



Brot
für die Welt

**INTERAGENCY COMMISSIONS
WORKING ON ISSUES OF GENDER EQUALITY,
VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN AND
DOMESTIC VIOLENCE:**

**THE BEST PRACTICES AND CHALLENGES
RAPID ASSESSMENT**

**FEBRUARY
2024**



CONTENTS

Executive Summary.....	3
Findings and Challenges of the Rapid Assessment into the Feasibility of Establishing Interagency Commission	5
Different Positions on the Creation of the Interagency Commission	7
Recommendations to Relevant Agencies.....	8
Purpose and Methodology of the Rapid Assessment.....	9
Introduction	10
Georgia's Legal Framework and Standards	13
Examples of Good Practices	6
Spain	16
Canada	17
USA	17
United Kingdom	18
Key Findings of the Qualitative Research	19
• Creation of Interagency Commissions (Preconditions) and their Initial Assessment by Research Participants	19
• The Work Process of Interagency Commissions	23
• Position about Relevance of Creating Interagency Commissions	24
• The Importance of Strengthening the Interagency Commission.....	28
• The Importance of Institutionalization of the Interagency Commissions.....	30
Conclusion	32
Recommendations	32
Bibliography.....	34

**The publication was prepared with the financial support of an
International organization Brot für die Welt (Bread for the World)
Opinions expressed in the publication may not express
the views of the donor organization**

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Women Fund ‘Sukhumi’, in partnership with the esteemed international organization BROT für die Welt, has been steadfastly working on the ‘Strengthening Women’s Rights in Western Georgia’ project since 2009. This remarkably successful initiative is dedicated to fostering cooperation and bolstering coordination among referral entities combatting violence against women at the local level.

Initially, regular meetings were held in six target municipalities of Western Georgia: Kutaisi, Khoni, Tskaltubo, Senaki, Poti, and Zugdidi. However, the project’s reach has significantly expanded over the years. Starting in 2017, the scope of the municipalities grew to include Kutaisi, Khoni, Tskaltubo, Zugdidi, Poti, Tsalenjikha, Senaki, Lanchkhuti, and Ozurgeti. From 2021 onwards, Terjola, Vani, Baghdati, Kobuleti, and Chokhatauri were also added to the list.

The organization’s practices highlighted the crucial role of cooperation, information exchange, and coordination among state agencies addressing violence against women and domestic violence in preventing violence and ensuring effective and timely responses. This revelation made institutionalizing interagency commissions at the municipal level a key objective for the Women’s Fund “Sukhumi.” Between 2021 and 2023, with the recommendation and direct support of the organization, interagency commissions were established in the municipalities of Senaki, Chokhatauri, Baghdati, and Vani. Efforts are being made to strengthen these commissions institutionally. **From 2024**, the “Sukhumi” Fund and the municipalities mentioned above plan to implement proposals made by the interagency commissions. These efforts aim to contribute to the elimination of violence against women and/or domestic violence within separate municipalities, as well as to provide protection and assistance to women who are victims of such violence.

It should be noted that regulating the issue through legislation and enhancing the competence of the referring entities is important to ensure the sustainability, systematic, and coordinated work of interagency commissions.

It is noteworthy that on January 22, 2024, the Government of Georgia approved the resolution “**National Referral Procedures for Identification, Protection, Assistance, and Rehabilitation of Victims of Violence Against Women and/or Domestic Violence**”

(National Referral Procedures). The primary aim of this resolution is to establish a comprehensive set of measures aimed at identifying, protecting, and assisting victims of violence against women and domestic violence¹. According to the mentioned referral procedures, municipalities are designated as the subjects of the referral mechanism. They are responsible for identifying instances of violence against women/domestic violence, responding to such instances, and ensuring swift, effective communication and coordinated actions among relevant entities^{2,3}.

The Women Fund “Sukhumi” conducted a rapid assessment across ten target municipalities in Western Georgia⁴. The survey aimed to assess the feasibility of institutionalizing interagency commissions to bolster cooperation and coordination among state agencies concerning violence against women and domestic violence. It also aimed to evaluate the existing commissions’ institutional capabilities, accomplishments, and challenges they face.

Globally, the significance of interagency cooperation in preventing gender/domestic violence and ensuring an effective and timely response is recognized and understood. This research examined various interesting and successful practices of interagency coordination, including those in Spain, Canada, the USA, and the United Kingdom. These practices could serve as potential models for replication⁵.

1 Resolution of the Government of Georgia No. 14, on the approval of national referral procedures for the identification, protection, assistance, and rehabilitation of victims of violence against women and/or domestic violence, 22.01.24, Article: 1 (1), available at - <https://matsne.gov.ge/ka/document/view/6081714?publication=0>

2 Ibid, Art.: 6 (13)

3 Ibid, Art.: 6 (15)

4 Target municipalities: Baghdati, Vani, Terjola, Samtredia, Senaki, Zugdidi, Tsalenjikha, Chokhatauri, Kobuleti, Khobi.

5 (e.g. Family Assistance Unit - Spain; CCR (Co-ordinated Community Response to high risk/high danger domestic/intimate partner violence) - Canada; FVCC - (Family Violence Coordinating Council) and Domestic Violence Coordinator’s Office - USA; MASH (Multy-Agency Safeguarding Hubs) - United Kingdom).

FINDINGS AND CHALLENGES OF THE RAPID ASSESSMENT INTO THE FEASIBILITY OF ESTABLISHING INTERAGENCY COMMISSION

- In the executive branches of municipalities, particularly among mayors, the “Interagency Commission on Violence Against Women and/or the Prevention of Domestic Violence, Protection, and Assistance to Victims of Violence” mechanism holds significant **practical importance**. It has the potential to serve as the primary coordinating mechanism for preventing violence against women and domestic violence. This includes initiating necessary measures/programs/projects for the assistance and psychosocial rehabilitation of victims and for strengthening vulnerable families.
- **In municipalities where interagency commissions already exist, local referral procedures, communication, and coordination in the realm of social policy** are more organized. The response to violence cases is more effective, and the links involved in management are more responsibly engaged. The assistance provided to affected citizens, along with measures for violence prevention and family strengthening, proves to be very effective.
- With few exceptions, **local civil servants understand the commission’s importance as a mechanism** for promoting gender-just policies and express their readiness for its implementation.
- Local government representatives, including decision-makers and gender-responsible officials, anticipate the institutionalization of the interagency commission as **a mechanism for ensuring local coordination**. This implies that it will be given **a binding character**, therefore offering more leverage for social impact and positive change.
- **Representatives of self-government find platforms where they can learn from the experiences of other municipalities (e.g., Zugdidi municipality) very interesting**. They express a desire to make this process permanent.
- **For more effective functioning, interagency commissions require the support of qualified public organizations and continuous consultation and training**. This is necessary to familiarize them with legislative innovations, normative acts, and thematic studies and to collaborate on budgetary and new social initiatives.

Challenges

A rapid assessment revealed that, despite the willingness and political will of municipalities to implement or strengthen the interagency commission mechanism, they still face significant challenges in establishing an active agenda:

- ✓ **The commission's activity needs to be more formalized, often taking on a more informal structure. Departmental communications are mainly interpersonal.**
- ✓ **Commissions lack a clear strategy and are only now beginning to work on an Action Plan.**
- ✓ **Most of the interagency commissions have optimally solved the issue of commission composition.** In some commissions, members are periodically added or renewed. However, challenges arise with **agencies that refrained from including their representatives in the interagency commission in certain municipalities** (for example, some educational resource centers, the local structure of the Ministry of Internal Affairs, and the Association of Kindergartens).
- ✓ While most municipalities understand the **importance of raising awareness** of the interagency commission and actively use the municipality's website, the City Hall's Facebook page, and public meetings for this purpose, **the commission's regulations and the minutes of meetings are mostly unavailable.**
- ✓ **A significant challenge for the effective functioning of interagency commissions has been identified: the need to delineate powers from the municipality's Gender Equality Council to avoid duplication or overlapping of issues⁶.**

Respondents believe that **with good and effective communication, it is possible to properly separate powers** and use the same individuals to enhance communication. Respondents believe that it is possible to properly divide authority and use the same people to improve communication under good and efficient communication conditions. However, the section on the "unloading" of the Gender Council indicates that the executive power will be represented by a relatively small number of structural units.

