

Equality Policy in the Parties' Pre-election Perspectives – 2020

EMC

Introduction

The given document presents an analysis of the political parties' programs and policies on equality-related issues. More precisely, the document exhaustively reviews and analyzes the discourses, visions, and strategies presented by the parties in their election programs regarding the rights and needs of non-dominant religious and ethnic groups, as well as the women and LGBT rights and protection of human rights in conflict regions.

Generally speaking, it creates a feeling that equality policy is not a priority for most political parties, and most of them apply to the trivial and mainstream paradigms and visions. For the majority of political parties, the idea of equality is limited to formal equality before the law; The parties do not recognize sharply asymmetric status of various oppressed, excluded groups and the requirement for special interventions and policies by the State to create a fair political and social environment for them. The superficial nature of political programs and visions once again demonstrates the problem that parties show less attention and interest in minority groups; It should be noted that minorities did not participate in the program development process, which, in turn, reveals the problem of low representation of various non-dominant social groups in the parties. Despite the extensive work and experience of state institutions in the field of equality policy, political parties have not made a critical and structural analysis of the past and the results achieved, they do not put forward new alternatives and visions. Regardless of the social conflicts on equality issues, and the growing trends of chauvinism, xenophobia, Islamophobia, homophobia in our society and the political instrumentalization of these attitudes by certain political groups, the parties had not realized their political responsibility to strengthen emancipatory political ideas in society and to build social consensus on equality and solidarity ideals.

Freedom of Religion and the needs of religious minorities

As in previous years, the issues of protection of religious freedom, elimination of unequal environment in this regard, and support for the needs of religious minorities were not reflected in the agenda and programs of political parties during the 2020 parliamentary elections. This can be explained, on the one hand, by the low political interest in equality issues and, on the other hand, high political loyalty to the dominant religious institution - parties view the policy of religious freedom usually from the perspective of preferences and favoritism of the Orthodox Church. This criticism applies especially to the ruling political party, which does not mention religious freedom and equality protection issues in the pre-election program and program content documents.

A majority of opposition parties generally recognize the importance of the principle of equality before the law. In some cases, the importance of unwavering protection of religious freedom is also acknowledged. However, the specific measures to be taken to eliminate the unequal environment between religious organizations and discriminatory practices and how parties see the real challenges faced by the non-dominant religious groups are not reflected in the election plans of most opposition parties.

For years, religious¹ and international organizations,² as well as local human rights actors³ indicate several important recommendations on the realization of freedom of religion and equality. Including, protection and restitution of the property confiscated in the Soviet period; revision of existing discriminatory and non-democratic practices of funding religious organizations; creation of secular and multicultural teaching and social environment in public schools. Special attention is needed for the experience of religious intolerance and conflicts and their positive transformation.

Beyond freedom of religion, the cultural and political representation of non-dominant religious groups that are compactly and traditionally resided in various regions is also critical, which requires respective political measures on central, as well as regional and local levels. More attention should be paid to the building of dialogue and solidarity among different religious groups and the creation of cultural spaces for this purpose. Unfortunately, such issues are totally absent from the parties' political texts.

Election programs of Strategy Builder and European Georgia discuss the punishment of discriminatory acts and incitement of hatred and rivalry; however, the parties do not speak about deep social layers of this problem and systemic ways of its handling. Although European Georgia often speaks in pre-election speeches about the principles of a secular state and the necessity to protect it, the election program does not present visions and ways how the party will be able to achieve these goals.

The only opposition party that has a specific vision for the protection of the rights/interests of religious minorities reflected in the election program is the political party - Lelo for Georgia. It plans to change the political vector towards religious and ethnic minorities which are based on security paradigms; The party considers the threat to be not their involvement in politics, but the exclusion of non-dominant groups from public and political spaces. The Lelo election program involves the abolition of the Office of the State Minister for Reconciliation and Civic Equality, as well as the State Agency for Religious Affairs, and their replacement with the Civic Equality Agency, which will work on the issues of religious and ethnic minorities and closely collaborate with the respective councils within the Public Defender Office. The abolition of the State Agency for Religious Affairs is, on the one hand, a positive step towards

