

# DUAL VULNERABILITY AND SECURITY

A Case Study of Azerbaijani and Armenian  
Ethnic Minority Women in Georgia

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Ethnic Minority Women in Georgia

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## Summary

This study explores the security problems of ethnic Armenian and Azerbaijani women living in Georgia. Through an intersectional analysis of security, the paper contextualizes the marginality and vulnerability that are embedded in social and institutional hierarchies. It uses a multi-sectoral approach within a human security framework to analyze ethnic minority women's personal, economic, food, health, and political (in) securities. The study incorporates gender as an epistemological perspective in security analysis both at a conceptual and practical level and problematizes intersectionality and vulnerability in the Georgian security environment. The study's data was collected through focus groups and key informant interviews. Primary sources are enriched with document review. In total, six focus groups with forty-eight ethnic Azerbaijani and Armenian women were conducted. Eight face-to-face interviews with key informants were carried out with experts, non-governmental organizations (NGO), the Public Defender's Office, the Ministry of Internal Affairs, and the Ministry of Defence. A critical emancipatory lens was employed to guide the analysis.

The study shows that access to security is particularly limited for ethnic minority women, who experience a dual vulnerability due to their gender (gender-based violence, patriarchal stereotypes) and belonging to a non-dominant ethnic group (lack of access to resources and education, language barriers, cultural stereotypes). The combination of gender-based and ethnic identity-based insecurities makes ethnic minority women more vulnerable to repression, ill-treatment, and discrimination. While each respondent's lived experience is unique, no significant differences were found between the two ethnic groups regarding the experiences of insecurity across the five components of the human security framework, including physical security, economic security, food security, health security, and political security. Importantly, the study did not specifically aim to study the differences in the security experiences of Azerbaijani and Armenian women.

The study argues that while the security sector is becoming more inclusive and incorporating a gender perspective, there is no coherent intersectional approach to address the security problems of vulnerable groups. Considering the higher vulnerability of ethnic minority women, their bottom-up empowerment is crucial to developing an inclusive security agenda. The research also shows that gender-based violence should become a priority area of Georgia's security sector. Since the human security framework best captures everyday insecurities of individuals, it should be at the core of national security policies.

# Key Findings

## Georgian Security Sector:

- Georgian National Security Policy has been relatively successful in conceptually broadening the meaning of security, reflecting on gender equality and the rights of ethnic minorities. However, there is not a coherent, intersectional approach to address the security problems of vulnerable groups, who are subjected to multiple forms of discrimination.
- Even though the National Security Concept includes key areas of the human security framework, its ability to introduce a broad conceptualization of security into practice is questionable due to the narrow focus of bodies involved in security coordination and planning. The ministries which are permanent members in the Security Council are limited in their scope to address multi-faceted, human-based security issues.
- The Georgian security sector should be aware of tokenism. Increasing the share of women in decision-making positions and the creation of gender oversight bodies within institutions can play a vital role in bringing a gender perspective to the policy making process. It can also be used to mask the lack of gender-informed policy-making within institutions and create a false impression that institutions are following through on international commitments.
- The state apparatus still views ethnic minorities as a security threat, even though the language of official documents has changed. An analysis of the main conceptual documents of Georgia's National Security Policy (NSP) underlines the state's dual approach to ethnic minorities. For instance, 'civic integration of national and religious minorities' is listed under the umbrella heading of Internal Security (Article 8),<sup>1</sup> which combines internal threats, risks, concerns over territorial integrity, and the fight against extremist-terrorist ideologies. The integration of civic and national minorities is not listed under Article 9, dedicated to the protection of human rights and freedoms.

- Deepening the meaning of security remains problematic, with the state remaining the main object of security. There is no explicit commitment towards inclusion of lower levels of analysis such as collectives, individuals, and vulnerable segments of society.

## Gendered (in)securities of ethnic minority women:

- Azerbaijani and Armenian, ethnic minority women in Georgia experience a variety of security issues related to gender (gender-based violence, patriarchal stereotypes) and ethnicity (lack of access to resources, education, language barrier, cultural stereotypes). The combination of these factors results in dual vulnerabilities to repression, ill-treatment, and discrimination.
- Patriarchal structures affect women from all ethnic backgrounds, albeit in different ways. Ethnic minority women are usually more disadvantaged and marginalized in power hierarchies. Therefore, it is important that state institutions take a culturally sensitive approach towards ethnic minority women's protection.
- While each respondent's lived experience is unique, no significant differences were found between the two ethnic groups across the five components of the human security framework: physical security, economic security, food security, health security, and political security.
- Transport, healthcare, and food security are important factors impacting EMW's well-being.
- EMW feel safer and better integrated in Tbilisi than in Marneuli and Akhalkalaki.
- The respondents' narrated bottom-up conceptualizations of security. These conceptualizations resemble the critical security approach, which favors broadening and deepening the concept. The study found that as a human-based approach the human security framework best captures the everyday insecurities of vulnerable groups.

<sup>1</sup> Law on National Security Policy Planning and Coordination Rules, No: 3126-II s. Chapter II, Articles 6-13.

- EMW representation in politics remains very low. Gender is the main obstacle to EMW participation in politics on the local level.
- Insecurities arising from gender identity often get subsumed under ethnic identity. Recognizing the problem of 'subsuming security' is particularly important for analyzing how gender and ethnic identities shape ethnic minority women's security needs. Adequate responses to the security needs of EMW requires the acknowledgment of the importance of identity, which is critical in understanding security.
- EMW face the silent security dilemma: their conditional security often depends on invisibility as a survival strategy. Speaking up can aggravate the threats they face. Three main factors enforce security as silence, including a lack of information and awareness about domestic violence, cultural stigma and stereotypes, and a perceived lack of institutionalized support and safety nets.
- Employing resistance (through a focus on visual and bodily practices) as an empirical and conceptual tool could help to identify ethnic minority women's agency and with that, overcome their dichotomous understanding as potential threats or vulnerable subjects. The bottom-up empowerment of ethnic minority women is crucial for developing an inclusive security agenda.



# INTRODUCTION

*“To talk about security without thinking about gender is simply to account for surface reflections without examining deep down below the surface” (Booth 1997: 101).*

After achieving independence, Georgia’s security agenda became increasingly fused with state sovereignty and national interests (see Fluri and Cole 2005, Kakachia 2005, Deyermond 2008, Simons 2012). Since the collapse of the Soviet Union, many Eastern European and Central Asian states emerged with complex socio-political situations and ethnopolitical conflicts. Drawing on examples from Central European multi-ethnic states, several scholars (Buzan 1993, Hann 1996, Ghai et al. 2003, Shoup 2007, Stroschein 2012) argue that countries with large ethnic minority populations can be prone to internal tensions. This stems from the mismatch between identities and boundaries, which in turn can challenge territorial integrity. The risk of securitization,<sup>2</sup> the discursive construction of large ethnic minority groups as threats, is greater for minorities that are large and less integrated and reside in compact areas close to their kin state (Karolak-Michalska 2020). The added anxiety regarding the perception of ethnic minorities as a threat also comes from their perceived links to external forces. Despite the absence of historical evidence, narratives on ethnic identity and territorial integrity often result in the exaggeration of internal tensions with large, compactly settled minority groups.

In Georgia, the securitization of ethnic minorities occurred simultaneously with attempts at integration. As a result, two discourses, one of securitization and one of human rights, overlap and shape the Georgian security agenda towards ethnic minorities.

Combined with ethno-political unrest, the Soviet legacy ushered in an understanding that threats coming from external factors were the main security concerns (see Deyermond 2008). Thus, security maintenance has become limited to military tools or combatting external power influences. Conse-

quently, political elites regarded the survival of the state as a sovereign entity as their key priority (Jones 2003, Kolstø and Høivik 2018). After the end of the Cold War, western security scholars and practitioners started to shift their focus from a state-centered analysis and started to include social, economic, environmental, and health issues into research (Kakonen 1994, Buzan et al. 1998). However, the volatility of the South Caucasus, including its ethnopolitical conflicts, resulted in state-centrism’s continued dominance of the security agenda. Despite the broadening of the meaning of security at the conceptual level through the inclusion of non-military threats into national security concepts, little space was left for the incorporation of the individual as the main object of security.<sup>3</sup>

This limited understanding of security ignores the gender dimension (Hudson et al. 2008/2009, Hudson 2009, Hoogensen and Stuvøy 2006). Furthermore, when women have limited access to the security discourse, a wide variety of threats experienced outside the military domain are omitted (Hansen 2000). Access to the security discourse is particularly problematic for ethnic minority women (EMW). They experience a dual vulnerability due to their gender and belonging to a minority ethnic group. The combination of gender-based and ethnic identity-based insecurities exacerbate the detrimental effects of widespread problems in Georgia, making ethnic minority women more vulnerable to human rights abuse and discrimination. Furthermore, the lack of a gender perspective in the mainstream security sector combined with Georgia’s ethnopolitical anxieties (Cotter 1999) continuously influences EMW’s (in)security. This results in a complex interplay between the perceptions of minorities as a vulnerable group and/or a potential source of internal tensions.<sup>4</sup> For this reason, it is essential to analyze ethnic minority women’s positionality in the security discourse through an intersectional lens. This paper focuses on the security experiences of the two largest ethnic minority groups residing in proximity of kin state borders, Azerbaijanis and Armenians.

<sup>2</sup> The concept of securitization was coined by Ole Wæver and further developed by the Copenhagen School of Security Studies (Buzan et al. 1998). Securitization refers to the discursive intersubjective construction of a threat – the declaration that a referent object urgently needs to be protected against a certain threat which enables the direction of disproportionate attention and resources towards curbing that threat.

<sup>3</sup> Referent object is defined as ‘things that are seen to be existentially threatened and that have a legitimate claim to survival’ (Buzan et al. 1998:36). This may refer to values, groups, entities, identities, etc.

<sup>4</sup> For reference see Kymlicka, W. (2001). „Justice and Security in the Accommodation of Minority Nationalism: Comparing East and West’ and Pentassuglia, G (2003). „On the Models of Minority Rights Supervision in Europe and How They Affect a Changing Concept of Sovereignty”.

With these starting points, the study starts with the key assumption that security is 'a powerful political tool in claiming attention for priority items in the competition for government attention' which also helps to mobilize the public's attention to issues that are seen as important (Buzan 1991: 370). Therefore, utilization of a security framework to address ethnic minority women's problems may, 'help to bring attention to issues and groups of people that are normally marginalized' (Hudson 2009: 54) and result in emancipatory change.

The study has two objectives. First, it contributes to the limited body of empirical scholarship on ethnic minority women's experiences of (in-)security in Georgia. Second, it engages in the theoretical debate around voice and agency in security analysis and addresses how the security problems ethnic minority women face can be included in a gender-informed security agenda.<sup>5</sup> The research questions are divided into two separate but interrelated parts. First, the project explores the main security threats ethnic minority women in Georgia perceive and experience. Second, it addresses how their voices can be included in the development of a gender-informed security agenda. Thus, the paper primarily focuses on mapping the gendered insecurity discourse. Together with an empirical exploration of the data collected through focus groups and key informant interviews, the second research question engages with academic literature and addresses how the security framework can include groups with limited voice and lack of access to public and political discourses. Consequently, the study starts with the feminist epistemology in security analysis and addresses the relationship between ethnic minority women's security problems and dominant military-oriented security discourse, paying attention to power inequalities in shaping the security agenda.

The paper uses the term 'ethnic minority women' for analytical convenience. It does not construct them as a coherent totality. It would be misleading to consider both minority groups as homogenous. Some may not look at themselves as 'ethnic minorities', but rather solely as citizens of Georgia. While each respondent's lived experience is unique, no significantly different findings were found between the two ethnic groups regarding ethnic-identity and gender-based insecurity. Furthermore, since the study focuses on the unique lived experiences of ethnic minority women, it does not aim to provide a comparative analysis of their ethnic-identity based insecurity arising from belonging to either ethnic group specifically. Even though Azerbaijani and Armenian ethnic minority groups are different, gender, socioeconomic status, place of residence, and/or sexuality rather than ethnicity often shape EMW's experiences of insecurity. Therefore, the importance of these factors should not be downplayed. To avoid generalization, this study uses extensive quotations instead of interpreting narratives to directly engage with the subjects of this study, putting participants' perceptions at the centre of inquiry. To consider ethnic minority women as a uniform repressed group would undermine their agency and resistance. Thus, it is particularly crucial to 'speak security' with rather than on behalf of them.

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5 The author of this report explores the conceptual and practical link between the security of vulnerable groups and resistance as a tool of agency in her dissertation 'Queering Security: (in)Securitisation and Resistance of LGBTQ Community in Poland', available at: <http://dspace.ut.ee/handle/10062/69872>. The dissertation serves as broader theoretical foundation for this study.



# THEORETICAL AND EMPIRICAL RESEARCH PUZZLES

This subchapter starts with the definition of security, and then proceeds to identify the main theoretical and empirical research puzzles discussed in this paper. Thus, it identifies gaps in the literature that address gendered insecurities and the vulnerabilities of marginal groups.

Security has often been discussed as an 'essentially contested concept' (see Gallie 1956), since it has multiple meanings for different people. The question of whose security matters is one of the most crucial starting points in security analysis and is related to ontological and epistemological discussions around the concept. While the working definition of security commonly relates to the 'alleviation of threats to cherished values' (Williams 2011:5) and the ability to pursue cherished political and social ambitions (Booth 2007), the choice of what security means and whose security matters is deeply political. Security is a profoundly political concept in the sense that it plays a vital role in deciding how resources are allocated, who is protected, and who or what is seen as a threat (Williams 2011). Thus, in different contexts, different narratives of danger continuously shape sometimes colliding discourses of threat and vulnerability.