For some municipal representatives, **the role of the interagency commission and its future development from a practical and relatively short-term perspective remains unclear. This indicates a lack of experience and knowledge in gender-sensitive**

⁶ In the composition of the Gender Equality Councils of municipalities, in addition to the gender advisor of the city hall (as provided for by the statute), we often find vice-chairpersons, representatives of social services, the children's rights protection department, and the financial and legal services, among other structures of the city hall.

policy issues. Such uncertainty is observed not only in municipalities where creating an interagency commission is considered necessary and important (where it is not yet functioning) but also in places where its active social purpose is recognized yet already functioning.

DIFFERENT POSITIONS ON THE CREATION OF THE INTERAGENCY COMMISSION

Along with the proponents advocating for the establishment of an interagency commission in various municipalities, **the perspectives of public officials opposing this idea were also revealed:**

a) There are already existing social and health commissions within the City Hall, addressing issues related to the identification of domestic violence cases and engaging in assistance for victims (Khobi, Kobuleti); b) Self-government, as a referral-involved entity, already maintains active cooperation with all adjacent agencies: police, social assistance agencies, educational and health sectors. Therefore, the establishment of an additional formalized mechanism is deemed unnecessary;

c) There is a concern that the interagency commission might only exist “on paper” for an extended period, similar to the Gender Equality Councils in the majority of municipalities. **The situation improved only after the municipalities received clear and direct recommendations from higher authorities, including relevant training and enhancement of knowledge and skills.** While the compulsory nature of the commissions might not yield immediate tangible results, the **importance of communication, cooperation, and coordination** among the referral mechanism’s participants **will gradually become recognized**⁷.

In discussions regarding the necessity of forming interagency commissions within the City Hall, the crucial argument highlighted was the need to bolster the gender equality mechanism in the executive branch. The current role of the Gender Adviser is considered inadequate (even with highly skilled personnel), as this function is often merged with other civil service roles. In municipalities where a gender department is operational, the situation does not significantly improve if the function is merely formal and becomes overshadowed by the myriad other duties of the department. Nonetheless, examples of successful implementation exist, such as in the municipalities of Zugdidi and Senaki.

⁷ At the subsequent stage, the Gender Equality Councils identified needs and integrated gender programs into the budget. They communicated with various gender groups to activate and strengthen their participation. Furthermore, expanding the network of social partners and coordinating interaction with referral subjects were prioritized.

RECOMMENDATIONS TO RELEVANT AGENCIES

- **For the Permanent Parliamentary Gender Equality Council:** Increase the Gender Equality Council's efforts and advocate for changes in legislative acts to institutionalize interagency commissions. Coordinate efforts to attract and encourage government agencies and civil actors.
- **For the Inter-Agency Commission on Gender Equality, Violence against Women and Domestic Violence:** Promote the process of institutionalization of interagency commissions in municipalities, strengthen existing commissions, and ensure close cooperation between the government of Georgia, the Inter-Agency Commission on Gender Equality, Violence against Women and Domestic Violence, and municipalities.
- **For the Ministry of Internally Displaced Persons from the Occupied Territories, Health, Labour and Social Affairs of Georgia:** Encourage the involvement of social workers and representatives of the primary healthcare sector in the commission's activities. This will contribute to strengthening interagency communication on addressing the priority social needs of beneficiaries.
- **For the Ministry of Science and Education:** Ensure the full participation of the education sector in the local referral processes and the involvement of heads of educational resource centers and/or heads of educational institutions in the municipal commission.
- **For local authorities:** Plan events for the effective functioning of the commission; create a network of social partners and activate inter-municipal platforms for experience sharing; timely develop commission action plans and implement periodic reporting practices; promote the activities of the commission and use resources available to municipalities for information exchange events.
- **For local and international non-governmental organizations:** Strengthen municipalities' potential, raise qualifications, and organize information exchange platforms to promote the effectiveness of the Commission's activities. Advocate for the institutionalization of municipal interagency commissions on issues of violence against women and domestic violence in city halls by qualified non-governmental organizations.

PURPOSE AND METHODOLOGY OF THE RAPID ASSESSMENT

The purpose of the rapid assessment is **to investigate the feasibility of establishing interagency commissions to enhance cooperation and coordination among state agencies regarding violence against women and combating against domestic violence. Additionally, it aims to evaluate the institutional capabilities of the existing commissions, their accomplishments, and the obstacles they encounter.**

The qualitative research methodology was used, specifically - in-depth interviews.

Target municipalities for the study include **10** diverse locations: Baghdati, Vani, Terjola, Samtredia, Senaki, Zugdidi, Tsalenjikha, Chokhatauri, Kobuleti, and Khobi.

The target groups comprise various sectors of the local government, such as representatives of the municipality's interagency commissions, members of the Municipal Gender Equality Council, representatives from the City Hall's social service and children's rights protection departments, as well as Mayor's Advisers on gender equality issues or individuals responsible for gender matters. Additionally, the study involves other local referral units, including representatives from social agencies, education resource centers, and non-governmental organizations that address violence against women issues.

The total number of respondents participating in the study is **27**, including 21 women and 6 men.

The number of in-depth interviews: 27.

The fieldwork for this research took place between October and November 2023.

INTRODUCTION

The Women Fund “Sukhumi,” as part of the “Strengthening Women’s Rights in Western Georgia” project supported by BROT für die Welt, has been actively working since **2009** to promote cooperation and strengthen coordination among referral entities addressing violence against women at the local level.

Initially, systematic meetings between state agencies of the referral system were conducted in six target municipalities of Western Georgia: Kutaisi, Khoni, Tskaltubo, Senaki, Poti, and Zugdidi. **Since 2017**, the coverage area expanded to include Kutaisi, Khoni, Tskaltubo, Zugdidi, Poti, Tsalenjikha, Senaki, Lanchkhuti, and Ozurgeti. **From 2021**, meetings have been actively held in Kutaisi, Khoni, Tskaltubo, Terjola, Vani, Baghdati, Senaki, Poti, Zugdidi, Tsalenjikha, Kobuleti, Ozurgeti, Lanchkhuti, and Chokhatauri.

The “Sukhumi” Fund platform facilitates information exchange and cooperation between state agencies. It brings together representatives from local self-government (gender council, social and health services of the city hall, children’s department, representatives of kindergartens, Mayor’s representatives in villages), Social Service Agencies, law enforcement, the Legal Aid Bureau, Courts, Prosecutor’s Educational Resource Centers and schools, as well as medical staff and administration of local polyclinics, outpatient clinics, and separate non-governmental organizations working on women’s rights.

At these meetings, local referral entities are introduced to statistics presented by law enforcement agencies, exchange information on existing support programs for women who have experienced violence, and discuss solutions to problems and challenges. When discussing violence cases, the entities collaboratively plan ways to address the issue. For instance, during a case in Lanchkhuti Municipality, entities participating in the meeting [the Kutaisi shelter, “The Children’s Rights Protection and Support Department,” social services, the representative of the Mayor in the village, and the school administration] jointly planned responses to assist a woman who was a victim of domestic violence. Additionally, effective cooperation between local actors of the Interagency Commission occurred in Senaki municipality, resulting in the resolution of health service provision to beneficiaries and the prevention of social conflict.

The practice of the organization’s work underscored the critical role of cooperation, information exchange, and coordination among state agencies addressing issues of violence against women/family violence in terms of prevention and effective and timely response. This emphasis made the institutionalization of interagency commissions at the municipal level a pivotal component of the agenda for the Women’s Fund “Sukhumi.” Between **2021 and 2023**, following the organization’s recommendation and direct support,

interagency commissions were established in the municipalities of Senaki, Chokhatauri, Baghdati, and Vani, with efforts aimed at their institutional strengthening. **Starting in 2024**, with financial contributions from the Fund “Sukhumi” and the municipalities as mentioned above, it is planned to implement initiatives devised by the interagency commissions. These initiatives aim to advance the elimination of violence against women and/or domestic violence within individual municipalities and to provide protection and assistance to women who are victims of violence.

However, it is important to note that regulating this issue through legislation is crucial for the interagency commissions’ sustainability and systematic and coordinated operation.

