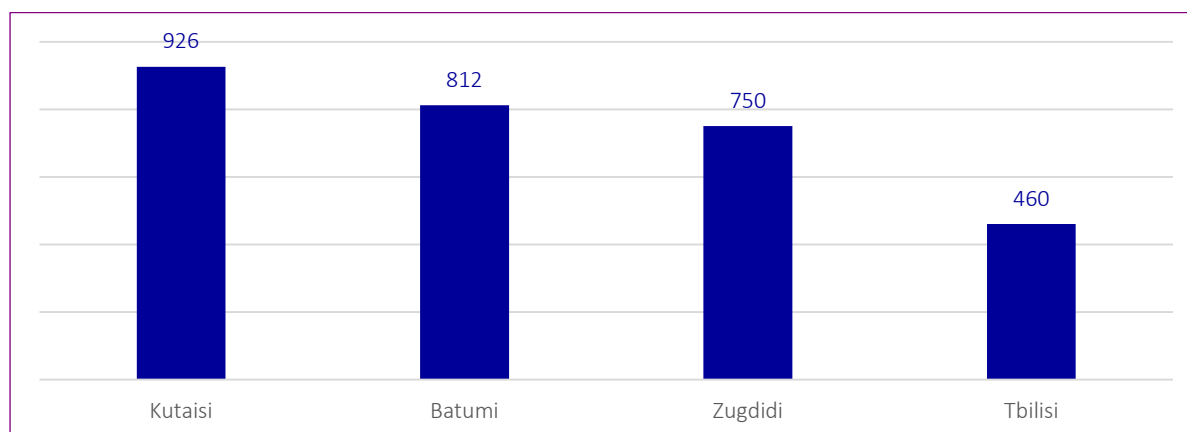
Table 5. Total number of beneficiaries utilising free canteens of identified self-governing entities by year

	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
Tbilisi	24,418	28,947	31,276	39,578	39,390	39,003	39,158	42,734
Kutaisi	700	800	800	800	800	800	800	800
Zugdidi	230	230	250	250	250	280	280	280
Batumi	2,623	3,021	4,021	4,521	4,779	5,182	5,800	6,258
Total	27,971	32,998	36,347	45,149	45,219	45,265	46,038	50,072

Source: Information requested from the self-governing units.

The amount granted to each recipient varies substantially by municipality, although it is important to emphasise that it is higher in the regions than in Tbilisi. This discrepancy may be the result of economies of scale or menu variations. For example, in the 2020–2021 period, GEL 926 was allocated annually per beneficiary in the municipality of Kutaisi, GEL 812 in Batumi, GEL 750 in Zugdidi, and GEL 460 in Tbilisi.

Figure 7 . Average amount allocated annually to each free meal beneficiary in the cities participating in the study, 2020–2021 in Georgian Lari (GEL)



Source: Information requested from the self-governing units.

Municipalities set the policies governing the selection of canteen beneficiaries (policies vary slightly from municipality to municipality). In particular:

- The programme in Tbilisi has been approved by the order of the Mayor of Tbilisi, No. 1-819 of 16 December 2021, "On free dining services by the territorial bodies of Tbilisi City Hall". The programme is limited to socially vulnerable individuals whose rating score does not exceed 200,000, according to their registration and/or actual place of residence. A person who meets the requirements is added to the list of beneficiaries who may access the requested canteen, based on the Social Welfare Agency's centralised database of socially disadvantaged families, which includes all members of the family stated in the extract.

- The municipalities of Batumi, Kutaisi and Rustavi all utilise the same strategy. Residents of Batumi and Kutaisi who are socially vulnerable and whose rating score does not exceed 65,000 are eligible for the programme. If emergency help is required in Kutaisi, an exemption may be granted with the mayor's approval. Individuals whose rating score does not exceed 100,000 are permitted to partake in the Rustavi programme.
- In contrast to the municipalities mentioned above, Zugdidi does not have specific social security restrictions on the use of free canteens. Instead, the Social Conditions and Circumstances Study Commission of Zugdidi Municipality City Hall selects beneficiaries based on candidates' applications and pertinent supporting documentation.