This research project builds on the intersection of key assumptions from feminist international relations and security studies (Enloe 1989; Tickner 1992; 2001; Parpart and Zalewski 2008; Cohn 2012, Gentry et al. 2019) combined with a poststructuralist critique of the Copenhagen School's Securitisation Theory<sup>6</sup> (Wæver 1989; 1995; Buzan et al. 1998). Numerous scholars (Ashley 1989, Tickner 1992, Hansen 2000, Hudson 2008/2009, Weber 2015) have emphasized security scholars' silences around gender. How the dual vulnerability arising from being a woman and an ethnic minority impacts security problems is an underexplored area. Starting with the feminist standpoint, the study attempts to overcome the normative and conceptual shortcomings of the Copenhagen School (CS), one of the most prominent critical approaches in security studies (see Wæver 1989, Buzan et al. 1998). To do so, the study incorporates the gendered dimension of human security (see Hoo-

gensen and Stuvøy 2006, Floyd 2007). Therefore, the paper contributes to the limited body of academic literature that incorporates a gender perspective to establish human security as an epistemological perspective in security analysis. However, the aim here is not to test the applicability and epistemological underpinnings of those theories, but to use them as analytical tools to re-conceptualize security by including the marginal groups as the referent objects of security. On a practical level, the project develops practical recommendations to identify key policy areas affecting gendered insecurity and to engage ethnic minority women's voices to build an inclusive, gender-informed security agenda.

By using the concept of human security as an analytical framework, the project decouples the gendered dimension of security threats Azerbaijani and Armenian ethnic minority women in Georgia experience. It also addresses one of the most contested aspects of securitization theory (ST) – its epistemological reliance on the speech act (Bigo 2002; Balzacq 2010, 2015) and the absence of gender (Hansen 2000, Floyd 2007, Hudson 2009). ST ties security to a speech act when securitizing actors have the necessary means to articulate security problems, in the original formulation of ST within the Copenhagen School. Thus, only 'authoritative' actors can construct what needs to be seen as a threat and who needs to be protected. As a result, the Copenhagen School's epistemological reliance on speech act theory ignores the security of marginalized populations who are often invisible, lack access to official discourses, and have a limited ability to openly speak about their (in)security (Hansen 2000, 2006). The study also engages with a second important limitation of ST, arguing that gender-based insecurities of marginal groups are often subsumed under other identity-based security problems (Hansen 2000). Acknowledging the problem of 'subsuming security' is important to identify EMW's experiences of insecurity. Following Hansen's (2000) critique of the Copenhagen School, the research problematizes securitization theory's failure to identify the problems of those with limited agency and opportunities to articulate insecurity.

There is also a large empirical gap in terms of the literature which addresses security threats to women in the South Caucasus. The securitization of external military factors leads to the neglect of the gendered dimension of threat perception. Apart from sociological studies of women's problems

<sup>6</sup> Securitization Theory (ST) assumes that security threats are not found objectively but are created by 'speech acts' of authoritative figures. Declaration of something as a threat is a securitizing move. For successful securitization, securitizing move requires that the audience accepts the threat as truly dangerous, requiring immediate action.

(Gamakharia 2015, Jenderedjian and Bellows 2021), virtually no scholarship addresses gendered security problems that minorities in Georgia face by engaging with the security literature. Only a few projects have dealt with gender and security in the South Caucasus (for instance organizations such as UN Women, Kvinna till Kvinna Foundation). However, most of these projects focus on post-conflict areas or operate under the broader framework of gender equality without incorporating the security dimension. Some scholars have called for comprehensive, bottom-up approaches to understanding security in the South Caucasus region (see Faber and Kaldor 2005). With these starting points, the paper focuses on the Georgian context and explores the security of ethnic minority women in two discourses: the discourse of securitization and the discourse of human rights.

## 2.1 ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORK – GENDER MAINSTREAMING OF HUMAN SECURITY

This subchapter draws on feminist critiques of security studies. It uses human security as an analytical roadmap to explore gendered insecurities among ethnic Armenian and Azerbaijani women in Georgia. Widening and deepening the concept of security through its horizontal and vertical expansion provides fruitful grounds for developing the notion of human security (Hudson 2009: 56). The concept of human security was first introduced and popularized in the United Nations Development Programme’s 1994 Human Development Report (UNDP, 1994). The report entitled ‘New Dimensions of Human Security’ broadened the scope of security analysis and focused on the security of people rather than the security of states and territories. The report emphasized that human security

is a people-centered approach and, ‘is concerned with how people live and breathe in a society, how freely they exercise their many choices, how much access they have to market and social opportunities’ (1994).

As a **people-centered** approach, human security puts the individual at the center of inquiry. It revolves around two primary components: ‘freedom from fear’ and ‘freedom from want’. It helps address security threats outside the military realm. Consequently, it focuses on a **multi-sectoral** understanding of security problems, including economic, food, health, environmental, personal, community, and political insecurities. The study does not address community security in a separate subchapter, because EMW’S security is at the core of the paper’s analysis. Environmental security was omitted from the analysis for two reasons. First, the respondents did not consider it as an important security problem. Second, based on the interview and FG group data, insufficient evidence was found to problematize the special needs of EMW in the environmental security sector.

The concept of human security here is used as an umbrella term and is neither definitive nor fully comprehensive (Gomez and Gasper 2013). In practice, the concept has focused on the humanitarian-development-peace nexus, emphasizing sustainable development, freedom from poverty, hunger, disease, and access to basic human needs. Even though UNDP’s human security approach has been translated into practical actions supporting vulnerable communities, it has been criticized for a lack of gender and, especially, queer perspectives (Parveen et al. 2014). In recent years, UNDP’s practitioners tried to overcome criticisms regarding the lack of a gender perspective, and with time, human security started to develop a gender-sensitive and gender-conscious framework (Jolly and Ray

Figure 1  
Human Security Framework

| Security Areas         | Human Security Framework   |
|------------------------|--|
| Personal Security      | Enforced protection of human rights, empowerment of vulnerable groups  |
| Economic Security      | Infrastructure and access to services (transport, water, electricity), employment opportunities, access to learning  |
| Food Security          | Access to nutrition  |
| Health Security        | Access to healthcare and services, sanitation facilities, community-based disease prevention   |
| Environmental Security | Healthy physical environment, pollution, protection from hazardous material  |
| Community Security     | Explicit protection of community identity, protection from oppressive practices and ill-treatment of women, protection against discrimination  |
| Political Security     | Protection of basic political rights, protection from state repression, ill-treatment and discrimination; Establishment of institutions and practices for good governance and protection |

Based on UNDP report (1994: 22–40)

2006). Some National Human Development Reports acknowledge that women's experience of insecurity is fundamentally different (Jolly and Ray 2006:5). Increasingly, gendered approaches aim to disaggregate cultural, social, political, and economic mechanisms and how power and control are distributed (2006: 6). Owing to this trend, the gendered human security approach started to recognize questions such as who was affected, how, and what specific protection or assistance people in more vulnerable segments of society need.

A second stream of criticism relates to the lack of academic theorization and practical implementation of the concept. Since the concept of human security was introduced outside academia as a policy-making approach (Floyd 2007), to date, no systematic theoretical or analytical approach has been developed to address the bottom-up processes of threat articulation. Even though the human security framework is considered a human-based approach, in practice, it takes a dual policy framework and rests on two reinforcing aspects of protection and emancipation (Floyd 2007). Protection implies a top-down approach and combines the establishment of good governance, institutions, and protective instruments, while emancipation acknowledges the important role of individuals as actors defining their security problems and necessities (OCHA 2009: 8-9). Commitment to emancipation is hard to put into practice since national governments, international organizations, and NGOs decide what human security threats are, and a human-based approach is not always practised (Owen 2004: 384). As a result, Hoogensen and Stuvøy (2006) argue that human security is still a top-down approach, and that the security of marginalized groups in states that otherwise are considered 'secure' is ignored (2006 :209). To reflect on these criticisms, this paper takes a dual approach. It combines top-down perspectives in the form of analysis of official documents and interviewing government representatives and experts with a bottom-up approach by directly engaging with the subjects of this study – forty-eight women of Azerbaijani and Armenian ethnic background.



## METHODOLOGY

### 3.1 RESEARCH QUESTIONS:

The research questions are divided into two separate but interrelated fields. The project addresses: 1) What are the main security threats ethnic minority women in Georgia perceive and experience? And 2) How can their voices be included in the development of a gender-informed security agenda?

To address the first research question, the following sub-questions were formulated:

- What do ethnic minority women consider their main security threats, and how do they understand security?
- What are their experiences of security issues within the human security framework?
- What are their opinions about how the government is addressing those problems?
- What are their views on dominant security narratives, such as regional territorial conflicts?
- What strategies and mechanisms do ethnic minority women use to articulate their insecurities?
- What constraints do they face in access to the security discourse?

The last two sub-questions focus on the strategies and mechanisms through which women try to be represented in the security agenda and how their voices can be heard. Here, rejecting the Copenhagen School's epistemological reliance on speech acts, the research focuses on practice (for example, demonstrations, protests, silent forms of resistance).

In parallel to the empirical exploration of the data, the second set of research questions engages with key informants and the academic literature. It analyses how the security framework can be inclusive to groups who lack access to public and political discourses. This includes the following sub-questions:

- To what extent do key conceptual documents in the Georgian National Security Policy incorporate the human security framework? What are the main strengths and

weaknesses regarding the inclusion of ethnic minorities and gender?

- What are good practices of inclusion of marginal voices in the security agenda? Which channels currently exist in Georgia for the inclusion of gender issues in the security agenda?

Exploration of the key research questions proceeds in parallel. On a theoretical level, to explore the gendered insecurity discourse of ethnic minority women in Georgia, the study uses human security as an analytical framework. To address the second research question, the project engages with securitization theory and its feminist critique.

### 3.2 METHODS AND DATA COLLECTION

The study takes an interpretive approach, putting the subjects of the study, ethnic Azerbaijani and Armenian women, at the center of the inquiry. To better understand the context and address the research questions, the data collection proceeded in two stages. Primary data was collected through focus groups and key informant interviews and was further enriched with document review. The critical emancipatory lens guides the analysis. Thus, the study reflects on sociopolitical injustices and recognizes vulnerable groups' potential to become agents of change.

In total, six focus groups were conducted with forty-eight ethnic minority women (Table 1). Two FGs were conducted at in Marneuli, Akhalkalaki, and Tbilisi. Marneuli and Akhalkalaki were selected as they are the cities with the largest proportion of ethnic minorities, while Tbilisi offers a case for comparison between different experiences of (in)security. Three focus groups were conducted with Azerbaijani EMW and three with Armenian EMW. Two focus groups were conducted in Tbilisi (one with Azerbaijani EMW and one with Armenian EMW), and four in cities with significant ethnic minority populations (two with Azerbaijani EMW in Marneuli, and two with Armenian EMW in Akhalkalaki). Two focus groups were comprised of women aged between 18-29, 30 and above, and two with mixed age groups.

Figure 2  
Focus group characteristics

|                | Armenian EMW |              |                  | Azerbaijani EMW |              |                  |
|----------------|--------------|--------------|------------------|-----------------|--------------|------------------|
| Location / Age | 18-29        | 30 and above | Mixed age groups | 18-29           | 30 and above | Mixed age groups |
| Tbilisi        |              |              | 1 FG             |                 |              | 1 FG             |
| Marneuli       |              |              |                  | 1 FG            | 1 FG         |                  |
| Akhalkalaki    | 1 FG         | 1 FG         |                  |                 |              |                  |

Eight face-to-face interviews were conducted with key informants, including experts, NGOs, the Public Defender's Office, the Ministry of Internal Affairs, and Ministry of Defence. The focus groups and interviews were recorded with the informed consent of the participants. Recordings were transcribed. Due to the pandemic, interviews and focus groups were conducted on Zoom.

Before conducting the focus group discussions (FGD) and key informant interviews (KIIs), the research team developed semi-structured guides specific to each target group. The questions were broad and offered participants the opportunity to elaborate on their responses based on their knowledge and experience. During the discussion, participants were allowed to explain their attitudes and opinions. Furthermore, open-ended questions enabled the moderator to keep the focus on the key questions and simultaneously allowed the respondents to discuss matters of particular importance to them.

The study analyzed publicly available information to contextualize the situation and explore legal and normative frameworks addressing the gender dimension of security. This included analysis of key conceptual documents of national security policy and available information at the webpages of the permanent member ministries and agencies represented in the National Security Council. These include the Ministry of Defence, the Ministry Internal Affairs, the Ministry Foreign Affairs, the Ministry of Finance, the State Security Service, the Georgian Intelligence Service, and the Georgian Defence Forces.

### 3.3 SAMPLING AND DATA ANALYSIS

The study utilized a purposive sampling method. Thus, the research team reached out to and selected study participants using criteria related to the research objectives. The sample was comprised of Azerbaijani and Armenian women living in ethnic minority-dominated areas (Javakheti and Kvemo-Kartli) and those living in Tbilisi. The general criterion was that respondents identified themselves as members of an ethnic minority group. Further, two criteria are based on location and age.

The data analysis was conducted using qualitative content analysis combining conventional and directed approaches. Key topics (political, personal, economic, food and health security) were preconceived and derived from the human security framework. The deductive use of the analytical framework resulted in a consistent focus on the key research questions. Apart from the key themes, the study took an interpretive inductive approach to allow new insights to emerge from the data. Thus, flexible utilization of conventional and directed content analysis enabled the study to avoid the shortcomings of both approaches.

### 3.4 CREDIBILITY, TRUSTWORTHINESS, AND ETHICAL ISSUES

Since the study takes an interpretive approach and focuses on the perceptions and experiences of everyday security problems Azerbaijani and Armenian ethnic minority women face, the direct engagement with the subjects of the study ensured the credibility of their narratives. The report uses their direct quotes and avoids the generalization of their narratives.

The research prioritized ethical considerations, including the safety and rights of the research participants. Before the interview, all participants received plain language statements explaining why the study was being conducted and what it would involve. It included information that participants are free to withdraw at any time, without giving any reason. After becoming familiar with the research aims and goals, participants provided verbal consent to participate in the research. All possible identifiers were removed from the data and names were replaced with pseudonyms to ensure the participants' confidentiality. The names of the key informants also remain confidential, and the paper only mentions their affiliation or area of expertise. A written summary of the report will be available for all participants upon request. In addition, considering the pandemic, all focus groups and interviews were conducted online, and respondents participated from a place of their convenience. When a participant had a problem with accessing the online platforms, the research team arranged their participation with the help of a local recruiter.

### 3.5 LIMITATIONS

The study should be seen as an exploratory preliminary inquiry. It does not aim to generalize the findings to ethnic minority women living in Georgia nor to how the security sector addresses the gendered insecurities of minority women.

