EVALUATION REPORT

Final external evaluation of the project "Strengthening Participatory Democracy and Human Rights at Local Level in Georgia"

**Council of Europe Project VC 2804
ADA Project 8377-00/2020**

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List of acronyms

ADA	Austrian Development Agency
ADC	Austrian Development Cooperation
AP	Action Plan
CoE	Council of Europe
CSO	Civil Society Organisation
DAC	Development Assistance Committee
LGBTI	Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and intersex
NALAG	National Association of Local Authorities of Georgia
OECD	Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development
PDO	Public Defenders Office
ToC	Theory of Change
ToR	Terms of Reference
ToT	Training of Trainers
UN	United Nations
USAID	U.S. Agency for International Development

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Background

I. **Context:** With its Action Plan for Georgia 2020-2023, the Council of Europe (CoE) seeks to assist national and local authorities in the implementation of the 2020-2025 Decentralisation Strategy. Amongst other goals, the Action Plan aims to create favourable conditions for ethical decision-making and more citizen-oriented, gender-sensitive, open, and transparent local governance. The Austrian Development Agency (ADA) has supported policy work on decentralisation and assisted the Georgian Government in the adoption of the Pilot Integrated Regional Development Programme (2020-2022). Its Framework Strategy with the EU Eastern Partner Countries focuses on inclusive local development and effective institutions in Georgia by means of increasing local governments' capacities to provide effective and high-quality services and by empowering civil society to participate in local decision-making and local development.

II. **Description of the intervention:** The project *Strengthening Participatory Democracy and Human Rights at Local Level in Georgia* aims to strengthen CSO and citizen participation in decision-making processes and to establish effective co-operation mechanisms between local authorities and the civil sector. It also aims to strengthen the capacities of local authorities and of the National Association of Local Authorities of Georgia (NALAG) to embed human rights standards and practices in their policies and strategies, to incorporate a gender perspective, and to eliminate all forms of discrimination.

III. The project is implemented by the Council of Europe with financial contribution from the Austrian Development Cooperation. It commenced in December 2020 with a three-year implementation period and a total budget of 1,800,000 EUR distributed evenly between two components, respectively led by the CoE General Directorate II (DGII) and Congress. Due to challenges resulting from the Covid-19 pandemic, which were outside the project's control, the project set-up experienced certain delays. Local elections held in early October 2021 required flexibility and reorganisation of activities targeting local authorities.

IV. The project aims for three distinct outcomes:
   - The development and piloting of an improved regulatory framework for civil participation by civil society and local authorities *(DGII component)*;
   - The strengthening of capacities of local authorities and NALAG to integrate and implement human rights standards and practices in their policies and strategies, and to advocate human rights in Georgia as full-fledged partners *(Congress component)*;
   - In selected municipalities, local authorities improve social inclusion and equal opportunities for all, incorporate a gender perspective in local political action, and eliminate discrimination (*Congress component*).

V. **The evaluation:** The purpose of the evaluation is to ensure accountability and to promote organisational learning. Its recommendations will be used for framing a follow-up intervention. The evaluation will provide an external assessment of the overall project measured against the objectives and indicators as set out in the project log frame. On the basis of the ToR the specific objectives of the evaluation are: To assess the project intervention against the OECD criteria of relevance, effectiveness and sustainability and moreover against the CoE specific criteria of added value; to assess how and with what results gender has been mainstreamed in the project; and to provide recommendations on possible lines of action and further activities for future assistance, long-standing sustainability, and improved project methodology.

VI.   The evaluation covers the full range of activities up until June 2023 and all 18 participating municipalities. Following a desk review, interviews and focus groups were carried out in six municipalities including Marneuli, Oni, Ozurgeti, Tbilisi (DGII and Congress components, plus grant); Dmanisi (Congress component); and Rustavi (DGII component). In addition, an online survey covered all participating municipalities. A total of 63 stakeholders participated through interviews and focus groups, and a total of 133 stakeholders participated in the online survey.

Conclusions and recommendations

VII.   **RELEVANCE:** The project is of relevance to priority areas of the CoE Action Plan as well as for the Austrian Development Cooperation in Georgia. The objectives of the project adequately address the needs of the beneficiaries by virtue of a thorough and participatory needs assessment. The needs assessment could be further strengthened by a more prominent analysis of the interlinkages between issues related to human rights on the one hand and civil participation on the other. The particular need for participation mechanisms for underrepresented groups is only indirectly revealed when the two assessment reports are analysed together. The project interventions have been aligned with key strategies, policies and reforms, also with reference to obligations under respective international treaties. On the whole, the project has taken the needs of different gender and other underrepresented groups well into account as project interventions are based on a sound assessment process. The project Theory of Change (ToC) would benefit from further consideration of the national actors' involvement and more visible interlinkages of the civil participation and human rights project components.

VIII.   **Recommendation 1:** Ensure that the ToC of a potential follow-up project 1) is reviewed with key stakeholders, including municipal stakeholders, to ensure feasibility of effect chains in a given time frame, 2) more explicitly includes national actors through a separate strand of action and 3) visualises the interplay between the two project components of civil participation and human rights.

IX.   **EFFECTIVENESS:** The project has been effective in producing concrete outputs. Awareness has been raised, knowledge enhanced, and new knowledge products have been utilised by municipalities. First examples of new practices, regulatory frameworks and structures at municipal level can be found. The effectiveness of the interplay between new practices, new policies and new or enhanced structures varies between municipalities. Exemplary results are the following:

Selected results at the local level
- **New practices:** Citizens' Assembly, Civic Lab, Participatory Budgeting, UChange Game, Municipal strategic documents are developed with a participatory methodology.
- **Regulatory frameworks:** Municipality-internal guidelines on antidiscrimination and participation, a Youth participation strategy.
- **Newly established or strengthened municipal structures:** Strengthened Municipal Advisory councils, on gender equality, disability, and related to youth, including setting up a budget item for the latter.

Selected results strengthening the interplay between central and local level
- **New practices:** NALAG successfully promotes exchange between municipal and national authorities on human rights; Support provided to municipalities to implement Government decree N264 on the development of mid-term development documents of municipalities.
- **Regulatory frameworks:** MoU between NALAG and the Office of the Advisor to the Prime Minister on Human Rights for cooperation on all human rights issues; NALAGs draft strategy for the localisation of human rights; School Participatory Budgeting regulatory framework developed involving local and central institutions.

X.   In particular, NALAG's capacities are valued by stakeholders. The association has close ties with municipalities, facilitates productive exchange between municipalities, and can even play the role of a door-opener, facilitating exchange with both civil society and the national level.

XI.   Limited evidence was found of wider changes at outcome level attributed to the implementation of rights-based local initiatives, policies and practices and increased participation. It also is too early to assess wider benefits for gender and underrepresented groups.

XII.   As reasons for achievements and lack thereof, the evaluation can establish that one of the main factors determining the project's success is the political will at national level as well as in the municipalities. Further, it is crucial for the quality of participatory processes that citizens perceive them to be genuine and that the political interest exhibited in them is authentic and transparent. Here, civil society organisations play a key role. Another enabler is the trust created in the medium-term when participatory processes lead to visible projects which meet the concrete needs in the municipalities.

XIII. **Recommendation 2:** A future project might well consider the importance of coaching/mentoring for individual municipalities. Coaching/mentoring should take all identified enablers into account, e.g. it can support municipalities in identifying resources to finance small-scale project as visible results from participation processes. Consider locally based facilitators for this function to enhance continuity of these coaching processes.

XIV.   **Recommendation 3:** Initiate an analysis of lessons learnt from the implementation of the small-scale projects of this intervention, jointly with municipalities and national stakeholders. Assess options on how the funding of small-scale projects for municipalities to support participatory and human rights-based processes at local level can become sustainable.

XV.   **Recommendation 4:** Assess the possible need for adaptation to specific rural and urban contexts, in which local populations exhibit differences in composition and age structures.

XVI.   **Recommendation 5:** Monitor with target groups whether the presumed positive effects for gender and underrepresented groups materialise (e.g. through the initiated small-scale projects), and analyse enabling factors.

XVII. **SUSTAINABILITY:** The evaluation could establish that sustainability is likely in a number of areas. The depth of changes, and hence the likelihood of their sustainability, varies between municipalities. NALAG's raised capacities contribute to the likelihood of sustainability. Overall, sustainability prospects are at an expected level given the length and scope of the project. Policies, organisational structures and practices have not yet evolved to the degree that both an organisational memory and a political culture change can be established. This would require longer-term engagement, e.g. through a follow-up project.

XVIII. Recommendation 6: In view of a possible follow-up project and expansion, aim for a balance between municipalities which already demonstrated commitment and interest in civil participation and human rights throughout the present project (potential for sustainability orientation) and municipalities where the awareness of human rights and civil participation needs to be raised (expansion of project scope).

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Context and description of the intervention

1. Context: On 26 October 2002, Georgia signed the European Charter on Local Self-Government, which was ratified in December 2004 and came into effect in April 2005. Also in 2005, a new organic law on "Local Self-Government" was adopted, which enabled the formation of local self-government bodies through elections. Large-scale decentralisation and regional development reforms were implemented. In 2010 changes to the Constitution of Georgia introduced guarantees for local self-government. In 2014 a new organic law, the Self-Government Code, was adopted. It consolidated various legislative acts regulating issues related to local self-government. On 31 December 2019, the Georgian Government approved the new 2020-2025 Decentralisation Strategy and its respective Action Plan for 2020-2021.

2. With its Action Plan for Georgia 2020-2023, the Council of Europe (CoE) seeks to assist national and local authorities in the implementation of the 2020-2025 Decentralisation Strategy. Amongst other goals, the Action Plan aims to create favourable conditions for ethical decision-making and more citizen-oriented, gender-sensitive, open, and transparent local governance. The Austrian Development Agency (ADA) has supported policy work on decentralisation and assisted the Georgian Government in the adoption of the Pilot Integrated Regional Development Programme (2020-2022). Its Framework Strategy with the EU Eastern Partner Countries focuses on inclusive local development and effective institutions in Georgia by means of increasing local governments' capacities to provide for effective and high-quality services and by empowering civil society to participate in local decision-making and local development.

3. Description of the intervention: The project *Strengthening Participatory Democracy and Human Rights at Local Level in Georgia* aims to strengthen CSO and citizen participation in decision-making processes and to establish effective co-operation mechanisms between local authorities and the civil sector. It also aims to strengthen the capacities of local authorities and of the National Association of Local Authorities of Georgia (NALAG) to embed human rights standards and practices in their policies and strategies, to incorporate a gender perspective, and to eliminate all forms of discrimination.

4. The project is implemented by the Council of Europe under the Council of Europe Action Plan for Georgia 2020-2023, with financial contribution from the Austrian Development Cooperation. It commenced in December 2020 with a three-year implementation period and a total budget of 1,800,000 EUR distributed evenly between two components, respectively led by the CoE General Directorate II (DGII) and Congress. Due to challenges resulting from the Covid-19 pandemic, which were beyond the project's control, the project set-up experienced certain delays. Local elections held in early October 2021 required flexibility and reorganisation of activities targeting local authorities.

5. The project aims for three distinct outcomes:
   1. The development and piloting of an improved regulatory framework for civil participation by civil society and local authorities *(DGII component)*;
   2. The strengthening of capacities of local authorities and NALAG to integrate and implement human rights standards and practices in their policies and strategies, and to advocate human rights in Georgia as full-fledged partners *(Congress component)*;
   3. In selected municipalities, local authorities improve social inclusion and equal opportunities for all, incorporate a gender perspective in local political action, and eliminate discrimination (*Congress component*).

1.2 Purpose and scope of the evaluation

6. Purpose: The purpose of the evaluation is to ensure accountability and to promote organisational learning. It will serve to identify lessons learnt and its recommendations will be used for framing a follow-up intervention. The main users of the evaluation will be Congress and DGII management and project teams. Furthermore, the evaluation audience includes the project partners, members of the Project Steering Committee, including civil society organisations co-operating in the project, elected representatives and staff from the target local authorities and local experts as well as the donor ADA. The evaluation will provide an external assessment of the overall project measured against the objectives and indicators as set out in the project log frame. On the basis of the ToR the specific objectives of the evaluation are: To assess the project intervention against the OECD criteria of relevance, effectiveness and sustainability and moreover against the CoE specific criteria of added value; to assess how and with what results gender has been mainstreamed in the project; and to provide recommendations on possible lines of action and further activities for future assistance, long-standing sustainability, and improved project methodology.

7. Scope: The evaluation covered the full range of activities up until June 2023. As the evaluation was carried out six months before completion of the project, activities planned for and implemented after June 2023, were not considered (for a full list of these activities, see annex 10). The evaluation covers all 18 participating municipalities: Akhmeta, Ambrolauri, Bolnisi, Borjomi, Chokhatauri, Dedoplistskaro, Dmanisi, Gori, Marneuli, Oni, Ozurgeti, Rustavi, Tbilisi, Telavi, Tetritskaro, Tsalka, Tskaltubo and Zestaponi (annex 1).

1.3 Evaluation methodology including limitations

8. Description of the methodology: The evaluation combines a summative approach, which identifies the lessons of the past, with a formative approach, which aims to inform future decision-making on the project. The methodology uses qualitative and quantitative data. The evaluators applied a participatory approach through focus groups and an online survey to ensure a maximum coverage of stakeholders. The methodology further followed the principles of utility and inclusion of a human rights and gender perspective.

9. Data collection methods, data sources and data quality: The evaluators applied a triangulation of data collection methods which included (a) a systematic document review; (b) online and on-site semi-structured interviews; (c) focus groups and (d) an online survey. Data sources for the document review included project-related documents, CoE policy documents and monitoring reports and external reports for context analysis (annex 9). Interviews were carried out with the CoE DGII and Congress project team, primary stakeholder groups (civil society, mayors, local councillors, administrative staff of local authorities, NALAG, the Public Defender's Office) and external stakeholders from government, parliament, experts and international organizations. Data quality and systematic data collection were ensured through a number of data collection and analysis tools.

10. Gender equality and human rights appropriateness of the evaluation process has been ensured through the inclusion of specific questions relating to gender and underrepresented groups as outlined in the evaluation matrix. Interviews, focus groups and the online survey reflect the diversity of stakeholders including women and men. Two focus groups captured specific perspectives of youth (Oni) and of participants in a Citizens' Assembly format (Rustavi).

11. Stakeholder consultation started in June 2023 with an initial kick-off with CoE project staff in Strasbourg, followed by a series of online interviews with relevant CoE staff and other stakeholders. After this, on-site interviews and field visits to the sample municipalities were carried

out between 24 – 31 July, completed by a debriefing of the project team at the CoE office in Tbilisi. A total of 54 stakeholders were interviewed, 9 stakeholders participated in 2 focus groups and 133 stakeholders responded to the online survey.[1] (annex 8)

12. Reference indicators, benchmarks and sampling frames: The evaluation is based on an evaluation matrix structured around the evaluation questions under selected OECD/DAC criteria of relevance, effectiveness and sustainability. Questions addressing effectiveness and the CoE specific criteria of added value were grouped under a joint section "effectiveness and added value" in the evaluation matrix. Reference indicators were formulated for each evaluation question (annex 7). In line with the ToR, the evaluation concentrated on those criteria and respective key questions which will be important for a follow-up project. As the evaluation was carried out six months before the end of the project an assessment against the OECD/DAC criteria of impact would have been too early.

13. The evaluators adjusted the project Theory of Change (ToC) to visualise pathways of change determined by the national level. The evaluators applied a traffic light system[2] based on the scoring of the ADA results assessment to visualise achievement levels of the output and outcome components in the adjusted ToC (annex 3).

14. The basis of the sampling frame was the purposive selection of six municipalities, covering a third of all 18 project municipalities, to ensure coverage of the two project components, civil participation (by DGII) and human rights (by Congress), and to ensure the inclusion of municipalities that implemented a small-scale grant project. For reasons of time and resources, the evaluators had to limit the sample to six municipalities. The coverage of one third of the total municipalities participating in the project was nevertheless sufficient for a robust conclusion. Sampling was carried out in consultation with the client. The distribution was hence as follows: Marneuli, Oni, Ozurgeti, Tbilisi (DGII and Congress components, plus grant); Dmanisi (Congress components); Rustavi (DGII component). For the survey, purposive sampling was used (project stakeholder list) in combination with snowball-sampling (municipality contact points invited participants of local activities to take part in the survey).[3]

15. Limitations: As outlined in the inception report, the methodology was not able to consider three outcome indicators which are based on the SDG indicator catalogue because relevant data could only have been collected through large representative surveys which would have exceeded the scope of this evaluation.[4]

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[1] A total of 283 stakeholders were invited to participate in the survey. Response rate = 47%
[2] Scoring scale: Fully achieved – largely achieved – partially achieved – not achieved.
[3] For more details on the survey see annex 3.
[4] These are the following indicators: OC3.4: Proportion of population in selected municipalities reporting having personally felt discriminated against or harassed in the previous 12 months on a ground of discrimination prohibited under international human rights law; OC3.5: Proportion of population satisfied with their last experience of public services (SDG 16.6); OC3.6: Proportion of population who believe decision-making is inclusive and responsive, by sex, age, disability and population group (SDG 10.3, SDG 16.7).

2. FINDINGS

16. Evaluation findings are structured by the evaluation criteria of relevance, effectiveness including added value, and sustainability. Findings are presented under each evaluation question. At various points, interview partners could not distinguish between the two project components, civil participation and human rights. For this reason, results were not fully presented separately according to components.

2.1 Relevance

2.1.1 Evaluation question: To what extent has the intervention design been relevant to the priority areas of the 2020-2023 Council of Europe Action Plan and the Framework Strategy of the Austrian Development Cooperation for Georgia?

> FINDING 1: The project is designed to contribute to expected AP outcomes for local democracy and human rights implementation at local level, complementing other AP interventions targeting the national level.

> FINDING 2: The project is designed to contribute to ADC's Country Strategy for Georgia, in particular in terms of strengthening governance and local development.

17. The Action Plan (AP): As a strategic programming instrument, the AP aims to bring the country further into line with European standards in three distinct areas: Human rights, the rule of law and democracy. Under the third thematic area of democracy, as part of strengthening democratic governance, the AP document defines expected outcomes for local democracy. These include: better consultation of local authorities on the development of the national Decentralisation and Good Governance Strategy; building capacities of newly elected local councillors to support the decentralisation process; enhancing the quality of service and protection of human rights at local level; improving the management of resources at local level and empowering women to take active part in political life.

18. Both CoE and partner interviews confirm the relevance of the project to the AP area of democracy. Moreover, the focus on good governance and civil participation also contributes to the AP area of human rights, as the project design aims to strengthen the rights of underrepresented groups including women, youth, children and minorities at local level. Beyond its thematic contribution, interviewees underlined that the project, which supports the implementation of national strategies at local level, complements the respective AP interventions, which target mostly national level institutions, very well. Finally, the project reflects the AP approach of technical cooperation and political engagement for standard setting at national level, in particular as the Congress strengthens the political input of the project to ensure that municipalities are involved in reforming legislation along CoE standards.

19. ADC Country Strategy for Georgia: According to the project proposal, the design of the project aims to be in line with the cross-cutting strategic goal of governance, as presented in the Austrian Development Cooperation's (ADC) Country Strategy for Georgia. Furthermore, it aims to contribute to the area of "Decentralisation and enhanced governance for more efficient administration, better service delivery and strengthened civil participation".

20. Interviews with CoE stakeholders confirm that the strategic focus of ADC on inclusive local development and needs-based service delivery is addressed through the project and that the project equally contributes to the Austrian Development Agency (ADA) indicators. One

interviewee highlighted the CoE's human rights approach as an added value to ADC's strategy. Although the CoE initially aimed to select municipalities on the basis of specific human rights issues, they were actually chosen as they were part of the ADC's six 'development strategy regions' and can be defined as "development regions" in terms of administrative reforms or their infrastructure.

2.1.2 Evaluation question: To what extent have intervention objectives addressed the needs (identified through the baselines assessments conducted in the framework of the project) of the beneficiaries?

FINDING 3: All stakeholder groups perceive the project as relevant to their needs.

FINDING 4: The needs assessments as part of the project inception proved to be key for the identification of gaps and particular needs. Related processes involving the support of local experts and a thorough participatory process including multiple stakeholders were invaluable.

