

MORITORING REPORT

**2020 Georgian Parliamentary Elections in the Region of Guria
Research on the compliance of election campaigns
with the interests of the vulnerable groups**

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Introduction

The 2020 Georgian parliamentary elections are one of the most important elections on the way of democratic development of the Georgian state. For the first time in Georgia, elections were held with a relatively democratic electoral system. These changes were achieved thanks to the significant involvement of international partners and the role of the United States of America should be specially noted and appreciated. The project implementation team is especially grateful to the National Democratic Institute (NDI), with the support of which implementation of the project “Waiting for response” became possible. The goal of the project was to make the electoral process in the Guria region more focused on substantive discussion and represent the interests of vulnerable groups. In the 2020 elections, voters in the Guria region had more opportunities to make an informed choice and the candidates participating in the elections had more space and chances to accept specific challenges and demands of the voters.

Project “Waiting for response”

Since July 2020, “Guria Civic Center”, supported by the American National Democratic Institute (NDI) and in partnership with “Innovation and Civic Development Centre - Progress House” and “Student Youth Council” is implementing the project “Waiting for response”. The goal of the project was to stimulate substantive discussion among the political actors and support improvement of the electoral environment by promoting its adjustment to the needs of interest groups in the region of Guria during the period of upcoming parliamentary elections of 2020. For the project three vulnerable groups were identified: eco-migrants, youth, and the urban population.

Within the project:

- Focus groups were carried on with all three target groups of the project (eco-migrants, youth and urban population);
- Presentation on issues important to all three groups was prepared and presented to participating parties and candidates;
- A meeting was held with civil society organizations in Guria region on the topic of identified problems.

There were prepared “10 Questions for Participating Majority Candidates from their voters and civil society organizations”.

Received answers have been processed into infographics and spread through social networks and two local print media as newspaper supplements and TV-debates between the candidates were held on relevant topics.

Needs of Vulnerable Groups - 2020

In July 2020, Georgian researchers of non-governmental non-profit research center CRRC directly interviewed about 30 interviewees among members of three vulnerable groups (eco-migrants, youth and urban population). The questionnaire was developed in cooperation with the Guria Civic Center and partner organizations. The respondents were not limited to topics that are solved through parliamentary activities. However, while developing questions, it was mostly taken into account that the answers obtained should relate to the parliamentary elections. Challenges that each vulnerable group considers problematic are summarized. The problems were distributed among 8 blocks according to their urgency.

Economy

N	Existing challenges	Eco-migrants	Youth	Urban population
1	Insufficient jobs	✓	✓	✓
2	Inadequate and unequal payment by regions	✓	✓	✓
3	Low level of production in agricultural processing and industrial directions	✓	✓	✓
4	High level of internal and external migration	✓	✓	✓
5	Low awareness of government economic support programs and lack of adaptability to the skills of potential beneficiaries	✓	✓	✓
6	The existing education system does not meet the demands of the economy and the market	✓	✓	✓
7	Absence of a strong economic, educational and cultural center of attraction in Guria region	✓		✓
8	Distrust towards state economic empowerment programs	✓		✓
9	Less support for local production while growing imports	✓		✓
10	Less support for starting a business	✓		✓
11	Dependence on bank loans and enslaving conditions of banks		✓	✓
12	Disorganized, unfair working conditions, especially in banks and supermarkets		✓	✓
13	Development of utility service while growing insolvency of the population	✓		
14	Economic vulnerability - loss of wages, social assistance and other income means poverty	✓		
15	Increased prices for basic necessities and essential goods			✓
16	Lack of state and municipal programs for promoting employment		✓	