The first limitation of the study relates to non-representative data. The study draws on data gathered through respondent's narratives from three main locations. Considering the limited budget and timeframe, data can be biased towards socially better-connected minority women and might leave out socially isolated people based on their gender identity, place of residence, and physical capacity. However, all efforts were made to make the sample more representative of vulnerable groups. The study may also be biased towards locally active and engaged EMW who agreed to participate in this study. Another significant factor for limited representation was the language barrier. Four focus groups were conducted in Georgian and two in Russian. Thus, women who only spoke Azerbaijani or Armenian were excluded from the research. Even though the representativeness of the data cannot be guaranteed, the study provides in-depth, human-based findings that can be used for future research.

The second significant limitation of the study stems from its heteronormative focus on gendered insecurities. However, the study acknowledges that LGBTQ+ individuals from ethnic minority groups have different experiences of insecurity. Thus, going beyond heteronormativity would allow an understanding of their everyday security problems and problematize silenced groups' agency in the security discourse. Although this study does not address multiple aspects of intersectional analysis, it serves as a preliminary inquiry into gender problematization of the Georgian security environment.

The third limitation stems from the lack of perspectives from critical stakeholders from the security sector. The study analyzed online material available through ministry webpages, combined with interviews with Ministry of Defence and the Ministry of Internal Affairs officials. Thus, it would be interesting to conduct a more representative study of how security professionals and key decision-makers define and practice security as well as how they see the role of intersectionality in developing an inclusive security agenda.



## RESEARCH RESULTS

### 4.1. GEORGIAN NATIONAL SECURITY POLICY: DOCUMENT CRITICAL ANALYSIS

Before exploring ethnic minority women's security issues in Georgia, this sub-section provides a brief analysis of Georgian security policy. The analysis only covers key conceptual documents and is not comprehensive. Therefore, it should be interpreted with caution.

Georgia's National Security Policy (NSP) is comprised of three main types of conceptual documents: **1. The Concept of National Security; 2. The Georgian Threat Assessment Document; and 3. The National Strategies in the Field of Security.**<sup>7</sup> NSP is carried out at the departmental level

through organizational and conceptual documents, including department concepts, department strategies, doctrines, and programs. The Law on National Security Policy Planning and Coordination Rules,<sup>8</sup> which took force in 2015, defines areas of National Security Policy (NSP) (Table 2) and underlines its key values as sovereignty and territorial integrity, freedom, democracy and the rule of law, security, welfare, and peace.

Interestingly, 'Civic integration of national and religious minorities' is listed under the umbrella heading of Internal Security (Article 8), which combines internal threats, risks, concerns over territorial integrity, and the fight against extremist-terrorist ideologies and activities. Integration of civic and national minorities is not listed under Article 9, dedicated to the pro-

Figure 3  
Areas of National Security Policy

| Areas of National Security Policy |  |  |
|-----------------------------------|--|--|
| <b>Article 6</b>                  | State defense                                    | Military threats, preparedness for armed attacks   |
| <b>Article 7</b>                  | Foreign security                                 | External threats, intelligence activities, protection of Georgian diaspora abroad, policy of non-recognition, and de-occupation  |
| <b>Article 8</b>                  | Internal security                                | Internal threats, risks, and challenges; civic integration of national and religious minorities, territorial integrity, fight against extremist-terrorist ideologies and activities          |
| <b>Article 9</b>                  | Socio-economic and energy security               | Protection of human rights and freedoms guaranteed by the Constitution of Georgia, ensuring health and social protection, food security, protection against pandemics and biological threats |
| <b>Article 10</b>                 | Civil security                                   | Environmental threats, risks and challenges, resilience to emergencies   |
| <b>Article 11</b>                 | Information security                             | Cyber threats, protection of critical information systems  |
| <b>Article 12</b>                 | Law and order                                    | Strengthening the rule of law, improvement of criminogenic situation   |
| <b>Article 13</b>                 | Other issues related to national security policy |  |

Based on Law on National Security Policy Planning and Coordination Rules.

<sup>7</sup> Law on National Security Policy Planning and Coordination Rules, No: 3126-II s. Chapter II, Articles 6-13.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

tection of human rights and freedoms. The simple move to list minority issues under Article 8 underlines the state's dual approach to ethnic minorities, where the discourse of securitization and human rights are contested and intertwined. This brings into focus the problem of securitization and de-securitization, which is discussed in the coming subchapter.

**1. The Concept of National Security** is a founding document that defines national values and interests, threats, risks and challenges facing the country, clarifies the vision of development, and determines the main focus of national security policies.<sup>9</sup> Acknowledgement and recognition of non-traditional security threats and a focus on multi-sectoral understandings of security are some of the main strengths of the concept. Even though the concept does not provide a holistic conceptualization of security, it encompasses key themes from the UNDP human security multi-sectoral framework. These themes include economic, food, health, environmental, personal, community, and political security. They are briefly mentioned in the document. Another strength of Georgia's National Security Concept is its focus on the protection of the rights of minorities and their inclusion. The concept undertakes a commitment to the rights and freedoms of ethnic and religious groups through building a society based on the principles of pluralism, tolerance, justice, and non-discrimination.<sup>10</sup> Considering Georgia's troubled past of ethnic nationalism in the early 1990s, minority rights recognition in a fundamental national security document shows the country's commitment to democratic nation-building.

While conceptually, the NSC includes vital areas of the human security framework, its ability to put a broad conceptualization of security into practice is questionable, because the document lays out highly unrealistic expectations and disregards critical internal and external threats (MacFarlane 2012). Another significant limitation is the narrow focus of relevant bodies involved in coordination and planning. The permanent members of the National Security Council (together with the Government of Georgia) are the Prime Minister, the Minister of Defence, the Minister of Internal Affairs, the Minister of Foreign Affairs, the Minister of Finance, the Head of the State Security Service, the Head of the Georgian Intelligence Service, and the Commander of the Georgian Defence Forces. The ministries represented in the Council are limited in their scope to address multi-faceted and human-based security issues included within the concept. For instance, other ministers (Minister of Justice, Minister of Environment Protection and Agriculture, Minister of Education, Minister of Health and Social Affairs, and the State Minister for Reconciliation and Civic Equality) that are relevant in addressing human security issues emphasized in the concept are not included as permanent members of the Council. Even though the National Security Concept underlines its strong commitment to the alleviation of multi-sectoral

security threats, on a practical level, planning and coordinating national security policies remains within a state-centric, military-oriented strategic discourse.

Another problematic aspect of the concept is its wording. While addressing security guarantees to individuals living in Georgia, the concept uses the word citizen excessively, excluding migrants or ethnic minorities without citizenship. Since many ethnic minorities remain undocumented or do not have Georgian citizenship, their insecurities are not acknowledged and are thus silenced. For the security concept to move towards greater inclusion, the word citizen could be amended to individual or human.

**2. The Threat Assessment Document,**<sup>11</sup> is, unlike the National Security Concept, explicitly state-centered. The confidential part of the document was last updated in 2015. The first two versions (2007-2009 and 2010-2013) also contained non-confidential elements available to the wider public. The previously available non-confidential version of the document does not address threats corresponding to the widened conceptualization of security as emphasized in the National Security Concept, and it maintains a focus on external, territorial, and military threats.

**3. The National Strategies in the Field of Security** are not defined in the Law on National Security Policy Planning and Coordination. Analysis of national strategies and department action plans of the ministries represented as permanent members of the National Security Council is beyond the scope of this paper since departmental documents focus on implementation rather than on the conceptualization of security.

Whether conventional security actors see gender-based violence as a security issue is questionable. Nonetheless, on a positive note, Georgia has made significant progress through undertaking commitments to UN Security Council Resolution N1325. Gender equality is also mentioned in the NSC. Furthermore, for instance, in 2014, the Ministry of Defence of Georgia approved a Gender Equality Strategy, together with several accompanying documents. This committed the Ministry to the integration of gender and established the Gender Equality Monitoring Group. The monitoring group coordinates awareness-raising activities on the UN Security Council № 1325 resolution, disaggregates data based on gender, and works on the prevention of discrimination in the workplace. Although the progress is notable, it would be very challenging to assess the actual implementation of those commitments on a practical level, since the indicators are quite general and often do not resonate with the local context. In addition, documents evaluating the performance of the action plans are either unavailable or outdated.<sup>12</sup>

<sup>9</sup> Law on the approval of the 'National Security Concept of Georgia'. No: 1895. <https://www.matsne.gov.ge/ka/document/view/43156?publication=0>, retrieved on 03/08/2021

<sup>10</sup> საქართველოს ეროვნული უსაფრთხოების კონცეფცია. თავდაცვის სამინისტრო. Available at: <https://mod.gov.ge/page/70/saqartvelos-erovnuli-usaftrxoebis-koncfecia>

<sup>11</sup> Georgian Threat Assessment Document, No:707. Available at: <https://matsne.gov.ge/ka/document/view/1032959?publication=0>

<sup>12</sup> See GoG (2020). On approval of the report on implementation of National Action Plan 2018-2020 of UN Security Council resolutions on Women, Peace and Security. Available at: <http://myrights.gov.ge/uploads/files/docs/5956719-1325.pdf>

Positive steps have been taken to incorporate a gender perspective into policy planning and implementation from the Ministry of Internal Affairs (MIA). The establishment of the Human Rights Protection and Investigation Quality Monitoring Department was of particular importance. The body was founded with, *“The primary rationale behind the Human Rights Protection Unit creation was to establish the fight against domestic violence and gender-based crime as the priority areas of the Ministry. On the one hand, to prevent and to respond effectively, on the other”* (Human Rights Protection Unit, MIA).

Furthermore, both ministries have undertaken a commitment to increase the representation of women in the security sector and decision making. According to data from 2019, women held 32% of decision-making positions in the Ministry of Defense and 3% in the Ministry of Internal Affairs. However, when speaking about increasing the representation of women, it is important to remember the difference between mere tokenism and genuine feminist-inspired transformation in the security sector. One form of tokenism is when governments are trying to increase the proportion of women in uniformed service or senior roles. In this case, one needs to ask whether this quantifiable move genuinely results in gender-sensitive decision making and contributes to gender equality. Another form of tokenism is establishing separate bodies within the security institutions responsible for gender oversight, without incorporating them into practical decision-making. While gender oversight bodies can play a vital role in incorporating a gender perspective in decision making, they can be used to mask a lack of gender-informed policy-making processes within the institutions and create a false impression of following through on international commitments.

Unlike the Ministry of Defence and Ministry of Internal Affairs, the State Security Service (SSS) remains exclusively state-centered. All senior personnel are men,<sup>13</sup> and none of the available normative acts incorporate a gender perspective.<sup>14</sup> The official SSS website states that its main activities are, protection of the constitutional order, sovereignty, territorial integrity, and military potential of Georgia, fighting corruption, transnational organized crime, protection of state secrets and ensuring the economic security of the country.<sup>15</sup> Even though the SSS claims that its *“Activities are carried out in such a way as to protect both the security of the state and the basic human rights and freedoms”*, monitoring and evaluation reports<sup>16</sup> do not show evidence of incorporation of individuals as referent objects of security. Therefore, both on practical and conceptual levels, the SSS ignores not only gender, but also the importance of human security issues.

Despite its many shortcomings, the Georgian NSP has been relatively successful in conceptually broadening the meaning of security, and reflecting on gender equality and the rights of ethnic minorities. Interviews with Ministry of Internal Affairs and Ministry of Defense officials also demonstrated an increasing commitment to address a variety of non-traditional threats under the security policy. While no special frameworks exist to address the dual vulnerability of ethnic minority women, fighting gender-based violence is becoming a priority area. However, deepening the meaning of the concept remains problematic, with the state remaining the main referent object of security. There is no explicit commitment to inclusion of lower levels of analysis, such as collectives and individuals. Nevertheless, the progress should be noted, and international organizations should continue to support the security sector's reform in Georgia, making it more inclusive, gender-informed, and adaptive to the needs of vulnerable groups. For the development of a fully inclusive security agenda, it is crucial to move towards a lower level of analysis and include individuals as the main referent objects. It is also important to establish and institutionalize the Regulatory Impact Assessment (RIA) and Gender Impact Assessment (GIA) of policies and initiatives to better understand their impact on different population segments. Most crucially, the security sector should focus on female agency. Empowering female agency in the security sector will contribute to a better understanding of their experiences of insecurity and help to interpret security outside the limited, male-dominated discourses of war and peace. Furthermore, inclusive participation of women from diverse backgrounds could also help de-escalate conflicts through formal and informal diplomatic processes.

#### 4.1.1 The Possibility of De-securitization: Historical Narratives on Threat Perceptions

This chapter addresses the securitization of ethnic minorities as potential dangers. While de-securitization can seem the optimal ethical option, the paper argues that for the inclusion of urgent problems that ethnic minorities face in the security agenda, de-securitization may fail to present their problems in a timely manner. Instead, it is necessary to shift the focus from a discourse of threat towards a discourse of human rights, while maintaining the conceptual language of security.

The Law on National Security Policy Planning and Coordination Rules lists minority issues next to a variety of potential internal threats, underlining the state's dual approach to ethnic minorities. Risk-based and human-rights based approaches to ethnic minorities continue to co-exist through discursive and non-discursive, institutionalized practices within the security sector. The securitization of ethnic minorities arguably continues not only through speech acts as discussed in the original securitization theory (Buzan et al. 1998), but also through institutionalized frameworks of risk assessment, which security institutions created (see Bigo 2002). This hidden discourse of securitization only occasionally emerges through scrutinized examination of official documents. This subchapter explores the securitization of ethnic minorities through non-discursive,

<sup>13</sup> Georgian State Security Service, Head and Deputies. Accessed on 3 Oct 2021: <https://sbg.gov.ge/page/aboutus/head>

<sup>14</sup> Georgian State Security Service, Information/normative acts. Accessed on 3 Oct 2021: <https://sbg.gov.ge/page/info/normative-acts>

<sup>15</sup> Georgian State Security Service, About Us. Accessed on 3 Oct 2021: <https://sbg.gov.ge/page/aboutus/info>

<sup>16</sup> Georgian State Security Service Reports (2020, 2019, 2018, 2017). Available at: <https://sbg.gov.ge/page/info/reports>

institutionalized frameworks of threat perception.

