



WeResearch

ASSESSING PUBLIC PARTICIPATION IN POLICY-MAKING PROCESS

Phase 2





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CONTENT

Acronyms	4
Executive Summary	5
Foreword	8
Introduction	9
Public Consultations - Georgian Context	10
Public Consultation Index (PCI)	13
Methodology	15
Research Objectives and Key Research Questions	15
Document Selection	15
Data Collection	16
Sampling	16
Research Instruments	16
Data Analysis	17
Scoring	17
Ethical approach	17
Limitations	18
Analysis	19
Effective Planning and Implementation of Public Consultations	20
1. Criterion - Accessibility of Public Consultation Process	23
2. Criterion - The Openness of the Public Consultation Process	25
3. Criterion - Effectiveness of Public Consultation Process	26
4. Criterion - Accountability	30
5. Criterion - Diversity of Participants and Inclusiveness of Public Consultation Process	33
6. Criterion - Public Engagement and Interest in Public Consultations	36
Summary and Comparison to the Previous Study	38
Conclusion and Recommendations	40
Recommendations	40
Annex I: Public Consultation Index (PCI) Assessment Per Strategy	42
Annex II - Public Consultation Index (PCI)	61

ACRONYMS

AoG - Administration of Government of Georgia CAP - Climate Action Plan

CSO - Civil Society Organisations

EU - European Union

GESI - Gender Equality and Social Inclusion

GoG - Government of Georgia

KII - Key Informant Interview

LGBTQ – Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Queer

NGO - Non-governmental Organisation

OECD - Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development

PAR - Public Administration Reform

PCI - Public consultation index

PWD – Persons with Disabilities

SIGMA – Support for Improvement in Governance and Management

UN – United Nations

UNDP - United Nations Development Programme

USAID - United States Agency for International Development

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The current study is the second in the series of assessments of public participation in the policy development process in Georgia. The purpose of the study was to evaluate the quality of public consultations processes of the policy documents adopted in 2021.

The objectives of the study were:

- To assess the compliance of the conducted public consultations with the regulations outlined in the Decree of the Government of Georgia N629
- Analyse the quality of public consultations using Public Consultation Index (PCI) and relevant international standards
- Identify existing gaps and develop practical recommendations for improvement

The primary methodological framework used for the assessment is Public Consultation Index, which consists of the following six criteria and corresponding indicators: Accessibility, Openness, Effectiveness of the Public Consultation Process, Accountability, Diversity of Participants/Inclusiveness, and Public Engagement/Interest. The first five criteria assessed the coordination public agencies' efforts to conduct meaningful public consultations, the sixth criterion evaluated the civic engagement from the perspective of the coordination agency. The PCI was first developed and piloted in 2020 study. Within the framework of the current study, PCI was revised, elaborated and improved.

The study adopted qualitative approach. The data was collected through 27 Key Informant Interviews with the representatives of the coordination public agencies and public consultation participants, two observations and summary reports of public consultations (when available).

The research targeted 12 strategies and action plans from the 2021 policy document cohort. Each policy document was assessed against the criteria and indicators of the PCI.

The study has identified that three factors—knowledge of good practices of civic participation, the political will of coordination agencies, and donor support—are important aspects contributing to meaningful and effective public consultations. Moreover, each factor alone is not sufficient to ensure the quality of participatory process, thus, the combination of all the aforementioned factors is required as they have a reinforcing effect on each other. These three factors largely influence the accessibility, openness, effectiveness, accountability, and inclusiveness of public consultation processes. The evaluation results of the public consultations targeted by this study against the PCI criteria are summarised below.

Accessibility

Most coordination agencies did not disseminate public consultation announcements through public channels, which limited the consultation process only to the invited stakeholders. However, the majority of policy documents were published on government websites, with no information about planned public consultations. Together with the lack of efforts to engage the broader public, the language accessibility of the policy document was another problem and on average, coordination agencies only met the minimal standards. Furthermore, accessibility of the public consultation process for ethnic minorities and persons with disabilities (PWD) was one of the areas where most coordination agencies failed to meet the minimal requirements of the accessibility criterion of the

Public Consultation Index (PCI). The data shows while some coordination agencies made significant progress towards meaningful decision-making, the accessibility of the public consultation process remains problematic, and more efforts are needed to ensure engagement of the broader public. Particularly, it concerns more vulnerable segments of the population whose voices are underrepresented and who have limited access to decision-making.

Openness

The openness of the public consultations is another important prerequisite for genuine civil engagement in policy making. Despite all coordination agency representatives emphasised the importance of civic engagement and participatory democracy, most fell short from taking concrete steps to ensure the openness of public consultations for ordinary citizens. The closed format of public consultation with the pre-mapped stakeholders hindered the inclusion of all interested parties and undermined the openness of the government institutions.

Effectiveness of Public Consultation Process

Most coordination agencies performed well at the criterion measuring the effectiveness of the process. While coordination agencies used different formats of public consultations and utilised different mechanisms for feedback collection, most public consultations satisfied requirements of each indicator. In all cases, participants were informed about public consultations at least one week earlier. Most consultations were conducted in more than one format at more than one stage of policy development cycle. Furthermore, the absolute majority of coordination agencies allocated sufficient time and provided more than one mechanism for feedback provision. However, challenges remain, and coordination agencies and public consultation participants can have different judgment on the effectiveness. The participants emphasised that their engagement was often rather sporadic and fragmented and that sometimes they struggled to provide meaningful feedback. Therefore, although the public consultation processes were overall effective based on corresponding PCI indicators, there appears to be a lack of systematic and synchronised approach.

Accountability

The average score on accountability criterion was the highest among all the PCI criteria. However, this was not due to the high scores achieved per each indicator but to the lack of available information. This resulted into excluding the strategy document from scoring. Main challenge from the coordination agencies' perspective was the lack of resources and time to provide justified feedback to all participants. On the other hand, the lack of adequate human and financial resources allocated to public consultation planning and implementation can be illustrative of coordination agencies' political will: it shows to what extent they prioritise civic participation in decision-making and whether they allocate enough resources for conducting effective public consultations.

Diversity of Participants/Inclusiveness

Ensuring diversity of participants was one of the most challenging aspects as the majority of coordination agencies did not identify it as their priority. In most cases, the coordination agency representatives did not consider inclusion of minority groups to be essential for a meaningful public consultation. They believed it was more important to include the relevant group of participants rather than all minority representatives. Therefore, according to them, if the strategy document did not identify vulnerable groups as relevant stakeholders, inclusion of minorities was often considered irrelevant and costly. Thus, the average score on PCI index across all strategy documents was the lowest on this criterion; five strategy documents scored 0 on all indicators of Diversity criterion and five barely met the minimum requirements on most indicators. Only two strategy documents (the State Strategy for Civic Equality and Integration 2021 - 2030 and Action Plan 2021- 2022 and State Strategy for Civic Equality and Integration 2021 – 2030) exceeded the minimum scores and were two of the most successful examples.

Public Engagement and Interest (from the coordination agency's perspective)

Available data shows that the public engagement was sufficiently high in most cases. Furthermore, even though not every invited party provided their feedback, most coordination agency representatives evaluated the engagement of public consultation participants favourably. They also believed that the feedback they received during the consultations was valuable and meaningful for the development of a strategy document under discussion. Consequently, the average score for this criterion across all policy documents was 2.7 out of 3. This perspective of the coordination agency representatives also shows that governments can greatly benefit from active citizens and dynamic civil society. Therefore, public engagement is not only crucial for accountable governance but it also contributes to a better quality of policy documents and promotes sustainable decisions by communicating the needs and expectations of all participants, including the government institutions.

Based on the research findings and identified gaps, two sets of recommendations for the Administration of the Government of Georgia (AoG) and the coordination public agencies were developed.

Recommendations for AoG mainly focused on awareness raising and capacity building of the coordination agencies and all relevant employees regarding the minimum standards, as well as best international and local practices for conducting public consultations. Moreover, it was advised to use PCI to motivate the coordination agencies to gradually improve their public consultations. It was also suggested to make mandatory the inclusion of vulnerable minority groups in public consultation process.

Recommendations for the coordination agencies concerned the most problematic areas identified by the PCI i.e. the indicators with relatively low scores. Those issues include improving the accessibility of announcements and policy documents, raising the diversity and inclusion of public consultation processes, increasing the effectiveness and ensuring wider civic engagement, improving the accountability and, specifically, quality of summary reports.

FOREWORD

The presented report builds on previous research conducted in 2020¹ by WeResearch team. It is based on the theoretical and methodological underpinnings as well as practical tools developed in the previous study to evaluate the public consultation process of policy documents from the 2021 cohort.

The previous study aimed to evaluate the quality of the public consultation process regarding the policies approved in 2020. It explored public consultation planning, implementation, and civic engagement in public consultations. The research covered all the strategies and action plans² for which public consultations have been completed within a set timeframe: eight, in total. The study had three main objectives: 1) it assessed the compliance of the conducted public consultations with the new regulations outlined in the Decree of the Government of Georgia N629³, which took force on December 20, 2019; 2) analysed the quality and usefulness of public consultations; 3) identified the existing gaps, developing practical recommendations for the Administration of the Government of Georgia and the Coordination agencies responsible for planning and implementing the public consultations.

Based on the data available from the 2020 policy document cohort, this research developed the methodological tool for the assessment of the public consultation process of target policy documents - Public Consultation Index (PCI). The PCI evaluated the selected strategies across six criteria: 1. Accessibility; 2. Openness; 3. Effectiveness of public consultation process; 4. Accountability; 5. Diversity of participants; 6. Public engagement/interest. The first five criteria assess the coordination agency efforts for each public consultation process from the perspective of participants (CSOs, private sector representatives, independent experts, citizens etc.) and its compliance with the relevant standards as outlined in the literature review. The sixth criterion, public engagement/interest, reflects the coordination agencies' perspectives. The PCI was created in the approximation of the best practices outlined in the literature, Georgian legislative framework, and feedback received from the participants of the validation workshop where the preliminary results of the 2020 study were presented.

During the current study, PCI was revised, expanded, and updated as described in the following sections. The study strived to build a working tool for the evaluation of the public consultation process to be used by any stakeholder in government, civil society, or donor community in the future.

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- 1 Assessing Public Participation in Policy Making Process, WeResearch, available at: https://www.ge.undp.org/content/georgia/en/home/library/democratic_governance/assessing-public-participation-in-the-policymaking-process.html
 - 2 Excluding policies in the national security domain, which are not obliged to comply with the requirements of Government Decree #629.
 - 3 Decree of Government of Georgia #629 (December 20, 2019) on Approval of the Rules of Policy Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation. <https://matsne.gov.ge/ka/document/view/4747283?publication=0>

INTRODUCTION

Over the last few decades, the idea that citizens' engagement in decision-making makes governments more responsive, inclusive, and accountable became mainstream in policy development.⁴ It has been acknowledged that civil society's ability to influence the state contributes to better democratic outcomes and quality of governance.⁵⁶ With that, countries with more advanced democratic systems have sought an increasing shift from top-down forms of governance towards more horizontal modes of participatory decision-making.

The definitions and understanding of what constitutes "public participation" differ. Various researchers and the international community use diverse terminology and rely on different frameworks. Nevertheless, public participation usually implies some input from the individual citizens and/or organisations as well as a possibility of influencing decisions/policies which affect their lives.

With regards to the public consultation, it is considered to be a special form of public participation and is the most widespread arrangement for citizen engagement in the policy making used in OECD countries⁷. The meaningfulness of a public consultation depends on its purpose, implementation, motivation of those involved and its outcome. Thus, public consultations can be regarded as a substantial method of citizen engagement if enough effort was taken to engage with relevant stakeholders, citizen input was actively sought, and participants had (at least partially) contributed to the outcome: policy or decision.

Within the framework of the 2020 study⁸, WeResearch has conducted a comprehensive literature review to establish a theoretical background for the assessment, examining the alternative definitions, discussing the most widely known participation models, and presenting mechanisms along with the benefits and challenges of citizen engagement. This research shall not repeat this contextual overview, the latter is available for further consultations online (see footnote).⁹

4 Gaventa, J. and Barrett, G. (2010) So What Difference Does it Make? Mapping the Outcomes of Citizen Engagement. IDS Working Paper 347. Institute of Development Studies at the University of Sussex, Brighton. Available at: https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/epdf/10.1111/j.2040-0209.2010.00347_2.x

5 Putnam, R. D. (2002) *Making Democracy Work: Civic Traditions in Modern Italy*, Princeton University Press

6 Cohen, J. (2007) 'Deliberative Democracy', in Rosenberg, S.W. (ed.), *Deliberation, Participation and Democracy: Can the Persons Govern?*, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

7 Bishop & Davis (2002). Mapping Public Participation in Policy Choices. *Australian Journal of Public Administration*, 61(1):14–29.

8 Assessing Public Participation in Policy Making Process, WeResearch, available at: https://www.ge.undp.org/content/georgia/en/home/library/democratic_governance/assessing-public-participation-in-the-policymaking-process.html

9 Assessing Public Participation in Policy Making Process, WeResearch, available at: https://www.ge.undp.org/content/georgia/en/home/library/democratic_governance/assessing-public-participation-in-the-policymaking-process.html

PUBLIC CONSULTATIONS - GEORGIAN CONTEXT

Over the recent years, Georgia has achieved considerable gains in terms of substantive democracy and open governance. Despite this progress, numerous challenges remain on practical and normative levels. Since 2015, the Government of Georgia (GoG) initiated the Public Administration Reform (PAR) and expressed its commitment towards establishing transparent, effective, and accountable decision-making. The successful implementation of PAR has been declared as a pivotal part of the EU-Georgia Agreements. The Georgian Public Administration Reform Roadmap¹⁰ aimed to set a comprehensive conceptual framework under one umbrella document and defined the scope of PAR based on “EC Enlargement Strategy 2014 – 2015.” In addition, considering the local context, it also included local self-governance issues. The PAR Roadmap sets forward the country’s national priorities across six areas (Table I).

Table I. Six Areas of Public Administration Reform in Georgia

Public Administration Reform in Georgia					
Policy Development and Coordination	Public service and Human Resource Management	Accountability	Services Delivery	Public finance Management	Local self-Government

This study addresses the Public Consultation component, which is an integral part of Policy Development and Coordination. The general objectives of Policy Development Reform are to improve the policy planning process, strengthen informed budgeting, and develop strong mechanisms for evaluation, monitoring, and accountability of decision-making.¹¹

The Georgian government has identified the improvement of citizens' active engagement in policy planning as one of their key priorities. Consequently, Georgia has undertaken various international commitments, including the EU-Georgia Association Agreement Agenda 2017-2020, Sustainable Development Goal 16 (nationalised), Open Government Partnership Action Plans, Aarhus Convention.¹² Moreover, the participation of citizens and stakeholders in decision-making is regulated by the following legislations: the Constitution of Georgia,¹³ General Administrative Code of Georgia,¹⁴ Local Self-Government Code of Georgia,¹⁵ Law of Georgia on Structure, Authority, and Regulation of Activity of the Georgian Government,¹⁶ and various normative acts.

10 Georgian Public Administration Reform Roadmap 2020 (May 2015). Available at: [http://gov.ge/files/423_49307_626772_PAR_Geo_Draft\(1\).pdf](http://gov.ge/files/423_49307_626772_PAR_Geo_Draft(1).pdf)

11 Georgian Public Administration Reform Roadmap 2020 (May 2015). Available at: [http://gov.ge/files/423_49307_626772_PAR_Geo_Draft\(1\).pdf](http://gov.ge/files/423_49307_626772_PAR_Geo_Draft(1).pdf)

12 Aarhus Convention was ratified by Georgia on 30/10/2001 <https://matsne.gov.ge/ka/document/view/1210443?publication=0> last accessed on 30/11/20.

13 The Constitution of Georgia, Article 77,Point 3,pg.31.-33 <https://matsne.gov.ge/ka/document/view/30346?publication=35> last accessed on 30/11/20.

14 General Administrative Code of Georgia,Article 72 - Point 1-c;Article 103- Point 1;Article 115 – Point 2,Article 117-118 and 120. <https://matsne.gov.ge/ka/document/view/16270?publication=32>

15 Local Self-Government Code of Georgia <https://matsne.gov.ge/ka/document/view/2244429?publication=44>

16 Law of Georgia on Structure,Authority and Regulation of Activity of the Georgian Government,Article 29. <https://matsne.gov.ge/ka/>

Although the Public Administration Reform have been relatively successful, various reports emphasised the gaps in its implementation regarding effective public participation in the policy making process. In the baseline study report conducted by OECD / SIGMA (2018), Georgia scored 0 in the public consultation component. Based on that, GoG has declared public consultations as one of the critical components of PAR as part of the second wave of the reform. In response to the identified gaps, the Georgian government approved the Rule for Development, Monitoring, and Evaluation of Policy Document.¹⁷ This new rule aimed "to introduce results-oriented policy planning, monitoring, and evaluation, and to establish quality assurance mechanisms in these areas."¹⁸ Furthermore, it obliged coordination agencies to conduct public consultations on any national and sectoral policy (with few exceptions) before the government approves it. The rule applied to the policy documents approved after its enactment: from 2019 onwards.

Therefore, public consultation was identified as a tool to 1) providing information to citizens with regards to the policy planning, 2) listening to citizens and analysing their views, 3) identifying the real needs and challenges.¹⁹ To ensure effective public participation and develop a systematic approach, the AoG adopted the Policy Planning, Monitoring, and Evaluation Handbook and its annexes, defining minimum standards and requirements for public consultations:²⁰

- The coordination body is obliged to inform the interested parties about the venue within a reasonable time before each public consultation.
- Upon completion of the consultation, the coordinating body shall provide a written response to every stakeholder, explaining in a substantiated manner which recommendation was considered, partially considered, or rejected in the final policy document.
- The coordinating agency shall prepare a summary report on the results of the consultation. The summary report should be included as an annex to the policy presented to the Government of Georgia for enactment.
- The summary report on public consultations must contain at least the following:²¹
 - Information about the conduct of public consultations (format, venue, time, number of participants, channel of communication).
 - Information on participants (total number), agreements on recommendations or proposals that were taken or not considered.

In addition, the Handbook puts forward numerous non-mandatory recommendations. For instance, coordination institutions are encouraged to engage the public at every stage of a policy-making cycle, yet public discussions are mandatory only for a final draft. Similarly, the Handbook recommends making every effort to engage all the relevant stakeholders and use various means of communication to notify them about consultations reasonably in advance, which leaves plenty of room for misinterpretation. The assessment focuses on the outcome of the public consultations rather than the process. As the AoG representative explained, this approach was chosen considering the availability of monitoring mechanisms over coordination institutions at hand of the Administration of the Government.

document/view/2062?publication=38#part_59

- 17 Decree of Government of Georgia #629 (December 20, 2019) on Approval of the Rules of Policy Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation. <https://matsne.gov.ge/ka/document/view/4747283?publication=0>.
- 18 Ibid. Chapter I, Article I.
- 19 Annual Report on Monitoring the Implementation of the Public Administration Reform Action Plan 2019-2020 (April 2020). p.17. Available at: http://gov.ge/index.php?lang_id=geo&sec_id=423&info_id=76492
- 20 Policy Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation Handbook, Administration of the Government of Georgia, Section 3.5, pg. 36-37. https://www.ge.undp.org/content/georgia/en/home/library/democratic_governance/PolicyDevelopmentHandbook.html
- 21 Annex 9 of the Policy Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation Handbook. Administration of the Government of Georgia, file:///C:/Users/Elena/Downloads/UNDP_GE_DG_PAR_policy%2520planning,%2520M&E%2520handbook_annexes_eng.pdf

While the Handbook was useful to establish a more coherent approach to conducting public consultations, it had numerous practical challenges. In April 2020, GoG published the Annual Report on Monitoring the Implementation of the Public Administration Reform Action Plan 2019-2020²² to identify the achievements and shortcomings of PAR. This report covers the period from January to December 31, 2019. The Monitoring Report methodology relies on the Policy Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation Handbook²³ and the OECD/SIGMA Toolkit²⁴ for the preparation, implementation, monitoring, reporting, and evaluation of PAR.

The Annual Report underlines the challenges to successful public consultations, including the lack of human resources, timely recruitment of experts with relevant expertise, and inconsistent planning of public consultations with the stakeholders. According to the Report for the target cohort of 2020, 51% of documents submitted for approval to the GoG satisfied the standards and requirements of the Handbook,²⁵²⁶ 51% of their accompanying reports also satisfied the minimum standards.

WeResearch also identified numerous gaps and challenges in the implementation of successful public consultations.²⁷ Even though the Administration of the Government of Georgia developed elaborate recommendations and legal basis for conducting public consultation, the coordination agencies had varying knowledge of the Rules of Procedures for Development, Monitoring, and Evaluation of Policy Documents. Most respondents were unaware of the existence or contents of the Handbook that the AoG made available in 2019. Most coordination agencies had limited understanding of the summary report standards. The majority of the public consultations had a format of targeted consultations. Furthermore, the research found that most coordination agencies took no special measures to ensure the diversity and inclusion of the participants. Hence, the relevant coordination agencies need to adopt smoother and better coordinated efforts to conduct meaningful public consultations based on the best international and local standards.