Information about these programmes is disseminated through various sources. Free Tbilisi canteens are promoted by social agencies,²⁴ municipal administrations and district offices. An additional list of potential beneficiaries is formed in the following manner: on the basis of an applicant's request, they are registered on the waiting list. Then, the individual who has been added to the additional list from the waiting list is contacted by telephone in advance and given information about when to come to the canteen of their choosing to access services. These lists are revised periodically (for instance, lists of beneficiaries in the municipality of Rustavi are updated once every month, and according to the respondent interviewed for this assessment, this approach is well-maintained with no modifications). According to the officials of the communities mentioned above, information about their programmes is available and promoted without gender considerations. However, the municipality of Zugdidi has adopted a different approach. Here, beneficiaries learn about municipal programmes through social media, personal interactions, the assistance of the mayor's unit of administrative officials, and the involvement of the civil sector. Although information is communicated through many channels, **the process of selecting and organising information sources does not account for gender differences in information acquisition**, according to the researchers.

At the same time, details of food provision and services in canteens differ by municipality. **Working days also vary**. In some self-governing units, these facilities are open every day, including on the weekends, whereas in others, they are only available from Monday through Friday. During the COVID-19 pandemic, beneficiaries were proactively provided with a meal or given non-perishable raw food.²⁵

The winning tenderer is responsible for the following services: allocating suitable space for free canteens at the locations stated in the bid, taking into account the number of beneficiaries, providing the necessary infrastructure, and supplying the facility with essential provisions. Personnel at the facilities must comply with relevant sanitary/hygiene rules and standards, and the free canteen must be conveniently **located** (for example, all four free canteens in the municipality of Rustavi are located near municipal bus stations). The relevant tender regulations require that the company maintains a distance of no more than 300 metres from a bus stop. When selecting the address, citizens' desire to use the programme in a certain area is also taken into account. Furthermore, beneficiaries of all the municipalities involved in the study are also provided with a free transport service. This improves women's and other programme participants' access to transportation services. **Nevertheless, the geographical coverage of the canteens remains questionable, as they primarily cover the urban population. The lack of free canteens in rural areas is a serious issue**, especially given that Georgia's rural poverty rate is higher than the rate of poverty urban. Consequently, this issue should be considered in the proposed legislation or its supporting materials. Alternatively, municipalities could offer additional incentives to charitable organisations that deliver food to rural populations.

²⁴ Note: When a citizen receives the status of being 'socially vulnerable', they are given detailed information about social programmes which they can benefit from, based on assigned points.

²⁵ Note: During the pandemic, due to COVID-19 regulations, free canteens were replaced by the so-called food distribution programme. As mentioned in the interviews, beneficiaries in the database received a grocery basket once a month, consisting of 10 to 12 named products.

The researchers uncovered **various beneficiary registration procedures in the municipalities** during the interviews. A citizen is registered on a waiting list based on an application. In addition, each month, the Georgia Social Services Agency provides updated electronic databases of socially vulnerable individuals to the municipalities, which are processed and updated through the agency's electronic programme. In the municipality of Tbilisi, a so-called electronic card system exists, based on which the list is updated every month. If a citizen is absent for 10 days without a valid reason, changes his or her address, passes away, or loses his or her social status, they are removed from the canteen list. An electronic case management system handles the data, and a telephone call with the recipient clarifies the facts. If necessary, a site visit is scheduled. The recipient must attest to the excusability of their absence by giving a statement and providing any supporting evidence. A list of individuals to be removed from or added to the list is compiled (in the form of a separate attachment for each canteen), which, alongside a memo by the deputy curator, serves as the basis for the governor's order. The municipality of Rustavi is planning to implement a similar scheme. At present, beneficiaries are only recorded via a specific journal.

After a person is removed from the primary list, the position is filled following the order of the secondary (additional) list. Accordingly, individuals on the waiting list are added to the secondary (additional) list according to the list's priority. **Exceptions are permitted for families in difficult socio-economic and vulnerable situations, large families with many children, socially vulnerable families, and families with low scores.**

The interviews conducted for this study reveal that the group of beneficiaries is diverse and the free canteen service is supplied to various categories of people. Based on the statistical data available, the number of women exceeds that of men. **It is evident from the acquired databases that most women beneficiaries are socially vulnerable, elderly, single and have disabilities.** In addition, **most of the people who receive pick-up meals are women and adolescents.** This may be due to different factors. On the one hand, it may be due to pervasive stigma in society which considers that caring for household nutrition is the responsibility of women, causing men to separate themselves from so-called women's affairs. On the other, it may be due to the number of women involved in the so-called informal sector (domestic care work); since women participate more in domestic work and family activities, providing food for the family is considered a woman's job. Accordingly, similar social norms and stereotypes are reflected in the prevalence of women who pick up food from canteens.