Addressing ethnic minority issues through a risk-based, security lens is an obstacle to their inclusion in a non-politicized, empowerment-oriented security agenda. A variety of scholars have expressed a preference for de-securitization as a more effective approach to managing security problems (Wæver 1995; Huysmans 1998; Grayson 2003). While there is no consensus on the meaning of de-securitization, it generally refers to removing 'security-ness' from issues previously seen as security problems. Wæver (2000: 53) outlines three possible strategies for de-securitization. The first is simply to prevent issues from being discussed in terms of security. The second strategy relates to managing security issues in a way that does not trigger security concerns. This strategy is particularly relevant when addressing minority issues, where identity politics and 'othering' are crucial in shaping security dilemmas (see Roe 2002). A third option favors bringing security problems back into 'normal politics'.

To de-securitize minorities constructed as threats, one first needs to explore how securitization unfolds. Unlike discursive forms of securitization such as the Copenhagen School initially discussed, it is more difficult to empirically observe latent securitizing frames embedded in organizational practices. Institutionalized securitization is sustained and shared within the habitus of 'security professionals' (Bigo 2002: 66) that unavoidably contributes to the securitization of ethnic minorities. In other words, through practice, security professionals become socialized to a particular habitus (i.e. embodied dispositions that guide their behavior, choices, and identity, and orient them towards specific assessment of threats and vulnerabilities) (see Bourdieu 1977, 1984).

Interviews with experts support the findings underlining the Georgian security sector's risk-based approach to ethnic minorities. According to experts, on a practical level, ethnic minorities are seen as a threat rather than vulnerable groups that need protection. While some threats, defined as present dangers, require immediate action, in some contexts, threats are re-defined as 'vulnerabilities' i.e., future risks that at a given time do not pose an existential threat and do not require a policy response (Grayson 2003: 339). Following this argument, experts' opinions are somewhat in line with the assumption that the Georgian security sector is more focused on vulnerabilities 'from' rather than the vulnerability 'of' ethnic minority groups.

As underlined earlier, a significant limitation of the Copenhagen School is its epistemological reliance on speech act theory. Therefore, securitization that exists on an institutional level, but is not publicly articulated will be left out of CS's methodological scrutiny. Field experts noted that even though the government does not rhetorically discuss ethnic minorities as security threats, they still see them through a security lens. One stated, 'I do not think we have a chauvinist government which is against minorities, but they still see them as security risks.' Another expert's opinion illustrates the notion of institutionalization of risk frameworks towards ethnic minorities. They stated, 'The natural instinct of the security structures is to suppress something, to perceive something in the context

of danger. In the best-case scenario, ethnic minorities are seen as a burden, which I believe is connected to the traumatic experiences of the 90s and the regional context' (Field expert).

The roots of (un)intentional securitization can be found in the poststructuralist reading of security policy (Hansen 2006). National discourses on threat and danger are rooted in historical experiences and influence the institutional lenses of threat assessment. As mentioned earlier, the perception of ethnic minority groups as national security threats has been a common practice in many post-Soviet countries. Thus, 'Ethnic minorities are often perceived in the context of security, and correspondingly managed through the security sector, in this case, the SSSG [State Security Service of Georgia]' (Field expert).

Another expert also underlined that treating ethnic minorities as security risks differentiates between 'us' and 'them'. They continued to state that most of the efforts towards integration come from a risk reduction perspective, not from the perspective of democratization and inclusion. They stated, 'First, we should all realize that we are citizens of the same country, with equal rights. I do not think this is enshrined in our political discourse' (Field expert and NGO representative).

This subchapter argued that securitization of ethnic minorities in the discourse of threat continues not because it is the goal of the security sector, but instead due to the unintentional effect of institutionalized practices of securitization mediated through institutional habitus. Despite the government's alleged commitment to a human-rights-based approach, security professionals derive their dispositions from historical and cultural narratives on threat perception (Hansen 2006). Therefore, de-securitizing strategies should focus on security actors and society alike. These strategies should focus on teaching and educating society and securitizing actors that ethnic minorities are not a threat. Teaching the society that ethnic minorities are not a threat can be difficult and requires symbiotic efforts from the government and NGOs. However, progress can be achieved through awareness raising campaigns and inclusion of tolerance and multiethnicity in the school curriculum, especially through reconsideration of how history books draw on the image of the enemy based on 'othering' people of different religions and ethnic backgrounds, investing in initiatives connecting Georgian and ethnic minority youth, and training and re-training of security professionals. The second focus of de-securitizing strategies should be overcoming and challenging dichotomous understandings of native-ethnic minorities. The second strategy relates to what Huysmans (1995: 67) calls a deconstructivity strategy. It would present ethnic minorities as individuals with multiple identities: woman, mother, father etc. Focusing on intersectional unity will help to address insecurity through multiple lenses, while avoiding 'othering' of ethnic minorities. Thus, the focus on ethnic minority women's problems serves at the same time as de-securitizing (removing threat from the discourse) and as a securitizing (elevating their problems into the security agenda) strategy, while maintaining the focus on an emancipatory agenda.

## 4.2 RESPONDENTS' NARRATIVES: RE-CONCEPTUALIZING HUMAN (IN-) SECURITIES FROM THE BOTTOM-UP

This chapter engages with the narratives of the subjects of this study, ethnic minority women, and explores their experiences of (in)security using the concept of human security as an analytical framework. The approach adopted in this paper allowed the subjects of this study to put forward their understanding of security. It also underlined the need to work towards a conception of security that reflects upon unique lived experiences of different groups and individuals. Only a sociologically adequate notion of security can provide a richer picture to assess the issues that endanger communities and individuals in different contexts (Bilgin 1999:32).

The study reflects on several variables related to experiences of (in)security. It neither treats ethnic minority women as a homogenous group nor downplays significant differences within and across ethnic group belonging. While the study acknowledges intersectionality and the importance of variables such as socio-economic background and age, it places particular importance on residence as a critical determinant of experiences of (in)security. While each respondent's lived experiences are unique, the study did not find significant differences between the two ethnic groups across the four components of the human security framework: physical security, economic security, food security, and political security. Even though religion can be an important factor in determining one's experiences of security (Danchin and Cole 2002; Fox and Akbaba 2015), the respondents did not discuss religion-based insecurity (only one woman from an Azerbaijani FG mentioned experiences of discrimination at the workplace for wearing a religious head covering which is discussed later). Therefore, since the study draws on the respondents' narratives and FG participants did not discuss religion as a source of additional vulnerability, the study does not explore the impact of religious affiliation on the experiences of insecurity.

**Place of residence** proved to be an essential variable influencing experiences of (in)security. It significantly determines a person's chances of well-being, development of human potential, and experiences of inequalities manifested throughout life. In this study, the importance of place can be classified across two key variables: residence in the capital versus other areas and residence in ethnic minority-dominated versus non-ethnic minority-dominated areas.

The data showed that women from both ethnic backgrounds living in the capital experience less identity-based insecurities. Many of their challenges resemble the general socio-political and economic problems of the country. The respondents from both Tbilisi focus groups underlined that they did not experience problems associated with language barriers and felt more integrated. Their assessment of their security was also relatively positive:

*As a member of an ethnic minority group, you will be surprised, but the environment has not given me a reason to think about security... as a member of an ethnic minority*

*group, I never thought about it. I am so assimilated and well-integrated into the environment. I have no fear. I also have a Georgian godmother. I have always felt mutual understanding, and a sense of tolerance coming from them. (Tbilisi FG, Armenian EMW, mixed age group).*

The security problems of ethnic minority women living outside the capital, in ethnic minority-dominated towns or villages were quite different. The respondents from Akhalkalaki and Marneuli focus groups stressed a lack of political, economic, and social rights, as well as the language barrier as an essential obstacle. One stated, 'If you don't speak the language, it is hard to achieve anything.' Differences in lived experiences of (in)security once again underline that ethnic minority women are not a homogeneous group, and more comprehensive, context-specific approaches are needed for their empowerment and protection.

Experts and representatives of the Public Defender's offices in Akhalkalaki and Marneuli noted that apart from socio-economic problems that are relatively similar for the entire Georgian population, ethnic minorities experience additional issues related to a low level of involvement in political processes, lack of access to quality education, and the language barrier. These problems pose significant obstacles in access to employment opportunities and services.

Respondents were asked about their conceptualizations of security at the beginning of focus groups. They had no prior knowledge about the human security framework. The vast majority of the respondents' understandings of security are quite close to the concept of human security that emphasizes broad, multispectral dimensions of (in)security. The quotes below illustrate how the human security framework captures the respondents' narrated understanding of (in)security:

*For me, first of all, security means safety and protection in all areas. One of the most important spheres is the economy, but not the only one. I think that this word includes much more than just economic security, starting with personal security, the security of your property, your property rights. Economic security is one of the components (Marneuli FG, Azerbaijani EMW, age group: 30 and more).*

*For me, living in a safe environment is important. To be safe, to have a job, to go out, to have money for food. That people do not have to go to work in Russia. To have good medical services. To be protected in every way, and not to have to go to Tbilisi for everything (Akhalkalaki FG, Armenian EMW, age group: 30 and more).*

Some of them defined security as access to healthcare. One stated, "For me, the most important thing is to be healthy. That is security for me. To have the necessary means to get health services, to have good doctors [in a village] to feel secure here" (Akhalkalaki FG, Armenian EMW, age group: 30 and more).

Several participants from focus groups emphasized women's rights and domestic violence as security issues. They underlined a vital link between security and the absence of domes-

tic abuse. The following quote highlights how connected the public and private domains of security are, 'We are safe, for example, when we are out in the city and feel safe. When we are happy in the family, when we know there is no violence at home, that there is peace. This is what I mean by security' (Tbilisi FG, Azerbaijani EMW, mixed age group).

One respondent from Tbilisi (Azerbaijani EMW) spoke about forced marriages of underage girls as a security issue. She said that women's and girls' rights are often violated when forced into marriages or when they have no right to work or study.

Others saw the inviolability of their personal lives as a security issue. The quotes below illustrate how the experiences of (in) security are profoundly gendered, and that the problems not captured through a normative patriarchal lens can have a critical importance for women's security:

*For me, inviolability of my personal life is security. To be more concrete, this may mean many things, for instance, my everyday life, my behavior, the way I dress [should not create problems for me]. The same applies to the work-space, that I do not experience any form of harassment (Marneuli FG, Azerbaijani EMW, age group 18-29).*

*[Security means] personal freedom, when no one interferes with how I look, how I am dressed, and I am free, my personal freedom... (Marneuli FG, Azerbaijani EMW, age group 18-29).*

The study found that respondents narrated, bottom-up conceptualizations of security are similar to the critical security approach, favoring broadening and deepening of the concept. Ethnic minority women's understandings can best be captured across the components of the human security framework. Furthermore, the study found that the conditions for and experiences of (in)security largely vary within communities. EMW respondents from the Tbilisi FG experienced less ethnic or gender identity-based discrimination, compared to the participants from ethnic minority dominated cities like Marneuli and Akhalkalaki. In addition, the respondents from rural areas from both ethnic backgrounds face more insecurities than those living in larger cities. Most importantly, the respondents' experiences indicate that it is necessary to incorporate human security as a key conceptual tool in security analysis, since it best captures individuals' security problems. For this purpose, the next subchapters explore in more detail ethnic minority women's security needs across five human security components: personal security, economic security, food security, health security, and political security. The focus group data is further enriched with key informant interviews and public information.

#### 4.2.1 Personal Security: The Silent Security Dilemma and Domestic Violence

Considering that the most gendered aspect of human (in) security can be conceptualized under the physical security component, the analysis starts with the exploration of gender-based violence and how the security dilemma prevents ethnic minority women from voicing issues around their insecurity.

Women's security is closely connected to their security at home. Violence in the private sphere of the home is a critical security issue that affects individuals and impacts core principles of the human security framework, including the freedom from fear, freedom from want, and life in dignity. Violence against women is not only conceptualized under human security, but as emerging scholarship argues, it is also a national security issue (Hudson et al. 2008/2009; Hudson et al. 2015; Bjarnegård and Melander 2017). According to Hudson et al. (2008/2009) the level of gender-based violence better predicts state security and peacefulness than indicators that measure the level of economic development, democracy, or civilizational identity. Thus, gender equality can be another powerful explanatory factor influencing state security and conflict de-escalation (2008/2009: 7). Even though the findings that link the security of women to the security of states are somewhat preliminary, it is important to note the possibilities of theorization regarding the causal relationship between state security and women's safety.

To address the (in)security of women, voice and agency are crucial. Lene Hansen (2000) describes how silence prevents vulnerable subjects from being seen as referent objects of security. To highlight the importance of voice, she bases her analysis on the tale of the Little Mermaid, who sacrifices her voice to get closer to the earthly prince. However, the prince marries another woman. The Little Mermaid, whose silence prevents her from being fully materialized as an embodied subject worthy of protection and the prince's love, dissolves into foam, turning into an earthbound spirit (2000: 285). Reflecting on the Little Mermaid's silent security dilemma, Hansen (2000) argues that the epistemological reliance on speech acts within the Copenhagen School's Securitisation Theory ignores vulnerable subjects who are constrained to openly voice their security problems. Problematization of gendered security through a focus on voice and subjectivity is a ground-breaking contribution of post-structuralist critical reading of security scholarship.