Education

N	Existing challenges	Eco-migrants	Youth	Urban population
1	The employment rate of those with higher education is lower than that of those with vocational and secondary education	✓	✓	✓
2	School education is not appropriate enough for higher education	✓	✓	✓
3	Lack of access to quality vocational education for the residents of Guria villages	✓	✓	✓
4	Overcrowded groups in kindergartens and an insufficient number of kindergartens	✓	✓	✓
5	Insufficiency of vocational education centers	✓	✓	
6	Bullying at school	✓	✓	
7	Low qualification of teachers in kindergartens		✓	✓
8	Unfavorable environment for development in kindergartens		✓	✓
9	Poor quality curricula in kindergartens		✓	✓
10	Poor qualification of teachers in schools		✓	✓
11	Insufficiently popularized vocational education		✓	✓
12	Gender inequality in the education process	✓		
13	Less state support for housing and communal affairs for students from regions	✓		
14	Mothers do not have support in access to education and work	✓		
15	Child safety in kindergartens is less protected		✓	
16	Transportation of schoolchildren is disordered and problematic		✓	
17	School heating and other small infrastructural problems		✓	
18	Insufficient infrastructure for the study of natural sciences		✓	
19	Less information for school students about higher education		✓	
20	Discrimination on religious grounds at school		✓	
21	Lack of professional orientation and career planning programs		✓	
22	lack of the internship system		✓	
23	Non-prestigious and low-quality vocational education system and programs		✓	
24	Faulty infrastructure for online education, both at schools and in high schools		✓	
25	Less support for non-formal educational activities		✓	
26	Less experience of working with inclusive children in kindergartens		✓	
27	Non-optimized schools, very small contingent or overcrowded classrooms		✓	
28	The average age of teachers is over 50 years		✓	

Social Problems

N	Existing challenges	Eco-mi-grants	Youth	Urban population
1	Inequality and injustice of the distribution of social assistance and rating points methodology	✓	✓	✓
2	Unadapted environment for the disabled and elderly people	✓	✓	✓
3	There are no programs aimed at strengthening the family, therefore a large number of families are demolished due to social or other problems (eco-migrants, urban)	✓		✓
4	Low qualification of social agents	✓		✓
5	There is a need for social assistance but the municipal budget cannot afford it	✓		
6	Pensions and social assistance do not meet the existing needs	✓		
7	Disordered working conditions (schedule, environment, etc.)		✓	

Agriculture

N	Existing challenges	Eco-mi-grants	Youth	Urban population
1	There is no irrigation water, and our work is meaningless, high-quality and competitive products are not created due to lack of water	✓	✓	✓
2	Unregistered, uncultivated and unfenced lands in rural areas	✓	✓	
3	Low access to agricultural machinery (eco-migrants)	✓		
4	Lack of companies buying and processing milk, fruit, tea and other agricultural products (eco-migrants)	✓		

Infrastructure

N	Existing challenges	Eco-mi-grants	Youth	Urban population
1	Bad conditions of road infrastructure	✓	✓	
2	Bad conditions of outdoor lighting systems and /or absence of outdoor lighting	✓	✓	
3	Low quality of implemented infrastructure projects	✓	✓	
4	The unsatisfactory condition of transport infrastructure (Waiters, vehicles)	✓	✓	
5	Bad conditions of sewage system		✓	✓
6	The unsatisfactory condition of towns and villages and appropriate appearance		✓	
7	Irrelevant touristic infrastructure (Ureki)		✓	
8	Irrelevant drainage system		✓	
9	Lack of sports infrastructure (stadium, gym, bowling alley, swimming pool, etc.)		✓	
10	Lack of cultural and educational infrastructure (cinema, library, clubs, other) (youth)		✓	
11	The insufficient amount and/or lack of children-entertainment infrastructure		✓	

Health Care

N	Existing challenges	Eco-migrants	Youth	Urban population
1	High service rates in medical institutions and low qualification of doctors	✓	✓	✓
2	The high price of medicines and its incompatibility with pensions, salaries and other incomes	✓	✓	✓
3	Inability to receive qualified medical services in Guria region	✓	✓	✓
4	A small number of hospitals, large queues and overcrowded wards	✓	✓	✓
5	Never-ending waiting for operations	✓		✓
6	Ineffective and unqualified ambulance service		✓	

Environmental protection / recreation

N	Existing challenges	Eco-migrants	Youth	Urban population
1	Insufficient recreational spaces (parks, squares)	✓	✓	✓
2	Relatively poorly cleaned environment and waste disposal problems		✓	
3	A healthy lifestyle is less popularized and supported			✓

Public Administration

N	Existing challenges	Eco-migrants	Youth	Urban population
1	The problem of publicity, dissemination of information and communication with the population	✓		
2	Corruption and bias	✓		
3	Police surveillance at gathering places in villages		✓	
4	Village authorities have neither mechanisms nor competencies to solve the problems in time	✓		

10 Questions to Majoritarian Deputy Candidates and Their Answers

In cooperation with civil society organizations working in the Guria region, 10 questions were developed for majoritarian deputy candidates. Seven candidates answered the questions:

1. Khatuna Gogorishvili - "European Georgia"
2. Manuchar Kvirkvelia - "United National Movement - United Opposition"
3. Shota Gogiberidze - "Alliance of Georgian Patriots"
4. Nino Shetsiruli-Gobronidze - "Our Georgia - Solidarity Alliance"
5. Otar Kerkadze - "Aleko Elisashvili - Citizens"
6. Vakhtang Zenaishvili - "Girchi"
7. Giorgi Sioridze - "Lelo for Georgia"

Majoritarian deputy candidates presented the public with their opinion on 10 topics.

