



Policy, Advocacy, and Civil Society Development in Georgia (G-PAC)

საჯარო პოლიტიკის, ადვოკატირებისა და სამოქალაქო საზოგადოების
განვითარება საქართველოში

E-Participation Mechanisms on the Web-pages of Public Institutions

The research was prepared within the framework of the project “Development of E-Participation in Georgia”

The project is being implemented by “Institute for Development of Freedom of Information” (IDFI), in cooperation with “Center for Post-Soviet Studies” (CPSS) with the financial support of the grant “Partnership for Change”, within the framework of the USAID program of “East-West Management Institute”, “Public Policy, Advocacy and Civil Society Development in Georgia” This program was made possible by the generous support of the American people through the United States Agency for International Development (USAID). The contents of this research do not necessarily reflect the views of USAID or the United States Government.

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Executive Summary

IDFI (Institute for Development of Freedom of Information) has been monitoring 23 public institution web-pages as well as the web-site of the administration of the President of Georgia in the frames of project 'Development of e-Participation in Georgia'. Monitoring was conducted according to the 2012 UN E-Government Survey and 'Evaluating the parameters of information transparency on the official web-pages of public institutions' elaborated by IDFI in 2011. Project group developed the synthesis of these two researches by elaborating three-component evaluating system.

Methodology

Evaluating system consists of the following parts: E-information/communication, E-consultation, E-decision making.

1. E-information/communication -- consists of the components that are focused on informing the user. This part includes following 10 sections:
 - Open Data, providing users with documents and reports of the institution;
 - Special section dedicated to provide service and information for at least one vulnerable group;
 - E-participation action plan;
 - Availability of web-page in foreign languages (English, Russian);
 - Calendar of planned events to support dialogue between the citizen and the state;
 - Public discussion reports;
 - Availability of section 'contact': Address (with interactive map), contact person, telephone, fax, e-mail, Skype;
 - RSS;
 - E-mail subscription;
 - Subscription via SMS.
2. E-Consultation – includes interactive mechanisms that make easier citizen's connection to the institution.
 - Simple feedback forms;
 - Conducting survey for improving online services;
 - Blogs;
 - Poll;
 - Integration with social networks (Facebook, Twitter, Wordpress, YouTube);
 - Ability to share news on social networks, e-mail etc.;
 - User space on web-site (ability to register/sign in);

- Space for comment under each news;
 - Frequently Asked Questions section;
 - Ability to send online message/online operator service.
3. E-decision-making – means involving citizens in decision making process. For achieving this goal following services are required on the web-page:
- Downloadable drafts of regulations and bills so that users are able to express their views in forms of comments or send them via e-mail etc;
 - Forum for discussing various decisions;
 - Officials responding the question/problems of users;
 - Petitions;
 - Confirmation of feedback delivery;
 - Voting.

Project aims at conducting monitoring of the web-pages of the Administration of the President of Georgia, Parliament of Georgia, Government of Georgia and 21 government agencies according to above mentioned criteria, identifying the problems in terms of citizen involvement and drawing out recommendations to solve problems. This report will review the web-pages of target agencies and compare them with foreign analogues.

Following web-pages were chosen for monitoring:

