



## **Women's Economic Empowerment Through Gender Integration in Georgian Government Policy and Related Action Plans**

### **Small and Medium Entrepreneurship Development**

Europe Foundation (EPF) has been supporting both social enterprise (SE) development and women's economic empowerment to contribute to inclusive political and economic governance. As these areas are essentially interlinked and correlated with economic development at individual, group, and national level, EPF has identified gender mainstreaming of the SME Strategy as a key step towards inclusive growth in line with Georgia's sustainable development ambition.

To advocate for the enabling regulatory and policy environment for SME development and women's economic empowerment, Europe Foundation commissioned gender assessment of 2016-2020 SME Development Strategy of Georgia. The logical continuation of the process was initiation of a survey on the Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on Women Entrepreneurs, conducted in August-September 2020. The survey aimed at: a) assessing the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on business entities established by women, including their financial, operational and other aspects; and b) defining those general barriers women entrepreneurs encounter while doing business, and in their everyday lives.

Assessment of the Georgia's SME Development Strategy 2016-2020 and other related strategic documents demonstrated that while the encouragement of female entrepreneurship is one of the priority actions of the strategy, so far, no concrete steps have been taken by relevant duty-bearers in this direction. Moreover, of five key priorities of the Strategy, only one, namely the SME skills development and promotion of entrepreneurial culture, includes efforts targeting women's economic empowerment. Furthermore, the 2016-2017 action plan of Georgia's SME Development Strategy envisioned development of the mechanisms for promotion of women-led entrepreneurship, however, no progress has been observed in this direction either.

Europe Foundation welcomes decision about considering two new priority directions – women entrepreneurship and green economy - while preparing new SME Development Strategy. Foundation highlights the importance of ensuring active engagement of all stakeholders during elaboration of the above-mentioned priorities, as well as the whole strategy.

There are number of general recommendations aimed at creating of favorable environment for SME development and women's economic empowerment.

## Recommendations:

- The survey Impact of the Coronavirus Pandemic on Women Entrepreneurs has shown that it is crucial to consider women's voices when developing programs for alleviating the economic consequences of the Coronavirus. According to the feedback received directly from women entrepreneurs, the differences related to geographic location, level of education attained and marital status should be taken into consideration while planning the relevant measures. The survey demonstrated that married women entrepreneurs living in the regions of Georgia with no higher education especially need empowerment.
- As regards concrete interventions, monetary assistance and the implementation of social assistance programs for employees will be especially important for small and medium enterprises.
- The survey has shown, once again, that unfortunately women continue to face negative and stereotypical attitudes from society, especially those women entrepreneurs operating outside of Tbilisi. Consequently, additional efforts must be taken to eliminate such attitudes. Measures to this end must first and foremost be carried out in the regions.
- Gender equality should be considered as a crosscutting issue while elaborating new SME Strategy<sup>1</sup> and not as a stand-alone policy area. References should be made to international and national commitments. Just as importantly these references should be reflected throughout the strategy document, as well as in indicators to measure progress.
- It is necessary to elaborate SME Strategy-related indicators, namely clearly defined gender indicators. At the initial stage, gender analysis should be carried out in order to set concrete goal and plan relevant actions to ensure more women engagement. For a proper monitoring to take place, the strategy must have clearly defined gender indicators, including baseline indicators to annually track their progress towards results.
- Before evaluation of SME strategy, it is necessary to involve women entrepreneurs, relevant associations and organizations working on the women issues. Above-mentioned players or other stakeholder identification and outreach to key informants is needed for (1) evaluation of the results of the existing Strategy; (2) identification of expected results (priority directions); (3) identification of existing and ongoing initiatives to map potential overlap and synergies; (4) identification of indicators upon which the next phase strategy would be evaluated. The same participatory approach should be ensured during monitoring and evaluation of the strategy.
- Capacity development of SME supporting institutions in terms of gender equality and gender mainstreaming and integration issues.

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<sup>1</sup> For detailed recommendations in regard to SME strategy please see Gendered Assessment of SME Development Strategy of Georgia 2016-2020 commissioned by Europe Foundation and conducted by Nordic Consulting Group – NCG Sweden at the following link: [http://www.epfound.ge/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/SME-Gendered-Assessment\\_ENG.pdf](http://www.epfound.ge/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/SME-Gendered-Assessment_ENG.pdf)