



WeResearch

ASSESSING PUBLIC PARTICIPATION IN POLICY-MAKING PROCESS

Phase 3





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ACRONYMS

AoG - Administration of Government of Georgia

CSO - Civil Society Organisations

EU - European Union

GoG - Government of Georgia

KII - Key Informant Interview

LGBTQ - Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Queer

MSM - Men who have sex with men

NGO - Non-governmental Organisation

OECD - Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development

PAR - Public Administration Reform

PCI - Public consultation index

PWD - Persons with Disabilities

SIGMA - Support for Improvement in Governance and Management UN - United Nations

UNDP - United Nations Development Programme

USAID - United States Agency for International Development

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The current study is the third in the series of assessments of public participation in the policy development process in Georgia. The purpose of the study was to evaluate the quality of public consultations processes of the policy documents adopted in 2022.

The objectives of the study were:

- Assess the compliance of the conducted public consultations with the regulations outlined in the Decree of the Government of Georgia N629
- Analyse the quality of public consultations using Public Consultation Index (PCI) and relevant international standards
- Identify existing gaps and develop practical recommendations for improvement
- Analyse the trends in the quality of public consultations assessed with PCI over the period 2020-2022

The primary methodological framework used for the assessment is Public Consultation Index, which consists of the following six criteria and corresponding indicators: Accessibility, Openness, Effectiveness of the Public Consultation Process, Accountability, Diversity of Participants/Inclusiveness, and Public Engagement/Interest. The first five criteria assessed the coordination public agencies' efforts to conduct meaningful public consultations, the sixth criterion evaluated the civic engagement from the perspective of the coordination agency. The PCI was developed and piloted in 2020 study and subsequently revised and improved in 2021 study. The present study uses exactly the same criteria and indicators as in 2021, which allows for better comparison of results between 2021 and 2022 studies.

It should be highlighted that, while Government Decree N629 was used in the development of PCI, PCI criteria and indicators set higher standards than the minimal requirements outlined in the legislation. Thus, fulfilment of some PCI criteria and indicators is not obligatory under the Georgian legislation. This should be kept in mind while interpreting the results of this study, as all policy documents were assessed against the PCI criteria and a strategy which fails to satisfy a PCI indicator may be in full compliance with the Government Decree N629. PCI carries a more recommendatory character and should be viewed as a benchmark, an ideal future which the public consultation process should strive to converge towards.

The study adopted qualitative approach. The data was collected through 29 Key Informant Interviews with the representatives of the coordination public agencies and public consultation participants, one observation, summary reports of public consultations (when available) and self-evaluation questionnaires filled out by the coordination agency representatives (when available).

The research targeted 12 strategies and action plans from the 2022 policy document cohort. Each policy document was assessed against the criteria and indicators of the PCI.

The study has identified that four factors – knowledge of good practices of civic participation, the political will of coordination agencies, donor support and public engagement/interest – are important aspects contributing to meaningful and effective public consultations. Moreover, each factor alone is not sufficient to ensure the quality of participatory process, thus, the combination of all the aforementioned factors is required as

they have a reinforcing effect on each other. These factors largely influence the accessibility, openness, effectiveness, accountability, and inclusiveness of public consultation processes. The evaluation results of the public consultations targeted by this study against the PCI criteria are summarised below.

Accessibility

The first criterion of the Public Consultation Index measured the accessibility of the consultation announcement and policy document/policy brief to the public, with seven corresponding indicators measuring different aspects of accessibility. The overall score for this criterion slightly increased from the previous year. Data showed that coordination agencies improved their scores by disseminating public consultation announcements and policy documents through public channels and improving the format and presentation of the content in the policy documents. However, they failed to take streamlined efforts to include diverse segments of society such as ethnic minorities and people with disabilities (PWD). In fact, the accessibility of the public consultation process for ethnic minorities and PWD was the most problematic area, where all coordination agencies failed to meet the minimal requirements of the corresponding indicators of the PCI (a deterioration from the previous year). Thus, concrete efforts are needed to make sure that consultation processes are designed to encourage the participation of all, in particular the most vulnerable members of society. This includes the provision of translation services, the use of accessible formats, and the adoption of measures to reach out to marginalized groups.

Openness

The openness of the public consultations is another important prerequisite for meaningful civic engagement and genuine participatory democracy. Compared to the previous year, most coordination agencies performed significantly better on both indicators of this criterion, with many achieving the highest standards set by PCI (score of 3). Usually, participation in public consultation was open to all interested organizations and ordinary citizens and anyone could provide feedback on the policy document. The significantly improved score on the Openness criterion is a clear indication that the coordination agencies are making progress towards achieving the highest standards of openness and transparency. The results should be celebrated as a positive step towards promoting good governance and enhancing the credibility and legitimacy of the policy-making process.

Effectiveness of Public Consultation Process

Based on the collected data, it can be concluded that coordination agencies generally performed well in terms of the effectiveness of the public consultation process. The average score of 2.1/3 (which remained the same compared to the previous study) indicates that most public consultations met the minimum requirements of each indicator. The majority of coordination agencies informed participants about planned public consultations at least one week in advance, utilized multiple formats for conducting consultations, and provided sufficient time and mechanisms for feedback provision. However, it is important to note that most coordination agencies involved only smaller working groups in the early stages of public consultations. To ensure more effective and well-rounded process of public consultations, wider public and local organizations should be involved at all stages of the policy development cycle, not just at the final stage when the document is already finalized.

Accountability

Overall, coordination agencies performed exceptionally well on this criterion, achieving an almost perfect score of 2.8/3 - the highest score compared to all other criteria. The performance on this criterion also improved compared to the previous year.

The majority of coordination agencies performed exceptionally well by providing well-elaborated summary reports and communicating justified feedback to the public consultation participants. However, to a certain degree achieving high scores was influenced by the lack of available information on several indicators which led to the exclusion of the strategy document from the scoring. While compared to the previous year public consultation reports were mostly publicly available and contained well-elaborated comments on received feedback, some of the public consultations participants were not aware of the existence of such reports. Three coordination agencies did not provide the summary reports of the public consultations. In such cases, the research team had to rely on subjective input provided by the coordination agency and CSO representatives.

Diversity of Participants/Inclusiveness

Similar to the previous year's findings, ensuring diversity and inclusion of participants remained one of the most challenging aspects of public consultations conducted in 2022. The majority of coordination agencies were not able to meet the minimum requirements set by the PCI criterion related to diversity and inclusion and received the lowest average score among other PCI criteria (0.4 out of 3). In most cases, equal representation of women and men was achieved without prior consideration, and most coordination agencies did not make additional efforts to ensure the inclusion of minority groups – such as persons with mental or physical disabilities, religious and ethnic minorities, the LGBTQ community, etc. Based on average scores per each policy document on the fifth criterion only two coordination agencies met or exceeded minimum requirements: Vocational Education Strategy of Georgia for 2022-2027 and its Action Plan 2022-2024 and National Tuberculosis Control Strategy for 2023-2025 and its Action Plan 2023-2025.

The low score on the fifth criterion (PCI 5) demonstrates a concerning finding, as it suggests that underrepresented groups may not have had equal opportunities to participate in the public consultation process and have their voices heard. This indicates that there is still significant work to be done to ensure that public consultations are inclusive and representative of all stakeholders.

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

The effectiveness of the public consultation process and its outcomes largely depend on active engagement from citizens and CSOs. The sixth criterion assesses public consultation participants' engagement from the coordination agencies' perspectives and is counted separately from the other five criteria.

The interest from the public significantly varied depending on the strategy document. While some public consultations enjoyed a high level of interest, several representatives of the coordination agencies complained about the lack of interest from the public. Public consultation participants observed that there are numerous reasons why there may be limited interest and engagement from the public to participate in public consultations. One of the reasons is that many of them do not see the value in participating or may believe that their input will not be taken into account.

Overall, both the coordination agencies and the CSOs highly appreciated the involvement of the participants in the public consultations, as the feedback received as a result of the consultations helped to improve the policy document. In general, the new regulations were evaluated positively by the coordination agencies, as they promote the openness of the process and allow the responsibility of the public agency to be shared with civil society. The total average score on the sixth criterion is 2.4/3, which has declined by 0.3 points compared to the previous year. The reason for such a decline can be not lower interest from the public per se but coordination agencies' increased expectations towards citizen engagement.

Comparison to the Previous Studies

The comparison of the PCI scores over the period 2020 -2022 should be done cautiously, as the research methodology was significantly updated after the 2020 pilot study. In particular, PCI indicators were revised, expanded, and updated and scoring guidelines were spelled out in 2021. Therefore, the changes in the PCI scores from the 2020 study to 2021 and 2022 may not be informative, while the comparison of 2021 and 2022 PCI scores is more accurate, as the same methodology was used in the last two studies.

The overall PCI score has somewhat improved between 2021 and 2022, while 2020 score is the same as in 2022. Though, as mentioned, the comparison of the last two studies is more meaningful, thus the progress achieved is a sign of positive development. The analysis of the score dynamics by the PCI criteria, however, shows the significant difference between the trends. While some aspects of public consultation process have improved considerably, others have seen no progress or even deterioration. Namely, PCI scores on the Openness and Accountability criteria have increased considerably, Accessibility criteria has seen a modest improvement, while the scores on the Diversity of Participants, Effectiveness of Public Consultation Process and Public Engagement criteria has either deteriorated or have not changed. The results indicate that while the positive developments in some areas of are noteworthy, some aspects of public consultations remain problematic and continuous commitment of the coordination agencies, donors, and the public is needed to bring the public consultation process in Georgia closer to the international standards.

Recommendations

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

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

Recommendations for the coordination agencies concerned the most problematic areas identified by the PCI i.e. the criteria and indicators with relatively low scores. Those issues included improving the diversity and inclusion of public consultation processes for vulnerable groups as well as suggestions for increasing interest and engagement of ordinary citizens and general public in the policy development process.

FOREWORD

The presented report builds on two previous research studies conducted in 2020¹ and 2021² by the WeResearch team. It is based on the theoretical and methodological underpinnings as well as practical tools developed in the previous studies and aims to evaluate the public consultation process of policy documents from the 2022 cohort.

The previous studies evaluated the quality of the public consultation process focusing on public consultation planning, implementation, and civic engagement. The studies targeted the strategies and action plans³ for which public consultations have been completed within a set timeframe: eight policy documents in 2020 and twelve in 2021. The research team had three main objectives: 1) it assessed the compliance of the conducted public consultations with the regulations outlined in the Decree of the Government of Georgia N629⁴, which took force on December 20, 2019; 2) analysed the quality and usefulness of public consultations; 3) identified the existing gaps, developing practical recommendations for the Administration of the Government of Georgia and the Coordination agencies responsible for planning and implementing the public consultations.

In the previous phases of the study, the research team developed the methodological tool for the assessment of the public consultation process of target policy documents - Public Consultation Index (PCI), described in detail in the following sections. The PCI was created in the approximation of the best practices outlined in the literature, the Georgian legislative framework, and the feedback received from the field experts and participants of the validation workshops conducted to verify the preliminary research results. PCI was piloted in the 2020 study. In the second phase of the research, PCI was revised and expanded, as outlined below. The research team hopes that PCI will serve as a practical tool for the evaluation of the public consultation process to be used by any stakeholder in government, civil society, or donor community in the future.

1 Assessing Public Participation in Policy Making Process, WeResearch, 2021, available at: <https://www.undp.org/georgia/publications/policymaking-public-participation>

2 Assessing Public Participation in Policy Making Process – Phase 2, WeResearch, 2022, available at: <https://www.undp.org/georgia/publications/policymaking-public-participation>

3 Excluding policies in the national security domain, which are not obliged to comply with the requirements of Government Decree #629.

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

INTRODUCTION

Over the last few decades, the idea that citizens' engagement in decision-making makes governments more responsive, inclusive, and accountable became mainstream in policy development.⁵ It has been acknowledged that civil society's ability to influence the state contributes to better democratic outcomes and quality of governance.^{6,7} With that, countries with more advanced democratic systems have sought an increasing shift from top-down forms of governance towards more horizontal modes of participatory decision-making.

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

The public consultation is considered to be a special form of public participation and is the most widespread arrangement for citizen engagement in the policy making used in OECD countries⁸. The meaningfulness of a public consultation depends on its purpose, implementation, motivation of those involved and its outcome. Thus, public consultations can be regarded as a substantial method of citizen engagement if enough effort was taken to engage with relevant stakeholders, citizen input was actively sought, and participants had (at least partially) contributed to the outcome: policy or decision.

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

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

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

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

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

9 Assessing Public Participation in Policy Making Process, WeResearch, 2021, available at: <https://www.undp.org/georgia/publications/policymaking-public-participation>

PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION REFORM AND PUBLIC CONSULTATIONS - GEORGIAN CONTEXT

Over the recent years, Georgia has achieved considerable gains in terms of substantive democracy and open governance. Since 2012, the Government of Georgia (GoG) declared the Public Administration Reform (PAR) as a priority and expressed its commitment towards establishing transparent, effective, and accountable decision-making. The Georgian Public Administration Reform Roadmap 2020¹⁰, a comprehensive strategic framework approved in 2015, set the country’s national priorities for PAR across six pillars (Table 1).

Table 1: Six Pillars of Public Administration Reform in Georgia

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

The implementation of PAR has been guided by three Action Plans for 2015-2016, 2017-2018, and 2019-2020. The course of the Public Administration Reform beyond 2020 is determined by the new PAR Strategy for 2023-2026 and its Action Plan 2023-2024, which have been adopted with some delay on February 16, 2023¹¹.

The successful implementation of PAR is a pivotal to the EU-Georgia Agreements, such as EU-Georgia Association Agreement¹² and EU-Georgia Association Agreement Agenda 2017-2020¹³ and new EU-Georgia Association Agreement Agenda 2021-2027. The latter clearly spells out that Georgia needs to remain committed to strengthening public administration “to foster an accountable, efficient, effective, open and transparent governance, build a merit-based and professional civil service, ensure quality public services and strong local self-government.”¹⁴

The current study focuses on the public consultations, as a form of citizen engagement in policy-making, which is an integral part of the Policy Development and Coordination pillar of the reform and has been declared as one of the key priorities. The importance of public participation has been stressed in EU-Georgia Association Agenda for 2021-2027, under which Georgia obliges to: “Promote citizen’s rights and possibilities to access information and participate in governance at the national and subnational level.”¹⁵ Other international commitments of Georgia in this field include: Sustainable Development Goal 16 (nationalised), Open Government Partnership Action Plans, Aarhus Convention.¹⁶

10 Georgian Public Administration Reform Roadmap 2020 (May 2015). Available at: <https://matsne.gov.ge/ka/document/view/2953552?publication=0>

11 Public Administration Reform Strategy for 2023-2026 and its Action Plan 2023-2024 Available at: <https://www.matsne.gov.ge/ka/document/view/5723982?publication=0>

12 The Association Agreement between Georgia and the European Union, on the one hand, and the European Atomic Energy Community and their member states, the “Georgia-EU Association Agreement” https://www.eeas.europa.eu/delegations/georgia/eugeorgia-association-agreement_en

13 https://mfa.gov.ge/pfiles/files/EU-Georgia_association_agenda_-2017-2020.pdf

14 <https://mfa.gov.ge/pfiles/files/2021-2027-EU-Georgia-Association-Agenda-EN.pdf>

15 https://osgf.ge/wp-json/wi/validate/v1/file?wifile=wp-content/uploads/2022/12/Khatia-Nikolashvili_ForWeb.pdf

16 Aarhus Convention was ratified by Georgia on 30/10/2001

The right of citizens to participate in decisions/policies which affect their lives is also guaranteed by the national legislation: the Constitution of Georgia,¹⁷ General Administrative Code of Georgia,¹⁸ Local Self-Government Code of Georgia,¹⁹ Law of Georgia on Structure, Authority, and Regulation of Activity of the Georgian Government,²⁰ and various normative acts.

In the past years, significant progress has been achieved with respect to improving public engagement in policy-making. In 2018, in the baseline study report conducted by OECD/SIGMA²¹, Georgia scored 0 in the public consultation component, due to the absence of the regulatory framework and no clear rules and guidelines on conducting public consultations. In response to the identified gaps, the Georgian government approved the Rule for Development, Monitoring, and Evaluation of Policy Document²² obliging the coordination agencies to conduct public consultations on any national and sectoral policy (with few exceptions) before the government approves it. The rule applied to the policy documents approved after its enactment: from 2019 onwards.

To ensure effective public participation and develop a systematic approach, the Policy Planning, Monitoring, and Evaluation Handbook, developed and adopted by the AoG with the support of UNDP/UK Aid, defined minimum standards and requirements for public consultations:²³

- The coordination body is obliged to inform the interested parties about the venue within a reasonable time before each public consultation.
- Upon completion of the consultation, the coordination body shall provide a written response to every stakeholder, explaining in a substantiated manner which recommendation was considered, partially considered, or rejected in the final policy document.
- The coordination agency shall prepare a summary report on the results of the consultation. The summary report should be included as an annex to the policy presented to the Government of Georgia for enactment.
- The summary report on public consultations must contain at least the following:²⁴
 - Information about the conduct of public consultations (format, venue, time, number of participants, channel of communication).

<https://matsne.gov.ge/ka/document/view/1210443?publication=0> last accessed on 30/11/20.

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

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

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

20 Law of Georgia on Structure, Authority and Regulation of Activity of the Georgian Government, Article 29. https://matsne.gov.ge/ka/document/view/2062?publication=38#part_59

21 The Principles of Public Administration Policy Development and Co-ordination - Georgia, SIGMA Programme, 2018, pg. 40, <http://www.sigmaxweb.org/publications/Baseline-Measurement-Report-2018-Georgia.pdf> last accessed on 30/11/20.

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

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

24 Annex 9 of the Policy Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation Handbook. Administration of the Government of Georgia, Available at: <https://www.undp.org/georgia/publications/policy-planning-monitoring-and-evaluation-handbook-2019>

- Information on participants (total number), agreements on recommendations, or proposals that were accepted or not considered.

While the Handbook was useful to establish a more coherent approach to managing public consultations, it did not provide practical tools and recommendations on how to conduct meaningful public consultations that inform the decision-making process. The assessments conducted by WeResearch in 2020 and 2021²⁵ have demonstrated that the coordination agencies had varying knowledge of the Rule for Development, Monitoring, and Evaluation of Policy Document and the contents of the Handbook that the AoG made available in 2019. While the coordination agencies were generally aware that policy drafts have become subject to mandatory public consultations, they had a vague understanding of what constitutes a public consultation, who needs to be involved and what purpose it serves. Many coordination agencies did not distinguish between stakeholder engagement and public consultations with wider public participation. The majority of the public consultations had a format of targeted consultations, providing no or limited possibilities to engage ordinary citizens in discussion. Furthermore, according to the findings of the mentioned two studies, most coordination agencies took no special measures to ensure the diversity and inclusion of the participants.

Considering the aforementioned challenges and to improve the quality of public consultations, the AoG, with the support of Good Governance Initiative of USAID, developed and approved the Guide on Public Consultations as Annex 11²⁶ to the Policy Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation Handbook. This document is the compilation of guidelines on public consultation planning, implementation methods, analysis of feedback, reporting, and evaluation. It is based on the academic literature review, international experience, and best practices. Annex 11 is a practical toolkit for any public entity wishing to conduct a meaningful public consultation. It is currently available in electronic format, but AoG also plans to create a printed version of the guide. Moreover, the AoG in active collaboration with the UNDP has created a training module on conducting effective public consultations (based on Annex 11) and has started training the relevant public servants responsible for the policy planning from the Coordination agencies accordingly.²⁷ With respect to policy planning, monitoring, and, evaluation, AoG plans to train additional public servants responsible for this process, create an electronic training module on policy development and include policy planning, monitoring, and evaluation training module in the list of basic programs for public servant professional development.²⁸

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

25 Assessing Public Participation in Policymaking Process (2020) and Assessing Public Participation in Policymaking Process – Phase 2 (2021). WeResearch. Available at: <https://www.undp.org/georgia/publications/policymaking-public-participation>

26 Guide on Public Consultations, Policy Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation Handbook, Annex 11. Available at: https://pdf.usaid.gov/pdf_docs/PA0027MZ.pdf

27 Supporting Public Administration Reform in Georgia – Phase II, <https://www.facebook.com/media/set/?vanity=UNDPGeorgia&set=a.600007368832150>

28 Public Administration Reform Action Plan 2023-2024. Available at: <https://www.matsne.gov.ge/ka/document/view/5723982?publication=0>

PUBLIC CONSULTATION INDEX (PCI)

The methodology framework of the current study is based on the Public Consultation Index (PCI), which assesses the process (rather than the outcome) of the public consultations. Considering the challenges and the lack of a common approach to evaluating the efficiency or quality of the public consultations, this Public Consultation Index was drafted in line with the best practices outlined in the literature and applied to the Georgian context. The index aims to identify strengths and weaknesses in the implementation of public consultations and convergence towards good international practices as well as the relevant local standards. In addition, the PCI allows for a comparison across policy documents and assessment of the coordination agencies' conduct. It also aims to support the relevant authorities and stakeholders in creating public consultations' best practices and generating conditions for partnership and policy dialogue.