¹ The collection of recommendations by Council of Religious existing under Public Defender's Office, available at:

http://ombudsman.ge/res/docs/2020092417162834667.pdf?fbclid=IwAR2ayhq_eIUmw_OzVjebxro3NWrKxa1_fcPDUImWKrF_aN_CBR91U-emZz4I

Recommendation package of the same Council, 2017, available at: http://tolerantoba.ge/index.php?id=1281619908&sub_id=1345202134

² COE Commission on Elimination of Racism and Intolerance, Report on Georgia, 8 December, 2015, available at: <https://rm.coe.int/fourth-report-on-georgia-georgian-translation-/16808b5775>

ADVISORY COMMITTEE ON THE FRAMEWORK CONVENTION FOR THE PROTECTION OF NATIONAL MINORITIES. Third Opinion on Georgia¹ adopted on 7 March 2019, page: 24, available at: https://rm.coe.int/3rd-op-georgia-en/1680969b56?fbclid=IwAR0Hzmw9vtSyyIlg-54T9muRaAnA4xybJFh1fTVKrQvROxqS7IGX3a0_dybqA

³ Religion, Politics and Social Contexts – the collection of studies, reports and articles, EMC, 2020, available at: <https://emc.org.ge/ka/products/religia-politika-da-sotsialuri-kontekstebi-kvlevebis-angarishebis-da-statiebis-krebuli>
Freedom of Religion – Critics of State discriminatory and non-secular policy, EMC, 2016. <https://emc.org.ge/ka/products/kvleva-religiis-tavisufleba-sakhelmtsifos-diskriminatsiuli-da-arasekularuli-politikis-kritika>

The report on Freedom of Religion and Belief in Georgia, 2010-2019, TDI, available at: https://www.tdi.ge/sites/default/files/tdi-angarishi-religiis_tavisupleba_sakartveloshi_2010-2019.pdf

strengthening of religious freedom, however, it has principle importance to properly analyze the problematic nature of the Agency's working strategies and approaches and their eradication. From the very beginning the Agency's work was aimed at creating unfair hierarchies among religious organizations and their control; Since its foundation, the Agency has not taken any significant initiatives to promote religious freedom and equality. Among other things, it failed to meet its obligations under the Government's Human Rights Action Plan, which included, among other activities, to eliminate discriminatory provisions in the legislation and elaborate a policy for returning (restitution) of the property confiscated during the Soviet era. It would be important if the party clarified critical approaches towards the Agency's work and outline ways to eliminate them.

The Lelo election program also addresses issues related to the preservation and maintenance of disputed religious cult buildings as cultural heritage sites. However, it is vague why the political organization does not speak about the resolution of such disputes between religious organizations. Also, elaboration of restitution policy and respective legislative framework is missing in the election program, which is one of the most important challenges posed to the religious organizations and several disputes are ongoing on this matter, including on the judicial level. Lelo election program promises to create a unified taxation system for religious organizations, however, in describing this model, the political party does not clarify the details, neither the discussion on this issue contains systemic critics towards the existing funding practices of religious organizations.

In sum, it is clear that the interest of political parties in freedom of religion and equality matters is weak and the challenges faced by non-dominant religious groups, their real needs, and concerns are not reflected in their programs and plans. Only some of the party programs reflect visions and recommendation in more detail. The silence of political groups on religious freedom issues, given the general political climate, which is sharply polarized and makes it impossible to create a political agenda based on social interests, can be explained by the parties' high loyalty towards the dominant religious institution and electoral interest. The small parties are unable to break through this area and they try to raise and actualize more mainstream issues.

Protection of ethnic minority rights and political participation

The majority of the published programs, except for European Georgia and Lelo, do not single out the issue of non-dominant ethnic groups in separate chapter or subchapter. Analysis of political parties' pre-election programs reveals that parties are often unaware of the needs, concerns, and challenges of non-dominant ethnic groups. Pre-election programs often reveal parties' trivial and superficial views on the protection of the rights of non-dominant ethnic groups and their participation in public and political life. Attempts to offer different narratives and texts by several parties are noteworthy in this regard. However, it should be mentioned that their programs are still fragmental and artificial.