FINDING 5: National level institutions, which are not a direct target group of project measures, are not considered a key stakeholder in the project Theory of Change (ToC). The interplay between the two project components is not visualised.

21. Assessment of needs: Overall, all stakeholder groups confirmed the relevance of the intervention. This is further verified by the results of the survey which was carried out as part of this evaluation. Here, 70% of respondents stated that the project met the needs of local authorities "to a great extent" and 67% of respondents stated that the project met the needs of local citizens and communities "to a great extent".[5] From a total of 64 municipalities, the CoE received 40 applications to participate in the project, indicating the relevance of the project.[6]

22. Interviews confirm that for both components of the project relevant data on target groups and needs was obtained and a subsequent analysis thereof fed into the design and further planning of project interventions. Data and information gathered for the context analysis were collected from a wide range of sources.[7]

23. Thorough baselines/needs assessments for both project components during the inception phase constitute the centrepiece of the context analysis.[8] Its findings filled specific information gaps and generated disaggregated data for the establishment of an indicator baseline and target values. Stakeholders emphasised that the assessments benefitted hugely from the utilisation of local experts for a number of reasons: The provision of relevant local context and expertise; close cooperation with the relevant partners PDO and NALAG; and the provision of specific

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[5] For both values N=117.

[6] Within the human rights component, the project exceeded the originally envisioned 10 municipalities by three, to include 13. Within the DGII component, it exceeded the originally envisioned 10 municipalities by five, to include 15 (18 in total for both components).

[7] *CoE monitoring mechanisms* including e.g. the 2018 assessment report of the Congress on the level of implementation of human rights obligations and standards at local level in Georgia; *lessons learned of previous CoE projects* including the Project on civil participation in decision-making in the Eastern Partnership Countries (2015-2017) and 2019-2020 Project on civil participation in the municipality of Tbilisi; *findings in the context of governmental stakeholder initiatives, e*.g. the 2020-2025 Decentralisation Strategy; *analysis of other institutions, e*.g. the USAID sustainability Index; Media Development Foundation's Anti-Western Propaganda Monitoring Report, Caucasus Resource Research Centre. Annex No. 4 of the project proposal includes a non-exhaustive bibliography that has served to inform the preparation and development the proposal.

[8] Council of Europe: Civil Participation Briefs (for 11 municipalities); Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe (December 2021): Human Rights at Local Level in Georgia. Assessment Report; Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe (August 20222): Local authorities' Efforts, Challenges and Needs in the Implementation of Human Rights Commitments. Baseline Assessment report

recommendations on the basis of first findings to the municipalities. The local experts were also key in identifying crucial issues which had not been recognised by the municipal stakeholders.

24. Interviews confirm that participating municipalities benefitted directly from assessment, as municipality-specific findings served as a basis for project development and enabled targeted efforts to address identified weaknesses or gaps.

25. Interviewees emphasised the participatory approach of the assessment processes. For example, the needs assessment on civil participation was preceded by a mapping of CSOs to ensure sufficient inclusion of civil society input. The participatory process also included thorough feedback mechanisms, e.g., the human rights needs assessment provided a feedback opportunity for respondents at local level. Focus groups carried out with municipal focal points obtained findings for feedback. Findings have also been shared with the platform of municipalities to obtain feedback on any potential gaps. Moreover, findings have been shared with partners.

26. The number of stakeholders participating in the assessment process was dependent on the available budget for this exercise. Although interviews confirm that all relevant stakeholder groups had been involved, one CoE interviewee pointed out that an increased budget for broadening participation would still have been welcome. Civil society input also varied due to the differing engagement at municipal level. The mapping exercise identified CSOs in all municipalities, with some having more CSOs than others. There were one or two municipalities where identified CSOs did not work on civil participation. Moreover, activism levels varied across municipalities, e.g., the CSOs in Telavi municipality are quite active, while the CSOs in Zestaponi municipality are not.

27. The Theory of Change (ToC): The ToC developed for this project (annex 2) does not consider a key stakeholder of this intervention: The national level institutions, albeit not a direct target group of project measures such as training activities, play a key role in determining the effects. Moreover, although the project design distinguishes two components (civil participation and human rights) and implementation and administration are clearly divided between two entities (CoE DG II and the Congress), the two project components have clear interlinkages and joint effects, which are not well visualised in the ToC.

2.1.3 Evaluation question: To what extent have interventions been aligned with, and supportive of, the decentralisation reform and relevant strategies / policies on promotion and protection of human rights and strengthening civil participation at local level?

FINDING 6: Interventions including capacity building and technical support have been in line with the 2020-2025 Decentralisation Strategy and its aim to promote the strengthening of civil participation at local level.

FINDING 7: Project interventions have been supportive of the National Strategy for the Protection of Human Rights as well as of strategies and policies advancing underrepresented groups including women, youth and persons with disabilities with reference to obligations under respective international treaties.

28. Project design: The project design, as outlined in the project application, aimed to support existing relevant strategies and legal provisions. These include: the 2005 Law "on Local Self-Government"; the 2014 Self-Government Code; the 2017 revision of the Constitution of Georgia, which introduced the principle of subsidiarity; the 2020-2025 Decentralisation Strategy and its Action Plan; the 2018-2021 Regional Development Program in Georgia; the 2014-2020 National Strategy

for the Protection of Human Rights and its Action Plan and the development of a subsequent strategy; and the State Strategy for Civic Equality and Integration and its 2015-2020 Action Plan.

29. Civil participation: On the whole, interviews confirm that the project was able to support a number of strategies. In particular, interviewees highlighted the project's contribution to the 2020-2025 Decentralisation Strategy and to strengthening civil participation at local level.[9] Interviewees confirmed that the project contributed to putting the Decentralisation Strategy into practice in pilot municipalities by introducing a set of well-tested participation tools, as tools stipulated by law were mostly not yet put into practice. Here, the project approach of introducing tools and providing assistance on putting them into practice, e.g., Citizens' Assembly, responded to the need for capacity building and technical support.

30. Several interviewees pointed out that a component on fiscal decentralisation was lacking in the project. Fiscal decentralisation is an integral part of the Decentralisation Strategy, enabling municipalities to cope with newly envisaged tasks. Another aspect concerns the inclusion of the national level. It is included into the project indirectly through the establishment of relevant structures under NALAG such as the Committee on Human Rights Localisation to ensure a constructive dialogue between two levels. Here, one interviewee pointed out that the project's ability to support the Decentralisation Strategy would be enhanced by targeting the national level more directly to strengthen municipal communication with the central government.

31. Localisation of human rights: In September 2022, the Government of Georgia approved the second National Strategy for the Protection of Human Rights in Georgia for 2022-2030 with the elaboration of the respective Action Plan being underway. According to an interview with a governmental stakeholder, the localisation of human rights is a priority. Hence the project contribution is considered to be highly relevant in building human rights knowledge and awareness at local level. Several interviewees stressed that one of the thematic shortcomings of the National Human Rights Strategy, the lack of reference to LGBTI rights, is taken up through various project activities, e.g., on the occasion of meetings at municipal level.

32. Interviewees also emphasised that with this project human rights are for the first time systematically addressed at municipal level. Moreover, the project approach of facilitating horizontal exchange and coordination on human rights is seen as valuable in light of the challengingly large number of 64 municipalities. In view of this, one stakeholder stressed that the holistic project approach with the aim of involving all municipalities in the initiatives is relevant, as the introduction of human rights cannot take place in individual municipalities but must always be seen in the overall context, also at national level.

33. Concerning strategies and policies advancing underrepresented groups including women, youth and persons with disabilities, interviewees highlighted project involvement in the advancement and implementation of the National Youth Strategy and the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. Moreover, the project's contribution towards the development of two separate action plans was highlighted: the 2020-2024 "National Action Plan on the Implementation of the UN Resolutions 1325 on Women, Peace and Security" and the "National Action Plan for the Elimination of Violence against Women and Domestic Violence." One interviewee also stressed that, as municipalities are not prepared to adapt new stipulations from

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[9] Objective 3.3 of the *Decentralisation Strategy* aims to "Facilitate effective participation in decision making and implementation at a local level". To that end "The review of existing legal framework in force and creation of possibility of participation at local self-governing level is planned for the achievement of set goal, which shall ensure the institutional participation of citizens in the decision making process at a local level. In order to achieve this objective, the strategy envisions to review existing legal framework and set up participation mechanisms at a local level to ensure institutional participation of wider public in local decision-making." Decentralisation Strategy 2020-2025, p.16. https://mrdi.gov.ge/pdf/5e468e292b317.pdf/Decentralization-strategy-ENG.pdf

the 2019 Code on the Rights of the Child, the project responds to the need for respective capacity building and technical support.

2.1.4 Evaluation question: How has the project design taken into account the needs of the different gender and underrepresented groups?

> FINDING 8: The needs of underrepresented groups including youth, women and minorities are well reflected in the project design. The project interventions chosen, which include awareness raising, capacity building, piloting of new practices incl. project grants, are an appropriate response to the needs identified in the assessment process.

34. Needs assessed: Relevant data and information were gathered from a variety of external studies and assessments, including e.g., the 2020 assessment of local self-government bodies' gender policies and the 2019 "Special Report on Combating and Preventing Discrimination and the State of Equality" published by the Public Defender Office of Georgia and the 2019 "Study of the participation of Ethnic Minority Representatives in Political Life" by the Open Society Georgia Foundation.[10] The needs assessment for the human rights component, which was carried out in 13 municipalities[11] in August 2022 and included interviews with thematic Advisory Councils (e.g., on gender, persons living with disabilities etc),[12] provided an accurate picture of the situation, including needs and gaps with regard to underrepresented groups at the local level.

35. The project's human rights needs assessment identified that, although Advisory Councils are institutionalised in all 13 municipalities for the purpose of advancing the interests of PwDs and children/youth and of working towards gender equality, target group members or CSOs are not included, which limits effective participation and representation. Additional gaps include: the lack of awareness about group-based rights among local authorities; a need for adequate platforms or fora which foster the horizontal and vertical collaboration between local authorities and state and national authorities; the lack of awareness among local authorities about discrimination as such and about (structural) inequalities between different groups; the strong need for training on anti-discrimination legislation, protection mechanisms and their implementation. Concerning gender, identified needs and gaps include, amongst others, the need to raise awareness and develop the capacities of local representatives to advance gender equality, ensure the practical implementation of gender-responsive budgeting and carry out region-targeted programmes aimed at improving human rights.

36. Inclusion of underrepresented groups including youth, women and minorities: The project design incorporated elements based on the needs of different gender and underrepresented groups mainly through respective capacity building and training of municipal stakeholders. Interviewees also pointed out the municipalities' high level of ownership concerning the needs assessment. Municipal baseline values have been integrated into the planning and work of local authorities. Another project element which was highlighted was the municipal project grants, which targeted women, minorities and human rights initiatives based on the municipal needs assessment. The project design has a focus on youth participation to link into the decentralisation strategy and action plan through inclusion of a number of measures such as ToTs, school participatory budgeting, information campaigns and educational tools based on e.g. the UChange methodology.

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[10] https://osgf.ge/en/publication/study-of-the-participation-of-ethnic-minority-representatives-in-political-life/

[11] Bolnisi, Borjomi, Chokhatauri, Dedoplistskaro, Dmanisi, Marneuli, Oni, Ozurgeti, Tbilisi, Tetritskaro, Tsalka, Tskaltubo, and Zestaponi.

[12] Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe (2022). Local authorities' efforts, challenges and needs in the implementation of human rights commitments baseline assessment reports. Baseline Assessment Report.

2.2 Effectiveness

2.2.1 Evaluation question: To what extent has the project achieved its expected outputs and immediate outcomes?

37. Findings and evidence of outputs and immediate outcomes are grouped and presented around the following (a) Strengthened stakeholder capacities and (b) new practices, regulatory frameworks, and new or strengthened structures.

Strengthened stakeholder capacities (both project components)

FINDING 9: Project measures have contributed to increased awareness and capacities (knowledge, skills and competences) of municipal stakeholders with regards to human rights and civil participation.

FINDING 10: A number of stakeholders have utilised capacities and tools gained through the project to introduce new practices, regulatory frameworks, and structures.

FINDING 11: Capacity building measures fostered networking between stakeholders at municipal level and also with the national level.

38. Raised awareness: All interviewees stated that they do see some effects in terms of awareness raising and emphasised different content-related aspects of a heightened awareness, including:
    - local responsibility for the implementation of policies in line with human rights principles and obligations (local mandate);
    - mayor's self-awareness of responsibilities and power at local level;
    - increased attention to the needs of youth by mayors and administration;
    - increasing willingness of participants in CoE events to start more open discussions of sensitive issues like minority rights, anti-discrimination and LGBTQI-rights;
    - promotion of transparency and open government;
    - the contribution of participatory processes to the efficiency of municipalities;
    - an improved attitude of municipalities towards acting on a sound knowledge base,

39. Enhanced knowledge: Most of the interviewees who had participated in trainings, conferences or the study trip describe them as positive. Many were able to name concrete content which they consider particularly enriching or useful for their work. These include the following, whereby the order in which they are listed does not reflect the frequency of their mention: human rights, case studies on protection of vulnerable groups, international best-practice, anti-discrimination, code of ethics, tools for civil participation such as UChange, school participatory budgeting, Citizens' Assembly, forum theatre, communication (via social media), communication tools like animated videos, visualisation techniques, proposal writing and risk management.

40. Utilization of capacities gained through trainings: The training of trainers (ToT) participants consistently stated that they were able to directly apply what they had learned in the trainings that they consequently delivered. The content was used in various participatory processes in Gori, Marneuli, Ozurgeti, Rustavi and Akhmeta as well as during the study visit to Austria. The accompanying mentoring process was helpful for the new trainers. Some participants of other trainings identified concrete examples of how they used specific training content.

41. Participants' self-perception on utilisation of training material: As part of the survey a total of 104 participants answered the question "Did you use any of the following tools or publications in practice / in your work?" The question allowed multiple answers. These are shown in the following

chart in absolute number of mentions. The highest number of mentions can be found at the top of the chart. The number of mentions decreases towards the bottom and the right. Following publications are the top 5:

- Guide on Civil Participation Forms in Self-Government
- Publications on Civil Participation in Decision-Making Toolkit and Guidelines
- Handbook on Open Local Government and Public Ethics
- Human Rights handbook for local and regional authorities
- Manual on Citizens Assembly

Chart 1: Usage of publications and tools

Did you use any of the following tools or publications in practice / in your work? You may choose as many tools as applicable. [13]

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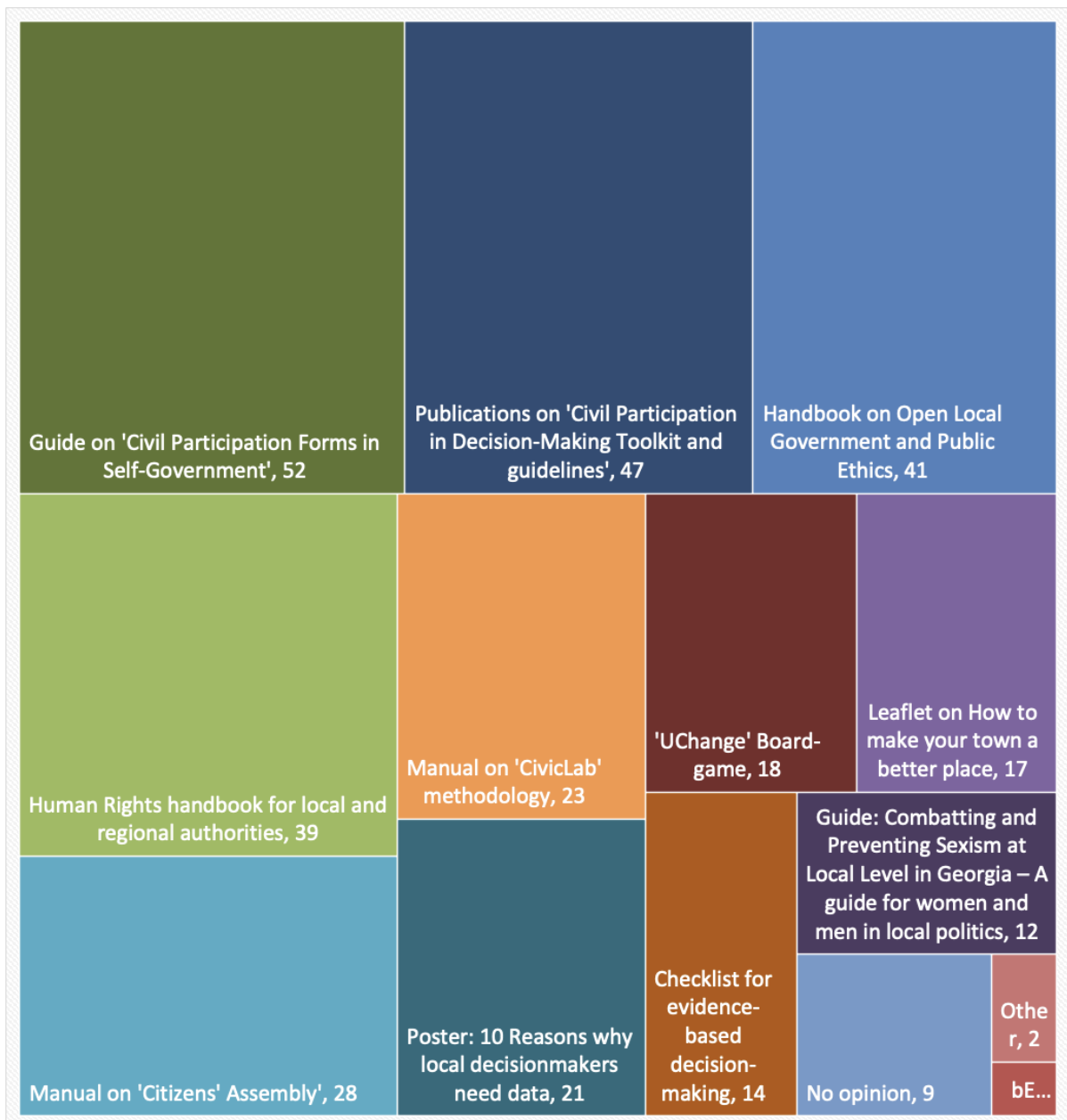
[13] As multiple answers were possible, respondents selected a total of 324 options. Lower right corner = be-Open Platform, 1 mention; other, 2 mention: a) Various forms of participation will be used within the project, b) Mechanisms of citizens' involvement provided for by the "Local Self-Government Code", as well as "informal" mechanisms: civil budget, youth advisory council.

42. Participants' self-perception of utilisation of capacities gained through trainings: Further, survey participants were asked whether they applied in practice what they had learned at any of the project events. A total of 77% of survey participants stated that they did so either to a considerable or to a great extent.

Chart 2: Application of what has been learned

Have you applied in practice anything you learned in any of these events (including academies, workshops, conferences, winter schools, trainings, study visits, introductory presentations on "citizens assembly", and peer-to-peer exchange)? (N=111)
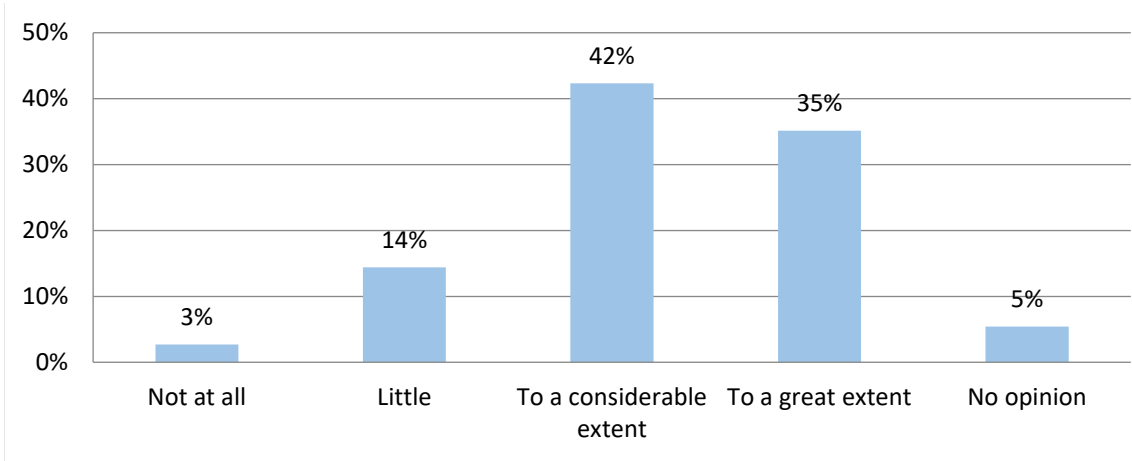
43. Networking and exchange as a training output: As an additional output, trainings, conferences and the study trip provided opportunities for peer exchange, sharing of best practices and informal communication. A number of interviewees valued this part of the training activities and events. The interview partners named various levels of exchange: the most prominent was the exchange between the municipalities. However, exchange between local and national levels as well as exchange with representatives of other CoE member states were also mentioned. In some cases, trainings also promoted the exchange and cooperation between municipalities and civil society. Some interviewees pointed out that for some municipalities this process of increasing trust and communication between municipalities and local civil society was successfully continued in local participatory processes.