It should be highlighted that, while Government Decree N629 was used in the development of PCI, PCI criteria and indicators are based on the international best practices and recommendations, many of which are mentioned in the Annex 11 of the Policy Planning, Monitoring, and Evaluation Handbook. Therefore, PCI sets significantly higher standards than the minimal requirements obligatory under Georgian legislation. This should be kept in mind while interpreting the results, as all policy documents targeted in this study were assessed against the PCI criteria and indicators. Thus, a strategy that fails to satisfy a PCI indicator (e.g. regarding diversity) may be in full compliance with the Government Decree N629. PCI carries a more recommendatory character and should be viewed as a benchmark, an ideal future that the public consultation process should strive to converge towards.

The first version of the PCI was developed and piloted during the 2020 study. In the 2021 study, the PCI was revised and updated based on consultations with subject experts from the government (AoG), academia, and non-governmental organisations. Furthermore, the research considered the recommendations outlined in the Guide on Public Consultations - Annex 11 of the Policy Planning, Monitoring, and Evaluation Handbook. The following improvements have been made to the index:

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

In the current study, no further changes were made to the PCI, which allows for a better comparison of the results with the results of Phase 2 conducted in 2021 (see Analysis section).

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

The PCI is based on limited data. The policy documents are primarily scored based on the information provided by the subjects of this study: coordination agencies and participants of the public consultations

and the official documents (public consultation reports), while observation of the consultation process is rarely possible. Thus, the research team does not assume any responsibility for how truthful or complete are the interviewees' opinions and whether it might have led to scoring errors.

The index is composed of six criteria: accessibility, openness, effectiveness of the public consultation process, accountability, diversity of participants/inclusiveness, and public engagement/interest. The first five criteria assess the efforts of the coordination agency towards the public consultation process from the perspective of the engaged civil society representatives as well as its compliance with the relevant standards as outlined in the literature review. Since public consultation is a two-way communication process between authorities and individuals, non-governmental organisations, and civil society, the sixth criterion, public engagement/interest, and corresponding indicators reflect on coordination agencies' perspectives to make the process of evaluation fair. Each criterion has specific indicators as listed in Table 2.

Table 2: PCI Index

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

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

- 0 = public consultation does not meet the indicator.
- 1 = public consultation minimally meets the aspects of the indicator.
- 2 = public consultation meets most aspects of the indicator.
- 3 = public consultation fully meets the aspects of the indicator.

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

METHODOLOGY

Research Objectives and Key Research Questions

This study aims to evaluate the quality of public consultation processes regarding the strategies and action plans adopted in 2022. It focuses on the process evaluation of public participation in policy-making rather than its outcomes. The study has the following objectives:

- 1) Assess the compliance of the conducted public consultations with the new regulations outlined in the Decree of the Government of Georgia N6²⁹;
- 2) Analyse the quality of public consultations using the Public Consultation Index (PCI) and relevant international standards;
- 3) Identify the existing gaps and develop practical recommendations for improvement.
- 4) Analyse the trends in the quality of public consultations assessed with PCI over the period 2020-2022

Document Selection

The research team examined all policy documents from the 2022 cohort approved by the GoG in March 2022²⁹ subject to the requirements of Government Decree #629³⁰. As the result of the analysis the research team filtered out concept notes (conducting public consultation is optional for concept notes) as well as policy documents previously assessed in the 2020 and 2021 studies.

To finalise the list of policies within the research scope, the enquiries have been made to the coordination state agencies for each of the remaining 26 policy documents. Those concerned the stage of development of the documents and public consultation plans and processes. Based on the collected responses and considering the project timeline, the research scope was finalised and the study identified 12 strategy documents to cover, as listed below:

1. National Road Safety Strategy for 2022 – 2025 and its Action Plan 2022-2023
2. Capital Market Development Strategy of Georgia for 2023-2028 and its Action Plan 2023-2024
3. Digital Governance Strategy of Georgia for 2023-2024 and its Action Plan 2023-2024
4. Vocational Education Strategy of Georgia for 2022-2027 and its Action Plan 2022-2024
5. Public Administration Reform Strategy for 2023-2026 and its Action Plan 2023-2024
6. National Action Plan for 2022-2024 on the Measures to be Implemented for Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence and Protection of Victims/Survivors
7. National Action Plan for 2022-2024 on Implementation of the UN Security Council Resolutions on Women, Peace, and Security.
8. Fourth National Environmental Action Programme of Georgia for 2022-2026
9. 2023-2024 Action Plan of the 2021-2024 Strategy for the Development of the State Internal Financial Control System
10. National Healthcare Strategy for 2022-2030 and its Action Plan 2022-2024
11. National Tuberculosis Control Strategy for 2023-2025 and its Action Plan 2023-2025
12. National HIV/AIDs Strategy for 2023-2025 and its Action Plan 2023-2025

²⁹ Decree of Government of Georgia #417 (March 4, 2022)

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

Data Collection

To answer the key research questions, the WeResearch team utilised a qualitative approach to data collection and analysis. Specifically, the key informant interview (KII) method was used for primary data collection. KII is an individual interview with purposefully selected respondents. Overall, 29 key informant interviews (KIIs) were conducted throughout the study with the coordination agency representatives and public consultation participants who were consulted on the policy documents. In particular, 12 interviews were conducted with coordination agency representatives and 17 with public consultation participants from CSOs, professional associations, academia, or independent experts. The coordination agencies provided information about the public consultation participants.

Initially, the study design had also incorporated observation of public consultation in addition to the KIIs, however, the research team had only managed to conduct one observation for the “2023-2024 Action Plan of the 2021-2024 Strategy for the Development of the State Internal Financial Control System”. With other strategies, it was not possible to observe the public consultation process within the timeframe of this study as it had been completed, not yet planned, or conducted in a format that did not allow for an observation (e.g. only written feedback was collected).

In the current 2022 study, additionally, a self-evaluation questionnaire for the coordination agency representatives was elaborated and piloted. Data was collected via the online platform <https://www.questionpro.com>. The questionnaire was sent to 12 coordination agency representatives prior to the interview and response was received from 6 of them.

All fieldwork was conducted via online communication platforms or by phone. The interviews were audio-recorded with the verbal consent of the respondents. Summary write-ups of all recorded interviews were developed later for detailed analysis.

Data collected during fieldwork was supplemented with the information obtained from the public consultation summary reports, subject to their availability. A total of 9 (out of 12) summary reports were analysed. Furthermore, self-evaluation questionnaires (when available) were used to complement and cross-check the information extracted during the interviews/observation.

Sampling

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

When recruiting the public consultation participants, the research team strived to ensure the diversity of the respondents whenever possible. However, since the access to public consultation participant list was restricted, in most cases researchers had to rely on few contacts provided by the coordination agency. This has limited the diversity of respondents.

Research Instruments

The research team utilised two semi-structured interview guides for KIIs. One guide was designed for public consultation participants (CSOs, private sector representatives, and other interested individuals/

organisations), while another guide targeted coordination public body representatives. Within the framework of the current study, the interview guides were revised and restructured to follow the PCI framework. The questions included in the KII guides covered all three objectives of this study and respective research questions. The semi-structured interview guides allowed the researcher to add or adapt the questions during interviews while the respondents were free to elaborate on their responses.

The research team also used a separate observation form to guide the researcher in the public consultation process.

Furthermore, in the current study, additional quantitative tool was designed and piloted: Structured self-evaluation questionnaire for the coordination agency representatives³¹. The questionnaire was developed on the basis of PCI Index and online platform (<https://www.questionpro.com>) was selected for data collection. It was sent to the respondents prior to the interview. The purpose of the questionnaire was on the one hand to allow the coordination agencies to self-assess public consultation process according to the given criteria and on the other hand to give them a better understanding about (i.e. prepare them for) the interview.

Data Analysis

The research team applied the PCI as the primary framework for data analysis. The researchers assessed each target policy document according to the PCI indicators and scored per criterion.

The sources for the assessment included write-ups of interviews with the coordination agency representatives and public consultation participants, observation reports, self-evaluation questionnaires (if available) and public consultation summary reports (if available). The information obtained from the different sources complemented and enhanced each other. In case of discrepancies, researchers relied on their own judgment.

Scoring

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

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

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

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

31 <https://questionpro.com/t/AUit3ZwCKl>

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

Ethical approach

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

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

Informed consent and Voluntary participation

'Informed consent is the cornerstone of ethical research.³² All respondents were informed about the purpose of the study prior to the interview. All participants were free to participate or withdraw their participation at any time. Respondents were notified regarding the following issues and interviewed after voluntary and informed consent has been taken from them.

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

Protection of human subjects and confidentiality

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

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

Limitations

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

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

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

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

Limitation 4: Often, the research team did not have access to the full list of public consultation participants. In some cases, coordination agencies refused to share information about public consultation participants or provided only a few contacts, some of which turned out to be irrelevant (e.g. person was not involved in the consultation process or was part of the organisers of the event). Therefore, the researchers usually had to rely on convenience sampling when selecting respondents. On a few occasions researchers depended only on the views of the coordination agencies. This is why the results of the study may not represent the views of everyone engaged in the public consultations and may not be transferable to other situations.

Limitation 5: Given the project timeline, the research team had to rely on limited sources of information as sometimes public consultation summary reports were unavailable.

ANALYSIS

Prior to analysing the data according to Public Consultation Index (PCI) criteria, this chapter identifies the factors that contribute to an effective process of public consultations. The study discovered that all parties involved, including coordination agencies, civil society organizations, and ordinary citizens, agree that conducting public consultations is crucial for effective decision-making. Public consultations offer decision-makers the chance to integrate public input, improve transparency, boost legitimacy, and establish trust.

Even though public consultation is acknowledged as an important method for improving decision-making efficiency, effectiveness, and transparency, there are numerous factors that greatly impact the successful planning and implementation of public consultation. A prior study from 2021 identified three key factors that determine the effectiveness of the process: **the coordination agencies' knowledge of guidelines and best practices** for conducting public consultations, their **willingness** to act, and the **support of donors**. While these three factors remain important, a fourth factor was identified in this study from the perspective of coordination agencies: **public engagement**. This fourth factor is crucial because without public interest, even with coordination agencies' efforts, public consultations will not be successful.

Coordination agency representatives who are responsible for drafting policies should be aware of any changes or updates to the recommendations and guidelines. This ensures that they can comply with the new regulations and that the implementation of the policies is consistent and effective. The findings from the previous studies (pilot study in 2020 and 2021), showed that many coordination agency representatives were not well-informed about new regulations outlined in the Rules of Procedures for Development, Monitoring, and Evaluation of Policy Documents (Decree of the Government of Georgia N629 of December 20, 2019). The current study found that most coordination agency representatives were better informed regarding rules and regulations around conducting public consultations. Although there has been progress, some coordination agencies still do not understand the distinction between selective stakeholder engagement and authentic public consultations. They may view any form of stakeholder involvement as equivalent to public consultations. However, selective stakeholder engagement can lead to issues with inclusion, transparency, and legitimacy. Additionally, the closed format of public consultations restricts the variety of research participants. Having a diverse range of participants is important to ensure that decisions are not based solely on the interests of one group, but rather on the needs and interests of a diverse set of people.

Some coordination agencies noted that involving ordinary citizens in the discussion was not their goal due to the need for expert knowledge around the topics covered in the policy document:

I can't say we targeted ordinary citizens because the policy document contains very specific topics, but we ensured in every way that if someone was involved in our field, especially those who work with these vulnerable groups, they would be represented as much as possible. (Coordination agency representative)

Some CSO representatives also believed that while involving the public could be possible, it was not necessary:

It's always possible to increase the scale of public consultations. But I just don't think it's necessary, I am not sure how much the public will be interested in such a topic. I think the representation that we had from CSOs in this process was more or less sufficient. (Public consultation participant)

These opinions demonstrate that in some cases there is still limited awareness of involving ordinary citizens in public consultation processes. In the best-case scenarios, public consultations should be designed to be inclusive and provide opportunities for all interested persons to participate in the decision-making process. When decision-makers engage in selective stakeholder engagement, they are not giving all citizens an equal opportunity to provide their input. Furthermore, when the coordination agency notifies only selected organisations and experts, this can raise concerns about transparency in the decision-making process. When decision-makers only engage with specific stakeholders, it can give the impression that decisions are being made behind closed doors, without input from the broader public. As a result, a selective approach toward mapping out and inviting public consultation participants underlines the legitimacy of the process.

The study findings reiterate the belief that political will is an essential component of effective decision-making and continued support for implementing high-quality public consultations. It remained a relevant factor contributing to the successful implementation of public consultations on both collective and individual levels. At the collective level, political will refers to a government institution's willingness to allocate sufficient resources and support staff to ensure the successful planning and coordination of public consultations. The responsibility of creating an enabling environment for employees to commit to this process falls on the coordination agency.

The study found that the collective political will of the government entities to commit to conductive effective public consultations increased compared to the previous year. In most cases, enough staff and resources were allocated to ensure streamlined coordination of the process:

I think we had enough resources to plan and coordinate as needed. We did not have donor support but we still managed. (Coordination agency representative)

At the individual level, political will refers to the willingness of concrete individual employees to invest their time and resources into conducting public consultations and achieving the desired outcomes. It reflects employees' values, priorities, and commitment. In situations where institutions lack clearly defined priorities for citizen engagement, the will of individual decision-makers and government employees can play a crucial role.

Many public consultation participants had a favourable opinion on the efforts made by the coordination agencies:

They didn't refrain from using their time and energy, we were already tired of so many meetings, but they really listened and noted down as much as they could (public consultation participants)

Another factor that could significantly improve the quality and effectiveness of public consultations was donor support. Sufficient funding is a critical component of conducting successful public consultations. Donors play an essential role in providing financial support to ensure that public consultations are adequately resourced, properly implemented, and effectively managed. Similar to the previous studies, many coordination agencies noted that without donor support they would not be able to conduct high-quality public consultations.

The present study identified the importance of donor support in **two** main ways. First, donors can help to support **the capacity building** of coordination agency representatives by developing appropriate consultation

methods, providing training for staff, recruiting experts, supporting organizing meetings and events, and conducting outreach activities to engage with the wider public. Capacity building may include providing training for government officials and civil society organizations on best practices for engaging with the public, collecting feedback, and analysing results. Secondly, donor support **helps to increase accessibility**: additional funding can help increase the accessibility of public consultations, making it easier for a broader range of individuals and communities to participate. This can include providing translation services, accessibility of public consultations for people with disabilities, transportation, and other support services to facilitate the engagement of underrepresented groups.

While these three factors are important for the effective planning of an open and inclusive process of public consultations, there are challenges that are beyond the control of coordination agencies. The main challenge here is the overall **interest of the public and particularly, ordinary citizens to engage in public consultations**. The data indicates that the majority of participants in public consultations were representatives of civil society organizations (CSOs). Furthermore, in many instances where public consultations were open to ordinary citizens, there was a lack of interest in participation from them.

For instance, participation in the consultations around Capital Market Development Strategy for 2022-2026 and its Action Plan 2022-2023 was open to any interested party. The information about planned public consultation was published on the agency's website and included both a package of documents and a link to the meeting, which everyone could access. In addition to the opportunity to attend the meeting, all interested parties could provide feedback to the coordinator in an online format - the application for public consultations included an e-mail of the responsible person to whom feedback could be provided. Despite the openness of the process, the group of participants was homogeneous, in particular, only experts, international organizations, donors, representatives of various public agencies and the private sector, which directly represented the target segment of the strategy (for example brokerage companies, banks, etc.) were involved:

Only those who are involved in the sector communicated with us, only the interested stakeholders because it is so sectoral and so specific that citizens will not be interested. (Coordination agency representative)

There could be several reasons for the lack of interest from ordinary citizens to participate in public consultations. One of them is **difficulty in accessing information**: Ordinary citizens may face challenges in accessing information about the consultation process or the issues being discussed, they may not be aware that public consultations are taking place, which can make it difficult for them to participate effectively. Another reason can be **limited access to Internet** for people living outside urban areas. While urban areas and public sector are widely embracing digital forms of communication, there are still many rural inhabitants in Georgia who do not have access to a computer or a smart phone. Yet another reason can be **perceived lack of impact**: citizens may not believe that their participation will have any significant impact on the decision-making process. In addition, they may feel a **lack of trust**: citizens may not trust the decision-making process or the government institutions responsible for organizing the public consultation, which can lead to a lack of motivation to participate. Furthermore, according to the coordination agency representatives, citizens often **lack awareness of the importance of participating** in public consultations:

The main reason for low feedback I think is low awareness and limited knowledge about the policy-making reform and system. The biggest problem is awareness, and seeing the connection between their efforts and policy outcomes. (Coordination agency representative)

The lack of awareness of citizens on the importance of participating in public consultations can be attributed to several factors, including low political culture, lack of education, or citizens' disengagement from the political process due to feelings of disillusionment with the political system. To increase awareness and participation in public consultations, it is essential to address these factors. Governments and organizing agencies should make an effort to communicate relevant information about public consultations more effectively and provide educational materials to citizens. They should invest in long-term strategies to create incentives for citizen participation. These strategies may involve collaboration with local CSOs, the creation and improvement of online platforms, and simplifying the tools for participation.

Therefore, although around some policy documents public interest may be low, it is important that coordination agencies strive to create meaningful opportunities for public engagement and consultation, which can increase public trust and support for important policy decisions. Building trust between decision-makers and the public can lead to more effective collaboration and cooperation, which can increase the motivation of the public to be more involved in the decision-making process in the long term. When people trust that their participation will be valued and that their input will be considered, they are more likely to engage in public consultations and provide constructive feedback.³³ This, in turn, can lead to more informed decision-making that reflects the needs and interests of a wider range of stakeholders.

To ensure proper planning and implementation of public consultations, several factors are crucial, including knowledge of guidelines and best practices, political will from coordination agencies, and adequate funding. Additionally, strong motivation and interest from the public significantly impact the quality of outcomes and hold coordination agencies more accountable. These factors are interconnected and essential for making the public consultation process effective and impactful. The following part of the report analyses the Public Consultation Index (PCI) criteria, which evaluates the accessibility, transparency, efficiency, accountability, and inclusivity of public consultation processes. The final criteria assess public engagement and interest in the consultations.

1. Criterion - Accessibility of Public Consultation Process

Efficient, effective, and transparent decision-making centres around the idea that public consultations are inclusive to all citizens. Public consultations provide an opportunity for decision-makers to incorporate public input into their decision-making process. This input can help identify issues and concerns that may not have been considered otherwise and can lead to more informed and effective decisions. Therefore, in order to have truly inclusive and effective outcomes, the public consultations should target not only experts, international organisations, or local NGOs, but most importantly – ordinary citizens.

Since meaningful participation in public consultations requires that the process is accessible to ordinary citizens, the first criterion of the Public Consultation Index (PCI) relates to the Accessibility of the consultation announcement and policy document/policy brief to the broader public. The accessibility criterion is further broken down into seven corresponding indicators each measuring different aspects of accessibility.

33 Irvin & Stansbury (2004). Citizen Participation in Decision Making: Is It Worth the Effort? *Public Administration Review*, 64: 55-65.