To protect the rights of non-dominant ethnic groups and ensure their real participation in public political life, basically, two theories of change are offered in the programs of the political subjects registered in the 2020 parliamentary elections: state language teaching to minorities and eradication of

discrimination facts. It is noteworthy, that almost all pre-election programs see the solution in teaching the state language to minorities, which is one of the major challenges for non-dominant ethnic groups to participate in public life. However, no political party states anything, on the one hand, about strengthening the voice of those citizens who already know the state language, and on the other hand, about ensuring the political participation of people who do not know and can not learn the state language due to their socio-economic conditions, age, or the place of residence. In this regard, the [program](#) of the ruling party, Georgian Dream, can be emphasized, which covers the issue of participation of non-dominant ethnic groups in public and political life in only one sentence and focuses only on state language teaching.

One of the most widespread theories of change - eliminating discrimination and ensuring equality before the law - is shared equally by most opposition parties. European Georgia, United National Movement - Power is in Unity and Girch focuses on the elimination of all forms of discrimination and equality before the law, where the main subjects of their theoretical framework are individuals and their individual freedom and not social groups and their collective rights. These political parties say almost nothing about the legal, social and power asymmetry of non-dominant ethnic groups and special policies and interventions to address these issues. In the program proposed by the United National Movement, we read: "All citizens are equal before the law and this will be guaranteed by an independent judiciary and a politically neutral administrative body." This statement about a politically neutral administrative body seems to imply cultural neutrality as well. However, our work with non-dominant ethnic groups shows that administrative bodies violate the principle of religious and cultural neutrality and often reveal loyalty to dominant religious institutions or social groups while exercising their powers. In this situation, it remains unclear with what specific methods and how the United National Movement intends to ensure the mentioned neutrality in the minority regions and the country in general. According to the party [program](#), to pursue an effective anti-discrimination policy, an internal mechanism for reviewing complaints on discrimination in all public institutions will be established. This is indeed an interesting measure to eradicate discrimination, however, in existing reality when as a result of systemic barriers, the representatives of non-dominant ethnic groups cannot get employed in the public sector and neither public services are accessible for them, this mechanism remains without function and useless. For the efficiency of this proposal, it is first and foremost necessary to develop a strategy to employ non-dominant ethnic groups in the public sector and also to eliminate the causes of alienation between state institutions and ethnic minorities.

From the viewpoint of the New Political Center - Girchi, it is clear that the party does not recognize the different identities of Georgian citizens and emphasizes Georgian citizenship instead of talking about minorities. The introduction of a unifying framework against the growing and politically instrumentalized chauvinistic tendencies is indeed important, however, this statement highlights the blindness towards the specific oppression, exclusion, and challenges of non-dominant groups.

European Georgia focuses on the elimination of discrimination and punishing oppression and violence in its [program](#), which, as already mentioned, in the context of the strengthening existing chauvinist and ethno-nationalist rhetoric, may be considered a progressive approach. It should be noted, however, that

punitive approaches, in line with international practice, often aggravate chauvinistic and ethno-nationalist rhetoric, while European Georgia says nothing about the structural social and political reasons that fuel chauvinism and ethnonationalism. At the same time, European Georgia states in its program that "we will ensure minorities are not oppressed in state agencies and they have access to state services like other citizens." But it says nothing about how and by what methods they intend to achieve this.

According to the Strategy Builder program, full integration of non-dominant ethnic groups into public and political life is not possible only through the refinement of legislation. From the perspective of Strategy Builder, stereotypes, and prejudices in society slow down the process of achieving equality. It is welcoming that this political union considers coordinated work of the civil sector, private sector, and the state essential to achieve equality for non-dominant ethnic groups, and emphasizes the need for proactive and preventive measures by the state. According to the Strategy Builder, it is critical to raise public awareness and plan educational activities not only for the general public but also for public officials and law enforcement officials "to increase their tolerance towards various vulnerable groups." However, the party says nothing about the needs, concerns, and challenges of these groups. Besides, the party does not single out issues of non-dominant groups as a separate chapter or sub-chapter in the [program](#) published on its website. Moreover, in its program, the party does not even mention non-dominant ethnic groups once.

The vision proposed by the Labor Party, despite the fragmentation of their ideas, clearly shows an attempt to introduce new perspectives. It is noteworthy that the party highlights the issue of knowledge of both languages (state and minorities) among teachers working in regions populated by non-dominant ethnic groups. Also, it considers critically important to set a 5% quota on state grants and funding for non-dominant ethnic groups. In addition, an essentially new approach is developed by the Labor Party on access to information, which implied adaptation of all government sites and e-services to minorities and non-dominant ethnic groups.