On November 22, 2022, “GREVIO” (a Group of Experts on Actions Against Violence against Women and Domestic Violence) published a baseline assessment report on the implementation of the Istanbul Convention by the Georgian authorities. In this report, GREVIO urged the state authorities, particularly the **Inter-Agency Commission on Gender Equality, Violence against Women and Domestic Violence**, to further enhance and strengthen coordination between national and regional/local authorities. This effort aims to ensure intersectoral cooperation focused on the needs of women victims of violence and to enact policies to prevent and combat violence against women⁸.

In recent years, Georgia has made significant strides towards the decentralization of social work. This advancement has notably improved the identification of cases of violence against women and domestic violence, as well as vulnerable families, ensured a higher level of coordination among local referral entities, and fostered timely responses.

Since 2020, The Child Rights Protection and Support Departments have been operating within municipalities. Although these departments do not directly handle referrals, they play a crucial role in social work with vulnerable families and significantly promote local coordination in the identification and management of domestic violence cases against women⁹.

Following amendments to the Law of Georgia “On Prevention of Violence against Women and/or Domestic Violence, Protection, and Assistance to Victims of

8 GREVIO report of the Council of Europe on Georgia’s implementation of the Istanbul Convention (22.11.22), p. 17, available in English - <https://rm.coe.int/grevio-report-on-georgia-2022/1680a917aa>

9 For detailed insights into the activities of departments dedicated to protecting children’s rights, refer to the research conducted by the Fund “Sukhumi,” titled ‘The child rights protection and support department’s effectiveness assessment and existing challenges’ This comprehensive study offers an in-depth look at the effectiveness, challenges, and recommendations for future improvements. The document is accessible through [<https://fsokhumi.ge/index.php/en/publications/gender-based-violence/item/13004-the-child-rights-protection-and-support-department-s-effectiveness-assessment-and-existing-challenges>], offering valuable information for policymakers, researchers, and activists involved in child protection efforts.

Violence,” municipal bodies’ responsibility in implementing preventive measures has been increased, effective July 1, 2023.

On January 22, 2024, the Government of Georgia approved the **“National Referral Procedures for Identification, Protection, Assistance, and Rehabilitation of Victims of Violence Against Women and/or Domestic Violence” (National Referral Procedures)**. The main objective of these procedures is to outline measures that will aid in preventing violence against women and in the detection, protection, and assistance of domestic violence victims¹⁰. According to these referral procedures, municipalities are key players in the referral mechanism, tasked with identifying incidents of violence against women/domestic violence and responding appropriately¹¹. They also ensure swift, effective communication and coordinated activities between relevant entities.

Municipalities now have several tools for combating, preventing, protecting against, and assisting in cases of violence against women and/or domestic violence. These tools include **Municipal Gender Equality Councils within City Councils, Persons responsible for gender equality issues in City Halls/Councils, Gender-sensitive municipal budgets, Gender Equality Strategies, Action plans for implementing gender equality measures, Child Rights Protection and Support Departments, Women’s rooms, Mayor’s representatives in administrative units.**

A pivotal component of these mechanisms is the **“Interagency Commission for the Prevention of Violence Against Women and/or Domestic Violence, Protection, and Assistance to Victims of Violence,” established in municipalities** by the mayors. This commission ensures systematic and coordinated efforts in addressing issues of violence against women and domestic violence within the municipality’s jurisdiction¹².

Interagency commissions have been established in several target municipalities, including Zugdidi, Senaki, Chokhatauri, Baghdati, and Vani.

10 Resolution of the Government of Georgia No. 14, on the approval of national referral procedures for the identification, protection, assistance, and rehabilitation of victims of violence against women and/or domestic violence, 22.01.24, Article: 1 (1), available at - <https://matsne.gov.ge/ka/document/view/6081714?publication=0>

11 Ibid, Art.: 6 (13)

12 Research by Women’s Fund “Sukhumi,” ‘Assessment of Effectiveness of the Municipalities’ Preventive Measures to Combat Violence Against Women/Domestic Violence’ Available at - <https://fsokhumi.ge/index.php/en/publications/gender-based-violence/item/13797-assessment-of-effectiveness-of-the-municipalities-preventive-measures-to-combat-violence-against-women-domestic-violence>

GEORGIA'S LEGAL FRAMEWORK AND STANDARDS

The Georgian Constitution guarantees the protection of women from discrimination and the provision of equal rights and opportunities alongside men. Moreover, the state assumes a positive duty to employ special measures to ensure the substantive equality of men and women and to eliminate existing inequalities¹³.

In 2017, the ratification of the Council of Europe Convention on “Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence” (hereinafter referred to as the Istanbul Convention) marked a significant advancement in the combat against violence against women and domestic violence within Georgia. By ratifying this Convention, the state committed to implementing a **more effective, comprehensive, and coordinated policy** for the protection and support of victims of violence against women and domestic violence. This commitment entails, on the one hand, the adoption of necessary legislative or other measures by all relevant entities or agencies involved in the process, which collectively **ensures a holistic and more comprehensive response** to incidents of violence against women (Article 7 (1)). On the other hand, it involves **interagency cooperation** for the effective execution of the adopted policies and measures¹⁴. The Istanbul Convention requires signatory countries to establish one or more official bodies responsible for coordinating, implementing, monitoring, and evaluating policies and **measures to prevent and combat all forms of violence covered by the Convention, including at the municipal level**¹⁵.

Significant amendments were made to approximately 25 legislative acts to align national legislation with the Istanbul Convention. Among these, changes were made to the Local Self-Government Code, **which specified the municipality's authority in implementing measures to promote gender equality, prevent violence against women and/or domestic violence, and protect and assist victims of violence against women and/or domestic violence**¹⁶.

¹³ Constitution of Georgia, 1995, Article: 11.1; 11.3; Available - <https://www.matsne.gov.ge/ka/document/view/30346?publication=36>

¹⁴ Comments on the Provisions of the Convention, Council of Europe; p. 40 available at - <https://Rm.Coe.Int/Geo-Istanbul-Convention-And-Explanatory-Report-A4/16808d24c5>

¹⁵ The Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence (the so-called “Istanbul Convention”), 2011, Art.: 10(1), available at - <https://rm.coe.int/168008482e>

¹⁶ Local Self-Government Code, 2014, Art.: 16.4; Available at - <https://matsne.gov.ge/ka/document/view/2244429?publication=69>

According to the amendments made to the Law of Georgia “On Gender Equality,” a **Municipal Gender Equality Council was established in the City Council¹⁷, and a civil servant responsible for gender equality issues was appointed** in the City Hall¹⁸. Due to the complexity of violence against women and in the family, many state structures are involved in the fight against it. The effectiveness of this struggle is directly proportional to the understanding of the role assigned by all the agencies working against violence and the proper fulfilment of their obligations. To ensure systematic and coordinated work, an interagency commission on gender equality, violence against women, and domestic violence¹⁹ was created within the executive authority. The main task of this commission is to coordinate, monitor, and evaluate the implementation of policies and measures aimed at preventing and suppressing all forms of violence within the scope of the Istanbul Convention. The Advisor to the Prime Minister of Georgia on Human Rights Protection and Gender Equality chairs the interagency commission²⁰.

On January 22, 2024, the “National **Referral Procedures** for the Identification, Protection, Assistance, and Rehabilitation of Victims of Violence Against Women and/or Domestic Violence” (National Referral Procedures) was approved. The main purpose of these procedures is to define a set of measures that will contribute to the prevention of violence against women and domestic violence, identifying, protecting, helping victims of violence, supporting victims of violence, and preventing secondary victimization²¹.

National referral procedures determine the rights and duties of state bodies **to ensure timely detection and support of victims of violence against women and/or domestic violence and the rule of coordination²²**, according to which municipalities, as subjects participating in referral procedures, are tasked with identifying the fact of violence against women and/or domestic violence. They are also responsible for **appropriately**

17 Law of Georgia “On Gender Equality”, 2010, Art. 13(11) available at - <https://www.matsne.gov.ge/ka/document/view/91624?publication=10>

18 Ibid, Art. 13(12)

19 Ibid, Art. 12(6)

20 Resolution No. 286 of the Government of Georgia dated June 12, 2017, Resolution No. 286 of the Government of Georgia dated June 12, 2017, “On the Creation and Approval of the Statute of the Interagency Commission Working on Issues of Gender Equality, Violence Against Women and Domestic Violence; Art. 1; Available at - <https://matsne.gov.ge/ka/document/view/3698004?publication=4>

21 Resolution No. 14 of the Government of Georgia dated January 22, 2024, “On approval of national referral procedures for identification, protection, assistance, and rehabilitation of victims of violence against women and/or domestic violence,” Art. 1(1); Available at - <https://matsne.gov.ge/ka/document/view/6081714?fbclid=IwAR3c98OHBioZhA7wZHMymJdIU38if3DsmLLbymVJPJ0Pbq2ctE-2ae3YcMc&publication=0>

22 Ibid, Art. 1(2)

responding to it and ensuring fast, effective communication and mutually agreed activities between the relevant state structures²³.

