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TSALKA LOCAL DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY



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DECEMBER, 2019

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1. METHODOLOGY

The Local Development Strategy seeks to improve the livelihoods of Tsalka municipality's local population and to further develop the municipality.

The main goal of the Strategy is to improve the social integration of local communities in Tsalka municipality, provide access to social services and create new economic opportunities for the local population via participatory planning. The expected outcomes of the Strategy include: reducing rural poverty, improving the livelihoods of the local population and addressing economic, social and environmental challenges faced by Tsalka municipality.

The methodology behind developing the Strategy is based on the LEADER approach and principles, involving the active engagement of local community members in the assessment and prioritizing the needs of the local population. To properly accomplish this important task, the Tsalka LAG was provided with intensive trainings concerning issues in terms of developing a local development strategy based on LEADER principles at the initial stage of strategy development.

The Tsalka Local Development Strategy consists of analytical and strategic parts, including monitoring and evaluation. The analytical part of the strategy includes quantitative analysis of various areas similar to Tsalka municipality, which was carried out by CENN and the parties involved in the project (GFA and IfLS) during the first stage of the strategy's development. The analysis involved both the review of available literature and field surveys. To support the quantitative analysis, a qualitative study and sector-specific SWOT analysis was conducted with the active involvement of representatives from different sectors. SWOT analysis described priority areas of the region on the basis of which strategic areas for intervention were identified.

The analytical part of the Tsalka Local Development Strategy is based on the results of the following thematic studies that were carried out within the framework of the project:

- Demographic and social characteristics of Tsalka municipality;
- Agricultural needs assessment in Tsalka municipality;
- Study of tourist potential and cultural heritage of Tsalka municipality.

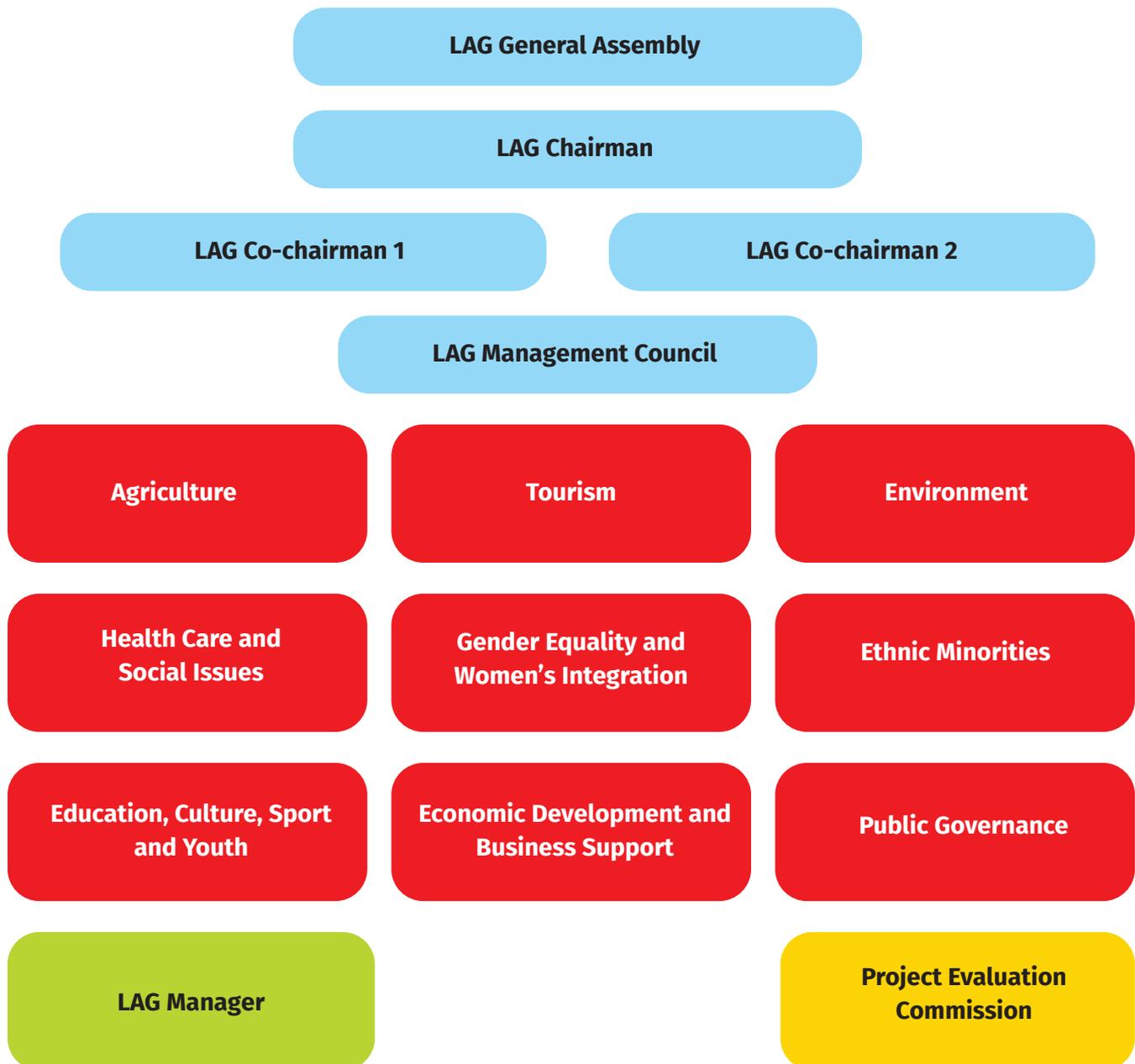
The strategic part contains those issues and needs which have been identified in the analytical part, prioritized by the LAG sectoral groups and agreed upon with the LAG management council.