According to the Lelo for Georgia [program](#), the party plans to actively involve non-dominant ethnic groups in the state's political life, to provide access to quality education and promote Georgian language teaching. It should be noted that according to Lelo, as a result of the 10-year program proposed by them, "the number of those who do not know the Georgian language will be less than 1% of the Georgian population." However, even at the level of hints, the programs says nothing about how Georgian language education will be provided to the population outside the institutional systems of education (middle and upper-middle age people). This issue is closely linked to the participation of non-dominant ethnic groups in public and political life. Often, especially at the self-government level, non-dominant ethnic groups are unable to engage in public and political life due to a lack of state language knowledge, while Lelo says nothing about what mechanisms will increase the political participation of non-dominant groups if they do not know the state language. Lelo's statement that "Lelo will change the policy vector for ethnic and religious minorities is important – less involvement of minorities in state's political life and governance system will be assessed as a threat to the state and not their 'excessive' political activity (as it has been for decades)". Such formulation of this issue is a transformational and

new vision in Georgian politics and party programs. However, it is also fundamentally important to create institutional and political guarantees that will facilitate the participation of ethnic minorities in political life and increase communication and trust towards government agencies.

It is noteworthy that Lelo is critical of the activities of the Ministry of Reconciliation and Civic Equality and the Agency for Religious Affairs. Under the Lelo program, civic equality issues should be separated from the Ministry of Reconciliation and a Civic Equality Agency should be set up to work on issues of non-dominant ethnic and religious groups. In our opinion, this approach is interesting, however, it requires additional clarifications from the party, including the mandate and arrangement of the new agency, as well as relations and cooperation strategies with organizations working to protect the rights of religious and ethnic minorities.

Lelo's promise to create quality textbooks for non-dominant ethnic groups in their native language and literature is welcomed. However, given that such a promise has long been issued by the Ministry of Education, Lelo's explanation would be interesting, where they see the problem in the current situation and why such textbooks have not been created to date, resulting in Lelo explaining what and how it would change.

According to the Lelo's proposal, a new school subject - "Diverse Georgia" will be introduced in public schools to raise awareness about Georgia's ethnic and religious minorities. However, nothing is said about how this school subject will differ from the existing civic education subject, which has the same objectives.

It should be noted that despite the numerous criticisms and dissatisfaction voiced in recent years on the problem of political participation of ethnic minorities, most of the political parties' programs do not provide special visions and reformist ideas on this issue. The parties do not address the problem of lack of consultative mechanisms at the executive and legislative levels,⁴ nor the issues of special mechanisms for minority political participation, for example, recognized mechanisms such as quotas, reserved seats, incentives for parties through funding, or ethnic parties.⁵

The issue of informative isolation and alienation of non-dominant ethnic groups should be mentioned separately, as well as the problems of Public Broadcaster coverage in languages understandable to ethnic minorities focused on their needs and interests,⁶ which was once again demonstrated during the pandemic and military escalation in Karabakh. Unfortunately, these issues were not among the interest areas of political parties.

⁴ Ethnic minority consultative mechanisms, reality in Georgia and international experience, EMC, 2020, available at: <https://emc.org.ge/ka/products/etnikuri-umtsiresobebis-sakonsultatsio-mekanizmebi-realoba-sakartveloshi-da-saertashoriso-gamotsdileba>

⁵ Positive Mechanisms to support ethnic minority political participation, EMC, 2020, Available at: <https://emc.org.ge/ka/products/pozitiuri-mekanizmebi-umtsiresobebis-politikuri-monatsileobis-mkhardasacherad-saertashoriso-gamotsdilebis-mimokhilva>

⁶ Ethnic minority needs, Public Broadcaster and Pandemic, EMC, 2020, Available at: <https://emc.org.ge/ka/products/etnikuri-umtsiresobebis-sachiroebibi-sazogadoebrivi-mautsgebili-da-pandemia-1>

Even more unrecognized and invisible are the issues of the special vulnerability of ethnic minorities and their limited access to public services, vital resources, and social infrastructure. The parties, unfortunately, do not understand the reality that political and cultural isolation not only damages the democratic processes but also hinders the social development of these groups, further impoverishes them, and creates a clearly unfavorable social environment.