New practices, regulatory frameworks and strengthened structures

FINDING 12: Tangible results in terms of the application of new practices, development of new regulatory frameworks or action plans at local level and newly introduced or strengthened municipal structures have been achieved.

FINDING 13: NALAG's capacities to facilitate exchange between municipalities and the national level as well as with civil society were strengthened and are valued by stakeholders. Furthermore, based on its strengthened capacities NALAG contributes both to the localisation of human rights and to the human rights dialogue between local and national level.

44. New practice in the field of civil participation: Interviewees verified that the project initiated new practices of civil participation. Examples include the following methodologies and tools for participation: Citizens' Assembly (representative representation of the population), CivicLab (representation of community stakeholder groups) – in particular utilized in municipalities' medium-term development planning, Participatory budgeting with communities, Voting on

budget priorities, Forum theatre/change the scenario (wider community involvement/information), UChange Game. In addition, school participatory budgeting is to be piloted for the first time in Georgia. CSOs highlighted that NALAG successfully plays the role of a door-opener, facilitating contact between municipalities and local civil society, hence contributing to putting these new practices into place.

45. Regulatory frameworks/action plans/policies in the field of civil participation: Interviewees provided evidence that in some cases, the new practice was also formalised through policy papers and decisions. These include, e.g., municipality-internal guidelines on participation, strategy plans for specific local issues in which the input from Citizens' Assemblies was incorporated (e.g., the forest development plan in Rustavi municipality), and a Youth participation strategy in Oni municipality.

46. Newly established or strengthened municipal structures in the field of civil participation: Municipal Advisory councils, which, according to interviewees, did not function adequately or, at times, not at all prior to the start of the project, were revitalised. Some of them worked practically for the first time and interviewees confirmed an added value. To pick a few examples, Oni municipality created a structural basis for the work of the Youth Council by setting up a budget item for it. A gender advisor to the mayor was also put in place there, as a direct follow-up to the initial needs assessment on participation. Ozurgeti municipality described that they included all needs identified in the needs assessment on participation in the following year's budget plan. In the context of small grants, they set up a joint working group consisting of representatives of the target group and municipal employees.

47. New practice in the field of human rights: In terms of new practices interviewees highlighted the following
    - NALAG facilitating exchange: All interviewees referring to this topic felt that NALAG was strong in promoting exchange between municipalities and that the project has clearly supported this. Overall, the exchange was described as productive, and participants value the opportunities.
    - Exchange between national and local level: Interviewees stated that NALAG successfully promotes exchange with national authorities and that this is a valuable dialogue. In particular, the exchange on human rights seems to have fostered new insights on both sides (national institutions and municipalities). Municipalities said they were better informed about processes at the national level. National stakeholders indicated that they were better able to communicate what they expect from municipalities in terms of implementation of certain policies. Furthermore, national stakeholders also indicated that they could better assess the specific capacities and know-how of municipalities.
    - Small grants offered an opportunity to pilot new practices. At the time of conducting the evaluation the small projects were either in preparation or implementation phase, hence respective results remain yet to be verified. However, recipients emphasised the small grants during interviewees. This may underline that municipalities have little budgetary leeway for their own initiatives and therefore emphasise these opportunities. (For more details on the small grants see chapter 2.2.3 on benefits for specific groups.)

48. Regulatory frameworks/action plans/policies in the field of human rights: NALAG and the office of the advisor to the Prime Minister on human rights signed an MoU for cooperation on all human rights issues. Based on this MoU municipalities and NALAG may have the chance to input into the National Action Plan on Human Rights. However, interviewees' assessment of whether a genuine participatory process is taking place on this issue differed considerably. Hence, a consistent interplay between the MoU and a new practice is yet to be seen. For the usage on local level, NALAG drafted a strategy for the localisation of human rights, which interviewees believe will be adopted in the next assembly meeting.

49. Newly established or strengthened structures in the field of human rights: Strengthening NALAG was one of the capacity building objectives of the project. As a result, a working group or committee on localisation of human rights was created within NALAG, which contributes to a structural anchoring of the topic in the institution. Furthermore, NALAG is in the process of setting up a resource centre for municipalities on human rights, incl. a gender training component.

50. Survey results referring to both project components: The findings outlined above were substantiated by the survey. Participants were asked "To what extent has the project *"Strengthening participatory democracy and human rights at local level in Georgia"* produced tangible results, e.g. action plans, regulatory frameworks, policies and practices?" Of 96 respondents who answered the question, 91% stated either "to a considerable" or "to a great extent". Looking at the different groups within the survey, data shows that governmental authorities other than municipalities are slightly more positive on this question than the municipalities themselves. CSOs and other local actors exhibit a similarly positive attitude towards the projects results, as visible in chart 4 below.

Chart 3: Tangible results of the project

To what extent has the project "Strengthening participatory democracy and human rights at local level in Georgia" produced tangible results, e.g. action plans, regulatory frameworks, policies and practices? (N=96)
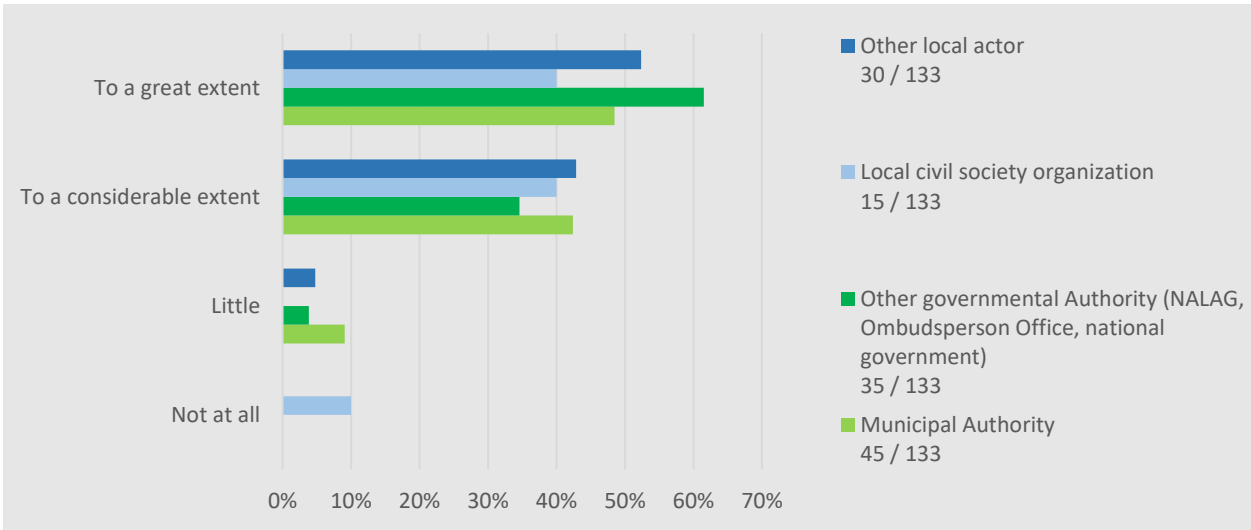
2.2.2 Evaluation question: What have been reasons for achievements and lack thereof?

FINDING 14: In light of a challenging political culture, the trust between mayors/municipalities and citizens/local civil society is a key enabler for genuine participation processes. In turn, participatory processes and fact-based information and communication increase trust. The interventions and process quality of the project contributed to these mutually reinforcing enablers.

FINDING 15: The municipalities' ongoing high dependence on the central level, which is also reflected in limited financial and human resources, is seen a potential hindrance to realising genuine participation processes and the localisation of human rights policies and practices.

> FINDING 16: The socio-geographical setting of municipalities has an effect on needs, capacities and feasibility to realise participatory processes at local level as well as on the localisation of human rights.

51. Overall political culture as an external challenge: Interviewees touched on different aspects of political culture which are counter-productive to participatory processes. One issue is a perceived lack of will of authorities and administration to take responsibility. Further, citizens raise the critique that there is not a lack of participation, but rather a lack of implementation and that hundreds of citizens' petitions are already on the municipalities' tables. The comparatively low level of civic education and voluntary culture, along with the low level of trust between government and citizens, were also identified as hindering factors. Furthermore, a political culture which encourages issue-based constructive joint work between ruling and opposing parties is lacking. One interviewee pointed to the fact that very few representatives of opposition parties participated in project events. To some extent this backdrop was the starting point or justification for some of the project activities and was addressed, to some extent it goes beyond the scope of the project.

52. Degree of trust between mayors and citizens/local civil society as key enabler: According to interviewees' perception, a central factor determining the success of the project in any given municipality lies in the person of the mayor. This concerns both his/her political function and anchoring as well as his/her personality and motivation in office. Many interviewees referred to the level of trust between mayors and citizens as a crucial success factor. Participation processes need to be genuine, not just "tick the box"-processes. It is key that recommendations or voting on priorities (for local development) are followed up and lead to real results. In some municipalities this trust and a joint understanding of goals could be established, in others this was described as a difficulty which could not be overcome. E.g., a case was described in which the municipality was in principle ready to work on public participation, but when the proposal was on the table to include watch-dog-CSOs, the municipality closed up. A number of interviewees pointed out that the good co-operation between all stakeholders contributed to the project's achievements and that the CoE played a positive role in facilitating this co-operation.

53. Fact-based information and communication as a cross-cutting enabler: Furthermore, many interviewees mentioned the quality of information and communication as being a key factor in determining success on all different levels. Providing fact-based information (e.g., on the subject on hand) and correct information on the entire participation process is equally important. This includes the quality of experts' input, the quality and timing of any formal communication by the municipality directed at civil society, citizens and other stakeholders, the quality and timing of wider information campaigns (e.g., introducing new participation mechanisms) and the quality of communication within the participatory processes (e.g., agreements between participants not to instrumentalise the discussion for wider political issues).

54. Process quality on operational level as further enabler: Concerning the quality of implementation processes interviewees highlighted a good or very good working relationship with CoE, the positive role of the experts involved, who were seen as a real asset, the mix of political representatives and operational municipal staff as a feature of capacity building measures and the choice of new tools for citizen participation as such.

55. Municipalities' capacities as a limitation: Interviewees pointed out that there are some limitations in municipalities' capacities. These comprise e.g.
    - the overall high level of dependency of the municipalities on the central government.
    - the scarce financial resources to put new tools and practices into place, implying the challenge of helping the municipalities identify resources and opportunities within their area of responsibility.

- little experience with participatory formats and processes leading to an underestimation of the time and resources needed. This in turn hampers the process as less time is available for the preparation and the evaluation phase of processes.

56. Socio-geographical setting of municipalities: A number of interviewees said that geographical factors also influence the success and feasibility of certain participatory processes. On the one hand, bigger municipalities fare better as they have more resources, both financially and in terms of human resources. On the other hand, they face different challenges in managing participatory methods, which might be more feasible in smaller communities. Also, financial needs and hence the appropriate financial volume of a grant may differ between locations of different size. Additional challenges were named for remote regions, where people might not travel to their administrative centres for months. Equally, with regards to human rights, a lack of services, information and awareness on human rights issues is seen to be more prevalent in rural, less populated areas.

2.2.3 Evaluation question: Are there unintended or unplanned outputs or outcomes? How has the intervention dealt with any unintended outputs or outcomes?

> FINDING 17: There are a limited number of unintended outputs, of which an MoU between NALAG and the Office of the Advisor to the Prime Minister on Human Rights is the most prominent.

57. MoU NALAG - Office of the Advisor to Prime Minister on Human Rights: The most prominent unexpected output is the MoU, which NALAG signed with the Office of the Advisor to Prime Minister on Human Rights. The MoU stipulated NALAG to be part of the advisory body discussing human rights policy documents as well as the new 2022-2030 Human Rights Strategy and Action Plan.

58. However, interview partners had very different assessments of the significance of the MoU for practice. According to one interviewee, there had neither been an opportunity to read nor to review and input into the draft MoU document. Furthermore, there was no consistent information on whether the draft document had already been sent to Parliament for hearing in spring 2023. Other interviewees underlined that the MoU indicates genuine political will to integrate the municipalities' perspectives into policy making processes.

59. Citizens' Assembly's further potential: One of the mayors described an unexpected side effect resulting from the positive experience with the Citizens' Assembly. The Assembly has practiced a political communication that is able to discuss political issues without party political ties. According to the interviewee, this opens up the option of resorting to this body in case of political tensions in the community. If this assumption holds true, party-political instrumentalization of local issues can be counteracted, influencing political culture in a positive way.

60. Civil society structures: One CSO stakeholder emphasized that the CSO participated in the project only three months after having been founded; at a time when no other donor would take the risk to support such a young organisation. Participating in the project supported their functioning and helped build a track-record. As this CSO seeks to increase participation of one of the underrepresented groups, this can both strengthen a CoE follow-up project and have a sustainable impact for the target group.

2.2.4 Evaluation question: How have the different gender and underrepresented groups benefitted from the outcomes?

> FINDING 18: At output level, gender and other underrepresented groups have been included into project measures implemented by CoE (trainings etc) and subsequent measures undertaken by the municipalities (such as Citizen's Assemblies etc). These outputs have the potential to generate positive effects for gender and underrepresented groups including youth, minorities and persons with disabilities in the future.

61. Participation of gender and other underrepresented groups, including youth, minorities and persons with disabilities: With the exception of the Information Campaign "Change the Scenario - Play Your Role",[14] the project systematically collected gender-disaggregated data at output level (implementation of project trainings, meetings, workshops etc). According to this data, women have equally participated in the human rights component of the project with 48% (176 out of a total of 364 participants). Women's participation is higher in the civil participation component of the project with 63% (417 out of 655 participants). The higher value can be explained by the fact that this project component primarily targets CSOs, in which women are generally over-proportionally involved. According to the year 1 report, both local and international expert pools also achieved a good gender balance and level of diversity.

62. A further assessment of the participation data of the human rights component showed that around 20% (69) of participants are specifically concerned with the issues of gender and other underrepresented groups. These include: 33 stakeholders with a focus on gender (focal points, gender equality council, specialists etc); 19 focussing on youth and children's rights (municipal head of units and specialists etc); 15 focussing on human rights (PDO, experts etc.); 1 on ethnic minorities (council chairperson) and 1 on persons living with disabilities (PDO).

63. Stakeholder interviews confirm that, overall, the project was able to ensure the inclusiveness of processes. This is evident by fair representation of different underrepresented groups in various activities, such as Citizens' Assemblies and, in particular, by the different ethnicities taking part in the academies implemented in two regions. In light of this, interviewees stressed that CSOs have been key in contributing to the inclusive approach of the project. Finally, an overall observation by a number of stakeholders was that beyond balanced representation, active participation of women could be seen.

64. Outputs that have potential to improve the situation of women: The following was highlighted by interviewees.
    - The project contributed to strengthening and institutionalising municipal gender equality councils.
    - The inclusion of municipal gender advisors in training. However, the question remained as to how the councils put acquired knowledge into practice.
    - The online course on gender equality and discrimination, which includes five modules on gender equality, gender responsive budgeting, participatory budgeting, the role of local authorities' associations to promote gender equality, and combating sexism at local level. This will be hosted on the NALAG website and will continue to strengthen local capacities.
    - The project brought the importance of the local level to the attention of other actors, e.g., UN Women will now work with municipalities.

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[14] Campaign events are open to a wider public. Therefore, prior registration and data collection is not done to encourage free participation of interested citizens.

65. Outputs that have potential to improve the situation of underrepresented groups including youth, minorities and people with disabilities: The following was highlighted by interviewees.
    - Participatory tools, such as the UChange methodology and planned school-participatory budgeting benefit youth and children. A legal basis for piloting school participatory budgeting is under development.
    - The project supported the communication between mayors and ethnic communities although minorities have to a considerable extent been involved via CSOs representing them (e.g. participation in spring school).
    - Local government realized the importance of the protection of vulnerable people, e.g. rights of people with disabilities. Georgia ratified the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in 2014 and introduced new obligations, many of which concerned local levels. The project helped to introduce respective obligations.
    - The five small grants supported the municipalities of Bolnisi, Oni, Tbilisi, Ozurgeti and Marneuli in implementing measures on diversity, inclusion and human rights.[15] These municipalities represent areas with larger ethnic and religious minority populations.

66. Wider benefits: On the whole, it is too early to identify wider benefits for underrepresented groups resulting from project outputs.

2.2.5 Evaluation question: To what extent has the Council of Europe had a comparative advantage vis-à-vis other international actors in its interventions in the field of democratic governance, civil participation, and human rights, specifically in the empowerment of civil society, local authorities and their national association?

FINDING 19: The CoE has a comparative advantage vis-à-vis other international actors, in particular through its long-term commitment and strategic triangle outlined in the CoE Action Plan for Georgia, its high reputation and available expertise.

FINDING 20: The project is complementary to and creates synergies with the key initiatives of other international actors including the Open Government Programme. In this context the CoE has been instrumental in taking a leading role in the coordination of respective civil participation initiatives in the country which led to concrete examples of co-operation.

67. Comparative advantage: Interviews with stakeholders identified a number of comparative advantages of the CoE. The long-term strategic commitment of the CoE, outlined in a sequence of Actions Plans, has been highlighted not only by national but also by municipal stakeholders. Moreover, stakeholders view the CoE's human rights focus as being unique when compared to other international actors' approaches.

68. National stakeholders also acknowledged the uniqueness of the CoE's strategic triangle, in which standard setting and the Committee of Ministers' binding resolutions guide project implementation and monitoring mechanisms in order to push respective processes. One interviewee particularly highlighted the introduction of human rights issues into the Congress's monitoring of local government, which is seen as a powerful tool for assessment and generation

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[15] *Bolnisi municipality:* Ensuring equality, diversity and inclusion in local public life through institutionally strengthened engagement mechanisms and awareness campaigns; *Oni municipality:* Strengthening the capacities and effectiveness of thematic councils in Oni Municipality; *Tbilisi municipality:* Enhancing access to information, public services, and programmes by ethnic minorities on municipal services in Tbilisi; *Ozurgeti municipality:* Civil, political, and social integration of ethnic minorities in Ozurgeti Municipality; *Marneuli municipality:* Awareness campaign for people with special needs about social services available in Marneuli municipality.

of lessons learnt. Hence, the Georgian membership in the CoE and the Congress is viewed to lead to political leverage.

69. In addition, interviews underlined the high reputation of the CoE having positive effects at operational level, as it is prestigious for municipalities to participate in CoE projects. Moreover, international organisations perceive the CoE to be well-positioned to lead in terms of coordination and building bridges between stakeholders.

70. Other comparative advantages of the CoE highlighted by stakeholders include CoE expertise available through a group of independent international and local experts and peer exchange leading to high learning effects, especially through exchange with other CoE member states in the region.

71. Complementarity and synergies: Interviews confirm synergies with interventions of other international actors. In Rustavi, the methodology of a Citizens' Assembly was used to plan the redesign of the municipal forest. The results can be implemented practically, as this is financially supported by a Swedish donor. Without this funding perspective, the participatory process would have been irrelevant. In Oni municipality the drafting of the medium-term development plan, which will be supported by USAID, will utilize the civil participation tools methodology.

72. A number of interviewees stressed synergies with the Open Government Programme, an international partnership initiated under the Obama administration, which aims to bring together government and civil society.[16] Georgia has been a member since 2011. The OGP also introduced a local programme and prior to this project two municipalities were already OGP members. Two additional municipalities joined the OGP after participating in the project's activities and are in the process of submitting action plans, which were developed jointly with civil society, to the OGP.