¹ Agriculture and Rural Development Strategy of Georgia for 2021-2027; Regional Development Program of Georgia; Priorities of Tsalka Municipality; publications of the National Statistics Office of Georgia; publications of the Social Service Agency.

2. LOCAL ACTION GROUP – LAG

The Tsalka LAG is a civic platform composed of representatives from the private, civil and public sectors and based on voluntary membership.

LAG membership, composition (organizational structure), selection process, rotation policy and other institutional issues are regulated by the LAG charter. According to the charter, the LAG is chaired by the chairperson who oversees the LAG's activities. In his/her performance, he/she is assisted by two vice-chairpersons. The chairperson and vice chairpersons are selected by the LAG members.



LAG activities are based on the seven main principles of the LEADER approach:



Within the framework of the project, “EMBRACE Tsalka,” the main goals and tasks of the LAG were identified via a participatory approach, on the basis of which the local development strategy has been elaborated.

Within the scope of the aforementioned project, the main objectives of the LAG are to support:

- Socio-economic development of rural areas;
- Environmental protection and green economy;
- Development of tourism and businesses;
- Involvement of women and youth;
- Education, culture, sport and youth;
- Health care and social issues;
- Public governance;
- Integration of ethnic minorities.

Within the framework of the project, “EMBRACE Tsalka,” the Tsalka LAG fulfills the following tasks:

- Determines the priorities of rural development based on analysis of the municipality's capacities and challenges;
- Based on the results of consultations with local communities, identifies local needs associated with the state of their local environment;
- Assures the Tsalka LDS complies with national strategies;
- Provides access to complete and comprehensive information concerning the LDS to the local community;
- Widely disseminates information about grant application submission procedures and explains these procedures;
- Establishes and ensures transparent and non-discriminatory procedures for review, evaluation, selection, implementation and monitoring of grant projects.

The Tsalka LAG cooperate with the legislative and executive bodies of Georgia, local and international organizations and private businesses.

The management council, together with the sectoral groups of the general assembly, identified priorities and determined directions that respond to challenges faced by Tsalka municipality and fully reflect its needs.