Under the umbrella term of personal security, the paper analyses a variety of insecurities such as crime, physical violence, domestic violence, and early marriage. Domestic violence against women is undoubtedly the clearest example of gender-based insecurity that illustrates the silent security dilemma. As Hansen (2000:287) notes, 'Security as silence occurs when insecurity cannot be voiced', when openly speaking up about security problems is impossible, and may even result in aggravation of danger. Many women interviewed in this study emphasized structural complexities and lack of safety

nets and protection as hindrances to their ability to voice their problems and resist their insecurity:

*Society believes that women should keep silent, and if she is beaten, then that's what she deserves. Ethnic Azeri or ethnic Armenian women in our region rarely go to the police, because when she leaves, she must either go to her own parents or... It is dangerous to return to her husband... She has nowhere to go. I would also think about it. What is next, after the police? I also had such cases [of domestic violence] in my family, and I did not contact the police. I did not want to return to my parents' house with my children, and I had nowhere to go on my own. I did not see any support from the state. It was tough for me, so I did not dare to leave. I haven't made up my mind yet, but then we'll see (Marneuli FG, Azerbaijani EMW, age group: 30 and more).*

Domestic violence was a recurring issue in focus group participant's conceptualization of security. Many respondents, irrespective of location and ethnic belonging, expressed deep concerns about domestic violence. Their narratives show that the private space of the home becomes a site of contestation where female voices are systematically silenced:

*There is a traditional approach to women that [a woman] must be silent in the family, and no one should be sorry for her. For example, if a husband physically abused a woman, other women would say that this is normal and that it happens to them as well. And if, for example, a woman goes to her parents, they convince her that it is normal, that it happens to everyone, and that she will get used to it soon. Domestic violence is still present, because no one says a word (Marneuli FG, Azerbaijani EMW, age group 18-29).*

*It is tough to be a divorced woman in the Caucasus. After divorce, people see you differently. You become a second-rate person, and that is why women are scared and remain silent (Akhalkalaki FG, Armenian EMW, age group 18-29).*

*You know, our women, Azerbaijani women, are ashamed to report. They are like, oh, my mother-in-law or father-in-law abused me, and if I report, I will destroy my family. They are ashamed to report their mothers-in-law, mothers of their husbands (Marneuli FG, Azerbaijani EMW, age group 18-29).*

Respondents spoke about three main problems that prevent ethnic minority women from speaking out. The first is a lack of information and awareness about domestic abuse. The second is associated with cultural stigma and stereotypes. The third is a lack of safety nets and institutionalized support:

*In general, no woman in Georgia is safe and protected from [domestic] violence, including members of ethnic minorities. But there is an additional problem within ethnic minorities, and this is related to comprehending and understanding the problem. Firstly, it is related to a lack of information. Secondly, fear of the public is a very important factor here. Those stereotypes are created in society. I will never call it a tradition. Tradition is something else entirely. I would call*

*them misconceptions and norms specifically created for putting women in certain frames, and all this, of course, forces women not to speak up in the face of violence! Not to even think of such a thing, because the biggest fear for these women is a family breakdown, which is why they endure everything (Marneuli FG, Azerbaijani EMW, age group 18-29).*

*I think many accompanying reasons make us so passive and vulnerable to abuse. But, if we were confident in the conscientiousness of law enforcement agencies, if we were confident that there would be full support from the state, then we would be much braver. This is a problem for ethnic minorities for the most part in our region, but I would say that we have this problem throughout the country. It's just that in the region, it is more pronounced (Marneuli FG, Azerbaijani EMW, age group: 30 and more).*

One respondent also raised the question of how can women benefit from speaking up? When a group or individual faces a silent security dilemma, speaking up may aggravate the insecurity. She captured the essence of the silent security dilemma:

*Sure, there are women who refuse, speak up, and resist, but what happens then? This is also problematic, because there are shelters, but they stay there temporarily, right? There has been much talk about it, that these women cannot get jobs, and they are not provided permanent housing. So, the women who raised their voices and resisted still could not make it to the end. Because of that, women cannot take risks to speak up (Marneuli FG, Azerbaijani EMW, age group 18-29).*

Apart from domestic violence, women can be particularly vulnerable to crimes such as robberies. Several respondents raised concerns about crime in their neighborhoods, and three respondents from a Marneuli FG mentioned that they had been robbed recently. The vulnerability of women to robberies once again proves the importance of gender mainstreaming across all security enforcement areas. The respondent believes she was chosen as a victim, because she is a woman. She stated, 'I am absolutely sure, unambiguously that, this [robberies] is connected with the fact that I am a woman, and at the moment, I live alone. But this is also because the structures responsible for the rule of law do not work well' (Marneuli FG, Azerbaijani EMW, age group: 30 and more).

Positively, many respondents noted improvements in the reduction of crime. Reflecting on the 1990s, one respondent remembered times when she could not go out, because of rampant robberies. Now, she believes the situation has improved (Tbilisi FG, Armenian EMW, mixed age group). Several respondents also noted the progress in the decline of domestic violence. One stated, 'It used to happen that a husband beat or mocked his wife, but not anymore' (Akhalkalaki FG, Armenian EMW, age group: 30 and more). Others in the Akhalkalaki FG also agreed that domestic violence was no longer as common as before, because women were standing up against it. Furthermore, some of them also underlined their trust in police. Considering the perceived lack of support to women

who stand up against domestic violence, this is where the role of institutions such as police, courts, and other state and non-state funded support becomes crucial. Consolidated efforts are needed for awareness raising and empowering women to resist abuse.

A Ministry of Internal Affairs official also underlined the importance of access to information for combatting gender-based violence. They reflected on the detrimental impact of the lockdown on victims of domestic violence:

*When the first lockdown was announced, the Ministry of Internal Affairs sent text messages to the population in Georgian, Azerbaijani, and Armenian. The text messages included information about who to contact in case of domestic violence, how to call 112, and how to use a mobile app that has a silent alarm button, the SOS button. We were fully aware that during the lockdown when victims had to live in the same space with the perpetrators, they might not even have had an opportunity to step aside and call the police silently. That is why the silent alarm button is particularly important (Human Rights Protection Unit, MIA).*

The availability of mobile applications with silent alarm functionality (SOS app) is indeed an important acknowledgement of the precarious position of women, which also resonates with the silent security dilemma that victims of domestic violence face in voicing their insecurity.

The respondents' narratives show that gender-based violence is one of the most gendered security issues for ethnic minority women living in Georgia. While high femicide rates and domestic violence remain important problems for all women, EMW are particularly vulnerable due to a combination of several factors, including higher exposure to patriarchal stereotypes, lack of awareness about gender-based violence, lack of information about reporting mechanisms, and perceived low levels of trust in support systems that the state and/or NGOs provide. An important limitation of the state's effort to combat gender-based violence is its disregard of a focus on women subjected to multiple forms of discrimination, including women belonging to ethnic minority groups.<sup>17</sup> Although the legislative environment has improved in recent years and a number of mechanisms have been developed for combatting gender-based violence, in practice, there are a variety of gaps and these tools are often limited to a formalistic approach, and effective implementation and monitoring is still lacking.<sup>18</sup> In addition, according to the Public Defender's reports measures to eliminate femicides and gender-based violence are primarily reactive and ineffective for prevention.<sup>19,20</sup> Further-

more, the mobile application SOS currently is not available in ethnic minority languages. To improve gender equality for all women and girls across Georgia, the state should adopt special measures targeting vulnerable groups of women, develop practical impact assessment tools, and collect statistical data disaggregated by gender as well as ethnicity, age, and disability status. Making such information publicly available would help to monitor the effective implementation of intersectional gender-mainstreaming policies and help to eradicate gender-based violence.

## 4.2.2 Economic security

Economic security is another key component of the human security framework and is closely linked to women's emancipation. The respondents discussed financial security as one of the most important problems. While some respondents never experienced identity-based obstacles to employment opportunities, several respondents from Tbilisi, Akhalkalaki, and Marneuli spoke about systemic problems and discrimination in access to the labor market. Participants in the Marneuli and Akhalkalaki focus groups underlined the language barrier as a critical obstacle for employment opportunities.

Several respondents noted that the lack of employment opportunities in Georgia forced their family members to emigrate to other countries:

*The problem of employment is rather pressing. Everyone in our village is Armenian. My father works in Russia now. Women are housewives. They do not work, because there are no jobs [...] and men work in Russia (Akhalkalaki FG, Armenian EMW, age group 18-29).*

*[Here] every young person is looking for a job. They go back and forth, but no one finds a proper job. They are trying to get a job, but there are no jobs, so they go to Poland. There is no money! No money for food, for clothing, for nothing. Many leave Georgia and move to Turkey or Baku (Marneuli FG, Azerbaijani EMW, age group 18-29).*

The emigration of ethnic minorities to countries like Russia is also connected to their perception as potential security threats. As a field expert mentioned in an interview, the security sector sees ethnic minorities as potential risks, 'Because they have certain ties to foreign forces that may have anti-Georgian attitudes.' The lack of economic security at home forces ethnic minorities to emigrate abroad, further exacerbating their securitization as potential threats.

A representative of the Public Defender's Office observed that due to the mass emigration of men, the burden of domestic care, household chores, and agriculture lay on women, and 'Consequently, they can no longer afford employment or self-realization' (Public Defender's Office, Akhalkalaki). Thus, economic security is also interlinked with other components of human security. Importantly, it is also connected to women's empowerment and independence from men as providers. In addition to access to the labor market, ensuring strong

<sup>17</sup> CEDAW/C/GEO/4-5 Concluding observations on the combined fourth and fifth periodic reports of Georgia, 2014, Par. 16

<sup>18</sup> Public Defender of Georgia. Review of Georgia's Gender Mainstreaming Obligations and Their Fulfilment Status. Available at: <https://www.ombudsman.ge/res/docs/2021031012092124287.pdf>

<sup>19</sup> Public Defender of Georgia, Femicide Monitoring Report 2019. Available at: <https://ombudsman.ge/res/docs/2021061415064797521.pdf>

<sup>20</sup> Public Defender of Georgia, Report on Femicide Monitoring. Available at: <https://ombudsman.ge/res/docs/2020070314085774956.pdf> 2014-2018

practical mechanisms against discrimination is crucial for women's empowerment.

The respondents' opinions regarding discrimination in the labor market were somewhat mixed. Many respondents believed that there was no identity-based discrimination towards ethnic minorities on the Georgian labor market. However, some of them had different experiences and emphasized a variety of structural and cultural problems that create dual barriers for ethnic minority women to enter the labor market.

*Gender-based discrimination exists in Georgia, and in our case, there is an added dimension – ethnic identity-based discrimination, which creates a double barrier for us. A good example of that is Marneuli municipality. First, there are no women in higher positions, and there are no ethnic Azerbaijani women at all (Marneuli FG, Azerbaijani EMW, age group 18-29).*

According to some respondents, identity-based discrimination still prevails. Even though the Law on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination, which aims to eliminate discrimination and ensure equal rights for all regardless of, 'National, ethnic or social background, profession, marital status, health status, disability, sexual orientation, gender identity or other markers' (Article 1),<sup>21</sup> was adopted in 2014, many EMW continue to experience a variety of forms of discrimination. One of the respondents even recalled a case from two years ago when her friend was refused a job in a bank, because she was wearing a headscarf. She stated, 'They did not hire her only, because she was wearing [a headscarf]. They directly told her that it was because of her [headscarf]!' However, this case of open discrimination might be an outlier rather than the norm, and it should not be seen as an illustrative case of ethnic Azerbaijani minority women's greater vulnerability to discrimination.

The respondents' narratives illustrate that gender equality in the labor market is far from a finished project. Ethnic minority women are particularly vulnerable to patriarchal standards of labor distribution within the family, limiting their ability to enter the workforce. Additionally, some spoke about discrimination from employers. Furthermore, due to the mass emigration of men, EMW are left in charge of all household chores and agriculture. Thus, they cannot pursue self-realization at work and rely on remittances from abroad. Language barriers compound the problem of access to employment opportunities. Some respondents mentioned that due to inflexible hours at Georgian language centers, they cannot take classes. In some cases, economic insecurity is not mitigated, because ethnic minority women lack information about their rights that the Constitution provides for. Considering these factors, more focused efforts are needed to raise awareness about minority groups' fundamental human rights. In addition, for female empowerment, it is crucial to establish local employability agencies and increase support for local organizations

that focus on women's employment. Mainstreaming the dual vulnerability of EMW in the labor market will contribute to the successful and meaningful implementation of the Law on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination.<sup>22</sup>

#### 4.2.2.1 Infrastructure and Transportation

The importance of public transport for women's security was one of the themes that emerged from the focus group data. Transportation has traditionally been viewed as gender-neutral and has been rarely discussed as a security issue. However, over the last few years, transport policy started to increasingly be addressed in relation to gender through the acknowledgment that inefficient public infrastructure and public transport can exacerbate vulnerability. In 2008, the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) published a report that underlined the importance of access to transportation for gender equality and sustainable development by "Broadening the access to health and education services, employment, improving the exchange of information and promoting social cohesion".<sup>23</sup> The report acknowledges that better access to transport infrastructure and services can positively impact the empowerment of vulnerable groups by making basic services more affordable.<sup>24</sup>

Access to transportation is also related to freedom of movement and is affirmed as an essential human right in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR, Article 13). Some respondents defined freedom of movement as an important determinant of their feeling of security. For one of the respondents, security means, 'To live free, move freely, to live as I wish' (Marneuli FG, Azerbaijani EMW, age group 18-29). Access to safe public transportation is particularly crucial for ethnic minority women's security, who face dual barriers due to their gender and ethnicity. The lack of public transportation prevents women, especially those living in rural areas, from entering the workforce. It is also a structural barrier that exacerbates women's dependence on men. In such contexts, access to public transportation becomes a feminist issue and core aspect of security as emancipation.

One respondent made an interesting observation on the importance of public transportation for women's emancipation. She stated:

*There is no transport in the villages. There should be transport at least two or three times per day so that women do not depend on their husbands to take them to town. It should not be like that! There should be public transport so that women can go to town whenever they want, for shopping or whatever reasons, and have contact with Georgians, and with people in general. There is no trans-*

21 Law of Georgia on The Elimination of All Forms Of Discrimination. Available at: <https://matsne.gov.ge/en/document/view/2339687?publication=0>

22 Parliament of Georgia (2014). Law on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination. Available at: <https://matsne.gov.ge/en/document/view/2339687?publication=0>

23 United Nations Economic Commission (UNECE) (2008), „Gender and Transport,” [https://www.unece.org/trans/theme\\_gender.html](https://www.unece.org/trans/theme_gender.html)

24 Ibid. p.2

*port, and women have to depend on men (Akhalkalaki FG, Armenian EMW, age group 18-29).*

Furthermore, several respondents from Akhalkalaki noted that there are negative perceptions regarding women who drive cars. One stated, 'In some villages, it is a shame for a woman to drive a car' Another stated, 'People say bad things about the women who have a car and can drive' (Akhalkalaki FG, Armenian EMW, age group 18-29). Another stated, 'I also want to have a driving license, but they do not allow me to because of these perceptions.'