In order to ensure that information about the planned public consultation is easily discoverable by interested persons, consultation announcements and policy documents/policy briefs should be accessible via public channels. Disseminating announcements about the planned public consultation through various online means (e.g. the entity's official website, social media page, online media) or traditional media (TV, newspaper, leaflet, banner) is the first step towards engaging the wider public in decision-making processes. Thus, underpinning the importance of the availability of information on the planned public consultations, the first and second indicators of the Accessibility criterion assesses the **efforts taken** by a public entity to disseminate the public consultation announcement through multiple communication channels (PCI 1.1) and whether policy document and/or policy brief was publicly available (PCI 1.2). It should be highlighted that sending the announcement by email only to potential stakeholders should not be considered a form of public dissemination.

The public consultation announcements were mostly shared through government agency websites, emails, and Facebook pages. Unlike the previous year, when the majority of government agencies opted to send the announcements via email to the target audience, such as experts, organisations, and other government bodies, this year, most of them used public channels to reach out to the wider public.

Overall, most coordination agencies (ten out of twelve) met minimal requirements set by PCI and disseminated public consultation announcements through at least one public channel. Furthermore, six coordination agencies exceeded the minimum standards and used two or more public channels. The previous year, seven out of twelve coordination agencies scored 0. In the 2022 cohort, the total score per this indicator was 1.3, which improved by 0.5 points compared to the previous year.

Dissemination of public consultation announcements via one public channel, often at the responsible coordination agency's official website is not sufficient. Public consultation participants pointed out the need to reach a wider audience:

Announcements are usually posted on the website of the Ministry, on Facebook, but perhaps a bigger information campaign would be better. We as local thematic NGOs are keeping an eye on what is posted there, we also receive information by e-mail, but an ordinary citizen may not check the Ministry's page every day, in such a case, larger scale outreach would help engage the public get them involved in the process. (Public consultation participant)

Although there are areas for improvement, disseminating public consultation announcements on coordination agency websites and social media is a positive step towards ensuring that the public is aware of and can participate in the consultation process. By using these channels, coordination agencies were able to reach a wider audience, including those who may not be aware of the consultation process through other means.

However, it is important to note that the effectiveness of this approach may depend on a variety of factors, such as the agency's social media following, the timing and frequency of announcements, and the accessibility of the agency's website. In addition to using websites and social media, coordination agencies should also consider other ways to disseminate information about public consultations, such as through local media outlets, community organizations, and targeted outreach to specific groups. This can help to ensure that the consultation process is inclusive and accessible to a diverse range of voices.

The next indicator (PCI 1.2) looks at whether the policy document/policy brief was accessible to the public. Providing access to policy documents and policy briefs is crucial for ensuring that the public is able to make informed contributions to the consultation process. Making these documents easily accessible can also help to promote transparency and accountability in the policy-making process. Uploading policy documents and policy briefs to the coordination agency's website is an effective way to make them easily accessible to the public. By doing so, interested persons and organizations can quickly and easily access the information they need to participate in the consultation process.

As per the second indicator (PCI 1.2) coordination agencies performed exceptionally well, nine of twelve achieved the highest score. In addition to being available on the website, in most cases, the policy document and/or policy brief was as accessible as an attachment or web link in the public consultation announcement. This ensured that interested persons and organizations are aware of the document's existence and could access it directly from the announcement. Easily accessible policy documents are more likely to encourage participants to participate and provide feedback:

It is much easier to find the policy document when it is available with the announcement. Then you do not need to go and search on the ministry website. It is time-consuming and some websites have terrible search tools. Sometimes you just give up. (Public consultation participant)

Overall, only two public entities failed to meet the minimum requirements (scored 0) and one coordination agency scored 1 – meaning policy document and/or policy brief was available only for organizations/persons selected by the coordination agency. If the policy document or policy brief is not available on the website, it is important for the coordination agency to provide an alternative way for interested persons and organizations to obtain it quickly and easily. This can include providing a direct download link, offering to send the document by email, or making hard copies available upon request. Going forward, it is important for coordination agencies to prioritise the availability and accessibility of policy documents, and to take steps to ensure that members of the public are aware of their right to access these documents. This can include publicizing the availability of policy documents through various channels, such as social media and local media outlets.

While ensuring that policy documents and policy briefs are easily accessible is a crucial step towards promoting transparency, accountability, and meaningful public participation in the policy-making process, it is important to note that the dissemination of information about public consultations is only one part of a larger process. PCI accessibility criterion's third indicator (PCI 1.3) is grounded in the belief that both organizations and ordinary citizens wishing to participate in the public consultation process do not need to possess expert knowledge in the field to understand the content of the policy document/policy brief and provide feedback.

Therefore, it is important for coordination agencies to ensure that policy documents are clear, concise, and easily accessible to the public. Especially in those cases, when the comprehension of the policy document requires thematic knowledge, it is desirable that the coordination entity prepares a policy brief, written in simple language, in an easily digestible format - for instance, the document should not contain special terms and abbreviations that are not explained and defined, the key information should be highlighted, and preferably, information visualization methods should be used.

Some coordination agencies prioritised that the policy document was easily understandable to the citizens with no expert knowledge, especially if the document targeted their beneficiaries. For instance, a coordination agency representative underlined while drafting the Vocational Education Strategy of Georgia for 2022-2027 and its Action Plan 2022-2024 they put efforts to make sure that the document was easily comprehensible:

When we started working on the vocational education strategy, our first goal was to make the strategy easy to read, so that it would be understandable not only to people employed in the field of education but also to some people employed in other fields. We wanted this strategy to be understandable to any citizen. For instance, if a ninth grader or a tenth grader looks at this strategy, they should understand what services vocational education offers them and what benefits they will have for them.”
(Coordination agency representative)

Overall, simplicity in terminology and the easily understandable format of the policy document were favourably assessed by both coordination agency representatives and public consultation participants. However, some of them noted that using simple language is not advisable and oftentimes not possible when it comes to official documents:

Strategy is an official document where certain state structures agree on certain issues, therefore it should not be easily understandable for everyone. (Public consultation participant)

Even though conflicting opinions were shared regarding the third indicator, compared to the 2021 policy cohort, in 2023 coordination agencies' scores per third indicator significantly increased. In seven out of twelve cases, the agencies achieved the highest score. In such scenarios policy documents and/or policy briefs were written in simple, easily comprehensible language, highlighted important content, did not use special terms and unexplained abbreviations, and/or used methods for visualization of the information. The remaining policy documents and/or policy briefs highlighted important content, however, the documents used special terms and unexplained abbreviations, resulting in a lower score.

Another important and often overlooked area of accessibility is the inclusion of underrepresented vulnerable groups. The majority of coordination agencies failed to meet the minimum standards set by the PCI on the accessibility of public consultations to ethnic minorities and people with disabilities. The next four indicators of the first criterion (PCI 1.4; 1.5; 1.6; and 1.7) assess the accessibility of public announcements and policy documents and/or policy briefs to ethnic minorities and people with disabilities.

Across all criteria and indicators, coordination agencies achieved one of the lowest scores compared to other indicators. Furthermore, compared to the previous year, the average scores were lower for the 2022 policy cohort, with all coordination agencies scoring 0 across all four indicators.

Overall, several coordination agencies shared the idea that experts were the main facilitators of the inclusion of specific needs of disadvantaged groups. According to coordination agency representatives often key priority was to get expert opinions regarding the special needs of different groups of people since they could act on behalf of the beneficiaries:

In general, this is the case in other fields as well, our field requires specific knowledge, and it is always preferable to listen to the opinion of experts rather than others who do not have proper knowledge in this field. The experts are well aware of the needs of different groups of people and they can lobby for them. (Coordination agency representative)

While experts may indeed be able to voice the needs of people who are underrepresented in policymaking, for genuine bottom-up decision-making it is crucial to ensure inclusion and diversity while drafting policies. For genuinely inclusive decision making it is particularly important to involve major ethnic minority groups living in Georgia. To ensure inclusion in the policy development process, they should be able to receive announcements about public consultations. If the announcement was accessible in at least one ethnic minority group's language, it was considered that minimal requirements were met.

In all cases, public consultation announcements were accessible only in the Georgian language, meaning that coordination agencies failed to meet the minimum requirements and scored 0 (PCI 1.4). Furthermore, neither of the policy documents/policy briefs was accessible in any ethnic minority group's languages. Consequently, all coordination agencies scored 0 on the fifth indicator (PCI 1.5), meaning they failed to ensure the accessibility of information in at least one main ethnic minority group's language, namely Azeri, Armenian and Abkhaz languages.

Ethnic minorities in Georgia may have limited proficiency in the majority language used in policy documents and public consultations. Providing translations can help ensure that these communities have equal access to information and can fully participate in the policy-making process. Therefore, providing translations can help to address linguistic and cultural barriers that may limit the ability of ethnic minority communities to understand and engage with policy decisions.

Public consultation participants also mentioned the exclusion of ethnic minorities who do not speak the Georgian language from the public consultation processes:

All types of official documents are only available in the Georgian language, and we also see the problem that minorities are actually completely cut off from this process. (Public consultation participant)

However, translating the policy document into different languages requires additional resources. One of the coordination agency representatives noted that they even requested a form from the donor to consider translating the policy document:

When we developed the strategy document and the international donor evaluated it, one of our comments was that it was not translated into the language of ethnic minorities, and unfortunately, it is not until now. (Coordination agency representative)

While translating public documents into ethnic minority languages can be resource-intensive and coordination agencies may face challenges in securing the necessary funding and resources, it is important for coordination agencies to prioritize language access in their public engagement and policy-making efforts. In most cases,

coordination agencies rely on donor support, but there are also various strategies that coordination agencies can use to make the translation process more feasible and cost-effective. For example, they can leverage technology and community resources to support the translation process, such as crowdsourcing translations or partnering with local community organizations that can provide translation services. Overall, while translating public documents can present challenges for coordination agencies, it is important for them to prioritize language access in their public engagement efforts to ensure equitable and inclusive participation from all members of the community.

People with disabilities are often excluded from the public consultation process and decision-making due to inaccessible formats and lack of access to information. The sixth (PCI 1.6) and seventh (PCI 1.7) indicators assess to what extent the announcements about planned public consultations and policy documents/briefs took into consideration the special needs of people with disabilities. To ensure inclusion in the policy development process of people with disabilities, the information contained in the public announcement as well as the policy document itself should be adapted to their needs. For instance, the announcement and policy document/brief could be printed in Braille code or available as an audio version, video/audio clip could be accompanied by sign language translation etc.).

None of the public consultation announcements or policy documents/briefs was adapted to the needs of people with disabilities. Thus, the overall score for the sixth (PCI 1.6) and seventh (PCI 1.7) indicators was 0 (PCI 1.6). While in the previous year, several coordination agencies took concrete steps to make public consultations more accessible, this year none of them put any effort to ensure the accessibility of information to more vulnerable segments of society.

Adapting public consultation announcements and policy documents/briefs to the needs of people with disabilities is a matter of accessibility, human rights, and good governance. People with disabilities have the right to access information on an equal basis with others, as recognized by the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. Adapting public consultation announcements and policy documents/briefs can help fulfil this right and ensure that people with disabilities are not excluded from important decision-making processes.

Many coordination agencies underlined that ensuring diversity and inclusion is a desired outcome, however hard to realise due to various constraints. Some of the public entity representatives mentioned that there are currently some initiatives in place that could contribute to making public consultations more accessible for diverse groups:

There is an EU directive - Web Accessibility Directive, which we would like to be implemented in our legislation. This would mean that an appropriate regulatory framework will be created, in which state institutions and service providers will be obliged to take into account the needs of different groups when designing and providing services. Of course, you cannot adapt the processes to everyone's special needs, even the countries that are frontrunners do not have the ambition to do so. (Coordination agency representative).

While the Georgian government has taken several positive steps to make decision-making more accessible to people with disabilities, such as the adoption of the Law on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in 2014,

which aims to ensure the full participation of people with disabilities in all areas of life, including decision-making processes, there are various gaps when it comes to implementation of the commitments. It is crucial for coordination agencies to prioritise making participation in decision-making processes more accessible to people with disabilities by providing information and documents in accessible formats and using assistive technology to facilitate participation.

To summarise, the success of efficient and transparent decision-making relies on inclusive public consultations that involve input from all citizens, not just experts or organizations. In order to achieve this, public consultations must be accessible to ordinary citizens and consultation processes should be designed to ensure that everyone can participate and have their voices heard. The first criterion of the Public Consultation Index measured the accessibility of the consultation announcement and policy document/policy brief to the public, with seven corresponding indicators measuring different aspects of accessibility. Data showed that while coordination agencies improved their scores by disseminating public consultation announcements and policy documents through official channels, they failed to take streamlined efforts to include diverse segments of society such as ethnic minorities and people with disabilities. Concrete efforts are needed to make sure that consultation processes are designed to encourage the participation of all members of society. This includes the provision of translation services, the use of accessible formats, and the adoption of measures to reach out to marginalized groups.

Table 3: Scoring – Accessibility

Criterion I: Accessibility	2022
	0.9
1.1. Public consultation announcement was disseminated through at least one public channel.	1.3
1.2. Policy document and/or policy brief was made publicly available.	2.3
1.3. Policy document and/or policy brief is available in plain language, easily comprehensible format, and those without field expertise can understand it.	2.5
1.4. The public announcement was accessible for major ethnic minority groups living in Georgia (accessible in the Azerbaijani, Armenian and Abkhaz languages).	0.0
1.5. Policy document and/or policy brief was accessible for major ethnic minority groups living in Georgia (accessible in the Azerbaijani, Armenian and Abkhaz languages).	0.0
1.6. The public announcement was adapted to the needs of people with disabilities (e.g. Braille code, audio version, sign language translation, etc.)	0.0
1.7. Policy document and/or policy brief was adapted to the needs of people with disabilities (e.g. Braille code, audio version, sign language translation, etc.)	0.0

2. Criterion - The Openness of the Public Consultation Process

By engaging in open and transparent dialogue, decision-makers can work to identify common ground and build trust between citizens. Public consultations enhance transparency in decision-making and ensuring citizen engagement is one of the main goals of Public Policy Reform (PAR). By providing the public with the opportunity to participate and provide feedback, decision-makers can demonstrate that they are open to taking into account a range of perspectives and interests. The second criterion of the Public Consultation

Index examines the openness of the public consultation process and is broken down into two corresponding indicators, with the first indicator (PCI 2.1) assessing the ability to participate and the second (PCI 2.2) relating to the ability to provide feedback.

The first indicator (PCI 2.1) assesses if any interested person or organisation has an opportunity to get engaged in public consultation. This means that participation in public consultations is not restricted only to potential interest groups, hired experts, or international organizations and donors. Thus, if the engagement is only possible by an invitation from the coordination agency, the wider public is excluded from participation. Thus, coordination agencies should not take a selective approach towards CSO and citizen engagement.

Compared to the previous year, most coordination agencies performed significantly better on this indicator, achieving the highest score of 3. In ideal scenarios, participation in public consultation was open to all interested organizations and ordinary citizens - nine out of twelve coordination agencies achieved the highest score of 3. In less favourable scenarios, participation was open to international and local organizations and/or experts and/or interested persons while engagement was possible only by invitation from the coordination agency.

The second indicator (PCI 2.2) assesses whether all interested or engaged persons/organisations have an opportunity to comment and provide feedback on the policy document. The provision of feedback is crucial for conducting meaningful and outcome-oriented public consultations. For that, any person engaged in the public consultation, regardless of its format, should have an opportunity to provide feedback or comment on the policy document. To ensure a streamlined process of receiving feedback, the public entity should not set any restrictions in this regard or selectively allow only certain organisations or experts to provide feedback. For instance, during the face-to-face meeting, the facilitator should create possibilities for the engagement of all participants. If the document is posted online, the comment function should be turned on. If the document is distributed through electronic mail, its format should allow easy feedback. Most importantly, all interested ordinary citizens should be able to provide their input.

The results show significant improvement in the coordination agencies' scores on the second indicator of openness (PCI 2.2) compared to the previous year. The agencies' efforts in enhancing the accessibility and transparency of their policy documents have resulted in an average score of 2.8 out of 3 across twelve documents. This score is close to the highest standards set by PCI based on the best international practices.

While one coordination agency was only able to minimally meet the requirements, the remaining eleven policy documents exceeded the threshold of the minimum score, with ten of them achieving the highest scores. This shows the commitment of the coordination agencies to promote openness in their policy-making processes though allowing ordinary citizens to participate in public consultations.

Overall, the improved score on the Openness criterion is a clear indication that the coordination agencies are making progress towards achieving the highest standards of openness and transparency. The results should be celebrated as a positive step towards promoting good governance and enhancing the credibility and legitimacy of the policy-making process.

To summarise, the data shows that the openness of public consultations is an important prerequisite for meaningful civic engagement and genuine participatory democracy. The study found that for ensuring the

openness of public consultations by involving the wider public and receiving meaningful feedback, first of all, information on planned consultations should be publicly available. Therefore, the Openness criterion (PCI 2) is closely connected to the Accessibility criterion (PCI 1). Openness and accessibility should continue to be a hallmark of public consultations in the future so that more people will be encouraged to participate in shaping the policies and decisions that affect their lives and communities. Therefore, coordination agencies should not opt for a closed format of public consultations with the pre-mapped stakeholders, instead, they should take concrete steps towards ensuring the openness of public consultations for ordinary citizens.

Table 4: Scoring – Openness

Criterion II: Openness	2022
	2.7
2.1. Any interested person or organisation (CSOs, private sector organisations, ordinary citizens etc.) has an opportunity to participate in public consultation.	2.7
2.2. All interested or engaged persons/organisations have an opportunity to comment/provide feedback on the policy document.	2.8

3. Criterion - Effectiveness of Public Consultation Process

The third criterion of the Public Consultation Index (PCI) evaluates the effectiveness of public consultations. It is important to note that this criterion does not measure the output or the outcome of the public consultations, but rather, it assesses the effectiveness of the process itself. There are six corresponding indicators under this criterion, which examine the effectiveness of procedural planning and execution. These indicators help to evaluate whether the public consultation process was well-designed, effectively executed and provided an opportunity for meaningful engagement and feedback from the participants.

The first indicator of the Public Consultation Index (PCI 3.1) evaluates the timely dissemination of announcements regarding the planned public consultation. The indicator assesses whether the public was informed in a timely manner about the start of the public consultation process, with a minimum period of one week set as the threshold.

According to best international practices, it is advisable to “consult as early and as widely as possible.” Therefore, if the public announcement was disseminated two or more weeks prior to the start of the public consultation process, the coordination agency received the highest score.

Advance notification is particularly important in the case of face-to-face meetings since interested parties need to plan their attendance. Except for one coordination agency, all the others met or exceeded the minimum requirements, with an average score of 2/3. This means that they disseminated announcements about the planned public consultations one or more weeks prior to the start of the consultation process.

We were fully aware of the importance to allocate sufficient time. People have different commitments and this should be taken into account. (Coordination agency representative)

The second indicator (PCI 3.2) explores to what extent the information provided in the public announcement was sufficient. This indicator examined if the announcements corresponded to the recommendations outlined in Chapter 3.5 of the Policy Planning, Monitoring, and Evaluation Handbook. It is recommended that the public announcement contains the following information: information about the format, date/time/location or period of public consultation; information about the responsible entity and respective contact person(s); information about consultation topic and objectives; information about distribution and feedback provision mechanisms of the policy document draft or policy brief (the policy document/policy brief or its access link can also be enclosed in the public announcement).

Collecting data on the second indicator of the Public Consultation Index (PCI 3.2) was challenging due to limited access to announcements that were not publicly available and were only disseminated through emails. This made it difficult to monitor and assess compliance with minimum standards, as the research team had to rely solely on the information provided by research participants.

The coordination agency representatives who conducted open public consultations were also well informed of the guidelines, which likely contributed to the relatively high average score of 2/3 achieved by all but one coordination agency. However, one coordination agency did not meet the minimum requirements, scoring 0 on this indicator, and one coordination agency was not assessed due to the unavailability of information.

Coordination agencies should not only provide sufficient time and information about public consultations but also use diverse formats for conducting public consultations. The third indicator (PCI 3.3) focuses on the chosen format of public consultations.