For the effective implementation of the mentioned obligation, it is important to **introduce interagency commissions for the prevention of violence against women and/or domestic violence, protection and assistance of victims of violence at the local level, and to regulate the mentioned issue by legislation.**

It should be noted that the **interagency commission** from the target municipalities was created for the first time in 2019 in the municipality of Zugdidi. According to the respondents, the initiative's author was the non-governmental organization "Women's Information Center," which, in 2021, in cooperation with **the Permanent Parliamentary Gender Equality Council**, prepared a draft law. This draft law provides for the amendment of the Georgian Law "On Gender Equality," in particular, the implementation of changes in Articles 12 and 13, which includes gender equality and other issues provided for by the legislation of Georgia at the government and municipal level of the Autonomous Republic, to ensure systematic and coordinated work, with the participation of representatives of the relevant state agencies, to create gender equality, violence against women, and domestic violence interagency commission.

Unfortunately, the said initiative is still under review and has not been adopted by the legislative body²⁴.

In 2021-22, on the recommendation of the Women's Fund "Sukhumi" and with its direct organizational support, interagency commissions were created and launched in the municipalities of Senaki, Chokhatauri, Bagdati, and Vani, based within the municipalities' Mayor's offices. This initiative aimed at enhancing the competence of incoming referral entities regarding issues of women and domestic violence.

²³ Ibid, Art. 6(13); Art. 6 (15)

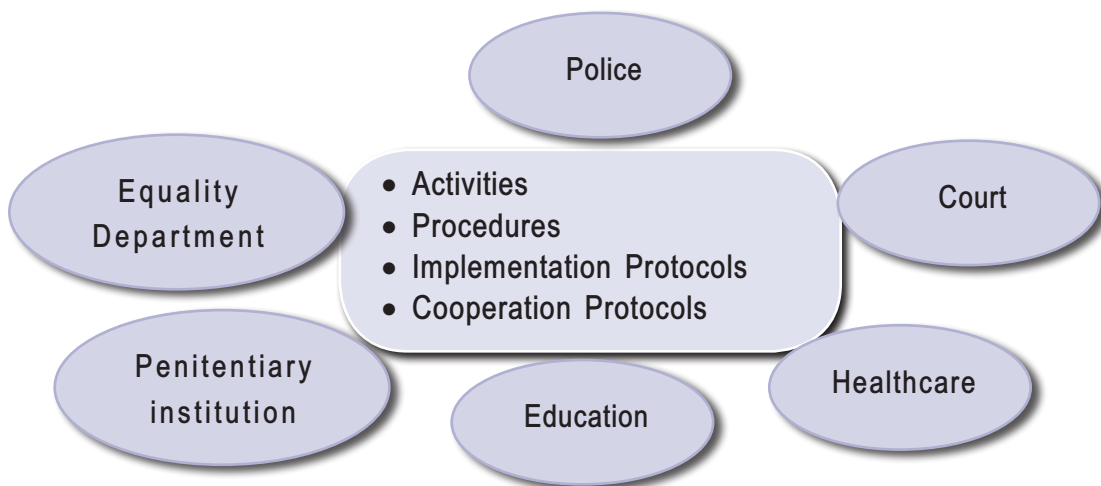
²⁴ Face-to-face interview with the executive director of "Women's Information Center" (WIC) - Teona Chikovani

EXAMPLES OF GOOD PRACTICES

During a desk research, examples of effective inter-agency cooperation and coordination across different countries were identified. Below are some notable instances:

SPAIN

In Spain, the “**Family Assistance Unit**,”²⁵ despite being a structural component of the police, serves as an exemplar of interagency collaboration, particularly in the context of addressing domestic violence against women. This Unit is highlighted not just for its role within the police force but as a framework for the complex and coordinated efforts of various relevant agencies. The “Family Assistance Unit” encompasses prevention, education, social assistance, health care, and the coordination and provision of various types of assistance to victims of violence. Operating nationwide with a focus on vulnerable groups, these units engage in more than just the investigation of violence cases²⁶. They execute coordinated actions with other agencies to deliver a comprehensive response to violent incidents, along with consultations, follow-up monitoring, and protection for victims. A coordinated response scheme is detailed below²⁷.



25 The Family Assistance Unit as an Expert Team on Providing Assistance to The Victims of Domestic Violence - available at - <https://www.eucpn.org/document/the-family-assistance-unit-as-an-expert-team-on-providing-assistance-to-the-victims-of>

26 European Crime Prevention Award (ECPA) - p.2, available at - https://eucpn.org/sites/default/files/document/files/GP_ECPA_2013_ES_TheFamilyAssistanceUnit-1.pdf

27 General Department of the Criminal Police Family Assistance Central Unit - available at - https://eucpn.org/sites/default/files/document/files/GP_ECPA_2013_ES_TheFamilyAssistanceUnit-2.pdf

CANADA

The Coordinated Community Response (CCR) to high-risk/domestic intimate partner violence exemplifies a partnership model between government and public agencies in Canada aimed at addressing and evaluating domestic violence against high-risk women²⁸. Originating as a response to bullying, the **CCR** adopts a victim-centered approach. Its core activities include information exchange regarding violence cases and collaboration with victims and service providers. Although the **CCR** lacks a standardized document, its methods involve various agencies, such as the police, legal system, social services, education, health, and child rights protection. This coordinated approach leads to the formation of **local councils** of service providers, comprising police, lawyers, and medical personnel, among others. These **councils** establish a communication network with service providers, ensuring a complex and coordinated response to violent incidents. A crucial role of these **local councils** is to offer diverse services to beneficiaries, often about which they are uninformed²⁹.

USA

Various coordinating structures operate across the United States, which are commendable examples of good practice in terms of their framework. **The Family Violence Coordinating Council (FVCC)** and **the Domestic Violence Coordinator's Office** play significant roles. The **FVCC** aims to provide a national and local platform for enhancing institutional, professional, and community responses to violence cases³⁰. Key issues addressed include domestic violence against women, violence against children, education and prevention, and the coordination and intervention of services for both victims and perpetrators.

The Domestic Violence Coordinator's Office functions as a public resource dedicated to reducing and eliminating domestic violence³¹. It receives funding from both the county and the central city, providing information and technical assistance to

28 Coordinated Community Response (CCR) to High Risk/High Danger Domestic/Intimate Partner Violence. - available at - <https://www.publicsafety.gc.ca/cnt/cntrng-crm/crm-prvntn/nvntn/dtls-en.aspx?i=10195>

29 Coordinated Community Response Components for Victims of Intimate Partner Violence: A Review of the Literature - available at - <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4113829/>

30 Family Violence Coordinating Council - available at - https://www.dupagecourts.gov/18th_judicial_circuit_court/services/family_violence_coordinating_council.php

31 About the County Domestic Violence Coordination Office - <https://multco.preservica.com/Render/render/waybackproxy/20130913231708/http://multco.us/dv/about-county-domestic-violence-coordination-office>

community groups. The coordinator serves as an official representative of the Domestic Violence Coordinating Council (DVCC) and acts as a local coordinator for domestic violence issues^{32, 33}.