In summary, the main narratives of the parties are largely aimed at teaching the language to non-dominant ethnic groups, identifying and punishing cases of discrimination, and thus, the parties use more outdated paradigms. Apart from several cases, no political party speaks about the real needs, concerns, and challenges of non-dominant ethnic groups, which is represented in several studies⁷ and recommendation packages.⁸ At the same time, none of the parties offer specific mechanisms that would not only trivially talk about achieving equality in the country, but also would create new visions, policies, and mechanisms for real participation of ethnic minorities in public life, generate a fair political and social environment and build a multicultural environment. The parties' visions do not represent the structural, critical analysis of the integration policy pursued so far, and the nuanced perspectives of change, new alternatives, and ways.

The rights of people living in conflict regions and nearby and conflict transformation

The restoration of territorial integrity and conflict resolution are not been skipped from the pre-election programs of political parties, although they do not offer essentially new, transformational approaches that would create a vision for gradual and realistic conflict resolution. The political vision of the Georgian Dream party regarding conflict resolution and the improvement of human rights is practically invisible in the pre-election program. The ruling political team intends to continue the existing policy of reconciliation and engagement and increase access to public services for the population living in the occupied territories. The ruling political team has no vision of what specific measures will be taken to address the problem of "creeping occupation" and respond to the humanitarian crisis in the occupied territories. Increased restrictions on freedom of movement and isolation during the Georgian Dream ruling have created a series of humanitarian crises in the occupied territories, affecting not only ethnic Georgian towns and villages but also Abkhazians and Ossetians. Given this experience, it is surprising when the governing team's vision remains unclear on how to manage such crises, what mechanisms should be used to improve the protection of fundamental human rights, and the overall humanitarian situation.

⁷ Research results on ethnic minority political participation, OSGF, 2019, Available at: <https://osgf.ge/kvlevis-shedegebi-etnikuri-umciresobebis-warmomadgenlebis-politikur-ckhovrebashi-monawileobis-shesakheb/>

⁸ Minority Council of Public Defender's office, Recommendations on the minority rights protection and civil integration, 2020, available at: <http://ombudsman.ge/geo/rekomendatsiebi/sakhalkho-damtsvelma-erovnuli-umtsiresobebis-uflebebis-datsvisa-dsamokalako-integratsiis-shesakheb-shemushavebuli-rekomendatsiebi-tsaradgina>

Other political parties' pre-election programs are not distinguished by new visions of conflict transformation and protection of rights in the occupied territories. The opposition parties' plans in this direction include to continue the policy of non-recognition, the maintenance of "occupation" as a term in international documents, the continuation of active advocacy with international organizations and partners to impose responsibility on Russia as an occupying power. It also envisages maintenance of the Geneva talks format, various initiatives to address the problem of employment and housing of IDPs. Political parties plan to increase security measures along the occupation line, strengthen patrols, and establish video surveillance to stop the "creeping occupation". Pre-election programs also promise to activate the Tatunashvili-Otkhozoria list, which is envisaged as one of the mechanisms to stop the creeping occupation. Also, Strategy Builder and Lelo programs recognize the importance of rebuilding trust and engaging in direct dialogue with Abkhazians and Ossetians. Almost all opposition political parties agree that significant economic progress of Georgia and the sharing/offering of relevant benefits to Abkhazians and Ossetians are a prerequisite for resolving the conflict.

Political parties still find it difficult to offer cutting-edge initiatives to resolve the conflict. Political parties do not have a proper understanding of the reasons for the success or failure of similar mechanisms used in previous years, the permanently changing political contexts, and attitudes in the occupied territories. Georgia's economic progress and strong international support are important in this process, but they are not crucial in building trust and peace between the parties and communities. The political elites have not yet realized the shortcomings and problems of the Geneva International Talks format, which, even after 12 years of work, is unable to bring about positive changes. At the same time, it is clear that neither this format nor its main achievement, the Incident Prevention and Response Mechanism (IPRM), has proved to be sufficient to address the humanitarian crisis.

Political parties also fail to offer what mechanisms they intend to apply to protect human rights in the occupied territories, nor is there a vision for the introduction of appropriate international mechanisms. It is also noteworthy that when we talk about the problem of protection of rights, the focus is largely on the discrimination of ethnic Georgians and the practice of human rights violations, which separates us from the objectives of restoring trust and reconciliation, and requires support for the unifying idea.

