



RESEARCH REPORT

**Digital competencies
of women of Gagauzia.
Challenges
and prospects**

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I INTRODUCTION

The research is devoted to study of the level of digital competencies of women in Gagauzia and its impact on women's competitiveness in the regional labor market.

To study this issue, there were conducted a series of focus groups and in-depth interviews with residents of Gagauzia aged 20 to 55 years. Among the respondents were, on the one hand, experts (representatives of government, educational organizations and various institutions for the regional development), and on the other - representatives of local population.

The respondents included people with different levels of education and social status, employed in different areas. The selection of experts was based on their high competencies in the field of digital literacy, as well as active public work aimed at improving the economic and social situation in the region.

The research conclusions and recommendations include aspects related to the current position of Gagauz women in the labor market, currently characterized by a high level of unemployment, the impact of digital competencies on the labor potential of women, as well as impact of digital skills on woman's position in the family.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The purpose of the study is to determine the impact of women's digital skills on their competitiveness in the labor market of Gagauzia, as well as to make recommendations for the development of digital competencies in women.

■ OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY:

- ☑ Determine the position of women in the labor market in Gagauzia
- ☑ Identify existing barriers to women's employment in Gagauzia
- ☑ Assess the prevalence of stereotypes regarding the position of women and men in the labor market
- ☑ Assess the prevalence of stereotypes regarding differences in the level of digital competencies among women and men
- ☑ Determine the perceived level of development of women's digital skills
- ☑ Identify the core digital skills women need to be successful in employment
- ☑ Identify the relationship between the level of domestic violence and the digital competencies and skills of women
- ☑ Assess awareness of digital skills development programs among the population (in general, women in particular)
- ☑ Determine the role of local authorities, NGOs and educational institutions in the formation of women's digital competencies

TARGET AUDIENCES OF THE STUDY

1. Men and women of Gagauzia aged 20 to 55 (employed / unemployed; living in the city / rural areas)
2. Experts: representatives of government departments, educational organizations, development institutions

RESEARCH METHODS AND SAMPLE SIZE

■ 7 focus groups (duration of the focus group is up to 2 hours):

- Women of Gagauzia aged 20 to 55 (employed, living in the city)
- Women of Gagauzia aged 20 to 55 (employed, living in the village)
- Women of Gagauzia aged 20 to 55 (employed, living in the village, working in the city)
- Women of Gagauzia aged 20 to 55 years (unemployed, living in the village)
- Female students of Gagauzia living in the city
- Young men of Gagauzia aged 20 to 25 (students/employed living in the city)
- Gagauz men aged 30 to 45 (employed)

■ 10 in-depth interviews (duration of the interview is 40-60 minutes):

- experts representing local authorities
- experts from the field of education
- experts representing NGOs
- representatives of the commercial sector (business)

RESULTS OF THE STUDY

1. Existing supportive measures of Gagauz women in matters of equal opportunities and increasing digital literacy

Over the past two decades, Moldova has achieved important milestones in the field of economic and social development, but some gender issues need to be addressed, such as violence against women, in the labor market.

Analyzing the policy of the Gagauzia region on the issues under study, several features can be distinguished. First, the region is characterized by low local initiative in resolving social issues. The political and administrative system is built as a clear vertical, where the key decisions are developed at the level of the Republic's top leadership, and from there it goes down to the regional level.

Despite the specifics of the region, a number of measures are being taken in Gagauzia that are demanded by civil society in relation to the gender aspect. These measures are:

- Adoption of the Conventions on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women;
- changes in regional legislation;
- joint initiatives with international organizations;
- research and study of the situation, collection of relevant statistical information in the region.

At the same time, it is important to note that the implementation of laws, educational work, organization of forums and other activities in the field of the gender agenda are carried out mainly through joint work with international organizations (UN), government representatives, and the media.

Despite the rather low involvement of the region in solving the gender related issues, representatives of the Gagauzia are actively involved in solving the problem of preventing domestic violence. This problem is under attention of both local and international organizations. The region is following the path of informing and educating the population, as well as establishing help centers for victims of violence.