Considering the aforementioned challenges and to improve the quality of public consultations, the AoG developed the Instruction of Public Consultations as Annex 11 (draft) of the Policy Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation Handbook in 2021, with the support of Good Governance Initiative of USAID. This document is the compilation of guidelines on public consultation planning, implementation methods, analysis of feedback, reporting, and evaluation. It is based on the academic literature review, international experience, and best practices. The Instruction stresses the importance of public consultations as a central part of the evidence-based policy development. It is foreseen that when approved, Annex 11 will provide methodological support to any public entity wishing to conduct public consultation and will help improve its quality.

Finally, despite various challenges and gaps, active support to PAR remains one of the key priorities of the Georgian Government. Thus, more studies, including regular evaluation of the public consultation practices, are needed to provide evidence-based information, and identify key areas of improvement for the successful implementation of the Public Administration Reform and its Policy Development and Coordination component.

22 Annual Report on Monitoring the Implementation of the Public Administration Reform Action Plan 2019-2020 (April 2020). Available at: http://gov.ge/index.php?lang_id=geo&sec_id=423&info_id=76492

23 Policy Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation Handbook, Administration of the Government of Georgia. https://www.ge.undp.org/content/georgia/en/home/library/democratic_governance/PolicyDevelopmentHandbook.html

24 OECD/SIGMA Toolkit for the preparation, implementation, monitoring, reporting and evaluation of public administration reform and sector strategies: Guidance for SIGMA partners. Available at: <http://www.sigmapublications.org/publications/strategy-toolkit.htm>

25 Policy Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation Handbook, Administration of the Government of Georgia, https://www.ge.undp.org/content/georgia/en/home/library/democratic_governance/PolicyDevelopmentHandbook.html

26 Annual Report on Monitoring the Implementation of the Public Administration Reform Action Plan 2019-2020 (April 2020). p.60. Available at: http://gov.ge/index.php?lang_id=geo&sec_id=423&info_id=76492

27 Assessing Public Participation in Policymaking Process (2020). WeResearch. Available at: https://www.ge.undp.org/content/georgia/en/home/library/democratic_governance/assessing-public-participation-in-the-policymaking-process.html

PUBLIC CONSULTATION INDEX (PCI)

The methodology framework of the current study is based on the Public Consultation Index (PCI), which assesses the process (rather than the outcome) of the public consultations. Considering the challenges and the lack of a common approach to evaluating the efficiency or quality of the public consultations, this Public Consultation Index was drafted in line with the best practices outlined in the literature and applied to the Georgian context. The index aims to identify strengths and weaknesses in the implementation of public consultations and convergence towards good international practices as well as the relevant local standards. In addition, the PCI allows for a comparison across policy documents and assessment of the coordination agencies' conduct. It also aims to support the relevant authorities and stakeholders in creating public consultations' best practices and generating conditions for partnership and policy dialogue. Besides, the indicators are based on the international guidelines, and several of them (excluding on diversity) are not mandatory under the Georgian regulations.

The first version of the PCI was developed and piloted during the 2020 study. In this study, the PCI was revised and updated based on the consultations with subject experts from the government (AoG), academia, and non-governmental organisations. Furthermore, the research considered the recommendations outlined in the Instruction of Public Consultations - Annex II (draft) of the Policy Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation Handbook. The following improvements have been made to the index:

- The indicators of the PCI criteria were revised for more clarity and precision
- Additional indicators were developed
- Explanation of each indicator was added
- The scoring system of each indicator was spelled out

Nevertheless, the PCI should be treated as a living organism that may require updates and corrections with the changes in regulatory environment or international and local standards.

The PCI is based on limited data. The policy documents are scored based on the information provided by the subjects of this study: coordination agencies and participants of the public consultations. Thus, the research team does not assume any responsibility for how truthful or complete are the interviewees' opinions and whether it might have led to scoring errors.

The index is composed of six criteria: accessibility, openness, effectiveness of the public consultation process, accountability, diversity of participants/inclusiveness, and public engagement/interest. The first five criteria assess the efforts of the coordination agency towards the public consultation process from the perspective of the engaged civil society representatives as well as its compliance with the relevant standards as outlined in the literature review. Since public consultation is a two-way communication process between authorities and individuals, non-governmental organisations, and civil society, the sixth criterion, Public Engagement/Interest, and corresponding indicators reflect on coordination agencies' perspectives to make the process of evaluation fair. Each criterion has specific indicators as listed in Table I.

Table 2 – PCI Index

Criterion 1: Accessibility	Criterion 2: Openness	Criterion 3: Effectiveness of public consultation process	Criterion 4: Accountability	Criterion 5: Diversity of participants/inclusiveness	Criterion 6: Public engagement/interest
<p>I.1. Public consultation announcement was disseminated through at least one public channel.</p> <p>I.2. Policy document and/or policy brief was made publicly available.</p> <p>I.3. Policy document and/or policy brief is available in plain language, easily comprehensible format which those without field expertise can understand.</p> <p>I.4. The public announcement was accessible for major ethnic minority groups living in Georgia (in the Azerbaijani, Armenian and Abkhaz languages).</p> <p>I.5. Policy document and/or policy brief was accessible for major ethnic minority groups living in Georgia (in the Azerbaijani, Armenian and Abkhaz languages).</p> <p>I.6. The public announcement was adapted to the needs of persons with disabilities (e.g. Braille code, audio version, sign language translation, etc.).</p> <p>I.7. Policy document and/or policy brief was adapted to the needs of persons with disabilities (e.g. Braille code, audio version, sign language translation, etc.).</p>	<p>I.1. Any interested person or party (CSOs, private sector organisations, ordinary citizens, etc.) has an opportunity to participate in public consultation.</p> <p>I.2. All interested or engaged persons/organisations have an opportunity to comment/provide feedback on the policy document.</p>	<p>3.1. The public announcement was disseminated at least one week before the start of the public consultation process.</p> <p>3.2. Information in the public announcement is sufficient (corresponds with the recommendations outlined in Chapter 3.5 of the Policy Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation Handbook).</p> <p>3.3. Public consultations were conducted in more than one format.</p> <p>3.4. More than one mechanism for feedback collection was ensured.</p> <p>3.5. Sufficient time (depending on the consultation format) was allocated for the provision of feedback.</p> <p>3.6. Public consultations were conducted at minimum one stage of the policy development cycle.</p>	<p>4.1. Summary report on public consultations comprehensively describes the goals, processes, and results of the public consultations.</p> <p>4.2. The information about accepted, partially accepted, and rejected comments was provided to the feedback authors.</p> <p>4.3. The justified explanation was provided to the feedback authors.</p> <p>4.4. Summary report on public consultations is publicly available.</p>	<p>5.1 In the public consultation planning process, specific steps have been taken to ensure the active engagement of both genders in the consultations.</p> <p>5.2 In the public consultation planning process, specific steps have been taken to identify and engage vulnerable minority groups.</p> <p>5.3 The coordination agency keeps records of the representatives of vulnerable minority groups engaged in the public consultations.</p> <p>5.4 The public consultation process is adapted to the needs of vulnerable minority groups (diverse needs of persons with disabilities, ethnic minority groups, etc.).</p>	<p>6.1. Number of CSOs/individuals engaged.</p> <p>6.2. Number of unique feedback contributors.</p> <p>6.3. Coordination agencies' evaluation of civil society engagement.</p> <p>6.4. Relevance of the comments provided by the civil society as assessed by the coordination agency.</p> <p>6.5. Timely provision of feedback.</p>

Each of the PCI indicators is scored on 0-3 scale, where 0 is the minimum and 3 is the maximum available score. Namely,

0 = public consultation does not meet the indicator.

1 = public consultation minimally meets the aspects of the indicator.

2 = public consultation meets most aspects of the indicator.

3 = public consultation fully meets the aspects of the indicator.

A detailed explanation of each indicator as well as the specific scoring guideline per each indicator can be found in the Annex II.

METHODOLOGY

Research Objectives and Key Research Questions

This study aims to evaluate the quality of public consultation processes regarding the strategies and action plans adopted in 2021. It focuses on the process evaluation of public participation in policy making rather than its outcomes. The study has three main objectives:

1. Assess the compliance of the conducted public consultations with the new regulations outlined in the Decree of the Government of Georgia N629;
2. Analyse the quality of public consultations using the Public Consultation Index (PCI) and relevant international standards;
3. Identify the existing gaps and develop practical recommendations for improvement.

Document Selection

The research targeted all policy documents from the 2021 cohort approved by the GoG. From the initial list of 51 documents that were adopted by the government in October 2021²⁸, the requirements of Government Decree #629²⁹ applied to 32 policy documents. Correspondingly, at the first stage, the research team focused on those 32 documents, filtering out 5 concept notes (conducting public consultation is optional for concept notes) as well as 3 policy documents previously assessed in the 2020 study.

To finalise the list of policies within the research scope, the enquiries have been made to the coordination state agencies for each of the remaining 24 policy documents. Those concerned the stage of development of the documents and public consultation plans and processes. Based on the collected responses and considering the project timeline, the research scope was finalised and the study identified 12 strategy documents to cover, as listed below:

1. National Strategy of Transport and Logistics of Georgia 2021 – 2030 and its Action Plan 2021-2022
2. 2021-2025 Small and Medium Entrepreneurship Development Strategy of Georgia and its Action Plan 2021 - 2022
3. 2021-2025 Strategy for Prevention and Control of Noncommunicable Diseases and its Action Plan 2021 - 2023
4. 2021-2025 Strategy for Elimination of Hepatitis C and its Action Plan 2021-2023
5. 2021-2030 Strategy for Development of Mental Health and its Action Plan 2021-2023
6. 2021-2030 Strategy for Development of Healthcare Systems and its Action Plan 2021-2023
7. State Strategy for Civic Equality and Integration 2021-2030 and its Action Plan 2021-2022
8. State Strategy towards the Veterans of War and Defence Forces 2022-2025 and its Action Plan 2022-2023
9. 2021-2025 Strategy for Protection of Children Living and/or Working in the Street from all Sorts of Violence including Human Trafficking
10. State Language Strategy 2021-2030 and its Action Plan 2021-2022
11. Unified Strategy for Education and Science of Georgia 2022-2030 and its Action Plan 2022-2023
12. State Action Plan for Youth Policy Development 2021-2022

28 Decree of Government of Georgia #1767 (October 5, 2021)

29 Decree of Government of Georgia #629 (December 20, 2019) on Approval of the Rules of Policy Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation. <https://matsne.gov.ge/ka/document/view/4747283?publication=0> last accessed on 30/11/20.

Data Collection

To answer the key research questions, the WeResearch team utilised a qualitative approach of data collection and analysis. Specifically, the key informant interview (KII) method was used for primary data collection. KII is an individual qualitative interview with purposefully selected respondents. Overall, 29 key informant interviews (KIIs) were conducted throughout the study with the coordination agency representatives and public consultation participants who were involved and consulted on the policy documents. In particular, 12 interviews were conducted with coordination agency representatives and 15 with public consultation participants from CSOs, professional associations, academia, or independent experts. The coordination agencies provided information about the public consultation participants.

Initially, the study design had also incorporated observation of public consultation processes in addition to the KIIs, however, the research team had only managed to conduct two observations of such process for the “Unified Strategy for Education and Science of Georgia 2022-2030 and its Action Plan 2022-2023”. With other strategies, it was not possible to observe the public consultation process within the timeframe of this study as it had been completed, not yet planned, or conducted in the format which did not allow for an observation (e.g. only written feedback was collected).

Due to the epidemiological restrictions, all fieldwork was conducted via online communication platforms or by phone. The priority was the safety of the researchers and participants. The interviews were audio-recorded with the verbal consent of the respondents.

Summary write-ups of all recorded interviews were developed later for detailed analysis.

Sampling

The study utilised a purposive sampling method which implied selecting and contacting participants based on the research objectives. To recruit the respondents from coordination state agencies, the research team reached out to the main contact points for each policy document covered in this study.

When recruiting the public consultation participants, the research team strived to ensure the diversity of the respondents to the greatest possible extent. Specifically, during the selection of respondents from the lists provided by the coordination agencies, the researchers considered different factors and included respondents with diverse attributions when possible (accounting for gender, ethnicity, disability, etc).

Research Instruments

The research team utilised two semi-structured interview guides for KIIs. One guide was designed for public consultation participants (CSOs, private sector representatives, and other interested individuals/organisations), while another guide targeted coordination public body representatives. Within the framework of the current study, the interview guides were revised and restructured to follow the PCI framework. The questions included in the KII guides covered all three objectives of this study and respective research questions. The semi-structured interview guides allowed the researcher to add or adapt the questions during interviews while the respondents were free to elaborate on their responses.

Additionally, the research team developed a separate observation form to guide the researcher in the public consultation process.

As the primary methodology framework of this study – the PCI – was revised and updated, the research team also modified and restructured the research instruments accordingly, aligning them with the PCI indicators. Moreover, the past experience and lessons learnt during the 2020 assessment were also considered when finalising the research instruments.

Data Analysis

The research team applied the PCI as the primary framework for data analysis. The researchers assessed each target policy document according to the PCI indicators and scored per criterion. The sources for the assessment included interview write-ups of the coordination agency representatives and public consultation participants, observation reports, and public consultation summary reports (if available).

Scoring

The collected data was analysed per criteria indicators. After considering the trade-offs between simplicity, availability of data, and complexity of measuring the quality of the public consultations, a score from 0 (min) to 3 (max) was chosen as a desirable range.

The guidelines on how to apply this scoring scheme to each individual indicator can be found in Annex II.

One researcher independently scored each indicator per strategy according to the detailed scoring system (Annex II). Missing data was excluded from the analysis. After scoring each indicator, a simple average score was calculated for each criterion per strategy. Simple averaging became a minimal arbitrary choice since it was easier to understand and present. Next, to estimate the total score per strategy, the averages for criteria 1-5 were calculated for each strategy, while criterion 6 was averaged as a separate score. The maximum score for the strategy document was 3.

Each strategy has two separate scores on the PCI index: The first score, which is an aggregated score of criteria 1-5, assesses the efforts of coordination bodies to conduct public consultations. This score is based on the indicators which are under the full control of coordination bodies. The second score, which is solely criterion 6, assesses public engagement in the consultation process which cannot be fully controlled by the coordination bodies.

The scoring of the indicators is arbitrary and normalised relative to the ideal maxima, based on the good practices of public consultation conduct discussed in the literature. It is essential to consider the context while assigning and interpreting the PCI scores as a variety of factors may influence the elaboration of policy document, such as peculiarities of content or availability of interested CSO representatives in the field.

Ethical approach

The ethical principles are critically important for WeResearch. The ethical issues have been considered throughout different stages of the research process: the formulation of a research plan, fieldwork phase, and data analysis. Do-No-Harm principle is intrinsic to all our projects, and we are careful to observe the issues of data protection, confidentiality, and privacy of the respondents. Since the research participants – key informants, represented two different groups of stakeholders, the research identified the ethical issues relevant for each target group.

Ethical considerations help not only to protect the safety of respondents and interviewers but to ensure data quality. The following principles have been respected during this study:

Informed consent and Voluntary participation

'Informed consent is the cornerstone of ethical research.³⁰ All respondents were informed about the purpose of the study prior to the interview. All participants were free to participate or withdraw their participation at any time. Respondents were notified regarding the following issues and interviewed after voluntary and informed consent has been taken from them.

³⁰ Denzin and Lincoln (2011). The SAGE handbook of qualitative research. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE

- What is the intent of the research?
- What information they provide will be used for
- That they can refuse to answer any questions they are not comfortable with
- How the data will be used and reported
- That the research and report will not contain any information that would reveal the identities of the respondents
- That they may withdraw their consent at any time during or after the interview
- That they can ask any clarifying questions before, during, and after the interview.

Protection of human subjects and confidentiality

Ethical guidelines were considered during data collection, including to ensure the confidentiality of respondents throughout all stages of fieldwork and data collection. The data confidentiality was ensured by removing all personal identifiers from the interview write-ups and final report. Records related to the participant identities were stored separately from the key informant interviews and interview write-ups. The raw data does not contain any information that could reveal the identities of respondents. However, since the identity of a contact person for each policy document was known within the responsible institution, ensuring full confidentiality of the participants was challenging in the case of coordination public agencies. The research team yet made all possible efforts to mitigate and minimise such risks.

Limitations

The study has certain limitations which are important to consider at the data analysis and interpretation stage.

Limitation 1: Due to the timeline of the study, it was not possible to observe and objectively assess the meaningfulness and quality of public participation in the policy making process. Accordingly, the study design mainly relies on the subjective assessments of meaningful participation provided by the public consultation participants.

Limitation 2: The research was conducted using a retrospective approach, i.e., the respondents had to recall the information from the events held several months before the interviews. In multiple cases, the respondents could not remember some details related to the public consultations, which might have impacted the quality of the collected data.

Limitation 3: The research covered only those subjects who directly participated in the public consultations. The research is hence missing the perspective of those who wished but could not participate in the consultations due to various reasons. Including those respondents could enrich this study with further insight into the planning and announcement stages of public consultations.

Limitation 4: Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the coordination agencies had to introduce certain limitations and amendments into the public consultation processes. Accordingly, the assessment results might have been specific to the pandemic period.

Limitation 5: In many cases, the research team did not have access to the full list of public consultation participants. Therefore, the researchers often had to rely on convenience sampling when selecting respondents. This is why the results of the study may not represent the views of everyone engaged in the public consultations and may not be transferable to other situations.

Limitation 6: Given the project timeline, the research team had to rely on the limited sources of information (interviews) as in most cases, public consultation summary reports were unavailable.

ANALYSIS

The findings of this study are presented based on the Public Consultation Index (PCI) criteria. The analysis follows a discussion of three main factors contributing to effective planning and implementation of public consultations and then proceeds with assessing each PCI criterion. The first five criteria address accessibility, openness, effectiveness, accountability, and inclusiveness of public consultation processes. The last criterion assesses public engagement and interest in public consultations.

Before presenting the main findings, this research needs to highlight a few challenges faced by the team in preparation for and during the fieldwork. These challenges provide additional information on such aspects as openness, accessibility, cooperation, and political will of the coordination agencies.

- A number of the coordinating agencies created bureaucratic hurdles in communication with the research team, requiring official, signed correspondence on any matter (i.e. not responding to emails), including requests to provide public information.
- Certain public servants demonstrated lack of cooperation by postponing interview date and time several times, saying they had no time or not showing up at the agreed time without giving a prior notice to the researcher.
- It was difficult to obtain full lists of public consultation participants as in many cases the coordinating agencies refused to share them, referring to the legislation on personal data protection, or only shared information about several selected participants.
- The research team did not have access to seven (out of 12) summary reports on public consultations. The coordination agency is not required to publish a summary report until the government officially approves the policy document, however, no rule prevents the state agencies from sharing it (if available) upon request. From the five summary reports that the research team obtained, only three were published together with the approved strategies, while the remaining two were provided upon request.
- Change in top management of the coordination agency caused the change of priorities within the organisation. It was difficult to agree on the time of interview with those respondents who claimed they were highly busy and had to agree all the details with their supervisors.

EFFECTIVE PLANNING AND IMPLEMENTATION OF PUBLIC CONSULTATIONS

While public consultation is considered to be one of the critical regulatory tools to improve efficiency, effectiveness, and transparency of decision-making, it also carries multiple challenges. Effective planning and implementation of public consultations largely depend on coordination agencies' knowledge of guidelines and good practices, their political will, and donors' support.

Knowledge of the guidelines and good practices makes a significant impact on the quality of public consultations. While some coordination agency representatives received comprehensive training on the topic, others had a very limited understanding of new regulations outlined in the Rules of Procedures for Development, Monitoring, and Evaluation of Policy Documents (Decree of the Government of Georgia N629 of December 20, 2019).

Furthermore, coordination agencies have different expectations and understanding of what does conducting successful public consultations entail. The study found that the coordination agencies were often unaware of the differences between stakeholder engagement and public consultations. In practice, stakeholder engagement is more limited in its scope. It only involves participation of a specific target audience, such as government bodies, business sector, experts, and organisations that have established and defined interests in the topic. On the contrary, public consultations target all citizens, thus having an inclusive citizen engagement process at its core. Due to limited knowledge of the differences between various forms of public engagement, many representatives of coordination agencies consider any form of stakeholder engagement as public consultation. On the other hand, some representatives of civil society organisations (CSOs) emphasise the importance of wider public engagement and note that their understanding of public consultation is different from how the coordination agencies implement them: "for us and for them [coordination agency] public engagement means different things," observed a CSO representative.