UNITED KINGDOM

The establishment discussed in the United Kingdom focuses on protecting child's rights. Nonetheless, it effectively embodies the concept of interagency coordination through a specific unit or department. Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hubs (**MASH**) consist of practitioners from various agencies (such as local authorities, police, and health services) who work together in a single office. They follow well-defined guidelines for information sharing, which fosters a high level of trust and maximum engagement from relevant agencies. By amalgamating information gathered by different specialists or agency representatives, **MASH** workers can obtain a comprehensive understanding of domestic or child abuse situations before formulating a response strategy. Social workers serve as the initial information source by making referral decisions at the outset of a risk, assigning colours of red, yellow, and green to indicate the situation's urgency. This color-coding approach determines the decision-making timeframe, which can vary from a few hours (in emergencies, 4 hours) to several days. Information sharing within the **MASH** complies with security regulations, and data collection is conducted through practitioners such as teachers, GPs, police officers, home care specialists, and school health staff whom **MASH** contacts. After information is collected, the social work manager decides on further actions. The timely identification of vulnerable families results from repeated analysis of information, allowing relevant agencies to prevent as much harm as possible from instances of violence^{34, 35}.

32 ABOUT THE IFVCC - available at - <https://icjia.illinois.gov/ifvcc/about/>

33 Family Violence Coordinating Council (FVCC) - available at - <https://www.roe26.net/fvcc>

34 Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hubs - pp. 1-3 available at - Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hubs. A London Council Member briefing. October 2012.

35 Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hubs (MASH) - available at - <https://www.nottinghamshire.gov.uk/care/childrens-social-care/nottinghamshire-children-and-families-alliance/pathway-to-provision/multi-agency-safeguarding-hub-mash>

KEY FINDINGS OF THE QUALITATIVE RESEARCH

According to information obtained from a rapid assessment, **4 of the 10 target municipalities have established** interagency commissions. These commissions **have written regulations** defining their powers and functions.

- **CREATION OF INTERAGENCY COMMISSIONS (PRECONDITIONS) AND THEIR INITIAL ASSESSMENT BY RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS**

According to respondents' information, the interagency commission for the prevention of violence against women and/or domestic violence and the protection and assistance of victims of violence was established for the first time in 2019 in Zugdidi Municipality with the support of the **Women's Information Center**. "Before the official establishment, we participated in a roundtable format organized by the Fund "Sokhumi," which facilitated coordinated work among agencies addressing the issue of violence. This experience highlighted the need for creating a commission," - **T. Chikava, a member of the interagency commission of Zugdidi Municipality.**

The commission facilitated the instant exchange of information between agencies, allowing for joint engagement and a coordinated response to support citizens.

I. Khvichiya, an inspector-investigator in Zugdidi, believes that the most critical aspect of the interagency commission's activity is the mutual exchange of information, which was problematic before the commission's creation. According to the respondent, the commission serves as an exemplary model of local coordination: "This work is very productive and necessary. Based on our experience, I can assert that every municipality should have a similar commission."

The activities of the interagency commission in Zugdidi Municipality focus on conducting various campaigns and meetings aimed at prevention. Additionally, with the involvement of commission members, the effectiveness of programs is evaluated, and the need for introducing alternative programs is assessed. As a result of the collaboration between the agencies of Zugdidi Municipality City Hall, **referrals of cases to the police, care agencies, victim support services, and programs of local non-governmental organizations have increased.**

In Senaki, the interagency commission has been in existence for 2 years. Its purpose, according to commission members, is to improve coordination on issues of

violence against women and domestic violence: “The commission was established to implement measures that would enhance the coordinated efforts of all municipal agencies responsible for addressing issues of violence against women and domestic violence. With support from the Women’s Fund “Sukhumi,” the commission’s composition was updated in 2021, and further activation was carried out” - **N. Khubua (Head of Social and Health Service of Senaki City Hall, Commission member).**

Darejan Zarandia, the head of the Senaki Educational Resource Center, finds membership in the interagency commission greatly beneficial for planning interventions and communicating with relevant agencies: “This commission bridged the educational sector with the social and children’s rights protection department of the City Hall, allowing for official cooperation.”

Municipal representatives acknowledge that the commission’s composition has been revised multiple times since its creation, with agencies being added. “For instance, at its inception, the children’s department was not involved, whereas today, the department’s coordinator is a commission member. We are considering involving various agencies (Union of Kindergartens, Coordinator of the Mayor’s Representatives) to improve coordination with the Mayor’s representatives. There is also a plan to involve the representatives of the medical field,” said N. Khubua.

“Our commission is a dynamic entity; therefore, we attempt to take responsive measures if needed. This includes inviting various specialists or incorporating our commission with organizations or agencies that can offer services to victims in this context and can also contribute to prevention.” - **Zugdidi inspector-investigator I. Khvichiya.**

An interagency commission was established in Baghdati Municipality in May 2022, and, according to the responsible persons, four meetings have been held so far. According to their information, “Even during the work of the gender council of the municipality, there were issues that were beyond the authority of the council, and we thought that it would be good to have a solid mechanism in the municipality, which would be responsible for responding to cases of domestic violence. Therefore, when the Fund “Sukhumi” entered the initiative, the municipality agreed to introduce a similar mechanism.” - **S. Natriashvili, the person responsible for gender issues (deputy chairman of the commission).**

One reason for implementing the mentioned mechanism was the round tables organized by the Fund “Sukhumi” in the municipality, within the framework of which the interagency communication and cooperation system was introduced.

“The initiative was followed by the sharing of best practices, which took place on the example of the Zugdidi Municipality. From the members of the Zugdidi commission, we received comprehensive information on why the establishment of this commission should be useful for the Municipality.” **M. Mshvenieradze, Head of Health and Social Protection Service of Baghdati Municipality, Member of the Commission.**

An interagency commission was established in Vani Municipality in June 2023, and two meetings were held. The respondents pointed out that a letter was sent from the Fund “Sukhumi” with the mentioned initiative, “we discussed and decided to take this recommendation into account because the organization has implemented many successful practices in the municipality over the years.” - **M. Ghviniashvili, head of legal service of Vani City Hall, member of the commission.** “We discussed for a long time about the composition, who could respond to the problem, and who we should include in the commission, but I think we missed the coordinator of the mayor’s representatives because the mayor’s representatives are the ones who should provide us with information on specific cases. That’s why I think I will raise this issue at the meeting.”

An interagency commission was established in Chokhatauri Municipality in June 2022. Two official meetings have been held; however, thematic groups are systematically gathered, and more emphasis has been placed on interagency communication.

Survey respondents believe **that municipal interagency commissions have a positive impact presently or in the future, on local gender policy, issues of protection against women and domestic violence, and the provision of services to victims. This will occur with the collaboration of representatives of various agencies which unite around one case.** This will make it easier for the beneficiary to receive assistance from not only the municipality but also from, a partner non-governmental organization or any other relevant agency. “In addition to our municipal services, there are also representatives of other agencies: representatives of state care agency and representatives of non-governmental organizations. Indeed, there is a positive impact and a better outcome, compared to providing one-time social assistance to victims. There is a closer socially friendly environment around them, and more units are involved in improving their condition, receiving information, referring them to the appropriate structure, strengthening them emotionally and financially.” – **N . Kapanadze, head of the children’s rights protection department of Chokhatauri City Hall, member of the interagency commission.**

“The difference is that is the existence of a commission, it is a huge responsibility. If you are a member of the commission, you are required to participate actively. When you are not a commission member, is the responsibility lies at the discretion of the individual. I think this commission is necessary because it clarifies everyone’s roles and responsibilities and how to work effectively. The agencies’ resources are pooled, and information is exchanged.” - **M. Kutubidze, vice mayor of Chokhatauri municipality and chairman of the interagency commission.** The commission consists of individuals who will contribute to a common goal. Meetings and negotiations were conducted with them in advance, which concluded successfully: “Everyone is on our team, and the head of the commission is satisfied with the willingness of the Gender Council to cooperate, both in terms of professional and personal constructive communication.”

The chairman of the Gender Equality Council of Chokhatauri Municipality shared a similar viewpoint: “I believe that the gender direction unit in the town halls should be stronger, and I welcome the establishment of a gender department, as is the case in Zugdidi. Such departments also exist in Ozurgeti, and from what I have seen, where these departments are present, the work is much more dynamic. Overall, the work of interagency commissions will strengthen the executive branch rather than overburdening a single employee who often has to juggle multiple functions and roles”.

As M. Beradze, Chairman of the Gender Equality Council of Chokhatauri Municipality, notes, the executive body is accountable for the work plan approved by the City Council. This responsibility is distributed and not assigned to just one individual - “in our case, we assign: ‘Municipality City Hall and Gender Equality Council.’ A person responsible for gender issues is involved in all activities of the Council.” The respondent has positive expectations about the functioning of the interagency commission. “I don’t foresee any problems. The gender councils also faced challenges initially, and it was unclear what our responsibilities were, but we are improving every year. I expect the commissions will experience a similar trajectory of improvement.”