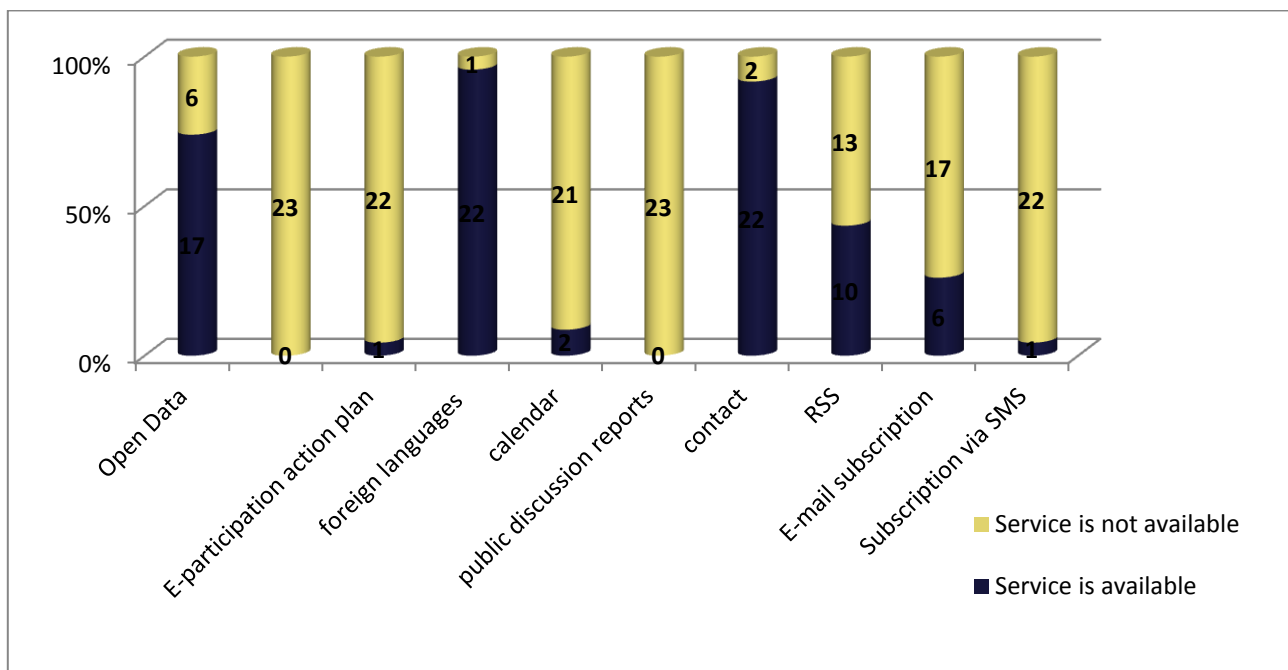
1. Parliament of Georgia -- www.parliament.ge
2. The Administration of the President of Georgia -- www.president.gov.ge
3. Government of Georgia -- www.government.gov.ge
4. Ministry of Defense of Georgia -- www.mod.gov.ge
5. Ministry of Internal Affairs of Georgia -- www.police.ge
6. Ministry of Labor, Health and Social Affairs of Georgia -- www.moh.gov.ge
7. Ministry of Agriculture of Georgia -- www.moa.gov.ge
8. Ministry of Finance of Georgia -- www.mof.ge
9. Ministry of Energy and Natural Resources of Georgia -- www.menr.gov.ge
10. Ministry of regional Development and Infrastructure of Georgia -- www.mrdi.gov.ge
11. Ministry of Education of Georgia -- www.mes.gov.ge
12. Ministry of Internally Displaced Persons from the Occupied Territories, Accommodation and Refugees of Georgia -- www.mra.gov.ge
13. Ministry of Economy and Sustainable Development of Georgia -- www.economy.ge
14. Ministry of Environment Protection of Georgia -- www.moe.gov.ge
15. Ministry of Justice of Georgia -- www.justice.gov.ge
16. Ministry of Sport and Youth Affairs of Georgia -- www.msy.gov.ge
17. Ministry of Culture and Monument Protection of Georgia -- www.culture.gov.ge
18. Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Georgia -- www.mfa.gov.ge
19. Ministry of Corrections and Legal Assistance of Georgia -- www.mcla.gov.ge
20. Office of the State Minister of Georgia for Diaspora Issues -- www.diaspora.gov.ge
21. Office of the State Minister of Georgia for Reintegration -- www.smr.gov.ge
22. Central Election Commission of Georgia -- www.cec.gov.ge
23. Tbilisi City Hall -- www.tbilisi.gov.ge