Furthermore, several coordination agency representatives mentioned that informing only individuals and organisations with the relevant expertise was sufficient for conducting a meaningful public consultation and that there was no need to engage wider public. Some of them even argued that in certain cases, engagement of the broader public was not reasonable or necessary because providing comments on a policy document often required a certain level of expertise and knowledge of the issue:

We tried to involve the most relevant actors. This strategy document requires specific and expert knowledge. I don't think the engagement of citizens is necessary in this case. (Coordination agency representative)

While some public consultation participants favoured the involvement of limited audience with relevant knowledge as an acceptable form of public engagement, others expressed their dissatisfaction. According to them, such form of limited engagement leaves out many individuals who would like to contribute to the discussions on policy documents:

Many of us did not have any information that the strategy document was published and the consultations were being conducted. We got this information through networking, so-called word of mouth, from other organisations. I cannot say that the Ministry intended to disseminate information to involve larger groups. (Public consultation participant)

In addition, the Policy Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation Handbook³¹, which defines the minimum requirements for the public consultations, is not clear about the differences between stakeholder engagement and public consultations. Defining a clear set of standards required for conducting high-quality public consultations would help coordination agencies to take additional efforts towards ensuring an inclusive citizen engagement process. As of April 2022, Annex 11, which sets out to provide comprehensive instructions on conducting targeted and public consultations, has not been approved yet.

While receiving comprehensive training is essential to successfully implement public consultations, coordination agencies' political will is also crucial for meaningful and wide participation of citizens. Thus, the political will of decision-makers significantly influences the quality of public consultations.

The results of this study illustrate that the political will, expressed in committed support for implementing high-quality public consultations, is relevant on both collective and individual levels. The collective level relates to the willingness of a government institution to allocate sufficient human resources and support staff throughout the process. It is a coordination agency's responsibility to create the enabling environment bolstering individuals' commitment to implement public consultations successfully.

On the individual level, the notion of political will relates to the willingness of the individuals, reflecting their values, priorities, and commitment to achieve desired outcomes. In the contexts where institutions lack clearly defined sets of priorities towards citizen engagement, the will of individual decision-makers and government institution employees can play an essential role. Despite their criticism towards the lack of institutional effort from coordination agencies, several public consultation participants underlined the commitment of a few individual employees: "I was even surprised to see how these two-three employees managed to do such a colossal job" – noted a CSO representative.

The data indicates that the public consultation participants appreciated it when coordination agencies took extra efforts to reach out to the wider audience. Expressing strong political will from the coordination agencies also contributed to higher motivation and interest from CSO representatives and citizens:

Their attitude, their effort were commendable. I could see how they tried to reach out and involve all interested people. (Public consultation participant)

We did everything we could from calling, visiting them on the spot, sending emails, to using common friends and acquaintances. We tried everything so that they [potential public consultation participants] would read the policy document and provide any feedback. (Coordination agency representative)

On the other hand, several participants reported the lack of political will from the government institutions. With no effort from coordination agencies, the CSO representatives and other interested individuals found it challenging to contribute to the development of a policy document:

Instead of them [coordination agency] trying to reach out and asking for our feedback, we were the ones calling them more than ten times, writing, and asking for our comments to be considered. Many other organisations would have given up, but we did not, we kept trying. (Public consultation participant)

³¹ Policy Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation Handbook, Administration of the Government of Georgia, Section 3.5, pg. 36-37. https://www.ge.undp.org/content/georgia/en/home/library/democratic_governance/PolicyDevelopmentHandbook.html last accessed on 30/11/20.

To summarise, the interview data shows that the political will of government institutions and individual employees can significantly improve the quality of public consultations. The creation of organisational culture that would support employees' efforts is an expression of political will. In turn, strong political will expressed in the commitment to conduct effective public consultations is crucial for meaningful engagement and participatory decision-making. However, political will may not be enough in some cases due to lack of financial resources and expertise. To overcome these challenges, donors' support becomes valuable.

Donor support can be instrumental in public policy reform as this is another factor contributing to the better quality of public consultations. More than half of the public consultations covered in this study received some form of donor support. In several cases, the donors offered technical assistance which related to expert knowledge; in others, they provided financial resources.

The coordination agency representatives emphasised that continuous support from donors helped them to reach wider public, conduct consultations in regions, combine different meeting formats, provide translations to other languages, ensuring more inclusive participatory processes:

We have had ongoing support from donors for many years, and we are very grateful. I hope we will have their support in the future. Otherwise, it will be challenging, almost impossible, to manage. (Coordination agency representative)

On the other hand, coordination agencies that did not have donor support had fewer resources to implement public consultations successfully. Thus, their limited budget was a challenge:

Government institutions have limited budget allocated for communication purposes, and you cannot spend more than allowed. (Coordination agency representative)

However, while donor support is important for stakeholder mobilisation and continuity of effort, it does not guarantee the implementation of high-quality public consultations. Although donors provided technical and financial assistance, some coordination agencies still lacked the capacity and to ensure inclusive and meaningful public engagement.

Even though we had donor support, it was still challenging to ensure smooth communication with everyone. (Coordination agency representative)

To sum up, adequate financial, technical, and human resources are necessary to conduct effective and meaningful public consultations. Furthermore, coordination agency employees must have access to appropriate guidance and training in combination with strong institutional support expressed in enabling organisational culture that sustains their efforts. Even though the challenges may relate to various objective factors such as the COVID-19 pandemic, inability to conduct high-quality public consultations is often illustrative of coordination agencies' lack of political will. Besides, in the absence of coordination agencies' willingness to ensure inclusive and meaningful participation, donor support becomes irrelevant. Furthermore, when coordination agency representatives have no knowledge and understanding of good practices of participatory decision-making, they are not able to conduct high-quality public consultations even despite their willingness and commitment. Therefore, all three factors: knowledge of good practices of civic participation, the political will of coordination agencies, and donor support have a reinforcing effect on each other and are important factors contributing to meaningful and effective bottom-up decision-making. Although these three factors are not exhaustive, and other variables may be in place depending on the context, they largely influence the accessibility, openness, effectiveness, accountability, and inclusiveness of public consultation processes. Each aspect of the public consultations is discussed in more detail below.

I. Criterion - Accessibility of Public Consultation Process

Meaningful participation and effective outcomes of the public consultations require that the process is accessible for anyone, from international organisations and experts to local NGOs and ordinary citizens. The first criterion of the Public Consultation Index (PCI) is accessibility, which is broken down into seven corresponding indicators. This criterion relates to the accessibility of the consultation announcement and policy document/policy brief to the broader public.

Making information about the planned public consultation easily discoverable by the interested persons is the first step towards engaging the wider public in decision-making processes. The first indicator of accessibility criterion assesses the efforts taken by a public entity to disseminate the public consultation announcement through multiple communication channels. Announcements about the planned public consultation can be disseminated through various online means (e.g. the entity's official website, social media page, online media) or traditional media (newspaper, TV, leaflet, banner). It should be highlighted that sending the announcement by email only to the potential stakeholders should not be considered a form of public dissemination.

The announcements were mostly shared through emails, government agency websites, and Facebook pages. If the announcement was published on a public channel, anyone who wished to participate could get involved. Even though most agencies did not have any criteria for selecting participants of public consultations, they also did not make additional efforts to spread the announcement and reach a wider public. Thus, they did not disseminate consultation announcements through public channels. The majority opted to send the announcements via email to the target audience, such as experts, organisations, and other government bodies. Closed format of public consultation was chosen because some coordination agencies considered it unnecessary to involve the wider audience that did not have the expertise and specific knowledge about the policy document under discussion. Consequently, they only contacted and engaged the stakeholders with the relevant expertise and knowledge in the area. Overall, seven out of twelve coordination agencies scored 0, meaning that they did not disseminate the public consultation announcement through at least one public channel.

The second indicator assesses whether the policy document and/or policy brief was made publicly available or if an interested person/organisation could easily and quickly obtain it from the coordination agency. Ideally, a policy document or its brief is uploaded to the entity's website or is attached to the public consultation announcement. Unlike public announcements, in most cases, the policy documents or policy briefs were publicly available on official web pages of the coordination agencies. In some cases, policy documents were available to any person or organisation upon request, while in other instances, policy documents or policy briefs were attached to the public consultation announcement or were uploaded to the entity's official website. Overall, per this indicator, the absolute majority of the coordination agencies scored above the minimum requirement.

Furthermore, for an inclusive process of citizen engagement, it is important that both organisations and ordinary citizens wishing to participate in the public consultation could understand the content of the policy and provide feedback without expert knowledge. Therefore, the third indicator assesses if the policy document and/or policy brief were available in plain language and an easily understandable format. The coordination entity should generally prepare a policy brief written in plain language, especially in those cases when the comprehension of the policy document requires specific knowledge. The score for this indicator was assigned based on the answers of the coordination agency representatives and public consultation participants.

According to the data, most policy documents were not written in plain language or easily comprehensible format. However, some CSO representatives did not consider it a problem and believed that expert knowledge was required to participate in public consultations.

In contrast, several CSO representatives and coordination agency representatives alike believed that an easily understandable, user-friendly wording of the policy documents was necessary to ensure the broader engagement of different segments of society. However, they argued, it was often hardly achievable due to various constraints, including limited time and budget:

We also wanted to make short videos and animations to help younger persons understand and comprehend the policy document better. These user-friendly formats are important but require additional resources. (Coordination agency representative).

Furthermore, one of the most crucial aspects of the accessibility of public consultations is ensuring the participation of vulnerable and underrepresented groups. For instance, to ensure inclusion of underrepresented minority groups in the policy development process the public announcement should be accessible in the languages of the main ethnic minority groups living in Georgia. Consequently, the fourth indicator relates to the accessibility of consultation announcements, and the fifth – to the accessibility of policy documents and/or policy briefs.

Accessibility of public consultations to ethnic minorities is the area where the coordination agencies failed to meet the minimal standards set by the PCI. The Ministry of National Integration and Reconciliation scored the highest on this indicator, partially due to the fact that the policy document itself identifies ethnic minorities as a target group:

The strategy has a name “Civic Integration and Equality,” thus we emphasise different target groups of ethnic minorities. For instance, ethnic minority women were especially involved. (Coordination agency representative)

Furthermore, the available data shows that the public announcement and policy documents were translated into at least one ethnic minority language only in two cases. One policy document was translated into English because the coordination agency closely cooperated with the international donors. In other cases, the inclusion of ethnic minorities was rather sporadic. For example, during the meetings, coordination agency representatives accepted comments in Russian but the policy document itself was not translated.

The sixth and seventh indicators aim to evaluate the PCI against the best international practices and assess if the public announcement and policy document and/or policy brief were adapted to the needs of persons with disabilities. To ensure the inclusion of persons with disabilities in the policy development process, the policy documents and announcements about public consultations should be adapted to their needs. For instance, the announcement could be printed in Braille code or made available as an audio/video clip which could also be accompanied with a translation into the sign language, etc.

The only coordination agency that made additional steps to ensure the inclusion of PWD was the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth Affairs. All other coordination agencies did not take special measures to include persons with disabilities. In one of the cases when policy document claimed to address the special needs of PWD, they were neither invited to the public consultations, nor the public consultation process was adopted:

We did not invite persons with disabilities. However, the strategy addresses their special needs. We are aware of their needs; therefore, these issues were included in the new strategy. (Coordination agency representative)

Such an approach, when the target audience is excluded from meaningful participation, undermines the core purpose of public consultations, and highlights serious existing gaps in decision-making. The further analysis discusses the importance of ensuring the inclusion and diversity of public consultations' participants in more detail under the PCI criterion Diversity and Inclusion.

To summarise, most coordination agencies did not disseminate public consultation announcements through public channels, which limited the consultation process only to the invited stakeholders. However, the majority of policy documents were published on the government websites, with no information about planned public consultations. Together with the lack of efforts to engage the broader public, the language accessibility of the policy document was another problem and, on average, coordination agencies only met the minimal standards. Furthermore, accessibility of the public consultation process for the ethnic minorities and persons with disabilities was one of the areas where most coordination agencies failed to meet the minimal requirements of the accessibility criterion of the Public Consultation Index (PCI). The data shows that while some coordination agencies made significant progress towards meaningful decision-making, the accessibility of the public consultation process remains problematic and more efforts are needed to ensure the engagement of broader public, particularly, more vulnerable segments of the population whose voices are underrepresented and who have limited access to decision-making. The scoring of Criterion I per indicator is provided in Table 3.

Table 3. Scoring – Accessibility

Criterion I: Accessibility	0.7
I.1. Public consultation announcement was disseminated through at least one public channel.	0.8
I.2. Policy document and/or policy brief was made publicly available.	1.9
I.3. Policy document and/or policy brief is available in plain language, easily comprehensible format, and those without field expertise can understand it.	1
I.4. The public announcement was accessible for major ethnic minority groups living in Georgia (accessible in the Azerbaijani, Armenian and Abkhaz languages).	0.4
I.5. Policy document and/or policy brief was accessible for major ethnic minority groups living in Georgia (accessible in the Azerbaijani, Armenian and Abkhaz languages).	0.3
I.6. The public announcement was adapted to the needs of people with disabilities (e.g. Braille code, audio version, sign language translation, etc.)	0.2
I.7. Policy document and/or policy brief was adapted to the needs of people with disabilities (e.g. Braille code, audio version, sign language translation, etc.)	0.3

2. Criterion - The Openness of the Public Consultation Process

The second criterion examines the openness of the public consultation process. The first indicator assesses if any interested person or organisation has an opportunity to get engaged in the public consultation. This means that the participation in public consultations is not restricted only to potential interest groups and field experts.

Even though citizen engagement is one of main goals of the Public Policy Reform (PAR), only a few coordination agencies emphasised their commitment to ordinary citizen engagement in the policy-making process. On this indicator, most public consultations met only minimal PCI requirements, meaning that participation in the public consultation was only open to experts, international and thematic local organisations. However, the engagement was possible only by an invitation from the coordination agency and the wider public was excluded from the participation. Several public consultation participants argued that coordination agencies should not have taken a selective approach towards CSO engagement:

The Ministry should not be selective when involving only specific organisations, and partnerships must be genuine. The Ministry has neither the flexibility nor desire to cooperate strategically. (Public consultation participant)

Genuine citizen engagement is only possible if the consultation announcement is publicly available and if coordination agency representatives realize the importance of including ordinary citizens in policy making:

For us, the opinions of ordinary citizens are more important than those of experts, it does not matter if they have deep knowledge of the issue or not (coordination agency representative)

For meaningful civic engagement, it is crucial that public consultation participants do not only attend the consultations but also provide feedback. The second indicator of openness of public consultations examined if any person engaged in the public consultation, regardless of its format, had an opportunity to provide feedback or comment on the policy document. On this indicator, the absolute majority of the coordination agencies met minimum requirements or scored higher.

In the best-case scenario, all interested ordinary citizens should be able to provide feedback on the policy document. However, since in most cases the participation in public consultations was limited to NGOs and experts, ordinary citizens could not provide their comments. In such cases, the possibility to provide feedback on the policy document was restricted only to the people and organisations invited by a coordination agency. In a few cases, while the announcement about public consultations was not publicly available and only thematic organisations were selected to participate, local organisations still had an opportunity to comment on the policy document if they got information about a planned public consultation from other CSOs (for instance, via word of mouth, networking, etc.)

To summarise, openness of the public consultations is another important prerequisite for genuine civil engagement in policy making. Although all coordination agency representatives emphasised the importance of civic engagement and participatory democracy, most fell short of taking concrete steps towards ensuring the openness of public consultations for ordinary citizens. The closed format of public consultation with the pre-mapped stakeholders hinders the inclusion of all interested parties and undermines the openness of the government institutions. The scoring of Criterion II per each indicator is provided in Table 4.

Table 4. Scoring – Openness

Criterion II: Openness	1.6
2.1. Any interested person or organisation (CSOs, private sector organisations, ordinary citizens etc.) has an opportunity to participate in public consultation.	1.3
2.2. All interested or engaged persons/organisations have an opportunity to comment/provide feedback on the policy document.	1.9

3. Criterion - Effectiveness of Public Consultation Process

The third criterion assesses the effectiveness of the public consultation process based on six corresponding indicators. While coordination agencies applied different approaches to the public consultation process and faced different challenges, most of them performed relatively well.

The first indicator explores whether the public was informed on time about the start of the public consultation process. The goal here should be to “consult as early and as widely as possible” in order to include as many interested parties as possible. This indicator can only be measured for online/offline meetings. If public consultation takes place online or in person, the minimum notice period shall be one week. All coordination agencies that conducted open public consultations met this requirement and announcements about public consultations were

disseminated at least one week before the start of the public consultation process. Moreover, it is advisable to extend the deadline for feedback collection if the public interest regarding the policy document is high:

From the beginning, as defined in the Government Decree N629, we decided to announce at least two weeks earlier, although due to the high interest in the topic of the strategy document, we thought that more people would like to get involved, so we extended the deadline for another week. (Coordination agency representative)

The second indicator aims to assess if the information provided in the public announcement was sufficient. Collecting data on this indicator was challenging because the research team did not have access to the announcements that were not publicly available and were only disseminated through emails. This indicator examined if the announcements corresponded to the recommendations outlined in Chapter 3.5 of the Policy Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation Handbook. The requirements oblige coordination agencies to include information about: the format, date/time, location, or period of public consultation; information about the responsible entity and respective contact person(s), information about the consultation topic and objectives; information about distribution and feedback provision mechanisms of the policy document draft or policy brief.

All publicly available consultation announcements met these standards. The coordination agency representatives that conducted open public consultations were well informed of the guidelines outlined in the Government Decree N629. However, when coordination agencies opt for target consultations by engaging stakeholders through sending emails, monitoring and assessing public consultation compliance with the minimum standards is problematic. Such form of public engagement challenges the ability to monitor compliance, questions the openness and effectiveness of the process, and undermines the possibilities for participation of ordinary citizens. Contrary to that, some coordination agency representatives emphasised that sending policy document through emails was not sufficient for receiving meaningful feedback from the public:

Of course, we could send the document via emails only, or just post it on our webpage and active CSOs would see it, but we knew it would not be comprehensive and we would not get enough feedback. (Coordination agency representative)

The format of public consultations is another critical factor for ensuring public participation. To ensure the engagement of the wider public in the policy development process, the coordination agencies should use diverse methods for conducting public consultations. The third indicator relates to this aspect. Using more than one format of public consultations could help the coordination agencies to increase the engagement and fortify the effectiveness of the process. To achieve this, for instance, they can use different formats of public consultations simultaneously throughout the process such as face-to-face or online meetings, focus groups, conferences, physical or online surveys, collecting comments through web-page or social media.

It is commendable that most of the coordination agencies conducted public consultations using at least two formats. Some representatives mentioned that due to the COVID-19 pandemic, they moved all public consultations to an online format, either in form of online meetings or collection of written feedback. The respondents mentioned that the positive side of the online format was that attendees could be engaged from anywhere, even from abroad. The drawback of this process was that some participants had technical problems, while others may have had limited access to online tools and the internet. Furthermore, several participants stressed that in-person offline discussions facilitated better exchange of views:

The pandemic has negatively affected everything. Of course, when there is a face-to-face discussion in the auditorium, it is much more comfortable, there is more exchange of views. It is still possible in Zoom but, you will probably agree, there are more challenges. (Public consultation participant)

While many respondents expressed their preference for the in-person offline format, successful public consultations in such format required additional spending. Several coordination agency representatives emphasised that due to the lack of resources and limited funds, they could only conduct consultations online. Overall, financial assistance was regarded as an essential pre-requisite for ensuring the engagement of the wider public:

If we take the non-pandemic circumstances, we will first need donor assistance, financial assistance, and the assistance from international organisations. (coordination agency representatives)

On the other hand, the coordination agencies that had donor support and additional funds allocated for conducting public consultations were able to utilise different formats, including visits to the regions, and conduct in-person meetings at various venues.

Another important aspect of conducting effective and meaningful public consultations is providing diverse mechanisms for collecting feedback. Thus, the fourth indicator examines whether the coordination agency ensured the collection of feedback and comments using more than one mechanism. Feedback mechanisms may include: written feedback via email, comments on the web page or social media, feedback by phone, oral feedback during meetings, written feedback in chats, Google forms, or other online survey formats.

Coordination agencies utilised different mechanisms for feedback collection, from official correspondence to informal calls and networking with the public consultation participants. In the majority of cases, coordination agencies utilised at least two mechanisms for collecting the input. First, the public consultation participants provided written comments and then discussed them during the meeting. In the cases when the public consultation participants were limited to only one mechanism of feedback provision, they claimed that the process would have been more effective if they could provide comments in different formats:

I wish the public consultation was conducted not only in written format but also through online meetings. In addition, we could also have focus groups with organisations of the same profile. Sometimes written comments are not elaborate or clear enough, so it is always good to have meetings. (Public consultation participant)

While providing several mechanisms for receiving feedback is important for the effective public consultation process, it is also necessary to allocate sufficient time for feedback provision. The fifth indicator assesses whether the public consultation participants had reasonable time to provide comments.

In the scenario when a coordination agency opts for an online/in-person meeting or similar formats where the policy document draft is presented and discussed, the participants should have at least one week to provide additional comments. When collecting feedback via email or by posting the document online, at least two weeks from posting/sending date should be allowed to collect the input from the interested persons/organisations.