73. Furthermore, stakeholders pointed out the complementarity of this project with others, e.g., the GiZ project on "Promoting good financial governance" which started in April 2023, or its 2022-2024 project on "Strengthening civil society in the Eastern Partnership".

74. Finally, interviews highlighted the importance of the CoE taking a leading role in the coordination of civil participation initiatives in the country. Regular donor coordination meetings, led by the CoE and attended by a number of international organizations including UNDP, USAID, GiZ, etc., were perceived as being helpful in avoiding overlaps and in creating opportunities to understand and share experiences on the different actors' various approaches.

75. Interviewees also confirmed that these coordination meetings led to concrete examples of cooperation. One such example is the provision of consultancy services by the Solidarity Fund PL on the implementation of the School Participatory Budgeting methodology in Georgia. Here, graduates of the Academy of Participation, a programme which has been implemented by the Solidarity Fund PL since 2019, act as municipal experts in the project. Furthermore, USAID is strongly interested in the CivicLab approach.

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[16] Open Government Partnership | Committed to making governments more open, accountable, and responsive to citizens (opengovpartnership.org)

2.3 Sustainability

2.3.1 Evaluation question: What is the likelihood that the benefits from the interventions will be maintained when the project is completed?

> FINDING 21: There is a high likelihood that some of the benefits from the intervention will be maintained when the project is completed. However, processes and organisational structures are still fragile and rather at a pilot stage.

Likelihood of sustainable benefits

76. Survey participants' perception on sustainability prospects: Survey participants' views on sustainability prospects are optimistic. 52% of respondents state that they believe that project results are sustainable "to a great extent" and 41% of respondents believe that project results are sustainable "to a considerable extent" (see chart 4 below).

Chart 4: Sustainability

Do you believe the results of the project 'Strengthening participatory democracy and human rights at local level in Georgia' are sustainable? (N=96)
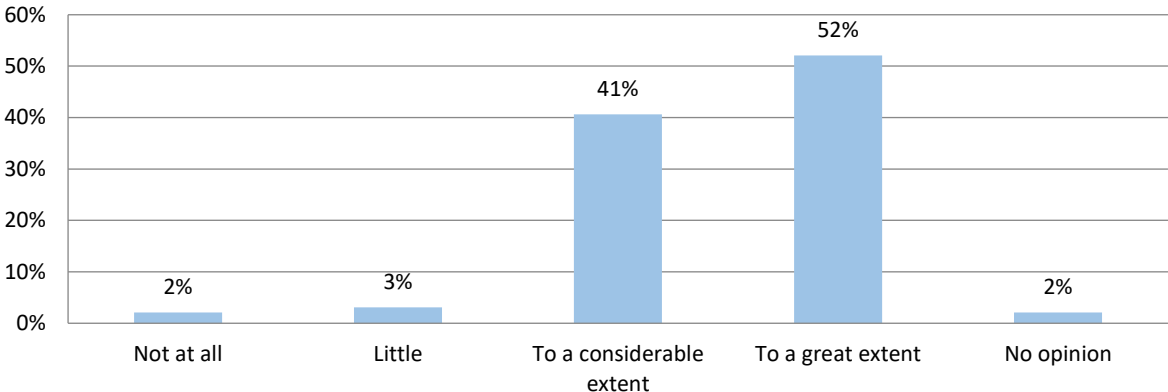
77. Interviewees' perception: This assessment from the survey is also reflected in the interviews. Many interviewees named concrete specifics or individual activities that they believe will be sustainable. These include increased awareness, the intention to continue using what has been learnt, the wide availability of all project materials in different languages as well as the continuation of some of the newly piloted practices. E.g., the inter-municipal dialogue is believed to be highly likely to continue through the Forum facilitated by NALAG, as trust amongst participating municipalities is quite strong and other municipalities are interested in engaging with the Forum. At the same time, the interviewees are aware that e.g. building awareness that social policies at the local level must be human rights-based and without access barriers, be it for women, youth or minorities, is a long-term process which needs ongoing work in order to maintain results. The same is true for civil participation processes, which need external facilitation by experts. Some scepticism has been expressed concerning municipal ability and willingness to finance such continuous processes.

Factors determining sustainability prospects

> FINDING 22: Sustainability prospects increase when activities are successfully implemented simultaneously in the areas of awareness raising, capacity building, piloting of new practices, introduction of new policies and anchoring in institutions. In the medium-term, the project scope needs to be more comprehensive, with an increased number of municipalities (quantitative) and a strategic selection of stakeholders (qualitative).

78. Political will and legal framework: Interviewees identified several factors which determine sustainability prospects. A number of interviewees stressed the importance of the political will of relevant national stakeholders, including the MRDI. The Ministry is confirmed to be supportive of the project. For a manifestation of the broader political will towards decentralization a legal framework is important. In this regard, it was pointed out that there is legal basis for the inclusion of citizens' participation in municipal budgets.

79. Involvement and ownership: Interviewees pointed out that involvement and ownership of stakeholders, e.g., NALAG and PDO as well as mayors and civil society, are key factors determining sustainability. Cooperation between municipal authorities and CSOs is seen as an enabling factor or, as summarized by one stakeholder, as a "formula for success."

80. Human resources: In terms of municipalities' human resources the number of trained staff (both for human rights and for participation) are one of the factors determining sustainability and the overall number of trained staff needs to be increased. Staff turnover and brain drain to the private sector underline this problem. Only longer-term effort can lead to a sustainable base of human resources.

81. Pool of local experts: The pool of local experts was mentioned by many as a determining factor for sustainability, with an inherent contradiction. On the one hand, the experts should contribute to the sustainability of the new knowledge and approaches presented by the project, as they are closely linked to the municipalities (e.g., individual consultants or CSO representatives in regional proximity with appropriate context and local knowledge). On the other hand, a multiplier factor opposing this effect was highlighted, since the experts are also engaged in other projects in the region, which in turn may mean that they are no longer fully available to the municipalities (e.g., with regard to different renumeration or salary scales). This should be kept in mind.

82. Project scope: Interviewees pointed out that, in order to function as a favourable factor, the project scope needs to be comprehensive enough, including the number of municipalities (quantitative) and strategic selection of stakeholders (qualitative). There are differing views on the current coverage of the project. One interviewee emphasized that covering 18 municipalities (both components) out of a total of 64 municipalities was a sound start. Another interviewee pointed to the necessity of upscaling in order to ensure sustainability. Moreover, a number of interviewees stressed the importance of working with and advocating relevant central government institutions to ensure sustainability.

83. Time frame: The time horizon of the intervention is viewed as another key determinant. A number of interviewees stressed that the time frame needed to ensure sustainability exceeds the project duration. The project is therefore viewed as the piloting phase of a longer-term process of turning innovation into relevant and stable practice.

84. Methodology: The appropriateness of the methodology, which followed an in-depth, needs-based approach, was pointed out by interviewees as an enabling factor. Furthermore, sustainability is particularly ensured through a continuous building of knowledge by means of the

ToT methodology and peer engagement, and the community of local expert that has been established informally (usage of a WhatsApp group etc). Equally however, the challenge of providing more follow-up to the interventions, especially on the utilization of tools, was highlighted. In addition, CoE interviewees underlined the importance of synergies with other programmes and initiatives. To this end, systematic exchange and coordination is an enabling factor.

85. Gender and underrepresented groups: Not much evidence has been found concerning sustainability prospects in relation to the different gender and underrepresented groups. The exception, as stressed by the CoE and expert stakeholder interviewees, is a certain degree of heightened awareness in particular with regard to LGBTI, which is evident through more open discussions. In this regard, one interviewee stressed that the politicisation of human rights presents a key challenge to achieving sustainable results for any project working on human rights issues relating to minorities, gender and anti-discrimination.

3. LESSONS LEARNT, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

3.1 Lessons learnt

Stakeholders

86. **Ownership of processes by municipalities is crucial**.
    Involving municipalities at each phase of project development and implementation is required in order to ensure ownership.

87. **Municipalities hold expertise, which is to be recognized and harvested**.
    Municipalities hold expertise on social issues and how these translate into budgets for specific measures. They are able to identify underrepresented groups very well. Often, they do not frame social issues in a human rights language.

88. **Engagement of CSOs at the local level is indispensable in order to benefit from their knowledge of local context and human rights.**
    This would include also more informal, grass-root initiatives, as CSOs have been an important contributor to the pool of experts.

89. **Participation of Congress gives the project greater political weight, which is beneficial.** This political weight can be used to increase the project's effectiveness, in particular when the strategic interaction of the two components is further reflected on and developed.

Tools and processes

90. **Capacity building of municipalities cannot be a one-off intervention but requires longer-term continuous follow-up.**
    This has been highlighted in particular by expert and CoE interviewees.

91. **Municipalities welcome the facilitation of participatory techniques for those planning processes, which they are obliged to follow**.
    Examples are the medium-term development plans. Here municipalities have asked for methodological support on how to organize these processes.

92. **Target group specific educational material for participation is a plus.**
    Examples are the UChange board game, designed specifically for use with youth, and its local adaptation in Rustavi, which included plenty of specifics relating to that municipality.

93. **Fact-based information is key in all phases of participatory processes, adding to their quality**.
    Fact-based information and communication are highly valued by a wide range of stakeholders and contribute to the credibility of processes.

94. **The project would have benefitted from a longer time frame**.
    The project was very ambitious timewise and factors like the complexity of the stakeholder setting, the political framework to navigate and the low level of civic engagement were underestimated.

3.2 Conclusions and Recommendations

Findings	Conclusions	Recommendations
RELEVANCE		
To what extent has the intervention design been relevant to the priority areas of the 2020-2023 Council of Europe Action Plan and the Framework Strategy of the Austrian Development Cooperation for Georgia?		
FINDING 1: The project is designed to contribute to expected AP outcomes for local democracy and human rights implementation at local level, complementing other AP interventions targeting the national level.	The project is of relevance to priority areas of the CoE Action Plan as well as for Austrian Development Cooperation in Georgia.	
FINDING 2: The project is designed to contribute to ADC's Country Strategy for Georgia, in particular in terms of strengthening governance and local development.		
To what extent have intervention objectives addressed the needs (identified through the baselines assessments conducted in the framework of the project) of the beneficiaries?		
FINDING 3: All stakeholder groups perceive the project as relevant to their needs.	The objectives of the project adequately address the needs of the beneficiaries through a thorough and participatory needs assessment. The needs assessment could be further strengthened by a more prominent analysis of the interlinkages between issues related to human rights on the one hand and civil participation on the other. The particular need for participation mechanisms for underrepresented groups is only indirectly revealed when the two assessment reports are analysed together.	
FINDING 4: The needs assessments as part of the project inception proved to be key for the identification of gaps and particular needs. Related processes involving the support of local experts and a thorough participatory process including multiple stakeholders were invaluable.		
FINDING 5: National level institutions, which are not a direct target group of project measures, are not considered a key stakeholder in the project Theory of Change (ToC). The interplay between the two project components is not visualised.	The project Theory of Change (ToC) would benefit from further consideration of the involvement of the national actors and more visible interlinkages of the civil participation and human rights project components.	Recommendation 1: Ensure that the ToC of a potential follow-up project 1) is reviewed with key stakeholders, including municipal stakeholders, to ensure feasibility of effect chains in a given time frame; 2) more explicitly includes national actors through a separate strand of action for work; 3) visualises the interplay between the two project components.

Findings	Conclusions	Recommendations
To what extent have interventions been aligned with, and supportive of, the decentralisation reform and relevant strategies / policies on promotion and protection of human rights and strengthening civil participation at local level?		
FINDING 6: Interventions including capacity building and technical support have been in line with the 2020-2025 Decentralisation Strategy and its aim to promote the strengthening of civil participation at local level.	The project interventions have been aligned with key strategies, policies and reforms, also with reference to obligations under respective international treaties.	
FINDING 7: Project interventions have been supportive of the National Strategy for the Protection of Human Rights as well as of strategies and policies advancing underrepresented groups including women, youth and persons with disabilities with reference to obligations under respective international treaties.		
How has the project design taken into account the needs of the different gender and underrepresented groups?		
FINDING 8: The needs of underrepresented groups including youth, women and minorities are well reflected in the project design. The project interventions chosen, which include awareness raising, capacity building, piloting of new practices incl. project grants, are an appropriate response to the needs identified in the assessment process.	On the whole the project has taken the needs of different gender and other underrepresented groups well into account as project interventions are based on a sound assessment process.	
EFFECTIVENESS		
To what extent has the project achieved its expected outputs and immediate outcomes?		
FINDING 9: Project measures have contributed to increased awareness and capacities (knowledge, skills and competences) of municipal stakeholders with regards to human rights and civil participation.	The project has been effective in producing concrete outputs, as described in the findings above. Awareness has been raised, knowledge enhanced and new knowledge products have been utilised by municipalities. First examples of new practices, regulatory frameworks, and structures at municipal level can be found.	Recommendation 2: A future project might well consider the importance of coaching/mentoring for individual municipalities. Coaching/mentoring should take all identified enablers into account, e.g. it can support municipalities in identifying resources to finance small-scale project as visible results from participation processes. Consider locally based facilitators for this function to enhance continuity of these coaching processes.
FINDING 10: A number of stakeholders have utilised capacities and tools gained through the project to introduce new practices, regulatory frameworks, and structures.		
FINDING 11: Capacity building measures fostered networking between stakeholders at municipal level and also with the national level.		

Findings	Conclusions	Recommendations
FINDING 12: Tangible results in terms of the application of new practices, development of new regulatory frameworks or action plans at local level and newly introduced or strengthened municipal structures have been achieved.	The evaluation can establish evidence of more immediate outcomes relating to the set-up and functioning of new mechanisms for citizen participation and human rights dialogue. Limited evidence was found of wider changes at outcome level attributed to the implementation of rights-based local initiatives, policies and practices and increased participation. The effectiveness of the interplay between new practice, new policies and new or enhanced structures varies between municipalities.	
FINDING 13: NALAG's capacities to facilitate exchange between municipalities and the national level as well as with civil society were strengthened and are valued by stakeholders. Furthermore, based on its strengthened capacities NALAG contributes both to the localisation of human rights and to the human rights dialogue between local and national level.	NALAG has close ties with municipalities, facilitates productive exchange between municipalities, and can even play the role of a door-opener, facilitating exchange with both civil society and the national level.	
What have been reasons for achievements and lack thereof?		
FINDING 14: In light of a challenging political culture, the trust between mayors/municipalities and citizens/local civil society is a key enabler for genuine participation processes. In turn, participatory processes and fact-based information and communication increase trust. The interventions and process quality of the project contributed to these mutually reinforcing enablers.	Key enablers are the political will at the national level as well as in the municipalities. It is crucial for the quality of participation processes that citizens perceive participatory processes as genuine and that the political interest in the process is authentic and transparent. Here, civil society organisations play a key role. Another enabler is that visible projects in the municipalities emerge from the participation processes to create trust in the medium-term. The five small-scale projects funded as part of this project are a first step towards the creation of trust capital.	
FINDING 15: The municipalities' ongoing high dependence on the central level, which is also reflected in limited financial and human resources, is seen a potential hindrance to realising genuine participation processes and the localisation of human rights policies and practices.		Recommendation 3: Initiate an analysis of lessons learnt from the implementation of the small-scale projects of this intervention, jointly with municipalities and national stakeholders. Assess options on how the funding of small-scale projects for municipalities to support participatory and human rights-based processes at local level can become sustainable.
FINDING 16: The socio-geographical setting of municipalities has an effect on needs, capacities and feasibility to	The technical quality of the implemented measures and initiated processes are another aspect of effectiveness. None of the measures were identified as being weak in implementation. Another important aspect of process quality is the adaptation of measures and contents to the respective municipality and its conditions. Both the needs and the specific stakeholder environment are	Recommendation 4: Assess the possible need for adaptation to specific rural and

Findings	Conclusions	Recommendations
realise participatory processes at local level as well as on the localisation of human rights.	diverse, and measures must reflect this.	urban contexts, in which local populations exhibit differences in composition and age structures.

Are there unintended or unplanned outputs or outcomes? How has the intervention dealt with any unintended outputs or outcomes?

Findings	Conclusions	Recommendations
FINDING 17: There are a limited number of unintended outputs, of which an MoU between NALAG and the Office of the Advisor to the Prime Minister on Human Rights is the most prominent.	The MoU between NALAG and the Office of the Advisor to the Prime Minister on Human Rights can be seen as a good starting point for further co-operation as part of a new project.	

How have the different gender and underrepresented groups benefitted from the outcomes?

Findings	Conclusions	Recommendations
FINDING 18: At output level, gender and other underrepresented groups have been included into project measures implemented by CoE (trainings etc) and subsequent measures undertaken by the municipalities (such as Citizens' Assemblies etc). These outputs have the potential to generate positive effects for gender and underrepresented groups including youth, minorities and persons with disabilities in the future.	It is too early to assess wider benefits for gender and underrepresented groups. The many stages of the process - sensitisation of stakeholders, activation of underrepresented groups, piloting of participatory measures or piloting of human rights-based measures, then implementation and stabilisation of such processes - are prerequisites for the emergence of wider benefits.	Recommendation 5: Monitor with target groups whether the presumed positive effects for gender and underrepresented groups materialise (e.g. through the initiated small-scale projects), and analyse enabling factors.

To what extent has the Council of Europe had a comparative advantage vis-à-vis other international actors in its interventions in the field of democratic governance, civil participation, and human rights?

Findings	Conclusions	Recommendations
FINDING 19: The CoE has a comparative advantage vis-à-vis other international actors, in particular through its long-term commitment and strategic triangle outlined in the CoE Action Plan for Georgia, its high reputation and available expertise.	The CoE leveraged its comparative advantage to strengthen coordination and the creation of synergies between actors and initiatives in the field of human rights and civil participation.	
FINDING 20: The project is complementary to and creates synergies with the key initiatives of other international actors including the Open Government Programme. In this context the CoE has been instrumental in taking a leading role in the coordination of respective civil participation initiatives in the country which led to concrete examples of co-operation.		

Findings	Conclusions	Recommendations
SUSTAINABILITY		
What is the likelihood that the benefits from the interventions will be maintained when the project is completed?		
FINDING 21: There is a high likelihood that some of the benefits from the intervention will be maintained when the project is completed. However, processes and organisational structures are still fragile and rather at a pilot stage. FINDING 22: Sustainability prospects increase when activities are successfully implemented simultaneously in the areas of awareness raising, capacity building, piloting of new practices, introduction of new policies and anchoring in institutions. In the medium-term, the project scope needs to be more comprehensive, with an increased number of municipalities (quantitative) and a strategic selection of stakeholders (qualitative).	The evaluation could establish that sustainability is likely in a number of areas. The depth of changes, and hence the likelihood of their sustainability likelihood, vary between municipalities. NALAGs raised capacities contribute to the likelihood of sustainability. Overall, sustainability prospects are at an expected level given the length and scope of the project. Policies, organisational structures and practices have not yet evolved to the degree that both an organisational memory and a political culture change can be established. This would require longer-term engagement, e.g. through a follow-up project.	Recommendation 6: In view of a possible follow-up project and expansion, aim for a balance between municipalities which already demonstrated commitment and interest in civil participation and human rights throughout the present project (potential for sustainability orientation) and municipalities where the awareness of human rights and civil participation needs to be raised (expansion of project scope).