These include:

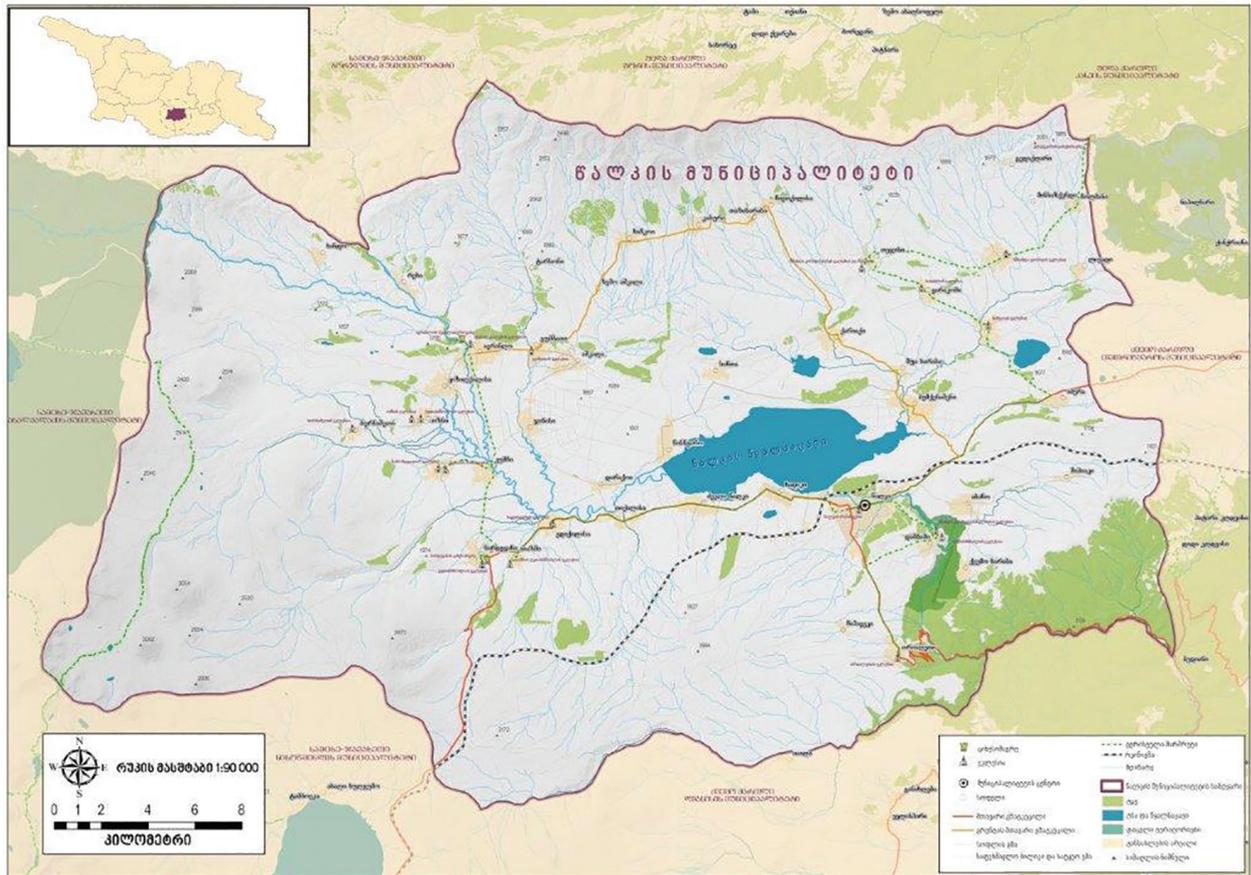
- Agriculture (regional value chain development);
- Supporting tourism development;
- Supporting non-agricultural economic activities.
- Protection of the environment and management of natural resources;
- Education, culture, sport and youth;
- Health care and social issues;
- Gender equality and women's integration.

3. OVERVIEW OF TSALKA MUNICIPALITY

3.1 GENERAL CHARACTERISTICS OF TSALKA MUNICIPALITY

Tsalka municipality is located in the south-western part of Georgia, in the Kvemo Kartli region. The municipality is bordered by Borjomi and Kaspi municipalities to the north, Akhalkalaki municipality to the west, Ninotsminda and Dmanisi municipalities to the south and Tetrtskaro municipality to the east.

The area of Tsalka municipality is 1,050,6 km². The municipality is located in a moderately humid subtropical zone. The average elevation is 1,400 m above sea level. The city of Tsalka is the administrative center of the municipality.



3.2 RELIEF AND LANDSCAPE

The morphological appearance of the territory of Tsalka municipality is shaped mainly by volcanic, tectonic, erosion and periglacial landforms – moderately to highly elevated mountains, volcanic peaks, tectonic depressions, anticlinal hills, and canyon-shaped gorges.