World leaders and civil society organizations are paying attention to the problem of violence both in the workplace and in families. Analyzing the experience of combating violence against women in different countries, there could be identified several priority areas of work:

- studying the problem, public announcement of the results,
- amendments to federal legislation,
- support and counseling for women victims of violence,
- cooperation with public organizations/state institutions/NGOs,
- correctional work with violators,
- the international cooperation.

Issues related to the digital literacy gender gap in Gagauzia and in the Republic of Moldova are not a priority for these countries' leadership. In world practice, much more attention is paid to this topic, primarily by European countries. The best world practices include the following measures in relation to insufficient digital literacy of the population:

- providing citizens with access to equipment, software and tools for the effective use of digital systems;
- digitalization of the main areas of life (health care, education, public services, etc.);
- educational work with the population;
- putting cybersecurity issues on the political agenda.

Speaking about increasing the involvement of women in the digital economy, the focus of the implemented measures is on the following points:

- combating digital gender stereotypes;
- promotion of digital skills and education;
- Increasing the number of women in IT.

Solving the problems of gender inequality in European countries is one of the priorities. The European Parliament is actively involved in achieving equal rights for men and women and has a standing committee dealing with women's rights and gender equality. The actions of the European Union in this area are carried out in three directions:

- legislation on equality;
- integrating gender aspect in all policies);
- concrete actions aimed to improve the status of women.

The main issues for discussion are the significant gender pay gap; differences in the level of employment; underrepresentation of women in senior management, boards of directors and in politics.

2. Profile of study participants. Lifestyle, work experience

Among the population of Gagauzia there are women and men of various ages and social status. Usually, adult women have children (1-2 children). The age of the child is determined by the age of the woman. Women are employed in various fields - they work in education (teachers of schools and universities), tourism, budgetary organizations, journalism, and accounting. Working women note that they experienced difficulties in finding employment (especially during the covid-19 pandemic). For some women, careers were determined by family traditions (for example, music, pedagogy). Some women also have the experience of changing their field of activity: for example, from a teacher to a journalist.

Women living in rural areas are often employed in educational institutions. Many of unemployed women living in these territories also have experience of seasonal work “in the field” (harvesting), as well as experience of working abroad. Husbands of unemployed women often go abroad to work. The category of unemployed women in rural areas more often speaks of the difficulties of finding a main or part-time job.

Female students, as a rule, are studying in the field of pedagogy, economics. Some of them have part-time jobs combining education and work.

Young men often work in the field of IT, also combining it with university. Men over the age of 25 work in various fields - investments, industrial and agricultural sectors etc. They do not mention about difficulties with getting a needed job.

Hobbies, as a rule, are related to leisure with the family (including spending time with children and grandchildren), as well as reading, doing sports, watching movies and TV shows. For rural residents, the management of a household and farms is an important element of life.

Among the experts there are people involved in the development of the economic and social sphere of the region, who are also dealing with digital literacy's issues, supporting entrepreneurship etc. Experts work in the public sector (municipal council), at universities. Many have experience in the activities of NGOs, as well as of IT academies and IT companies and various programs to improve the digital literacy of the population of Gagauzia.

3. The modern labor market in Gagauzia and the status of women

■ GENERAL CHARACTERISTICS OF THE LABOR MARKET

Experts say there are predominance of small and medium-sized businesses in the region. According to experts, the main sectors of the region's economy are trade (40%), agriculture (20%), to a lesser extent - industry (10%), as well as transport (5%) and construction (4%).

The situation on the labor market is assessed by experts as problematic, primarily due to the high level of unemployment in the region. According to experts, the level of employment in Gagauzia is one of the lowest in Moldova. It is noted that the level of wages is also low, that leads to labor migration of the population to more economically developed countries of Europe. At the same time, residents of Gagauzia are usually employed in jobs requiring low qualifications in these countries (nurses, nannies, drivers). Experts agree that it is more problematic to travel to other countries during a COVID-19 pandemic, what affects reducing the income level of the population and leads to economic and social problems.