• THE WORK PROCESS OF INTERAGENCY COMMISSIONS

The work process of interagency commissions, according to respondents, should primarily focus on several critical areas:

- ❖ Identifying victims of violence;
- ❖ Production of gender statistics;
- ❖ Planning of prevention measures;
- ❖ Developing mechanisms for the elimination of violence. **(K. Salia, Chairman of Tsalenjikha City Council)**

A rapid assessment revealed that these commissions begin to address pertinent issues from the outset. For instance, the members of the Senaki Commission reported active engagement from their very first meeting. A significant information campaign addressing violence against women was planned and executed as part of “16 active days. Moreover, a training session for school teachers was initiated in collaboration with the Fund “Sukhumi”. This training led to numerous events involving all 24 schools in Senaki and approximately 5,200 individuals.

“Within the frame of our existing commission, we responded to several cases effectively. The commission provided clear insight into the responsibilities of each agency, enabling me to seek assistance directly from commission members. This facilitates intensive sectoral communications from one session to the next.” - D. Zarandia, head of the Senaki Educational Resource Center.

During the Zugdidi Interagency Commission meetings, discussions focus on topics deemed necessary by the commission. This includes working on specific cases, engaging in discussions to assess the needs of beneficiaries and new programs and services, and analyzing existing services. “All agencies have the opportunity to present their vision and practical insights regarding specific programs, including their strengths and weaknesses and suggestions for improvement.” - **I. Khvichiya, inspector-investigator of the Ministry of Internal Affairs, Zugdidi.**

Zugdidi Municipality often shares its experiences with other municipalities. “Our commission members consistently share information about our work at every meeting. The Zugdidi Municipality aims to enhance its awareness and promote it beyond its municipality.” - **T. Chikava, a Zugdidi Municipality’s interagency commission member.**

- **POSITION ABOUT RELEVANCE OF CREATING INTERAGENCY COMMISSIONS**

From the target municipalities of the rapid assessment, commissions have not been established in the municipalities of *Tsalenjikha, Samtredia, Kobuleti, and Khobi*, where most respondents highlight departmental communications gaps. The current political context in Tsalenjikha municipality complicates communication with other agencies. According to the chairman of the city council, despite efforts, communication with the local representation of the Gender Equality Council, the Ministry of Internal Affairs, and the local educational resource center could not occur.

E. Beraya, the head of the legal service of the Tsalenjikha City Hall, believes it is crucial to establish an interagency commission in all municipalities to ensure systematic and coordinated work on the prevention of violence against women and/or domestic violence. This is because agencies periodically exchange information, and recommendations are developed on measures to be taken to protect and assist victims of violence. It is important to include all entities whose function is to protect human rights.

In Samtredia municipality, the social workers of the Agency For State Care And Assistance For the (Statutory) Victims of Human trafficking express their distress over the lack of communication between the agencies in the process of implementing programs or studying needs. For example, during the round-table format meetings of the Women’s Fund “Sukhumi” and various other gatherings, it was revealed that the **local referral entities were not adequately informed about the local statistics and needs.** The representatives of the Ministry of Internal Affairs and the state care and Agency For State Care And Assistance For the (Statutory) Victims of Human trafficking openly stated that they were uninformed about the programs in the budget.

During the rapid assessment, instances of fruitful and active cooperation between individual referral entities were highlighted, and with some agencies, there was a need for deeper and more intensive collaboration: “Communication between the police and social workers is well organized; however, more frequent connection and cooperation between the social triad and structures of the City Hall are necessary. For example, during the planning of the municipal budget, it is desirable at the end of the year to invite social workers to express opinions about the municipality’s needs. There are cases when we do not have information about this or that municipal program. Since we are in direct contact with vulnerable families and cases of violence, we must be involved and informed.”

“If we have examples of the commission achieving results, justifying its existence, and implementing a successful system for coordination, then I welcome its establishment. I think our municipality should learn from successful examples. It is necessary to involve the Ministry of Internal Affairs, the social worker of the state care agency, the representative of the resource center, the head of the association of kindergartens, the children’s department, the social service, etc. The position of Coordinator of the Mayor’s representatives is important in case of both, detection and prevention.” - **N. Dolakidze, the person responsible for gender in Terjola City Hall.**

It is interesting and a kind of summary is the opinion of one of the respondents about the effectiveness of the commission’s activity, where each step of the work process is logically described and connected: “The establishment of the commission at least guarantees the exchange of information. When the issue of the responsibility of specific agencies is decided, a statistics production group will be created in the municipality, which will rely on the information presented by all agencies united in the interagency commission. The presence of specific statistical data means revealing facts to which the relevant agencies are tasked to respond. The interagency commission will coordinate the mentioned process. If the mentioned mechanism worked, the rate of prevention and response would change on the scale of the municipality - detection of facts will improve, which will be followed by timely response.” - **N. Dolakidze, person responsible for gender, Terjola City Hall.**

In addition, **K. Salia (the head of the Tsalenjkha City Council)** believes that for the commissions to function fully, it is necessary **to cooperate with the non-governmental sector**, conduct training for the heads of the Ministry of Internal Affairs, local authorities, the resource center, and Agency For State Care And Assistance For the (Statutory) Victims of Human trafficking, and share the good practices of other municipalities.

The chairman of the **Kobuleti** Gender Equality Council, L. Shakarishvili, positively assesses the commission’s importance: “Given that the local self-government is the branch of government that is closest to the citizens and therefore has more obligations and responsibilities, of course, the work of the interagency commission would simplify the work.”

The creation of the commission is positively evaluated by the representatives of various sectors of the **Terjola** municipality - since all agencies involved in the detection of cases of violence, prevention, and provision of services will be involved, which will effectively affect not only the provision of services to the beneficiary but will also make it easier for the service providers to fulfil their duties: “The existence of such a group is a great luxury in dealing with specific cases. When the representatives of the Ministry of Internal Affairs, the state care agency, the resource center, and we [the Child Rights Protection

Department] are together, it will help the beneficiary. The provision of services will become more efficient, which is very difficult at the moment when one of the agencies initially refuses to engage and tries to transfer it to another.” - **N. Khujadze, social worker of the children’s department of Terjola City Hall.**

Despite the positive attitude of the majority of respondents, contrary opinions were also revealed (in municipalities where the interagency commission does not function). According to several respondents, **there is no need to establish an interagency commission in the municipality because the functions and powers that the interagency commission should implement are integrated into the activities of the Gender Council in the Social Affairs Commission:**

According to the Vice Mayor of **Khobi municipality**, D. Beraya, **“if the interagency commission intends to include social actors in its composition along with the executive branch - (social worker, educational sector, police, non-governmental sector) - the same composition is already fully reflected in the Gender Equality Council. All structures involved in responding to issues of domestic violence against women are in constant communication with the City Hall. Or the composition of the Gender Council should be revised because the same people were not represented in both circles. According to the regulations of the Gender Equality Council, it is not envisaged that the executive unit and referral subjects be presented in this dose.”**

Kh. Mamasakhlisi, head of the social service of the Kobuleti Municipality City Hall, does not see the necessity of establishing a commission: “If there should be a ‘commission for the commission,’ then it makes no sense.” According to her, the municipality cooperates with all relevant agencies and is directly contacted (even without the interagency commission) upon receiving the first official or anonymous message.

According to one of the respondents, when a case is referred to a relevant agency, and continuously returned, or endlessly redirected from one agency to another, **such circumstances excludes the prospect of creating an interagency commission.**

It is very important to involve all agencies at the same time, to communicate effectively, and to plan ways of helping.