Overall, both the coordination agency representatives and public consultation participants emphasised the importance of giving the public enough time to provide meaningful and elaborate comments on a policy document:

If we want genuine participation, we must give these people a reasonable amount of time to read, understand, and then provide feedback. So when we are talking about larger documents, we often give a period of two to three weeks. (Coordination agency representative)

The sixth indicator examines whether the coordination agency has conducted a public consultation on more than one stage. Conducting public consultation regarding the final draft of the policy document is mandatory.

Thus, it is a minimum requirement. According to the Policy Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation Handbook, public engagement is advisable at each stage of the policy development cycle. Moreover, the engagement at the early stages of the policy development (e.g., situation analysis and priority setting) is essential to allow citizens, beneficiaries, and interested parties to make a real contribution to the policy development.

The data shows that the majority of the coordination agencies conducted consultations at least at two stages. However, at the earlier stages of the policy development cycle, they mainly engaged with working groups consisting of relevant public entities, donors, and hired experts. Only three coordination agencies managed to engage the wider public at all stages of policy development, while most others conducted public or targeted consultations only at the final stage.

Public consultations that occur only at the final stages of the document elaboration result in poorer participation and minimal feedback from CSOs and citizens. Public consultation participants emphasised that their continuing engagement at all levels contributed to better quality of consultation process:

The public consultation process was rather fragmented, we would come and discuss at later stages, and then disperse. I wish the system, the framework of the civil society engagement was better elaborated. (Public consultation participant)

Their involvement from the early stages, starting from designing the policy document's goals and objectives, fostered their commitment to the public consultation process and resulted in relevant, better-elaborated feedback. Therefore, the engagement of citizens and CSOs at multiple stages of the strategy or action plan elaboration is crucial for the effective and meaningful public consultations.

To enrich the data with a quantitative assessment from the public consultation participants' perspective, the research team asked the interviewees to evaluate their satisfaction with participation in the public consultation processes on a 10-point scale, where 10 points meant the highest satisfaction. Out of 15 respondents participating in the research, 14 provided their assessment while one refrained from the quantitative evaluation. The research team could not interview the participants of public consultations concerning four policy documents. In three cases, the coordination agencies did not provide contact data of the public consultation participants, whereas another agency provided the contacts of only five participants (out of more than 200 mentioned in the summary report). However, they either did not wish to participate in the research or did not respond to the research team's interview request. The average satisfaction score based on the feedback from 14 CSO representatives was 8.1 out of 10.

To summarise, most coordination agencies performed well at the criterion measuring the effectiveness of the process. While coordination agencies used different formats of public consultations and utilised different mechanisms for feedback collection, most public consultations satisfied the requirements of each indicator. In all cases, the participants were informed about public consultations at least one week earlier. Most consultations were conducted in more than one format and at more than one stage of the policy development cycle. Furthermore, the absolute majority of the coordination agencies allocated sufficient time and provided more than one mechanism for feedback provision. However, challenges remain, especially as coordination agencies and public consultation participants tend to judge the efficiency of the consultations from different perspectives. The participants felt that their engagement was often sporadic and fragmented as well as that sometimes they struggled to provide meaningful feedback. Therefore, while the public consultation processes were overall effective based on the corresponding PCI indicators, there appears to be the lack of a systematic and synchronised approach. The scoring of Criterion III per each indicator is provided in Table 5.

Table 5. Scoring – Effectiveness of Public Consultation Process

Criterion III: Effectiveness of Public Consultation Process	2.1
3.1. The public announcement was disseminated at least one week before the start of the public consultation process.	1.8
3.2. Information in the public announcement is sufficient (corresponds with the recommendations outlined in Chapter 3.5 of the Policy Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation Handbook).	2.6
3.3. Public consultations were conducted in more than one format.	1.9
3.4. More than one mechanism for feedback collection was ensured.	2
3.5. Sufficient time (depending on the consultation format) was allocated for the provision of feedback.	2.4
3.6. Public consultations were conducted at minimum one stage of the policy development cycle.	2.2

4. Criterion - Accountability

Developing the mechanisms for internal and external accountability is crucial for open and transparent governance. Thus, accountability is another important aspect of successful public consultations. It is essential that coordination agencies set reasonable expectations for responding to public inquiries during the public consultation process to establish meaningful cooperation between the government and the public.

However, managing and responding to the public feedback is challenging and requires significant resources. Despite the challenges, coordination agencies should strive to meet the requirements set by the Policy Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation Handbook and provide elaborate feedback to the participants of the public consultations.

Provision of the detailed and well-elaborated summary report of public consultations is one way to account for citizens' inputs received during the consultation. The first indicator of the accountability criterion assesses if a summary report on public consultations comprehensively describes the public consultations' goals, process, and results. It assesses the compliance of the summary report with the minimum requirements outlined in Annex 9 of the Policy Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation Handbook. Apart from this mandatory information, the summary report should contain additional details about the goals and process of the public consultation, used communication channels, approaches, and activities, methodology applied for the analysis of collected comments, and whether any feedback was provided to the authors of the comments. Moreover, the report should describe changes made to the policy document as the result of the public consultation and contain information about the received recommendations and arguments for accepting or rejecting them.

Assessing the accountability criterion was particularly challenging as only five coordination agencies provided us with the summary reports of their public consultations. The majority of the coordination agencies failed to meet the deadline of conducting public consultations within a set timeframe during 2021, and the summary reports were not available by February 2022. However, on a positive note, while coordination agencies had varying understanding of what the summary report entailed, all five available summary reports exceeded the minimum requirements and received high scores on the Public Consultation Index (PCI).

The second indicator of the accountability criterion examines whether the public consultation participants received any feedback from the coordination agencies on which of their recommendations were considered or not considered in the policy document. In the cases when a summary report was not yet available, the research team complemented the data from the interviews with public consultation participants.

While most of the participants received some kind of feedback, many of them expressed dissatisfaction with the lack of proactive communication from the coordination agencies:

We were actively involved, we sent our comments, but we did not receive any feedback. Of course, it is great when they [coordination agency] ask to provide our comments, but it is very unfortunate that it is just a formality in most cases. (Public consultation participant)

On the other hand, the coordination agency representatives also pointed out various challenges of providing feedback to all participants. These challenges primarily concerned the lack of human resources and insufficient funds:

We are aware that communication is the most important aspect that requires improvement at every stage. But it requires lots of resources. We tried everything, but I sincerely wish we could reach out to more people. (Coordination agency representative).

Of course, more could have been done, and there is room for improvement, but there were objective reasons - we are understaffed, and we can't do everything as we would like to. (Coordination agency representative).

Organising meetings, replying to emails requires human resources and time, which we often do not have. (Coordination agency representative).

A few coordination agencies received donor support to ensure smooth communication with the public consultation participants. For instance, a donor hired a communication officer who was in charge of responding to the inquiries and technical planning of public consultations for one of the coordination agencies. While hiring an external team member for communication purposes helps a coordination agency to spare human resources for different purposes, it does not contribute to the capacity building of government institutions in long term.

The third indicator is related to the previous one and assesses whether the comment authors received justified feedback or explanation of why their recommendations and comments were not taken into consideration. The public consultation participants claimed that they particularly appreciated receiving justified feedback. Many of them mentioned that continuous communication with the coordination agency representatives was crucial for conducting meaningful public consultations. Moreover, providing justified feedback also increased the CSO representatives' and citizens' motivation to participate in public consultations. Public consultation participants who received justified feedback assessed the effectiveness of public consultations more favourably:

Overall, I believe the consultation process was effective. We received the feedback and many different opinions were considered. (Public consultation participant)

Since some coordination agencies conducted a large number of public consultations and consequently received many comments, it was particularly challenging for them to keep track of the exact number of comments. Therefore, they grouped the comments under the umbrella topics, which is why the summary reports only addressed thematic comments. Such an approach is reasonable, thus the coordination agencies that provided information about accepted/rejected comments under the thematic groups but did not provide quantitative data did not receive low scores.

Two coordination agencies, the Ministry of Economy and Sustainable Development and the Ministry of Justice, presented the results of the consultations on the final draft of the strategy document quantitatively and graphically. Quantitative and graphic illustrations of accepted, partially accepted and rejected comments

is easily comprehensible. Furthermore, quantitative information makes it easier to compare and group the feedback acceptance rate across the cases. However, if coordination agencies conduct a large number of public consultations at different stages of policy development and combine various formats of feedback provision, they may find it challenging to keep track of quantitative data. In such cases, grouping the comments under thematic areas and providing qualitative data is sufficient. Three coordination agencies, the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth Affairs, Ministry of Integration and Reconciliation and the State Language Department opted for qualitative grouping and analysis of the feedback. Since this approach is reasonable, the PCI will be updated accordingly for the next year's policy document cohort to capture the instances when quantitative data is not available.

The fourth indicator assesses whether the summary report on the consultations was made publicly available. The availability of the summary report is crucial for ensuring accountability of the government institutions to the public. It also helps to monitor and evaluate the compliance of the public consultation with the requirements set by the Policy Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation Handbook.

The publication of a summary report is obligatory only after the approval of a policy document. Since many coordination agencies postponed the approval deadline, only two summary reports were publicly available by February 2022. Therefore, the evidence to assess the compliance with this indicator is insufficient. Although the research team does not have access to all the summary reports, all coordination agency representatives noted during the interviews that those would be available in foreseeable future.

To summarise, the average score on the accountability criterion was the highest among all the PCI criteria. However, this was not because of the high scores achieved per each indicator but due to the lack of available information. This lead to the exclusion of the strategy document from the scoring. The main challenge from the coordination agencies' perspective was the lack of resources and time to provide justified feedback to all participants. On the other hand, the lack of adequate human and financial resources allocated to public consultation planning and implementation can be illustrative of the coordination agencies' political will. It shows to what extent they prioritise civic participation in decision-making and whether they allocate enough resources for conducting effective public consultations. Finally, coordination agencies should find optimal ways of ensuring accountability to public consultation participants by establishing open institutional culture and easily accessible, less bureaucratic communication channels. The scoring of Criterion IV per each indicator is provided in Table 6.

Table 6. Scoring – Accountability

Criterion 4: Accountability	2.5
4.1. Summary report on public consultations comprehensively describes the goals, processes, and results of the public consultations.	3
4.2. The information about accepted, partially accepted, and rejected comments was provided to the feedback authors.	2.7
4.3. The justified explanation was provided to the feedback authors.	2.4
4.4 Summary report on public consultations is publicly available.	1.5

5. Criterion - Diversity of Participants and Inclusiveness of Public Consultation Process

The study found that ensuring diversity and inclusion of participants was one of the most problematic aspects of the conducted public consultations.

Most coordination agencies took no specific measures to ensure the diversity and inclusion of the participants. While an equal representation of women and men was achieved without prior consideration, most coordination agencies did not make additional efforts to ensure the inclusion of minority groups – such as persons with mental or physical disabilities, religious and ethnic minorities, LGBTQ community, etc. The only exceptions in terms of making additional efforts to ensure the diversity and inclusion of participants from various backgrounds who were not identified as immediate relevant stakeholders were the State Action Plan for Youth Policy Development 2021-2022 and the State Strategy for Civic Equality and Integration 2021 - 2030 with the corresponding action plan. Furthermore, the Ministry of Culture, Youth, and Sports took concrete measures to identify the special needs for each registered individual and address those needs during the meetings. For instance, upon registration, the individuals with disabilities were able to indicate their special needs so that the coordination agency could adapt the consultation process accordingly.

Some representatives emphasised that one should only take additional steps to account for the inclusion if the strategy document explicitly targets minority groups. For instance, the State Strategy for Civic Equality and Integration 2021 - 2030 and Action Plan 2021-2022 identified ethnic minority groups as their direct audience, thus including those groups was necessary due to the very topic of the policy document. The Strategy towards the Elimination of Hepatitis C also identified the persons with the history of substance abuse and drug addiction as the direct stakeholders, thus including them in the public consultation process. Furthermore, LGBTQ individuals were also invited to provide comments. The Strategy for Mental Health Development 2021-2030 and the Action Plan 2021-2023 also ensured the participation of individuals with mental disabilities and relevant NGOs working on this issue. Another policy document that consulted persons with disabilities was the Strategy on Veterans of War and Defence Forces 2022 - 2025 and the Action Plan 2022 - 2023. War veterans were defined as the direct stakeholders and since most of them had physical disabilities, the public consultation process was adapted to their needs.

As mentioned earlier, in most public consultations, an equal representation of women and men was achieved accidentally. The first indicator examines if specific steps had been taken during the public consultation planning process to ensure the engagement of both genders in the consultations. To ensure an equal inclusion of men and women, the importance of gender should be considered at the early stages of public consultation planning. This can be achieved, for instance, by identifying the minimal target share/number of women and men prior to the public consultation planning. It is also important to ensure a balanced discussion. For that, the meeting facilitator should try to encourage the participation of both women and men. Finally, it is advised that coordination agencies consult gender experts while planning their public consultations. Consulting with the gender experts will allow to identify gender specificities for each strategy document and ensure the adoption of the relevant measures.

Another important aspect of the inclusive public consultation process is identifying and engaging vulnerable minority groups. Thus, the second indicator assesses whether the coordination agencies have taken any purposeful steps in the planning process to engage vulnerable minority groups in the public consultations. One of the ways to include these groups in the public consultation process is by keeping the database of the organisations working on the issues of different vulnerable minority groups such as ethnic minorities, persons with disabilities, LGBTQ individuals. During the planning phase of the public consultations, the coordination agencies should contact these organisations to identify vulnerable minority groups and take additional steps to ensure their participation.

As mentioned earlier; most coordination agencies did not take any targeted measures to ensure the diversity and inclusion of the public consultation participants. Most representatives agreed that the additional steps for inclusion should only be made if the strategy document identifies minority groups as direct beneficiaries of the strategy. The data shows that the lack of coordination agencies' understanding of how important it is to ensure the diversity of research participants was one of the main obstacles hampering inclusive public consultation. The lack of financial resources was yet another important challenge as adopting public consultation to the special needs of persons with disabilities and providing translations to the ethnic minority languages required financial resources that the coordination agencies often did not have:

This part, about inclusion, is also related to financial resources. Do you know how much one hour of simultaneous interpretation costs? We do not have such resources. (Coordination agency representative)

However, even considering the lack of financial resources, coordination agencies may still strive to include persons from diverse backgrounds using strategies that do not require additional funds. For instance, keeping the database of the organisations working on the issues of different vulnerable minority groups such as ethnic minorities, persons with disabilities, and LGBTQ individuals would also contribute to the continuity of their effort towards inclusion. Although in such cases direct participation may not be necessarily achieved, communication with the CSOs working with vulnerable minority groups would help bringing their perspective and mainstream their special needs, even if they are not defined as immediate beneficiaries of the policy document.

Keeping the database of thematic organisations helped the Youth Agency to reach out to young persons from different minority groups:

We have a database consisting of around 150 organisations. We have done the mapping to identify organisations that work on different topics. So, since we have this internal database, we can contact them from a very early stage of public consultations, send questionnaires, and involve them in thematic groups (coordination agency representatives)

Furthermore, to ensure continuity of inclusion of participants from diverse backgrounds, it is advised to keep track of the representatives of vulnerable minority groups engaged in the public consultations. The third indicator therefore aims to assess whether the coordination agencies keep records and analyse public consultation participants' belonging to vulnerable minority groups. Keeping such statistical data would help identify the gaps in the public consultation process and draft potential solutions for future improvement. The available data shows that none of the coordination agencies analysed the public consultation participants' belonging to a vulnerable minority group.

It is important to emphasise that only taking concrete steps to identify vulnerable minority groups during the consultation planning is not sufficient. The consultation process itself should also be adapted to the needs of different minority groups to ensure genuine inclusion and diversity of participants. The fourth indicator looks at the inclusion aspect during the public consultation process. For instance, participants should have a possibility of providing feedback in their preferred format (written or oral) or language. In addition, the sign language translation should be ensured during the meeting; the physical space should be adapted to the needs of persons with disabilities, etc.

Since the majority of coordination agencies did not make efforts to include different minority groups, the public consultation process was also not adapted to their special needs. Among public consultations that included participants from vulnerable minority groups (five strategy documents in total), three required adapting the process to the special needs of the participants. The public consultation on the Strategy on Veterans of War

and Defence Forces 2022 - 2025 and the Action Plan 2022 - 2023 was adapted to the needs of one vulnerable group: persons with physical disabilities. The State Strategy for Civic Equality and Integration 2021 - 2030 ensured the participation of ethnic minority groups by providing translation and conducting public consultation in regions populated by ethnic minority groups. The State Action Plan for Youth Policy Development 2021-2022 was the most successful example, engaging youth with disabilities and from diverse ethnic minority backgrounds.

The Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth Affairs came up with the mechanism allowing not to exclude persons with special needs from the consultation process. The registration link included the question if a person required special assistance or had specific needs:

Before each meeting, we had a registration form that included a question about the special needs of a person. I remember, during our visit to one of the regions, one participant mentioned that they were using a wheelchair. Because of that, we decided to change the venue.

The Strategy towards the Elimination of Hepatitis C and The Strategy for Mental Health Development 2021-2030 and the Action Plan 2021-2023 included the objectives that referred to drug users and persons with mental disabilities, respectively. Therefore, both documents required collaboration with different organisations that worked on these topics. While both policy documents involved vulnerable minority groups (drug users and persons with mental disabilities) in the policy discussions, the research team does not have sufficient data to confirm if the coordination agencies pre-identified their special needs or adapted the public consultation processes when necessary.

To conclude, ensuring diversity of the participants was one of the most challenging aspects of the public consultation. The majority of coordination agencies also did not identify it as their priority. In most cases, the coordination agency representatives did not consider minority inclusion to be an essential part of conducting meaningful public consultations. They considered it more important to include the relevant group of participants rather than all minority representatives. Therefore, if the strategy document did not identify vulnerable groups as relevant stakeholders, the minority inclusion was often considered irrelevant and costly. Thus, the average score on the PCI index across all strategy documents was the lowest on this criterion; five strategy documents scored 0 on all indicators and five barely met the minimum requirements of most indicators. Only two strategy documents (the State Strategy for Civic Equality and Integration 2021 - 2030 and Action Plan 2021 - 2022 and State Action Plan for Youth Policy Development 2021-2022 exceeded the minimum scores and were the successful examples. The scoring of Criterion V per each indicator is provided in Table 7.

Table 7. Scoring – Diversity of Participants/Inclusiveness

Criterion 5: Diversity of Participants/Inclusiveness	0.5
5.1. In the public consultation planning process, specific steps have been taken to ensure the active engagement of both genders in the consultations.	0.5
5.2. In the public consultation planning process, specific steps have been taken to identify and engage vulnerable minority groups.	1
5.3. The coordinating agency keeps records of the representatives of vulnerable minority groups engaged in the public consultations.	0.1
5.4. The public consultation process is adapted to the needs of vulnerable minority groups (diverse needs of people with disabilities, ethnic minority groups, etc.)	0.5

6. Criterion - Public Engagement and Interest in Public Consultations

Active engagement of citizens and CSOs is crucial for conducting meaningful public consultations. The engagement and interest from the public varied depending on the strategy document. While some public consultations enjoyed a high level of interest, several representatives of the coordination agencies complained about the lack of interest from the public, despite their attempts. The sixth criterion captures the coordination agencies' assessment of the public engagement and is not part of the total score consisting of the previous five criteria.

The first indicator of the level of public engagement is the number of CSOs/individuals engaged in the public consultations. Overall, almost every public consultation involved more than ten participants. However, there was a significant difference between the number of participants involved in each consultation. For instance, more than 500 participants in total took part in the discussion of the State Action Plan for Youth Policy Development 2021-2022, while some other consultations involved less than fifteen stakeholders.

According to the coordination agency representatives, the topic of the strategy document largely determined the size of the engaged audience:

Participation in public consultations was available to everyone; we even received comments from ordinary citizens. But many international and local organisations were not interested, maybe because the topic of our strategy document was specific and perhaps not so interesting to the wider public. (Coordination agency representative)

While the topic of the policy document influences public interest, coordination agencies' efforts are also important. Much fewer participants were involved when the coordination agencies conducted only one public consultation at the final stage of the policy development. On the contrary, the coordination agencies that conducted several cycles of public consultations managed to engage more participants. Furthermore, utilising a combination of online and offline formats of public consultations also increased the number of engaged persons. Another significant factor that contributed to the higher public engagement was visiting the regions and conducting public consultations with the local population.

The number of unique feedback contributors is the second indicator of public engagement. This indicator measures how many persons/organisations provided their feedback on the policy document. It must be mentioned that when the detailed summary report was not available, the research team relied on information provided by the coordination agencies and CSO representatives to assess this indicator. All coordination agencies received feedback from at least five individuals/organisations. However, in many cases, only experts and/or thematic organisations provided their comments, and no ordinary citizens were involved.

Apart from the topic of the policy document, which naturally influences the degree of public interest, the coordination agencies noted various challenges associated with receiving feedback from CSOs and citizens:

In general, it is often quite problematic for government institutions to involve many participants; we often have to beg for feedback. Sometimes, they called and asked many questions about the deadline, format, etc., but in the end, they did not provide any comments. (Coordination agency representative)

Some of the parties involved did not return their feedback on the strategy. However, from our side, the coordination agency responded to all the participants with explanations as to why someone's feedback was considered and why not. We also wrote back to those who did not provide their feedback. (Coordination agency representative)

Even though not all participants provided their comments, most coordination agency representatives mentioned that the public consultation participants were active during the process. Thus, the average score on the third indicator related to the coordination agencies' evaluation of civil society engagement is close to the maximum (2.8/3).