Key problems of the modern labor market in Gagauzia:

- Lack of jobs with high wages
- The covid-19 pandemic as a factor in reducing the number of jobs
- Labor migration of the population (leads to staff turnover)
- Low interest of people in work, taking into account the current level of wages
- Lack of qualified personnel in the labor market
- Informal employment, seasonal work and irregular income (harvesting)
- Lack of work in rural areas
- Paternalism (expectation that the work will be "given")
- Nepotism (employment with the help of relatives, friends)

"...the problems are related to the lack of professional education at the local level. There are very few people who go to higher or secondary specialized education and then want to work in their specialty. Most of them get education just to have a certificate paper" (interview with NGO project manager)

Experts note that against the backdrop of low wages, it is sometimes easier and more profitable to receive unemployment benefits, which are higher than the minimum (affordable) salary of a potential employee.

When assessing the level of unemployment in various target audiences, experts agree that the problem is not gender-based – it is difficult for both women and men to find a job. It is noted that unemployment is typical primarily for people with a low level of education, as well as

migrants. Some experts say about a higher unemployment rate among the young population, as well as among older women: against the backdrop of a “labor gap” during the maternity leave period, it is more difficult for women to get a job after a long break. At the same time, key factor of employment impossibility in all age and gender groups is the lack of education.

“What about employment and women... even now, when we travel around the country, we see women in villages, they basically do not even have a secondary education. And this really greatly reduces the chances of being competitive in the labor market” (interview with a Director of the Regional Center for Social Affairs)

There are also difficulties in employment of certain national minorities - Rom. The problem of employment is more typical for residents of rural areas.

Experts often spoke about a direct relationship between employment and the level of digital literacy - this is typical, first of all, for the older age group (40+): in the absence of digital competencies, it is more difficult for any resident of Gagauzia to get a job.

“...according to my observations, I see that this is, indeed, the person who owns all the digital skills, languages, and various management skills. It’s easier for him to get a job in any industry” (focus group with employed women living in rural areas)

Among the promising professions in the labor market are:

For women	For men
Beauty industry (quick money)	Entrepreneurship (any field)
Pedagogy, education	Politics
Trade	Jurisprudence
SMM	Construction
Public sector (including leadership position)	

Work in IT in the perception of the study participants (especially men) is successful and promising. Having your own business characterizes a person as successful, but is more often mentioned among male professions. Professions related to physical labor are perceived as typical for men.

Both men and women note there are a large number of gender-neutral professions that can be obtained in the first place, depending on the level of education and personal qualities of the candidate.

■ THE STATUS OF WOMEN IN THE LABOR MARKET

The main professional areas in which women are employed today in Gagauzia:

- Education
- Healthcare
- Beauty industry (manicure, pedicure, eyebrows, etc.)
- Accounting
- Trade (cashiers; sellers)
- Public sector
- Banking
- Cooking
- Sewing
- Farming

When assessing the competitiveness of women in the labor market, experts mentioned factors FOR and AGAINST hiring women (in the case of competition with a man). The experts named both personal qualities and objective features, primarily related to family and children.:

FOR the employment of women	AGAINST the employment of women
Perception of women as more adaptive, flexible, trainable	The presence of small children (distracts from the work process; a woman takes sick leave)
Diligence, perseverance (compared to men)	Potential maternity leave for a young married woman
Constancy, stability of a woman as a potential employee	Inability to work in a certain schedule (in case of having a family) - business trips, late returns at home
More serious attitude to work (compared to a man)	The emotionality of women (a barrier to a leadership position)

“We do not have such direct discrimination, where women will not be hired. But there are some managers who can say: “Yes, well, a woman at a young age, she can go on maternity leave” (interview with a head of department)

“Women are more stable. She is ready for different tasks, ready to obey more than a man. Because a man can, I would say «showing off» sometimes. And the woman will do everything possible, will try to complete the task. (interview with a manager of the university department)

Thus, for women in modern Gagauzia, the presence of a family and children can become a factor that reduces their level of competitiveness. At the same time, many participants of the study tell about generally the same conditions of competition for women and men in the labor market.

■ MODERN SUCCESSFUL WOMAN IN GAGAUZIA

Most of the study participants, when describing a successful woman in Gagauzia, emphasize that she must combine work and family life. The region is characterized by a conservative view of the family way of life – housekeeping and raising children is the responsibility of a woman. In modern young families (in cities), the situation is gradually changing, but this trend is only developing at the moment.