To increase the engagement of the wider public in the policy development process, coordination agencies should use diverse methods and opt for more than one format of public consultation. Using more than one format of public consultation could help the coordination agencies to increase the engagement and effectiveness of the process. This can be achieved by using different formats of public consultations simultaneously throughout the process such as face-to-face or online meetings, focus groups, conferences, physical or online surveys, and collecting comments through web-page or social media.

Eight out of twelve coordination agencies used more than one format (with an average for this indicator 1.8/3), which is praiseworthy, and points to some level of diversity in the methods used for conducting public consultations. However, it is also important to consider that the average score on this indicator is still lower than the previous year and there was no significant progress observed between the 2021 and 2022 policy cohorts.

Using diverse formats for public consultations can help ensure that a wider range of participants is able to participate and provide meaningful feedback. Therefore, it is important for coordination agencies to continue striving towards using more diverse formats and to explore additional methods that can be utilized to enhance the effectiveness of the consultation process.

Another important aspect of conducting effective and meaningful public consultations is providing diverse mechanisms for feedback provision. The fourth indicator (PCI 3.4) examines whether the coordination agency ensured the collection of feedback and comments using more than one mechanism. Feedback mechanisms

may include written feedback via email, comments on the web page or social media, feedback by phone, oral feedback during meetings, written feedback in chats, Google forms, or other online survey formats. It should be highlighted that feedback collected only from public entities and hired experts, regardless of the number of mechanisms used, received 0 scores.

Data shows that most coordination agencies utilised different mechanisms for feedback collection, from official correspondence to informal calls and networking with the public consultation participants. All of them except for one met or exceeded the minimum requirements, scoring 2.3/3.

However, in some cases even though several mechanisms of feedback provision were provided, public consultation participants only used one format:

We have suggested that written or any other form of communication would be acceptable. But we did not receive any written feedback, only the verbal communication expressed during the public consultation itself. (Coordination agency representative)

It is encouraging to see that most coordination agencies utilized different mechanisms for feedback collection and that the majority of them met or exceeded the minimum requirements, scoring 2.4/3. This is a positive increase compared to the previous year, indicating that coordination agencies are taking steps to ensure that feedback is collected through multiple channels. Using a variety of feedback mechanisms can help to ensure that a wider range of perspectives and experiences are taken into account, leading to more informed and effective decision-making.

Overall, the scoring data suggests that coordination agencies are making progress in ensuring that feedback is collected effectively and efficiently. However, there is always room for improvement, and coordination agencies should continue to explore new and innovative ways of collecting feedback to further enhance the effectiveness of public consultations by providing clear guidelines on feedback provision encouraging participants to use the simplest and most convenient tools for feedback collection.

While providing diverse mechanisms for receiving feedback is an important prerequisite for the effective public consultation process, it is also necessary to allocate sufficient time to collect feedback. The fifth indicator (PCI 3.5) assesses whether the public consultation participants had reasonable time to provide meaningful and elaborate comments.

PCI takes into account two scenarios of time allocation for feedback provision depending on the consultation format used. For example, if a coordination agency decides to conduct public consultations via online/ in-person meetings or similar formats where the policy document draft is presented and discussed, the participants should have at least one week to provide additional comments. In the second scenario, if feedback is collected via email or by posting the document online, at least two weeks should be allowed to collect the input.

Allowing one week for feedback provision was considered an acceptable threshold by both coordination agency representatives and public consultation participants.

If one is really interested, considering the volume of the documents, it is possible to read them in a short time, although I think it is always better to allocate at least a week because people who have work and other commitments may not manage to read them. The time can be extended, but if there is high interest. It's best to have at least a week to be sure there is enough time. (Public consultation participant)

Overall, the fact that both coordination agency representatives and public consultation participants consider one week to be an acceptable threshold for feedback provision is a positive indication that coordination agencies are effectively balancing the need for timely feedback with the need to allow participants sufficient time to review and provide meaningful input. Thus, findings suggest that the timeframe of one week as indicated in the Policy Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation Handbook is mostly reasonable.

Setting clear and reasonable timeframes for feedback provision is indeed important to ensure that participants have adequate time to review and provide feedback on policy drafts. It also helps to ensure that the feedback is received in a timely manner, allowing coordination agencies to incorporate it into the documents.

However, it is worth noting that some potential public consultation participants may require additional time to provide feedback, particularly if they are a smaller or less-resourced organization. It can be especially challenging for ordinary citizens who have various other commitments and feedback provision takes an additional dedicated effort. Thus, coordination agencies should be open to providing flexibility in their feedback collection process and ensure that all participants have an equal opportunity to provide their input.

The sixth indicator (PCI 3.6) examines whether the coordination agency has conducted a public consultation on more than one stage of a policy development cycle. According to the Policy Planning, Monitoring, and Evaluation Handbook, while public engagement is advisable at each stage of policy development, conducting public consultation is mandatory only on the final draft of the policy document.

While conducting public consultation at the last stage is sufficient to satisfy the minimum requirements set by PCI, it is advisable to ensure public engagement at the earlier stages of policy development. The respondents from civil society organisations believe that public discussions may be more effective if they are conducted during the early process of developing the policy document, as it may be a way to get more input to identify key areas for improvement problems before the document is finalized. They noted that in the final stage: “all we can do is to provide feedback on what is already written.” (Public consultation participant).

Two coordination agencies achieved the highest score by conducting public consultations at three stages of policy development: Vocational Education Strategy of Georgia for 2022-2027 and its Action Plan 2022-2024 and National Tuberculosis Control Strategy for 2023-2025 and its Action Plan 2023-2025. Another six also exceeded minimum requirements, scoring 2/3, while only one coordination agency scored 0.

Involving a wider audience from the early stages, starting from designing the policy document's goals and objectives, conducting a situation analysis and priority setting, allows citizens, beneficiaries, and interested parties to make more meaningful contributions, fosters their commitment to the public consultation process and results in better-elaborated feedback. Therefore, public engagement at multiple stages of the policy document elaboration cycle is crucial for effective and meaningful public consultations.

However, it has to be noted that most coordination agencies opted for smaller working groups involving NGOs, international organizations, and other government bodies at the early stages of public consultations:

In initial working groups experts working in the field were invited, as well as representatives of state agencies, and representatives of the non-governmental sector were also invited (Coordination agency representative)

While such an approach can be useful in ensuring diverse perspectives and expertise are brought to the table, it may also limit the participation of ordinary citizens and other stakeholders who are not part of these groups:

In my case, I was only involved when the final document was already ready. So, I could not contribute to the initial drafting of key priorities and goals. I know they had meetings initially, but my organisation was not involved there (Public consultation participant)

It is important that wider public and local organizations are not involved only at the final stage of public consultation when the document is already finalized. Such an approach would limit the opportunities for meaningful engagement and input from these stakeholders, potentially leading to suboptimal outcomes. Therefore, coordination agencies should aim to involve a diverse range of stakeholders throughout the entire consultation process, from the initial planning stages to the finalization of the document. This can help to ensure that a variety of perspectives and ideas are considered and incorporated into the final product.

To summarise, based on the collected data, it can be concluded that coordination agencies generally performed well in terms of the effectiveness of the public consultation process. The average score of 2.1/3 indicates that most public consultations met the minimum requirements of each indicator. The majority of coordination agencies informed participants about planned public consultations at least one week in advance, utilized multiple formats for conducting consultations, and provided sufficient time and mechanisms for feedback provision. However, it is important to note that most coordination agencies involved only smaller working groups in the early stages of public consultations. To ensure more effective and well-rounded process of public consultations, wider public and local organizations should be involved at all stages of the policy development cycle, not just at the final stage when the document is already finalized.

Table 5: Scoring – Effectiveness of Public Consultation Process

Criterion III: Effectiveness of Public Consultation Process	2022
	2.1
3.1. The public announcement was disseminated at least one week before the start of the public consultation process.	2.0
3.2. Information in the public announcement is sufficient (corresponds with the recommendations outlined in Chapter 3.5 of the Policy Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation Handbook).	2.5
3.3. Public consultations were conducted in more than one format.	1.8
3.4. More than one mechanism for feedback collection was ensured.	2.3
3.5. Sufficient time (depending on the consultation format) was allocated for the provision of feedback.	2.0
3.6. Public consultations were conducted at minimum one stage of the policy development cycle.	1.8

4. Criterion - Accountability

Public consultation provides opportunities for diverse voices to be heard, strengthens the legitimacy of decision-making, and builds national ownership over the implementation of the policy documents. With that, participation in public consultations requires time and resources from citizens and CSOs, therefore, it is important that public consultation participants feel that their input is valued. Thus, coordination agencies should be accountable to the participants by providing elaborate feedback regarding inputs received during the consultation.

Overall, coordination agencies performed exceptionally well on this criterion, achieving an almost perfect score of 2.8/3 - the highest score compared to all other criteria. However, three coordination agencies did not provide us with the summary reports of the public consultations. Thus, the research team had to rely on subjective input provided by the coordination agency and CSO representatives.

Public consultation reports provide an overview of the consultation process, the feedback received, and how the feedback was taken into consideration in the decision-making process. Without these reports, it is difficult to assess the effectiveness and accountability of the public consultation process.

The provision of a detailed and well-elaborated summary report of public consultations is one way to account for citizens' inputs received during the consultation. The first indicator (PCI 4.1) of the Accountability criterion assesses the comprehensiveness of a summary report on public consultations, whether it elaborately describes the public consultations' goals, process, and results. It assesses the compliance of the summary report with the minimum requirements outlined in Annex 9 of the Policy Planning, Monitoring, and Evaluation Handbook. Apart from this mandatory information, the summary report should contain additional details about the goals and process of the public consultation, used communication channels, approaches, and activities, the methodology applied for the analysis of collected comments, and whether any feedback was provided to the authors of the comments. Moreover, the report should describe changes made to the policy document as the result of the public consultation and contain information about the received recommendations and arguments for accepting or rejecting them.

Most coordination agencies achieved high scores and all of them exceeded the minimum requirements, achieving an average score of 2.7/3 on this indicator. It is recommended that coordination agencies continue to improve the quality of public consultation reports and ensure that they provide complete and transparent reports of their public consultations in the future to maintain accountability and trust with the public.

The second indicator (PCI 4.2) of the accountability criterion examines whether the public consultation participants received any feedback from the coordination agencies on which of their recommendations were considered, partially considered, or not considered in the policy document. In the cases when a summary report was not yet available, the research team complemented the data from the interviews with public consultation participants.

The research team was not able to obtain a summary report or any other data that would measure the accountability criteria of consultations planned around the National Tuberculosis Control Strategy for 2023-2025 and its Action Plan 2023-2025. Thus, this document was excluded from the analysis.

The evaluation found that eleven out of twelve coordination agencies received a perfect score of 3, indicating that they provided feedback to participants on which recommendations were considered and which were not considered in the policy document.

This is a positive result as it indicates that the coordination agencies took the time to provide feedback to participants, which can help to build trust and transparency in the policy-making process. By providing feedback, participants can feel that their input was valued and considered, even if not all of their recommendations were ultimately incorporated into the policy document.

Public consultation participants also highlighted the importance of receiving the feedback since according to them it gives the involved parties a sense of real participation and increases their motivation:

We received feedback on our comments, which is quite rare sometimes, you can do a lot of work and send your input, but in the end, you realize that nothing, there is no outcome. In this case, we received feedback, which is a good precedent. (Public consultation participant)

The views of an ordinary citizen should be taken into account and they should be provided with feedback, which will be the motivation to participate in similar processes: showing that politics actually concerns you and you can have some type of participation in this process and you can have a say in decision making is very important. (Public consultation participant)

While providing feedback is important, it is crucial to let the participants know why their feedback was or was not considered. The third indicator (PCI 4.3) assesses whether the public consultation participants who provided input received justified feedback or an explanation of why their recommendations and comments were not taken into consideration.

Some CSOs shared their experience and noted that oftentimes they feel like their voice is not heard:

Many people who have had experience with working with government bodies and have been very enthusiastically involved in such processes, in the end, realise that that recommendation had no impact, nothing changed with their feedback. So, getting reasoned feedback on why our comments were not taken into account would be an additional motivator for those people to become more informed and involved in the process. (Public consultation participant)

Even though providing justified feedback to every participant is the ideal scenario, however, in practice, it is often impossible. Some of the coordination agencies conducted a large number of public consultations and received a big volume of comments, consequently, it was particularly challenging for them to keep track of the exact number of comments and provide justified feedback to every contributor. In such cases, some summary reports provided aggregated comments under thematic groups and addressed comments per group. Such an approach is reasonable, thus the coordination agencies that provided information about accepted/rejected comments under the thematic groups but did not provide quantitative data did not receive low scores.

If the number of received comments were exceptionally high, coordination agencies grouped and aggregated them into themes:

We received more than 800 comments in total, and absolutely all of them were forwarded to relevant sectors whose responsibility it was to consider whether or not to consider this or that comment. After that, all individuals and non-governmental organizations who sent these comments were notified by e-mail, and they received information from us about what was included in the policy document and what was not taken into account. (Coordination agency representative)

However, even though it is challenging for coordination agencies to provide individual feedback to each participant, here selective approach to justified feedback provision can be considered an optimal solution. Participants who provided in-depth and well-elaborated feedback should receive justified feedback in order to be encouraged to continue participation:

It never happens, never, when the government of Georgia comes back to us with any reasoned argumentation, about why this or that proposal was not taken into account. It never happens... Even if they do not provide written feedback, they could hold a public hearing or consultation and there, go through these issues very scrupulously and consistently. Unfortunately, this does not happen and this must be changed. (Public consultation participant)

Although providing individual feedback to public consultation participants can be challenging, especially if there are a large number of participants, it is important for coordination agencies to make every effort to ensure that participants do not feel like their voice is being ignored.

One way to address this challenge is to make sure public consultation participants are aware of and have access to summary reports. Another approach could be to provide feedback in a more targeted way, focusing on specific themes or issues that were raised during the consultation and conducting additional meetings to go through the thematic comments. This could help to make the feedback more relevant and useful for participants, while also reducing the workload for coordination agencies. Ultimately, the goal should be to ensure that participants feel that their input was valued and taken into account.

The fourth indicator (PCI 4.4) looks at whether the summary report on the consultation was publicly available which is related to the previous indicator. The availability of the summary report is crucial for ensuring accountability to all public consultation participants. It also helps to monitor and evaluate the compliance of the public consultation with the requirements set by the Policy Planning, Monitoring, and Evaluation Handbook. By March 2023, eight out of twelve summary reports were publicly available. Although the research team does not have access to the remaining four summary reports, coordination agency representatives noted during the interviews that those would be available within the coming weeks. The average score on this indicator was near perfect - 2.9/3.

To sum up, the average score on the Accountability criterion was the highest among all the PCI criteria. The majority of coordination agencies performed exceptionally well by providing well-elaborated summary reports and communicating justified feedback to the public consultation participants. However, to a certain degree achieving high scores was influenced by the lack of available information on several indicators which led to the exclusion of the strategy document from the scoring. While compared to the previous year public consultation reports were mostly publicly available and contained well-elaborated comments on received feedback, some of the public consultations participants were not aware of the existence of such reports.

Therefore, not only availability but also ensuring access to the summary report is a matter of transparency and accountability. By providing a summary report, coordination agencies can demonstrate that they are committed to openness and transparency in the policy-making process. It helps to ensure that participants are informed about the outcomes of the consultation and can see how their input was taken into account. Furthermore, the availability of summary reports can help to monitor and evaluate the compliance of the public consultation with the requirements set by the Policy Planning, Monitoring, and Evaluation Handbook. This helps to ensure that coordination agencies are meeting their obligations and can identify areas for improvement in future consultations.

The scoring of Criterion IV per each indicator is provided in Table 6.

Table 6: Scoring – Accountability

Criterion 4: Accountability	2022
	2.8
4.1. Summary report on public consultations comprehensively describes the goals, processes, and results of the public consultations.	2.7
4.2. The information about accepted, partially accepted, and rejected comments was provided to the feedback authors.	3.0
4.3. The justified explanation was provided to the feedback authors.	2.5
4.4. Summary report on public consultations is publicly available.	2.9

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

It is unfortunate to note that, similar to the previous year’s findings, ensuring diversity and inclusion of participants remained one of the most challenging aspects of public consultations conducted in 2022. The majority of coordination agencies were not able to meet the minimum requirements set by the PCI criterion related to diversity and inclusion and received the lowest average score among other PCI criteria (0.4 out of 3). This indicates that there is still significant work to be done to ensure that public consultations are inclusive and representative of all stakeholders. It is important for coordination agencies to take steps to address this issue and promote diversity and inclusion in future consultations. This can include targeted outreach efforts to underrepresented communities, providing translation services, and offering alternative formats for engagement to accommodate diverse needs and preferences.

Overall, most coordination agencies took no specific measures to ensure the diversity and inclusion of the participants. In most cases, equal representation of women and men was achieved without prior consideration, and most coordination agencies did not make additional efforts to ensure the inclusion of minority groups – such as persons with mental or physical disabilities, religious and ethnic minorities, the LGBTQ community, etc. Based on average scores per each policy document on the fifth criterion (PCI 5) only two coordination agencies met or exceeded minimum requirements: Vocational Education Strategy of Georgia for 2022-2027 and its Action Plan 2022-2024 and National Tuberculosis Control Strategy for 2023-2025 and its Action Plan 2023-2025. Most of the coordination agencies scored the lowest on Diversity and Inclusion criterion (PCI 5). Moreover, they also failed to meet minimum standards per each indicator.

The first indicator (PCI 5.1) examines if specific steps had been taken during the public consultation planning process to ensure the engagement of both genders. As mentioned earlier, in most public consultations, an equal representation of women and men was achieved accidentally. To ensure an equal inclusion of men and women, the importance of gender should be considered at the early stages of public consultation planning. This can be achieved, for instance, by identifying the minimal target share/number of women and men prior to the public consultation planning. It is also important to ensure a balanced discussion. For that, the meeting facilitator should try to encourage the participation of both women and men. Finally, it is advised that coordination agencies consult gender experts while planning their public consultations. Consulting with the gender experts will allow identifying issues to be considered from a gender perspective for each strategy document and ensure the adoption of the relevant measures.

For instance, the Vocational Education Strategy of Georgia for 2022-2027 and its Action Plan 2022-2024 involved consultations with gender experts whose recommendations were considered in the policy drafting process. In some cases, due to the thematic work of coordination agency gender representation and involvement of experts were by default ensured.

Consideration of recommendations by gender experts was by default incorporated into the National Action Plan for 2022-2024 on the Measures to be Implemented for Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence and Protection of Victims/Survivors and National Action Plan for 2022-2024 on Implementation of the UN Security Council Resolutions on Women, Peace, and Security:

In our public agency, we specifically work on gender equality; therefore, I can confidently say that each of us is a gender expert. We did not need to think in this direction at the planning stage. I will say directly, based on the fact that this statement was publicly posted on the website, which is equally accessible to women and men, we did not take any specific measures. (Coordination agency representative)

Another important aspect of the inclusive public consultation process is identifying and engaging vulnerable minority groups (people with disabilities, ethnic minority groups, etc.) Thus, the second indicator (PCI 5.2) looks at whether the coordination agencies have taken any purposeful steps in the planning process to engage minority groups in public consultations. One of the ways to include these groups in the public consultation process is by keeping a database of the organisations working on the issues of different vulnerable minority groups such as ethnic minorities, persons with disabilities, LGBTQ individuals. During the planning phase of the public consultations, the coordination agencies should contact these organisations and take additional steps to ensure their participation.

Only three coordination agencies met or exceeded the minimum requirements of the second indicator: *Vocational Education Strategy of Georgia for 2022-2027 and its Action Plan 2022-2024; National Tuberculosis Control Strategy for 2023-2025 and its Action Plan 2023-2025 and National HIV/AIDS Strategy for 2023-2025 and its Action Plan 2023-2025*. The National Tuberculosis Control Strategy and HIV/AIDS Strategy managed to ensure the participation of diverse groups of participants because many of these groups were identified as immediate relevant beneficiaries and the coordinating council already included organisations working with different vulnerable groups. However, the coordination agencies did not take concrete measures to identify the special needs of registered individuals and address those needs during the meetings.