Although the input of the public consultation participants was assessed as valuable for developing quality documents, the coordination agencies discussed several additional challenges. According to them, some of the

comments were overly unrealistic or even beyond the scope of the policy documents. Such comments failed to add value to the policy documents and were not considered. The fourth indicator relates to this aspect and assesses whether the feedback provided by the public consultation participants was valuable for the improvement of the policy document.

The coordination agency representatives indicated that the great majority of the provided recommendations were relevant and hence taken into consideration, or there were objective reasons for not reflecting on these comments in the policy document:

We received many comments. I would say the feedback received from the CSOs was valuable, it was not just for the sake of formality. (Coordination agency representative)

However, some coordination agency representatives spoke about the challenges associated with analysing and incorporating the comments. It was an additional task to address the irrelevant comments and suggestions that were beyond the scope of the policy document:

Of course, not all comments were relevant, and we did not even expect that. But we still tried to address all comments as much as we could. (Coordination agency representative)

Sometimes, due to the large number of received comments, it was difficult to summarise and connect them in a meaningful way. In such cases, the coordination agencies had to utilise additional resources and time to identify and include the relevant feedback while rejecting irrelevant comments with a justified explanation.

Providing feedback to a coordination agency within the set timeframe is the responsibility of a participants. The fifth indicator hence assesses whether the public consultation participants have provided their input within the allocated deadlines.

According to the coordination agency representatives, most participants provided their comments within the deadline; however, in those cases when the public interest was high, they extended the deadlines to allow more persons to provide their comments. Only in three cases the coordination agency representatives mentioned that some participant provided their feedback a few days after the deadline.

Overall, the available data shows that the engagement of the public was sufficiently high in most cases. Furthermore, even though not every invited party provided their feedback, most coordination agency representatives evaluated the engagement of the public consultation participants favourably. They also believed that the feedback they received during the consultations was valuable and meaningful for the development of a strategy document under discussion. Consequently, the average score for this criterion across all policy documents is 2.7 out of 3. Finally, the coordination agency representatives' perspective also shows that governments can greatly benefit from active citizens and dynamic civil society. Therefore, public engagement is crucial not only for the accountable governance but also it contributes to a better quality of policy documents and promotes sustainable decisions by communicating the needs and expectations of all participants, including the government institutions. The scoring of Criterion VI per each indicator is provided in Table 8.

Table 8. Scoring – Public Engagement/Interest

Criterion 6: Public Engagement/Interest	2.7
6.1. Number of CSOs/individuals engaged.	2.7
6.2. Number of unique feedback contributors.	2.6
6.3. Coordinating agencies' evaluation of civil society engagement.	2.8
6.4. Relevance of the comments provided by the civil society as assessed by the coordinating agency.	2.8
6.5. Timely provision of feedback.	2.6

SUMMARY AND COMPARISON TO THE PREVIOUS STUDY

It is challenging to compare the PCI scores of the public consultations conducted in 2021 to the findings of the previous study conducted around the policy documents from the 2020 cohort. Although both studies use the same methodological tool – the Public Consultation Index (PCI), comprised of six main criteria – in the 2021 study, the indicators and scoring guidelines were revised, expanded, and updated. Moreover, the research team also updated the scoring guidelines to ensure accuracy and replicability of the scoring. If the scoring primarily relied on the researchers' assessments in the previous study, this study took additional efforts to ensure consistency of the measurement and accuracy of the tool. Therefore, the decline in the scores should not necessarily be seen as an indication of the deterioration of public consultations quality. On the other hand, the progress in the scores should be interpreted as a positive step towards more meaningful, effective, and inclusive decision-making.

To summarise the research findings, the total average score of all public consultations covered in the current study was 1.4 (out of 3), indicating that most of the conducted public consultations met the minimum requirements set by the Public Consultation Index (PCI) and corresponded to the relevant local standards. There appears to be a slight decline in the overall score compared to the previous 2020 policy document cohort (1.8/3). However, as mentioned earlier, the lower score can be explained by the changes in the PCI.

Among the criteria that measure coordination agencies' efforts, the Accountability (2.5/3) and Effectiveness of Public Consultation Process (2.1/3) showed the highest scores. Similarly, the public consultations conducted around the 2020 policy document cohort also scored the highest on the Accountability (2.2/3) and Effectiveness of the Public Consultation Process (2.6/3) criteria. Overall, the data indicates that the coordination agencies performed better when they received comprehensive training on the guidelines and requirements on planning the public consultations, drafting summary reports, and clearly defined requirements for providing justified explanations to the feedback authors. While in 2020 only a few coordination agency representatives had a comprehensive understanding of the new rules and procedures outlined in the Policy Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation Handbook, in 2021 more coordination agency representatives received training, thus they were better informed on how to conduct successful and meaningful public consultations.

Most public consultations met or exceeded the minimal requirements on the criteria measuring Accessibility and Openness for both 2020 and 2021 policy documents cohorts. The scores were also relatively similar for both years: Accessibility - 0.7/3 in 2021 and 1/3 in 2020; Openness 1.6/3 and 1.8/3, respectively. To measure the Accessibility of the public consultation process, the 2021 study added several indicators to include the key principles of the GESI framework. For this reason, the total score per this criterion slightly declined compared to the previous year. On the positive side, the consultation processes were generally more open and more interested persons or organisations had an opportunity to get engaged in the public consultations.

However, one of the most problematic aspects was ensuring the diversity and inclusion of the participants. In the 2021 study, most coordination agencies failed to meet the minimum requirements of this criterion except for two coordination agencies. Thus, the average score per this indicator was the lowest in 2021 (0.5/3). It was also one of the lowest in 2020 (1.3/3), the only indicator that scored lower was Accessibility (1/3). In the previous year, the criterion 5: Diversity of Participants was vaguely defined and did not address the inclusion of various disadvantaged groups. The present study took additional effort to highlight the importance of inclusive decision-making and participation of people with different special needs.

The criterion measuring Public Engagement and Interest from the coordination agencies' perspective was not significantly updated; therefore, it allows for a more straightforward comparison with the previous year's study. This criterion has seen the most significant increase in the score from 2/3 in 2020 to 2.7/3 in 2021. Such increase indicates that the public interest has grown and shows that the coordination agencies assess the level of engagement of citizens more favourably and consider that the feedback provided by the public consultation participants was valuable for the improvement of the policy document. Table 9 compares the average scores per criterion from the 2020 and 2021 studies.

Table 9 – Comparison of Average Scores from 2020 and 2021

Indicator/Criterion	2021	2020
Overall score for criterion 1: Accessibility	0.7	1
Overall score for criterion 2: Openness	1.6	1.8
Overall score for criterion 3: Effectiveness of Public Consultation Process	2.1	2.6
Overall score for criterion 4: Accountability	2.5	2.2
Overall score for criterion 5: Diversity of Participants	0.5	1.3
PCI Total Score	1.4	1.8
Overall score for criterion 6: Public Engagement/Interest	2.7	2.0

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Depending on the context, government entities have different understanding of what criteria “good” public consultation should meet. While over the recent years Georgia has made significant achievements towards open governance and the establishment of transparent, effective, and accountable decision-making, various challenges remain. While the progress should be noted, one of the areas that needs improvement is the public consultation component, which is an integral part of the Public Administration Reform (PAR).

High-quality participatory processes may have different objectives, values, and qualities; however, they share several similar standards that contribute to the effective and meaningful engagement of the public. To assess the quality of the public consultation process, the study updated and revised the Public Consultation Index (PCI) that was created in line with the best practices outlined in the literature, Georgian legislative framework, and the feedback received from the participants of the validation workshops. The study identified several challenges and scoped out best practices on the six PCI criteria: accessibility, openness, effectiveness of the public consultation process, accountability, diversity of participants, and public engagement.

The research findings show that overall, most of the conducted public consultations met the minimum requirements set in the Policy Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation Handbook. However, they still fail to meet the best international standards. Furthermore, there was a significant difference between the quality of the public consultations conducted by different coordination agencies and their scores on the PCI indicators varied significantly. While various factors can influence the quality of public consultations, this study found that knowledge of good practices of civic participation, political will of coordination agencies, and donor support contribute to meaningful and effective bottom-up decision-making and have a reinforcing effect on each other.

Based on the study findings, the research team developed recommendations for the Administration of the Government of Georgia and the coordination agencies to improve the public consultations.

Recommendations

Recommendations for the Administration of the Government of Georgia:

- Raise awareness and increase capacity of the coordination agencies regarding the existing standards and best practices of conducting public consultations in the policy development process.
- Train all public servants and public sector employees (both at the Ministry and LEPL level) engaged in the policy development on the minimum requirements and recommendations for conducting public consultations outlined in the Policy Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation Handbook.
- Develop a detailed guide (or approve Annex II) and corresponding training modules on how to conduct public consultations (objectives, planning, implementation, forms, reporting, and evaluation). Disseminate the information and conduct training of the relevant employees of the coordination agencies.
- Spread the information about the local best practices of conducting public consultations through information campaigns, thematic events, dissemination of printed and electronic materials, etc.
- Use the Public Consultation Index to encourage the coordination agencies to do more than the minimum requirements (Decree #629) for conducting public consultations. For instance, through wide recognition/acknowledgment of the coordination agencies which score the highest on the index.
- Make the inclusion of vulnerable minority groups (or organisations representing their interests) in the public consultations mandatory, at least relevant/target vulnerable minority groups for each policy document.

- Collaborate with international donors to create digital mechanisms which would simplify the communication and public consultation process between the coordination agencies and the public.

Recommendations for the Coordination Agencies

- Make consultation announcements publicly available - disseminate the public consultation announcements through multiple communication channels to increase the accessibility and make the information easily discoverable for the interested persons.
- Make policy document and/or policy brief available in plain language - in cases when specific knowledge is required to comprehend a policy document, it is desirable that the coordination entity prepares a policy brief written in plain language and an easily comprehensible format to ensure engagement of both organisations and ordinary citizens.
- Make a public consultation announcement, policy document and/or policy brief accessible for major ethnic minority groups living in Georgia – to ensure the inclusion in the policy development process, the public announcement should be available in the languages of ethnic minorities.
- Adapt the public announcement, policy document, and/or policy brief to the needs of persons with disabilities – to ensure their inclusion in the policy development process, the information contained in the public announcement should be adapted to their needs. For instance, the announcement could be printed in Braille code or available as an audio or video clip accompanied with a sign language translation, etc.
- Conduct public consultations in more than one format – using diverse methods to conduct public consultations ensures greater engagement of the wide public in the policy development process.
- Use diverse mechanisms for collecting feedback in the public consultation process – for instance, written feedback through email, comments on the web page or social media, feedback by phone, oral feedback during the meetings, written feedback in chats, Google forms, or other online survey formats.
- Conduct public consultations at all stages of policy development – the coordination agencies should involve public from the strategy concept phase instead of only at the final stage of the strategy development. This ensures more productive collaboration and contributes to a meaningful public consultation process. Conduct public consultations on the municipal level – this allows for participation of wider public from the regions and municipalities and thus, contributes to decentralisation of decision-making.
- Improve and enforce quality standards for summary reports of public consultations – ensure compliance with the minimum requirements outlined in the Policy Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation Handbook. Furthermore, it is advisable that the summary reports contain additional details about the goals and process of public consultations; information about the used communication channels, approaches, and activities, methodology that was applied for the analysis of collected comments, and whether any feedback was provided to the authors of the comments.
- Make additional targeted efforts to ensure inclusion and diversity of participants – take concrete steps in the planning process to identify and engage vulnerable minority groups in the public consultations. Keep the database of the CSOs working with various vulnerable minority groups.
- Gather data on the diversity of participants – this data should be used to provide a statistical overview for the summary reports on the public consultations and reach out to minority groups for future events.
- Improve communication mechanisms with CSOs and general public. Reducing bureaucratic hurdles can increase civic participation.
- Encourage employees to adopt and develop pilot participatory projects and outreach strategies.

ANNEX I: PUBLIC CONSULTATION INDEX (PCI) ASSESSMENT PER STRATEGY

The State Strategy for Civic Equality and Integration 2021 – 2030 and 2021-2022 Action Plan

The State Strategy for Civic Equality and Integration 2021 – 2030 and 2021 – 2022 Action Plan achieved one of the highest scores on the PCI, with a total score of 2.4/3. The public consultations met most criteria of good international practices and the relevant local standards. The announcement about the planned public consultations was disseminated through public channels and participation was open to all interested parties. The announcement was disseminated reasonably early before the event, the information in the announcement was sufficient, public consultations were conducted in at least two formats and multiple feedback mechanisms were ensured. Furthermore, sufficient time was provided for feedback and public consultations were conducted at three different stages of the policy development. Among other criteria, the strategy scored the least on the criterion measuring diversity and inclusion (1.8/3) yet had one of the highest scores compared to other policy documents.

From the coordination agencies' perspective, public engagement and interest were also high (3/3). More than 200 individuals were actively involved in the process. Overall, The State Strategy for Civic Equality and Integration 2021 – 2030 and 2021 – 2022 Action Plan is an example of an effective and meaningful public consultation process.

Table 10: Public Consultation Index (PCI) Scoring for the State Strategy for Civic Equality and Integration 2021-2030 and 2021-2022 Action Plan

Indicator/Criterion	Score
Overall score for criterion 1: Accessibility	1.9
1.1. Public consultation announcement was disseminated through at least one public channel.	3
1.2. Policy document and/or policy brief was made publicly available.	3
1.3. Policy document and/or policy brief is available in plain language, easily comprehensible format, and those without field expertise can understand it.	3
1.4. The public announcement was accessible for major ethnic minority groups living in Georgia (in the Azerbaijani, Armenian and Abkhaz languages)	2
1.5. Policy document and/or policy brief was accessible for major ethnic minority groups living in Georgia (in the Azerbaijani, Armenian and Abkhaz languages)	0
1.6. The public announcement was adapted to the needs of people with disabilities (e.g. Braille code, audio version, sign language translation, etc.)	2
1.7. Policy document and/or policy brief was adapted to the needs of people with disabilities (e.g. Braille code, audio version, sign language translation, etc.)	0
Overall score for criterion 2: Openness	3
2.1. Any interested person or organisation (CSOs, private sector organisations, ordinary citizens, etc.) has an opportunity to participate in public consultation.	3
2.2. All interested or engaged persons/organisations have an opportunity to comment/provide feedback on the policy document.	3
Overall score for criterion 3: Effectiveness of Public Consultation Process	2.8
3.1. The public announcement was disseminated at least one week before the start of the public consultation process.	3

Indicator/Criterion	Score
3.2. Information in the public announcement is sufficient (corresponds with the recommendations outlined in Chapter 3.5 of the Policy Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation Handbook).	3
3.3. Public consultations were conducted in more than one format.	3
3.4. More than one mechanism for feedback collection was ensured.	2
3.5. Sufficient time (depending on the consultation format) was allocated for the provision of feedback.	3
3.6. Public consultations were conducted at minimum one stage of the policy development cycle.	3
Overall score for criterion 4: Accountability	2.7
4.1. Summary report on public consultations comprehensively describes the goals, processes, and results of the public consultations.	3
4.2. The information about accepted, partially accepted, and rejected comments was provided to the feedback authors.	2
4.3. The justified explanation was provided to the feedback authors.	N/A
4.4 Summary report on public consultations is publicly available.	3
Overall score for criterion 5: Diversity of Participants	1.8
5.1. In the public consultation planning process, specific steps have been taken to ensure the active engagement of both genders in the consultations.	2
5.2. In the public consultation planning process, specific steps have been taken to identify and engage vulnerable minority groups.	3
5.3. The coordination agency keeps records of the representatives of vulnerable minority groups engaged in the public consultations.	0
5.4. The public consultation process is adapted to the needs of vulnerable minority groups (diverse needs of people with disabilities, ethnic minority groups, etc.)	2
Total Score	2.4
Overall score for criterion 6: Public Engagement/Interest	3
6.1. Number of CSOs/individuals engaged.	3
6.2. Number of unique feedback contributors.	3
6.3. Coordination agencies' evaluation of civil society engagement.	3
6.4. Relevance of the comments provided by the civil society as assessed by the coordination agency.	3
6.5. Timely provision of feedback.	3

2021-2025 Strategy for Protection of Children Living and/or Working in the Street from all Sorts of Violence including Human Trafficking

2021-2025 Strategy for Protection of Children Living and/or Working in the Street from all Sorts of Violence including Human Trafficking met the minimal requirements of the PCI and achieved the overall score of 1.5/3. The strategy met or exceeded the minimal requirements of the criteria measuring openness (1.5/3), effectiveness of the process (2/3) and accountability (3/3), however, scored 0 on the criteria related to accessibility and diversity of the participants. The main drawback of the consultations was that they only targeted thematic organisations and experts and did not involve the wider public. On the positive side, the strategy document achieved the highest score on accountability (3/3), meaning that the summary report meets the standards, and a justified explanation was provided to the feedback authors.

Coordination agencies' evaluation of civil society engagement was relatively low (1/3). It should be emphasised that not all invited CSOs expressed their interest or provided feedback on the strategy document. Therefore, despite the efforts from the coordination agency, the number of involved participants remained relatively low compared to other successful examples from the 2021 cohort. However, while the wider public was not engaged in policy discussion, overall, the engagement of involved organisations was sufficient (1.8/3). Relatively low interest of the public posed a challenge for coordination agencies to implement high-quality public consultations. This underlines the importance of citizen participation culture for conducting successful public consultations.

Table 11: Public Consultation Index (PCI) Scoring for 2021-2025 Strategy for Protection of Children Living and/or Working in the Street from all sorts of Violence Including Human Trafficking

Indicator/Criterion	Score
Overall score for criterion 1: Accessibility	0
1.1. Public consultation announcement was disseminated through at least one public channel.	0
1.2. Policy document and/or policy brief was made publicly available.	0
1.3. Policy document and/or policy brief is available in plain language, easily comprehensible format, and those without field expertise can understand it..	0
1.4. The public announcement was accessible for major ethnic minority groups living in Georgia (in the Azerbaijani, Armenian and Abkhaz languages)	N/A
1.5. Policy document and/or policy brief was accessible for major ethnic minority groups living in Georgia (in the Azerbaijani, Armenian and Abkhaz languages)	0
1.6. The public announcement was adapted to the needs of people with disabilities (e.g. Braille code, audio version, sign language translation, etc.)	0
1.7. Policy document and/or policy brief was adapted to the needs of people with disabilities (e.g. Braille code, audio version, sign language translation, etc.)	0
Overall score for criterion 2: Openness	1.5
2.1. Any interested person or organisation (CSOs, private sector organisations, ordinary citizens, etc.) has an opportunity to participate in public consultation.	1
2.2. All interested or engaged persons/organisations have an opportunity to comment/provide feedback on the policy document.	2
Overall score for criterion 3: Effectiveness of Public Consultation Process	2
3.1. The public announcement was disseminated at least one week before the start of the public consultation process.	2
3.2. Information in the public announcement is sufficient (corresponds with the recommendations outlined in Chapter 3.5 of the Policy Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation Handbook).	N/A
3.3. Public consultations were conducted in more than one format.	N/A
3.4. More than one mechanism for feedback collection was ensured.	2
3.5. Sufficient time (depending on the consultation format) was allocated for the provision of feedback.	2
3.6. Public consultations were conducted at minimum one stage of the policy development cycle.	2
Overall score for criterion 4: Accountability	3
4.1. Summary report on public consultations comprehensively describes the goals, processes, and results of the public consultations.	3
4.2. The information about accepted, partially accepted, and rejected comments was provided to the feedback authors.	3
4.3. The justified explanation was provided to the feedback authors.	3
4.4. Summary report on public consultations is publicly available.	N/A
Overall score for criterion 5: Diversity of Participants	0
5.1. In the public consultation planning process, specific steps have been taken to ensure the active engagement of both genders in the consultations.	0

Indicator/Criterion	Score
5.2. In the public consultation planning process, specific steps have been taken to identify and engage vulnerable minority groups.	0
5.3. The coordination agency keeps records of the representatives of vulnerable minority groups engaged in the public consultations.	0
5.4. The public consultation process is adapted to the needs of vulnerable minority groups (diverse needs of people with disabilities, ethnic minority groups, etc.)	0
Total Score	1.3
Overall score for criterion 6: Public Engagement/Interest	1.8
6.1. Number of CSOs/individuals engaged.	1
6.2. Number of unique feedback contributors.	2
6.3. Coordination agencies' evaluation of civil society engagement.	1
6.4. Relevance of the comments provided by the civil society as assessed by the coordination agency.	3
6.5. Timely provision of feedback.	2

Unified Strategy for Education and Science of Georgia 2022-2030 and its Action Plan 2022-2023

The consultations around the Unified Strategy for Education and Science of Georgia 2022-2030 and its Action Plan 2022-2023 met all aspects of the indicators on the criteria measuring openness (3/3) and effectiveness of the process (2.5/3), minimally satisfied the standards regarding accessibility (1.1/3) and diversity of participants (0.5/3). The data on accountability criterion was not sufficient since the summary report is not yet finalised, therefore, this criterion was not assessed. The strategy document and announcement about the public consultation were available on public channels that also ensured openness of the process. However, the document was not accessible in the languages of major ethnic minority groups living in Georgia and for people with disabilities. Thus, in the public consultation planning process, no specific steps have been taken to ensure the diversity of participants. Overall, the public consultation process was effective and open to the interested CSOs as well as ordinary citizens.