Features of a modern successful woman in Gagauzia:

- Goal-oriented and active
- Diligence
- Independence, self-sufficiency (achieves everything by herself)
- Well-educated
- Follows current trends (including technology)
- Housekeeping (mentioned more often by men, some by women)
- Thriftiness (women in rural areas)

“I believe that a girl, first of all, should be economic, she should be hardworking, and, above all, I think that she should be purposeful” (focus group with employed young men, living in urban areas)

Men are more likely than women to say that a woman should be spiritual. But at the same time, in order for a successful woman to be recognized in the world of men, she needs “male” qualities of character. Gagauz men are more likely to have a patriarchal view of family values.

Women (an older audience) associate the success of a woman with the presence of a successful, strong man nearby.

“... the association of a successful woman is always for me when there is a successful man nearby. And when a woman is alone, she is just a strong woman. Success is a positive word, where there is both happiness and joy, satisfaction from what you are doing” (focus group with employed women, living in urban areas)

As examples of successful women, the study participants mention, first of all, the Bashkan of Gagauzia - Irina Vlah, as well as the President of Moldova Maia Sandu. Respondents also named women - business owners, directors of companies, as well as Irina Khakamada and women holding high positions in the administration (deputies of the People’s Assembly, heads of departments).

■ BARRIERS TO WOMEN'S EMPLOYMENT

When discussing the difficulties and barriers to women's employment, many respondents emphasize that specific barriers for a particular group are determined by the specifics of job and working position.

Respondents agree that a man is more likely to take a leadership position, since a man is the main earner in the perception of society. The situation is gradually changing in the cities, but the stereotype is still strong in the Gagauz society.

Another stereotype follows from the previous one - male subordinates generally have a negative attitude towards women on a higher position. There is an opinion that, despite the fact a woman works, she should take care of her children and her husband, not earn more than her husband and not occupy a position higher than her husband.

Among the main barriers to women's employment are the following:

Barriers related to personal qualities and level of education	Barriers related to family circumstances
Lack of self-confidence	Presence of young children
Lack of financial opportunity to get education	Lack of work experience (against the background of the maternity leave)
Lack of education	The need to sacrifice family in order to find time for work
Lack of driving skills / driver's license	Unwillingness / inability to go to work in the city (for women living in the village) as they need to be closer to children
Lack of digital skills	Marriage (potential maternity leave)
Lack of developed communication skills (typical for women from rural areas)	Public opinion (typical for villages) is a stereotype that a woman should not work, but should support the household and take care of children
	A large number of children (3+).

“Oh, and you recently got married, which means you will have children. And this element is one of the barriers to hiring a woman. Although we understand that by law they do not have the right to do this, that this is an element of discrimination” (interview with a director of the regional center for social issues)

“Women who live in villages are less competitive, that is, they usually have less communication skills, and this is a barrier” (interview with an NGO director)

Nepotism is also mentioned as a barrier. This means the need for personal connections for employment. In the perception of some respondents, nepotism is more often used by men than women.

Experts mention that often men and women against the background of the above barriers are initially in unequal competitive conditions - thus, a woman always needs to do a little more to compete with a man in the labor market.

4. Digital skills and competencies: impact on women's employment

■ IN-DEMAND DIGITAL SKILLS

Experts talk about the relatively low digitalization of business in Gagauzia at the moment (compared to European countries). In the perception of all participants in the study, digital skills primarily depend on the age of the person and are not determined by gender.

Some respondents note that “female” professions are often associated with office work and computer skills. Women's natural curiosity, as well as the need to use video communications during a pandemic (relevant for educators, online education) lead to a situation where a woman understands basic digital skills even better than a man.

When discussing the necessary digital skills, both experts and residents of Gagauzia talk about the ability to work on the Internet, knowledge of the Microsoft Office package. Mention is also made of working with remote video communication services (ZOOM, Teams), working in social networks, using instant messengers and e-mail. Digital security is also mentioned - the ability to store and protect information.

■ STEREOTYPES

The society of Gagauzia is not characterized by a stereotype according to which women are less versed in digital technologies than men.