While there are various structural obstacles to involving diverse groups of people, there are additional layers of invisible barriers when it comes to the inclusion of the most vulnerable groups. One of the CSO representatives underlined additional barriers to involving underrepresented and vulnerable segments of society:

The part of people in the population that are stigmatized, or believe that being diagnosed with Tuberculosis is a shame, should also be able to participate anonymously. It is very difficult to find these people, to involve them in this process because they do not want to be visible. You can't involve them by force. I think it would be good to involve those too, who want to remain anonymous in this discussion process. (Public consultation participant)

Public consultation participants underlined that the involvement of minority groups was crucial for inclusive and participatory decision-making:

It's incredibly necessary, wider groups should be involved, if we adapt for ethnic minorities ethnic minority, why not sign language? All of these are necessary, if the processes are to be improved, inclusion will also come with that. The more adapted these meetings are, the better. (public consultation participant)

Participation of minority groups and vulnerable segments of society should not be an ad hoc effort. It is important to ensure the continuity of inclusion of participants from diverse backgrounds. One of the best practices is to keep a database with contact details of the representatives of underrepresented and vulnerable minority groups engaged in public consultations. The third indicator (PCI 5.3) aims to assess whether the coordination agencies keep records and analyse data on public consultation participants belonging to vulnerable minority groups. Keeping such statistical data would help identify the gaps in the public consultation process and draft potential solutions for future improvement. Confidentiality and anonymity can be important concerns here; therefore, the coordination agency should ensure getting approval from the participants prior to keeping data.

While none of the coordination agencies has a systematic approach to keeping and analysing statistical data on the public consultation participants belonging to vulnerable minority groups, some of them strive to ensure inclusion by engaging NGOs who work with such groups in formats of coordination and planning committees. For instance, most policy documents are coordinated through a recommendation committee in the Ministry of Healthcare that coordinates projects financed by the Global Fund (AIDS, tuberculosis, hepatitis C). According to the coordination agency representative, this group is multi-profile and includes all potential stakeholders from different fields, not only from healthcare but also the non-governmental sector, and key stakeholders who are directly affected by these problems. Their committee has a protocol in place of which group and what percentage of vulnerable groups should be represented per each initiative. Consequently, the strategy draft is sent for consideration to pre-mapped target groups.

While taking concrete steps to identify vulnerable minority groups during the consultation planning is crucial, it is not sufficient. The consultation process itself should also be adapted to the needs of different groups to ensure genuine inclusion and diversity of participants. The fourth indicator (**PCI 5.4**) looks at whether the coordination agency makes efforts to ensure that the public consultation process is adapted to the needs of different vulnerable and minority groups.

For instance, participants should have the possibility to provide feedback in their preferred format (written or oral) or language. In addition, sign language translation should be ensured during the meeting; the physical space should be adapted to the needs of persons with disabilities, etc. All coordination agencies scored 0 on the fourth indicator, meaning that none adapted the public consultations process for people with special needs or ethnic minorities who do not speak the Georgian language.

The low score on the fifth criterion (PCI 5) demonstrates a concerning finding, as it suggests that underrepresented groups may not have had equal opportunities to participate in the public consultation process and have their voices heard. It is important for coordination agencies to recognize the importance of accessibility and inclusivity in the policy-making process and take steps to address these issues.

To conclude, ensuring the diversity of participants continues to be a significant challenge in the public consultation process, and the majority of coordination agencies did not prioritize it. Minority inclusion was often considered irrelevant and costly, and only a few strategy documents exceeded the minimum score of 1 on the PCI index for inclusivity. It is crucial for coordination agencies to recognize the importance of accessibility and inclusivity in the policy-making process and take steps to address these issues, such as providing translation services, offering alternative formats for engagement, and partnering with organizations that serve these communities. By promoting accessibility and inclusivity, coordination agencies can ensure that all stakeholders have an equal opportunity to engage in the policy-making process and contribute to the development of policies that are more responsive to their needs and preferences. The scoring of Criterion V per each indicator is provided in Table 7.

Table 7: Scoring – Diversity of Participants/Inclusiveness

Criterion 5: Diversity of Participants/Inclusiveness	2022
	0.4
5.1. In the public consultation planning process, specific steps have been taken to ensure the active engagement of both genders in the consultations.	0.7
5.2. In the public consultation planning process, specific steps have been taken to identify and engage vulnerable minority groups.	0.5
5.3. The coordination agency keeps records of the representatives of vulnerable minority groups engaged in the public consultations.	0.3
5.4. The public consultation process is adapted to the needs of vulnerable minority groups (diverse needs of people with disabilities, ethnic minority groups, etc.)	0.0

6. Criterion - Public Engagement and Interest in Public Consultations

The effectiveness of the public consultation process and its outcomes largely depend on active engagement from citizens and CSOs. Therefore, the engagement and interest of the public are crucial for conducting meaningful public consultations. The sixth criterion (PCI 6) and corresponding indicators assess public consultation participants' engagement from the coordination agencies' perspectives and are counted separately from the other five criteria.

The interest from the public significantly varied depending on the strategy document. While some public consultations enjoyed a high level of interest, several representatives of the coordination agencies complained about the lack of interest from the public. In most cases, they justified a lack of interest due to the specificity of the strategy document and the need for expertise in order to provide feedback.

In some cases, even though all interested parties had the opportunity to provide feedback they did not receive any substantial input from the participants. For instance, the Ministry of Economy and Sustainable Development used various mechanisms to receive feedback: participants could submit their comments both at the meeting and online using various tools. For example, after the first meeting, an online questionnaire (survey monkey) was developed which was sent to the meeting participants. A shared Excel document was also created, where each section had its own field for comments. However, despite the efforts, the coordination agency did not receive written feedback from the participants: “We sent them reminders, asked to fill it in, but they didn’t even open the links.” (Coordination agency representative)

Public consultation participants observed that there are numerous reasons why there may be limited interest and engagement from the public to participate in public consultations. One of the reasons is that many of them do not see the value in participating or may believe that their input will not be taken into account. One of the public consultation participants observed that they often do not feel that their participation was meaningful:

Often the consultation process is a pure formality. Consultations are conducted just because they have to tick as completed. I think that the process is not meaningful and may not actually have any impact on the policy-making process. (Public consultation participant)

Apart from the **perceived lack of value of participation**, limited public engagement may stem from various factors discussed in previous chapters. One of the reasons can be the fact that people may not be aware of the public consultation process, or may not understand the **purpose and potential impact** of their participation. Another reason can be a **lack of trust**: If the public does not have trust in the government or the consultation process, they may not see the value in engagement. Apart from that, **limited access** to information can be an issue: people may face barriers to participation such as a lack of time, resources, or access to information. Furthermore, the complexity of policy documents can be another issue: policy can sometimes be too difficult to understand, which may discourage some people from participating.

The next sections assess each indicator of the sixth criterion. The first indicator (PCI 6.1) considers the number of public consultation participants. Overall, almost every public consultation involved more than ten participants. However, there was a significant difference in the number of participants involved in each consultation. While some had more than a hundred participants, some had less than twenty.

Lack of public interest was often attributed to the topic under discussion:

Unfortunately, the awareness in this direction is not so high, both in the governmental and non-governmental sectors, therefore the interest is not at the level it should be. (Coordination agency representative)

Even though the topic of the policy document influences public interest, coordination agencies' efforts are also important. When the coordination agencies conducted only one public consultation at the final stage of the policy development engagement of the public was lower. On the contrary, if the coordination agency conducted several cycles of public consultations more participants were engaged.

Available evidence also shows that promoting public consultations through various channels, including social media, community organizations, and local media helps to raise awareness and increase interest in the consultation process.

Furthermore, coordination agencies can make the consultation process more accessible by providing clear and concise information about the consultation process, including how to participate and what the consultation is about. Additionally, they can offer multiple options for participation, such as online surveys or in-person meetings, to accommodate different schedules and preferences.

The second indicator (PCI 6.2) assesses public engagement based on the number of unique feedback contributors. This indicator measures how many persons/organisations provided their feedback on the policy document.

Seven out of twelve coordination agencies received feedback from at least five individuals/organisations. However, in many cases, even though citizens had a chance to provide their input, only experts or thematic organisations provided their comments:

I understand that this is a document that requires a certain degree of expertise, but it was available for everyone to comment on our webpage. But we only received feedback from organisations that work on this topic. (Coordination agency representative)

The third indicator (PCI 6.3) explores the level of engagement of citizens, CSOs and other interested parties. The average score on this indicator is 2.3/3. Most coordination agencies assessed public consultation participants' engagement favourably, noting that they were actively involved in the discussions. Two coordination agencies expressed their dissatisfaction and wished for a more proactive approach from the participants.

We kept reminding them to send us the feedback, but the only input we got was during online meetings. No written follow-up from any public consultation participants. (Coordination agency representative)

The fourth indicator (PCI 6.4) examines the relevance of the comments provided by participants and whether their feedback was valuable for the improvement of the policy document from the coordination agencies' perspective.

The coordination agency representatives indicated that the great majority of the provided recommendations were relevant and taken into consideration. In some cases, there were objective reasons for not reflecting these comments in the policy document and their authors were provided with justified explanations.

All comments that were taken into consideration or rejected are reflected in the summary report and this document is publicly available. It directly states the status of consideration of the comments and who was the author. (Coordination agency representative)

While coordination agencies emphasised the importance of the input received during the public consultations, they also noted that some received comments were sometimes irrelevant:

Sometimes during discussions, they themselves would agree that the comment was not relevant and we would just remove it. Sometimes we were receiving more like some form of questions about available services, not a feedback. Of course, these questions cannot be considered relevant to the policy document. (Coordination agency representative)

Timely provision of feedback from the public consultation participants within the set timeframe is another indicator that PCI looked at from the coordination agencies' perspective. The fifth indicator (PCI 6.5) assesses whether the public consultation participants provided their input within the allocated deadlines. The average score on this indicator is 2.7/3, meaning most public consultation participants provided their feedback in a timely manner.

Overall, both the coordination agencies and the CSOs highly appreciated the involvement of the participants in the public consultations, as the feedback received as a result of the consultations helped to improve the policy document. In general, the new regulations were evaluated positively by the coordination agencies, as they promote the openness of the process and allow the responsibility of the public agency to be shared with civil society. The total average score on the sixth criterion (PCI 6) is 2.4/3, which has declined by 0.3 points compared to the previous year. The reason for such a decline can be not lower interest from the public per se but coordination agencies' increased standards towards citizen engagement.

However, while the available data shows that the public's engagement was sufficiently high in most cases and according to the coordination agency representatives, the feedback they received during the consultations was valuable and meaningful for developing a strategy document, challenges remain. Coordination agencies should strive towards improving the accessibility and transparency of public consultations that can help to increase interest and engagement from the public. This could include providing clear and accessible information about the consultation process, actively seeking out diverse perspectives, and providing feedback on how public input is being used in decision-making. Additionally, using online platforms and social media to engage with the public can also help to broaden participation and reach a wider audience. The scoring of Criterion VI per each indicator is provided in Table 8.

Table 8: Scoring – Public Engagement/Interest

Criterion 6: Public Engagement/Interest	2022
	2.4
6.1. Number of CSOs/individuals engaged.	2.4
6.2. Number of unique feedback contributors.	2.0
6.3. Coordination agencies' evaluation of civil society engagement.	2.3
6.4. Relevance of the comments provided by the civil society as assessed by the coordination agency.	2.8
6.5. Timely provision of feedback.	2.7

SUMMARY AND COMPARISON TO THE PREVIOUS STUDIES

The present study provides an in-depth assessment of 2022 policy documents based on the Public Consultation Index (PCI), which is a metric that measures the effectiveness of public consultations. A higher PCI score indicates that the consultation process was more effective in engaging with the public and incorporating their feedback into decision-making.

WeResearch conducted three studies, the first of which was a pilot study conducted in 2020 that developed and tested PCI. The pilot study likely aimed to determine whether PCI is a reliable and valid measure of the quality of public consultations.

Despite all three studies utilizing the same methodological tool - the Public Consultation Index (PCI), which comprises six primary criteria, it is challenging to compare scores from the 2020 pilot study, since the assessment indicators were revised, expanded, and updated in frames of 2021 study. Additionally, the research team made efforts to enhance the scoring guidelines to ensure accuracy and replicability of the scoring, as opposed to relying solely on researchers' assessments as in the previous study. For the above mentioned reasons the changes in the PCI scores from the 2020 study to 2021 and 2022 studies should be interpreted with care, as direct comparisons may not be informative, while the comparison of 2021 and 2022 PCI scores is more accurate.

It is feasible to compare the findings of a study conducted in 2021 to the current (2022) study as no significant changes were made to the methodology or scoring guidelines. As noted, in 2021 scoring guidelines for the PCI were spelt out, which has contributed to the increased accuracy and replicability of the scoring, however, other relevant factors such as the availability of information and subjective assessments from research participants may have impacted the scoring.

The increase in the overall Public Consultation Index (PCI) score from 1.4 in 2021 to 1.8 in 2022 is a positive development. The scores in 2020 and 2022 are the same, which could potentially be attributed to methodology changes. This significant changes in the scoring methodology between the two years has impacted the interpretation and comparison of scores. Therefore, if analysed across the three years, the drop of total score from 1.8 to 1.4 between 2020 and 2021 and then increase to 1.8 in 2022 does not necessarily indicate deterioration of the quality of public consultation in 2021 or a stagnation in the consultation process over the whole period. It should be noted that 2020 was the first year, when holding public consultation has become mandatory in the policy planning process, which meant that some public entities lacked information about requirements of the Government Decree #629 and experience of conducting public consultations. Thus, it would be logical to attribute the observed score dynamics between 2020 and 2021 to the significant changes in the index scoring methodology, and focus instead on the progress observed between 2021 and 2022.

While direct comparison of scores achieved in 2020 is challenging, we can compare criterions score shift from 2021 to 2022. The increase in score by 0.3 points signifies that the public consultations conducted in 2022 were overall more effective in ensuring accessibility and openness of the process, engaging with the public and incorporating their feedback into decision-making. The rise in the PCI score demonstrates that the consultation process was more inclusive, transparent, and accountable, leading to a better quality of public consultations. This improvement in the quality of public consultations is a positive step towards ensuring

that decision-making processes are more democratic and that the voices of all stakeholders are heard and considered. The findings of this study highlight the importance of ongoing and continued efforts to enhance the effectiveness of public consultations, and they provide a valuable benchmark for future research in this field.

In 2020, the accessibility criterion of the PCI was set at 1, indicating that the public had relatively equal access to participate in consultations. However, in 2021, the accessibility criterion decreased to 0.7, implying a reduction in the overall accessibility of public consultations. Subsequently, in 2022, the accessibility criterion increased to 0.9, indicating an improvement in the accessibility of public consultations compared to the previous year. The decrease in accessibility in 2021 can be attributed to the change in PCI calculation methodology and should not be interpreted as a straightforward worsening of the coordination agency's performance. While the improvement in the Accessibility criterion score from 0.7 to 0.9 in 2022 is a positive development that allows accurate comparison to the previous year and indicates a slight improvement, in-depth assessment per indicator highlights an ongoing issue with public consultations in regard to accessibility for ethnic minorities and people with disabilities. The issue remained unresolved throughout all three cohorts of the conducted studies. Despite efforts to enhance accessibility through public dissemination of announcements and policy documents, it is clear that minority and vulnerable groups continue to face significant barriers to participation in the decision-making process. The findings suggest that public consultations have not been effective in addressing the needs of these communities and that more work should be done to make them more accessible. The lack of accessibility can be a significant hindrance to the democratic process, as it limits the ability of these groups to participate fully in decision-making that affects their lives.

The significant improvement in the Openness criterion score from 1.8 and 1.6 (in 2020 and 2021 respectively) to 2.7 (in 2022) is a remarkable achievement, indicating that the public consultations conducted in 2022 were considerably more open to the public compared to both previous cohorts. The decline from 2020 to 2021 should be interpreted with caution due to the changes in scoring methodology, however, gradual improvement in the score over the three-year period is an important development, as openness is a critical factor in ensuring that the decision-making process is open, transparent and accountable. The positive trend in this criterion score is an indication that ongoing efforts to increase the openness of public consultations are having a meaningful impact. In combination with the increased openness of the process, promoting public consultations through various channels is an important strategy for increasing awareness and participation. By engaging with communities through social media, community organizations, and local media, coordination agencies can help to ensure that more voices are heard and that the consultation process is more inclusive and representative.

The Effectiveness of Public Consultation Process criterion score has remained unchanged from 2021 to 2022 (2.1/3), indicating that there was no significant improvement or decline in this area. There are several potential factors that may have led to a decline in the effectiveness criterion of the Public Consultation Index (PCI) from the score of 2.6 in 2020 to 2.1 in 2021 and 2022. Although understanding the reasons behind this decline is crucial for identifying areas of improvement and enhancing public engagement in decision-making processes it is challenging to identify concrete factors due to the significant change in the PCI scoring methodology. Despite this limitation, there is a range of potential factors to be considered: such as training provided to coordination agency representatives, stakeholder engagement strategies, communication channels, decision-making transparency, and overall public trust in the consultation process. While the overall score

dynamics over the period may be viewed as a neutral result, it is important to note that effectiveness is crucial in ensuring that public consultations lead to meaningful outcomes and decisions. The findings show that coordination agencies should continue to build on the previous year's successes and work towards more efficient and effective decision-making processes.

The Accountability criterion of the Public Consultation Index (PCI) increased from a score of 2.2 in 2020 to 2.5 in 2021, and further to 2.8 in 2022. The steady increase of the Accountability criterion score represents a positive development, meaning that decision-makers are increasingly recognizing the importance of accountability, leading to enhanced responsibility, transparency, and public trust. This positive trend not only fosters better decision-making outcomes but also encourages increased public participation and satisfaction. By continuing to prioritize and strengthen accountability within public consultations, policymakers and stakeholders can create a more inclusive and effective decision-making process that truly reflects the needs and aspirations of the communities they serve. The increase in the Accountability score also suggests that there were more mechanisms in place to ensure that decision-makers were accountable to the public and that there were more opportunities for feedback and input from stakeholders. It indicates that decision-makers are prioritizing the documentation and reporting of consultation processes and outcomes. By maintaining detailed records, decision-makers can demonstrate the rationale behind their decisions, show how public input was considered, and ensure transparency in the decision-making process. This commitment to reporting contributes to the accountability of decision-makers and instils confidence in stakeholders that their voices are heard and valued.

The decline in the score of the Diversity of Participants criterion from 1.3 in 2020, to 0.5 in 2021 and 0.4 in 2022 is a disappointing development. The Diversity of Participants criterion is a critical component of public consultations, as it ensures that a wide range of perspectives is represented and considered in the decision-making process. The decrease in this score suggests that efforts to increase diversity and inclusivity in public consultations have not been successful and that there is still much work to be done to ensure that all voices are heard and considered. Several factors may contribute to the disappointing decline in the criterion score. These factors include limited outreach and engagement efforts, barriers to participation faced by marginalized groups, inadequate representation of diverse communities, and insufficient efforts to address systemic biases and structural inequalities. These challenges can prevent the meaningful inclusion of underrepresented voices, resulting in a narrowing of perspectives and a less robust decision-making process. Data also shows that people with disabilities and ethnic minorities are still underrepresented in public consultations and may face barriers such as physical, communication or attitudinal barriers that prevent them from fully participating in the process. This is particularly concerning given the potential implications for underrepresented and vulnerable populations whose views are not taken into consideration.

The coordination agencies and their donors should explore further why the score has declined and identify strategies to increase diversity and inclusivity in future public consultations. This may include targeted outreach to underrepresented groups and adapting public consultations. Adapting public consultations can take many forms, such as providing materials in accessible formats, ensuring that venues are physically accessible, and providing translation and interpretation services. By making these adaptations, decision-makers can create a more inclusive and accessible environment that encourages participation from people with disabilities and minority groups. By adapting public consultations to the needs of these underrepresented groups, decision-makers can ensure that they are fully informed about the needs and perspectives of this group and that their decisions are more reflective of the needs and priorities of the community as a whole.