“At least once a month, official meetings should be held, where it will be possible to discuss specific issues, for example, the budget cycle (which is a continuous cycle) so that all this is reflected in the municipal budget in the form of specific programs, which ensures the protection of gender equality and the protection of human rights in all aspects.” - **L. Shakarishvili, Chairman of the Gender Equality Council of Kobuleti Municipality.**

- **COOPERATION BETWEEN THE GENDER EQUALITY COUNCIL AND THE INTERAGENCY COMMISSION**

The issue of cooperation between the Gender Equality Council and the Interagency Commission is recognized by respondents, who acknowledge the risk of duplicating activities but believe that **close cooperation and coordination can neutralize this threat**. The Zugdidi Commission members state that the work of the Gender Council and the Interagency Commission are distinct, with no overlap in activities, despite some members being part of both entities. **This dual membership is not seen as a hindrance but rather as beneficial for their operations.**

“I am a member of both the Gender Equality Council and the Commission. Both platforms serve similar purposes for me, and I will be equally involved in both. Meetings with professionals and acquiring information are essential to understanding our differences and learning how to complement each other. It would be really good to separate certain things to avoid duplication.” - **N. Kapanadze, head of the Children’s Rights Protection Department of Chokhatauri Municipality.**

The challenge³⁶ of potential duplication between the Gender Council and the Interagency Commission is addressed by several officials, including M. Beradze, Chairman of the Gender Equality Council of Chokhatauri; M. Kutubidze, Vice Mayor of Chokhatauri Municipality and Chairman of the commission; and L. Kavtaradze, Chairman of the Khobi Municipality Council. They propose solutions:

1. Issues that exceed the authority or resources of the Gender Council should be escalated to the interagency commission. Conversely, if a political decision is deemed appropriate and the issue originates from or should be initiated at the City Council level, the interagency commission should refer the matter back to the Gender Council. The Gender Council should then take responsibility for advancing the issue accordingly.
2. Strengthen cooperation with qualified NGOs and foster intensive personal communication between the Gender Council and the Interagency. “The effectiveness of these units largely depend on the individuals involved – this is a principle of competition. There’s only one executive unit, which encompasses several external structures. Among these, the Council is merely one component of the City Council structure.”

³⁶ Avoiding duplication and spending the resources of two mechanisms on the same case, and vice versa, redistribution between two agencies.

3. Seeking guidance from more experienced municipal structures (municipalities) can be beneficial.
4. Some suggest that the representatives of the Gender Council and the Interagency Commission should not be the same individuals to avoid potential conflicts of interest.
5. Contrarily, others, like **M. Gvinianidze, head of the City Hall’s legal service and a commission member**, argue that having common members facilitates information exchange and enhances coordination between the two bodies.
6. In preparing the gender equality action plan it’s essential to involve the Interagency early on, and assess resource needs for activities like informational meetings.
7. “The Gender Equality Council primarily focuses on matters of violence and gender issues. In contrast, the inter-agency commission is designated for specific tasks, which may include addressing urgent cases. It’s important to understand that the Gender Council has its distinct plan, goals, and tasks, making duplication unlikely. Instead, the commission serves as an excellent foundation for the Gender Council’s work. It helps to gather statistical data to better understand the situation, such as the prevalence of violence in schools and kindergartens within Bagdati Municipality. This information becomes a vital resource and support for the council to draft its future plans,” stated **M. Mshvenieradze, Head of the Health and Social Protection Department of Baghdati Municipality and Member of the Commission**.

- **THE IMPORTANCE OF STRENGTHENING THE INTERAGENCY COMMISSION**

In the process of rapid assessment, the importance of increasing the competence and qualification of the commission members on issues of violence against women and domestic violence, as well as the existing mechanisms, programs, and services for the protection and assistance of victims, was highlighted. Below are the methods for qualification improvement as identified by the respondents:

“I have information that [the commission] works well in Zugdidi, and I like this model. However, attitude and competence regarding the issue are very important. Merely creating the commission will not change anything. It should be staffed optimally, and it is also important who will assist in raising competence.” - **Kh. Mamasakhlisi, Head of the Social Service of the City Hall of Kobuleti Municipality.**

- ❖ **Organization of meetings:** Respondents unanimously highlighted the Women’s Fund “Sukhumi” meetings where experiences were shared. They also noted the importance of public discussions, round tables, and thematic workshops for the intensive exchange of information and experience among referral subjects. “It was especially important for me because, in our work, we often encounter situations where the beneficiary is not interested in your level of awareness. You should be able to explain everything to them; you should have an answer and provide the necessary information - this reflects their attitude. We must have the correct information and properly redirect the beneficiaries to the relevant authority. This is why the information received at the meetings is valuable.” - **M. Mshvenieradze, Head of the Health and Social Protection Service of the City Hall of Baghdati Municipality, member of the Commission**³⁷.
- ❖ **Conducting trainings for commission members and heads/representatives of relevant agencies** (e.g., Ministry of Internal Affairs, local resource center, Agency For State Care And Assistance For the (Statutory) Victims of Human trafficking) - “It would be beneficial to have trainings aimed at more specific documentation, for example, about the rights and duties of commission members, about the commission’s work, about handling/managing specific cases. Additionally, it would be good to introduce meetings to exchange practices. Network meetings of existing commissions, which will increase the motivation to be more active.” said **S. Natriashvili, the person responsible for gender issues in Baghdadi City Hall and deputy chairman of the commission; N. Khujadze, social worker of the Child Rights Protection Department of Terjola City Hall; K. Salia, chairman of Tsalenjikha Sakrebulo.** “If a similar commission is created in Samtredia, the first step should be to hold training sessions for its representatives. The next step would be to share the experience of other successful commissions.” - **T. Morchadze, social worker of the state care agency, Samtredia.**
- ❖ **Holding network meetings:** “It would be beneficial to introduce meetings for the exchange of practices. Network meetings of existing commissions, which will increase the motivation to be more active,” said **S. Natriashvili, the person responsible for gender in Baghdadi City Hall, deputy chairman of the commission.**

³⁷ The inter-agency commission of Baghdati discussed one rather delicate case, which was resolved with minimal discomfort for the victim. Commission members attributed the successful resolution to effective intersectoral communications.

“The Fund “Sukhumi” held network meetings in municipalities where interagency commissions function. A meeting was held with those municipalities’ representatives and where discussions about the need to create an interagency commission were still ongoing. The representatives of Zugdidi and Senaki presented their activities in detail. Networking and sharing experiences are of great importance. However, the meetings should not be sporadic; experience sharing should occur more frequently. Non-governmental organizations play a significant role in this.” - **M. Beradze, Chairman of the Gender Equality Council of Chokhatauri Municipality.**

- ❖ **Strengthening the role of non-governmental organizations:** Respondents emphasized the role of non-governmental organizations in the issue of strengthening the commissions. “I believe that the commissions are newly created and, after three years, we may talk about their work in a completely different way.” - **M. Beradze, Chairman of the Gender Equality Council of Chokhatauri Municipality.** “Non-governmental organizations play a crucial role in raising competencies. Besides, there must be one non-governmental representative in the interagency commission.” - **T. Sichinava, the person responsible for gender issues at the Khobi Municipality City Hall.**

- **THE IMPORTANCE OF INSTITUTIONALIZATION OF THE INTERAGENCY COMMISSIONS**

Most respondents emphasize the importance of institutionalizing interagency commissions within City Hall, focusing on the necessity for these bodies to have a legislative foundation. Such a foundation, where the main emphasis is placed on the “**mandatory nature**” of implementation at the legislative level, is believed to ensure its members’ mandatory participation and commitment, thereby **enhancing the effectiveness and efficiency of these commissions.** Below are revised opinions and arguments in support of institutionalization, highlighting the significance of legislative backing:

“Existence at the level of law will impose obligations on all members of the commission. When tasked with something, you must do it and learn more about it as you work. Implementation at the legislative level will significantly contribute to the efficiency of the commissions.” - **M. Mshvenieradze, Head of the Health and Social Protection Service of the City Hall of Baghdati Municipality, member of the commission;**

“The Gender Council is recommendatory, and in the case of institutionalization, it will assume additional obligations. It is all about the fate of specific individuals, and it cannot be treated superficially” - **T. Sichinava, the person responsible for gender issues at the Khobi Municipality City Hall.**

“Of course, our successful practice in the country is very good. However, if our goal is to speed up processes, get results in the short term, and achieve more progress in ensuring human rights and gender equality, it is better to recognize this institution at the legislative level” - **L. Shakarishvili, Chairman of the Gender Council of Kobuleti Municipality.**

T. Morchadze (social worker of the state care agency, Samtredia) notes the importance of establishing the commission and acknowledges the municipality’s resources for enhancing communication. If the commission or council is institutionalized, it becomes simpler to establish it, justify its effectiveness, and collaborate with other agencies.