According to the research participants, **women and men who use free canteens have equal rights. However, several economic and social issues affect the supply of food to socially vulnerable individuals.**

- For example, in a telephone call with the municipality of Batumi, the interviewee mentioned that free canteens in Georgia work in a somewhat different form. In particular, these programmes feed the homeless and single people on the spot. Approximately 5–10% of canteen beneficiaries fall into this category, as they lack the means and resources to cook food. In other cases, beneficiaries are families who find it difficult to feed themselves and their children, but prefer to prepare food independently. According to the interviewee, it would be **advisable to have other supplementary programmes, such as food assistance for families to provide them with fresh/raw products or food vouchers.**
- During an interview, a representative of the municipality of Zugdidi stressed that it is impossible to know the **medical history of the beneficiaries and accordingly customise a menu to meet the needs of mothers, children and vulnerable groups.**
- The respondent from the municipality of Rustavi states that the menu of free canteens does not consider gender-based requirements/needs, and that only people with diabetes are presented with a slightly different menu including different types of baked goods.

The documents provided by the Tbilisi administration do not address concerns regarding the operation of municipal free canteens. In addition, based on this information, **Tbilisi's administrations believe that, by giving a single menu to beneficiaries, all groups benefit equally. Hence, the need for customised menus has never arisen.**

There is a general problem with **monitoring** free meal programmes due to the lack of a solid and systematic methodology. In particular:

- In Rustavi, a survey is conducted on the spot to determine beneficiaries' level of satisfaction. However, its results do not reflect the actual customer satisfaction rate of the free canteens.
- The monitoring situation is better in the capital city's canteens, where members of a deliberative/consultative council, nominated by the district governor, oversee the fulfillment of contractual obligations by the company that won the tender once a week (if necessary, out of order). This includes adherence to sanitary/hygiene standards; visual inspection of the quality of imported products; controlling the quality, quantity and weight of servings based on the daily menu; timely food delivery; quality service; correct operation of installed cameras and reviews of recordings. After that, the council member usually drafts an inspection protocol.
- In the municipality of Zugdidi, beneficiaries' level of satisfaction is determined by a survey. The employees on duty assigned to the City Hall receive information directly from the beneficiaries and measure their level of satisfaction. The quality of food is monitored by a full-time City Hall employee, who observes the work process at the end of the month and submits a monthly report to the City Hall.
- The interview with the municipality of Batumi indicates that beneficiaries' level of satisfaction is regularly measured. Agency personnel contact beneficiaries and ask them to complete a special questionnaire. Based on their answers, changes have been made in practice, including changes to the winter menu. In one case, dishes were replaced, while in another, cooking methods were modified. In addition, beneficiaries can submit complaints and suggestions on the institution's Facebook page, which is mainly maintained by women.

Beneficiaries in every municipality have **raised the issue of the lack of customised menus**. The medical history of the beneficiaries is unknown, the **service does not consider the needs of vulnerable groups**, and the menu is the same for everyone, regardless of their particular dietary requirements. However, the municipalities have distinct approaches in this regard. For instance, the menu of free canteens in the city of Rustavi has been developed by a nutritionist, and the calorie count has increased from 1,600 to 1,800 following the most recent regulations.

In Zugdidi, the City Council approves the free meal programme and budget, while City Hall approves the menu directly to avoid unnecessary bureaucratic procedures. A nutritionist at City Hall consults with professionals to design the meal, and a tender regulates this procedure.

In the municipality of Kutaisi, the City Council approves the free canteen menu, and the programme regulates the calorie content of the meals provided. In the municipality of Samtredia, the City Council has drafted and authorised the canteen menu on the balance sheet of the City Hall. Therefore, changes in rations are related to bureaucratic procedures. According to an interview conducted for this assessment, the municipality intends to modify rations and systems to enhance service quality, although limited funding remains a problem. Therefore, in Samtredia, there is no home delivery service for village beneficiaries because the municipality does not have adequate financial and human resources.