Main orographic units include:

1. The Tsalka depression – in terms of general orographic characteristics, the Tsalka depression is a plateau located 1,500-1,900 m above sea level. Narrow anticlinal elevations and relatively wide synclinal depressions determining the structure of the Tsalka depression are developed within the mentioned area as a result of folding Neogene volcanic lavas.

First of all, the so-called Tsalka hill, an anticlinal elevation stretching from north to south, should be mentioned. The hill is crossed by rivers at several locations, where canyon-shaped gorges are present as a result of vertical erosion. In general, canyon-shaped gorges are often found within the Tsalka depression. Erosion depths in these canyons vary from 30-50 m to 200-300 m. along both sides of the Tsalka hill, several flat-bottomed synclinal depressions can be observed – Beshtasheni, Kiriaki, Bareti, etc. These depressions are separated by Beshtasheni, Lovadi, Bareti, Korsu secondary anticlinal elevations and the bottom of the Javakheti range. The Beshtasheni depression is the largest (22 km long and 9 km wide). It is surrounded by the Tsalka and Beshtasheni hills to the north and by the Korsu anticline and the bottom of the Javakheti range to the south. The Korsu and Dashbasi anticlinal elevations and the Edzani synclinal depression between them are located on the south-eastern part of the Tsalka depression. The administration center of the municipality – the city of Tsalka – is located at the bottom of the Edzani depression, at 1,480-1,540 m above sea level.

The alluvial sloping lowland connected with the bottom of the Trialeti range that is located north to the Tsalka hill is a part of the Tsalka depression. It has developed by alluvial materials transported by Ktsia River and its left tributary – the Gumbati River – from the south facing slope of the Trialeti range during the Upper Pliocene-Quaternary era.

2. The south facing slope of the eastern section of the Trialeti range: this slope is heavily dissected by eroded gorges of the left tributaries of the Ktsia River, which has canyon-shaped morphology at certain locations. Flat-bottomed or slightly sloping-bottomed depressions (Rekhi, Tarsoni, Kabuli, etc.) have developed within the limits of the slope.

3. The Javakheti range: shield-shaped surfaces of low relative height, which have developed as a result of bulging basaltic lava layers due to uplifting tectonic movements, play an important role in the terrain of the ridge zone of the section of the Javakheti range, which is located within the limits of the municipality. These shield-shaped surfaces look like plateaus, where dome and cone-shaped volcanos (Dalidagi, Gumdati, etc.) are only 250-350 m high in elevation from their surfaces.

4. The Samsari range: the municipality covers the ridge of the northern section and east-facing slopes of this range. The largest landforms include cone and dome-shaped volcanic peaks (Samsari, Tavkvetili, Patara Shavnabada with a well-defined crater, Didi Shavnabada, etc.) built of Quaternary lavas. Quite large areas in the middle and lower parts of the slopes of the volcanos are covered with so-called “Stone seas” – lava boulders developed as a result of frost weathering (Karknali in Georgian). The traces of old glaciation in the form of cirques and kars are still found on the slopes of the Samsari volcano.

The following landscapes are found in Tsalka municipality:

- Mountain lava plateau;
- Mountain steppe vegetation and black soils;
- Steppified meadow and chernozem-like soils of foothills;
- Mountain steppified subalpine meadows, chernozem-like soils;
- Subalpine meadow, mountain meadow raw and raw-turfy soils;
- Alpine meadows, with mountain meadow vegetation and primitive raw-turfy soils;
- Moderately elevated mountains with deciduous forests.

3.3 HYDROGRAPHICAL NETWORK

Tsalka municipality has a dense hydrological network consisting of a number of small and large rivers with smaller tributaries.

The main river is the Ktskia River flowing from Borjomi municipality. The Ktsia River has a number of small tributaries including Chochiani, Ozni, Narovani, Gumbati, etc.

There are many small lakes (Bareti, Leliani, Grdzeli Tba, Uzungoli, etc.) at the bottom of synclinal depressions, which developed as a result of erosion of volcanic rocks. Ichthyofauna is not found in these lakes. Small groups of wetland vegetation (reed, cattail, etc.) are present along the shores of the lakes.