The decrease in the score of the Public Engagement/Interest criterion from 2.7 in 2021 to 2.4 in 2022, is worth noting, but it should be acknowledged that this criterion is mostly subjective from the perspective of coordination agencies, and may not necessarily indicate an actual decline in the public interest. Therefore, it should be interpreted with caution, and should not be viewed as a definitive indicator of public interest or engagement. Similarly, the increase of the score from 2 in 2020 to 2.7 in 2021 can be attributed to shifts in the subjectivity of coordination agency representatives, or can also be related to the change in scoring methodology. While coordination agencies may make an effort to gauge public interest in a given issue, it is possible that their perceptions may not always align with the views of the broader community. Moreover, the Public Engagement/Interest criterion should not be viewed in isolation. Other criteria, such as Accessibility, Openness, and Accountability, may have impacted public consultation participants' interest and motivation.

To summarise, improving the quality and effectiveness of public consultation processes is an ongoing effort that requires the collaboration and engagement of a range of stakeholders, including **coordination agencies, donors, and the public**. While there have been some positive developments in recent years, such as establishing Rules of Procedures for the Development, Monitoring, and Evaluation of Policy Documents (Decree of the Government of Georgia N629), creating the Policy Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation Handbook and Guide on Public Consultations (Annex 11) there is still much to be done to ensure that these processes are truly effective and inclusive.

Coordination agencies have a key role to play in improving public consultation processes, as they are often responsible for planning, coordinating, designing and implementing these processes. They can take steps to ensure that consultations are accessible, open, and accountable, and can work to build trust and engagement with the public. This may involve investing in new tools and technologies, improving communication and outreach strategies, and developing new partnerships with civil society and community groups.

Donors can also play a critical role in supporting and improving public consultation processes, providing financial and technical support for coordination agencies, and investing in capacity-building and training initiatives for the decision-makers and the public. This can help to build the skills and knowledge necessary to effectively participate in the consultation process and can help to ensure that these processes are truly inclusive and representative.

Finally, the public themselves have an important role to play in improving public consultation processes. By engaging in consultations, providing feedback, and advocating for change, the public can help shape the direction and outcomes of these processes and strive for their voices to be heard and valued. This requires a commitment to active engagement and participation, as well as a willingness to work collaboratively with other stakeholders to achieve common goals.

In conclusion, improving public consultation processes is an ongoing effort that requires the engagement and commitment of coordination agencies, donors, and the public. By working together, these stakeholders can help build more effective, inclusive, and accountable consultation processes that better reflect the needs and priorities of their communities.

Table 9: Average Scores from 2020, 2021 and 2022

Indicator/Criterion	2020³⁴	2021	2022
Overall score for criterion 1: Accessibility	1	0.7	0.9
Overall score for criterion 2: Openness	1.8	1.6	2.7
Overall score for criterion 3: Effectiveness of Public Consultation Process	2.6	2.1	2.1
Overall score for criterion 4: Accountability	2.2	2.5	2.8
Overall score for criterion 5: Diversity of Participants/Inclusiveness	1.3	0.5	0.4
PCI Total Score	1.8	1.4	1.8
Overall score for criterion 6: Public Engagement/Interest	2.0	2.7	2.4

34 Due to changes in methodology, the comparison of the scoring from the 2020 pilot study with the scores from 2021 and 2022 studies may not be informative.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Depending on the context, government entities have different understanding of what criteria “good” public consultation should meet. Over the recent years Georgia has made significant achievements towards open governance and the establishment of transparent, effective, and accountable decision-making, but a number of challenges remain. One of the areas that needs improvement is public engagement in policy development, which is an integral part of the Public Administration Reform (PAR).

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

The research findings show that overall, most of the conducted public consultations met the minimum requirements set in the Policy Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation Handbook. Compared to the results of the studies conducted in the past two years, the current study found that overall coordination agency representatives were better informed regarding rules and regulations around conducting public consultations. Although there has been progress, some coordination agencies still do not understand the distinction between selective stakeholder engagement and authentic public consultations. As the result, the engagement of wider public and ordinary citizens in the consultation process was minimal, majority of public consultations participants were representatives of civil society organizations (CSOs), and professional and business associations. Moreover, the coordination agencies fail to meet the best international standards in the field of diversity and inclusion. The research findings also show, that there was a difference between the quality of the public consultations conducted by different coordination agencies and their average scores on the first five PCI indicators varied from 0.85 to 2.2. While various factors can influence the quality of public consultations, this study found that knowledge of good practices of civic participation, political will of coordination agencies, donor support and strong motivation and interest from the public contribute to meaningful and effective bottom-up decision-making and have a reinforcing effect on each other.

Recommendations

Recommendations for the Administration of the Government of Georgia:

- Raise awareness and increase the capacity of the coordination agencies regarding the existing standards and best practices of conducting public consultations in the policy development process.
 - Periodically, train all relevant public servants and public sector employees (both at the Ministry and LEPL level) on how to plan, conduct and evaluate public consultations based on the best practices described in the Guide on Public Consultations (Annex 11 of the Policy Planning Monitoring and Evaluation Handbook) and the benchmarks outlined in the Public Consultation Index.
 - Create a dedicated electronic course/online training module on Public Consultations and make it accessible through the united electronic learning platform. This would give access to the training

to a wider range of public sector employees, including on the municipal level. A study conducted in 2021 showed that public servants positively evaluate online training possibilities and find them convenient and effective.³⁵

- Conduct informational and educational campaigns, thematic events etc. to share information about the importance of public consultation, public consultation requirements (spelt out in Decree #629) and best practices (Annex 11, PCI) for conducting public consultations to encourage wider engagement of the general public in the policy-making process.
- Use the Public Consultation Index to motivate the coordination agencies to strive for excellence and exceed the minimum requirements (Decree #629) for conducting public consultations. For instance, through wide recognition/acknowledgement of the coordination agencies which score the highest on the index.
- Make the inclusion of vulnerable minority groups (or organisations representing their interests) in the public consultations mandatory, at least relevant/target vulnerable minority groups for each policy document.
- Collaborate with international donors to create digital mechanisms, which would simplify the public participation process and provide opportunities for anonymous engagement to vulnerable groups.

Recommendations for the Coordination Agencies

- **Increase diversity and inclusiveness of the public consultation process**
 - Make a public consultation announcement, policy document and/or policy brief accessible for major ethnic minority groups living in Georgia – make it available in the languages of ethnic minorities. The use of digital technologies (e.g. machine translation services), as well as partnerships with local civil society organizations and donors working on ethnic minority issues could be instrumental in reducing the costs of translation.
 - Adapt the public consultation process as well as public announcements, policy documents, and/or policy briefs to the needs of persons with disabilities. For instance, the text could be printed in Braille code or available as an audio or video clip accompanied by a sign language translation, physical space should be adapted for wheelchairs and people with vision impairment etc.
 - Take concrete steps in the planning process to identify and engage vulnerable minority groups in public consultations. This could be achieved in the following ways: keeping the database of the CSOs working with various vulnerable minority groups and collaborating with these organizations to reach out to the vulnerable minority groups, conducting targeted information campaigns, ensuring translation to ethnic minority language or sign language, providing opportunities for anonymous engagement of stigmatized groups, gathering data on participants if they belong to any vulnerable minority group etc.
- **Increase efforts to raise the engagement of the general public and ordinary citizens in the public consultation process.**
 - Make sure that not only stakeholder groups are targeted/invited for public consultations at different stages of a policy-making cycle. Public consultations conducted at the last and mandatory stage are usually open to a wide public, however, this is usually not true for the consultations conducted at the earlier stages of policy development, which are limited to the stakeholders invited by the coordination agency. In order to increase the effectiveness of participation and give ordinary citizens

35 Professional Development of Civil Servants in Georgia – Supporting the Shift to Online Learning, PMC Research Center with the financial support from UNDP/UK Aid, 2021.

and wider civil society an opportunity to influence the policy-making process, they should be included in consultations as early as possible.

- Make public consultation announcements publicly available by using multiple communication channels (agency web pages, social media pages, partnering with CSOs) and media (online news agencies, TV, radio, sms notifications etc).
- Ensure that policy document/policy brief is easily accessible to ordinary citizens. An ordinary citizen should not require extra effort to find the policy document.
 - For instance, when a policy draft is posted online for public comments, the coordination agencies should do their best to make it easily searchable (through search engines) for interested persons on the one hand and spread the word about the document being open to comments through various communication channels/mediums, on the other.
 - The coordination agencies should always include the web link to the draft policy document in the electronic public announcement.
- Ensure that the policy document and/or policy brief is available in plain language - in cases when specific knowledge is required to comprehend a policy document, it is desirable that the coordination entity prepares a policy brief written in plain language and an easily comprehensible format (e.g. infographics) to ensure engagement of both organisations and ordinary citizens. Newly emergent technologies (like large language models/artificial intelligence) allow to simplify the language of various texts and summarize/extract the most important points in different languages in a matter of seconds. As the technologies develop very rapidly, it may soon be possible to use them for the adaptation of Georgian texts as well.
- Use diverse methods to conduct public consultations and increase the geographical coverage of physical events (on the municipal level) to ensure greater engagement of the wide public in the policy development process.
- Use diverse and innovative mechanisms for collecting feedback in the public consultation process – for instance, written comments through email, comments on the web page or social media, feedback by phone, oral feedback during the meetings, written feedback in chats (messenger, WhatsUp, Viber etc.), Google forms, or other online survey formats.
 - Providing feedback should be easy and comfortable for citizens
 - Instruction for providing comments and recommendations should be concise and easy to follow.
- Provide timely feedback to the public consultation participants regarding their comments and recommendations. The coordination agencies should always thank participants for their input, communicate if the feedback was considered and provide justification for not taking the recommendations into account. This should be implemented in a timely manner (not only through the summary reports of public consultations) to make participants feel valued and encourage future engagement. When providing the individual feedback is not feasible (due to a large number of participants), the comments can be analysed and grouped by topic with explanations/argumentation provided for each topic and sent out to participants as soon as possible after completing the consultation process.
- It is advisable to include an acknowledgment note by the end of the summary report, thanking all public consultation participants for their time and efforts. When possible and agreed beforehand, call out their names/organisations to acknowledge their efforts.
- Conduct public consultations at all stages of policy development – the coordination agencies should involve the ordinary public (and not only stakeholder groups) from the early stage of policy development (when policy priorities are determined) rather than only the final stage. This ensures more productive collaboration and contributes to a meaningful public consultation process.

ANNEX I - PCI ASSESSMENT PER STRATEGY

2023-2024 Action Plan of the 2021-2024 Strategy for the Development of the State Internal Financial Control System

The public consultations on the draft policy “2023-2024 Action Plan of the 2021-2024 Strategy for the Development of the State Internal Financial Control System of Georgia” partially satisfied the minimum requirements determined by PCI (Total score - 1.67/3).

Information about the public consultation was disseminated through several channels. For example, the information was posted on the agency’s website, spread through social networks (Facebook groups), and sent by e-mail. The consultation took place via the electronic platform Zoom (the invitation link did not ask for a password to access the meeting).

The policy development process did not meet the minimum requirements of criteria for diversity of participants, as the process was not adapted to the needs of vulnerable minorities and diversity of participants was not ensured. It should also be noted that both genders were equally involved in the discussion of the Action Plan, although this was not purposefully planned. The group of participants was homogeneous. In particular, the consultation was attended by the representatives of financial/economic and internal audit entities, as well as representatives of the central government, autonomous republic government and local self-government bodies.

Throughout the public consultation process, most of the participants were actively involved in the discussion. The feedback provided during the consultation was reflected in the document. Apart from the comments made during the public meeting, there was no other kind of feedback given on the document. The lack of information and low awareness about the mentioned reform and system was considered as the main reason for the lack of feedback.

From the perspective of the coordination agency, public involvement and interest was low.

Indicator/Criterion	Score
Overall score for criteria 1: Accessibility	1.0
1.1. Public consultation announcement was disseminated through at least one public channel.	2
1.2. Policy document and/or policy brief was made publicly available	3
1.3. Policy document and/or policy brief is available in simple language, easily comprehensible format and can be understood by those without field expertise.	2
1.4. The public announcement was accessible for major ethnic minority groups living in Georgia (accessible in Azeri, Armenian and Abkhaz languages)	0
1.5. Policy document and/or policy brief was accessible for major ethnic minority groups living in Georgia (accessible in Azeri, Armenian and Abkhaz languages)	0
1.6. The public announcement was adapted to the needs of people with disabilities (e.g. Braille code, audio version, sign language translation etc.)	0

Indicator/Criterion	Score
1.7. Policy document and/or policy brief was adapted to the needs of people with disabilities (e.g. Braille code, audio version, sign language translation etc.)	0
Overall score for criteria 2: Openness	3.0
2.1. Any interested person or organization (CSOs, private sector organizations, ordinary citizens etc.) has an opportunity to participate in public consultation	3
2.2. All interested or engaged persons/organizations have an opportunity to comment/provide feedback on the policy document	3
Overall score for criteria 3: Effectiveness of process	1.8
3.1. The public announcement was disseminated at least one week before the start of the public consultation process.	2
3.2. Information in the public announcement is sufficient (corresponds with the recommendations outlined in Chapter 3.5 of the Policy Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation Handbook)	3
3.3. Public consultations were conducted in more than one format	1
3.4. More than one mechanism for feedback collection was ensured	2
3.5. Sufficient time (depending on the consultation format) was allocated for the provision of feedback	2
3.6. Public consultations were conducted at minimum one stage of the policy development cycle	1
Overall score for criteria 4: Accountability	2.5
4.1. Summary report on public consultations comprehensively describes the goals, process, and results of the public consultations.	1
4.2. The information about accepted, partially accepted, and rejected comments was provided to the feedback authors.	3
4.3. The justified explanation was provided to the feedback authors.	3
4.4. Summary report on public consultations is publicly available.	3
Overall score for criteria 5: Diversity of participants	0
5.1. In the public consultation planning process, specific steps have been taken to ensure the active engagement of both genders in the consultations.	0
5.2. In the public consultation planning process, specific steps have been taken for the identification and engagement of vulnerable minority groups.	0
5.3. The coordination agency keeps records of the representatives of vulnerable minority groups engaged in the public consultations.	0
5.4. The public consultation process is adapted to the needs of vulnerable minority groups (diverse needs of people with disabilities, ethnic minority groups etc.)	0
Total (average) score on the first five criteria	1.67
Overall score for criteria 6: Public engagement/ interest	0
6.1. Number of CSOs/individuals engaged	0
6.2. Number of unique feedback contributors	0
6.3. Coordination agencies' evaluation of civil society engagement	0
6.4. Relevance of the comments provided by the civil society as assessed by the coordination agency	N/A
6.5. Timely provision of feedback	N/A

National Healthcare Strategy for 2022-2030 and its Action Plan 2022-2024

Public consultations on the draft policy, “National Health Protection Strategy 2022-2030 - Action Plan 2022-2024” partially met the minimum requirements defined by PCI (Total score - 1.79/3).

The consultation process was mostly closed and participation was possible only by invitation of the coordination agency. The group of participants was homogeneous, as the majority of people involved in public discussions were experts working on the issue.

Information about the consultation was disseminated through several channels. For example, information was posted on the Ministry’s website and social network page (Facebook), as well as sent by e-mail. Most of the participants of the consultation were actively involved in the process of public discussions.

In total, 320 recommendations and comments of different types were received during the public consultation. For all recommendations/comments, a justified response regarding consideration, partial consideration or non-consideration was elaborated. This feedback is presented in detail in the public consultation summary report.

The strategy development process did not meet the criteria for diversity of participants, as the process was not adapted to the needs of vulnerable minorities and diversity of participants was not ensured.

The summary report of public consultations was distributed publicly. This report contains detailed information about the goals and process of the consultation, as well as the methodology for processing the received recommendations and the results of the consultation.

From the perspective of the coordination agency, the policy development process and related public consultations were conducted in accordance with the “Rule for Development, Monitoring, and Evaluation of Policy Document” (Decree #629). From the perspective of the coordination agency, community involvement and interest was high.

Indicator/Criterion	Score
Overall score for criteria 1: Accessibility	0.9
1.1. Public consultation announcement was disseminated through at least one public channel.	2
1.2. Policy document and/or policy brief was made publicly available	3
1.3. Policy document and/or policy brief is available in simple language, easily comprehensible format and can be understood by those without field expertise.	1
1.4. The public announcement was accessible for major ethnic minority groups living in Georgia (accessible in Azeri, Armenian and Abkhaz languages)	0
1.5. Policy document and/or policy brief was accessible for major ethnic minority groups living in Georgia (accessible in Azeri, Armenian and Abkhaz languages)	0
1.6. The public announcement was adapted to the needs of people with disabilities (e.g. Braille code, audio version, sign language translation etc.)	0
1.7. Policy document and/or policy brief was adapted to the needs of people with disabilities (e.g. Braille code, audio version, sign language translation etc.)	0

Indicator/Criterion	Score
Overall score for criteria 2: Openness	3.0
2.1. Any interested person or organization (CSOs, private sector organizations, ordinary citizens etc.) has an opportunity to participate in public consultation	3
2.2. All interested or engaged persons/organizations have an opportunity to comment/provide feedback on the policy document	3
Overall score for criteria 3: Effectiveness of process	2.3
3.1. The public announcement was disseminated at least one week before the start of the public consultation process.	1
3.2. Information in the public announcement is sufficient (corresponds with the recommendations outlined in Chapter 3.5 of the Policy Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation Handbook)	3
3.3. Public consultations were conducted in more than one format	2
3.4. More than one mechanism for feedback collection was ensured	3
3.5. Sufficient time (depending on the consultation format) was allocated for the provision of feedback	3
3.6. Public consultations were conducted at minimum one stage of the policy development cycle	2
Overall score for criteria 4: Accountability	2.8
4.1. Summary report on public consultations comprehensively describes the goals, process, and results of the public consultations.	2
4.2. The information about accepted, partially accepted, and rejected comments was provided to the feedback authors.	3
4.3. The justified explanation was provided to the feedback authors.	3
4.4. Summary report on public consultations is publicly available.	3
Overall score for criteria 5: Diversity of participants	0
5.1. In the public consultation planning process, specific steps have been taken to ensure the active engagement of both genders in the consultations.	0
5.2. In the public consultation planning process, specific steps have been taken for the identification and engagement of vulnerable minority groups.	0
5.3. The coordination agency keeps records of the representatives of vulnerable minority groups engaged in the public consultations.	0
5.4. The public consultation process is adapted to the needs of vulnerable minority groups (diverse needs of people with disabilities, ethnic minority groups etc.)	0
Total (average) score on the first five criteria	1.79
Overall score for criteria 6: Public engagement/ interest	2.75
6.1. Number of CSOs/individuals engaged	2
6.2. Number of unique feedback contributors	N/A
6.3. Coordination agencies' evaluation of civil society engagement	3
6.4. Relevance of the comments provided by the civil society as assessed by the coordination agency	3
6.5. Timely provision of feedback	3

National HIV/AIDs Strategy for 2023-2025 and its Action Plan 2023-2025

Public consultations on the policy draft “National HIV/AIDS Strategy for 2023-2025 its Action Plan 2023-2025” partially met the minimum requirements defined by PCI. (Total score - 1.42/3).

The dialogue took place at all stages of strategy development and formed the basis for defining the strategic framework and priority directions of the policy.

Public consultation announcement and the draft policy document have not been disseminated publicly. A public announcement about the consultation was sent out via e-mail. Therefore, it was not available to any interested party.

The strategy development process partially met the inclusion criteria of vulnerable minorities. Namely, representatives of the LGBT and MSM community, who are at the most risk of getting HIV infections/AIDS, were targeted by the coordination agency. In particular, the organization for injecting drug users and the organization for defending the rights of LGBT people were involved in the process of public consultations as well as current and former tuberculosis patients.

As far as the feedback is concerned, there was no problem with the delivery channel. According to the assessment of the respondent, the issue was more the competence of the involved persons, some were not ready to provide input. However, feedback was collected from everyone who wanted to express a certain opinion.

At the time of research, the summary report of public consultations was not available publicly on the agency’s website or Legislative Herald of Georgia.