ANNEXES

Annex 1: Location of participating municipalities

1 Akhmeta	DG2
2 Ambrolauri	DG2
3 Bolnisi	DG2+Congress
4 Borjomi	DG2+Congress
5 Chokhatauri	DG2+Congress
6 Gori	DG2
7 Marneuli	DG2+Congress
8 Oni	DG2+Congress
9 Ozurgeti	DG2+Congress
10 Rustavi	DG2
11 Tbilisi	DG2+Congress
12 Telavi	DG2
13 Tetritskaro	DG2+Congress
14 Tskaltubo	DG2+Congress
15 Zestaponi	DG2+Congress
16 Dedoplistskaro	Congress
17 Dmanisi	Congress
18 Tsalka	Congress

Annex 2: Theory of Change as in project proposal

Better and human rights based public services by local authorities and strengthened popular influence on decision making at local level

Stronger local democracy

Better local governance with a focus on human rights

Increased participation and trust

Improved local capacities

Improved ability to advocate human rights

CITIZENS AND CSOs

LOCAL AUTHORITIES

NALAG

New strategies and mechanism on participation

Human rights-based local initiatives, policies and practices

Capacity development

New mechanisms for dialogue on human rights

More inclusive participation in decision making and empowerment of women and youth

Development, revision and implementation of strategies, tools and approaches for civil participation

CivilLab workshops contribute toward establishment of a sustainable dialogue

Academy of Civil Participation and UChange trainings to increase capacity to advocate, conduct analysis and formulate proposals

Development, revision and implementation of human rights strategies, action plans, initiatives, measures and/or policies

Selected municipalities implement local policies and practices for gender equality and/or the inclusion of minorities, IDPs and other underrepresented groups

Pool of educators on local democracy and human rights for young people set up

Training on local self-government, human rights and data collection methods

Peer learning and dissemination of best practices

Creation of a working platform (NALAG, national stakeholders and CSOs)

Contribution to the design and implementation of the National Strategy on Human Rights

Establishment by local authorities of the Council of Civil Advisors, including CSOs and local population

Co-operation with CSOs and local population on legislative proposals

29

Annex 3: Assessment of the project indicators

Proposed adjustment of the project Theory of Change (ToC)

The CoE developed a Theory of Change (ToC) for the project (annex 2) which visualises very well the pathways of project interventions to expected effects (outcomes) and impact. The ToC concentrated on three key stakeholder groups: Municipalities, NALAG and civil society. Main outcome areas were formulated concerning "increased participation and trust", "improved local capacities" and "improved ability to advocate for human rights". The ToC assumes that outcomes contribute to the expected impact of "stronger local democracy" and "better local governance with a focus on human rights".

For the purpose of the indicator assessment the evaluators developed an adjusted ToC to visualise the pathways of change determined by the national level and the two project components. In order to visualise the levels of influence which the project has over expected effects and change, the evaluators have combined the ToC with effect chain levels (measures, output, outcome and impact levels).

Concerning the inclusion of national level stakeholders in the ToC, the assumption is that as the project puts a functioning mechanism in place for human rights dialogue between national and local levels, national level stakeholders will acknowledge the added value and be supportive of local input into the development of human rights strategies and action plans. These in turn will then include relevant local issues identified by local actors. These outcomes will then lead to a broader impact at national level as inclusiveness of national governance will be strengthened.

In terms of interlinkages and joint effects of the two project components, the assumption is that a number of project measures have improved both local capacities to apply participatory approaches as well as the municipalities' knowledge and awareness of human rights. At outcome level, new and innovative participation strategies at local level not only lead to increased participation and trust, but also to more inclusive participation of underrepresented groups including women and youth.

ADA results assessment

The evaluators assessed project progress along the ADA results assessment scoring scale. As visualised in the ToC, progress along the ADA scale can be summarised as following:
- Project measures have been "fully achieved", with the exception of setting up a pool of educators on local democracy and human rights for young people. This is planned for autumn 2023.
- Project outputs relating to the building and strengthening of stakeholder capacities in the field of civil participation and human rights as well as improved capacity to advocate for human rights can be seen as "largely achieved".
- More immediate outcomes relating to the set-up and functioning of new mechanisms for citizen participation and human rights dialogue can be seen as "partially achieved". No evidence has been found concerning the expected outcomes around the human rights project component relating to CSO cooperation on legislative proposals and the contribution of NALAG to the National Strategy of Human Rights. Hence, this has been labelled as "not achieved".
- Finally, wider changes at outcome level relating to the application of rights-based local initiatives, policies and practices, increased participation, dialogue and trust by citizens and CSOs and inclusiveness of women and youth can also be seen as "partly achieved" according to evaluation findings.[17]

The evaluators were not able to assess the question "Have the right approaches (in light of ADA's overarching principles) been adopted to ensure results achievement?", which is part of the ADA Results Assessment Form. These principles are too wide to be operationalised within the scope of this evaluation.[18] The ADA Results Assessment Form allows indicating this aspect as "not assessed".

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[17] Expected change at impact level has not been assessed as this was outside the scope of this evaluation. Changes related to national level stakeholders (colour-coded "grey") were not assessed as they were not included in the original project ToC.

[18] The ADA Manual Environmental, Gender and Social Impact Management describes as overarching policies and principles the following: ownership; do no harm; equity, equality and non-discrimination; inclusive participation and equal representation of all stakeholders; accountability and transparency; empowerment; sustainability; environmental sustainability; gender equality and empowerment of women and girls; human rights.

Achievements according to project indicators: Based on a review of the project's logical framework, the evaluators point out that the overall number of indicators is rather high when compared with other projects of similar scope. In a number of cases indicators on output and outcome level are not in line with the output-outcome hierarchy. Many of the indicators on output-level are beyond the control of the project team and depend heavily on municipalities and other stakeholders taking action. These might instead be placed on the outcome level, implicating also a longer time frame. Not all indicators are as easily measurable as would be desirable.

The table below provides an overview of indicators and actual achievements. It must be taken into account that the evaluation reflects the indicator status as of 30/06/2023 and that the further duration of the project is still 6 months. The CoE project team plans a systematic data collection on indicator values in September/October 2023. This data was not yet available at the time of writing this report.

	Number	Percentage
Indicators on outcome level accord. to logical framework	14	
Indicators on output level accord. to logical framework	22	
Total no. of indicators	36	
Indicators partly fulfilled / evidence found	13	36%
Indicators fully met as planned / in some cases higher than target value / evidence found	4	11%
Indicators with current value either on zero or no data available	17	47%
Indicators for which corresponding activities have not yet taken place or have been cancelled	2	6%

According to one interviewee, at the beginning of project implementation the CoE followed expert advice to focus on processes and not merely on outputs in order to build the stakeholders' trust and enhance their sense of ownership. This may partly explain why a considerable number of indicators were not met, as these rather qualitative aspects of process management are underrepresented in the indicator design. Furthermore, the project started with a considerable delay due to external factors.

Concluding remarks

Comparing achievements with the theory of change, most of the assumptions have proven to be valid. Although processes have generally not progressed as far as assumed in the ToC, the potential process beginnings are in evidence.

CoE had designed a very ambitious project log frame with a large number of indicators, each with high target values. For this reason, the degree of target achievement is relatively low (one third of the indicators). Moreover, many of the chosen indicators reflect processes over which the project has only limited influence or are overambitious in terms of the given time frame. They would have to be placed in the context of longer processes of democratisation and mainstreaming of human rights principles.

The consultants would hence suggest to ensure that the achievement of formulated outputs in the log frame is directed by and under the control of the project. Moreover, the consultants suggest to plan for a review process of the project log frame during inception phase, in which indicators and target values can be adjusted in accordance with the findings of preparatory baseline assessments.

(Adjusted) theory of change

	Impact level
Local population benefits from better public services by local authorities which is inclusive of gender and underrepresented groups	
Stronger local democracy / Local governance has a focus on human rights / National governance inclusiveness strengthened	

Outcome level

- **CIVIL SOCIETY:** Increased participation, dialogue and trust by citizens and CSOs
- **CIVIL SOCIETY:** More inclusive participation in decision-making and empowerment of women and youth
- **MUNICIPALITIES** apply rights-based local initiatives, policies and practices
- **NATIONAL ACTORS:** National human rights policies/ strategies include local issues
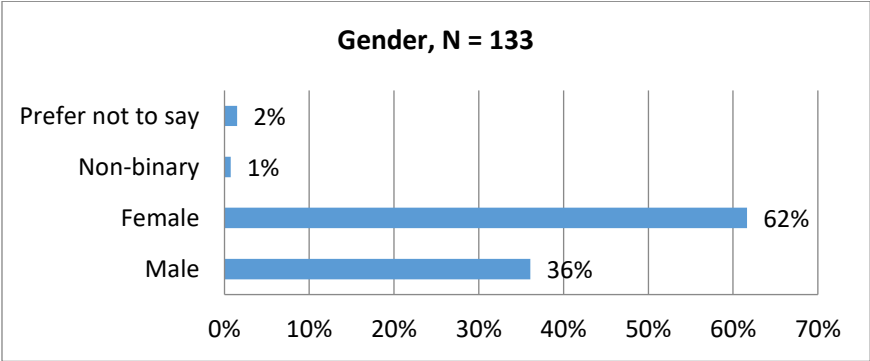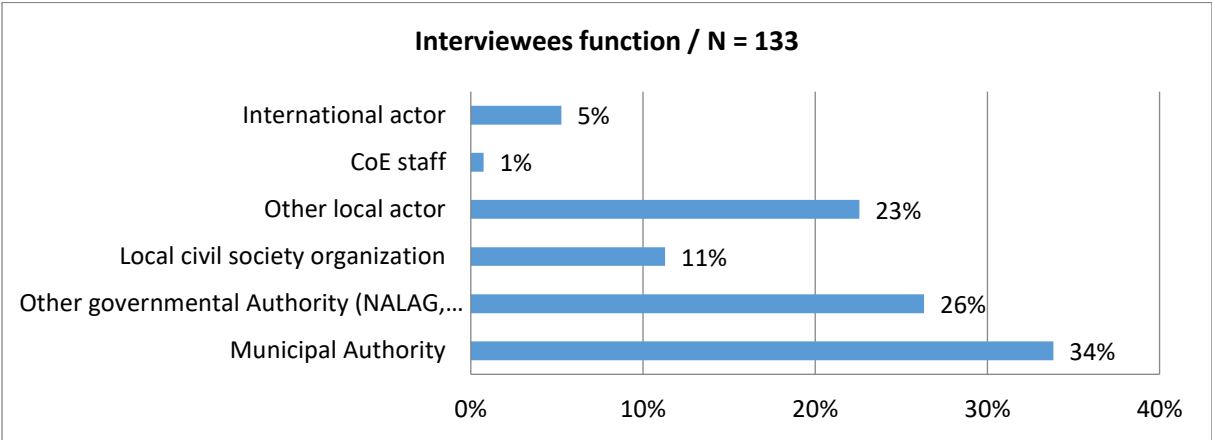- **CIVIL SOCIETY:** Co-operation on legislative proposals
- **NALAG** contributes to design/ implementation of the National Strategy on Human Rights
- **NATIONAL ACTORS:** aware of added value and supportive of local input
- **MUNICIPALITIES:** New/innovative participation strategies and mechanisms for citizens at local level, e.g. revitalized Councils of Civil Advisors, in place and functioning
- **MUNICIPAL/NATIONAL:** New mechanisms for dialogue on human rights are in place and functioning

Output level

- **MUNICIPALITIES/CSOs:** Improved local capacities to apply participatory approaches
- **MUNICIPALITIES:** Improved awareness and knowledge on human rights
- **NALAG/MUNICIPALITIES/CSOs:** Improved capacity to advocate for human rights

Project measures

- Development, revision and implementation of strategies, tools and approaches for civil participation
- Small grants for selected municipalities to implement local policies and practices for gender equality and/or the inclusion of minorities, IDPs and other underrepresented groups
- Peer learning and dissemination of best practices
- Creation of a working platform (NALAG, national stakeholders, CSOs)
- CivicLab workshops
- Pool of educators on local democracy and human rights for young people set up (planned for after 30.06.2023)
- Training on local self-government, human rights and data collection methods
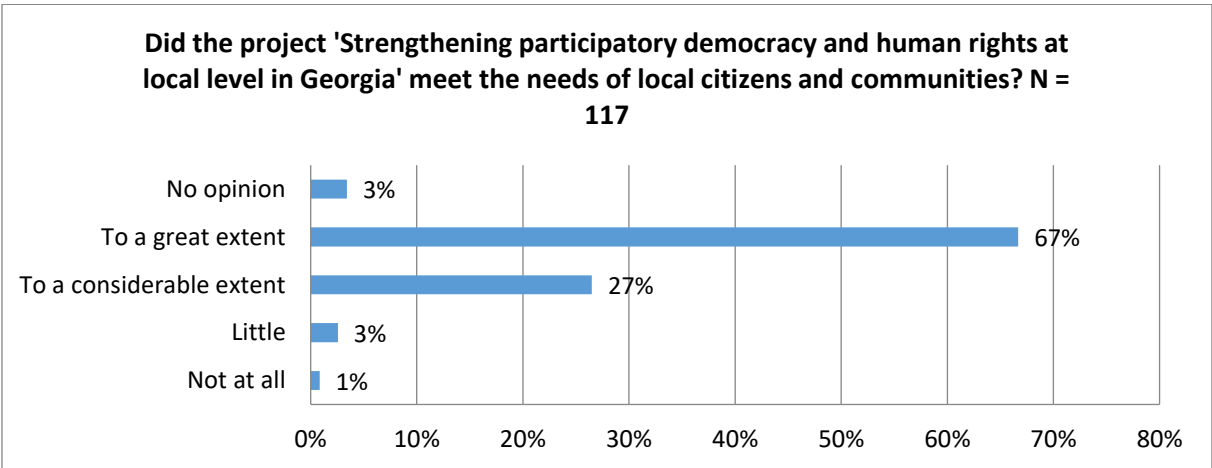- Academy of Civil Participation and U-Change trainings

Colour code: ■ Fully achieved   ■ Largely achieved   ■ Partially achieved   ■ Not achieved by 30.06.2023   ■ National stakeholders interplay with project (not part of original ToC)
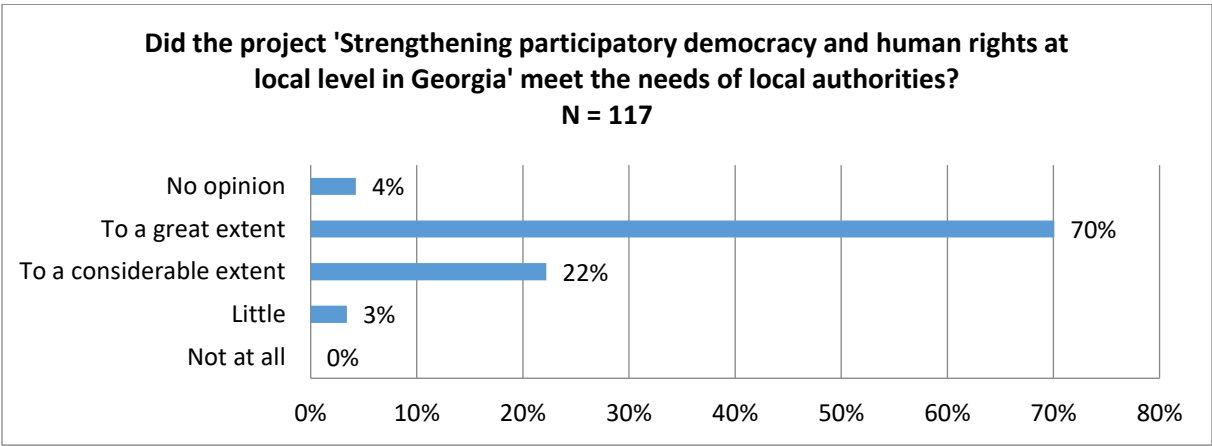
Annex 4: Survey questions and results

Council of Europe Project: "Strengthening participatory democracy and human rights at local level in Georgia"

Interviewees function / N = 133

Function	Percentage
International actor	5%
CoE staff	1%
Other local actor	23%
Local civil society organization	11%
Other governmental Authority (NALAG,…	26%
Municipal Authority	34%

Gender, N = 133

Gender	Percentage
Prefer not to say	2%
Non-binary	1%
Female	62%
Male	36%

Needs

Did the project 'Strengthening participatory democracy and human rights at local level in Georgia' meet the needs of local citizens and communities? N = 117

Response	Percentage
No opinion	3%
To a great extent	67%
To a considerable extent	27%
Little	3%
Not at all	1%

Did the project 'Strengthening participatory democracy and human rights at local level in Georgia' meet the needs of local authorities?
N = 117