Furthermore, the coordination agency assessed public engagement and interest favourably (3/3). The total average score on this criterion is 2.8/3.

Table 12: Public Consultation Index (PCI) Scoring for Unified Strategy for Education and Science of Georgia 2022-2030 and its Action Plan 2022-2023

Indicator/Criterion	Score
Overall score for criterion 1: Accessibility	1.1
1.1. Public consultation announcement was disseminated through at least one public channel.	2
1.2. Policy document and/or policy brief was made publicly available.	3
1.3. Policy document and/or policy brief is available in plain language, easily comprehensible format, and those without field expertise can understand it.	3
1.4. The public announcement was accessible for major ethnic minority groups living in Georgia (in the Azerbaijani, Armenian and Abkhaz languages)	0
1.5. Policy document and/or policy brief was accessible for major ethnic minority groups living in Georgia (in the Azerbaijani, Armenian and Abkhaz languages)	0
1.6. The public announcement was adapted to the needs of people with disabilities (e.g. Braille code, audio version, sign language translation, etc.)	0

Indicator/Criterion	Score
1.7. Policy document and/or policy brief was adapted to the needs of people with disabilities (e.g. Braille code, audio version, sign language translation, etc.)	0
Overall score for criterion 2: Openness	3
2.1. Any interested person or organisation (CSOs, private sector organisations, ordinary citizens, etc.) has an opportunity to participate in public consultation.	3
2.2. All interested or engaged persons/organisations have an opportunity to comment/provide feedback on the policy document.	3
Overall score for criterion 3: Effectiveness of Public Consultation Process	2.5
3.1. The public announcement was disseminated at least one week before the start of the public consultation process.	3
3.2. Information in the public announcement is sufficient (corresponds with the recommendations outlined in Chapter 3.5 of the Policy Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation Handbook).	3
3.3. Public consultations were conducted in more than one format.	2
3.4. More than one mechanism for feedback collection was ensured.	2
3.5. Sufficient time (depending on the consultation format) was allocated for the provision of feedback.	3
3.6. Public consultations were conducted at minimum one stage of the policy development cycle.	2
Overall score for criterion 4: Accountability	N/A
4.1. Summary report on public consultations comprehensively describes the goals, processes, and results of the public consultations.	N/A
4.2. The information about accepted, partially accepted, and rejected comments was provided to the feedback authors.	N/A
4.3. The justified explanation was provided to the feedback authors.	N/A
4.4 Summary report on public consultations is publicly available.	N/A
Overall score for criterion 5: Diversity of Participants	0.5
5.1. In the public consultation planning process, specific steps have been taken to ensure the active engagement of both genders in the consultations.	1
5.2. In the public consultation planning process, specific steps have been taken to identify and engage vulnerable minority groups.	1
5.3. The coordination agency keeps records of the representatives of vulnerable minority groups engaged in the public consultations.	0
5.4. The public consultation process is adapted to the needs of vulnerable minority groups (diverse needs of people with disabilities, ethnic minority groups, etc.)	0
Total Score	1.8
Overall score for criterion 6: Public Engagement/Interest	2.8
6.1. Number of CSOs/individuals engaged.	3
6.2. Number of unique feedback contributors.	3
6.3. Coordination agencies' evaluation of civil society engagement.	3
6.4. Relevance of the comments provided by the civil society as assessed by the coordination agency.	2
6.5. Timely provision of feedback.	3

The State Strategy for Veterans of War and Military Forces 2022 – 2025 and 2022 -2023 Action Plan

The State Strategy for Veterans of War and Military Forces 2022 – 2025 and 2022 -2023 Action Plan achieved one of the lowest scores on the PCI, with a total score of 0.3/3. The highest score was achieved on the Public Engagement/Interest criterion (1/3), meaning that public engagement was sufficient from the coordination agency's perspective. Yet on the Accessibility and Openness criteria the public consultation scored 0. The public consultations did not meet most criteria of good international practices and the relevant local standards. The announcement about planned public consultations was not disseminated through public channels and participation was only open to the specific groups of beneficiaries (veterans with disabilities). The information that the participants received about the consultation was limited. The announcement was disseminated reasonably early before the event. Only one face-to-face public consultation was conducted, and it involved six beneficiaries. Solely one format was ensured for the feedback provision - participants had an opportunity to provide comments regarding the policy documents during the meeting. The final report has not been developed as of February 2022, thus this aspect was not assessed.

Table 13: Public Consultation Index (PCI) Scoring for the State Strategy for Veterans of War and Military Forces 2022-2025 and 2022-2023 Action Plan

Indicator/Criterion	Score
Overall score for criterion 1: Accessibility	0
1.1. Public consultation announcement was disseminated through at least one public channel.	0
1.2. Policy document and/or policy brief was made publicly available.	0
1.3. Policy document and/or policy brief is available in plain language, easily comprehensible format, and those without field expertise can understand it..	N/A
1.4. The public announcement was accessible for major ethnic minority groups living in Georgia (in the Azerbaijani, Armenian and Abkhaz languages)	N/A
1.5. Policy document and/or policy brief was accessible for major ethnic minority groups living in Georgia (in the Azerbaijani, Armenian and Abkhaz languages)	N/A
1.6. The public announcement was adapted to the needs of people with disabilities (e.g. Braille code, audio version, sign language translation, etc.)	N/A
1.7. Policy document and/or policy brief was adapted to the needs of people with disabilities (e.g. Braille code, audio version, sign language translation, etc.)	0
Overall score for criterion 2: Openness	0
2.1. Any interested person or organisation (CSOs, private sector organisations, ordinary citizens, etc.) has an opportunity to participate in public consultation.	0
2.2. All interested or engaged persons/organisations have an opportunity to comment/provide feedback on the policy document.	0
Overall score for criterion 3: Effectiveness of Public Consultation Process	0.6
3.1. The public announcement was disseminated at least one week before the start of the public consultation process.	1
3.2. Information in the public announcement is sufficient (corresponds with the recommendations outlined in Chapter 3.5 of the Policy Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation Handbook).	N/A
3.3. Public consultations were conducted in more than one format.	0
3.4. More than one mechanism for feedback collection was ensured.	1
3.5. Sufficient time (depending on the consultation format) was allocated for the provision of feedback.	0
3.6. Public consultations were conducted at minimum one stage of the policy development cycle.	1

Indicator/Criterion	Score
Overall score for criterion 4: Accountability	N/A
4.1. Summary report on public consultations comprehensively describes the goals, processes, and results of the public consultations.	N/A
4.2. The information about accepted, partially accepted, and rejected comments was provided to the feedback authors.	N/A
4.3. The justified explanation was provided to the feedback authors.	N/A
4.4 Summary report on public consultations is publicly available.	N/A
Overall score for criterion 5: Diversity of Participants	0.67
5.1. In the public consultation planning process, specific steps have been taken to ensure the active engagement of both genders in the consultations.	N/A
5.2. In the public consultation planning process, specific steps have been taken to identify and engage vulnerable minority groups.	1
5.3. The coordination agency keeps records of the representatives of vulnerable minority groups engaged in the public consultations.	0
5.4. The public consultation process is adapted to the needs of vulnerable minority groups (diverse needs of people with disabilities, ethnic minority groups, etc.)	1
Total Score	0.32
Overall score for criterion 6: Public Engagement/Interest	1
6.1. Number of CSOs/individuals engaged.	1
6.2. Number of unique feedback contributors.	1
6.3. Coordination agencies' evaluation of civil society engagement.	N/A
6.4. Relevance of the comments provided by the civil society as assessed by the coordination agency.	N/A
6.5. Timely provision of feedback.	N/A

The State Strategy for State Language 2021 – 2030 and 2021-2022 Action Plan

The State Strategy for State Language 2021 – 2030 and 2021-2022 Action Plan achieved a score of 1.82/3 on the PCI, meaning that, overall, the public consultations satisfied the minimum requirements. The coordination agency representative positively assessed participation. The maximum scores were received on Accountability (3/3) and Public Engagement/Interest criteria (3/3). On the criterion measuring Diversity of Participants, the strategy document received 0, meaning that no steps were taken to ensure inclusive participation. Overall, the public consultations met a number of indicators, however, there were several challenges. The announcement of planned public consultations was not disseminated through public channels; it only targeted thematic organisations and experts and did not involve the wider public. On the positive side, the announcement was disseminated reasonably early before the event. The consultations were conducted in an online format and multiple feedback mechanisms were ensured. Furthermore, sufficient time was provided for the feedback. The participants also received justified responses and explanations about which of their feedbacks were considered or rejected.

Table 14: Public Consultation Index (PCI) Scoring for the State Strategy for State Language 2021-2030 and 2021-2022 Action Plan

Indicator/Criterion	Score
Overall score for criterion 1: Accessibility	1.5
1.1. Public consultation announcement was disseminated through at least one public channel.	0
1.2. Policy document and/or policy brief was made publicly available.	3
1.3. Policy document and/or policy brief is available in plain language, easily comprehensible format, and those without field expertise can understand it..	N/A
1.4. The public announcement was accessible for major ethnic minority groups living in Georgia (in the Azerbaijani, Armenian and Abkhaz languages)	N/A
1.5. Policy document and/or policy brief was accessible for major ethnic minority groups living in Georgia (in the Azerbaijani, Armenian and Abkhaz languages)	N/A
1.6. The public announcement was adapted to the needs of people with disabilities (e.g. Braille code, audio version, sign language translation, etc.)	N/A
1.7. Policy document and/or policy brief was adapted to the needs of people with disabilities (e.g. Braille code, audio version, sign language translation, etc.)	N/A
Overall score for criterion 2: Openness	2
2.1. Any interested person or organisation (CSOs, private sector organisations, ordinary citizens, etc.) has an opportunity to participate in public consultation.	1
2.2. All interested or engaged persons/organisations have an opportunity to comment/provide feedback on the policy document.	3
Overall score for criterion 3: Effectiveness of Public Consultation Process	2.6
3.1. The public announcement was disseminated at least one week before the start of the public consultation process.	2
3.2. Information in the public announcement is sufficient (corresponds with the recommendations outlined in Chapter 3.5 of the Policy Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation Handbook).	N/A
3.3. Public consultations were conducted in more than one format.	3
3.4. More than one mechanism for feedback collection was ensured.	3
3.5. Sufficient time (depending on the consultation format) was allocated for the provision of feedback.	2
3.6. Public consultations were conducted at minimum one stage of the policy development cycle.	3
Overall score for criterion 4: Accountability	3
4.1. Summary report on public consultations comprehensively describes the goals, processes, and results of the public consultations.	3
4.2. The information about accepted, partially accepted, and rejected comments was provided to the feedback authors.	3
4.3. The justified explanation was provided to the feedback authors.	3
4.4. Summary report on public consultations is publicly available.	3
Overall score for criterion 5: Diversity of Participants	0
5.1. In the public consultation planning process, specific steps have been taken to ensure the active engagement of both genders in the consultations.	0
5.2. In the public consultation planning process, specific steps have been taken to identify and engage vulnerable minority groups.	0
5.3. The coordination agency keeps records of the representatives of vulnerable minority groups engaged in the public consultations.	0
5.4. The public consultation process is adapted to the needs of vulnerable minority groups (diverse needs of people with disabilities, ethnic minority groups, etc.)	0
Total Score	1.82

Indicator/Criterion	Score
Overall score for criterion 6: Public Engagement/Interest	3
6.1. Number of CSOs/individuals engaged.	3
6.2. Number of unique feedback contributors.	3
6.3. Coordination agencies' evaluation of civil society engagement.	3
6.4. Relevance of the comments provided by the civil society as assessed by the coordination agency.	3
6.5. Timely provision of feedback.	3

The State Strategy for SME Development of Georgia 2021-2025 and Action Plan 2021-2022

The State Strategy for SME Development of Georgia 2021 – 2025 and Action Plan 2021 - 2022 achieved an average score of 1.25/3 on the PCI. The sixth criterion measuring Public Engagement/Interest achieved the highest score (3/3), while Diversity of Participants got the lowest (0/3). The Effectiveness of Public Consultation Process received (2/3), Accountability was (2.25/3). The public consultations met a number of indicators: The announcement was disseminated reasonably early before the event. Consultations were conducted in an online format and multiple feedback mechanisms were ensured. Furthermore, sufficient time was provided for the feedback. Participants also received justified feedback on which of their comments were considered and which were not. However, the announcement about the planned public consultations was not disseminated through public channels and it only targeted thematic organisations and experts. Thus, engagement of the wider public was not ensured.

Table 15: Public Consultation Index (PCI) Scoring for the State Strategy for SME Development of Georgia 2021-2025 and Action Plan 2021-2022

Indicator/Criterion	Score
Overall score for criterion 1: Accessibility	0
1.1. Public consultation announcement was disseminated through at least one public channel.	0
1.2. Policy document and/or policy brief was made publicly available.	0
1.3. Policy document and/or policy brief is available in plain language, easily comprehensible format, and those without field expertise can understand it..	N/A
1.4.The public announcement was accessible for major ethnic minority groups living in Georgia (in the Azerbaijani, Armenian and Abkhaz languages)	N/A
1.5. Policy document and/or policy brief was accessible for major ethnic minority groups living in Georgia (in the Azerbaijani, Armenian and Abkhaz languages)	N/A
1.6.The public announcement was adapted to the needs of people with disabilities (e.g. Braille code, audio version, sign language translation, etc.)	N/A
1.7. Policy document and/or policy brief was adapted to the needs of people with disabilities (e.g. Braille code, audio version, sign language translation, etc.)	N/A
Overall score for criterion 2: Openness	1
2.1. Any interested person or organisation (CSOs, private sector organisations, ordinary citizens, etc.) has an opportunity to participate in public consultation.	0
2.2. All interested or engaged persons/organisations have an opportunity to comment/provide feedback on the policy document.	2
Indicator/Criterion	Score

Overall score for criterion 3: Effectiveness of Public Consultation Process	2
3.1. The public announcement was disseminated at least one week before the start of the public consultation process.	2
3.2. Information in the public announcement is sufficient (corresponds with the recommendations outlined in Chapter 3.5 of the Policy Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation Handbook).	N/A
3.3. Public consultations were conducted in more than one format.	1
3.4. More than one mechanism for feedback collection was ensured.	2
3.5. Sufficient time (depending on the consultation format) was allocated for the provision of feedback.	3
3.6. Public consultations were conducted at minimum one stage of the policy development cycle.	2
Overall score for criterion 4: Accountability	2.25
4.1. Summary report on public consultations comprehensively describes the goals, processes, and results of the public consultations.	3
4.2. The information about accepted, partially accepted, and rejected comments was provided to the feedback authors.	3
4.3. The justified explanation was provided to the feedback authors.	3
4.4 Summary report on public consultations is publicly available.	0
Overall score for criterion 5: Diversity of Participants	0
5.1. In the public consultation planning process, specific steps have been taken to ensure the active engagement of both genders in the consultations.	0
5.2. In the public consultation planning process, specific steps have been taken to identify and engage vulnerable minority groups.	0
5.3. The coordination agency keeps records of the representatives of vulnerable minority groups engaged in the public consultations.	0
5.4. The public consultation process is adapted to the needs of vulnerable minority groups (diverse needs of people with disabilities, ethnic minority groups, etc.)	0
Total Score	1.25
Overall score for criterion 6: Public Engagement/Interest	3
6.1. Number of CSOs/individuals engaged.	3
6.2. Number of unique feedback contributors.	3
6.3. Coordination agencies' evaluation of civil society engagement.	N/A
6.4. Relevance of the comments provided by the civil society as assessed by the coordination agency.	3
6.5. Timely provision of feedback.	3

The State Strategy for Transport and Logistics 2021-2030 and Action Plan 2021-2022

The State Strategy for Transport and Logistics 2021-2030 and Action Plan 2021-2022 achieved an average score of 1.57/3 on the PCI. Accountability and Public Engagement/Interest criteria scored 3/3, meaning that the public interest was high and coordination agency representatives assessed civic participation favourably. The strategy document received the lowest score on the criterion measuring Diversity of Participants (0/3), meaning that specific steps have not been taken for the identification and engagement of vulnerable minority groups. However, on the criteria measuring Openness and Effectiveness of the Public Consultation Process, the public consultations scored above average. The summary report of public consultations was not developed during the fieldwork phase of this study, however, the interviewed public consultation participants emphasised that they received justified and well-elaborated feedback on which of their comments were considered/rejected.

Table 16: Public Consultation Index (PCI) Scoring for the State Strategy for Transport and Logistics 2021-2030 and Action Plan 2021-2022

Indicator/Criterion	Score
Overall score for criterion 1: Accessibility	0.7
1.1. Public consultation announcement was disseminated through at least one public channel.	1
1.2. Policy document and/or policy brief was made publicly available.	3
1.3. Policy document and/or policy brief is available in plain language, easily comprehensible format, and those without field expertise can understand it..	N/A
1.4.The public announcement was accessible for major ethnic minority groups living in Georgia (in the Azerbaijani, Armenian and Abkhaz languages)	0
1.5.Policy document and/or policy brief was accessible for major ethnic minority groups living in Georgia (in the Azerbaijani, Armenian and Abkhaz languages)	0
1.6.The public announcement was adapted to the needs of people with disabilities (e.g. Braille code, audio version, sign language translation, etc.)	0
1.7.Policy document and/or policy brief was adapted to the needs of people with disabilities (e.g. Braille code, audio version, sign language translation, etc.)	0
Overall score for criterion 2: Openness	2
2.1.Any interested person or organisation (CSOs, private sector organisations, ordinary citizens, etc.) has an opportunity to participate in public consultation.	1
2.2.All interested or engaged persons/organisations have an opportunity to comment/provide feedback on the policy document.	3
Overall score for criterion 3: Effectiveness of Public Consultation Process	2.2
3.1.The public announcement was disseminated at least one week before the start of the public consultation process.	2
3.2.Information in the public announcement is sufficient (corresponds with the recommendations outlined in Chapter 3.5 of the Policy Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation Handbook).	3
3.3.Public consultations were conducted in more than one format.	1
3.4.More than one mechanism for feedback collection was ensured.	2
3.5.Sufficient time (depending on the consultation format) was allocated for the provision of feedback.	3
3.6.Public consultations were conducted at minimum one stage of the policy development cycle.	2
Overall score for criterion 4: Accountability	3
4.1.Summary report on public consultations comprehensively describes the goals, processes, and results of the public consultations.	N/A
4.2.The information about accepted, partially accepted, and rejected comments was provided to the feedback authors.	3
4.3.The justified explanation was provided to the feedback authors.	3
4.4 Summary report on public consultations is publicly available.	N/A
Overall score for criterion 5: Diversity of Participants	0
5.1.In the public consultation planning process, specific steps have been taken to ensure the active engagement of both genders in the consultations.	0
5.2.In the public consultation planning process, specific steps have been taken to identify and engage vulnerable minority groups.	0
5.3.The coordination agency keeps records of the representatives of vulnerable minority groups engaged in the public consultations.	0
5.4.The public consultation process is adapted to the needs of vulnerable minority groups (diverse needs of people with disabilities, ethnic minority groups, etc.)	0
Total Score	1.6

Indicator/Criterion	Score
Overall score for criterion 6: Public Engagement/Interest	3
6.1. Number of CSOs/individuals engaged.	3
6.2. Number of unique feedback contributors.	3
6.3. Coordination agencies' evaluation of civil society engagement.	3
6.4. Relevance of the comments provided by the civil society as assessed by the coordination agency.	3
6.5. Timely provision of feedback.	3

2021-2030 Strategy for Development of Healthcare Systems and its Action Plan 2021-2023

The public consultations held during the development of the 2021-2030 Strategy for Development of Health Systems and its Action Plan 2021-2023 partially met the minimum requirements set by the PCI (total score - 0.8/3)

The consultation process was mainly closed and participation was possible by the invitation of the coordination agency. Consequently, the information on the planned public consultations was not publicly available.

The public consultation did not meet the criterion for the Diversity of Participants (0/3) because the process was not adapted to the needs of vulnerable minorities, and the participants' diversity was not ensured. The highest score was achieved on the Public Engagement/Interest criterion (3/3), followed by the requirements measuring the Effectiveness of the Public Consultation Process (1.8/3). The strategy document scored above average on several indicators: the public announcement was disseminated at least one week before the start of the public consultation process; public consultations were conducted in more than one format; more than one mechanism for feedback collection was ensured, and consultations were conducted at minimum one stage of the policy development cycle.