An exception exists regarding the menus of two free canteens managed by the private company, Caritas Georgia. This organisation offers its beneficiaries a variety of foods, with different rations for minors.

In addition, the **selection, training and retention of canteen employees is problematic**. In general, **their training is not on the agenda because**, according to survey results, beneficiaries are satisfied with service workers. During the interviews conducted for this assessment, only the representative of the municipality of Rustavi addressed the need for re-training. The respondent considered that this would increase satisfaction among service recipients. The municipality of Tbilisi often conducts training for its service staff. The two free canteens of the Caritas Georgia organisation stand out in terms of employee training, as a monitoring system protects food safety at these facilities, and the service provider coordinator has received required training.

Free canteens do not have a **specially allocated staff members who are psychologists or social workers** who work directly with beneficiaries. In keeping with the best practices of private canteens, their beneficiaries have other needs besides food provision, which can be effectively detected and assessed by an on-site specialist. However, the limited financial and human resources of local self-governments (municipalities) must be taken into account, which makes it difficult to assign this role to a specific person.

The interview with Caritas Georgia highlighted critical challenges. The non-profit group emphasised the **spike in food prices, which made it difficult to operate its two free canteens**. They view the development of tax deductions for food contributions as a solution for preventing the number of recipients from reaching an unsustainable level due to their limited budget. In addition, the rising cost of sanitary goods due to the COVID-19 pandemic was cited as an obstacle to effective compliance with rules.

It should be emphasised that the beneficiary selection process is more flexible in privately owned free canteens. Cantinas Georgia, for example, has a pre-established system for this purpose. Moreover, free meals are also provided to beneficiaries of the organisation's other programmes, such as minors in the children's daycare centre and single elderly persons at the elderly centre. The remaining beneficiaries are chosen depending on an assessment by a social worker. Priority is given to people who are socially disadvantaged, elderly, have several children, or live below the poverty line.

Gender-disaggregated attendance figures are the same for municipal and privately owned free canteens. According to the respondents, women are more likely to use free canteens. Men, on average, are less active in this regard. Furthermore, more female household members visit canteens to pick up food because of prevailing stigma and mentality.

Unlike municipal free canteens, Caritas Georgia's facilities have an interesting practice in place. In the food donation section, the organisation collaborates with private entities, including one large market chains, from which it receives unexpired, but damaged, packaged products. Public free canteens are less flexible in this regard. They cannot accept and use donated food (if any), but they can deliver donated food if a beneficiary cooks a meal at home, as indicated in the interviews.

The key findings identified by the interviews conducted by the GIA working group are comparable to the Public Defender's monitoring results in 2022 (Public Defender of Georgia, 2022). According to the research, there are several critical difficulties that all service providers broadly share. The research focused on the **non-existence of a single minimum standard for service management** that defines the quantity and caloric content of food applicable to all service providers, as well as mandatory standards for the physical environment, security and sanitary/hygiene conditions.

In this context, it is even more troubling that **the minimum nutritional value of the food is not considered in service delivery**. The planning of the service is not based on the recommended daily caloric intake and is generally geared to the budgetary allotment, without considering the recipients' nutritional needs. Caloric content, the energy value of meals, age, health condition and religious views are not considered when creating the menu, with one exception (gray bread for diabetics).

In addition, the Public Defender focused on the **absence of meal quality monitoring in free canteens**. Access to free canteens for vulnerable groups, the lack of appropriate infrastructure, the uncertainty of hygiene regulations, and the production of disaggregated statistics on service users were also recognised as major concerns in the report, indicating limited opportunities.

CHAPTER III.

FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

3.1. Primary findings

Food loss and waste management, and food donation, are not mentioned in strategic management documents in this field, including the Waste Management Code and Strategy. Consequently, **there are no gender-specific responses to this issue and no normative framework exists to promote gender equality in this field in Georgia.**

The study of the field's regulatory laws and strategic documents reveals that national strategic documents and sectoral legislation fully reflect the country's internationally proclaimed aspirations. However, the objectives corresponding to these goals and their measurement indicators are not properly reflected. For example, food loss and waste management are not given adequate consideration, and these topics are only addressed in the section on general waste. Overall, regulatory documents in the field do not **consider the interests of vulnerable groups or examine gender equality issues.** Strategic planning cycles do not incorporate gender objectives and outcomes.

