

What Hinders the Equal Participation of Women in Public Life?

Erika Kvapilova, UN Women Country Representative in Georgia

Speech to the international conference

“Gender Equality in Elections: What More Can be Done by EMBs”

Tbilisi, 11-12 July 2018

Ladies and Gentlemen, dear colleagues:

Congratulations to the Central Election Commission of Georgia and the Council of Europe for organizing this important exchange of views, experiences and best practices from the work of the Electoral Monitoring Bodies of the EU Eastern Partnership countries, and for focusing specifically on what can be done to increase women’s participation in elections and in public life.

Allow me to contribute to the discussion by offering some thoughts about what hinders the equal participation of women in public life, and what can and should be done. To illustrate key challenges, I will use examples from Georgia. However, the challenges are similar in all of the countries participating in this event.

Women’s participation in public life refers not only to the participation of women in political decision-making (in parliament and the executive branch), but also usually covers women’s participation in public employment, the judiciary and other public-sector entities. When discussing what hinders equal participation of women in public life, we must consider a wide variety of factors that include, but are not limited to, the legal and institutional barriers that prevent women from accessing education and decent jobs, exercising property rights, accessing credit, seeking justice, protecting their physical integrity and safeguarding against violence. Prevailing gender stereotypes, patriarchal social norms and some individual circumstances – such as persistent income poverty, poor health or disability, location and extensive family care responsibilities – also undermine women’s ability to meaningfully participate in public life.

Women all around the world continue having unequal access to economic and public life opportunities, and gender equality remains a global challenge. Persisting gender inequalities present a serious obstacle for achieving inclusive, sustainable growth alongside more equitable societies that respect human rights. That is also why gender equality was recognized as a stand-alone Sustainable Development Goal (SDG 5) in the global 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Moreover, gender equality has been critical for achieving all SDGs.

Despite global progress in some areas – such as girls’ education, women’s participation in law-making and women’s labour market participation – progress at the country level has been uneven. In Georgia, key official data still shows significant differences between women’s and men’s participation in public life in Georgia. Women represent only around 15 per cent of parliamentarians in Georgia, compared to the global average of 24 per cent and the EU/OSCE average of over 27 per cent. There is an almost 20-percentage-point difference in the economic activity rates between women and men in Georgia, the biggest gap among the South Caucasus countries. Women in Georgia earn on average 36 per cent less than men, compared to women

in the EU who earn on average 16 per cent less than men. According to the recent national study conducted by GEOSTAT and UN Women (2017),¹ violence against women in Georgia is widespread. Approximately 14 per cent of ever-partnered women aged 15-64 reported having experienced physical, sexual and/or emotional violence by an intimate partner in their lifetime. According to UNFPA findings (2017), early or child marriages are still common and not limited to any specific ethnicity or region of Georgia;² and intimate partner violence, as well as early and forced marriage, are among the most prevalent forms of violence against women and girls.

What can be done to close these gender gaps, remove remaining barriers and improve women's participation in public life in Georgia?

There is no silver bullet solution. Quotas or parental leave, although very important, will not solve the problem alone, but rather a series of mutually reinforcing measures should be implemented in parallel to address the existing challenges. Let me focus on some of them, especially those related to *removing legal and institutional barriers for women's increased participation in public life*.

The first logical step in achieving gender equality is the removal of discriminatory laws and policies and compliance with international gender equality standards, including the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and the Beijing Platform for Action. When it comes to gender equality, Georgia's key legal frameworks are generally well advanced, and Georgia should be commended for constantly improving them. The introduction of substantive gender equality in article 11 of the Georgian Constitution (effective as of 1 January 2018) that allows for the use of temporary special measures, as well as Georgia's ratification of the Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (2017), are only some of the recent examples of Georgia's commitment to gender equality and the enhancement of women's rights. In addition, Georgia continues implementing stand-alone National Action Plans (NAPs) that enhance gender equality in specific areas³ and that translate the international legal obligations to gender equality and women's empowerment into concrete actions. It will be important for these measures to be realistic in order to achieve and measure results, while at the same time flexible enough to incorporate, as appropriate and needed, measures to support the implementation of a wide range of gender-related commitments, including those resulting from transposing the EU "gender directives" or ILO Conventions into national legislation and policies.

Second, the laws, policies and NAPs must be supported by accountable institutions. Following the CEDAW Committee recommendations of 2014, Georgia established (in 2017) its central gender

¹ UN Women Georgia, *National Study on Violence against Women in Georgia 2017: Summary Report* (2018). Available at <http://georgia.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2018/03/national-study-on-violence-against-women-in-georgia-2017>.

² UNFPA Georgia, "From Evidence to Policy and Action: Harmful Practices of Early/Child Marriage and FGM/C will be discussed at the conference", 18 April 2018. Available at <http://georgia.unfpa.org/en/news/evidence-policy-and-action-harmful-practices-earlychild-marriage-and-fgmc-will-be-discussed>.