Ozurgeti fails to act as a regional center of attraction (Employment, education, medical services, shopping, entertainment, etc.). Therefore, permanent and temporary labor migration from Guria is high. Young people are leaving the region. What do you think, how can we stop migration from Guria?

As a solution to this complex problem the candidates see the following:

- Developing new employment positions;
- Reduction of nepotism;
- More publicity and participation;
- Development of cultural-educational and sports spaces;
- Reducing economic backwardness with countries and regions where migration is high from the Guria region;
- Promotion of small and medium businesses;
- Restoration of the University Branch and establishment of educational centers;
- Privatization of state property;
- Modernized agriculture and transformation of a peasant into a farmer;
- Development of tourism and tourist infrastructure;
- Cultivation of new agricultural crops (stevia, blueberry), restoration of tea, strengthening scientific and educational directions in agriculture.

Agriculture in the Guria region lags behind and does not play a significant role in expanding the economic opportunities of the region's population. The population claims that they have no access to agricultural machinery, qualified agro, phyto and veterinary consulting services, the land is not cultivated, and the raw materials produced have a low price. Processing companies are not developed. How would you help to create a value chain of production, storage and processing agricultural products in Guria?

Candidates consider to solve this problem with:

- So-called startup financing;
- Development of processing enterprises;
- Establishing of municipal companies of agricultural machinery;
- Privatization of agricultural lands along with anti-corruption guarantees;
- Investing in agricultural education;

- Establishing multifunctional “Country Houses”;
- Direct foreign investment in agriculture;
- Complete modernization of agriculture;
- Complete cadastre of agricultural lands at the expense of the state;
- Opening the European market for Georgia;
- Development of melioration and irrigation systems;
- Development of support centers for agricultural production and sales;
- Agronomist and veterinarian for all villages;
- Increase in local production and a decrease in imports;
- Development of eco-production;
- Development of refrigeration resources and support of farmers in the sale of products;
- Privatization of state property; Owners will decide how to use private property, the market will regulate it;
- Re-trained Georgian specialists;
- Special guarantee fund and easy access to finance;
- Special quality mark, agricultural and biological products and access to the European market.

Residents of Guria often claim that healthcare in the region is of poor quality, or they do not have access to it. They need to travel to large cities to receive qualified medical services. What would you do to ensure that residents of villages have access to quality medical care?

The candidates make the following promises to the population of the Guria region:

- Municipal hospitals;
- Strengthening state control in the field of medicine and health care;
- Strong primary health care and ambulance system;
- Re-training of physicians and increasing their salary;
- Reducing the price of medicines by half;
- Establishing strong regional clinics;
- Establishing a state insurance system;
- Abolition of income tax for doctors;
- Development of telemedicine;
- Strengthening institute of rural physicians;
- Economic strengthening of the population, which will subsequently join private insurance companies.

Preschool education service is one of the priority issues for the population. For various reasons, municipalities are unable to provide preschool education services of relevant standards, which, according to the law, should be accessible to everyone. What do you think should be done concerning this?

Majoritarian deputy candidates suggest the following ways to solve this problem:

- Highly qualified staff with good salaries;
- Quality nutrition and enhanced monitoring of nutrition;
- Good infrastructure and adequate hygiene standards;
- Safe transportation of children;
- Establishment of the principle of voucher financing in kindergartens;
- Equal working conditions and good salary, elimination of imbalances between the capital and region;

- Improved sanitary-hygienic conditions;
- More freedom for people in education; people need to be helped with resources, and they will decide for themselves who to entrust their child's education - to the state or private sector;
- Psychologist in every kindergarten;
- A well-developed kindergarten service will provide people with more job opportunities, which is a prerequisite for the country's socio-economic development.

The lack of sewerage systems is one of the most actual problems for the urban population of the Guria region. There are also problems with permanent and high-quality water delivery and sewerage system. Although these are functions of the municipality, in fact, responsibility for water delivery and sewerage in these settlements now lies with the central government. How do you see the solution to these problems?