The review of existing international literature and research on Georgia's context demonstrate that the proposed legislation could contribute to eradicating gender inequality.

Various factors contribute to food loss, including inefficient harvesting techniques and equipment, a lack of infrastructure and storage facilities, insufficient geographical distribution, the malfunctioning of food production technology, and a lack of relevant knowledge, etc. **Due to a shortage of appropriate financial resources, on the one hand, and socio-cultural constraints, on the other, women in Georgia have limited access to proper equipment, technology and infrastructure. This increases food loss and waste.**

At present, the State does not conduct awareness raising campaigns on **preventing and reducing food loss and waste.** The law requires the design of initiatives to reduce food waste and losses, the implementation of appropriate promotional incentive measures/programmes, and the development of educational programmes, which could positively affect gender inequality in this field. To do so, however, relevant measures must be gender-sensitive and transformative. More specifically, the diverse demands of men and women in the food loss and waste management sphere need to be considered, and measures are required to enable individuals to reconsider gender norms and attitudes that impact food loss and waste generation, etc.

Promoting food donations is one of the most significant aspects of the draft law's impact on women. According to research undertaken in the field of poverty and food donation, there are substantial gender-related barriers in this sphere. In Georgia, more women than men live below the poverty line. Girls, divorced women and woman-headed households have the highest poverty rates. Among recipients of free meals, the proportion of adult women typically exceeds that of adult men (by around 10%). Free canteens also serve significantly high numbers of minors.²⁶

Increasing food donations will reduce the poverty gap between men and women under given conditions. The contrasts between rural and urban communities should also be taken into account. Although governmenta; free meal programmes across the country primarily focus on urban areas, rural people who are more economically disadvantaged are overlooked.

Very little data exists on food loss and waste management, and food donation, in Georgia. Specifically:

- There is virtually no data or research on gender differences in terms of food loss and waste.

²⁶ Nearly 30% of the beneficiaries in Tbilisi are children. According to statistics from Zugdidi and Kutaisi, around 66% and 55% of beneficiaries are female (of all age groups).

- There are no statistics on food waste and losses in general. Only biodegradable waste data is assessed, which includes food waste. Very few studies have been conducted to examine losses in the value chains of various food products.
- In some self-governing units, gender-disaggregated data on the beneficiaries of free canteens is not gathered or processed. In addition, service providers usually view beneficiaries as a single homogeneous group. Therefore, studying the diverse requirements of these individuals and tailoring the programme to their needs is not a priority.

Emphasis should be placed on monitoring free canteens and the **absence of a programme evaluation requires special consideration**. Monitoring methods typically exclude food quality control, and supervision focuses primarily on financial audits (Public Defender's Office of Georgia, 2022). Monitoring does not consider the beneficiaries' diverse needs and satisfaction levels. There are no methods for evaluating the socio-economic and health effects of the free meals programme.

The lack of data, including gender-disaggregated data, greatly hinders **the development and implementation of effective, inclusive and gender-responsive policies**.

3.2. Recommendations for enhancing policies in terms of gender equality

Based on this assessment's findings, the research team developed recommendations for enhancing the gender impact in the areas of food loss, waste and food donation. The recommendations cover the following aspects:

a) Legislative amendments.

b) A set of recommendations for implementing policies in line with the framework. In addition, as food loss and waste reduction and food donation represent a vast sector, further recommendations have been developed. Their implementation will positively impact the reduction/elimination of gender disparities in this area.

a) Legislative amendments

In addition with the development of this report, and in response to the suggestions of the GIA Working Group, the following changes were made to the draft law:

1. In the article on goals and objectives (Article 2) it was prescribed that:
 - a) The law encourages the formulation and implementation of gender-responsive policies and practices that promote food waste reduction and redistribution.
 - b) The law's objectives are as follows:²⁷
 - Develop and implement a gender-responsive policy to reduce food waste and loss.
 - Provide women, children, the elderly and other vulnerable groups with sufficient and healthy food.
 - Implement gender-sensitive policies, promotion measures and programmes to raise the awareness of participants in the food supply chain.
2. The proposed law urges the Ministry of Environmental Protection and Agriculture of Georgia to develop and implement a gender-responsive policy for food loss and waste reduction, as well as to draft inclusive and gender-responsive legal acts and promote gender-sensitive food loss and waste awareness campaigns and training activities.
3. According to the draft law, the National Statistical Office of Georgia is responsible for undertaking gender-disaggregated statistical research and processing food loss and waste data.