24. State Audit Office -- www.sao.ge

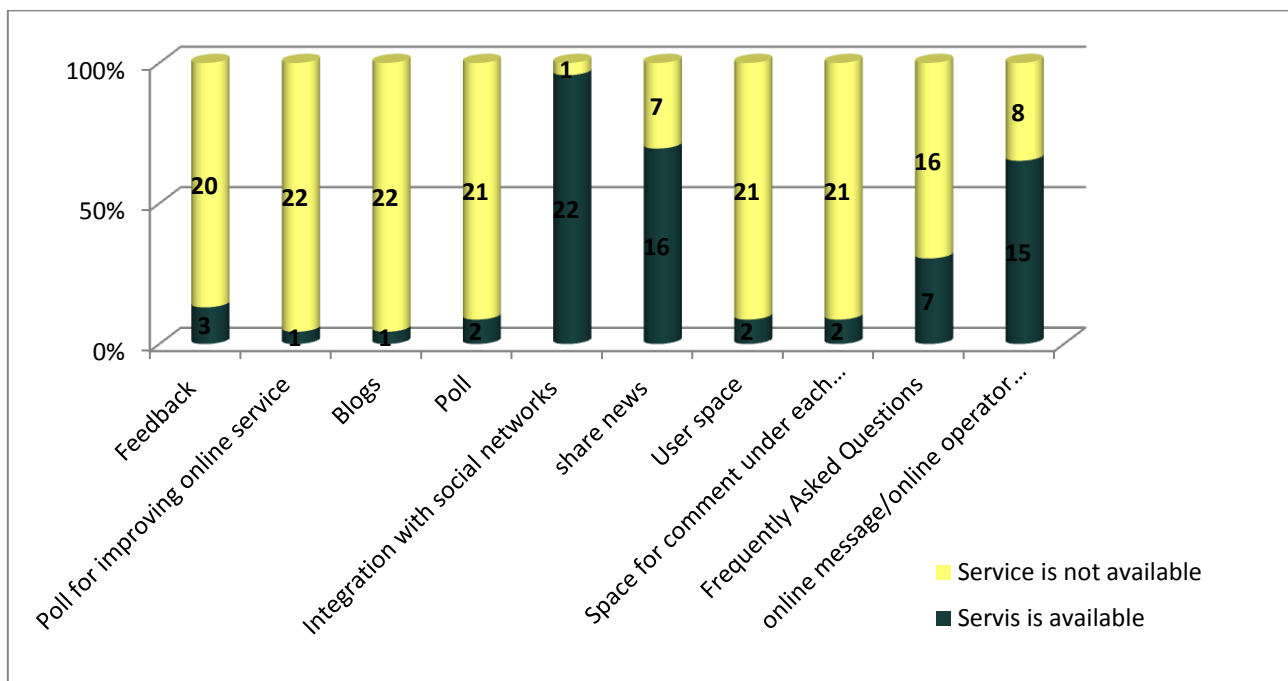
Review of Web-pages of Government Institutions