Regarding the statements (stereotypes), the respondents say the following:

Statements	Perception
Women should choose a humanitarian (the arts) education, while men should choose a technical one.	Most of men and women disagree with the statement. Some women (unemployed, live in the village) share this stereotype
Women perform worse in jobs related to IT and math than men	Study participants disagreed with the statement
Women in leadership positions perform worse than men	The participants of the study rather disagree with the statement, since the skills of a leader are determined by the personal qualities that a woman possesses. Older men are more likely to agree with the statement.
Women are less versed in modern technologies/gadgets/software	Study participants disagree with the statement. Older men are more likely to agree with the statement.

■ ASSESSMENT OF THE LEVEL OF DIGITAL SKILLS. THE NEED FOR ADDITIONAL DIGITAL SKILLS

Working women, both in rural and urban areas, rate their digital literacy (basic) quite high at 4-5 points out of 5 (70-80%), while older women say that young people today have higher level of digital competencies.

Unemployed women living in villages are aware of their gaps in digital education and say that it is necessary and important for them to take digital skills development courses. They note that they lack, among other things, basic skills (Microsoft Office package).

According to experts, there is a need for additional knowledge in the digital sphere and additional training is especially relevant against the backdrop of the digitalization of life and business. Digital educational programs should be also available to the population in rural areas, where the level of development of these competencies is lower.

■ EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMS IN THE FIELD OF DIGITAL SKILLS

Residents of Gagauzia agree that digital knowledge development programs are relevant and necessary for the population in general and women in particular.

“I believe that they are needed, because now a woman must also keep up with the times. Especially if she opens her own business, it’s all about the computer, digital technology, the internet.” (focus group with employed women, live in the rural areas)

Some of the respondents have experience in educational programs in the field of digital literacy. At the same time, the respondents emphasize that there are not many such programs, and that there is not much information about it. Study participants are aware of the following programs:

- Digital Woman - basic digital literacy courses
- Forum of young leaders of Moldova (for men, within the framework of grant support programs for projects in the IT field)
- Agroindbank - the company allocates funds for digital education programs

Respondents would like to receive knowledge in a hybrid format - offline courses allow to fully immerse yourself in the subject. At the same time, the remote format is also convenient as there is no need to waste time on the road. An important element of an ideal study program is the availability of materials at any time for study. Older respondents more often prefer offline studying formats.

Experts agree that at the moment there are not very many educational programs in the region, and it is necessary to increase their number.

It is mentioned that existing programs are often specialized and advanced (advanced level) - thus, there is a shortage of basic digital literacy courses. Most experts say this that first of all, it is necessary to create schools and courses for the development of basic digital knowledge.

One of the barriers to participation in such programs for obtaining basic digital skills is the lack of understanding by the potential student of what he needs - what program suits them, what skills they need to develop.

According to experts, the programs should be free and accessible to various categories of people. Assistance with employment after completing the program can be an additional advantage of such a program.

Success factors of the program for the development of digital skills and competencies (in the perception of residents of Gagauzia and experts):

- It is necessary to inform the target audience of programs about the existence of such a program and its availability
- Availability of a career center at the organization that runs the educational program
- Combination of distance and face-to-face education
- Adaptation of the program for different target audiences (level of knowledge; age; specialization)
- Optimal group size for training - up to 10 people
- Availability of practical knowledge and skills within the program.

5. Ecosystem for the development of digital literacy

■ THE ROLE OF EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS

Residents of Gagauzia note that modern school students already have a basic level of digital literacy. Some respondents agree that programming and advanced digital literacy courses can be taught as part of the compulsory curriculum at school.

According to the opinion of the residents of Gagauzia, today the university does not play a significant role in obtaining digital skills, since modern students are already digitally literate when they enter the university.

Expert opinions on the role of educational institutions also differ. School education with its post-Soviet style and the old program in the perception of experts does not provide a sufficient amount of digital knowledge - theoretical way of studying, irrelevant programs (for example, the Pascal programming language). At the same time, experts say that the current generation of schoolchildren has a high level of basic digital literacy. The experts also note that different schools may have different approaches, and it is impossible to draw a general conclusion about the level of school digital education.

According to experts, the stereotype associated with the gender specialization of education (technical education for boys, humanitarian education for girls) exists, but it is primarily formed in the family, and can be further strengthened at school and university.

The division of classes into technical and humanities at school reinforces this trend - after graduating from a humanities class at school, it is more difficult for a woman to enter a technical specialty at a university.