The respondents' narratives illustrate that individuals' vulnerabilities arising from a lack of public transportation and safe public transport have a gendered dimension. Therefore, access to public transport should be seen as an essential prerequisite of women's empowerment and realization of their full potential. To address the issue, gender-specific solutions should consider factors such as availability, punctuality, affordability, and safety of public transportation (Aloul et al. 2018). The study findings also underline the importance of intersectional approaches from stakeholders such as the Ministry of Economy and Sustainable Development, a member of the National Security Council. Unfortunately, no available evidence was found on the Ministry's webpage that would show its commitment to gender mainstreaming or an intersectional approach to address vulnerable groups' needs. Making transport more inclusive and responsive to the needs of women, particularly to more vulnerable groups of women, requires close coordination between government, community-based organizations, and women who are directly affected by the lack of access to basic public goods such as public transport.

### 4.2.3 Food security

The next component of the human security framework is food security. Accessibility to healthy food and good nutrition is crucial for the well-being and development of individuals (UN 2002). Food security means that 'People, at all times, have physical, social and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food that meets their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life' (UN 2002). Access to food can be seen as a basic common good. Thus, food security is a problem of social justice rather than an individual household's issue (Azétsop and Joy 2013). It also affects women disproportionately (Ransom and Elder 2003). Patriarchal norms of property ownership and control of financial resources exacerbates the vulnerability of women on this issue, especially in rural peripheries (Jenderedjian and Bellows 2021).

At least one respondent from Akhalkalaki and Marneuli focus groups mentioned that they could not afford to buy food at some point in their lives. Others emphasized malnutrition and lack of adequate food:

*Proper nutrition includes a comprehensive diet, and we can only afford minimum food that will not let us die of hunger (Marneuli FG, Azerbaijani EMW, age group: 30 and more).*

*I know several women who have salaries around 280-350 lari, which is not enough neither for rent nor for food... They work for eight hours from morning till evening, some as cleaning ladies, some as waitresses... I personally work with women, and I know how they live. They have a hard time making ends meet (Marneuli FG, Azerbaijani EMW, age group 18-29).*

Food security is closely related to economic security. While malnutrition is a common problem for many lower income families across Georgia, food insecurity is a particular concern for ethnic minority women, because they often face cultural barriers to property ownership (because the preference for passing property to sons is high among ethnic minorities),<sup>25</sup> decent employment, and quality education (see Sida 2015). Female farmers may face additional obstacles in accessing resources such as mechanized equipment, fertilizers, bank loans, improved seed varieties, and/or agricultural education (Sida 2015).

The respondents underlined that during Covid-19, food security was an important issue for their families. Some of them mentioned that previously food-secure households were now devastatingly threatened with food insecurity for the first time. There is evidence that in Georgia, ethnic minorities are more food insecure than the rest of the population.<sup>26</sup> Ethnic minority women's vulnerability to food insecurity remains a complex issue that is likely connected with a variety of risk factors such as unemployment, poverty, women's roles in the community, and their exposure to patriarchal norms. Furthermore, food security is also connected to access to public transportation. Thus, the respondents living in rural peripheries were left with a high concern about their food insecurity during the pandemic when municipal transport stopped operating.

The study suggests that food insecurity is an important issue for some ethnic minority women. EMW are more vulnerable towards food insecurity. Women's disadvantaged position in family hierarchies exacerbates patriarchal norms of property ownership, unemployment, and lack control of financial resources. Undoubtedly, different conditions result in different degrees of concerns about food insecurity among EMW. Some respondents underlined the lack of proper diet and nutrition. Others felt it was an issue of survival. While some never felt food insecure. To address and overcome structural inequalities, it is crucial to ensure ethnic minority women's equal participation in the labor market and to provide access to financial services. It is also essential to support awareness-raising among women regarding their property rights and to focus on their empowerment through education. Furthermore, since in most households, women are responsible for nutrition, they spend a great deal of time purchasing and preparing food that leaves them little time for other activities. Thus, access to affordable and timely transportation could also have a positive impact on

<sup>25</sup> See Georgia – Country Gender Assessment (December 2018). Asian Development Bank, p.15 <https://www.adb.org/documents/georgia-country-gender-assessment>

<sup>26</sup> See Caucasus Barometer (2020). Covid-19 Monitor 2020, wave 1. Available at: <https://caucasusbarometer.org/en/cv2020w1/CVFDACV-by-ETHNIC/>

their food security. Considering that food security is included in the main conceptual document of the security policy, the National Concept of Security, more coordinated efforts are needed from relevant stakeholders, including the Ministry of Economy, Ministry of Environment Protection and Agriculture, Ministry of Education, and municipal governments to mitigate the vulnerability of groups under greater risk.

#### 4.2.4 Health Security

The relationship between health and security is an essential aspect of the human security framework. Health security is acknowledged as, 'Both essential and instrumental to achieving human security' (Commission on Human Security 2003: 96). It includes access to health care and services, health promotion, disease control, and access to water and sanitation. Even though the human security framework has been mainly used to address problems of the so-called 'Global South', and HIV/AIDS, malaria, tuberculosis were mainly discussed as health security issues in developing countries, newly emerging diseases such as SARS, Swine Flu (H1N1), Avian Influenza (H5N1), MERS, and Covid-19 have also been identified as threats to national security in the 'Global North'. In recent years, health issues started to be regularly articulated in security language. Public health challenges like pandemics have been included in the National Security Strategy of the US, the UK, the Netherlands, and other Western countries.

Chauhan et al.'s (2020) systemic review of forty-eight studies globally indicates that patients from ethnic minority backgrounds may experience inequality in health care delivery and health outcomes due to a multitude of socio-cultural factors. An emerging body of scholarship also indicates that patients from minority groups are at higher risk of complicated health outcomes than the mainstream population (Suurmond et al. 2010, Quin and Kumar 2014). The Covid-19 pandemic demonstrated how inequality and social determinants of health create conditions for the spread of disease and how existing disparities in healthcare services are associated with higher mortality and morbidity (Killerby et al. 2020, López-Gay et al. 2021). Studies (Greer et al. 2021) also show that access to information contributes to the successful containment of the spread of pandemics.

This study found that Azerbaijani and Armenian women in Georgia experience obstacles in access to health services. While access to healthcare services was not an issue for women living in Tbilisi, respondents living outside the capital underlined a variety of problems related to health security. A lack of information and complicated procedures were the main obstacles to access government healthcare programs. These were further compounded due to the language barrier. Furthermore, women from rural areas and regional centers noted that they could not get timely treatment due to a lack of medical personnel, expertise, or resources.

According to the respondents, EMW experience additional problems related to access to reproductive health services. One respondent from a Marneuli focus group spoke about the

lack of efforts from the state to raise awareness on reproductive health issues and access to contraceptives among ethnic minorities. The problem is further complicated because of the language barrier, since women need a person to accompany them to the gynecologist. Sometimes, the accompanying person is a woman's husband or father. This causes additional stress. In the evaluation of the representatives from Public Defender's Offices from Kvemo Kartli and Samtskhe-Javakheti, accessibility and availability of information are key obstacles.

Respondents from an Azerbaijani focus group remembered that when the Covid-19 pandemic came to Marneuli and Bolnisi municipalities, they were put under a strict quarantine regime. They noted that ethnic minorities of Azerbaijani background experienced a surge in hate speech spreading across the internet, saying that they did not respect the quarantine rules and did not engage in proper hygiene. Afterwards, Azerbaijani youth launched a non-discrimination campaign on Facebook,<sup>27</sup> telling the public that the language barrier and the lack of information campaign are not the responsibility of the Azerbaijanis living in Marneuli and Bolnisi alone. The campaign underlined the state's responsibility and the need for awareness-raising related to Covid-19. This incident also showed that ethnic minorities who do not speak Georgian are particularly vulnerable during emergency situations like pandemics. Furthermore, ethnic minorities are more susceptible to exploitation from the outside, since they are more likely to get information from Russian media sources. For instance, it has been reported that to increase the popularity of its Covid-19 vaccine, Sputnik V, Russia has launched a campaign to undermine other vaccines the European Medicines Agency and WHO approved.<sup>28,29</sup> The expert and representatives of Public Defender's Office also underlined ethnic minorities' vaccine hesitancy in Georgia. Even though anti-vaccination narratives can be found in Georgian media as well, exposure to Russian media with no or limited possibility of obtaining information from Georgian health experts through the mainstream media makes ethnic minorities more vulnerable to disinformation. Thus, because of the language barrier, many ethnic Azerbaijani and Armenian citizens of Georgia live in different information spaces which according to the expert, is a security challenge. That is why providing access to information through trusted channels is not only a human right but should also be a national security priority.

The focus group data and interviews with the Public Defender's Office showed that health (in)security is connected to a variety of structural problems, having its roots in inequality and lack of access to information. Inequality and social determinants of health compounded with the language barrier, create dual obstacles for ethnic minority women in access to

<sup>27</sup> #No to discrimination – demonstration of Azerbaijani citizen of Georgia in social network. Available at: <https://publika.ge/aradiskriminacias-saqartvelos-moqalaxe-azerbajianelebis-aqcia-socialur-qselshi/>

<sup>28</sup> The Wall Street Journal (Mar 2021). Available at: <https://www.wsj.com/articles/russian-disinformation-campaign-aims-to-undermine-confidence-in-pfizer-other-covid-19-vaccines-u-s-officials-say-11615129200>

<sup>29</sup> Center for Medical Economics and Innovation (Mar 2021). Available at: <https://medecon.org/russias-anti-vaccine-propaganda-is-tantamount-to-a-declaration-of-war/>

healthcare, especially regarding reproductive health. Apart from the importance of access to healthcare, Covid-19 has further underlined that human health should be seen as a crucial component of security policy. Nevertheless, since threat perception and the language of security have been inexorably linked to the military domain, today, amid the uncontrolled spread of Covid-19, countries continue to attempt to manage the virus with hyper-militarized responses. These include the deployment of armies, military personnel, declaration of states of emergency, and through increasing the power of the state in ‘speaking security’. While military personnel can play an important role in managing health crises, it is crucial that states adopt health security policies based on prevention and harm reduction rather than containment. Furthermore, health professionals should be increasingly aware that health policies have inherently different impacts across class, gender, and ethnicity. Therefore, intersectional perspectives based on protection and prevention should be the key priority of health security policies.

## 4.2.5 Political Security

This subchapter explores the political security of ethnic minority women. Political security is closely related to community security and includes respect to human rights, protection from repression, discrimination, and ill-treatment (Human Security Unit 2009). Political security denotes not only how the state treats ethnic minorities, but also to what extent it protects and formally recognizes the special needs of minority groups. The unequal position of ethnic minority women in power structures makes them more vulnerable to violence, exclusion, and alienation. Therefore, even if the state does not pursue explicitly discriminatory policies, but fails to commit to international safeguarding protocols, the political security of EMW is undermined. Therefore, ensuring *“Non-discrimination between all people, irrespective of gender, religion, race or ethnic origin”* (UNDP, 1994: 14) relies upon practical implementation of commitments the state has undertaken. Increasing community security through the reduction of political exclusion is vital in discussing ethnic minorities’ security problems.

An adequate response to the security needs of ethnic minority women requires acknowledgement of the importance of identity, which is critical in understanding security (see McSweeney, 1999: 5). Many scholars (Zalewski 1998, Boulding 2000, Hansen 2000) argue that identity in security debates often revolves around ethnicity and race, while the importance of gender identity is often overlooked. According to Lene Hansen (2000: 287), gender security problems, *“Often involve intimate inter-linkage between subject’s gendered identity and other aspects of subject’s identity, ethnic, national or religious,”* and *“Because gender rarely produces the kind of collective, self-contained referent objects,”* gendered security gets subsumed under other aspects of identity. Recognizing the “subsuming security” problem is particularly important for analyzing how identity shapes ethnic minority women’s security needs. Despite the analytical challenges associated with detangling gender and ethnic identity based political insecurity, the respondents’ narratives show the significance of

gender in ethnic minorities political security across three main areas:

- The state’s ability to protect EMW from patriarchal malpractices such as gender-based violence and early marriage.
- The state’s ability to protect EMW from discrimination and hate speech.
- The state’s political will to increase the representation of EMW in politics and empower their agency.

**Patriarchal structures** affect women from all ethnic backgrounds, albeit in different ways. Ethnic minority women are usually more disadvantaged and marginalized in power hierarchies. Therefore, state institutions must have a culturally sensitive approach towards ethnic minority women’s protection. Protection from physical violence, which was discussed previously, is one of the essential areas where the state’s enhanced pro-active measures are needed. According to several respondents, due to cultural stereotypes, EMW are less likely to report abuse. The quote below demonstrates that protecting ethnic minority women from patriarchal malpractices requires targeted awareness-raising campaigns and culturally sensitive frameworks:

Our women are hesitant to ask for help. Of course, this is also the case among the Georgian population, but to a greater extent among the representatives of ethnic minorities. They do not report to the police, because they are worried about becoming the subject of discussion for the society (Marneuli FG, Azerbaijani EMW, 30 and more).

Besides domestic violence, forced early marriages are another form of ill-treatment and repression rooted in patriarchal norms. Early marriage directly affects the political security of EMW and results in a lack of access to education opportunities, has detrimental effects on women’s health, and isolates them from the labor market (Public Defender’s Office, Marneuli). Limited educational opportunities further influence EMW’s low awareness of their rights and make them more vulnerable to discrimination, repression, and ill-treatment in public and private spaces. Therefore, state institutions’ ability to protect EMW from patriarchal malpractices such as gender-based violence and early marriage is crucial for their political security.

The official from the Human Rights Protection Unit within the Ministry of Internal Affairs (MIA) underlined the importance of awareness-raising campaigns with ethnic minorities. The official mentioned that the MIA often launches campaigns in ethnic minority-dominated areas. In addition, the Human Rights Protection Unit frequently updates information on their Facebook page in Armenian and Azerbaijani languages. While the MIA appears to be the most successful actor from the traditional security sector that aims to address the gendered security of EMW, more efforts are needed to design culturally sensitive frameworks towards problem solving through reflecting on the profoundly gendered nature of patriarchal malpractices.

**The representation of EMW in politics by empowering their agency** is a critical component of political security. Of nine current state representatives to the regions, none are women,<sup>30</sup> and no woman with an ethnic minority background has ever held this position. Combined with the lack of female representation in politics, EMW face multiple additional obstacles related to their gender and ethnicity that hinder their involvement in formal and informal political processes.