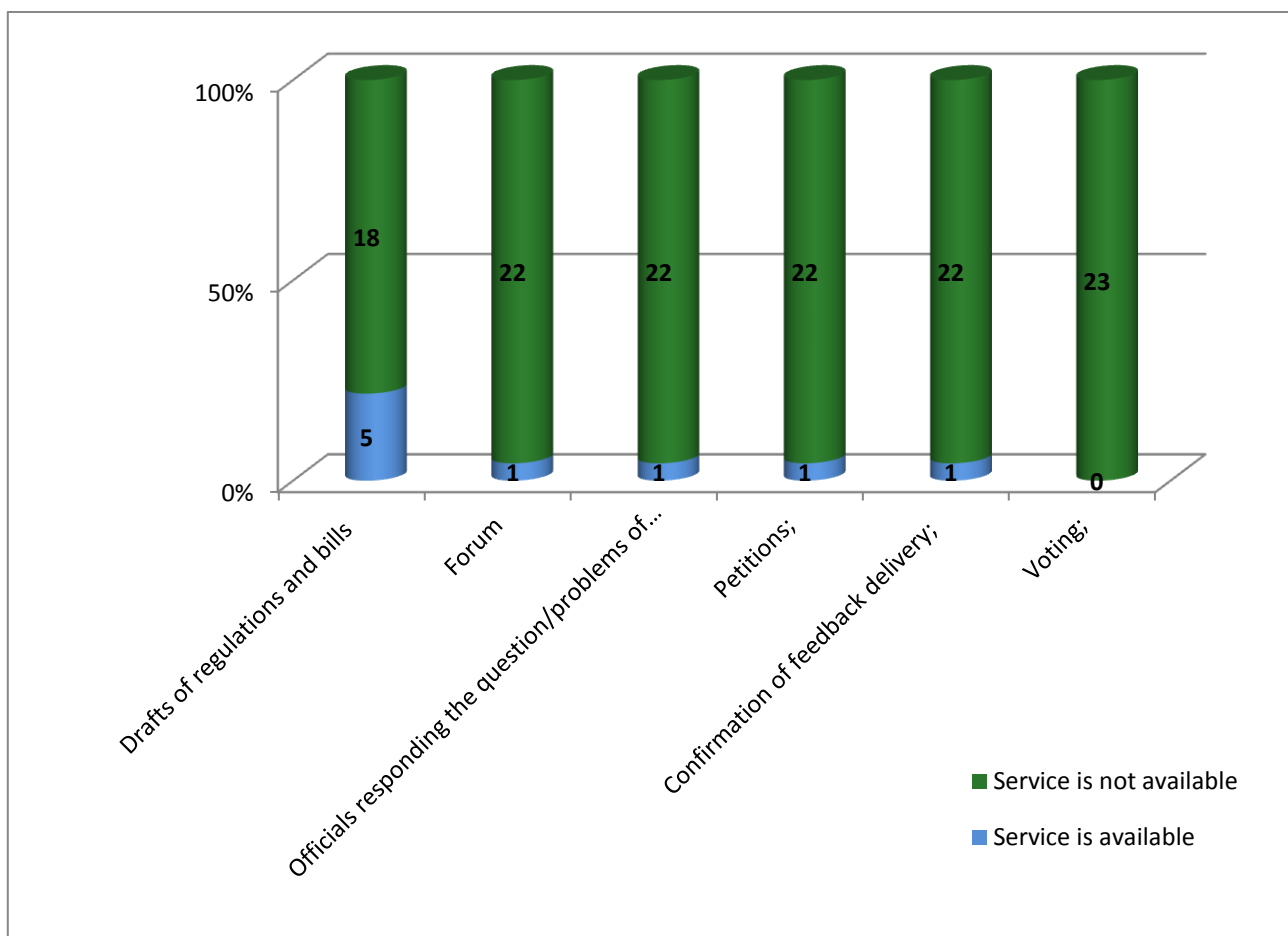
In order to display the general level of e-participation development we present three charts that quantitatively show how many public agencies comply with the requirements of each e-participation component:¹

E-Information/Communication module:



¹ Web-page of President of Georgia is not included in these charts

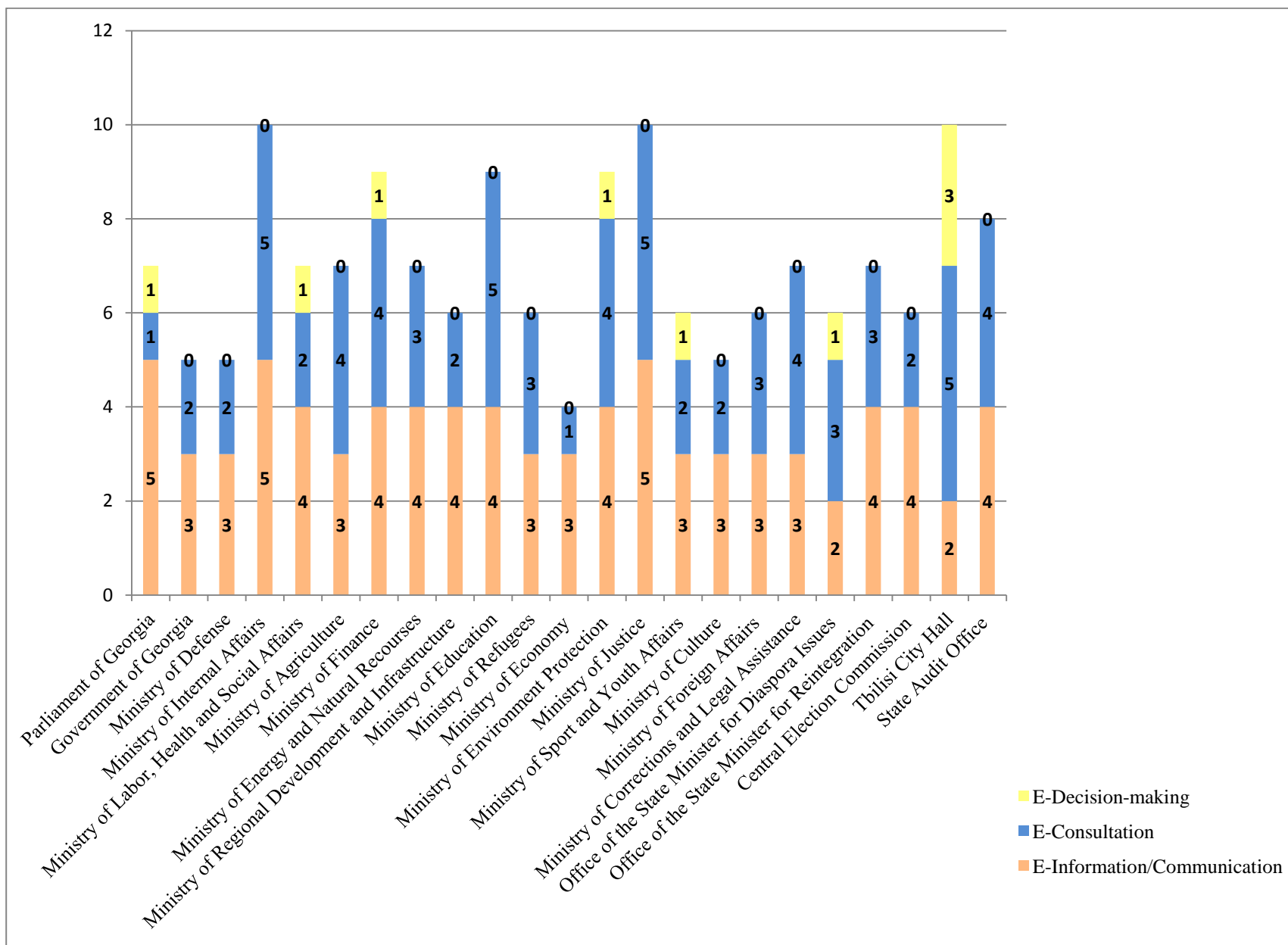
E-Consultation module:

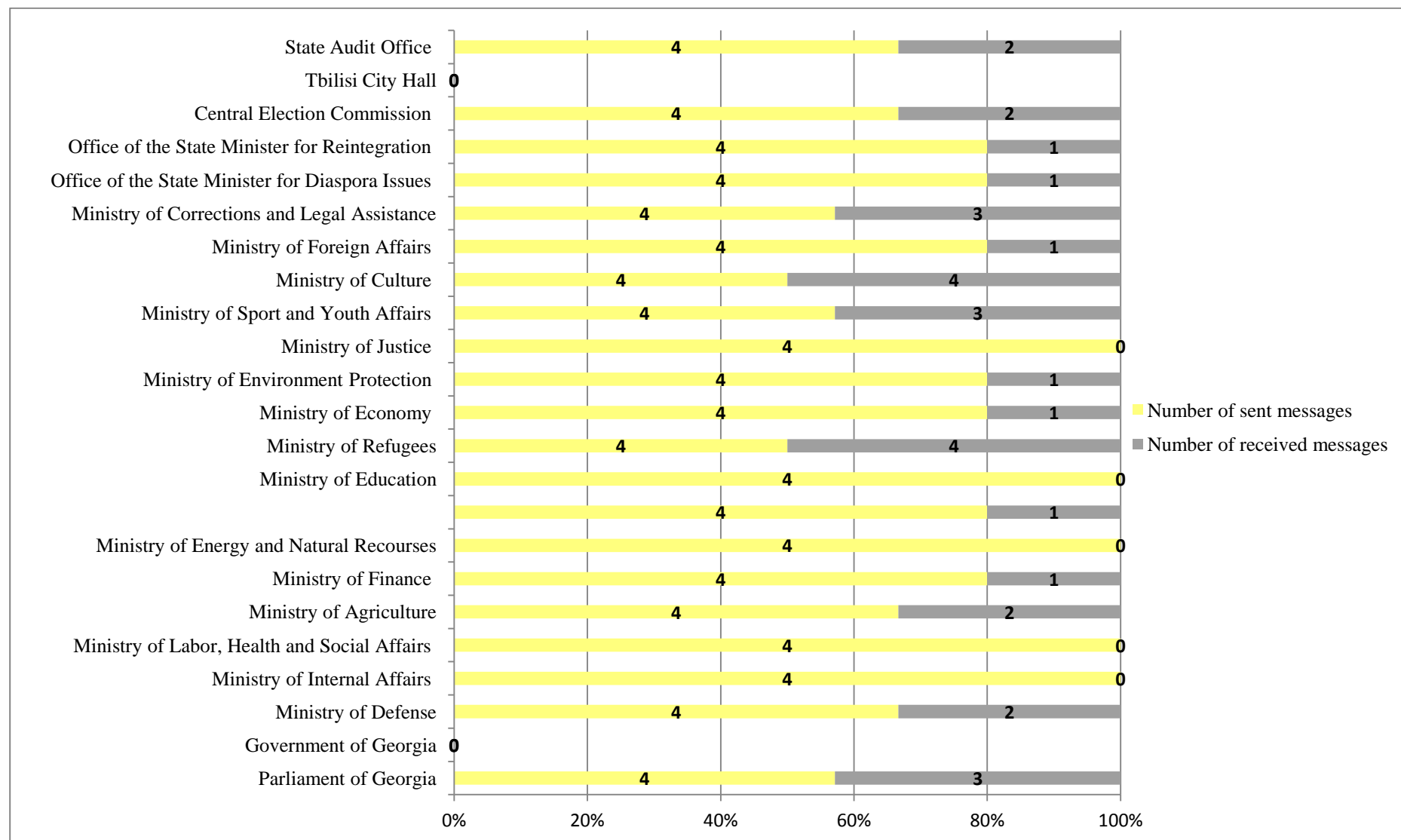
E-Decision-making module:

It is notable that project team was not only monitoring whether specific application was integrated on web-pages but also was testing each service as well as relevance of information. In many cases it seems that web-page has various communication mechanisms and services but in fact majority of these services have technical faults or are abandoned by page administrator. During monitoring four questions were sent from four various account to each above mentioned institution in order to estimate the level and quality of communication according to the quantity and content of received answers. Questions were simple and mainly concerning e-communication strategy as well as some specific questions. Besides the questions we sent recommendations and comments concerning the improvement of web-services.