Majoritarian deputy candidates think:

- Building sewerage and water delivery systems cannot be provided from the municipal budget, it must be organized by the central government, and local authorities must take care and manage;
- More finances to municipalities and they will look after these systems themselves;
- A financially independent municipality is a tool for solving the sewerage system, water delivery system and all other problems.

In the opinion of the population, one of the main problems in villages and cities is the lack of persons and institutions that make decisions. What do you think about decentralization? In what direction should self-government develop, to become more accountable to local people and more adequately meet local needs such as economic development, social, transport politics, etc.

The visions of the majoritarian deputy candidates are the following:

- The municipality must be financially independent and make its own decisions, part of the taxes must remain with it;
- There must be more partners in towns and villages that will work voluntarily;
- Existence of management structure over every 2000 people and the existence of agronomist and veterinarian in the agricultural districts;
- Each village should be a decision-maker;
- Regions should have administrative and financial independence;
- Unregistered lands and part of natural resources must belong to the self-government;
- Self-government must be created by private owners and not by the state;
- nevery large village services should be almost the same as in cities;
- All villages must have internet access.

Residents of Gura believe that state programs focused on economic development do not meet local requirements, for example, they do not support the starting of a business. How do you think the central/local government should support new, small and medium businesses?

Majoritarian deputy candidates think that:

- Small and medium businesses must be supported, especially in the fields of agriculture and tourism;
- Financial resources should be allocated fairly;
- Support projects must be managed by municipal centers instead of Ministries;

- Agricultural processing companies must be supported;
- Risks of bureaucracy and corruption must be reduced and effective monitoring systems for project implementation must be established;
- State non-interference in the economy, tax cuts and small government is needed;
- Bio and eco production, 2 million support fund to support quality agriculture, by the model of private-public partnership is needed.

Guria is one of the poorest regions in Georgia. What is your vision for the development of the economy in the region, which sectors of the economy should be developed and what should be the economic profile of the Guria region in the country's economy?

On this question Majoritarian deputy candidates answer:

- Tourism and Agriculture;
- Launching of Airport in Meria;
- Foreign direct investments;
- Good analysis of the business environment in the region and new development plans;
- Restoration of tea culture;
- Production of agricultural products, state consulting and technical support of production companies;
- Less state intervention and the region will define its economic profile;
- Increasing scientific-research potential in agriculture and promoting the production of quality products.

How would you ensure access to high-quality vocational education for young people living in the Guria region? What initiatives would you suggest to develop career guidance programs?

Majoritarian deputy candidates suggestions to the youth are:

- Vocational education systems adapted to economic sectors and market demand;
- Implementation of internationally recognized vocational education systems for 3, 6, or 9 months long;
- Internet to villages, IT-schools;
- Vocational education that meets the demands of the business;
- The popularization of vocational education among young people, adapting it to demands of the region and building new centers.

Today, people in the Guria region live and work in conditions where the loss of wages or other sources of income means living in poverty, where wages and social aid is under the living minimum, where the social assistance system distributes aid unfairly. How do you see social policy and the management of its implementation?

As a solution to the problem, candidates for majoritarian deputies see:

- Changing the existing social assistance system so that the socially vulnerable people be motivated to work.
- Targeted social assistance system and preservation of financial assistance for one year after employment.
- Defeating poverty and hunger at the first stage, and all others later; Free food ration in schools;
- Raising the living wage;
- Establishing unemployment benefits;
- Decentralization of the social assistance system will make it more targeted;
- Developing a social registry and establishing a social insurance system.

Political Debate 2020 - Between Majoritarian Deputy Candidates

Debates between the majoritarian candidates in the Guria region were held on October 15. Representatives of the following political parties took part in the debate:

- Khatuna Gogorishvili, “European Georgia”
- Vakhtang Zenaishvili, “Girchi”
- Nino Shetsiruli, “Our Georgia - Solidarity Alliance”
- Davit Mamaladze, Georgian Labor Party
- Otar Kerkadze, “Aleko Elisashvili - Citizens”
- Giorgi Sioridze, “Lelo for Georgia”
- Gocha Dzimistarishvili, an initiative group

The discussion took place in a format previously agreed with the participants. It was broadcasted by the local television channel “Guria TV”. The candidates discussed 10 issues that were selected within the project as a priority for the target groups. Particular time was devoted to discussing the candidates’ visions for future economic development, access to health services, decentralization, self-government reform and their future legislative initiatives as well.