³ This includes (1) the Human Rights Plan (2018-2020); (2) the National Action Plan for 2018-2020 on the Measures to be Implemented for Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence and Protection of Victims/Survivors; and (3) the National Action Plan on the Implementation of UN Security Council Resolution 1325 (Women, Peace and Security Agenda).

equality mechanism in the executive branch of the Government – the Inter-Agency Commission on Gender Equality, Violence against Women and Domestic Violence, located in the Prime Minister’s Office. In addition, the Gender Equality Council of the Parliament has strengthened its oversight of national and international gender equality commitments, including commissioning several studies analysing the gaps in implementation of non-discriminatory laws and gender equality plans. Some ministries have also developed their own internal gender equality strategies and plans, such as the Ministry of Defence and the former Ministry of Internally Displaced Persons from the Occupied Territories, Accommodation and Refugees of Georgia.. Other ministries have been undergoing voluntary self-assessments (gender audits) to determine areas of improvement. Yet, there is considerable space for strengthening and better resourcing the Inter-Agency Commission; refining the responsibilities for the implementation, monitoring and evaluation of gender equality commitments; and improving the overall coordination among relevant stakeholders, in order to ensure coherence, effective implementation and measurable impact of gender equality laws, policies and programmes on the lives of women and girls in Georgia.

Third, monitoring and oversight of gender commitments must be administered. I have already mentioned the important role of Parliament in overseeing the implementation of legislation and policies, but I would also like to mention the equally important role played by the Public Defender’s Office (PDO), particularly the Gender Equality Department, through their annual reports specifically targeting “gender issues”. It is also important to highlight the independent monitoring role of the civil society sector, especially women’s organizations. The current periodic review of the implementation of the CEDAW Committee Observations⁴ provides a great opportunity for Parliament to exercise its oversight function, as well as for the PDO and CSOs to provide their shadow reports to the CEDAW Committee.

Fourth, it is important to have available gender-disaggregated data to inform policymaking and measure progress towards achieving gender equality. There are challenges with the availability and quality of sex-disaggregated data and internationally comparable methodologies, as shown, for example, in the UN Women flagship report on gender equality in the SDGs, *Turning Promises into Action*, recently also presented in Georgia.⁵ There is significant space for improving sex-disaggregated data collection, analysis and dissemination by the national statistical system in Georgia, which includes GEOSTAT as well as other data providers. It is worth noting that the SDG Council in Georgia, in cooperation with GEOSTAT, has made the first steps in mapping what sex-disaggregated data is available but not accessible to various users, as well as what data should be collected to improve the overall understanding of gender equality in Georgia. In addition, UN Women in partnership with GEOSTAT conducted the National Study on Violence against Women mentioned earlier, which provides a baseline for the nationalized SDG 5 indicators. UNICEF in

⁴ Georgia was supposed to provide its periodic report to the CEDAW Committee by the end of June 2018. Due to some internal political and administrative changes, it is expected that the report will be submitted with some delay.

⁵ UN Women Georgia, “UN Women launches its flagship global report on gender equality in the Sustainable Development agenda in Georgia”, 30 May 2018. Available at <http://georgia.unwomen.org/en/news/stories/2018/05/un-women-launches-its-flagship-global-report-on-gender-equality>.

UN Women, *Turning Promises into Action: Gender Equality in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development* (2018). Available at <http://www.unwomen.org/-/media/headquarters/attachments/sections/library/publications/2018/sdg-report-gender-equality-in-the-2030-agenda-for-sustainable-development-2018-en.pdf?la=en&vs=5653>.

partnership with other UN agencies leads the Multiple Indicator Cluster Surveys (MICS) programme, which will provide important data for several areas of the nationalized SDGs.

Fifth, available tools such as rigorous, high-quality gender analysis and gender-responsive budgeting should become a standard practice in policymaking and programme development. In this context it is worth noting that, despite significant support provided by various international actors to budget the NAPs, and despite the existence of legal obligations not to approve any NAP without a budget, the current gender NAPs lack the budgetary annexes. The quality of the gender analysis provided to national authorities also varies significantly, and it is therefore important that policies and programmes are informed by high-quality analysis and advice that meets international quality standards.

Sixth, the temporary special measures (TSM) enshrined in CEDAW General Recommendation No. 25 should be used to increase women's participation in public life. Quotas are only one type of TSM that can be used to accelerate women's equal participation in public life. TSM include a wide variety of legislative, executive, administrative and other regulatory instruments, policies and practices such as outreach or support programmes; allocation or reallocation of resources; preferential treatment; targeted recruitment, hiring and promotion; and other measures. Better use of a variety of TSM, now enshrined in article 11 of the Georgian Constitution, can improve women's representation and participation in public life.

Seventh, addressing gender stereotypes should be considered a long-term investment in changing people's attitudes and perceptions. Numerous surveys conducted by national and international organizations show that gender stereotypes in Georgia are persisting and that there is an increasing divide between the capital and the regions. There are, however, several examples of successful public campaigns aimed at changing attitudes towards violence against women, encouraging men to assume more responsibilities for domestic chores and childcare, and destigmatizing children and people with disabilities, among others. Ongoing campaigns aimed at positive changes in formal and informal education, the promotion of girls and women's participation in non-traditional jobs, and the engagement of men in promoting gender equality⁶ should be considered an integral part of governmental strategies accompanying relevant changes in legislation and policies.

Ladies and Gentlemen, colleagues:

There is certainly more we could discuss during this conference, but time is limited. Moreover, rather than talking about what *should* or *could* be done, *acting* towards the change is most important. I believe that this is the goal of this conference. On behalf of UN Women, we are looking towards working with all of you and supporting national partners to achieve their gender equality goals and empower women and men equally in all areas of public life in Georgia.

Thank you for your attention.

⁶ UN Women's HeForShe campaign, the UN Secretary-General's UNiTE to End Violence against Women campaign, and the MenCare campaign are only some examples of the global campaigns implemented successfully in Georgia in recent years.