It is noted that within the university's communication campaigns (promotion of the university for potential applicants) this stereotype is also used. Advertising of technical specialties is broadcast through the images of successful male graduates, and liberal arts - from the images of women.

■ THE ROLE OF SCHOLARSHIPS, OLYMPIADS AND COMPETITIONS

According to the respondents, scholarships, olympiads and competitions will positively influence a girl's motivation in learning digital technologies. However, this is not determined by gender, but by the personal desire of a person to study, win competitions and olympiads. Such events will also contribute to the development of positive competition among boys and girls.

Experts agree with the opinion about the positive impact of competitions, olympiads, scholarships. But some express the opinion that girls may show modesty, self-doubt and not participate in such events, fearing comparison with men and public condemnation. Other experts note that such programs are a good incentive for modern girls who are not inferior to men in the learning process and are already quite competitive.

"... girls are modern, they are quite gambling, competitive. You know that now women are becoming more masculine and men are becoming more family, so we have the same trend." (interview with a member of University department)

■ THE ROLE OF LOCAL AUTHORITIES

Residents of Gagauzia note that local authorities should take part in the development of digital literacy skills of the population, including women. At the moment, according to their assessment, the local authorities do not take part in resolving this issue. At the same time, several respondents mention the project of creating an IT center and a technical college with the support of the authorities.

Experts also note that at the moment the authorities do not play a significant role in the development of programs to improve digital skills among the population and women.

Experts note the importance of the work of the authorities in the field of information and educational activities about the importance of digital literacy of the population. Experts also note the insufficient level of funding for potential digital literacy development programs at the moment.

One of the vectors for the involvement of local authorities in the development of digital literacy can be a partnership between the state and the private IT sector, which has the resources to improve digital literacy.

The attitude towards the introduction of gender quotas for positions in employment is rather negative both among the residents of Gagauzia and among experts. According to the participants of the study, such quotas will violate the natural distribution of employees in a particular

area in accordance with personal qualities and skills. Quotas will also disrupt natural professional competition among candidates.

As an incentive for equal gender distribution in commercial companies, experts suggest introducing incentives rather than quotas. For example, tax incentives and business subsidies can serve as incentives to promote gender balance.

■ THE ROLE OF NGOS

NGOs can positively influence the development of women's digital competencies. According to respondents, NGOs should help and initiate projects to develop digital literacy, as well as participate in the employment of women who have completed digital literacy courses.

Some participants of the study (among young men employed in the IT field) have had positive experience of participating in such training programs. The organizations "Pro-Europa", "Urban Center" in Comrat (financed by grants) were mentioned.

According to experts, today NGOs are active in terms of involvement in the process of increasing digital literacy - such organizations do more than government officials. At the same time, NGOs work mainly in large cities, and not in villages.

Experts also note the importance of outreach in the issue of highlighting digital literacy projects, including increasing the value of digital knowledge.

6. The impact of digital skills on the position of women in the family

■ THE FAMILY STATUS OF WOMAN. THE PROBLEM OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

Modern women of Gagauzia are interested in finding a job. Against the backdrop of low wages in the region, it is usually difficult for a man to support the whole family alone, so many men today are positive about the fact that a woman works and contributes to the family budget.

At the same time, the patriarchal perception of the role of a woman leads to the fact that a woman must be able to do everything - work, run a household, and raise children.

The reasons why a woman does not work, as a rule, are connected with external factors, or with her decision. According to the opinion of the inhabitants of the region, in today's realities, a husband rarely forbids a woman to work. The main reasons why a woman does not work:

Factors unrelated to the presence of family	Family factors
Lack of professional skills (including digital competencies)	Maternity leave, having young children
Low wages in the region	Lack of time due to household chores
Lack of desire, laziness (in perception of men)	Husband doesn't take woman's work seriously
The need to travel to work in the city, spend money and time on the road (for residents of rural areas)	Large number of children (3+)
	The husband forbids the woman to work / has a negative attitude towards her labor activity (according to residents, up to 20-30% of the population may have similar precedents in the family. More typical for residents of rural areas).
	Social factors: husband's alcoholism (leads to domestic violence, including the husband's ban on his wife's work)

In some families, the common practice is when a woman works together with her husband helping him in business. A woman in such cases is lower in status than her husband in the work process (assistant, manager in a company), but a common cause and common goals unite such a family..