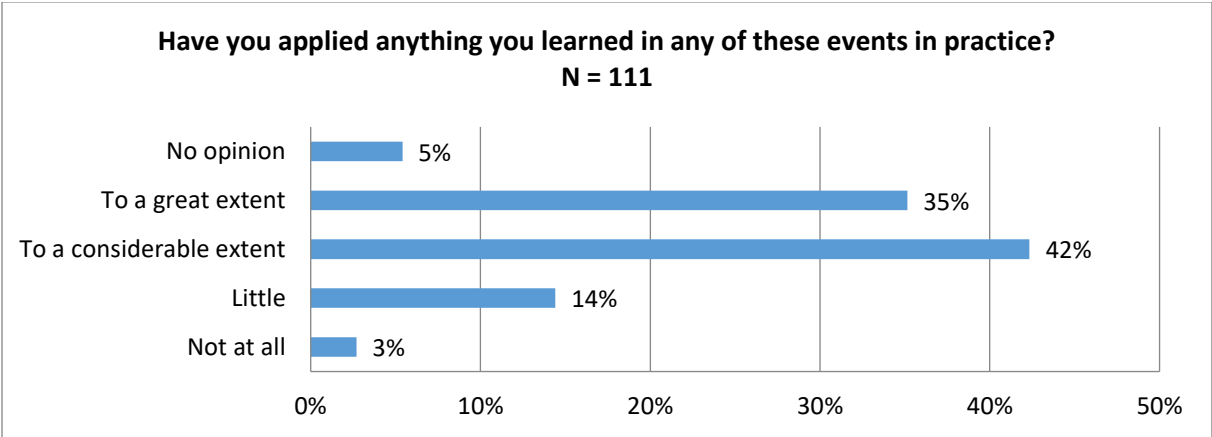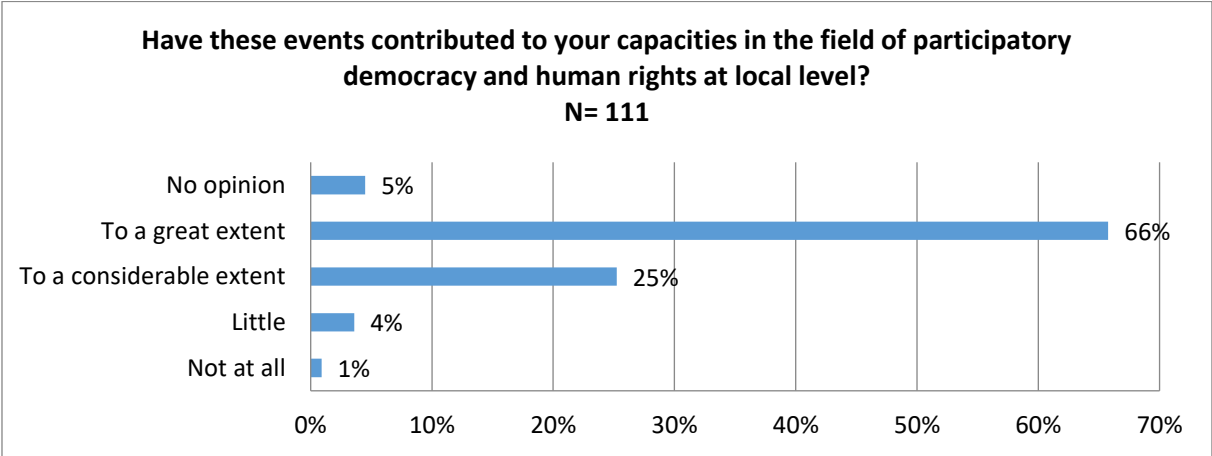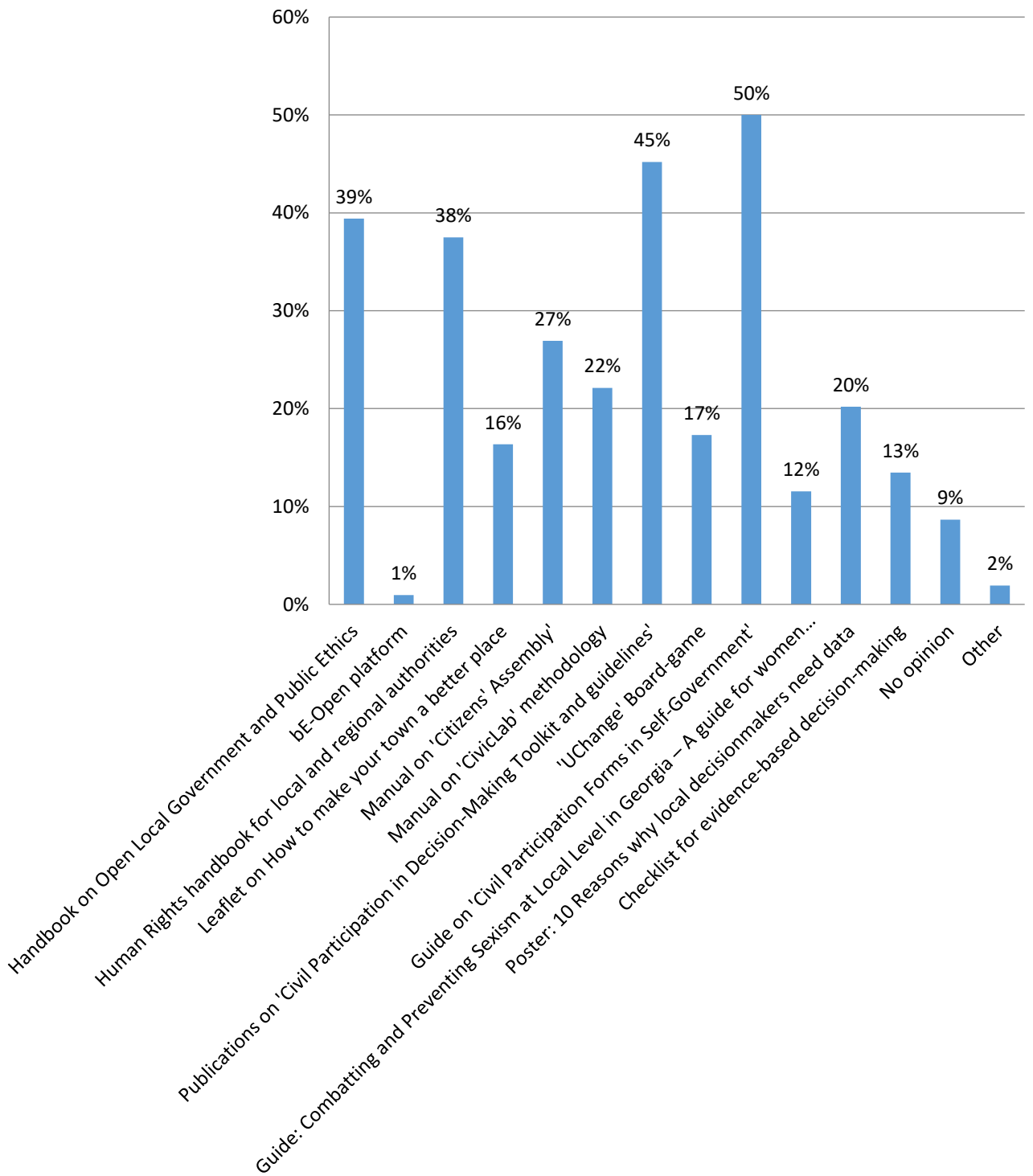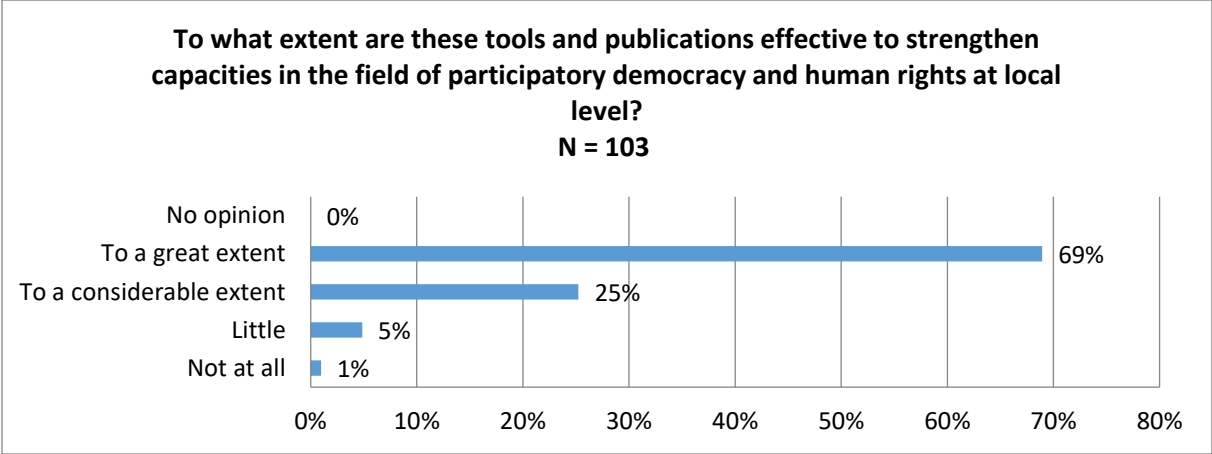| Response	Percentage
No opinion	4%
To a great extent	70%
To a considerable extent	22%
Little	3%
Not at all	0%

Effectiveness

The project has organized a number of events online and offline, e.g academies, workshops, conferences, winter schools, trainings, study visits, introductory presentations on "citizens assembly", peer-to-peer exchange, …
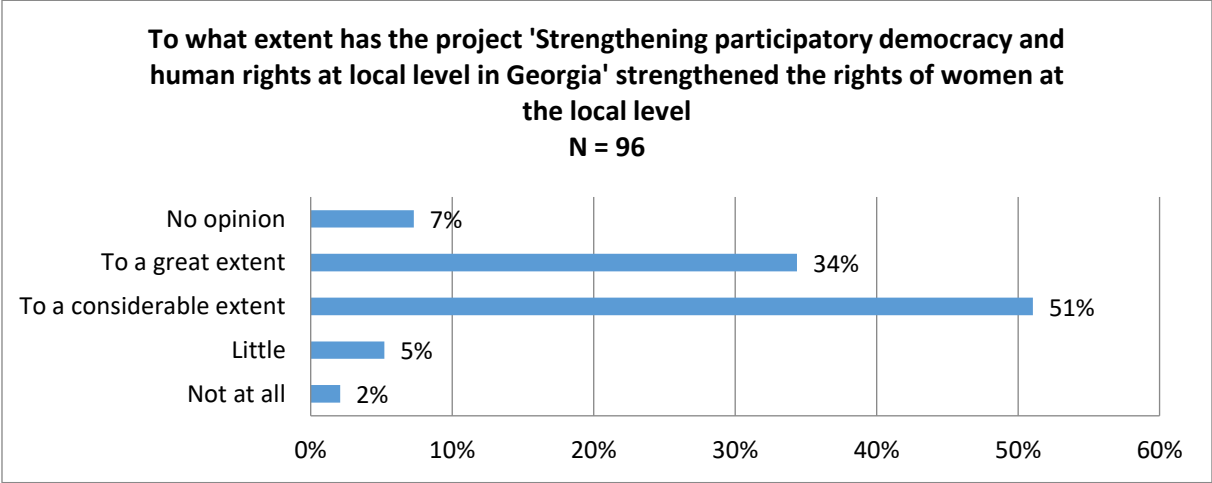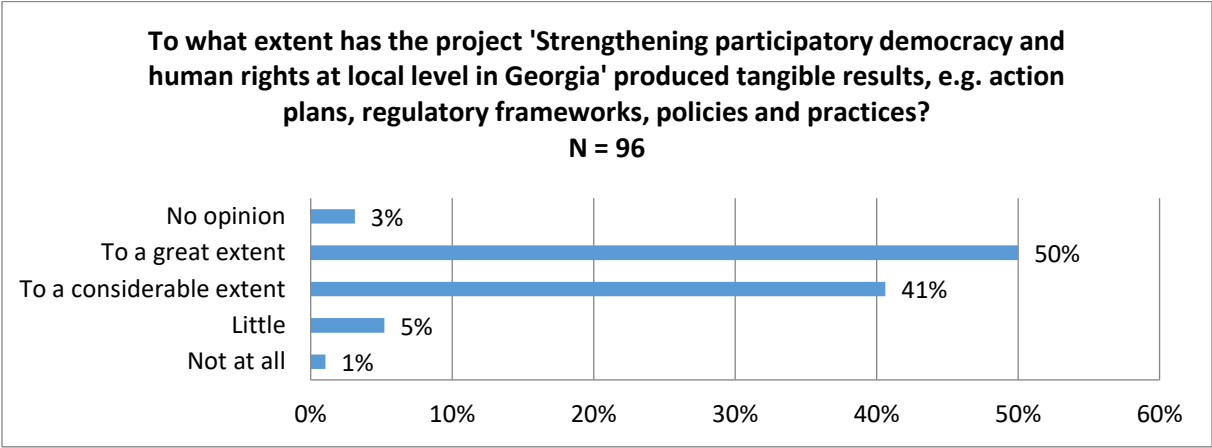
Have these events contributed to your capacities in the field of participatory democracy and human rights at local level?
N= 111

Response	Percentage
No opinion	5%
To a great extent	66%
To a considerable extent	25%
Little	4%
Not at all	1%

Have you applied anything you learned in any of these events in practice?
N = 111

Response	Percentage
No opinion	5%
To a great extent	35%
To a considerable extent	42%
Little	14%
Not at all	3%

Did you use any of the following tools or publications in practice / in your work?
N= 104 / multiple answers with total 324

To what extent are these tools and publications effective to strengthen capacities in the field of participatory democracy and human rights at local level?
N = 103

| Response	Percentage
No opinion	0%
To a great extent	69%
To a considerable extent	25%
Little	5%
Not at all	1%

Results & Sustainability

To what extent has the project 'Strengthening participatory democracy and human rights at local level in Georgia' produced tangible results, e.g. action plans, regulatory frameworks, policies and practices?
N = 96

| Response	Percentage
No opinion	3%
To a great extent	50%
To a considerable extent	41%
Little	5%
Not at all	1%

To what extent has the project 'Strengthening participatory democracy and human rights at local level in Georgia' strengthened the rights of women at the local level
N = 96

Response	Percentage
No opinion	7%
To a great extent	34%
To a considerable extent	51%
Little	5%
Not at all	2%

To what extent has the project 'Strengthening participatory democracy and human rights at local level in Georgia' strengthened the rights of vulnerable or underrepresented groups (other than women) at the local level?
**N = 96**

No opinion	4%
To a great extent	23%
To a considerable extent	61%
Little	10%
Not at all	1%
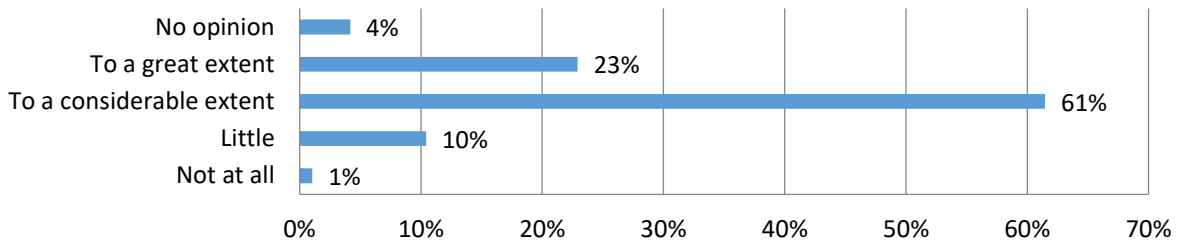
To what extent are you satisfied with the overall performance and results of the project 'Strengthening participatory democracy and human rights at local level in Georgia'?
N = 96
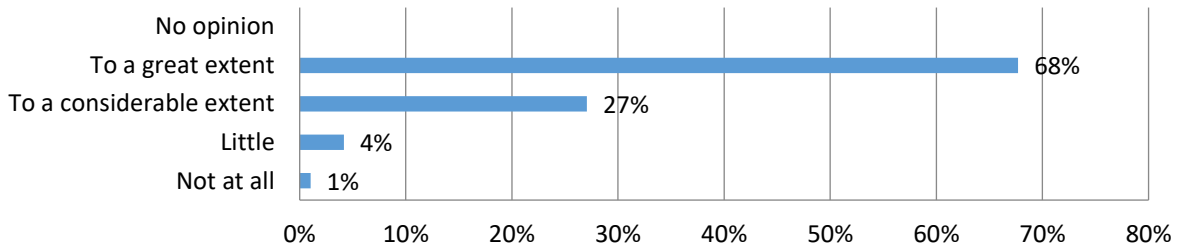
No opinion	
To a great extent	68%
To a considerable extent	27%
Little	4%
Not at all	1%

Do you believe the results of the project 'Strengthening participatory democracy and human rights at local level in Georgia' are sustainable?
N = 96

No opinion	2%
To a great extent	52%
To a considerable extent	41%
Little	3%
Not at all	2%
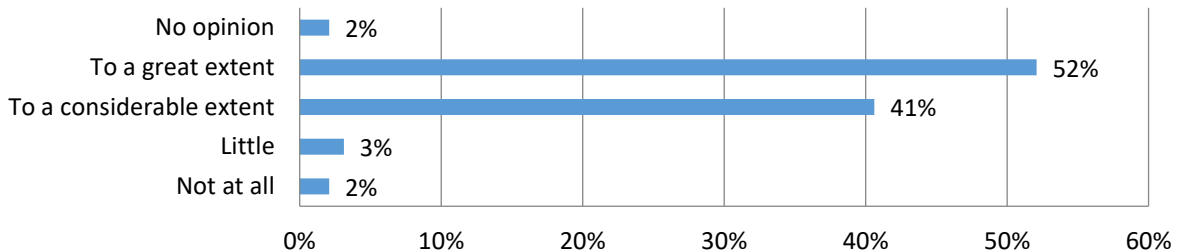
Annex 5: Recommendations by stakeholders

The recommendations collected below were expressed by interview partners. They reflect the opinions of the interview partners and are not necessarily shared by the evaluators. Evaluators do not claim that stakeholder's perceptions are factually correct.

Recommendations by municipal stakeholders:

Stakeholder recommendation
1. For a future project we would like to be part of the training design.
2. Target more concrete problems, less theoretical content.
3. Consider inclusion of a component to empower city councils.
4. Define target groups for different trainings/different content more clearly and evaluate their knowledge first.
5. There could be two parallel trainings, one for administrative staff, one for officials. The breaks can be done jointly, so there is still room for people to mix and have informal exchange.
6. Define longer and more systematic learning path for study groups, e.g. once a month. Trainings are scattered, we need a better designed step-by-step learning process. More goal oriented, more building on each training.
7. Give participants more space to express and show their specific context within the training.

Stakeholder recommendation
1. To other municipalities who want to implement citizens assembly: we had some discussion whether we should pay a one-time small remuneration to participants and we excluded this. We think it spoils the process. Rather start with a smaller group of people who have an intrinsic motivation. It also helps to build a culture of voluntarism. This also raises the sense of responsibility of the citizens. We need people who want to participate because they want to have a good environment for the next generation.

Stakeholder recommendation
1. Have bigger grants. If the grant is increased we can do more.
2. Always take specifics of the different municipalities into account.

Stakeholder recommendation
1. Have transparency on results of the on-going project. Who gained what at which level.
2. Introduce competitive principle: share results and see who did what.
3. Have specific experts invited to teach how to draft grant project specifically for municipality issues. No theory, very practical, tailored to specific municipality needs. Focus on individual programs for specific municipality.
4. Continue trainings. Make them even more user-oriented. Sometimes we are being tought staff we already know.

Stakeholder recommendation
1. CoE to support/participate in awareness raising activities with the population. Direct participation in meetings/campaigns with citizens would be great.
2. Continue trainings
3. Continue small grants
4. In the meetings/trainings create extra time slots for exchange between municipalities and with ombudsman office and with Ministries.

Recommendations by citizens

Stakeholder recommendation
Recommendation to other citizens implementing a citizens assembly
1. Work
2. Get as much information as possible in the beginning.
3. Get involved as much as possible
4. Call on young people to be engaged, seek their participation actively

Stakeholder recommendation
1. Create more spaces for gathering, e.g. like the book club. In particular when there is also international participants. This is good exchange.

Recommendations by civil society stakeholders:

Stakeholder recommendation
1. Quicker decision making when it comes to the realization of mutual actions and the activities of the project. More time in the project to be allocated for local activities than for the preparation/signing of the documentation/agreements needed for the realization of the said activities.

Stakeholder recommendation
1. He is wondering how the two components of the projects are being connected. Steering Committee reports are made available separately (DGII and Congress managers both present and report back in meetings)
- There are explicit interlinkages, for example: How is participation of underrepresented groups ensured? Are there lesson learned from both legs that can be translated into action – e.g. citizen participation on gender/HR? Are there any joint lessons learned?
- Don't know if there is anything that both components plan jointly despite two managers and two budgets.
2. Georgian municipalities more service provision orientated – e.g. infrastructure – and usually forget thinking about special needs of certain groups. It always needs someone to remind them. Then these needs are addressed but retroactively and not from the planning stage. To that end it would be good to see more involvement of the private sector as service contract holders into the project, e.g. on taking into account needs of disabled people and on accessibility.

Stakeholder recommendation
1. Empower NALAG more. A component could be that NALAG runs a small grants programme for municipalities. They are well connected.
2. Strengthen co-ordination between donors in the field. There were some duplications in the beginning of the project, which the CSO as contractor pointed out and brought everybody to one table.
3. CoE resources, like all the new publications, manuals etc. should be promoted further. Much invested to have good material, now more people, more CSOs need to know about them. In particular this should happen on local level. Online availability is great, but it takes more to make a tool known. Experts should introduce these tools on the local level, where CSOs don't have the knowledge about them.
4. CoE should contribute to tackle internal co-ordination problems within the municipalities. Find ways to have in the municipalities a person with responsibility for participatory processes. Only if this is a fixed position, there is any chance to create an institutional memory.
5. Train municipalities on public-private-partnerships fundraising to open up new resources for participatory processes. Municipalities should take the lead in co-operating with the private sector and lead the fundraising process.

Recommendations by other stakeholders

Stakeholder recommendation
1. Sharing of experience is an element a future project should build in more prominently into activities as it is something that really works.
2. Future projects should continue to address human rights at local level. So far this project is just a start. Methodological support is very much needed. Operational roll-out beyond legislative provisions is rarely happening.

Stakeholder recommendation
1. Ideally there should be no gap between completion of present and beginning of follow-up project to keep the momentum and ensure that motivation is not lost.
2. Grants were a good approach to generate ownership.

Stakeholder recommendation
1. Academies should be designed beyond a duration of a day. They very well can be run by local experts which would be beneficial as it would continue to built up local expertise.
2. It would also be good to reach to municipalities who did not get involved that much.
3. Follow-up on what has been done since completion of capacity building measure with those that participated, e.g. in the academies.

Stakeholder recommendation
1. Idea is that municipality can implement this by itself without external facilitator, would be good if there is a formal adoption of tools as an official participation mechanism; which makes it relevant even if change in administration.

Stakeholder recommendation
1. One of the main challenges is political willingness of municipalities. All projects at local level should have more focus on awareness-raising of municipal representatives.

Stakeholder recommendation
1. Involve more municipalities
2. Have more staff if possible. They are working a lot.

Stakeholder recommendation
1. For the follow-up to this project: there should be more systematic work, more national policy work as the mandate of municipalities is limited
2. Without widening municipalities Mandate overall, there can be no sustainability of the outcomes of this project
3. CoE is strong enough to make this happen by their mandate and the organizational setting

Stakeholder recommendation
1. Continue the project
2. Trainings are very important. Keep them as a prominent part of the project. Involve NALAG more in the trainings. A strong NALAG means strong municipalities.
3. Put more focus on the involvement of Youth in the local decision making processes. As there is not legal obligation to have youth advisory boards, we still have the option to have them on voluntary basis. Consider this as part of a future project to develop this idea further and create opportunities for young people.
4. Focus as well on women participation and women empowerment on local level. Eg. Usually municipalities cannot give grants to women, but this tool is very effective.
5. Involve more municipalities.
6. Share results of the project with all municipalities beyond the pilot municipalities.

Stakeholder recommendation
1. Participation works better when combined with concrete outputs (projects to be voted on) – The corresponding recommendation is to include this in indicators, more combination with concrete village support programmes.
2. We would like to see even more synergies between central level (good governance initiatives) and the local level activities. This is fruitful and should get more space in a possible follow-up project.
3. Involve a higher number of municipalities
4. Do a good analysis of what worked well to have a good starting points with new municipalities getting involved.