The respondents underscored the crucial role of qualified non-governmental organizations and local self-governments in advocating for the institutionalization of commissions:

“I consider advocating for the issue of the commission vitally important. I would like the Fund “Sukhumi” to continue addressing this issue. As a result, the country’s image will improve and fulfil its international obligations and commitments to human rights protection more effectively. The interagency commission will serve as the best mechanism for this.” -

L. Shakarishvili, Chairman of the Gender Equality Council of Kobuleti Municipality.

“Advocating for this issue and involving qualified local organizations, including our local self-government representatives, is crucial. As the head of the municipality’s gender equality council, I would also participate if needed. This would provide a practical rationale for consulting those directly addressing these issues. At the parliamentary level and during commission discussions, I would be eager to contribute as a speaker, given the opportunity.”

CONCLUSION

The research data analysis underscored the practical significance of interagency commissions in terms of referrals, communication, and coordinated work. However, to effect positive changes, it is crucial to further “formalize” these structural units and to shift effectively from the interpersonal level of communication to inter-structural and interagency coordination. It is of utmost importance to share, utilize, and implement examples of good practice (both local and international, where possible), to raise awareness (among both the population and representatives of municipalities), and to foster understanding of the commission’s significance in the long term; to ensure proper separation of powers (with the Gender Equality Council); to encourage the participation of municipal representatives in the commission’s activities; and to facilitate the enhancement of local authorities’ qualifications through non-governmental organizations, among other strategies.

RECOMMENDATIONS

TO THE PERMANENT PARLIAMENTARY GENDER EQUALITY COUNCIL:

- It is important to increase the efforts of the Permanent Parliamentary Gender Equality Council and advocate for changes in the legislative act for the institutionalization of municipal interagency commissions working on issues of gender equality, violence against women, and domestic violence.
- The Council must coordinate properly to strengthen the municipal interagency commissions and attract and encourage state agencies and civil actors.

TO THE INTERAGENCY COMMISSION ON GENDER EQUALITY, VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN, AND DOMESTIC VIOLENCE:

- It is important for the commission to facilitate the process of institutionalization of interagency commissions in municipalities to strengthen the already existing commissions so that it becomes an effective mechanism for gender equality, prevention of violence against women and domestic violence, and strengthening families at-risk of violence.
- It is important to ensure close cooperation between the interagency commission working on issues of violence against women and domestic violence under the Government of Georgia and municipalities, systematic exchange of information, and provision of methodological assistance in cooperation with local and international organizations.

To the Ministry of Internally Displaced Persons from the Occupied Territories, Health, Labour and Social Affairs of Georgia:

- It is important to encourage the participation of state social workers and representatives from primary healthcare sectors in the commission's activities. This approach will effectively strengthen interagency communication regarding resolving the beneficiaries' priority social needs.

TO THE MINISTRY OF SCIENCE AND EDUCATION:

- To ensure full participation of the educational sector in the local referral processes of cases of violence against women and domestic violence, heads of educational resource centers and/or educational institutions must be represented in the municipal commission.

TO LOCAL AUTHORITIES:

- Planning events is important for the commission's effective functioning, which will contribute to a fundamental understanding of the importance of interagency commissions in City Hall.
- Creating a network of social partners and activating inter-municipal platforms for sharing experiences is necessary.
- It is necessary to develop the commission's action plans in time and introduce the practice of periodic reporting.
- It is important to popularize the commission's activities and use available resources for municipalities (digital platforms, public meetings) for information exchange events.

TO LOCAL AND INTERNATIONAL NGOS:

- It is important to strengthen municipalities' potential and organize qualification-raising, training, and information exchange platforms to promote the effectiveness of the Commission's activities.
- It is important to advocate the institutionalization of municipal interagency commissions on the issues of violence against women and domestic violence in city halls by qualified non-governmental organizations.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

1. Resolution No. 14 of the Government of Georgia on the approval of national referral procedures for the identification, protection, assistance, and rehabilitation of victims of violence against women and/or domestic violence, 22.01.24 in Georgian <https://matsne.gov.ge/ka/document/view/6081714?publication=0>;
2. Council of Europe GREVIO report on Georgia's implementation of the Istanbul Convention (22.11.22) - <https://rm.coe.int/grevio-report-on-georgia-2022/1680a917aa>;
3. Monitoring Report by the Women's Fund "Sukhumi": "The child rights protection and support department's effectiveness assessment and existing challenges", 2023, <https://fsokhumi.ge/index.php/en/publications/gender-based-violence/item/13004-the-child-rights-protection-and-support-department-s-effectiveness-assessment-and-existing-challenges>
4. Monitoring Report by Women's Fund "Sukhumi": "Assessment of Effectiveness of the Municipalities' Preventive Measures to Combat Violence Against Women/Domestic Violence" - <https://fsokhumi.ge/images/2023/7/1/BROT-Prevention-ENG.pdf>;
5. Constitution of Georgia, 1995, in Georgian <https://www.matsne.gov.ge/ka/document/view/30346?publication=36>
6. Comments on the Provisions of the Convention, Council of Europe <https://Rm.Coe.Int/Geo-Istanbul-Convention-And-Explanatory-Report-A4/16808d24c5>
7. The Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence (the so-called "Istanbul Convention"), 2011, <https://rm.coe.int/168008482e>
8. Local Self-Government Code, 2024, in Georgian <https://matsne.gov.ge/ka/document/view/2244429?publication=69>
9. Law of Georgia "On Gender Equality", 2010, in Georgian <https://www.matsne.gov.ge/ka/document/view/91624?publication=10>
10. Resolution No. 286 of the Government of Georgia dated June 12, 2017, "On the Creation and Approval of the Statute of the Interagency Commission Working on Issues of Gender Equality, Violence Against Women and Domestic Violence," <https://matsne.gov.ge/ka/document/view/3698004?publication=4>

11. The Family Assistance Unit as an Expert Team on Providing Assistance to The Victims of Domestic Violence - <https://www.eucpn.org/document/the-family-assistance-unit-as-an-expert-team-on-providing-assistance-to-the-victims-of>
12. European Crime Prevention Award (ECPA) <https://eucpn.org/sites/default/files/document/files/GP-ECPA-2013-ES-TheFamilyAssistanceUnit-1.pdf>
13. General Department of the Criminal Police Family Assistance Central Unit - <https://eucpn.org/sites/default/files/document/files/GP-ECPA-2013-ES-TheFamilyAssistanceUnit-2.pdf>
14. Coordinated Community Response Components for Victims of Intimate Partner Violence: A Review of the Literature - <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4113829/>
15. Family Violence Coordinating Council - <https://www.dupagecourts.gov/18th-judicial-circuit-court/services/family-violence-coordinating-council.php>
16. About the County Domestic Violence Coordination Office - <https://multco.preservica.com/Render/render/waybackproxy/20130913231708/http://multco.us/dv/about-county-domestic-violence-coordination-office>
17. About The IFVCC - <https://icjia.illinois.gov/ifvcc/about/>
18. Family Violence Coordinating Council (FVCC) - <https://www.roe26.net/fvcchttps://www.publicsafety.gc.ca/cnt/cntrng-crm/crm-prvntn/nvntr/dtls-en.aspx?i=10195>
19. Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hubs (MASH) - <https://www.nottinghamshire.gov.uk/care/childrens-social-care/nottinghamshire-children-and-families-alliance/pathway-to-provision/multi-agency-safeguarding-hub-mash>



ქალთა ფონდი „სოხუმი“

The data was collected and rapid-assessment report was prepared by:

Women Fund “Sukhumi” Kutaisi head office’s

Monitoring group members:

EMMA KAMKIA, GURANDA GVANTSELADZE, TEA GOLETIANI

Women Fund “Sukhumi” Tbilisi representative office:

NINO KORINTELI

LIDA CHIKHLADZE

EKATERINE GAMAKHARIA

Translator: NINA MAMAGEISHVILI

Layout: LIA KOSTAVA

Contact information:

№6 Mgaloblishvili Str., Kutaisi, Georgia

Office space №2, №29b, A. Mitskevich Str., Tbilisi, Georgia

womansukhumi@gmail.com;

fundsukhumbilisi@gmail.com

www.fsokhumi.ge

www.facebook.com/fsokhumi