Thus, the political parties's programs are based on largely outdated visions of de-occupation and conflict transformation policies and omit the changing political and social environment that exists in these regions. The programs are also not based on new policy alternatives and visions raised from the local context that would promote trust and reconciliation between the parties to the conflict, as well as the protection of human rights and prosperity on both sides.

Gender Equality and Women's Rights

Gender Equality and women political participation

Some positive changes are noticeable in terms of promoting gender equality and women's political participation by registered political subjects in 2020 elections, although the majority of parties still do

not see gender equality as a major issue in all relevant areas of public life and as a rule, respond to the challenges of women's rights protection with narrow-specificity, superficial and declarative activities. Consequently, gender equality in party programs or visions is limited to emphasizing the need for women's political participation and supporting their role in party politics with declarative statements.

A certain part of political subjects considers the broader goal of gender equality to be limited to women's political participation, including European Georgia, the United National Movement, and Girchi. Accordingly, these political party programs do not address the future steps and specific measures, that will be taken to promote women's political participation and underlines the general importance of this issue.

Additional aspects of women's rights protection are highlighted by the Strategy Builder, whose program addresses not only women's political participation but also the strengthening of institutional mechanisms for gender equality, such as the Gender Council of the Parliament of Georgia. The program also highlights the importance of promoting gender equality awareness and empowering women across the country. However, this party's program addresses issue of violence against women and women's economic empowerment with only one sentence.

Interestingly, one part of the parties (Girchi, Labor Party), while acknowledging the importance of women's political participation, oppose the quota mechanism and promise to abolish it to the electorate, which also indicates that these political parties do not understand the root causes of structural problems in women's political participation.

It is noteworthy that the ruling political party Georgian Dream does not state its position and political vision on this issue.

Violence against women and domestic violence

Regardless of the scale of the violence against women and the importance of the problem, a large proportion of registered political parties completely omit the importance of combating violence against women, domestic violence, and femicide, as well as their underlying structural factors and causes (United National Movement, Labor Party, European Georgia). None of the political parties' agendas address issues related to the elimination of sexual violence against women, including sexual harassment and rape. Psycho-social needs for victim protection and support are also omitted from issues of violence against women and domestic violence.

Only one political party Lelo responds that it is important to increase the number of social workers, improve their skills, and working conditions to better deal with domestic violence. The program also addresses the need to integrate violence against women and domestic violence into curricula, including in ethnic minority languages. Lelo's program also addresses the problems of the prevention and operational response mechanisms and emphasizes the importance of developing a methodology for its refinement and processing of unified statistics.

The Party Strategy Builder also mentions the importance of combating violence against women, however, does not highlight any additional activities or strategic visions.

Economic empowerment of women

The women are a vital part of the economy and social structure that make up the unity of society, however, their work is less valued than the work of men. This situation is also related to the opportunities that are available to them. According to the 2018 Global Gender Inequality Index, women's participation in the labor market of Georgia is lower than that of men. At the same time, the share of women working part-time is twice as high as the number of employed men.⁹ This factor is generally determined by the disproportionately large workload of unpaid domestic and care work of women. According to the ILO, gender segregation is still a problem in the labor market in Georgia. Women, regardless of their qualifications and education, dominate nonprofit areas of activity where their income is substantially low.¹⁰

Despite the above-mentioned problems, which require active and effective measures by the state, most of the registered political parties do not realize the importance of women's economic empowerment, which is reflected in the absence of these issues in their programs.

In the context of economic empowerment, the importance of women's economic independence is reflected in one sentence in the Strategy Builder's program. Other political parties do not talk about the economic empowerment of women at all, it is noteworthy that neither the ruling party, the Georgian Dream, states its position on this issue.

The issue is relatively detailed only in the political party Lelo's program, which promises the better administration of kinder gardens and daycare centers for children and adolescents with disabilities. It also singles out the needs of women living in rural areas. However, the party considers "business skills mastering programs" to be the main focus of women's economic empowerment, which does not address the structural problems for women's economic empowerment, including the low gender sensitivity of the Labor Code and the need for legislative or practical regulations tailored to employees' interests.