Indicator/Criterion	Score
Overall score for criteria 1: Accessibility	0.3
1.1. Public consultation announcement was disseminated through at least one public channel.	0
1.2. Policy document and/or policy brief was made publicly available	0
1.3. Policy document and/or policy brief is available in simple language, easily comprehensible format and can be understood by those without field expertise.	2
1.4. The public announcement was accessible for major ethnic minority groups living in Georgia (accessible in Azeri, Armenian and Abkhaz languages)	0
1.5. Policy document and/or policy brief was accessible for major ethnic minority groups living in Georgia (accessible in Azeri, Armenian and Abkhaz languages)	0
1.6. The public announcement was adapted to the needs of people with disabilities (e.g. Braille code, audio version, sign language translation etc.)	0
1.7. Policy document and/or policy brief was adapted to the needs of people with disabilities (e.g. Braille code, audio version, sign language translation etc.)	0
Overall score for criteria 2: Openness	2.0
2.1. Any interested person or organization (CSOs, private sector organizations, ordinary citizens etc.) has an opportunity to participate in public consultation	2

Indicator/Criterion	Score
2.2. All interested or engaged persons/organizations have an opportunity to comment/provide feedback on the policy document	2
Overall score for criteria 3: Effectiveness of process	1.5
3.1. The public announcement was disseminated at least one week before the start of the public consultation process.	1
3.2. Information in the public announcement is sufficient (corresponds with the recommendations outlined in Chapter 3.5 of the Policy Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation Handbook)	2
3.3. Public consultations were conducted in more than one format	1
3.4. More than one mechanism for feedback collection was ensured	2
3.5. Sufficient time (depending on the consultation format) was allocated for the provision of feedback	1
3.6. Public consultations were conducted at minimum one stage of the policy development cycle	2
Overall score for criteria 4: Accountability	3.0
4.1. Summary report on public consultations comprehensively describes the goals, process, and results of the public consultations.	N/A
4.2. The information about accepted, partially accepted, and rejected comments was provided to the feedback authors.	3
4.3. The justified explanation was provided to the feedback authors.	3
4.4. Summary report on public consultations is publicly available.	N/A
Overall score for criteria 5: Diversity of participants	0.33
5.1. In the public consultation planning process, specific steps have been taken to ensure the active engagement of both genders in the consultations.	0
5.2. In the public consultation planning process, specific steps have been taken for the identification and engagement of vulnerable minority groups.	1
5.3. The coordination agency keeps records of the representatives of vulnerable minority groups engaged in the public consultations.	N/A
5.4. The public consultation process is adapted to the needs of vulnerable minority groups (diverse needs of people with disabilities, ethnic minority groups etc.)	0
Total (average) score on the first five criteria	1.42
Overall score for criteria 6: Public engagement/ interest	2.67
6.1. Number of CSOs/individuals engaged	N/A
6.2. Number of unique feedback contributors	N/A
6.3. Coordination agencies' evaluation of civil society engagement	3
6.4. Relevance of the comments provided by the civil society as assessed by the coordination agency	2
6.5. Timely provision of feedback	3

Digital Governance Strategy of Georgia for 2023-2024 and its Action Plan 2023-2024

Public consultations on the policy document, “Digital Governance Strategy of Georgia for 2023-2024 and its Action Plan 2023-2024” on average failed to satisfy the minimum requirements defined by PCI. (Total score - 0.86/3).

The consultation process was closed and participation was possible only by invitation of the coordination agency. The group of participants was homogeneous, as the majority of people involved in discussions were people working in this field.

Information about public consultation has not been made public. Moreover, the draft policy document was not disseminated through any public channel either. The main communication platform was email.

Feedback to the participants regarding the provided comments/recommendations was given only verbally with justifications whether recommendations would be considered or not. The feedback was mainly about clarifying various issues.

Most of the participants of the consultation were actively involved in the process of public discussions. More than half of the provided comments were reflected in the policy document. It should be noted that no other feedback on the document was collected, except for the one made during the physical meeting (consultation). The strategy development process did not meet the minimum criteria for diversity of participants, as the process was not adapted to the needs of vulnerable minorities and diversity of participants was not ensured. From the perspective of the coordination agency, public involvement and interest was very low.

At the time of research, the summary report of public consultations was not available publicly on the agency’s website or Legislative Herald of Georgia.

Indicator/Criterion	Score
Overall score for criteria 1: Accessibility	0.3
1.1. Public consultation announcement was disseminated through at least one public channel.	0
1.2. Policy document and/or policy brief was made publicly available	0
1.3. Policy document and/or policy brief is available in simple language, easily comprehensible format and can be understood by those without field expertise.	2
1.4. The public announcement was accessible for major ethnic minority groups living in Georgia (accessible in Azeri, Armenian and Abkhaz languages)	0
1.5. Policy document and/or policy brief was accessible for major ethnic minority groups living in Georgia (accessible in Azeri, Armenian and Abkhaz languages)	0
1.6. The public announcement was adapted to the needs of people with disabilities (e.g. Braille code, audio version, sign language translation etc.)	0
1.7. Policy document and/or policy brief was adapted to the needs of people with disabilities (e.g. Braille code, audio version, sign language translation etc.)	0
Overall score for criteria 2: Openness	1.0
2.1. Any interested person or organization (CSOs, private sector organizations, ordinary citizens etc.) has an opportunity to participate in public consultation	1

Indicator/Criterion	Score
2.2. All interested or engaged persons/organizations have an opportunity to comment/provide feedback on the policy document	1
Overall score for criteria 3: Effectiveness of process	0.0
3.1. The public announcement was disseminated at least one week before the start of the public consultation process.	0
3.2. Information in the public announcement is sufficient (corresponds with the recommendations outlined in Chapter 3.5 of the Policy Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation Handbook)	0
3.3. Public consultations were conducted in more than one format	0
3.4. More than one mechanism for feedback collection was ensured	0
3.5. Sufficient time (depending on the consultation format) was allocated for the provision of feedback	0
3.6. Public consultations were conducted at minimum one stage of the policy development cycle	0
Overall score for criteria 4: Accountability	3.0
4.1. Summary report on public consultations comprehensively describes the goals, process, and results of the public consultations.	N/A
4.2. The information about accepted, partially accepted, and rejected comments was provided to the feedback authors.	3
4.3. The justified explanation was provided to the feedback authors.	3
4.4. Summary report on public consultations is publicly available.	N/A
Overall score for criteria 5: Diversity of participants	0
5.1. In the public consultation planning process, specific steps have been taken to ensure the active engagement of both genders in the consultations.	0
5.2. In the public consultation planning process, specific steps have been taken for the identification and engagement of vulnerable minority groups.	0
5.3. The coordination agency keeps records of the representatives of vulnerable minority groups engaged in the public consultations.	0
5.4. The public consultation process is adapted to the needs of vulnerable minority groups (diverse needs of people with disabilities, ethnic minority groups etc.)	0
Total (average) score on the first five criteria	0.86
Overall score for criteria 6: Public engagement/ interest	0
6.1. Number of CSOs/individuals engaged	0
6.2. Number of unique feedback contributors	0
6.3. Coordination agencies' evaluation of civil society engagement	N/A
6.4. Relevance of the comments provided by the civil society as assessed by the coordination agency	N/A
6.5. Timely provision of feedback	N/A

Capital Market Development Strategy of Georgia for 2023-2028 and its Action Plan 2023-2024

The Capital Market Development Strategy of Georgia for 2023-2028 and its Action Plan 2023-2024 partially met the minimum requirements defined by PCI. (total score - 1.77/3).

Participation in the consultation process was open to all interested persons, as the information was disseminated through a public channel, namely, through the agency's website with a package of documents and a link to the meeting attached. In addition to the opportunity to participate in the meeting, an interested person could also provide feedback via email, as the contact information of the responsible person for the strategy was included in the public consultation announcement.

Despite the availability of information about the consultations, the group of participants was homogeneous and included experts, international organizations, donors, representatives of various public agencies, and the private sector, all of whom represent the target segment of the strategy.

All interested parties had the opportunity to provide feedback. The agency used various mechanisms to receive feedback. This included: recording comments at the meeting, using an online questionnaire, and sharing an Excel document where each agency had its own field for comments.

The strategy development process did not meet the criteria for the diversity of participants, as the process was not adapted to the needs of vulnerable minorities and the diversity of participants was not ensured.

In general, according to the evaluation of the coordination agency, the main challenge in the consultation process was related to the tight deadlines, the participants had a short period to familiarize themselves with the strategy (1 week) and they also had a short period for providing written feedback (1 week).

Indicator/Criterion	Score
Overall score for criteria 1: Accessibility	1.0
1.1. Public consultation announcement was disseminated through at least one public channel.	1
1.2. Policy document and/or policy brief was made publicly available	3
1.3. Policy document and/or policy brief is available in simple language, easily comprehensible format and can be understood by those without field expertise.	3
1.4. The public announcement was accessible for major ethnic minority groups living in Georgia (accessible in Azeri, Armenian and Abkhaz languages)	0
1.5. Policy document and/or policy brief was accessible for major ethnic minority groups living in Georgia (accessible in Azeri, Armenian and Abkhaz languages)	0
1.6. The public announcement was adapted to the needs of people with disabilities (e.g. Braille code, audio version, sign language translation etc.)	0
1.7. Policy document and/or policy brief was adapted to the needs of people with disabilities (e.g. Braille code, audio version, sign language translation etc.)	0
Overall score for criteria 2: Openness	3.0
2.1. Any interested person or organization (CSOs, private sector organizations, ordinary citizens etc.) has an opportunity to participate in public consultation	3

Indicator/Criterion	Score
2.2. All interested or engaged persons/organizations have an opportunity to comment/provide feedback on the policy document	3
Overall score for criteria 3: Effectiveness of process	1.8
3.1. The public announcement was disseminated at least one week before the start of the public consultation process.	1
3.2. Information in the public announcement is sufficient (corresponds with the recommendations outlined in Chapter 3.5 of the Policy Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation Handbook)	2
3.3. Public consultations were conducted in more than one format	2
3.4. More than one mechanism for feedback collection was ensured	3
3.5. Sufficient time (depending on the consultation format) was allocated for the provision of feedback	1
3.6. Public consultations were conducted at minimum one stage of the policy development cycle	2
Overall score for criteria 4: Accountability	3.0
4.1. Summary report on public consultations comprehensively describes the goals, process, and results of the public consultations.	3
4.2. The information about accepted, partially accepted, and rejected comments was provided to the feedback authors.	3
4.3. The justified explanation was provided to the feedback authors.	3
4.4. Summary report on public consultations is publicly available.	3
Overall score for criteria 5: Diversity of participants	0
5.1. In the public consultation planning process, specific steps have been taken to ensure the active engagement of both genders in the consultations.	0
5.2. In the public consultation planning process, specific steps have been taken for the identification and engagement of vulnerable minority groups.	0
5.3. The coordination agency keeps records of the representatives of vulnerable minority groups engaged in the public consultations.	0
5.4. The public consultation process is adapted to the needs of vulnerable minority groups (diverse needs of people with disabilities, ethnic minority groups etc.)	0
Total (average) score on the first five criteria	1.77
Overall score for criteria 6: Public engagement/ interest	1.75
6.1. Number of CSOs/individuals engaged	3
6.2. Number of unique feedback contributors	3
6.3. Coordination agencies' evaluation of civil society engagement	1
6.4. Relevance of the comments provided by the civil society as assessed by the coordination agency	N/A
6.5. Timely provision of feedback	0

Public Administration Reform Strategy for 2023-2026 and its Action Plan 2023-2024

Public Administration Reform Strategy 2023-2026 and its Action Plan 2023-2024 partially met the minimum requirements defined by PCI (total score - 1.84/3).

Overall, the strategy enjoyed high level of openness - both the public consultation announcement and the policy document were publicly available. Accordingly, organizations working on any topic, as well as any interested person, had the opportunity to provide feedback. For the collection of feedback, the coordination agency used two methods: e-mail and an online questionnaire. It should be noted that the public consultation announcement was distributed through only 1 public channel - social network.

The strategy development process did not meet the criteria for the diversity of participants, as the process was not adapted to the needs of vulnerable minorities and the diversity of participants was not ensured.

Regarding accountability, the summary report of the public consultations presented by the coordination agency is detailed and contains complete information about the considered, partially considered, and not considered comments.

At the time of research, the summary report of public consultations was not available publicly on the agency's website or Legislative Herald of Georgia.

Indicator/Criterion	Score
Overall score for criteria 1: Accessibility	0.9
1.1. Public consultation announcement was disseminated through at least one public channel.	1
1.2. Policy document and/or policy brief was made publicly available	3
1.3. Policy document and/or policy brief is available in simple language, easily comprehensible format and can be understood by those without field expertise.	2
1.4. The public announcement was accessible for major ethnic minority groups living in Georgia (accessible in Azeri, Armenian and Abkhaz languages)	0
1.5. Policy document and/or policy brief was accessible for major ethnic minority groups living in Georgia (accessible in Azeri, Armenian and Abkhaz languages)	0
1.6. The public announcement was adapted to the needs of people with disabilities (e.g. Braille code, audio version, sign language translation etc.)	0
1.7. Policy document and/or policy brief was adapted to the needs of people with disabilities (e.g. Braille code, audio version, sign language translation etc.)	0
Overall score for criteria 2: Openness	3.0
2.1. Any interested person or organization (CSOs, private sector organizations, ordinary citizens etc.) has an opportunity to participate in public consultation	3
2.2. All interested or engaged persons/organizations have an opportunity to comment/provide feedback on the policy document	3
Overall score for criteria 3: Effectiveness of process	2.8
3.1. The public announcement was disseminated at least one week before the start of the public consultation process.	3

Indicator/Criterion	Score
3.2. Information in the public announcement is sufficient (corresponds with the recommendations outlined in Chapter 3.5 of the Policy Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation Handbook)	3
3.3. Public consultations were conducted in more than one format	3
3.4. More than one mechanism for feedback collection was ensured	3
3.5. Sufficient time (depending on the consultation format) was allocated for the provision of feedback	3
3.6. Public consultations were conducted at minimum one stage of the policy development cycle	2
Overall score for criteria 4: Accountability	2.3
4.1. Summary report on public consultations comprehensively describes the goals, process, and results of the public consultations.	3
4.2. The information about accepted, partially accepted, and rejected comments was provided to the feedback authors.	3
4.3. The justified explanation was provided to the feedback authors.	1
4.4. Summary report on public consultations is publicly available.	2
Overall score for criteria 5: Diversity of participants	0.25
5.1. In the public consultation planning process, specific steps have been taken to ensure the active engagement of both genders in the consultations.	1
5.2. In the public consultation planning process, specific steps have been taken for the identification and engagement of vulnerable minority groups.	0
5.3. The coordination agency keeps records of the representatives of vulnerable minority groups engaged in the public consultations.	0
5.4. The public consultation process is adapted to the needs of vulnerable minority groups (diverse needs of people with disabilities, ethnic minority groups etc.)	0
Total (average) score on the first five criteria	1.84
Overall score for criteria 6: Public engagement/ interest	3.00
6.1. Number of CSOs/individuals engaged	3
6.2. Number of unique feedback contributors	3
6.3. Coordination agencies' evaluation of civil society engagement	3
6.4. Relevance of the comments provided by the civil society as assessed by the coordination agency	3
6.5. Timely provision of feedback	3

Vocational Education Strategy of Georgia for 2022-2027 and its Action Plan 2022-2024

The Vocational Education Strategy of Georgia for 2022-2027 and its Action Plan for 2023-2024 met most of the PCI requirements and received a total of 2.2/3.

It should be noted that the criteria for openness, accountability, and public engagement/interest met all requirements and were evaluated with the maximum score. Information about the public consultation, along with draft versions of the strategy and action plan, was disseminated through the Ministry's official website and Facebook page, which means that any citizen and an interested person could attend the meeting and comment. In addition, meetings were held with thematic groups. The consultations were conducted in interactive format and important comments were received, mostly from the representatives of the thematic groups. A joint meeting was organized to give feedback to public consultation participants whether their comments or recommendations had been taken into account and, if not, why. The meeting was held online format and anyone could attend.

The lowest score was recorded for the accessibility criterion (1.1/3); Although information about the public consultation was posted on the Ministry's official website, the strategy and the consultation process itself were not adapted to the needs of vulnerable minority groups (the policy document and/or its brief was not translated into minority language or adapted for persons with disability). No specific steps were taken in this direction, although the interests of vulnerable groups were taken into account when working on the document itself. The agency also consulted a gender expert, whose recommendations were taken into account when working on the policy document.

Indicator/Criterion	Score
Overall score for criteria 1: Accessibility	1.1
1.1. Public consultation announcement was disseminated through at least one public channel.	2
1.2. Policy document and/or policy brief was made publicly available	3
1.3. Policy document and/or policy brief is available in simple language, easily comprehensible format and can be understood by those without field expertise.	3
1.4. The public announcement was accessible for major ethnic minority groups living in Georgia (accessible in Azeri, Armenian and Abkhaz languages)	0
1.5. Policy document and/or policy brief was accessible for major ethnic minority groups living in Georgia (accessible in Azeri, Armenian and Abkhaz languages)	0
1.6. The public announcement was adapted to the needs of people with disabilities (e.g. Braille code, audio version, sign language translation etc.)	0
1.7. Policy document and/or policy brief was adapted to the needs of people with disabilities (e.g. Braille code, audio version, sign language translation etc.)	0
Overall score for criteria 2: Openness	3.0
2.1. Any interested person or organization (CSOs, private sector organizations, ordinary citizens etc.) has an opportunity to participate in public consultation	3
2.2. All interested or engaged persons/organizations have an opportunity to comment/provide feedback on the policy document	3

Indicator/Criterion	Score
Overall score for criteria 3: Effectiveness of process	2.8
3.1. The public announcement was disseminated at least one week before the start of the public consultation process.	3
3.2. Information in the public announcement is sufficient (corresponds with the recommendations outlined in Chapter 3.5 of the Policy Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation Handbook)	3
3.3. Public consultations were conducted in more than one format	2
3.4. More than one mechanism for feedback collection was ensured	3
3.5. Sufficient time (depending on the consultation format) was allocated for the provision of feedback	3
3.6. Public consultations were conducted at minimum one stage of the policy development cycle	3
Overall score for criteria 4: Accountability	3
4.1. Summary report on public consultations comprehensively describes the goals, process, and results of the public consultations.	3
4.2. The information about accepted, partially accepted, and rejected comments was provided to the feedback authors.	3
4.3. The justified explanation was provided to the feedback authors.	3
4.4. Summary report on public consultations is publicly available.	N/A
Overall score for criteria 5: Diversity of participants	1.25
5.1. In the public consultation planning process, specific steps have been taken to ensure the active engagement of both genders in the consultations.	3
5.2. In the public consultation planning process, specific steps have been taken for the identification and engagement of vulnerable minority groups.	2
5.3. The coordination agency keeps records of the representatives of vulnerable minority groups engaged in the public consultations.	0
5.4. The public consultation process is adapted to the needs of vulnerable minority groups (diverse needs of people with disabilities, ethnic minority groups etc.)	0
Total (average) score on the first five criteria	2.2
Overall score for criteria 6: Public engagement/ interest	3
6.1. Number of CSOs/individuals engaged	3
6.2. Number of unique feedback contributors	3
6.3. Coordination agencies' evaluation of civil society engagement	3
6.4. Relevance of the comments provided by the civil society as assessed by the coordination agency	3
6.5. Timely provision of feedback	3

National Road Safety Strategy for 2022 – 2025 and its Action Plan 2022-2023

The National Road Safety Strategy for 2022-2025 and its Action Plan for 2022-2023 partially met the requirements of PCI and received an above-average score (1.78/3). The highest score was given to the criterion of accountability (2.5/3), and the lowest to the diversity of participants (0.25/3). Information about the public consultation, the strategy and the action plan were sent to the profile groups by email in advance, so that they could read and make comments before the meeting. During the public consultation meeting, the coordination agency presented the strategy and action plan, and discussed the recommendations/comments provided by the participants. Participants were informed which recommendations were taken into account and which were not. The strategy was also posted on the official website of the Ministry, where any interested person could comment following the specified instructions. However, as the coordination agency noted, the citizens did not show much interest.

In the process of planning and implementation of public consultations, the agency did not take specific steps to engage vulnerable minority groups (the policy document and/or its brief were not available in ethnic minority language or adapted to the needs of people with disabilities).