The Tsalka water reservoir (Khrami HPP) is an important component of the local hydrographical network. The water reservoir is built in the lava hill as a result of blocking the narrow and deeply eroded canyon of the Ktsia River with a concrete dam. The water reservoir occupies the eastern part of the Beshtasheni synclinal depression at 1,510 m above sea level. The water reservoir serves the Khrami HPP I and Khrami HPP II cascade through its derivation tunnel.

The maximum depth of the water reservoir is 25 m, maximum capacity 312 million m³. The water level in the reservoir changes by seasons: low in February-March and high in July. The water level changes in the range of 9 m, therefore the surface of the reservoir is changing within the range of 5-30 km². The banks of the reservoir are slightly sloping and low mostly, only the south-eastern bank is steep and high. In winter, the coastal part of the surface of the water reservoir is covered with ice.

3.4 CLIMATE

According to the averaged observation data of local meteorological stations (Tsalka, Bareti, Trialeti, etc.), the territories located up to 1,500–1,800 m above sea level are characterized by a moderately humid climate, transitional from mountain meadow to steppe zone, with cold winters and a relatively long, warm season. The average annual temperature is 6°C, 16°C in July and -4.8°C in January, absolute minimum is - 34°C, absolute maximum is 33°C. Average annual precipitation reaches 600-740 mm. Maximum precipitation occurs in spring and the beginning of summer, minimum precipitation – in winter. The climate becomes more severe with increasing elevation.

The areas located up to 2,200-2,300 m above sea level are characterized by a mountain meadow-steppe climate with a short, cool summer and a long, cold and relatively dry winter. The climate of the territories located at higher elevations are severe, almost without summers, with low temperatures all year round and relatively small amounts of precipitation.

3.5 SOILS

Soils of Tsalka municipality consist mainly of different black soils. In synclinal depressions of lava plateaus, which are covered with meadow and steppe vegetation and located up to 1,800-1,900 m above sea level, humus containing (humus content 5-7%) medium thickness (rarely thick) mountain black soils are found. The upper stratum of this type of mountain black soils is carbonate free or with low carbonate content. Soils are quite saturated with bases and rich in plant nutrients, especially in nitrogen. Therefore, these soils are highly fertile and can produce high agricultural yields with its high

moisture storage capacity.

The structure of mountain black soils changes with increasing elevation, the thickness of humus containing horizon decreases, the carbonate content increases and the productivity of soils declines. From 1,900 m above sea level, mountain black soils are gradually replaced by leached, raw and chernozem-like mountain-steppe soils. From 2,300–2,400 m above sea level, raw-turfy mountain-meadow soils are present. Along the shores of lakes and the water reservoir as well as at the bottom of some dry lakes and around certain drying lakes, reedy raw-turfy soils are observed.