Stakeholder recommendation
1. Include more municipalities
2. More active involvement by us, e.g. adoption of meeting agenda, selection of experts.
3. Maybe we can provide recommendations on the municipalities to be included, in particular I would recommend more inclusion of smaller munici. Who have less resources, less contacts, etc.

Annex 6: Terms of Reference

Strengthening Participatory Democracy and Human Rights at Local Level in Georgia
Project Evaluation
TERMS OF REFERENCE

Introduction

This document provides the terms of reference (ToR) for an evaluation of Strengthening Participatory Democracy and Human Rights at Local Level in Georgia (2020/VC2804) jointly implemented by the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities (Congress) and the Directorate General of Democracy and Human Dignity, Division of Elections and Participatory Democracy (DGII) of the Council of Europe, under the framework of Council of Europe Action Plan for Georgia 2020-2023, with the financial contribution of the Austrian Development Cooperation (ADC) through the Austrian Development Agency (ADA).

The present ToR is for an end-of-project evaluation with the main purpose of identifying lessons learnt from project implementation and potential priority areas for future programming. The ToR provides background information about the project before describing the evaluation purpose, objectives, scope, evaluation criteria and questions, methodology, and required qualifications for the evaluator(s).

Background

Georgia being the 41st member state of the Council of Europe since 1999, and by accepting the obligations incumbent under Article 3 of the Statute of the Organisation, ratified relevant legal instruments on promoting human rights and pluralistic democracy, became member of open government thematic fora and adopted national policies contributing to decentralisation and protection of fundamental rights and freedoms. In this context, the Council of Europe within its Action Plan for Georgia 2023-2023 seeks to assist national and local authorities of Georgia in their dialogue and implementation of the Decentralisation Strategy (2020-2025). With the aim of improving the quality of local democracy, the Action Plan helps to create the correct conditions for ethical decision-making and more citizen-oriented, gender-sensitive, open, responsive, and transparent local governance. The Austrian Development Agency has technically and financially supported policy work on decentralisation and assisted Georgian Government in the adoption of the Pilot Integrated Regional Development Programme (2020-2022) and prioritises relevant interventions in that frame of reference. Its Framework Strategy with the EU Eastern Partner Countries focuses on inclusive local development and effective institutions in Georgia by means of increasing capacities of local government for effective and high-quality services and empowering civil society for participating in local decision-making and local development.

The project Strengthening Participatory Democracy and Human Rights at Local Level in Georgia **aims** at strengthening democratic public participation and human rights protection at municipal level by ensuring real impact of civil society organisations (CSOs) and citizens on the decision-making processes as well as establishment and implementation of effective co-operation mechanisms between local authorities and the civil sector. It also aims to strengthen the capacities of local authorities and the National Association of Local Authorities of Georgia (NALAG) to protect and embed human rights standards and practices in their policies and strategies, to incorporate a gender perspective, and to eliminate all forms of discrimination.

 The project was developed for three years period (2020-2023) and started in December 2020. It has a total budget of 1,800,000 EUR distributed evenly between two components, respectively led by DGII and Congress. The project is implemented by the Council of Europe under the Council of Europe Action Plan for Georgia 2020-2023 with financial contribution of the Austrian Development Cooperation. The total contribution by the Austrian Development Cooperation is of 1 500 000 EUR, with Action Plan funding of 300 000 EUR.

Expected **outcomes** of the project are to the following:

1) An improved regulatory framework for civil participation has been developed and piloted by civil society and local authorities; (DGII component)

2) The capacities of local authorities and National Association of Local Authorities of Georgia (NALAG) are strengthened to integrate and implement human rights standards and practices in their policies and strategies, and to advocate human rights in Georgia as full-fledged partners; (Congress component)

3)in selected municipalities, local authorities improve social inclusion and equal opportunities for all, incorporate a gender perspective in local political action, and eliminate discrimination. (Congress component)

The **methodology** chosen for project implementation is that of supporting local ownership of outputs while channeling best European practice and promoting peer-to-peer learning among local actors as well as between peers from other Council of Europe member states and Georgia. Moreover, the methodological approach taken towards capacity development is designed to promote transfer of knowledge, personal and institutional development in capacities and ultimately sustainable and locally owned new approaches to relevant processes.

Expected results of the project are that CSOs and local authorities develop and pilot an improved regulatory framework for civil participation; the capacities of local authorities and NALAG are strengthened to implement and integrate human rights standards and practices in their policies and strategies and to advocate their promotion as fully-fledged partners; and that selected municipalities[19] improve social inclusion and equal opportunities for all, incorporate a gender perspective in local political action and eliminate discrimination.

The project results are to be attained by activities designed to deliver eight intended immediate **outputs**, namely:
1. Under DGII component

- Output 1.1: Pilot city councils developed regulatory frameworks and practices to enable an increased public influence on policy and decision-making.
- Output 1.2: Capacity and awareness of public officials and civil society as well as local population was increased in participatory decision-making, including advocacy, policy analysis, proposal formulation and monitoring. Interactive CivicLab workshops facilitated co-operation among stakeholders on selected policy areas; local authorities, civil society representatives and citizens were engaged in implementation of infrastructural and development projects, including within the framework of intermunicipal cooperation.
- Output 1.3: Effective dialogue platforms were established around respective policy areas to support planning and implementation of regional and local development strategies and action plans aimed at promoting inclusive and participatory regional and local development.

2. Under Congress component

- Output 2.1: Capacities of local authorities, citizens and NALAG to respect, protect and fulfil human rights strengthened, including on data collection methods, in partnership with the Public Defender of Georgia and based on existing Council of Europe training curricula and tools.
- Output 2.2: NALAG created a sustainably working platform of municipalities to enhance the dialogue on human rights with national stakeholders and civil society organisations, and to advocate specific local needs and challenges in human rights.
- Output 3.1: Selected municipalities adopted/reviewed and implemented local action plans to increase gender equality and the inclusion of underrepresented groups, with a special focus on minorities, IDPs and other vulnerable groups.
- Output 3.2: Selected municipalities adopted/reviewed and implemented local policies and practices to prevent and combat discrimination, enabling equal participation and representation in local decision-making, and considering different sensibilities and needs.
- Output 3.3: A pool of educators was set up to carry out educational and awareness-raising activities on local democracy and human rights for young people to ensure continuous learning and sustainability.

The main **partners** of the project are NALAG, Public Defender (Ombudsman)'s Office of Georgia, the Ministry of Regional Development and Infrastructure of Georgia, the Administration of the Government of Georgia, the Parliament of Georgia, and CSOs.

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[19] From the target regions of the project: Tbilisi, Samtskhe-Javakheti, Kvemo Kartli, Kakheti, Imereti, Guria, Racha-Lechkhumi and Kvemo Svaneti.

Evaluation Purpose

The evaluation is an end-of-project evaluation. It will be undertaken in line with the [Council of Europe's Evaluation Policy](#) /[20] .The purpose of the evaluation is to ensure accountability and promote organisational learning. It will serve to identify lessons learnt during the project implementation and its recommendations will be used while framing a follow-up intervention.

The main **users** of the evaluation will be Congress and DGII management, project teams, and the donor. Furthermore, the evaluation audience includes the project partners and members of the Project Steering Committee, including civil society organisations co-operating in the project and elected representatives and staff from the target local authorities.

The evaluation process should be in line with the Council of Europe's Code of Conduct for Evaluation (see annex 1), human rights approach, and gender equality principles, as well as paying due attention to relevant sustainable development goals.[21]

Evaluation Objectives and Scope

The objective of the evaluation is to offer an independent assessment of the overall project measured against the objectives and indicators as set out in the project log-frame.

In particular, the **specific objectives** of the evaluation are:
1. To assess the **relevance, effectiveness, added value, and sustainability** of the project intervention
2. To assess how and with what results **gender** has been **mainstreamed** in the project
3. To provide **recommendations** on possible lines of action and further activities for future assistance, long-standing sustainability, and improved project methodology

The **scope** of the evaluation will cover the full range of activities and the full timeline of the project implementation from its inception period until the final activities implemented in 2023.

Evaluation Criteria and Questions

The evaluation will assess the project against the criteria of relevance, effectiveness, added value, and sustainability. It will provide answers to the following evaluation questions:[22]

1. **Relevance**
   1.1. To what extent has the intervention design been relevant to the priority areas of the 2020-2023 Council of Europe Action Plan and the Framework Strategy of the Austrian Development Cooperation for Georgia?
   1.2. To what extent have intervention objectives addressed needs (identified through the baselines assessments conducted in the framework of the project)[23] of the beneficiaries?
   1.3. To what extent have interventions been aligned with, and supportive of, the decentralisation reform and relevant strategies / policies on promotion and protection of human rights and strengthening civil participation at local level?
   How has the project design taken into account the needs of the different gender and underrepresented groups?

2. **Effectiveness**
   2.1. To what extent has the project achieved its expected outputs and immediate outcomes?
   2.2. What have been reasons for achievements and lack thereof?
   2.3. How have the different gender and underrepresented groups benefitted from the outcomes?

3. **Added Value**
   3.1. To what extent has the Council of Europe had a comparative advantage vis-à-vis other international actors in its interventions in the field of democratic governance, civil participation, and human rights, specifically in the empowerment of civil society, local authorities and their national association?

4. **Sustainability**

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[20] https://rm.coe.int/cm-2018-159-evaluation-policy-final/1680a426a2
[21] The project aims to contribute to SDGs 5 (Gender equality), 10 (Reduced inequalities), 16 (peace, justice, and strong institutions), 11 (Sustainable cities and communities) and 17 (Partnership for the goals).
[22] Sub-questions should be developed and proposed by the evaluator(s).
[23] As well as pointed out in other sources

4.1. What is the likelihood that the benefits from the interventions will be maintained when the project is over? What is the likelihood related to the different gender and underrepresented groups. What are the key factors contributing to and hindering sustainability?

Additional criteria and questions on relevant human rights, gender equality and democratic civil participation aspects can be proposed by the evaluator(s).

Design and Approach
This section defines the overall evaluation design, methodological approach and methods for data collection and analysis that may be used during the evaluation.

0. Submission of methodological brief
The decision to award the contract to a service provider will be made on the basis of a methodological brief. An **evaluation matrix** (template in Annex) should be submitted with the methodological brief by the service provider prior to the inception phase and signature of the contract (see "Submission of the methodological proposal" below). The methodological brief shall outline how the evaluator(s) will approach the assignment, clarifying the methodology to be employed and workplan for the evaluation, including the evaluation matrix and an estimated number of interviews/focus groups.

1. Inception phase
Kick off and clarification meeting(s)
At the initial stage of the evaluation, the evaluators will conduct **desk review and briefing discussions** with the project team which will further define the methodological and operational framework for the evaluation.
Inception report (IR)
 The inception report (IR) will serve as a roadmap for the evaluation and ensure shared understanding of all involved parties in the evaluation. Importantly, it further outlines the evaluation design and presents the data collection and analysis methods and tools to be used, identifying potential risks and limitations along with adequate mitigation strategies.
The CoE Checklist for evaluation inception report (Annex 4) is to be used as quality assurance.
The inception report should be structured as follows:
1. Background, purpose, and objectives of the evaluation
2. Evaluation context and scope (including preliminary desk review summary)
3. Methodology
4. Evaluation criteria
5. Evaluation questions
6. Data collection instruments and data analysis
7. Stakeholder mapping
8. Workplan
9. Elaborated evaluation matrix
10. Annexes

2. Data collection and analysis
Data Collection
Data should come from variety of sources to ensure accuracy, validity, and reliability. With a view of minimising biases and technical gaps, the evaluator(s) should refer to the method of data triangulation. Moreover, they are expected to strictly follow Council of Europe [Regulation on the protection of personal data](). The evaluator is encouraged to consider advantages and disadvantages of listed data collection tools and their applicability to the evaluation and make informed propositions on alternative methods.
The data collection stage includes:
- **Briefings** with the project teams in Strasbourg and Tbilisi.[24]
- **Desk review** of relevant documents and information from internal / external sources. The project team will ensure setting up an **evaluation *dossier*** consisting of all relevant information on the intervention to be evaluated as well as other relevant information and documentation, such as decisions of the Council of Europe's bodies or reports of Council of Europe's monitoring mechanisms on particular topics. The

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[24] The reference group/project team will be at disposal to provide relevant information and documentation throughout the evaluation process

documentation review is not limited to the project activities and can cover any information on the strategy or general approach, closely related or not.[25]

- **Structured and semi-structured interviews (individual, focus group interviews either in person or online)**[26] with a range of stakeholders (who will be initially contacted, informed and engaged with the help of the project team and of the main partner NALAG), including:
    - Representatives of the major administrative entities of the Council of Europe involved in the implementation of the project;
    - Members of the project Steering Committee;
    - Representatives of national and local government, local association, civil society actors;
    - Institutions and organisations implementing or funding projects of similar thematic;
    - Long and short term international and local experts or/and consultants who have been engaged in interventions with delivery of legal, thematic, and technical expertise.
- **Online survey** sent to participants of the project activities.

Reaching out to end beneficiaries of the project will be facilitated through project partners (including NALAG, PDO, CSOs).

Data Analysis
Qualitative data should be systematically analysed using a clearly documented process to facilitate identification of key themes and issues. While keeping personal data of informants anonymous, the evaluator(s) should develop a reference product (e.g., spreadsheet or CSV file) that will be handed over to the Council of Europe at the end of the evaluation.
Quantitative data generated during data collection phase from different sources will need to be cleaned, converted, and combined. Cleaned and processed raw quantitative data should be handed over to the Council of Europe provided that sources of information have been thoroughly anonymised. In addition to the narrative analysis, visually appealing charts and / or infographics should be provided.

3. Reporting
Main output of the assignment is the **evaluation report (ER)** of maximum 30 pages, excluding annexes, which should be delivered in accordance with the quality assurance checklist (see annex 3).
The **draft final report** will be submitted to the Council of Europe project team to for comments and a quality check. The project team will also submit the draft report to the Directorate of internal Oversight (DIO) for a quality check.
The report will then be transmitted to the donor for comments. A short **presentation** of the evaluation results can be made to CoE, the Donor ADC and the beneficiaries in a final meeting.
The evaluation report should be structured as follows:[27]

1. Executive Summary
2. Introduction (purpose and scope of the evaluation, description of the intervention, evaluation methodology including limitations, difficulties encountered during the evaluation)
3. Findings
4. Conclusions
5. Recommendations, possibly including suggested modalities of implementation
6. Lessons learnt
7. Annexes (including evaluation matrix, list of interviews and reviewed documents, questionnaires, formats of structured and semi-structured interviews, etc.) shall be presented in accordance with quality assurance checklists and templates for evaluation reports.

Deliverables
The following deliverables are required:
- **Inception Report**

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[25] Project document (provided in PMM database), contract and annexes (budget for the project, special and general conditions), workplans, inception report, annual progress reports, steering committee meeting minutes, news items published, technical papers and other publications.
[26] The evaluator will decide on the format of interviews based on the annex 6 – Template for interview/focus group guide of the Council of Europe, EJLT <https://rm.coe.int/coe-evaluation-guidelines-october-2020-pdf/1680a147d1>
[27] Please refer to the Quality Assurance Checklist for Evaluation Reports

- **Evaluation report**, plus the [ADA Results Assessment Form](#) (**RAF**)
- Anonymised **qualitative analysis reference product**
- Anonymised, cleaned and processed raw **quantitative data** used in any quantitative analysis.

Qualifications of the Evaluator(s)

The evaluator(s) should have the following **qualifications and competences**:
- an advanced university degree in evaluation, human rights law, social sciences, public management / administration, or a related field;
- a strong record (of minimum 5 years) in designing, managing and leading evaluations in the context of international cooperation;
- An extensive knowledge of / an experience in applying standard international evaluation principles (UNEG), qualitative and quantitative methods;
- Experience in the areas of local democracy and decentralisation reforms;
- Experience in the area of human rights is an asset;
- Solid understanding of the context (previous work experience in the region and / or with Council of Europe is an asset);
- Independence and absence of conflict of interests;
- Strong proficiency in English language, knowledge of Georgian is an asset.

Indicative Timeline for the Evaluation

No.	TASK	DEADLINE
1.	**Briefing discussions with the teams/kick off and clarification meetings**	**14.06.2023**
1	**Desk review**	**15.06-24.06.2023**
3	**Inception report**	**24.06.2023**
4	**Data collection**	**24.07-19.08.2023**
5	**Data analysis**	**19.08-20.09.2023**
6	**Draft final report**	**20.09.2023**
7	**Review of the draft report by the project team and DIO**	**5.10.2023 /**
8	**Final report**	**30.10.2023**
9	**Presentation of the evaluation results to ADC and beneficiaries**	**1.11.2023**

Evaluation Management

The evaluation will be managed and facilitated by the Council of Europe project team (reference group). The latter will provide the evaluator(s) with evaluation dossier (composed of relevant resources), list of stakeholders and partners. The evaluator(s) will be responsible for logistics of the process – travel arrangements, interpretation and translation, administrative and secretarial support, telecommunications, printing, etc. and for the dissemination of all methodological tools (e.g., questionnaires).

Submission of the methodological proposal

Following an international public call for **tenders** organised by Directorate of Internal Oversight (DIO) of the Council of Europe, an organisation-wide pool of evaluation experts has been established through framework contract No. 2021/FC/01 which is valid until 30 June 2026. The project team in consultation with the donor can invite one or more evaluators pre-selected by the DIO with reference to the present ToR to submit a methodological proposal.