Table 17: Public Consultation Index (PCI) Scoring for 2021-2030 Strategy for Development of Healthcare Systems and its Action Plan 2021-2023

Indicator/Criterion	Score
Overall score for criterion 1: Accessibility	0.3
I.1. Public consultation announcement was disseminated through at least one public channel.	0
I.2. Policy document and/or policy brief was made publicly available.	2
I.3. Policy document and/or policy brief is available in plain language, easily comprehensible format, and those without field expertise can understand it.	0
I.4. The public announcement was accessible for major ethnic minority groups living in Georgia (in the Azerbaijani, Armenian and Abkhaz languages)	0
I.5. Policy document and/or policy brief was accessible for major ethnic minority groups living in Georgia (in the Azerbaijani, Armenian and Abkhaz languages)	0
I.6. The public announcement was adapted to the needs of people with disabilities (e.g. Braille code, audio version, sign language translation, etc.)	0
I.7. Policy document and/or policy brief was adapted to the needs of people with disabilities (e.g. Braille code, audio version, sign language translation, etc.)	0
Overall score for criterion 2: Openness	1
2.1. Any interested person or organisation (CSOs, private sector organisations, ordinary citizens, etc.) has an opportunity to participate in public consultation.	1
2.2. All interested or engaged persons/organisations have an opportunity to comment/provide feedback on the policy document.	1

Indicator/Criterion	Score
Overall score for criterion 3: Effectiveness of Public Consultation Process	1.8
3.1. The public announcement was disseminated at least one week before the start of the public consultation process.	1
3.2. Information in the public announcement is sufficient (corresponds with the recommendations outlined in Chapter 3.5 of the Policy Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation Handbook).	N/A
3.3. Public consultations were conducted in more than one format.	2
3.4. More than one mechanism for feedback collection was ensured.	2
3.5. Sufficient time (depending on the consultation format) was allocated for the provision of feedback.	N/A
3.6. Public consultations were conducted at minimum one stage of the policy development cycle.	2
Overall score for criterion 4: Accountability	N/A
4.1. Summary report on public consultations comprehensively describes the goals, processes, and results of the public consultations.	N/A
4.2. The information about accepted, partially accepted, and rejected comments was provided to the feedback authors.	N/A
4.3. The justified explanation was provided to the feedback authors.	N/A
4.4 Summary report on public consultations is publicly available.	N/A
Overall score for criterion 5: Diversity of Participants	0
5.1. In the public consultation planning process, specific steps have been taken to ensure the active engagement of both genders in the consultations.	0
5.2. In the public consultation planning process, specific steps have been taken to identify and engage vulnerable minority groups.	N/A
5.3. The coordination agency keeps records of the representatives of vulnerable minority groups engaged in the public consultations.	0
5.4. The public consultation process is adapted to the needs of vulnerable minority groups (diverse needs of people with disabilities, ethnic minority groups, etc.)	0
Total Score	0.8
Overall score for criterion 6: Public Engagement/Interest	3
6.1. Number of CSOs/individuals engaged.	3
6.2. Number of unique feedback contributors.	N/A
6.3. Coordination agencies' evaluation of civil society engagement.	3
6.4. Relevance of the comments provided by the civil society as assessed by the coordination agency.	N/A
6.5. Timely provision of feedback.	N/A

State Action Plan for Youth Policy Development 2021-2022

State Action Plan for Youth Policy Development 2021-2022 received one of the highest scores on the PCI (total score - 2.6 / 3). The public consultation addressed most aspects of good international practices and relevant local standards.

The process of working on the action plan was characterised by a high degree of publicity, which is also confirmed by the fact that the information about the public consultation was disseminated through several public sources. For example, emails were sent to municipalities, information was posted on the coordination agency's website and social networks, a working version of the action plan was shared twice with the public at various stages of policy development, while not only the representatives of specific organisations and experts could provide feedback but also ordinary citizens.

It is also noteworthy that concrete steps have been taken to include vulnerable minority groups in the public consultation. The process was tailored to the needs of people with disabilities and ethnic minorities. Accordingly, the Youth Policy Development Action Plan consultations received the highest score on the Diversity of Participants criterion (2/3) compared to the other public consultations from 2021 policy document cohorts.

From the perspective of the coordination agency, public involvement and interest were high (2.8/3). CSOs working on youth issues and representatives of various municipalities as well as ordinary citizens were actively involved in the discussion process. In total, the process involved more than 500 participants of the public consultations. Furthermore, most participants provided their meaningful feedback.

Table 18: Public Consultation Index (PCI) Scoring for State Action Plan for Youth Policy Development 2021-2022

Indicator/Criterion	Score
Overall score for criterion 1: Accessibility	2.3
I.1. Public consultation announcement was disseminated through at least one public channel.	3
I.2. Policy document and/or policy brief was made publicly available.	3
I.3. Policy document and/or policy brief is available in plain language, easily comprehensible format, and those without field expertise can understand it..	3
I.4. The public announcement was accessible for major ethnic minority groups living in Georgia (in the Azerbaijani, Armenian and Abkhaz languages)	1
I.5. Policy document and/or policy brief was accessible for major ethnic minority groups living in Georgia (in the Azerbaijani, Armenian and Abkhaz languages)	3
I.6. The public announcement was adapted to the needs of people with disabilities (e.g. Braille code, audio version, sign language translation, etc.)	0
I.7. Policy document and/or policy brief was adapted to the needs of people with disabilities (e.g. Braille code, audio version, sign language translation, etc.)	3
Overall score for criterion 2: Openness	3
2.1. Any interested person or organisation (CSOs, private sector organisations, ordinary citizens, etc.) has an opportunity to participate in public consultation.	3
2.2. All interested or engaged persons/organisations have an opportunity to comment/provide feedback on the policy document.	3
Overall score for criterion 3: Effectiveness of Public Consultation Process	3
3.1. The public announcement was disseminated at least one week before the start of the public consultation process.	3
3.2. Information in the public announcement is sufficient (corresponds with the recommendations outlined in Chapter 3.5 of the Policy Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation Handbook).	3
3.3. Public consultations were conducted in more than one format.	3
3.4. More than one mechanism for feedback collection was ensured.	3
3.5. Sufficient time (depending on the consultation format) was allocated for the provision of feedback.	3
3.6. Public consultations were conducted at minimum one stage of the policy development cycle.	3
Overall score for criterion 4: Accountability	2.7
4.1. Summary report on public consultations comprehensively describes the goals, processes, and results of the public consultations.	3
4.2. The information about accepted, partially accepted, and rejected comments was provided to the feedback authors.	3
4.3. The justified explanation was provided to the feedback authors.	2
4.4. Summary report on public consultations is publicly available.	N/A

Indicator/Criterion	Score
Overall score for criterion 5: Diversity of Participants	2
5.1. In the public consultation planning process, specific steps have been taken to ensure the active engagement of both genders in the consultations.	2
5.2. In the public consultation planning process, specific steps have been taken to identify and engage vulnerable minority groups.	2
5.3. The coordination agency keeps records of the representatives of vulnerable minority groups engaged in the public consultations.	1
5.4. The public consultation process is adapted to the needs of vulnerable minority groups (diverse needs of people with disabilities, ethnic minority groups, etc.)	3
Total Score	2.6
Overall score for criterion 6: Public Engagement/Interest	2.8
6.1. Number of CSOs/individuals engaged.	3
6.2. Number of unique feedback contributors.	3
6.3. Coordination agencies' evaluation of civil society engagement.	3
6.4. Relevance of the comments provided by the civil society as assessed by the coordination agency.	3
6.5. Timely provision of feedback.	2

2021-2025 Strategy for Prevention and Control of Noncommunicable Diseases and its Action Plan 2021-2023

The public consultations on the 2021-2025 Strategy for Prevention and Control of Noncommunicable Diseases and its Action Plan 2021-2023 partially met the minimum aspects set by the PCI (total score of 1.1/3).

The consultation process was mainly closed, and participation was possible by the invitation of the coordination body. The involvement of the wider public was not ensured as the majority of those involved in the public consultations were experts working on the issue. The information on public consultations and policy document draft was not publicly available. The draft of the document could be obtained through an official request by contacting the coordination agency.

The strategy development process minimally meets the criterion measuring Diversity of Participants (0.3/3). The process was not adapted to the needs of vulnerable minorities, and the diversity of participants was not ensured. However, it should be noted that the patients attended the consultation, more specifically the "Survivor Women's Club", which brings together people who have survived breast cancer.

From the perspective of the coordination agency, public involvement and interest were high (2.8/3). It is also noteworthy that most of the consultation participants were actively involved in the process and provided timely feedback.

Table 19: Public Consultation Index (PCI) Scoring for 2021-2025 Strategy for Prevention and Control of Noncommunicable Diseases and its Action Plan 2021-2023

Indicator/Criterion	Score
Overall score for criterion 1: Accessibility	0.3
I.1. Public consultation announcement was disseminated through at least one public channel.	0
I.2. Policy document and/or policy brief was made publicly available.	2
I.3. Policy document and/or policy brief is available in plain language, easily comprehensible format, and those without field expertise can understand it..	0

Indicator/Criterion	Score
I.4.The public announcement was accessible for major ethnic minority groups living in Georgia (in the Azerbaijani, Armenian and Abkhaz languages)	0
I.5. Policy document and/or policy brief was accessible for major ethnic minority groups living in Georgia (in the Azerbaijani, Armenian and Abkhaz languages)	0
I.6.The public announcement was adapted to the needs of people with disabilities (e.g. Braille code, audio version, sign language translation, etc.)	0
I.7. Policy document and/or policy brief was adapted to the needs of people with disabilities (e.g. Braille code, audio version, sign language translation, etc.)	0
Overall score for criterion 2: Openness	1
2.1.Any interested person or organisation (CSOs, private sector organisations, ordinary citizens, etc.) has an opportunity to participate in public consultation.	1
2.2.All interested or engaged persons/organisations have an opportunity to comment/provide feedback on the policy document.	1
Overall score for criterion 3: Effectiveness of Public Consultation Process	1.8
3.1.The public announcement was disseminated at least one week before the start of the public consultation process.	1
3.2. Information in the public announcement is sufficient (corresponds with the recommendations outlined in Chapter 3.5 of the Policy Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation Handbook).	N/A
3.3. Public consultations were conducted in more than one format.	2
3.4. More than one mechanism for feedback collection was ensured.	2
3.5. Sufficient time (depending on the consultation format) was allocated for the provision of feedback.	2
3.6. Public consultations were conducted at minimum one stage of the policy development cycle.	2
Overall score for criterion 4: Accountability	
4.1. Summary report on public consultations comprehensively describes the goals, processes, and results of the public consultations.	N/A
4.2.The information about accepted, partially accepted, and rejected comments was provided to the feedback authors.	2
4.3.The justified explanation was provided to the feedback authors.	2
4.4 Summary report on public consultations is publicly available.	N/A
Overall score for criterion 5: Diversity of Participants	0.3
5.1. In the public consultation planning process, specific steps have been taken to ensure the active engagement of both genders in the consultations.	0
5.2. In the public consultation planning process, specific steps have been taken to identify and engage vulnerable minority groups.	1
5.3.The coordination agency keeps records of the representatives of vulnerable minority groups engaged in the public consultations.	0
5.4.The public consultation process is adapted to the needs of vulnerable minority groups (diverse needs of people with disabilities, ethnic minority groups, etc.)	0
Total Score	1.1
Overall score for criterion 6: Public Engagement/Interest	2.8
6.1. Number of CSOs/individuals engaged.	3
6.2. Number of unique feedback contributors.	2
6.3. Coordination agencies' evaluation of civil society engagement.	3
6.4. Relevance of the comments provided by the civil society as assessed by the coordination agency.	N/A
6.5.Timely provision of feedback.	3

2021-2025 Strategy for Elimination of Hepatitis C and its Action Plan 2021-2023

The public consultations about the 2021-2025 Strategy for Elimination of Hepatitis C and its Action Plan 2021-2023 satisfied the minimum requirements set by the PCI (total score 1.2/3).

The consultation process was mainly closed. Participation in the public consultations was possible by the invitation of the coordination body, and most of the participants were experts from the area. Thus, the engagement of the wider public was not ensured. Information on public hearings (announcement) was communicated but the policy document was not disseminated through any public channel, although it was accessible to any organisation and expert upon request.

The strategy development process also minimally meets the Diversity of Participants criterion (0.7/3) as the process was not adapted to the needs of vulnerable minorities, and no steps were taken to ensure an inclusive consultation process. However, since the strategy specifically targeted vulnerable minorities at risk for hepatitis C, the coordination agency involved direct beneficiaries. For instance, an organisation working with injection drug users and an LGBTQ human rights organisation were engaged in the public consultation processes. In addition, the patients of the Association of Hepatitis C also participated in the public consultations.

From the perspective of the coordination agency, public involvement and interest were high (3/3). Most participants were actively involved in the public consultation process, with 15 organisations providing feedback.

Table 20: Public Consultation Index (PCI) Scoring for 2021-2025 Strategy for Elimination of Hepatitis C and its Action Plan 2021--2023

Indicator/Criterion	Score
Overall score for criterion 1: Accessibility	0.4
I.1. Public consultation announcement was disseminated through at least one public channel.	1
I.2. Policy document and/or policy brief was made publicly available.	2
I.3. Policy document and/or policy brief is available in plain language, easily comprehensible format, and those without field expertise can understand it.	0
I.4. The public announcement was accessible for major ethnic minority groups living in Georgia (in the Azerbaijani, Armenian and Abkhaz languages)	0
I.5. Policy document and/or policy brief was accessible for major ethnic minority groups living in Georgia (in the Azerbaijani, Armenian and Abkhaz languages)	0
I.6. The public announcement was adapted to the needs of people with disabilities (e.g. Braille code, audio version, sign language translation, etc.)	0
I.7. Policy document and/or policy brief was adapted to the needs of people with disabilities (e.g. Braille code, audio version, sign language translation, etc.)	0
Overall score for criterion 2: Openness	1
2.1. Any interested person or organisation (CSOs, private sector organisations, ordinary citizens, etc.) has an opportunity to participate in public consultation.	1
2.2. All interested or engaged persons/organisations have an opportunity to comment/provide feedback on the policy document.	1
Overall score for criterion 3: Effectiveness of Public Consultation Process	1.4
3.1. The public announcement was disseminated at least one week before the start of the public consultation process.	1
3.2. Information in the public announcement is sufficient (corresponds with the recommendations outlined in Chapter 3.5 of the Policy Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation Handbook).	1
3.3. Public consultations were conducted in more than one format.	2
3.4. More than one mechanism for feedback collection was ensured.	1

Indicator/Criterion	Score
3.5. Sufficient time (depending on the consultation format) was allocated for the provision of feedback.	N/A
3.6. Public consultations were conducted at minimum one stage of the policy development cycle.	2
Overall score for criterion 4: Accountability	2.5
4.1. Summary report on public consultations comprehensively describes the goals, processes, and results of the public consultations.	N/A
4.2. The information about accepted, partially accepted, and rejected comments was provided to the feedback authors.	3
4.3. The justified explanation was provided to the feedback authors.	2
4.4 Summary report on public consultations is publicly available.	N/A
Overall score for criterion 5: Diversity of Participants	0.7
5.1. In the public consultation planning process, specific steps have been taken to ensure the active engagement of both genders in the consultations.	0
5.2. In the public consultation planning process, specific steps have been taken to identify and engage vulnerable minority groups.	2
5.3. The coordination agency keeps records of the representatives of vulnerable minority groups engaged in the public consultations.	N/A
5.4. The public consultation process is adapted to the needs of vulnerable minority groups (diverse needs of people with disabilities, ethnic minority groups, etc.)	0
Total Score	1.2
Overall score for criterion 6: Public Engagement/Interest	3
6.1. Number of CSOs/individuals engaged.	3
6.2. Number of unique feedback contributors.	3
6.3. Coordination agencies' evaluation of civil society engagement.	3
6.4. Relevance of the comments provided by the civil society as assessed by the coordination agency.	N/A
6.5. Timely provision of feedback.	3

2021-2030 Strategy for Development of Mental Health and its Action Plan 2021-2023

The 2021-2030 Strategy for Development of Mental Health and its Action Plan 2021-2023 partially met the minimum aspects set by the PCI (total score - 0.9/3).

The group of participants was relatively homogeneous and mainly consisted of psychiatrists and experts working on mental health topics. The information on public hearings was not made public, and the participation was possible only by the invitation of the coordination body.

The strategy scored the highest on the Effectiveness of the Public Consultation Process (2/3), meaning that it satisfied the requirements outlined in Chapter 3.5 of the Policy Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation Handbook and other recommendations found in the relevant literature. Public consultation minimally meets the criterion measuring Diversity of Participants (0.3/3) as the process was not adapted to the needs of vulnerable minorities, and participant diversity was not ensured. No further steps have been taken to ensure gender equality and the inclusion of minorities. At the same time, the direct beneficiaries of the strategy document, individuals with mental health problems and organisations working on this topic, were selectively involved in the process.

According to the coordination agency, due to the community's sensitivity, public involvement and interest were very high (2.7 / 3). The coordination agency received many comments from the participants, most of which, according to the representative of the agency, were relevant for improving the policy document.

Table 21: Public Consultation Index (PCI) Scoring for 2021-2030 Strategy for Development of Mental Health and its Action Plan 2021-2023

Indicator/Criterion	Score
Overall score for criterion 1: Accessibility	0.3
1.1. Public consultation announcement was disseminated through at least one public channel.	0
1.2. Policy document and/or policy brief was made publicly available.	2
1.3. Policy document and/or policy brief is available in plain language, easily comprehensible format, and those without field expertise can understand it.	0
1.4. The public announcement was accessible for major ethnic minority groups living in Georgia (in the Azerbaijani, Armenian and Abkhaz languages)	0
1.5. Policy document and/or policy brief was accessible for major ethnic minority groups living in Georgia (in the Azerbaijani, Armenian and Abkhaz languages)	0
1.6. The public announcement was adapted to the needs of people with disabilities (e.g. Braille code, audio version, sign language translation, etc.)	0
1.7. Policy document and/or policy brief was adapted to the needs of people with disabilities (e.g. Braille code, audio version, sign language translation, etc.)	0
Overall score for criterion 2: Openness	1
2.1. Any interested person or organisation (CSOs, private sector organisations, ordinary citizens, etc.) has an opportunity to participate in public consultation.	1
2.2. All interested or engaged persons/organisations have an opportunity to comment/provide feedback on the policy document.	1
Overall score for criterion 3: Effectiveness of Public Consultation Process	2
3.1. The public announcement was disseminated at least one week before the start of the public consultation process.	1
3.2. Information in the public announcement is sufficient (corresponds with the recommendations outlined in Chapter 3.5 of the Policy Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation Handbook).	N/A
3.3. Public consultations were conducted in more than one format.	2
3.4. More than one mechanism for feedback collection was ensured.	2
3.5. Sufficient time (depending on the consultation format) was allocated for the provision of feedback.	3
3.6. Public consultations were conducted at minimum one stage of the policy development cycle.	2
Overall score for criterion 4: Accountability	1
4.1. Summary report on public consultations comprehensively describes the goals, processes, and results of the public consultations.	N/A
4.2. The information about accepted, partially accepted, and rejected comments was provided to the feedback authors.	2
4.3. The justified explanation was provided to the feedback authors.	1
4.4. Summary report on public consultations is publicly available.	0
Overall score for criterion 5: Diversity of Participants	0.3
5.1. In the public consultation planning process, specific steps have been taken to ensure the active engagement of both genders in the consultations.	0
5.2. In the public consultation planning process, specific steps have been taken to identify and engage vulnerable minority groups.	1
5.3. The coordination agency keeps records of the representatives of vulnerable minority groups engaged in the public consultations.	0
5.4. The public consultation process is adapted to the needs of vulnerable minority groups (diverse needs of people with disabilities, ethnic minority groups, etc.)	0
Total Score	0.9
Overall score for criterion 6: Public Engagement/Interest	2.7
6.1. Number of CSOs/individuals engaged.	3
6.2. Number of unique feedback contributors.	N/A
6.3. Coordination agencies' evaluation of civil society engagement.	3
6.4. Relevance of the comments provided by the civil society as assessed by the coordination agency.	2
6.5. Timely provision of feedback.	2

ANNEX II - PUBLIC CONSULTATION INDEX (PCI)

Criteria I: Accessibility	Indicator Definition	Scoring
I.1. Public consultation announcement was disseminated through at least one public channel.	<p>The indicator assesses the efforts taken by the public entity to disseminate the public consultation announcement through multiple communication channels to increase accessibility and make the information easily discoverable by the interested persons. These could include various online means (e.g. the entity's official website, the entity's social media page, online media) as well as traditional media (newspaper, TV, leaflet, banner).</p> <p>It should be highlighted that sending the announcement by email ONLY to the potential stakeholders would not be considered as a form of public dissemination.</p>	<p>0 - Public consultation announcement was not disseminated through public channels.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1 - Was disseminated through one channel. 2 - Was disseminated through 2 channels. 3 - Was disseminated through 3 or more channels.
I.2. Policy document and/or policy brief was made publicly available	<p>Policy document and/or policy brief, which adequately describes the essence of the policy document, is easily accessible for any interested person/organization. Ideally, it is uploaded to the entity's website and/or is attached to the public consultation announcement (as an annex or as web link). Alternatively, the interested person/organization can easily and quickly obtain it from the coordinating agency.</p>	<p>0 - Policy document and/or policy brief is neither publicly available nor obtainable upon request.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1 - Policy document and/or policy brief is available ONLY for organizations/persons selected by the coordinating agency. 2 - Policy document and/or policy brief is available to any person and/or organization upon request. 3 - Policy document and/or policy brief is attached to the public consultation announcement (as an annex or web link) and/or is uploaded at the entity's official web-site/government portal.
I.3. Policy document and/or policy brief is available in simple language, easily comprehensible format and can be understood by those without field expertise.	<p>It is important that both organizations and ordinary citizens wishing to participate in the public consultation process do not need to possess expert knowledge in the field to understand the content of the policy and provide feedback. Especially in those cases, when the comprehension of the policy document requires specific knowledge, it is desirable that the coordinating entity prepares policy brief, written in a simple language, in easily comprehensible format. (E.g. the document should not contain special terms and abbreviations that are not explained first, the important information should be highlighted, information visualization methods can be used).</p>	<p>0 - Policy document and/or policy brief is not available</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1 - Policy document and/or policy brief is available, although it is hard to comprehend; important information is not highlighted. 2 - Policy document and/or policy brief highlights important content, however the document uses special terms and unexplained abbreviations. 3 - Policy document and/or policy brief is written in simple, easily comprehensible language, highlights important content, does not use special terms and unexplained abbreviations, and/or uses methods for visualization of the information.