*Regarding political involvement, for example, in previous years, we were told as an argument that we have a language barrier, and because of that, that is why you cannot be politically active. Now young people speak Georgian well, but there are still many barriers. There are still discriminatory processes (Akhalkalaki FG, Armenian EMW, age group 18-29).*

One participant from a Marneuli FG (age group: 30 and more) recalled that during a TV debate, the moderator asked a male candidate for the local council (sakrebulo) why there was not a single woman on the list. In response, he stated “That they could not find a single woman with experience and skills! We were laughing, not because it was funny, but because it was an absurdity!” Another respondent underlined the structural constraints and discrimination they face when they try to make their voices heard. She recalled an informal conversation with a local government official, who told her she would never get elected, because men in the local government office would never listen to her orders. It appears that on the local level, gender is the main obstacle to women’s participation in politics, which is also evident at the national level. No woman of Azerbaijani or Armenian ethnic background has ever held any prominent public position in the Georgian government since independence in 1991, nor are they represented in the current convocation of Parliament.

Representatives of the Public Defender’s Office from Marneuli and Akhalkalaki also spoke about obstacles to women’s political involvement. The most crucial problem is the burden of domestic care, which leaves women with less time to be politically active. The second most important factor is related to cultural norms and women’s lack of belief that their voices will be heard. A respondent stated, ‘Cultural barriers are very important here. Women are often told, it is none of their business when they try to make their voice heard’ (Public Defender’s Office, Marneuli). Another problem relates to state institutions/local government’s lack of consideration of gendered cultural specificities when increasing the public’s political involvement. For instance, a representative of the Public Defender’s Office shared her observation that meetings and public consultations in Marneuli often take place in Chaikhana:

*Chaikhana is considered a gathering place for men, and because of cultural considerations, there is no way the ethnic Azerbaijani women could go there. So, when you, the local government, choose Chaikhana as a place for a meeting,*

*you are by default excluding the participation of ethnic minority women (Public Defender’s Office, Marneuli).*

Therefore, to increase EMW’s political engagement, relevant stakeholders should put more effort into meeting the special needs of EMW, and keeping in mind cultural and practical barriers. This includes choosing neutral places for meetings (for instance, kindergartens, schools, or parks) and flexible hours (considering transport working hours, domestic care responsibilities). Most importantly, practical and focused efforts are needed to educate local government representatives on gender issues through investing in training/re-training and establishing local gender councils.

As discussed above, to achieve women’s emancipation and empowerment in the political security sector, increased political representation of ethnic minority women is essential. Direct representation of EMW will also ensure that their problems are addressed accordingly. Regarding possible solutions to overcome these problems, respondents believe that it will be impossible if the alienation of ethnic minorities continues. One respondent also underlined the need for strong political will and appropriate legal measures against alienation, discrimination, and exclusion of minorities.

*Integration is a two-way process, and integration cannot take place for so long, because there has been wrong politics in place, and this is a politics of alienation. I can say without hesitation that I always feel like a stranger, an alien, because they make me feel that way. It does not happen in my head, does it? At every step, I am reminded that you are alien. You are a guest, and you do not belong to this land, this water. This is the problem. This approach is found everywhere, preventing us from feeling like full-fledged citizens (Marneuli FG, Azerbaijani EMW, age group 18-29).*

While political security is one of the broadest and most important aspects of human security, it is analytically challenging to detangle different identity(ies) based insecurities. The research found that ethnic minority women’s security problems are often subsumed under each other on the policy level and in their own perceptions of security. On the policy level, state institutions fail to identify the special needs of EMW. Thus, their problems are addressed not through an intersectional approach (reflecting on dual vulnerability) but via separate policies focusing on ethnicity or broader gender issues. Respondents’ narratives further showed that more government and NGO efforts are needed to protect EMW from patriarchal malpractices, discrimination, and hate speech. It is also important to increase the representation of EMW in politics and provide secure channels for agency and problem articulation. Furthermore, the study also found that the focus group participants also struggled to reflect on their dual (in)security. When discussing experiences of repression, discrimination, and ill-treatment, most of them emphasized ethnic identity-based aspects of insecurity. At the same time, gender was more relevant in the physical security component, as discussed earlier. Therefore, the findings support the assumption that an intersectional approach is needed to address the double vulnerability of ethnic minority women. ‘Subsuming security’ can

<sup>30</sup> Government of Georgia - State Representatives. Accessed at 3 Oct 2021: [http://gov.ge/index.php?lang\\_id=GEO&sec\\_id=373](http://gov.ge/index.php?lang_id=GEO&sec_id=373)

be mitigated via intersectionality, laying the foundation for realizing ethnic minority women's political security by increasing protection, emancipation, and inclusive representation.

### 4.3 SECURITY, BORDERS, AND TERRITORIAL CONFLICTS

This subchapter explores EMW's views on dominant security narratives, territorial conflicts, and their experiences of (in)security resulting from them. Given the domestic and regional struggles in the South Caucasus, the themes of ethnic conflict and security are often discussed under the umbrella term geopolitics. Consequently, issues labelled 'geopolitics' take priority in knowledge production and reproduction through scholarly works and media coverage. With that, lived experiences of conflicts and the everyday security of women remain underexplored (Ziemer 2020). The respondents' narratives show that women interpret security differently during war and peacetime. Their understanding of security is much broader than conflict outcomes measured in military terms.

Three territorial conflicts in the South Caucasus and events afterwards had different effects on the respondents of this study. Several respondents from the Azerbaijani focus group noted increasing tensions between Armenians and Azerbaijanis living in Georgia due to war in Nagorno-Karabakh. One stated, 'I had many Armenian friends and acquaintances before the war. After the war, our relations got tenser' (Tbilisi FG, Azerbaijani EMW, mixed age group). The majority emphasized that the conflict should not spill over to their lives here in Georgia, and they should try to avoid tensions. One stated, 'We should be vigilant. We should avoid tensions. It will be taken care of there [outside Georgia]. We have to be friendly here' (Tbilisi FG, Azerbaijani EMW, mixed age group). Respondents believed that the conflict in Karabakh was a significant threat to ethnic Azerbaijani and Armenian minorities living in Georgia because of possible deterioration of their neighborly relations. One stated, 'Ethnic Azerbaijanis and ethnic Armenians have lived here for years and have had completely different relationships' (Marneuli FG, Azerbaijani EMW, age group 18-29). Several respondents expressed concern that their friendly coexistence was under threat because of the escalation of conflict in Karabakh.

Furthermore, when discussing territorial conflicts, the majority of respondents felt more affected by the conflicts in Georgia than between Armenia and Azerbaijan. One stated, 'Samachablo and Abkhazia, [they] are part of our homeland and have always been... Of course, we all want to live in a unified Georgia' (Marneuli FG, Azerbaijani EMW, age group 18-29).

*The war in Karabakh does not affect me to that extent because we are the citizens of Georgia. Yes, of course, it is unfortunate what's happening there, but we are citizens of Georgia. When the war in 2008 happened, we were terrified. I remember many people from Marneuli who went to war. Sadly, many even died. That's when I saw how much our people love Georgia (Marneuli FG, Azerbaijani EMW, age group 18-29).*

*The Caucasus is geographically a relatively small space not to feel this tension of territorial and ethnic conflicts. Naturally, every day it is excruciating to read the news that our citizens are being kidnapped in Samachablo. When our citizens in Gali are not allowed here for treatment, it causes deep indignation, and especially this moment is difficult for me when they are witnessing borderization, when their houses, gardens, cemeteries are behind barbed wire. People do not have access to their own house. Nagorno-Karabakh is the pain of the neighboring country, where ethnically identical people live, but the question is still in the demarcation of the border with Azerbaijan. Unfortunately, Russia throws this topic into our society and brings discord into our country, and many people do not understand this. They cannot correctly assess the current situation and succumb to provocations (Marneuli FG, Azerbaijani EMW, age group: 30 and more).*

The politicization around the Davit Gareji issue,<sup>31</sup> a monastery located on the border of Georgia and Azerbaijan, had painful repercussions for Azerbaijani ethnic minority residents of Georgia. One participant mentioned that during tensions surrounding David Gareji, she experienced deep emotional and psychological distress. She stated, 'Now I got used to it, because it is tough to change people's mind. Georgia is my homeland, and when they say otherwise, this is hurtful.' One FG participant said that Azerbaijanis living in Georgia are often forced to take a side on the Davit Gareji issue, which sometimes leads to conflict. She believes the problem should be solved between the governments, and ordinary people should not be held responsible for a governments' actions.

*For example, in the case of Davit Gareji, if you ask me, it should belong to Georgia, because it is a Christian heritage site. But you know what? When I hear discussion around this topic, I am often blamed as if it was my fault that this all is happening. This happens between the states, and who asked me, whether Gareji should belong to Georgia or Azerbaijan?! This affects me directly (Marneuli FG, Azerbaijani EMW, age group 18-29).*

The respondents' narratives illustrate how territorial disputes impacted the security of ethnic minority women in multiple ways. While not necessarily directly affected by the war, they experienced increased bullying, tensions, and deep emotional distress. Many scholars argued how male-dominated foreign policy, defense, and diplomacy systems exclude women and other minorities (Togebay 1994, Bashevkin 2014, Enloe, 2004 2014). Representation of more women in traditionally male-dominated institutions could bring new prospects for peace. Furthermore, at the core of the effective implementation of the UN Security Council Resolution 1325 lies women's direct participation in peace processes. Diversity and inclusion in foreign policymaking are crucial for responsible political leadership and essential for capturing insecurities outside the patriarchal lens. The women, and especially ethnic minority women, could play a tremendous role in contributing to sus-

<sup>31</sup> See more on Davit Gareji issue at [Radio Tavisupleba](https://www.radio-tavisupleba.com/)

tainable peace in this turbulent region through their involvement in formal peace talks and promoting people-to-people dialogue.

#### 4.4 VOICE AND FEMALE AGENCY: EMPOWERING RESISTANCE

In the chapter about personal security, the paper discussed the silent security dilemma that ethnic minority women face in making their voices heard. Silencing of ethnic minority women's voices is commonplace across other components of human security related to economic, health, and political security. If they make their voices heard, they are often reminded, 'That we are just guests, and if we don't like it, we can go back to where we came from' (Marneuli FG, Azerbaijani EMW, age group 18-29). As mentioned earlier, vulnerable groups' precarious security conditions often depends on their invisibility. However, to be heard and seen in the security discourse as a subject worthy of protection, having a voice is necessary. Female agency is, at the core, a gendered insecurity problem which is also related to ethnic minority resistance. This chapter problematizes security studies' epistemological reliance on the 'speech act' as an open articulation of insecurity, and instead suggests focusing on more subtle, non-discursive expressions of agency. This approach will help to identify and empower female voices.

The critical security studies literature highlights the role of grassroots, direct action and resistance towards establishing an ethical and emancipatory approach to security (Booth 2007; Wyn Jones 1999, Katlofen 2013). Ken Booth defined security as emancipation and as a practice of resistance (2007: 202). Contestation of dominant security narratives often happens against the backdrop of the creation of alternative discourses of security, with activists seeking to produce their own narratives around threat, danger, and security (Rossdale 2017). Many of these alternative conceptions of security revolve around the human security discourse (2017: 203). Since human security goes beyond the narrow definition of threat, 'Even discourses of resistance that do not explicitly mobilize the language of security can be understood as advancing alternative frameworks for security politics' (2017: 3). Therefore, ethnic minority women's activism and their acts of resistance against insecurities experienced across different components of the human security framework should be seen as attempts to produce alternative security practices.

There is a common conception that ethnic minorities are not politically and socially active in Georgia. Experts also emphasized that the political involvement of ethnic Azerbaijani and Armenian citizens of Georgia is relatively low at the local and national levels. Both groups are rather superficially represented at the national level, while at the local level, political participation is higher in Javakheti than in Kvemo Kartli (Field expert). Even though ethnic minority women's representation at the national political level remains low, they are becoming increasingly active within their communities. Respondents' narratives abounded with success stories and

acts of resistance.<sup>32</sup> Many of them mentioned that they mobilized several times to reach the local government with different demands, while some organized demonstrations to raise awareness about domestic violence and early marriage. One respondent mentioned that she often collaborates with NGOs and organizes workshops, trainings, and sometimes demonstrations in the streets to raise awareness on issues such as early marriage and domestic violence. She stated, 'We were walking with flyers and banners in the streets, to say what we wanted to say' (Marneuli FG, Azerbaijani EMW, age group 18-29). Some of them stand up to demand more political representation. Another noted that she often meets with representatives of NGOs and government and voices the problems that they face. One of them made a one-person picket in front of the police, because the police interrogated a four-year-old child. One respondent recalled when they were actively lobbying for an ethnic Azerbaijani woman to become governor. Even though they experienced backlash and representatives from the local government told them that their candidate had no chance, because she was an ethnic Azerbaijani woman and men would never obey her, they actively continued to support her. Another participant added that to nominate their candidate, they even created an initiative group, wrote a petition, and submitted it. According to the respondents from a Marneuli focus group, the female candidate had tremendous support in her community, and if at least one woman became a governor, it would have been an example for others.

The focus group and expert interview data show that bottom-up empowerment is the most important route to inclusion and sustainable security. One respondent stated, 'If you do not start making a change locally, you will not be able to have global solutions. We have to start from the bottom and not from the top, at the level of some narratives and declarations.' Supporting grassroots initiatives and the involvement of community members in solving their problems is an essential step towards empowerment and security according to different respondents:

*We, the representatives of this community, came out, and we talked openly about these problems, and in some cases, we not only talk about the problem, but also offer the solution. We offer ways, and we offer the solution! This is the result, and it is visible (Marneuli FG, Azerbaijani EMW, age group 18-29).*

*There are 7 or 8 grassroots organizations established in villages. 90% of our activities are voluntary. Our main activities include raising citizens' awareness about their rights, gender issues. The existence of these grassroots initiatives is very important (Marneuli FG, Azerbaijani EMW, age group 18-29).*

<sup>32</sup> There might be selection bias since it is likely that more active EMW took part in the study. While the findings of such qualitative studies with a small sample cannot be generalized, and this is an important limitation of this study, the respondents' narratives illustrate EMW's increasing agency at the local level.

Furthermore, another important route towards the inclusion of community members is establishing watchdog mechanisms of oversight with their direct involvement. One focus group participant noted that very few organizations make alternative reports on the implementation of the government action plans, because ‘These are very expensive processes and therefore, many organizations cannot afford it! [...] Strong government, the rule of law, an independent judiciary. Without all these structures in a single whole, we can never get our beautifully written laws to work’ (Marneuli FG, Azerbaijani EMW, age group: 30 and more).