Interested candidates are invited to **submit**:
- A **letter of interest** highlighting relevant experience of the consultant (service provider) in conducting similar assessments
- **Methodological brief** outlining how the evaluator(s) will approach the assignment (methodology employed and workplan for the evaluation, **including the evaluation matrix** and an estimated number of interviews/focus groups)
- **Resumes** of each member of evaluation team highlighting experience in conducting similar tasks

- A **financial offer** including a detailed budget with breakdown of costs per deliverable (not exceeding 30,000 EUR in total), including travel, interpretation, translation, etc. Indicated budget should be provided in EUR and VAT should be indicated separately
- For service providers subject to VAT <u>only</u>: a quote (**Pro forma invoice**) on their letterhead including:
  - service providers name and address
  - its VAT numbers
  - full list of services to be provided
  - fee per type of deliverables
  - total amount per type of deliverables
  - total amount, tax exclusive, the applicable VAT rate, amount of VAT and amount of VAT inclusive

ANNEXES

Annex 1: Council of Europe Code of Conduct for Evaluators
https://rm.coe.int/coe-codeofconductforevaluation/1680a1a023
Annex 2: Evaluation Matrix Template
https://rm.coe.int/evaluationmatrixtemplate/1680a1a024
Annex 3: Quality Assurance Checklist for Evaluation Reports
https://rm.coe.int/quality-assurance-checklist-for-evaluation-reports/native/1680a13750
Annex 4: Quality Assurance Checklist for Evaluation Inception Reports
https://rm.coe.int/quality-assurance-checklist-for-evaluation-inception-report/native/1680a1374f

Annex 7: Evaluation Matrix

LEAD QUESTIONS	SUB-QUESTIONS	MEASURES/INDICATORS	DATA COLLECTION INSTRUMENT(S)	DATA SOURCES
EVALUATION CRITERIA: RELEVANCE				
1.1 To what extent has the intervention design been relevant to the priority areas of the 2020-2023 Council of Europe Action Plan and the Framework Strategy of the Austrian Development Cooperation for Georgia?		Evidence of alignment with 2020-2023 Council of Europe Action Plan and ADC Framework Strategy for Georgia.	Main instrument: desk review Complementary: Semi-structured interviews	Evaluation dossier Stakeholders
1.2 To what extent have intervention objectives addressed needs (identified through the baselines assessments conducted in the framework of the project) of the beneficiaries?	• Have needs been properly assessed? • Do beneficiaries themselves perceive the intervention as relevant?	Scope and methodology of context analysis. Nature and extent of stakeholder and beneficiary input into analysis. Extent to which relevant data was available and incorporated into the analysis. Beneficiaries perceive the intervention as relevant.	Desk review and semi-structured interviews Online-survey	Evaluation dossier, in particular needs/baseline assessment Stakeholders
1.3 To what extent have interventions been aligned with, and supportive of, the decentralisation reform and relevant strategies / policies on promotion and protection of human rights and strengthening civil participation at local level?	• Which reforms and strategies in particular have been supported? • Anything that the project design were not able to cover?	No. of relevant strategies/policies identified in desk review and confirmed through interviews.	Main instrument: desk review Complementary: Semi-structured interviews	Evaluation dossier
1.4 How has the project design taken into account the needs of the different gender and underrepresented groups?	• Was the project design appropriate? • Was the project design based on a gender-sensitive needs assessment?	Extent to which specific needs of different groups are addressed within the project design (and practice)	Main instrument: desk review Complementary: Semi-structured interviews	Evaluation dossier, in particular initial project design and documentation of related processes, Stakeholders involved in the initial design

LEAD QUESTIONS	SUB-QUESTIONS	MEASURES/INDICATORS	DATA COLLECTION INSTRUMENT(S)	DATA SOURCES
EVALUATION CRITERIA: EFFECTIVENESS AND ADDED VALUE				
2.1 To what extent has the project achieved its expected outputs and immediate outcomes?	• To what extent have target values of the 3 outcomes and all outputs been achieved as stated in the project logframe? • What is stakeholders' self-perception on raised capacities regarding output 1.2 and output 2.1 • What are tangible results in terms of regulatory frameworks and practice (output 1.1), local action plans, policies and practices and the set-up of a pool of trainers (outputs 3.1 – 3.3) • What is stakeholders' perception of the effectiveness of dialogue platforms (output 3.1) and the working platform of municipalities (output 2.2)	Achieved values of outcome and output indicators. Extent to which raised capacities have been put into practice. No. of regulatory frameworks, policies, etc. Extent to which platforms have let to concrete results and follow-on activities.	Desk Review Semi-structured interviews Focus groups (possibly on specific outputs if feasible) Online-survey	Project reports Stakeholders
2.2. What have been reasons for achievements and lack thereof?	• Which strengths and weaknesses of processes and results do stakeholders identify?	Evidence of strengths and weaknesses identified by stakeholders.	Main instrument: Semi-structured interviews	
2.3 Are there unintended or unplanned outputs or outcomes?	• How has the intervention dealt with any unintended outputs or outcomes?	Confirmed evidence of any unintended outputs/outcomes.	Main instrument: Semi-structured interviews Complementary: Desk Review	Stakeholders Project reporting
2.4 How have the different gender and underrepresented groups benefitted from the outcomes	• Have outcomes and outputs equally / adequately (?) benefitted men and women?	Evidence of outcomes/outputs adequately benefitting women and men.	Main instruments: Semi-structured interviews Focus groups	Stakeholders End-users

LEAD QUESTIONS	SUB-QUESTIONS	MEASURES/INDICATORS	DATA COLLECTION INSTRUMENT(S)	DATA SOURCES
	• How significant are those outcomes in the perception of these underrepresented groups? • Do outcomes positively affect the individual beneficiary concerned or the group the individual presents?	Evidence of outputs/outcomes for underrepresented groups. Perception of the significance of evidenced outputs/outcomes.	Complementary: desk review	
2.5 To what extent has the Council of Europe had a comparative advantage vis-à-vis other international actors in its interventions in the field of democratic governance, civil participation, and human rights, specifically in the empowerment of civil society, local authorities and their national association?	• What are key strengths of the Council of Europe in the field of democratic governance, civil participation, and human rights, specifically in the empowerment of civil society, local authorities and their national association? • How were these key strengths put into practice? • Were there complementary activities with other international actors?	The extent to which stakeholders can identify specific contributions and strengths of CoE.	Main instruments: Semi-structured interviews Complementary: desk review	Stakeholders
EVALUATION CRITERIA: SUSTAINABILITY				
3.1 What is the likelihood that the benefits from the interventions will be maintained when the project is completed?	• What are the key factors contributing to and hindering sustainability? • What is stakeholder's perception on the likelihood that benefits will be maintained.	The extent to which stakeholders identify good practice introduced during the project life-cycle and still practiced. The extent to which benefits from the project led to structural or institutional changes or new policies. The extent to which stakeholders identify benefits as relevant and show ownership.	Main instruments: Semi-structured interviews Focus groups (possibly on specific outputs and outcomes if feasible) Complementary: desk review Online-survey	Stakeholders, end users Project reports, other reports on Georgia if available Stakeholders

LEAD QUESTIONS	SUB-QUESTIONS	MEASURES/INDICATORS	DATA COLLECTION INSTRUMENT(S)	DATA SOURCES
3.2 What is the likelihood related to the different gender and underrepresented groups.	• What are specific factors contributing to and hindering sustainability in regards to gender and underrepresented groups?	The extent to which stakeholders identify good practice introduced during the project life-cycle and still practiced. The extent to which benefits from the project led to structural or institutional changes or new policies.	Main instruments: Semi-structured interviews Focus groups (possibly on specific outputs and outcomes if feasible) Complementary: desk review	Stakeholders, end users Project reports, other reports on Georgia if available

Annex 8: Stakeholders participating in the evaluation

Stakeholder	Women	Men	Non-binary/ prefer not to say	Total
Interviews				**54**
Municipal Authority	12	14		26
Governmental stakeholders	3	4		7
Local civil society	3	2		5
Experts	2	4		6
Council of Europe	8	0		8
International Actors	1	1		2
Focus groups	6	3		**9**
Survey	82	48	3	**133**
Total				**196**

Annex 9: Key Documents

Council of Europe / Congress of Local and Regional Authorities

Council of Europe: Project Document. Strengthening participatory democracy and human rights at local level in Georgia (VC 2804) (incl. annexes 1-6).

Council of Europe: Inception Report (July 2021). Strengthening participatory democracy and human rights at local level in Georgia (VC 2804).

Council of Europe: Interim Narrative Report Year 1 (2021). Strengthening participatory democracy and human rights at local level in Georgia (VC 2804).

Council of Europe: Interim Narrative Report Year 2 (2022). Strengthening participatory democracy and human rights at local level in Georgia (VC 2804).

Council of Europe: Civil Participation Briefs.

Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe (December 2021): Human Rights at Local Level in Georgia. Assessment Report.

Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe (August 20222): Local authorities' Efforts, Challenges and Needs in the Implementation of Human Rights Commitments. Baseline Assessment report Council of Europe Action Plan for Georgia 2020-2023.

Council of Europe (April 2022): CivicLab A tool for development, analysis and forecasting of options in the decision-making process.

The Congress of Local and Regional Authorities: Recommendation 426 (2018) Local and regional democracy in Georgia. The Republic of Armenia Georgia The Republic of Moldova.

Council of Europe (March 2022): Mapping Deliberative Democracy in Council of Europe Member States.

External documents

Government of Georgia: Decentralization Strategy 2020-2025.

Austrian Development Cooperation (December 2021): Framework Strategy of the Austrian Development Cooperation with the EU Eastern Partner Countries. The Republic of Armenia. Georgia. The Republic of Moldova.

Austrian Development Agency (July 2020): Guidelines for Programme and Project Evaluations.

Public Defender (Ombudsman) of Georgia/Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs/UN Women (2021): Compliance of Social and Healthcare Programs of Local Self-Governments with the Principle of Equality.

Public Defender (Ombudsman) of Georgia (2020): Assessment of Gender Policy of Local Self-Government Bodies with special emphasis on women's economic empowerment.

Open Society Georgia Foundation/IDFI/Management Systems Development Center: Local Self-Government Index. National Assessment of Georgian Municipalities 2021.

Annex 10: Activities past the evaluation time frame

Participatory Democracy

3-4 July, 28 September, 11-12 October, Civil Participation Information Campaign "Change the Scenario – Play your role" - since June, the campaign was implemented in 5 municipalities of Georgia – Telavi, Akhmeta, Bolnisi, Tetritskaro and Marneuli. Around 500 local citizens participated in the campaign activities. The events in municipalities were dedicated to the topic of civil participation and brought together residents, activists, local authorities and organisations committed to make a difference in their communities. The campaign aims to promote the importance of civil participation and encourage citizens' to be involved in local decision-making in their municipalities.

The events allowed participants to be engaged in the forum theatre. The actors performed a short play on the community problem and encouraged audience's interaction to explore different participatory solutions to deal with the community issue. After the performance, the audience had an opportunity to be engaged in the discussion on local initiatives and tools for citizens' participation, which helped them reflect on how individual actions can make positive changes in the municipalities and also to explore existing opportunities and mechanisms to be effectively engaged in local decision-making. **Civil participation campaign outreach material was prepared and spread widely in municipalities to raise awareness and contribute to behavioural change in local communities and encourage active civil engagement.** 3 educational articles and quizzes on civil participation were prepared.

The campaign events are continuation of the civil participation campaign launched in February 2023 in Tbilisi which then moved to regions.

6 July 2023 – 3ʳᵈ coordination meeting of international organisations working in the field of civil participation/participatory democracy at local level was organised by the project. Organisations such as USAID, UNDP, Solidarity Fund PL, GIZ, Council of Europe had an opportunity to exchange information among each other on the implemented activities directed at improving civil engagement in municipalities as well as on planned activities. This exchange at the operational level ensured to leverage synergies between organisations in order to avoid overlaps and ensure effective coordination. **4ᵗʰ Coordination meeting is planned in November 2023**.

10 July 2023 Akhmeta municipality organised public consultations by applying Council of Europe methodology CivicLab with the project support. Public consultations aimed to develop a medium-term development strategy of the municipality. "CivicLab" is a digital public consultation tool that brings together representatives from various sectors to discuss the topic of the consultation and produce proposals through participatory process. The consultations gathered 30 representatives of public, private, and civil sectors around the discussion tables. After introducing CivicLab methodology to the participants, the experts facilitated a process of analysing existing problems and determining solutions, based on which they identified challenges, priorities and recommendations for the municipality for the development of the municipal strategic document. The participants addressed local problems in Akhmeta and formulated solutions within three thematic areas: local economic development, infrastructure and youth development. *This activity was a continuation of the application of the CivicLab methodology by two other target municipalities (Telavi, Ozurgeti) to ensure citizens participation in the development of the strategic municipal documents. Besides, practical application of the CivicLab methodology was ensured by training local experts in the methodology which contributed to the sustainability of the project actions.*

1-3 August 2023 – Youth Camp on civil participation was organised for young individuals from project target municipalities. 29 young individuals from the Project's pilot municipalities in Georgia gathered in Tbilisi to learn about the different ways to get involved in political decision-making in their municipalities. During the Council of Europe Youth Camp, which was an unique experience for the

porticipants, they acquired knowledge about civil participation methodologies and got acquainted with the successful and innovative youth participation practices in European countries, they had an opportunity to develop solutions for different municipal issues by applying the "Uchange" game methodology and to explore advocacy techniques, to make their voices heard in the community. *Youth camp on civil participation is a follow up of the expertise gained by local authorities and CSOs during the study visit in Austria, knowledge and experience received throughout the study visit was incorporated in the youth camp programme. Besides, one of the experts who developed the programme and facilitated the sessions at the camp was a participant of the study visit to Austria. This ensured the sustainability of the results of the study visit to strengthen efforts in youth participation in Georgia.*

29 June – 1 July Expert camp "School Participatory Budgeting (PB): Best Practices and Solutions for Georgian Municipalities". School PB is an innovative tool for youth participation, which is currently actively used around the world for promoting youth engagement in decision-making. The methodology helps the youth to improve their leadership competencies and teaches them how to develop projects, how to get involved in planning a school budget and ultimately have an impact on the decisions affecting them at schools. School PB methodology successfully contributes to active citizenship and civil participation in local communities. The initial phase of introducing the methodology began with the expert camp, which was held in Tbilisi on 29 June - 1 July and brought together relevant stakeholders to explore how to adapt the methodology to the Georgian framework. The Expert camp gathered 24 individuals from the education sector, municipalities, teachers and schoolchildren from Tbilisi and Zestaphoni pilot schools. Ministry of Education and Science of Georgia is the key partner to support schools in introducing the School PB and promoting participatory culture among the schoolchildren. Based on the discussions held in the course of the expert camp, the experts have developed a Georgian model of the School PB.

October – November 2023 - School Participatory Budgeting (SPB) draft regulatory documents are prepared and the methodology and tools are adapted to the Georgian context. Following the expert camp and after consultations with the core stakeholders, the Council of Europe experts developed draft regulatory documents at a school, and municipality levels - necessary to introduce SPB in Georgia.

9-10 November 2023 – Presentations of the school PB model, draft regulatory documents and tools will be conducted at the pilot schools in Tbilisi (177 Public school) and in Zestaponi (4 Public school). The experts will present achieved results, developed documents, will introduce the school PB methodology and proposed school PB model to municipality representatives, teachers and students and will also provide information on future steps of the pilot.
Piloting of the School participatory budgeting in Georgia is a follow up on the expertise gained during the study visit in Austria where the successful practices of school participatory budgeting in Austria have been introduced to the Georgian delegation.

September 20 – 30 November 2023 - application of Civil Participation in Decision-Making Toolkit by Gori municipality. Gori municipality applied the Council of Europe methodology Civil Participation in Decision-Making Toolkit to assess participation levels in the community, identify and assess stakeholders for the development of the 4-year municipal development strategy of Gori. Working group was formed in the municipality comprised of local authority representatives, local CSOs and Council of Europe expert to provide community and stakeholders assessments and prepare the foundation for the development of the strategy. After plotting and assessing relevant stakeholders, a civil engagement strategy is being developed to make sure that municipality offers stakeholders tailored engagement methods for ensuring their efficient participation in devising municipal strategy. *The application of the methodology has been a follow up of the training in "civil participation in decision-making toolkit" provided to local authority representatives to Gori, Marneuli and Tbilisi municipalities. Trained local team in Gori applies the methodology with the project support.*

13-17 November 2023 - Study visit of local authority representatives and local CSOs on civil participation to Portugal. The study visit to Portugal will provide knowledge to Georgian municipalities (14 representatives, local officials and CSOs, from 7 target municipalities) in successful practices of civil participation in Portugal, such as the organisation of citizens assemblies, participatory budgeting, school participatory budgeting, applying digital solutions to increase citizens engagement at local level, youth participation tools, etc. The study visit will encourage new initiatives and developments in civil engagement in Georgian municipalities as proved by the similar study visit to Austria earlier this year which resulted in concrete changes in the municipalities. The study visit will also help Georgian local authorities and CSOs to form partnerships with their Portuguese counterparts.

Human Rights

June 23, 2023 – *online workshop "Promoting Participation and Protecting the Rights of the Persons with Disabilities at Local Level"*. The Congress brought together representatives from 17 Georgian local authorities to foster the effective localisation of disability rights. The aim was to empower local authorities in effectively implementing Georgia's new Law on the Rights of the People with Disabilities. LAs exchanged on the establishment of inclusive policies and dialogue practices together with the Advisor to the President of Georgia on disability issues and representatives of Georgia's Public Defender's Office. Innovative practices were shared to promote the effective participation of people with disabilities and mainstream accessibility issues in local policymaking. The workshop's insights will be integrated into a human rights curriculum for local authorities in Georgia.

6-7 July 2023 - *capacity building event on codes of ethics and internal anti-discrimination practices for local administration*. The workshop was dedicated to supporting decision-makers at municipal level in working on their own codes of ethics and conduct. Participants were offered an opportunity for self-assessment based on applicable CoE Handbook on Public Ethics at Local Level and relevant Congress knowledge materials.

The workshop has built on the previous programme components and allowed the decision makers to pass experientially through different aspects of public ethics while preparing for drafting their own code of ethics. Following the World Café methodology, the participants discussed into smaller groups over several rounds the topic with the focus on such specific issues as transparency, accountability, non-discrimination, nepotism, anti-fraud, etc.

Under the guidance of the expert team the participants explored the main components to include / update relevant documents to ensure an inclusive approach in the process of onboarding different stakeholders and beneficiaries across their respective communities.

The event was organised within an unprecedented learning path on anti-discrimination for local authorities that includes a series of workshops, a roundtable, and online tools for learning and peer-exchange.

7 July 2023 - *The Georgian Forum of Exchange met with the newly elected Public Defender of Georgia for the first time to discuss future co-operation on the localisation of human rights*. LAs met to discuss their achievements with regards to the ongoing local initiatives aimed at strengthening inclusion and protection of human rights at local level. The Forum focused on the ongoing dialogue and co-operation between local authorities, NALAG, the central government, and the Public Defender's office. Next steps will be the implementation of NALAG's strategy for human rights prepared by the new Committee on Localisation of Human Rights, established within the association at the request of the Forum members.

1 August 2023 - *a new E-course on "Gender Mainstreaming at Local Level in Georgia" developed by the Congress and the National Association of Local Authorities of Georgia (NALAG)* was launched for

piloting. The course focuses on gender equality issues in local communities and presents strategies and good practices to combat discrimination for local authorities and their national association.

The e-course is designed for local and regional authorities involved in decision-making on gender equality issues, as well as municipal staff. A highly interactive e-course includes modules on gender equality principles and concepts, gender responsive budgeting, best practices in promoting gender equality at local level, the role of national associations in its promotion, and on combating sexism. Participants are guided through the modules by a gender equality expert and participate in peer exchange.

The future iterations of the e-course will be offered directly by NALAG and will be open for registration on their webpage.

2-3 October 2023 - *The Congress' unprecedented learning path on anti-discrimination for local authorities concluded with the roundtable "From local voices to national vision: antidiscrimination dialogue and the Human Rights Strategy", which gathered together representatives of local and central authorities*. Good practices locally and internationally have been shared. Moreover, NALAG's Committee on the Localisation of Human Rights had possibility to build on the results of the roundtable to finetune its draft Human Rights Strategy. As a follow up intervention, the Association will take a proactive approach to ensure that human rights and anti-discrimination efforts remain at the forefront of local governance in Georgia by engaging in a continuous dialogue with the Public Defender's Office.

18-20 October 2023 - A group of 25 trainers, among which promising young leaders from different regions of Georgia successfully completed the *training of trainers on local democracy and human rights in Georgia*.

Discussions focused on instruments for the protection and promotion of human rights at the local level, as well as on key concepts such as human rights education, conflict transformation, non-violent communication, and the fight against hate speech.

The participants were equipped with comprehensive understanding of the interrelation between human rights and local democracy, up to date knowledge of existing standards, and good practice examples from Georgia and other European countries. They were introduced with the necessary methodological tools to autonomously develop training curricula on human rights and local democracy based on the needs of young people and tailored to the relevant context of their communities.

The future activities of the new trainers will contribute to further encourage local authorities to empower under-represented youth in Georgia, raising their awareness on their rights and freedoms and motivating them to be more engaged in local decision-making.

Support activity (both components)

5 July 2023 - *4th Steering Committee meeting* of the project "Strengthening Participatory Democracy and Human Rights at Local Level in Georgia" was successfully held. Along with the core members of the Steering Committee, the meeting was attended by the associate members from Oni, Ozurgeti, Marneuli, Rustavi, and Akhmeta municipalities, as well as Youth Assembly Racha and Dean Consulting. The associate members shared their hands-on experience with the project during the last year, reflecting on existing opportunities but also challenges. They highlighted significant achievements made thanks to the project intervention, such as the organisation of citizens assemblies on sustainable development of flood-plain forest area in Rustavi and improving parking system in Ozurgeti, and the participatory development of multiple strategic municipal documents using Council of Europe civil participation methodologies. Another major achievement were the several local initiatives on mainstreaming equality and diversity in local public life and inclusion of underrepresented communities carried out by local authorities, with a special focus on Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs), persons with disabilities (PwD), minorities, and other vulnerable groups.

Among others, participants highlighted the innovative nature of the new structure under the NALAG's Executive Board, the Committee on Human Rights Localisation, and the importance of the Human Rights Strategy developed by this new Committee. They also welcomed the capacity development activities for local authorities on anti-discrimination matters carried out in collaboration with the PDO.

Besides, the Deputy Minister of Regional Development and Infrastructure welcomed the participatory and deliberative processes that are implemented or ongoing in municipalities which ensured involvement of different sectors and age groups in local decision-making which also very well showed to the municipalities the needs of citizens. The Deputy Minister emphasised the importance of introducing civil participation tools to schools as the culture and habits of civil engagement starts in childhood.