Women's health and social protection

A key aspect of women's health is the framework of sexual and reproductive health and rights, the effective implementation of which is essential for the well-being of women and girls, and their right to

⁹ World Economic Forum, The Global Gender Gap Report 2018. Available at http://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF_GGGR_2018.pdf

¹⁰ ILO, Direct Request (CEACR) - adopted 2013, published 103rd ILC session (2014). Available at https://www.ilo.org/dyn/normlex/en/f?p=NORMLEXPUB:13100:0::NO::P13100_COMMENT_ID:3142602

reproductive health in Georgia. Although the state approved a Maternal and Newborn Health Strategy in 2017, its implementation in practice is weak, with women not having access to quality services and information that could put their health at risk. Therefore, the pre-election programs of the political parties must respond to the existing critical challenges, however, as the parties' perspectives and the content of the programs show, these issues are not prioritized and mentioned by almost any party.

Certain issues on the health and social care program are reflected in Lelo's program, although attitudes towards these issues are general and do not allow to evaluate the specific measures, they plan to take in relation to key aspects of women and girls health care.

Thus, despite the high public interest in women's oppression and rights and the recent important legislative and institutional changes that have taken place, the issues of economic and social empowerment and protection of women, which are the basis for women's emancipation and a fair political, economic and social environment, remains out of focus. Despite the mainstreaming of gender equality issues, it is difficult to say that the visions and programs of political parties are essentially based on the ideas of feminist justice. Programs are devoid of such conceptual content and sensitivity. This is why parties fail to come up with new ideas and alternatives for women's emancipation process and largely duplicate dominant visions and perspectives. This repetition is also superficial and fragmentary.

Protection of LGBTQ people's rights

The majority of parties omit specific vulnerable group such as LGBTQ people from the political agenda over the years, and political parties and entities themselves have fueled stigmas and stereotypes about LGBTQ people through political homophobia, which has led to mistrust towards the political parties within the group.

LGBTQ people are still one of the most vulnerable and discriminated groups in Georgia today. Despite significant positive changes in legislation, substantial changes have not been observed in terms of shaping public opinion and reducing negative prejudices. This promotes the exclusion of LGBTQ people from the public sphere, which is also exacerbated by ultra-conservative, ultra-right, and violent groups that directly and openly oppose LGBTQ people and all other emancipatory policies that include the issues of exercise of human autonomy and free realization of ones' life (for example right to abortion). The mentioned problems are not addressed by the state's preventive policy, which in practice increases the sense of restriction of the fundamental rights of LGBTQ people and their insecurity.

The programs and visions of the registered political subjects in the 2020 parliamentary elections almost do not comprehend the ideas on how to improve the situation of LGBTQ people and what measures need to be taken to effectively protect their rights. Three types of tendencies can be noticed within their perspectives: The parties that do not mention LGBTQ people among minority groups at all and do not include them under any other cross-cutting issue (Georgian Dream, United National Movement, Labor Party); Parties that superficially mention these groups (Strategy Builder, European Georgia) and parties

that, in a relatively detailed way, formulate a strategy for the protection of the rights of LGBTQ people (Lelo).

Consequently, as noted, the complex needs of LGBTQ individuals are not fully represented in the party election programs. Interestingly, the Strategy Builder specifically addresses radical and ultra-right groups - stresses the need for legal accountability for their actions, and also considers awareness-raising campaigns as an important step.

The political party Lelo provides a more thorough overview of the problems facing LGBTQ people, including the protection of freedom of assembly and expression, the strengthening of preventive policies against violence, as well as the promotion of the realization of the socio-economic rights of the group. It should be noted that Lelo is the only party that addresses the specific needs of trans people, such as trans-specific health care and the legal recognition of gender.

Thus, interest in the needs and rights of LGBTQ people is still low among political parties, and a large proportion of them still use the approach of non-recognition and their disappearance. Although public debates and conflicts are frequent around LGBTQ issues, and parties can have an important role and resource in supporting emancipatory discourses and equality ideas and promoting constructive public debates, they still pursue a strategy of silence on these issues. Despite the dire legal and social situation of LGBTQ people, most parties do not have specific visions of policy change in this area, which is generally a problem for their programs in the field of equality policy and can also be explained by the underlying tendency to deny LGBTQ people rights and needs.