Although ethnic minority women are becoming increasingly involved in social and political processes, their agency largely remains unnoticed. One of the reasons why voices of vulnerable groups often are not heard is, because many of these primarily non-discursive forms of resistance get silenced by not receiving support or enough positive media coverage. It is essential to recognize their agency and empower local grassroots initiatives to hear and notice the voices of ethnic minority women.

Empowerment through training and equipping the local community with an activism toolkit is vital. One participant stated, ‘You have to teach them tools of fighting.’ Tools of participation should be institutionalized through local consultation councils and advisory bodies:

*If you do not actually provide the mechanisms by which you will hear the voice of the people, if you will not go and meet or talk with them periodically, it will not be an integral part of the policy planning process. Otherwise, it is good to discuss it theoretically, but it will not be possible to implement participatory mechanisms. Participation platforms need to be institutionalized. A more sustainable approach to both the participation and the community is very important (Field expert).*

*I am convinced that in general, women and students are drivers of change. They can make a difference. By empowering them, we will have a much higher chance of democratization. I think men in our region are less oriented towards change, but women do not like this stick-in-the-mud status-quo (Field expert).*

This section discussed the importance of female agency in gendered insecurity problematization and for ethnic minority women’s resistance. The vulnerable groups’ precarious security conditions often depend on their invisibility as a survival strategy. This hinders EMW from voicing challenges to security problems. Despite structural, practical, and cultural constraints, the study found that ethnic minority women in Georgia are becoming increasingly active within their communities. The focus group participants shared a variety of stories of female resistance. However, ethnic minority women’s agency often remains unacknowledged, because many of their strategies of resistance are unnoticed in public and official discourses. Instead of depicting ethnic minority women as vulnerable subjects with no agency, all efforts should be made to empower their voices. Therefore, policymakers and relevant stakeholders should look out not only for the voices in public discourses that are easily observed. Instead, they should seek to identify more subtle expressions of agency found through visual and bodily practices. People who are most directly affected by a lack of security access and who are most vulnerable if they voice their insecurity, should dominate the security discourse. Thus, developing an inclusive security agenda will only be possible if their voices will serve as the basis for solutions. Empowering women, particularly women subjected to multiple forms of discrimination, will enable the identification of problems currently ignored in the mainstream security sector.



## CONCLUSION

The paper contributes to growing scholarship incorporating a gender perspective into human security as an epistemological perspective in security analysis both at a conceptual and practical level. It also argues for broadening and deepening security in Georgia beyond the state as the privileged referent object. Due to the lack of scholarly focus on dual vulnerability and agency in the security discourse, combined with the limited empirical studies on the issue, the project has the potential for broader societal and academic impact, particularly for problematizing the lack of intersectionality and vulnerability in security analysis in Georgia. The study focused on the lived experiences of insecurity of ethnic minority women. Thus, it did not aim engage in comparative analysis of the security problems that ethnic Azerbaijani and ethnic Armenian women experience. This approach allowed for a focus on individual narratives of EMW without generalizing the findings across the two ethnic groups.

Through critical engagement with theoretical assumptions and providing empirical data, the paper analyzed the security problems of ethnic minority women and their strategies of resistance. In doing so, the study addressed two key research questions through an intersectional approach. First, it identified gaps in key conceptual security documents as well as the everyday insecurities of the subjects of this study, ethnic minority women living in Georgia. Thus, the study underlined intersectionality's importance in identifying and addressing the security problems of vulnerable groups absent from the dominant state-centered security paradigm. The focus group data and key informant interviews found that ethnic minority women experience a variety of identity-based dual barriers due to their gender and ethnicity. They are more vulnerable across all aspects of the human security framework: economic security, health security, food security, physical security, and political security. Language and socio-cultural barriers combined with patriarchal malpractices put them at greater risk of human rights abuses and limit their access to services. Furthermore, lack of trust in state institutions and lack of perceived support pose additional obstacles to resisting insecurity.

From a feminist standpoint, the study also explored the main areas where the human security framework needs to advance a more gender-sensitive understanding, with an emphasis on gender-based violence and areas traditionally seen as gender-neutral, such as transportation and public infrastructure.

The findings also problematized the importance of voice and agency for inclusion in the security discourse. Therefore, the study argues that while designing policies and aiming at women's representation, it is crucial to reflect on the silent security dilemma that vulnerable populations face. Their conditional security often depends on invisibility as a survival strategy.

Second, the paper problematized the role of discursive articulation of insecurity and instead explored different forms of resistance of ethnic minority women. These forms and sites of resistance include one-person pickets, membership in NGOs, participation in demonstrations, writing blogs, and other forms of grassroots activism. The findings challenge the existing misconception that ethnic Azerbaijani and Armenian women are not politically and socially active and instead focuses on their agency. The study also challenges the security literature that often depicts minorities as disempowered victims with no agency. By capturing the everyday insecurities of ethnic minority women and exploring their agency and resistance, the paper underlines the importance of the inclusion of diverse voices for sustained peace and democratic development.

Furthermore, the study problematized the common approach that depicts ethnic minority women as disempowered victims. Instead, it underlined the importance of seeking and finding their voices by focusing on non-discursive practices of (in)security articulation through a variety of forms of resistance that are not easily found in mainstream narratives. Only by capturing their agency, it will be possible to broaden the scope of security analysis and develop a genuinely inclusive security agenda. Employing resistance as an empirical and conceptual tool could help break free from a dichotomous understanding of ethnic minorities as threats or vulnerable subjects with no agency and allow their empowerment through (in)security contestation.

The study further addresses and broadens two significant theoretical and empirical gaps. First, more studies are needed to capture the everyday insecurities of vulnerable groups through an intersectional lens. Second, the focus on different forms of resistance of security contestation, including emancipation and de-securitization, require further research. Regarding empirical gaps, virtually no studies address the everyday insecurities of ethnic minority women in the South Caucasus

through a security lens during peacetime. Thus, more representative studies will be able to close the empirical gaps in security theorization in Georgia. One way to contribute to practical empirical studies about the inclusiveness of the security sector in Georgia could be through direct engagement with representatives of the security sector. However, such research requires a significant amount of time and commitment from state institutions. In addition, creating an index of inclusiveness of the security sector would be helpful in assessing and monitoring Georgian security sector reform. Systematically monitoring and assessing progress (or lack thereof) will result in a gender sensitive understanding of security implemented at the practical level. Consideration of the issues of marginality and vulnerability will further contribute to the development of a more inclusive security agenda.



## RECOMMENDATIONS

### To the Government on Georgia (GoG):

- Ensure close coordination between permanent members of the National Security Council and other relevant ministries to address multi-dimensional security threats by adopting a comprehensive agenda on human security issues.
- Establish, and where already present, strengthen gender councils in the security sector and incorporate them into practical decision-making and oversight. Make additional efforts to include EMW in the gender council of each ministry.
- Ensure effective implementation of UN Security Council resolution 1325 by increasing the direct participation of EMW in peace processes, foreign policy, defense, and diplomacy.
- Conduct information meetings and campaigns with security sector representatives to increase their awareness about ethnic minorities and the negative impact that is caused by perceiving them as potential threats.
- Mainstream EMW issues in key national legislation on gender equality, including the National Action Plan of the Law on Gender Equality,<sup>33</sup> National Action Plans on Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence, Human Rights Strategy and Action Plans (HR NAP),<sup>34</sup> National Action Plan on UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security.<sup>35</sup>
- Disaggregate Sustainable Development Goals' (SDGs) indicators (and especially goal #5) based on gender and ethnicity.

<sup>33</sup> Parliament of Georgia (2010). Law of Georgia on Gender Equality. Accessed 10 July 2021. <https://matsne.gov.ge/en/document/view/91624?impose=translateEn&publication=9>.

<sup>34</sup> Government of Georgia (2014). 2014–2020 Human Rights Strategy and Action Plans (HR NAP). Available at: <http://myrights.gov.ge/ka/documents/documents/strategy/>.

<sup>35</sup> 2011. National Action Plan on Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security. Accessed 10 July 2021. <https://matsne.gov.ge/ka/document/view/1558531?publication=0>

### To the National Security Council

- Ensure gender mainstreaming in the security sector by making Gender Impact Assessment (GIA) compulsory for each policy document.
- Amend the wording 'citizen' to 'individual' or 'human' in the National Security Concept in order not to exclude migrants or ethnic minorities without citizenship status.

### To the Ministry of Internal Affairs

- Define and strictly enforce penalties for hate speech against ethnic minorities.
- Invest in developing user-friendly digital applications available in ethnic minority languages such as the silent alarm button for reporting gender-based violence.
- Strictly enforce the minimum age for marriage and invest in culturally sensitive campaigns raising awareness among ethnic minorities.

### To the Ministry of Internally Displaced Persons from the Occupied Territories, Health, Labour and Social Affairs

- Increase the cultural awareness of health care providers about ethnic minorities to reduce their ethnic based biases and stereotypes.
- Provide timely and comprehensive information about Covid-19 related regulations and vaccination programs in Azerbaijani and Armenian Languages.
- Make health services accessible locally and invest in awareness-raising campaigns among EMW about existing healthcare services in Azerbaijani and Armenian languages.
- Provide universal access to quality sexual and reproductive health services locally and integrate these services into the basic Universal Healthcare Package.

- Health policies have inherently different impacts across class, gender, and ethnicity. Therefore, existing policies should be re-examined from an intersectional perspective to consider the specific needs of more vulnerable groups.

### To the State Ministry for Reconciliation and Civic Equality

- In collaboration with the Ministry of Education, produce bilingual teaching materials such as textbooks for school and kindergarten teachers to support the effective civic integration of children.
- Support awareness raising and effective implementation of the European Framework Convention on the 'Protection of National Minorities' and the European Charter on 'Regional or Minority Languages'.
- In close coordination with the Ministry of Internal Affairs, support the development of an appropriate legal framework and initiatives to adequately investigate and sanction hate speech and hate crime against minorities.
- Cooperate closely with the Tolerance Center, Council of Religions, and Council of National Minorities operating under the Public Defender of Georgia and ensure that EMW issues are mainstreamed in each relevant national strategy and action plan.

### To the Ministry of Education and Science of Georgia

- Promote bilingual education programs and invest in equitable access to education for ethnic minority women by designing special training programs and language classes taking into account the need for flexible hours and the burden of homecare.
- Mainstream gender issues in the school curriculum to ensure the promotion of women's rights and female empowerment with consideration of cultural and religious appropriateness for each minority group.

### To the Ministry of Economy and Sustainable Development, Ministry of Regional Development and Infrastructure of Georgia

- At the policy level, acknowledge that inefficient public infrastructure and public transport can exacerbate vulnerability.
- Make public transport more inclusive and responsive to the needs of women, by engaging in close coordination between government, community-based organizations, and women who are directly affected by the lack of access

to the public transport. Gender-specific solutions should consider factors such as availability, punctuality, affordability, and the safety of public transportation.

### To the Ministry of Environmental Protection and Agriculture of Georgia, Ministry of Economy and Sustainable Development, local municipalities, NGOs

- Invest in targeted support programs for female farmers by providing vouchers, access to mechanical equipment, fertilizers, and simplified procedures for bank loans.

### To Local municipalities and non-Governmental organizations

- Invest in awareness raising of EMW through multiple channels (SMS, mobile applications, information campaigns, trainings) about forms of domestic violence, what to do in the case of domestic violence, available services (shelters, crisis centers, SOS application, 116 006 consultancy hotlines, which provides information in different languages) for victims, and penalties for abusers.
- Adopt special measures to provide psychological counselling, legal and medical assistance to vulnerable groups of women by training/re-training social workers, counselors, lawyers, and healthcare professionals about socio-cultural specificities while working with EMW.
- Support awareness-raising among EMW about their property rights.
- Support female empowerment through non-formal education and agricultural training programs.
- Support the establishment of local trade unions that focus on women's issues and female employment.
- Support the establishment of employability agencies in Akhalkalaki and Marneuli.

### To Local Governments

- Promote ethnic minority women's representation in local decision-making by introducing special temporary targeted measures such as quota systems and training.
- Ensure strong mechanisms for meaningful functioning of local gender equality councils through capacity building for employees and equipping them with the skills needed for identifying women's needs, gender-sensitive budgeting, and providing information on gender-related legislation.
- Raise awareness of local government employees on gender issues through appointing a key staff member (Gen-

der Focal Point) within the local municipal bodies (Local Council and City Hall) who will deal with gender mainstreaming.

- Include Gender Focal Points in high-level meetings and decision-making processes.
- Simplify tools of participation by utilizing online platforms for conducting public consultations. Invest in developing digital tools of participation such as online petitions, submission of queries and complaints online in ethnic minority languages.

### **To the National Statistics Office of Georgia (Geostat)**

- Systematically collect data on physical (gender-based violence), economic (employment, income), food (access to nutrition), and health (number of hospitals in EM dominated areas, reported experiences of EMW) security issues disaggregated by sex, gender, age, ethnicity, and residence to better understand inequalities within and across ethnic minority groups.
- Adopt a unified definition to include self-reported ethnicity in data collection and analysis.
- Incorporate intersectionality as a tool of analysis by allowing simplified online analysis tools for more than two variables.

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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

|         |  |
|---------|--|
| CEDAW   | Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Violence against Women |
| CS      | Copenhagen School of Security Studies                                |
| EMW     | Ethnic Minority Women  |
| FG      | Focus Group  |
| Geostat | National Statistics Office of Georgia                                |
| GIA     | Gender Impact Assessment   |
| GoG     | Government of Georgia  |
| KII     | Key Informant Interview  |
| MIA     | Ministry of Internal Affairs   |
| NGO     | Non-Governmental Organization  |
| NSP     | National Security Policy   |
| OCHA    | United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs   |
| PDO     | Public Defender's Office of Georgia                                  |
| RIA     | Regulatory Impact Assessment   |
| SSS     | State Security Service   |
| ST      | Securitization Theory  |
| UDHR    | Universal Declaration of Human Rights                                |
| UN      | United Nations   |
| UNDP    | United Nations Development Programme                                 |
| UNECE   | United Nations Economic Commission for Europe                        |
| WHO     | World Health Organization  |

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