Indicator/Criterion	Score
Overall score for criteria 1: Accessibility	1.0
1.1. Public consultation announcement was disseminated through at least one public channel.	1
1.2. Policy document and/or policy brief was made publicly available	3
1.3. Policy document and/or policy brief is available in simple language, easily comprehensible format and can be understood by those without field expertise.	3
1.4. The public announcement was accessible for major ethnic minority groups living in Georgia (accessible in Azeri, Armenian and Abkhaz languages)	0
1.5. Policy document and/or policy brief was accessible for major ethnic minority groups living in Georgia (accessible in Azeri, Armenian and Abkhaz languages)	0
1.6. The public announcement was adapted to the needs of people with disabilities (e.g. Braille code, audio version, sign language translation etc.)	0
1.7. Policy document and/or policy brief was adapted to the needs of people with disabilities (e.g. Braille code, audio version, sign language translation etc.)	0
Overall score for criteria 2: Openness	2.5
2.1. Any interested person or organization (CSOs, private sector organizations, ordinary citizens etc.) has an opportunity to participate in public consultation	2
2.2. All interested or engaged persons/organizations have an opportunity to comment/provide feedback on the policy document	3
Overall score for criteria 3: Effectiveness of process	2.2
3.1. The public announcement was disseminated at least one week before the start of the public consultation process.	3
3.2. Information in the public announcement is sufficient (corresponds with the recommendations outlined in Chapter 3.5 of the Policy Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation Handbook)	3
3.3. Public consultations were conducted in more than one format	1
3.4. More than one mechanism for feedback collection was ensured	2

Indicator/Criterion	Score
3.5. Sufficient time (depending on the consultation format) was allocated for the provision of feedback	3
3.6. Public consultations were conducted at minimum one stage of the policy development cycle	1
Overall score for criteria 4: Accountability	3
4.1. Summary report on public consultations comprehensively describes the goals, process, and results of the public consultations.	3
4.2. The information about accepted, partially accepted, and rejected comments was provided to the feedback authors.	3
4.3. The justified explanation was provided to the feedback authors.	3
4.4 Summary report on public consultations is publicly available.	3
Overall score for criteria 5: Diversity of participants	0.25
5.1. In the public consultation planning process, specific steps have been taken to ensure the active engagement of both genders in the consultations.	1
5.2. In the public consultation planning process, specific steps have been taken for the identification and engagement of vulnerable minority groups.	0
5.3. The coordination agency keeps records of the representatives of vulnerable minority groups engaged in the public consultations.	0
5.4. The public consultation process is adapted to the needs of vulnerable minority groups (diverse needs of people with disabilities, ethnic minority groups etc.)	0
Total (average) score on the first five criteria	1.78
Overall score for criteria 6: Public engagement/ interest	2.5
6.1. Number of CSOs/individuals engaged	3
6.2. Number of unique feedback contributors	N/A
6.3. Coordination agencies' evaluation of civil society engagement	2
6.4. Relevance of the comments provided by the civil society as assessed by the coordination agency	2
6.5. Timely provision of feedback	3

National Tuberculosis Control Strategy for 2023-2025 and its Action Plan 2023-2025

National Tuberculosis Control Strategy 2023-2025 and its Action Plan 2023-2025 met most of the PCI requirements and received a total of 2.2/3 points. A maximum of three points was recorded for the criteria of openness, diversity of participants and community engagement/interest. The accessibility criterion received the lowest score (0.7/3).

Information about the consultation was sent to the profile groups one week in advance, together with the policy document. Participants had about two weeks to submit comments and recommendations, although this period was not strictly fixed and recommendations were accepted after two weeks as well. Feedback regarding which comments and recommendations were taken or not taken into account was sent individually to the participants. In addition, some participants made comments on the policy document itself, on which the agency also provided feedback.

It should be noted that the development of the national strategy for tuberculosis control and its action plan was a rather complex and specific process, because it also took into account the protocol defined by the international standards. The protocol defines, for example, who can be involved in the discussions - the main stakeholders, representatives from governmental and non-governmental sector; key target groups directly affected by these problems. There is a protocol that specifies the percentage of these groups that should be represented in the discussion process. Considering this, the criterion of diversity of participants was evaluated with a high score. However, regarding accessibility, it should also be noted that the policy documents were not accessible to vulnerable minority groups (the policy document and/or its brief were not available in ethnic minority language or adapted to the needs of people with disabilities). The consultation process was also not tailored to the interests of specific groups, although as the agency noted, there was no need for this during the process.

The summary report of public consultations had not yet been completed during the research process, thus, this criterion was not assessed.

Indicator/Criterion	Score
Overall score for criteria 1: Accessibility	0.7
1.1. Public consultation announcement was disseminated through at least one public channel.	1
1.2. Policy document and/or policy brief was made publicly available	1
1.3. Policy document and/or policy brief is available in simple language, easily comprehensible format and can be understood by those without field expertise.	3
1.4. The public announcement was accessible for major ethnic minority groups living in Georgia (accessible in Azeri, Armenian and Abkhaz languages)	0
1.5. Policy document and/or policy brief was accessible for major ethnic minority groups living in Georgia (accessible in Azeri, Armenian and Abkhaz languages)	0
1.6. The public announcement was adapted to the needs of people with disabilities (e.g. Braille code, audio version, sign language translation etc.)	0
1.7. Policy document and/or policy brief was adapted to the needs of people with disabilities (e.g. Braille code, audio version, sign language translation etc.)	0
Overall score for criteria 2: Openness	3
2.1. Any interested person or organization (CSOs, private sector organizations, ordinary citizens etc.) has an opportunity to participate in public consultation	3
2.2. All interested or engaged persons/organizations have an opportunity to comment/provide feedback on the policy document	3
Overall score for criteria 3: Effectiveness of process	2.0
3.1. The public announcement was disseminated at least one week before the start of the public consultation process.	1
3.2. Information in the public announcement is sufficient (corresponds with the recommendations outlined in Chapter 3.5 of the Policy Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation Handbook)	N/A
3.3. Public consultations were conducted in more than one format	2
3.4. More than one mechanism for feedback collection was ensured	2
3.5. Sufficient time (depending on the consultation format) was allocated for the provision of feedback	2
3.6. Public consultations were conducted at minimum one stage of the policy development cycle	3

Indicator/Criterion	Score
Overall score for criteria 4: Accountability	N/A
4.1. Summary report on public consultations comprehensively describes the goals, process, and results of the public consultations.	N/A
4.2. The information about accepted, partially accepted, and rejected comments was provided to the feedback authors.	N/A
4.3. The justified explanation was provided to the feedback authors.	N/A
4.4. Summary report on public consultations is publicly available.	N/A
Overall score for criteria 5: Diversity of participants	3.00
5.1. In the public consultation planning process, specific steps have been taken to ensure the active engagement of both genders in the consultations.	3
5.2. In the public consultation planning process, specific steps have been taken for the identification and engagement of vulnerable minority groups.	3
5.3. The coordination agency keeps records of the representatives of vulnerable minority groups engaged in the public consultations.	3
5.4. The public consultation process is adapted to the needs of vulnerable minority groups (diverse needs of people with disabilities, ethnic minority groups etc.)	N/A
Total (average) score on the first five criteria	2.2
Overall score for criteria 6: Public engagement/ interest	3
6.1. Number of CSOs/individuals engaged	3
6.2. Number of unique feedback contributors	3
6.3. Coordination agencies' evaluation of civil society engagement	3
6.4. Relevance of the comments provided by the civil society as assessed by the coordination agency	3
6.5. Timely provision of feedback	3

National Action Plan for 2022-2024 on Implementation of the UN Security Council Resolutions on Women, Peace, and Security

The National Action Plan for 2022-2024 for the Implementation of the UN Security Council Resolutions on Women, Peace and Security met more than half of the PCI requirements and received a total score of 1.95/3. The criterion of openness was evaluated with the highest score (3/3), while zero score was given for the criterion of diversity of participants.

The policy document was sent electronically to the profile groups for comments. At the same time, the action plan was also posted on the official website, where any interested person had the opportunity to comment. According to the coordination agency, the comments and recommendations received from the website were so few that it is difficult to assess their value. However, the comments received from profile groups were important. The participants provided recommendations on time. It is worth noting that according to the consultation participants, they did not receive any feedback regarding the extent to which their comments were taken into account and reflected in the policy document. The public consultation summary report contains information regarding the considered/not considered recommendations, some of those also include substantiation.

The coordination agency did not take specific, targeted steps regarding the involvement of vulnerable minority groups in the process (the policy document and/or its short version was not available for the main ethnic groups living in Georgia - translated into Armenian and Azerbaijani languages, or adapted for persons with disabilities). The coordination agency mentioned that their official website has a voice engine and is adapted for persons for vision impairment. However, they cannot say with certainty, whether this function would be relevant for adapting the policy document to the needs of people with vision disability.

Indicator/Criterion	Score
Overall score for criteria 1: Accessibility	1.6
1.1. Public consultation announcement was disseminated through at least one public channel.	2
1.2. Policy document and/or policy brief was made publicly available	3
1.3. Policy document and/or policy brief is available in simple language, easily comprehensible format and can be understood by those without field expertise.	3
1.4. The public announcement was accessible for major ethnic minority groups living in Georgia (accessible in Azeri, Armenian and Abkhaz languages)	0
1.5. Policy document and/or policy brief was accessible for major ethnic minority groups living in Georgia (accessible in Azeri, Armenian and Abkhaz languages)	0
1.6. The public announcement was adapted to the needs of people with disabilities (e.g. Braille code, audio version, sign language translation etc.)	N/A
1.7. Policy document and/or policy brief was adapted to the needs of people with disabilities (e.g. Braille code, audio version, sign language translation etc.)	N/A
Overall score for criteria 2: Openness	3
2.1. Any interested person or organization (CSOs, private sector organizations, ordinary citizens etc.) has an opportunity to participate in public consultation	3
2.2. All interested or engaged persons/organizations have an opportunity to comment/provide feedback on the policy document	3
Overall score for criteria 3: Effectiveness of process	2.7
3.1. The public announcement was disseminated at least one week before the start of the public consultation process.	3
3.2. Information in the public announcement is sufficient (corresponds with the recommendations outlined in Chapter 3.5 of the Policy Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation Handbook)	3
3.3. Public consultations were conducted in more than one format	3
3.4. More than one mechanism for feedback collection was ensured	3
3.5. Sufficient time (depending on the consultation format) was allocated for the provision of feedback	2
3.6. Public consultations were conducted at minimum one stage of the policy development cycle	2
Overall score for criteria 4: Accountability	2.5
4.1. Summary report on public consultations comprehensively describes the goals, process, and results of the public consultations.	3
4.2. The information about accepted, partially accepted, and rejected comments was provided to the feedback authors.	3
4.3. The justified explanation was provided to the feedback authors.	1
4.4. Summary report on public consultations is publicly available.	3

Indicator/Criterion	Score
Overall score for criteria 5: Diversity of participants	0.0
5.1. In the public consultation planning process, specific steps have been taken to ensure the active engagement of both genders in the consultations.	0
5.2. In the public consultation planning process, specific steps have been taken for the identification and engagement of vulnerable minority groups.	0
5.3. The coordination agency keeps records of the representatives of vulnerable minority groups engaged in the public consultations.	0
5.4. The public consultation process is adapted to the needs of vulnerable minority groups (diverse needs of people with disabilities, ethnic minority groups etc.)	N/A
Total (average) score on the first five criteria	1.95
Overall score for criteria 6: Public engagement/ interest	2.4
6.1. Number of CSOs/individuals engaged	3
6.2. Number of unique feedback contributors	1
6.3. Coordination agencies' evaluation of civil society engagement	2
6.4. Relevance of the comments provided by the civil society as assessed by the coordination agency	3
6.5. Timely provision of feedback	3

National Action Plan for 2022-2024 on the Measures to be Implemented for Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence and Protection of Victims/Survivors

The National Action Plan for 2022-2024 on the Measures to be Implemented for Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence and Protection of Victims/Survivors met most of the PCI requirements and received average score of 2/3. The criterion of openness was evaluated with the maximum score (3/3), while the diversity of the participants received zero.

The policy document was sent electronically to the profile groups for comments. At the same time, the action plan was also posted on the official website, where any interested person had the opportunity to comment. According to the coordination agency, the comments and recommendations received from the website were so few that it is difficult to assess their value. However, the comments received from profile groups were important. The participants provided recommendations on time. It is worth noting that according to the consultation participants, they did not receive any feedback regarding the extent to which their comments were taken into account and reflected in the policy document. The public consultation summary report contains information regarding the considered/not considered recommendations, some of those also include substantiation.

The coordination agency did not take specific, targeted steps regarding the involvement of vulnerable minority groups in the process (the policy document and/or its short version was not available for the main ethnic groups living in Georgia - translated into Armenian and Azerbaijani languages, or adapted for persons with disabilities). The coordination agency mentioned that their official website has a voice engine and is adapted for persons for vision impairment. However, they cannot say with certainty, whether this function would be relevant for adapting the policy document to the needs of people with vision disability.

Indicator/Criterion	Score
Overall score for criteria 1: Accessibility	1.6
1.1. Public consultation announcement was disseminated through at least one public channel.	2
1.2. Policy document and/or policy brief was made publicly available	3
1.3. Policy document and/or policy brief is available in simple language, easily comprehensible format and can be understood by those without field expertise.	3
1.4. The public announcement was accessible for major ethnic minority groups living in Georgia (accessible in Azeri, Armenian and Abkhaz languages)	0
1.5. Policy document and/or policy brief was accessible for major ethnic minority groups living in Georgia (accessible in Azeri, Armenian and Abkhaz languages)	0
1.6. The public announcement was adapted to the needs of people with disabilities (e.g. Braille code, audio version, sign language translation etc.)	N/A
1.7. Policy document and/or policy brief was adapted to the needs of people with disabilities (e.g. Braille code, audio version, sign language translation etc.)	N/A
Overall score for criteria 2: Openness	3
2.1. Any interested person or organization (CSOs, private sector organizations, ordinary citizens etc.) has an opportunity to participate in public consultation	3
2.2. All interested or engaged persons/organizations have an opportunity to comment/provide feedback on the policy document	3
Overall score for criteria 3: Effectiveness of process	2.7
3.1. The public announcement was disseminated at least one week before the start of the public consultation process.	3
3.2. Information in the public announcement is sufficient (corresponds with the recommendations outlined in Chapter 3.5 of the Policy Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation Handbook)	3
3.3. Public consultations were conducted in more than one format	3
3.4. More than one mechanism for feedback collection was ensured	3
3.5. Sufficient time (depending on the consultation format) was allocated for the provision of feedback	2
3.6. Public consultations were conducted at minimum one stage of the policy development cycle	2
Overall score for criteria 4: Accountability	2.75
4.1. Summary report on public consultations comprehensively describes the goals, process, and results of the public consultations.	3
4.2. The information about accepted, partially accepted, and rejected comments was provided to the feedback authors.	3
4.3. The justified explanation was provided to the feedback authors.	2
4.4. Summary report on public consultations is publicly available.	3
Overall score for criteria 5: Diversity of participants	0.0
5.1. In the public consultation planning process, specific steps have been taken to ensure the active engagement of both genders in the consultations.	0
5.2. In the public consultation planning process, specific steps have been taken for the identification and engagement of vulnerable minority groups.	0
5.3. The coordination agency keeps records of the representatives of vulnerable minority groups engaged in the public consultations.	0

Indicator/Criterion	Score
5.4. The public consultation process is adapted to the needs of vulnerable minority groups (diverse needs of people with disabilities, ethnic minority groups etc.)	N/A
Total (average) score on the first five criteria	2.0
Overall score for criteria 6: Public engagement/ interest	2.6
6.1. Number of CSOs/individuals engaged	3
6.2. Number of unique feedback contributors	2
6.3. Coordination agencies' evaluation of civil society engagement	2
6.4. Relevance of the comments provided by the civil society as assessed by the coordination agency	3
6.5. Timely provision of feedback	3

Fourth National Environmental Action Programme of Georgia for 2022-2026

The public consultations held on the Fourth National Environmental Action Programme of Georgia for 2022-2026 (NEAP 4) generally met the minimum requirements defined by PCI (total score - 1.86/3).

The policy received the highest score on the criteria of Openness (3/3), Accountability (3/3) and Public Engagement/Interest (3/3). It should be noted that the policy document and the announcement about public consultations were disseminated through public channels and all interested organizations and ordinary citizens could participate, which contributed to the openness of the process. Authors of comments/recommendations were provided with justified feedback, and the public consultation summary report met the highest standards defined by PCI.

From the perspective of the coordination agency, public engagement and interest was high, most of the consultation participants were actively involved in the process and provided timely feedback to the coordination agency. The criterion Accessibility criterion was evaluated with 1.1/3 points, while the Effectiveness of the Process with 2.2/3 points. The public announcement was disseminated a reasonable time before the consultation, and contained exhaustive information. Public consultations were conducted in two formats. Two mechanisms for feedback provision were offered and sufficient time was allocated for the purpose. Public consultation was conducted at the last stage of policy development only. Out of six criteria, this strategy was evaluated with 0 points on the Diversity of Participants criterion. Accordingly, in the planning process of the public consultation, the agency did not take any special steps to identify vulnerable minority groups and include them in the consultation. Overall, however, the public consultation process was effective.

Indicator/Criterion	Score
Overall score for criteria 1: Accessibility	1.1
1.1. Public consultation announcement was disseminated through at least one public channel.	2
1.2. Policy document and/or policy brief was made publicly available	3
1.3. Policy document and/or policy brief is available in simple language, easily comprehensible format and can be understood by those without field expertise.	3
1.4. The public announcement was accessible for major ethnic minority groups living in Georgia (accessible in Azeri, Armenian and Abkhaz languages)	0
1.5. Policy document and/or policy brief was accessible for major ethnic minority groups living in Georgia (accessible in Azeri, Armenian and Abkhaz languages)	0
1.6. The public announcement was adapted to the needs of people with disabilities (e.g. Braille code, audio version, sign language translation etc.)	0
1.7. Policy document and/or policy brief was adapted to the needs of people with disabilities (e.g. Braille code, audio version, sign language translation etc.)	0
Overall score for criteria 2: Openness	3
2.1. Any interested person or organization (CSOs, private sector organizations, ordinary citizens etc.) has an opportunity to participate in public consultation	3
2.2. All interested or engaged persons/organizations have an opportunity to comment/provide feedback on the policy document	3
Overall score for criteria 3: Effectiveness of process	2.2
3.1. The public announcement was disseminated at least one week before the start of the public consultation process.	3
3.2. Information in the public announcement is sufficient (corresponds with the recommendations outlined in Chapter 3.5 of the Policy Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation Handbook)	3
3.3. Public consultations were conducted in more than one format	2
3.4. More than one mechanism for feedback collection was ensured	2
3.5. Sufficient time (depending on the consultation format) was allocated for the provision of feedback	2
3.6. Public consultations were conducted at minimum one stage of the policy development cycle	1
Overall score for criteria 4: Accountability	3.0
4.1. Summary report on public consultations comprehensively describes the goals, process, and results of the public consultations.	3
4.2. The information about accepted, partially accepted, and rejected comments was provided to the feedback authors.	3
4.3. The justified explanation was provided to the feedback authors.	3
4.4. Summary report on public consultations is publicly available.	3
Overall score for criteria 5: Diversity of participants	0.0
5.1. In the public consultation planning process, specific steps have been taken to ensure the active engagement of both genders in the consultations.	0
5.2. In the public consultation planning process, specific steps have been taken for the identification and engagement of vulnerable minority groups.	0

Indicator/Criterion	Score
5.3. The coordination agency keeps records of the representatives of vulnerable minority groups engaged in the public consultations.	0
5.4. The public consultation process is adapted to the needs of vulnerable minority groups (diverse needs of people with disabilities, ethnic minority groups etc.)	0
Total (average) score on the first five criteria	1.86
Overall score for criteria 6: Public engagement/ interest	3
6.1. Number of CSOs/individuals engaged	3
6.2. Number of unique feedback contributors	3
6.3. Coordination agencies' evaluation of civil society engagement	3
6.4. Relevance of the comments provided by the civil society as assessed by the coordination agency	3
6.5. Timely provision of feedback	3