Following chart displays how many e-participation components are presented in each monitored web-page. It's clear that e-decision-making section is the most problematic. Tbilisi City Hall web-page is an exception providing three components out of five. In order to create clearer impression we will provide individual tables for each institution listing components that are available on their web-pages and providing links to each service.

Besides, as mentioned above, project team sent four questions to each institution in order to assess the quality of their communication strategy. Next chart represents the statistics of sent and received messages.





Three month long monitoring displayed following tendencies:

- The web-pages of public institutions are mainly focused on one-sided communication which is expressed through sharing information and not providing such discussion platforms as blog or forum. In many cases governmental web-resources do not even provide effective mechanisms of information sharing -- RSS or subscription with e-mail.
- Involvement of citizens in decision making process is very low. This is caused by several reasons -- absence of communication-consultation mechanisms, technical faults or inattentiveness from the web-page administration.
- Besides rare exceptions, citizens are not allowed to leave a comment. This negative tendency indicates that the institution is not open to questions, comments and criticism.
- During last several months institutions deactivated official Twitter pages. Majority of the institutions do not possess Twitter accounts any more, while most of those who still have it do not actively use Twitter. Just small number of institutions use Twitter actively as a communication tool.
- None of the monitored institutions provide special department for at least one vulnerable group;
- The majority of the monitored web-pages do not provide online service evaluation forms which could serve as means of identifying problems and searching for solution together with citizens.
- Public figures are unavailable for direct communication. Heads of the institutions do not moderate the discussions and don't respond to the problems posed by citizens.
- The majority of the institutions have not elaborated the e-participation action plan (citizen communication strategy).
- Institutions mainly leave the messages of citizens without response. In the frame of the project we electrically sent four questions to each monitored institution. Number of received answers was low. Just two institutions responded to all four messages.

Recommendations

- Taking the results of the research into account, it is recommended that each institution pays more attention to online communication as it is the fastest, easiest and the most effective way to receive the problems, questions or simply comments from citizens. In addition, constant interaction increases the transparency of public agency.
- It is necessary that all institutions perceive users not as passive recipients of information but parts of interaction. Besides, considering the problems in this sphere, citizens themselves must attempt to become parts of decision-making process and not stay indifferent.
- Public institutions must elaborate e-participation strategy and make it available in the form which enables users to add their comments and opinions.
- It is necessary to introduce applications and services that assist bilateral communication – forum, online operator, blog as well as space for leaving comments. Page shouldn't just be a source of information; it must also provide the discussion platform which will serve as space for discussing problems.

- Simultaneously to e-consultation we should consider the importance of involving citizens in decision-making process via various innovative applications. Every citizen must be given opportunity to contribute to making important decisions. These kinds of applications are ‘plan the budget of your city’ and other above mentioned mechanisms.
- Despite the circumstances as many citizens must get online services as possible. It is important to add special sections to each web-page which will provide service for at least one vulnerable group – zooming texts in and out, changing background color, turning the audio mode on etc. These features ensure the equality between the citizens regardless of their physical abilities.
- Conducting survey for improving online service is very important feature. Citizens must be able to send their comments, views of criticism via feedback forms.
- Technical failure of web-pages is one of the most common problems. It is important to integrate innovative applications and mechanisms to the web-page; however page administration must ensure that the services they offer are technically flawless so that citizens use them without problems. Contact information must be given fully including e-mail, fax as well as online message application.
- Statistics of sent and received messages display the necessity of improving problems in this sphere. Each message sent by the citizen must be treated with attention and must be answered.
- Social networks must be paid special attention, as they serve as fast and effective ways of spreading information as well as easy mechanisms for communicating with citizens. Even though Facebook dominates in Georgia, Twitter also has considerable amount of users, thus both communication platforms must be used effectively by sharing news on official pages and answering questions asked through social networks.

We may conclude that Georgian e-environment still faces various problems and challenges solving of which may take time and effort, especially considering that Georgian civic consciousness of e-democracy issues still is not developed properly.