²⁷ Only the objectives that underwent changes/amendments are included in this section.

4. Article 8 of the proposed legislation mandates that surplus food donation and redistribution must be conducted in accordance with the proposed legislation, and that food donation, recovery and redistribution procedures take into account the gender and social dimensions of food insecurity and malnutrition.
5. The proposed law (Article 12) requires food charity organisations (food banks) to ensure the distribution/donation of excess food primarily to the poor and those at risk of food insecurity and malnutrition.

b) Recommendations for policy implementation according to the framework document

For the proposed legislation to positively impact gender equality, corresponding normative acts and legislation must identify gender inequalities in food waste, food loss and food donation.

Therefore, gender mainstreaming strategic and action documents related to these areas is recommended. In particular, it the identification and analysis of existing gender challenges is necessary and, in turn, the formulation of gender-responsive objectives and relevant indicators. Furthermore, it is essential to develop strategies and programmes that are evidence-based to assist women and men to overcome the obstacles they face in the specified areas and meet their distinct needs.

Food loss and food waste

Reccomendations:

- The Government of Georgia should promote research on food loss and waste. These studies must provide information, specifically on the direction in which major losses or waste occur, which components of the value chain are vital in this regard, and whether these features are related to existing gender inequalities.
- Within the scope of various government initiatives (such as "Plant the Future" and "Enterprise Georgia") awareness raising measures aimed at reducing inequalities and focusing on gender differences in the area should be implemented.
- The legal entity under the public law "Enterprise Georgia" and JSC "Rural Development Agency" should re-train food-producing entrepreneurs to prevent food loss and waste. These programmes must consider the unique situations and needs of men and women entrepreneurs.
- Awareness raising activities aimed at reducing and eliminating food waste, as well as public education sessions, should include gender-responsive approaches and gender-specificity.
- Programmes should be developed by the Georgian Ministry of Environmental Protection and Agriculture to promote the separate collection of waste, including the separation of biodegradable waste from other types of waste, as well as its reuse, recycling, or recovery; the introduction of modern technologies for recycling biodegradable waste; and their nationwide availability. It is conceivable for waste separation to be a requirement for programme participants and/or that an organisation that separates waste obtains a high score during the application evaluation process.

Food donation and free meals

Reccomendations:

- Minimum standards should be established for the provision of free canteens at the municipal level and a general rule developed to determine the minimum requirements for preparing their menus. This rule should cover the calorie content of meals, energy value, the age of the beneficiaries, their food and dietary needs (allergies, diabetes, pregnant and nursing mothers, children) and seasonality.
- Self-governing authorities should provide citizens with more information about free canteens. In selecting and preparing sources, the government should consider disparities in access to information between women and men and use inclusive wording.

- Municipal canteens must adopt systematic methods for monitoring food safety and beneficiary satisfaction, and the effectiveness of free meal programmes must be regularly evaluated.
- As a mandatory element of the tender requirements for free canteens, self-governing entities should consider the requirement for training the facilities' full-time personnel. The emphasis of training programmes should be on inclusiveness, increasing gender awareness among participants, and identifying and eliminating any obstacles to food distribution.
- Psychologists should be assigned to engage with the recipients of free meals or those who utilise the resources of a different municipality's social services to provide individuals with information on these facilities and on opportunities to access additional services.
- Municipalities should provide transportation or alternative forms of assistance to beneficiaries with limited mobility or who travel long distances daily to obtain food.
- Municipalities should partner up to share their experiences of free meal provision.

Data collection, processing and research

Reccomendations:

- Local self-governing authorities should collect gender- and age-disaggregated statistical data on the beneficiaries of free meal services.
- The data collected by the National Statistical Office of Georgia on food loss should be disaggregated by gender (to determine in which direction the greatest losses occur, which components of the value chain are significant in this regard, which generates more waste, etc.).
- Research should be encouraged on food loss/waste generation and food donation to investigate gender-specific obstacles and identify strategies for overcoming them. It is essential to hold consultations with specialists, men and women, ethnic minorities, and groups representing persons with disabilities.

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