Many participants of the study agree that having a job and, as a result, financial independence directly affects family relationships and the position of a woman in the family. In the perception of both men and women, having a job increases the respect for a woman on the part of a man.

However, in cases where a woman earns more than a man, or moves up the career ladder more successfully, such a situation can provoke conflicts in the family and lead to divorce, since a man in Gagauzia is used to being the head of the family.

“...the fact that a woman has a job affects her position in the family. It is good in a young family when both work and bring money to the common budget. There are no infringements, because now everything is going to the fact that a woman is self-sufficient, she also has the right to achieve her goals” (focus group with employed women, living in the city)

Residents of Gagauzia give a number of examples from the lives of acquaintances and friends, when a woman earned more than a man and this oppressed him, led to conflicts and even divorce.

When discussing the topic of domestic violence, residents of Gagauzia say that today it is more common in rural areas. Many residents perceive domestic violence primarily as physical violence. When discussing other types of domestic violence (moral, economic), women

mention that such cases happen, especially in villages. A number of study participants have similar cases in the family (including on the part of parents - moral abuse of children).

“... I have such a case of financial abuse when a man controls the funds. There are also such cases when he asks how much you spent today on groceries. And if she doesn't work, then she doesn't have her own income at all and, of course, she constantly has to ask her husband for money ”(interview with employee of the university department)

“... I would not say that these are common cases, because the woman has become more self-confident and more informed. But the fact that she has increased strength, moral, I mean, and psychologically she is still more confident in herself, it is possible that this does not allow this phenomenon of violence to spread in such quantities as before ”(focus group with employed women, living in a rural area)

The mentality of the residents forces women to hide such cases, so it is difficult to assess the real picture in terms of domestic violence - women are not inclined to tell such stories because they are afraid of public condemnation. The prevalence of domestic violence is estimated differently - from 20-30% to 70-80%.

The situation is changing in modern young families in cities - since a woman is more independent, she works, she can get divorced and is not inclined to endure infringement from her husband.

“...young people will not tolerate violence. Why has the divorce rate increased? We have recently had the number of divorces, I compared, in my opinion, the 80s and the current period, the number of divorces has increased 3 times. And this is most likely due to the fact that young people are not inclined to endure, and young people are not inclined to hush up the problem ”(interview with an employee of the university department)

Many residents compare the situation in the country now and 30 years ago, when the situation with domestic violence was much worse. Respondents mention the concept of “mature Gagauz” - this is a male leader, the head of a patriarchal family, who can afford the oppression of a woman, takes it for granted. Residents agree that in modern realities the concept is rather irrelevant and rare.

Thus, the modern Gagauz family is just beginning to be built on the principles of equality, partnership, mutual assistance, including following the example of Western countries (where residents of Gagauzia often go to work).

■ THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN DIGITAL LITERACY AND DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

In the perception of the study participants, domestic violence and women’s digital competencies are connected, but indirectly. Digital competencies affect the competitiveness of a woman in the labor market, which increases her financial status in the family in general and in the eyes of her husband in particular. This reduces the likelihood of a woman’s oppression and increases her self-esteem - she is not ready to endure domestic violence if she earns money herself and does not depend on her husband.

“... if a woman is employed today, if a woman is competitive in the market today, she knows that she has her own income, she can provide for herself, she is confident in her abilities, then in this case, this woman will not allow this.” (interview with a Deputy Head at Investment Promotion Agency)

In conclusion, experts discuss the topic of effective steps that would have an impact on reducing the level of domestic violence. The steps are related, among other things, to increasing digital competencies and learning in the broad sense of the word. Experts propose the creation of a center where women can receive a variety of assistance. Some areas of work of such a center can be:

Areas of center’s work	Description of activity
Education (courses, programs)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teaching women relevant skills and competencies • Digital skills training
Alumni support	Help in finding a job
Legal support	Explaining to women their rights in the family
Information and educational activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • • Informational coverage of such programs and the work of centers in a mass audience (including in social networks) • • Promotion of IT specialties among women

Effective steps that will lead to a reduction in domestic violence in families are associated with increasing the level of education and the competitiveness of women in the labor market, including increasing the digital literacy of women.