All participants in the debate agreed on the need for decentralization and self-government reform. Giorgi Sioridze (“Lelo for Georgia”) said that their party program envisages leaving additional taxes for the local government. Khatuna Gogorishvili (“European Georgia”) noted that issues such as the development of the urban sewerage system can be solved centrally - by reflecting the corresponding amounts in the central budget so that the population does not need to expect long-term results of the decentralization process.

The positions of the participants in the discussion regarding the economic development of the Guria region did not differ significantly, each of them spoke about tourism and agriculture. Giorgi Sioridze (“Lelo for Georgia”) focused on the restoration of tea plantations, Nino Shetsiruli (“Our Georgia - Solidarity Alliance”) - on the cultivation of ecologically clean agricultural products, Khatuna Gogorishvili (“European Georgia”) - on tax cuts and improvement of infrastructure. In the opinion of Vakhtang Zenaishvili (“Girchi”) deregulation, more privatization and reducing the role of the state in the economy will solve the problems.



Agitation of the Majoritarian Deputy Candidates 2020 - How Candidates Respond to Public Needs

The project team monitored candidates' election campaigns to see if candidates raised priority issues for vulnerable groups during the campaign. For monitoring purposes, the project team members attended the candidates' pre-election meetings, attendance of which was approved by the headquarters of those candidates. Team also monitored local media resources and social media which the candidates were using.

In particular, the team monitored the following candidates:

- Vasil Chigogidze, "Georgian Dream": 16 meetings,
- Manuchar Kvirkelia, "United National Movement - United Opposition": 15 Meetings
- Otar Kerkadze, "Aleko Elisashvili - Citizens" - 12 meetings
- Giorgi Sioridze, "Lelo for Georgia" - 33 meetings
- Vakhtang Zenaishvili, "Girchi" - 2 meetings
- Khatuna Gogorishvili, "European Georgia" - 5 meetings
- Nino Shetsiruli, "Our Georgia - Solidarity Alliance" - 3 meetings

The monitoring revealed one main tendency, according to which those candidates who were cooperating with the project answering "10 questions" or participating in debates, were talking about the problems of vulnerable groups that were identified by the project, during the meetings with the voters, they talked about their plans for solving them.

For instance, the topic of vocational education appeared at the pre-election meetings of the candidate for "Lelo for Georgia". The candidate spoke with the population about visions and action plans of his party about the after-school vocational education system (October 22-23, meetings in Lanchkhuti and Chokhatauri).

Khatuna Gogorishvili, the candidate of "European Georgia" during the meetings with the urban population spoke about the regulation of the sewerage system (October 16, Lanchkhuti).

During the election campaigns, other candidates also spoke about at least one of the 10 priority topics that were identified within the project. Besides, to communicate with their voters and to present their views to them, the candidates actively used infographics prepared by the organization. Candidates for "Lelo for Georgia" and "Aleko Elisashvili - Citizens" often shared infographics prepared within the project, as well as fragments of the videos about debates to emphasize their priorities for the voters (Vakhtang Zenaishvili (decentralization), Otar Kerkadze (economic role of the region), Nino Shetsiruli (agricultural backwardness)).

During their meetings, the candidates of two electoral parties - Vasily Chigogidze ("Georgian Dream") and Manuchar Kvirkelia (United National Movement) did not mention any of the 10 priority problems of vulnerable groups identified within the project. During the meetings candidate Vasil Chigogidze was mainly focused on the infrastructure projects already implemented or planned for the future by the government, while candidate Manuchar Kvirkelia mostly spoke about social problems in general, how to overcome poverty and the need for a change of government.

Main Findings and Conclusions

- Voters pay less attention to election programs and visions and do not consider them as a key decision-making factor;
- The ruling party feels less accountable and is confident that administrative resource, as well as the satisfaction of the population with the current projects implemented by central and local governments, will ensure its victory;
- Party politics is centralized, election programs are set up at the national level in Tbilisi and often do not reflect the needs of the regions.

The project “Waiting for response”:

- Encouraged political parties and their candidates to go beyond the programs and slogans written in the central offices of their parties and think about the problems and challenges of the region and the people they are going to represent for the next 4 years in the parliament of Georgia;
- Beyond the center, in the political periphery, a space for political debate was created, which made the political views of candidates available to voters through the local TV channel, print media and social networks;
- Despite this, it remains a problem that the campaigns of the two parties that have achieved the best results in the elections are still centralized and focused on national issues, showing less interest in the problems and demands of vulnerable groups;
- Besides, the problem is that parties that work with civil society and take into account the interests of vulnerable groups become disenchanted with their poor results, which pushes them to centralize their future campaigns around national issues, as the big parties do.