I.4. The public announcement was accessible for major ethnic minority groups living in Georgia (accessible in Azeri, Armenian and Abkhaz languages)	To ensure inclusion in the policy development process of the main ethnic minority groups living in Georgia, they should receive announcement about public consultation in the language they can understand. Namely, in Azeri, Armenian and Abkhaz languages.	<p>0 - Public announcement is available only in Georgian language.</p> <p>1 - Public announcement is available in Georgian and another language.</p> <p>2 - Public announcement is available in Georgian and two other languages.</p> <p>3 - Public announcement is available in Georgian and three or more other languages.</p>
I.5. Policy document and/or policy brief was accessible for major ethnic minority groups living in Georgia (accessible in Azeri, Armenian and Abkhaz languages)	To ensure inclusion in the policy development process of the main ethnic minority groups living in Georgia, the policy document and/or policy brief should be available for them in the language they can understand. Namely, in Azeri, Armenian and Abkhaz languages.	<p>0 - Policy document and/or policy brief is available only in Georgian language.</p> <p>1 - Policy document and/or policy brief is available in Georgian and another language.</p> <p>2 - Policy document and/or policy brief is available in Georgian and two other languages.</p> <p>3 - Policy document and/or policy brief is available in Georgian and three or more other languages.</p>
I.6. The public announcement was adapted to the needs of people with disabilities (e.g. Braille code, audio version, sign language translation etc.)	To ensure inclusion in the policy development process of the people with disabilities, the information contained in the public announcement should be adapted to their needs. For instance, the announcement could be printed in Braille code or available as audio version, video/audio clip could be accompanied with sign language translation etc.).	<p>0 - Public announcement is not adapted to the needs of people with disabilities.</p> <p>1 - Public announcement is adapted to the needs of one category of people with disabilities.</p> <p>2 - Public announcement is adapted to the needs of two categories of people with disabilities.</p> <p>3 - Public announcement is adapted to the needs of three or more categories of people with disabilities.</p>
I.7. Policy document and/or policy brief was adapted to the needs of people with disabilities (e.g. Braille code, audio version, sign language translation etc.)	To ensure inclusion in the policy development process of the people with disabilities, the information contained in the policy document and/or policy brief should be adapted to their needs. For instance, the document could be printed in Braille code or available as audio version, video/audio clip could be accompanied with sign language translation etc.).	<p>0 - Policy document and/or policy brief is not adapted to the needs of people with disabilities.</p> <p>1 - Policy document and/or policy brief is adapted to the needs of one category of people with disabilities.</p> <p>2 - Policy document and/or policy brief is adapted to the needs of two categories of people with disabilities.</p> <p>3 - Policy document and/or policy brief is adapted to the needs of three or more categories of people with disabilities.</p>

Criteria 2: Openness	Indicator Definition	Scoring
<p>2.1. Any interested person or organization (CSOs, private sector organizations, ordinary citizens etc.) has an opportunity to participate in public consultation</p>	<p>Any interested person or organization has an opportunity to get engaged in the public consultation - public entity does not restrict participation in any way, does not invite only potential interest groups and field experts.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1 - Participation in the public consultation is open to international and local organizations and/or experts and/or interested persons (engagement happens only by invitation from the coordinating agency). 2 - Participation in the public consultation is mostly open - all interested international and local organizations and/or field experts can participate. 3 - Participation in the public consultation is open to all interested organizations and ordinary citizens. 	<p>0 - Participation in the public consultation is restricted to only relevant public entities, hired experts and international organizations/donors.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1 - Participation in the public consultation is open to international and local organizations and/or experts and/or interested persons (engagement happens only by invitation from the coordinating agency). 2 - Participation in the public consultation is mostly open - all interested international and local organizations and/or field experts can participate. 3 - Participation in the public consultation is open to all interested organizations and ordinary citizens.
<p>2.2. All interested or engaged persons/organizations have an opportunity to comment/provide feedback on the policy document</p>	<p>Any person engaged in the public consultation, regardless of its format, has an opportunity to provide feedback/ comment on the policy document. The public entity does not act selectively or set any restrictions in this regard. For instance, during the face-to-face meeting, the facilitator creates possibilities for the engagement of all participants. If the document is posted online, the comment function is turned on. If the document is distributed through electronic mail, its format allows easy feedback.</p>	<p>0 - Possibility to comment/provide feedback on the policy document is restricted to only relevant public entities, hired experts and international organizations/donors.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1 - Possibility to comment/provide feedback on the policy document is restricted to only persons and organizations invited/selected by the coordinating agency (e.g. field experts, international and local organizations). 2 - All international or local organizations and/or field experts have a possibility to comment/provide feedback on the policy document. 3 - All interested ordinary citizens and/or field experts and/or international or local organizations have a possibility to comment/ provide feedback on the policy document.

Criteria 3: Effectiveness of public consultation process	Indicator Definition	Scoring
3.1. The public announcement was disseminated at least one week before the start of the public consultation process.	The indicator assesses whether the public was informed in a timely manner about the start of the public consultation process. Minimum period is one week. Advance notification is particularly important in case of face-to-face meeting, since the interested persons and organizations need to plan their activities accordingly.	<p>0 - Public announcement was disseminated 0-6 days prior to the start of the public consultation process</p> <p>1 - Public announcement was disseminated 1 week prior to the start of the public consultation process</p> <p>2 - Public announcement was disseminated 8-13 days prior to the start of the public consultation process</p> <p>3 - Public announcement was disseminated 2 or more weeks prior to the start of the public consultation process</p>
3.2. Information in the public announcement is sufficient (corresponds with the recommendations outlined in Chapter 3.5 of the Policy Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation Handbook)	It is recommended that the public announcement contains the following information: information about format, date/time/location or period of public consultation; information about responsible entity and respective contact person(s); information about consultation topic and objectives; information about distribution and feedback provision mechanisms of the policy document draft or policy brief (the policy document/policy brief or its access link can also be enclosed in the public announcement).	<p>Public announcement contains the following information:</p> <p>0 - If any of the listed information is missing: information about format, date/time/location or period of public consultation; information about responsible entity and respective contact person(s).</p> <p>1 - Information about format, date/time/location or period of public consultation; information about responsible entity and respective contact person(s).</p> <p>2 - Information listed above under score 1 + information about consultation topic and objectives.</p> <p>3 - Information listed above under score 2 + information about distribution and feedback provision mechanisms of the policy document draft or policy brief (the policy document/policy brief or its access link can also be enclosed in the public announcement).</p>
3.3. Public consultations were conducted in more than one format	The indicator assesses whether the coordinating agency has used diverse methods for conducting the public consultations to ensure engagement of the wide public in the policy development process to the fullest extent. For example, face-to-face or online meeting, focus group, conference, physical or online survey, collecting comments through web-page or social media page etc. It should be highlighted that if consultations were conducted ONLY with public entities, hired experts and donors, they can not be considered as public consultations, regardless of the number of formats used, and will receive minimal score.	<p>0 - Consultations were conducted ONLY with the public entities and/or hired experts and/or donors (regardless of the number of consultation formats used).</p> <p>1 - Public consultations were conducted in one format.</p> <p>2 - Public consultations were conducted in 2 formats.</p> <p>3 - Public consultations were conducted in more than 2 formats.</p>

<p>3.4. More than one mechanism for feedback collection was ensured</p> <p>The indicator assesses whether the coordinating agency has used diverse mechanisms for collecting feedback in the public consultation process. For instance, written feedback through email, comments on the web-page or social media page, feedback by phone, oral feedback during meeting, written feedback in chat, google forms or other online survey formats.</p> <p>It should be highlighted that feedback collected ONLY from public entities, hired experts and donors, regardless of the number of mechanisms used, will receive minimal score.</p>	<p>0 - The feedback was collected ONLY from the public entities, hired experts and donors (regardless of the number of feedback mechanisms used).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1 - 1 mechanism was used for collection of feedback. 2 - 2 mechanisms were used for collection of feedback. 3 - More than 2 mechanisms were used for collection of feedback.
<p>3.5. Sufficient time (depending on the consultation format) was allocated for the provision of feedback</p> <p>The indicator assesses whether sufficient time was allocated for provision of feedback. Moreover, the period allocated for provision of feedback should vary according to the consultation format used. For example,</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1. If the meeting or similar formats were used for consultation, where the policy document draft was presented and discussed, participants should be given at least 1 week for provision of additional comments. 2. When collecting feedback through the electronic mail or by posting the document online, at least 2 weeks from the moment of posting/sending of the document package should be allowed for collection of feedback from the interested persons/ organizations. <p>When collecting feedback through the electronic mail or by posting online:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 0 - Less than two weeks were allocated for the provision of feedback. 1 - Two weeks were allocated for the provision of feedback. 2 - 2 to 3 weeks were allocated for the provision of feedback. 3- 3 weeks or more were allocated for the provision of feedback. 	<p>In case of meeting or similar formats:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 0 - Less than one week was allocated for the provision of feedback. 1 - One week was allocated for the provision of feedback. 2 - 1 to 2 weeks were allocated for the provision of feedback. 3- 2 weeks or more were allocated for the provision of feedback.
<p>3.6. Public consultations were conducted at minimum one stage of the policy development cycle</p>	<p>0 - Public consultations were not conducted</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1 - Public consultations were conducted ONLY at the mandatory stage (final draft of the policy document). According to the Policy Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation Handbook, public engagement is advisable at each stage of policy development cycle. Moreover, engagement at early stages of the policy development (e.g. situation analysis and priority setting) is essential to allow citizens, beneficiaries and interested parties to make real contribution to the policy development. 2 - Public consultations were conducted at two stages of policy development cycle. 3 - Public consultations were conducted at more than two stages of policy development cycle.

Criteria 4: Accountability	Indicator Definition	Scoring		
4.1. Summary report on public consultations comprehensively describes the goals, process, and results of the public consultations.	<p>First of all, the summary report on public consultations should comply with the minimal requirements outlined in the annex 9 of the Policy Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation Handbook. Apart from this mandatory information, it is advisable that summary report contain additional details about goals and process of public consultation; information about used communication channels, approaches and activities, what methodology was applied for analysis of collected comments, and whether any feedback was provided to the authors of the comments. Moreover, the report should describe changes (if any) made to the policy document as the result of the public consultation, as well as contain information about received recommendations and arguments for accepting or rejecting them.</p>	<p>0 - The summary report on public consultations does not fully comply with the requirements outlined in the annex 9 of the Policy Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation Handbook.</p> <p>1 - The summary report on public consultations contains all the mandatory information outlined in the annex 9 of the Policy Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation Handbook.</p> <p>2 - The summary report on public consultations, along with the minimal requirements outlined in the annex 9, contains additional information about goals and process of the public consultations (e.g. approaches, activities, communication channels and participant engagement methods and etc.).</p> <p>3 - The summary report on public consultations, along with the minimal requirements outlined in the annex 9, contains additional information about goals and process of the public consultations (e.g. approaches, activities, communication channels and participant engagement methods and etc.), also regarding the methodology used for the analysis of collected recommendations as well as the results of the public consultation.</p>	<p>0 - The coordinating agency has not replied to any of the authors of the comments.</p> <p>1 - 0 -35% of the authors of accepted, partially accepted and rejected comments received reply from the coordinating agency regarding their feedback.</p> <p>2 - 35% -70% of the authors of accepted, partially accepted and rejected comments received reply from the coordinating agency regarding their feedback.</p> <p>3 - Over 70% of the authors of accepted, partially accepted and rejected comments received reply from the coordinating agency regarding their feedback.</p>	<p>0 - None of the comment authors have received justified feedback</p> <p>1 - 0 -35% of comment authors have received justified feedback</p> <p>2 - 35% -70% of comment authors have received justified feedback</p> <p>3 - Over 70% of comment authors have received justified feedback</p>
	4.2. The information about accepted, partially accepted, and rejected comments was provided to the feedback authors.	<p>The indicator assesses whether any communication took place with the public consultation participants (individuals/organizations) about their feedback and whether they received information, which of their recommendations were considered or not considered in the policy document.</p>		
	4.3. The justified explanation was provided to the feedback authors.	<p>The indicator assesses whether authors of the comments have received justified feedback/explanation regarding why their recommendations/comments were not taken into consideration.</p>		
	4.4. Summary report on public consultations is publicly available.	<p>The indicator assesses whether the summary report on the public consultations was made publicly available (respecting personal data protection and anonymity principles).</p>	<p>0 - Summary report on public consultations is not publicly available</p> <p>1 - Summary report on public consultations is available only to some of the public consultations participants.</p> <p>2 - Summary report on public consultations is available to all public consultations participants.</p> <p>3- Summary report on public consultations is publicly available.</p>	

Criteria 5: Diversity of Participants/inclusiveness	Indicator Definition	Scoring
<p>5.1. In the public consultation planning process, specific steps have been taken to ensure the active engagement of both genders in the consultations.</p> <p>1. Gender was considered when inviting participants to the public consultations - target minimal share of women engagement was predetermined.</p> <p>2. Meeting facilitator tried to ensure equal engagement of both genders in the discussion.</p> <p>3. The coordination agencies have consulted gender experts while planning the public consultations.</p>	<p>The indicator assesses whether the coordination agency has taken any purposeful steps in the planning process for ensuring gender equality in the public consultations. For example,</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Gender was considered when inviting participants to the public consultations - target minimal share of women engagement was predetermined. 2. Meeting facilitator tried to ensure equal engagement of both genders in the discussion. 3 - In the planning process three or more steps/efforts (from the listed below or other) have been taken to ensure gender equality in the public consultations. <p>For example,</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Gender was considered when inviting participants to the public consultations - target minimal share of women engagement was predetermined. 2. Meeting facilitator tried to ensure equal engagement of both genders in the discussion. 3. The coordination agencies have consulted gender experts while planning the public consultations. 	<p>0 - No steps have been taken to ensure gender equality.</p> <p>1- In the planning process one step/effort (from the listed below or other) has been taken to ensure gender equality in the public consultations.</p> <p>2 - In the planning process two steps/efforts (from the listed below or other) have been taken to ensure gender equality in the public consultations.</p> <p>3 - In the planning process three or more steps/efforts (from the listed below or other) have been taken to ensure gender equality in the public consultations.</p>
<p>5.2. In the public consultation planning process, specific steps have been taken for the identification and engagement of vulnerable minority groups.</p>	<p>The indicator assesses whether the coordination agency has taken any purposeful steps in the planning process for the identification and engagement of vulnerable minority groups in the public consultations. For instance, the entity keeps the database of the non-profit organizations working on the issues of different vulnerable minority groups (ethnic, people with disabilities, LGBTQ+) and during the public consultation planning process contacts these organizations for the identification of vulnerable minority groups.</p>	<p>0 - No steps have been taken for engagement of vulnerable minority groups.</p> <p>1- In the public consultation planning process at least one specific step has been taken for identification and engagement of one category of vulnerable minority groups.</p> <p>2 - In the public consultation planning process at least one specific step has been taken for identification and engagement of two categories of vulnerable minority groups.</p> <p>3 - In the public consultation planning process at least one specific step has been taken for identification and engagement of three or more categories of vulnerable minority groups.</p>

<p>5.3.The coordination agency keeps records of the representatives of vulnerable minority groups engaged in the public consultations.</p>	<p>The indicator assesses whether the coordination agency performs analysis of the public consultation participants on the subject of belonging to a vulnerable minority group (e.g. participant list includes information about which ethnic group participants belong to, if the person has any disability and etc.).</p> <p>3 -Keeps records about engagement according to more than two variables from the following list: gender/ethnic belonging/gender identity/possession of disability</p>	<p>0 - No records are kept</p> <p>1 - Keeps records about engagement according to only one variable from the following list: gender/ethnic belonging/gender identity/possession of disability</p> <p>2 - Keeps records about engagement according to only two variables from the following list: gender/ethnic belonging/gender identity/possession of disability</p> <p>3 -Keeps records about engagement according to more than two variables from the following list: gender/ethnic belonging/gender identity/possession of disability</p>
	<p>5.4.The public consultation process is adapted to the needs of vulnerable minority groups (diverse needs of people with disabilities, ethnic minority groups etc.)</p>	<p>The indicator assesses whether the coordination agency makes effort to ensure that the public consultation process is adapted to the needs of different vulnerable minority groups. For instance, participants are allowed to provide feedback in the form or language they are comfortable with, sign language translation is ensured during the meeting, the physical space is adapted to the needs of people with disabilities and etc.</p>

Criteria 6: Public engagement/ interest	Indicator Definition	Scoring
6.1. Number of CSOs/individuals engaged	The indicator measures the number of participants (ordinary citizens and representatives of organizations) directly engaged in the public consultations (i.e. number of attendees). Only meeting or similar format of public consultations are envisaged here.	0-Only hired experts/donors/public entities are engaged in the consultations. 1 - Independent field experts and/or organizations working in the field and/or interested citizens are engaged in the public consultations (number of participants 1-5) 2 - Independent field experts and/or organizations working in the field and/or interested citizens are engaged in the public consultations (number of participants 6-10) 3 - Independent field experts and/or organizations working in the field and/or interested citizens are engaged in the public consultations (number of participants exceeds 10)
6.2. Number of unique feedback contributors	The indicator measures how many different persons/organizations provided their feedback (vs. many comments contributed by the same person/ organization)	0-Only hired experts/donors/public entities have provided their feedback on the policy document. 1 - Independent field experts and/or organizations and/or interested citizens have provided their feedback on the policy document (number of contributors 1-5) 2 - Independent field experts and/or organizations and/or interested citizens have provided their feedback on the policy document (number of contributors 6-10) 3 - Independent field experts and/or organizations and/or interested citizens have provided their feedback on the policy document (number of contributors exceeds 10)
6.3. Coordination agencies' evaluation of civil society engagement	The indicator allows the coordination agency to assess level of engagement of citizens, CSOs and other interested parties. How active were participants? (relevant only in case of meeting or similar format of public consultation)	0- participants were rather passive 1 - Participant activity level was satisfactory (up to 30% of participants were active) 2 - Participants were rather active (up to 50% of participants were active) 3 - Participants were very active (up to 70% or more were active)
6.4. Relevance of the comments provided by the civil society as assessed by the coordination agency	How valuable was the feedback provided by the public consultation participants for the improvement of the policy document? To what degree were the collected comments reflected in the policy document and what were the reasons for rejecting those which were not considered?	0- Comments submitted by public consultation participants were irrelevant/not related to the topic. 1 - Some (small share) of provided recommendations were valuable for the improvement of the policy document and were taken into consideration. 2 - Significant share of the provided recommendations were valuable for the improvement of the policy document and were taken into consideration (or there are objective reasons, beyond control of the coordination agency, for not reflecting those comments in the policy document). 3 - Great majority of the provided recommendations were valuable for the improvement of the policy document and were taken into consideration (or there are objective reasons, beyond control of the coordination agency, for not reflecting those comments in the policy document).

6.5.Timely provision of feedback	<p>The indicator assesses whether public consultation participants have provided their feedback to the coordination agency within the set timeframe (allocated for the public consultation).</p> <p>0 - No feedback was provided by the public consultation participants to the coordination agency.</p> <p>1 - The feedback provided by the public consultation participants to the coordination agency was long overdue (more than 7 days after the deadline).</p> <p>2 - The feedback provided by the public consultation participants to the coordination agency was slightly overdue (1-7 days after the deadline).</p> <p>3 - Public consultation participants have provided their feedback to the coordination agency within the set timeframe (allocated for the public consultation).</p>
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