4. DEMOGRAPHIC AND SOCIAL CHARACTERISTICS OF TSALKA MUNICIPALITY

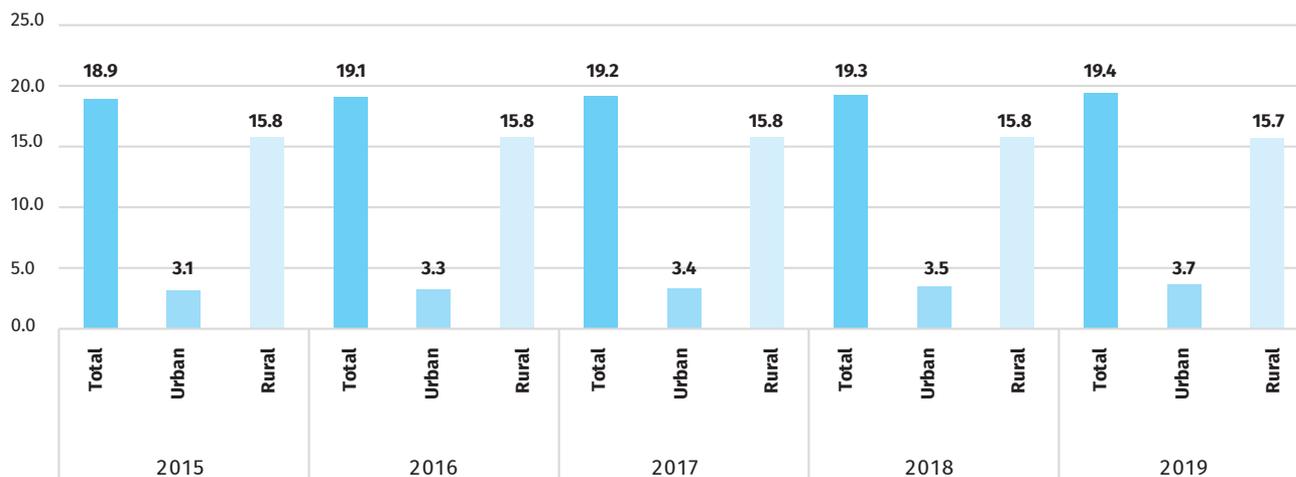
4.1 POPULATION AND DEMOGRAPHY OF TSALKA MUNICIPALITY

According to data from the National Statistics Office of Georgia, the population of Tsalka municipality is 19,000 as of January 1, 2019, including the urban population – 3,700 (19%) and the rural population – 15,700 (81%). The percentage of female residents in the municipality is about 51%, the percentage of men – 49%. The density of the population is 19.8 persons/km² (65.9 persons/km² in the Kvemo Kartli region).

Population of the municipalities and its percentage of the total population of the Kvemo Kartli region (2019)			
№	Municipality	In thousands	%
Kvemo Kartli region		433	100%
1	City of Rustavi	128	30%
2	Marneuli	107	25%
3	Gardabani	81	19%
4	Bolnisi	55	13%
5	Dmanisi	20	5%
6	Tetritskaro	22	5%
7	Tsalka	19	4%

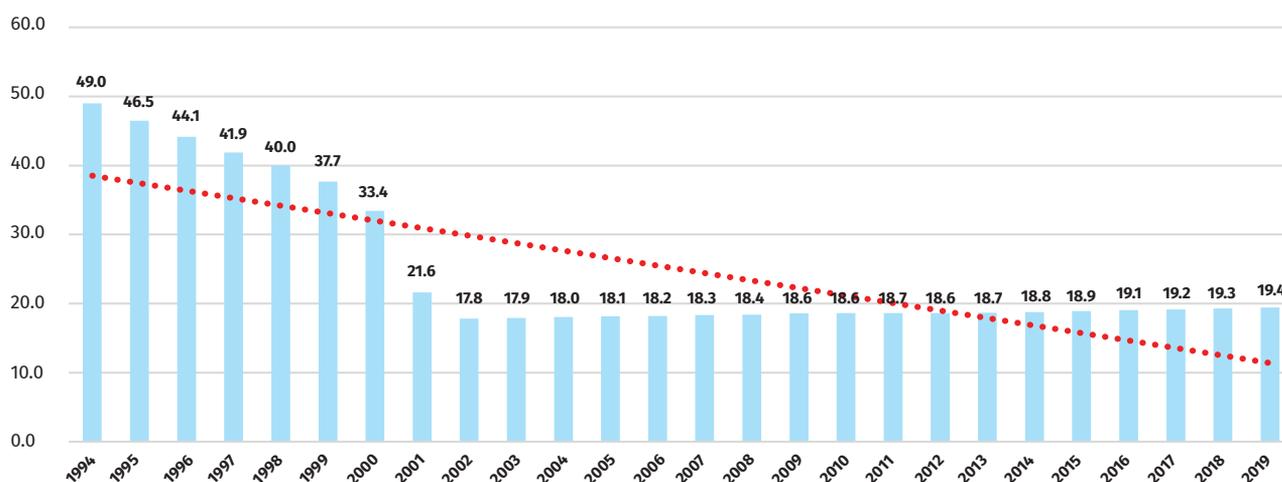
The percentage of Tsalka municipality in the total population of the Kvemo Kartli region is the smallest – 4%.

Population of Tsalka municipality (in thousands) as of January 1, in terms of urban and rural areas



According to data from the National Statistics Office of Georgia, the population of Tsalka municipality in 1994-2019 is characterized by a decreasing trend. For instance, in 1994, 49,000 people were registered in the municipality, while in 2019, the number of residents was 19,400 (decreased by 29,600).

Population of Tsalka municipality as of January 1, from 1994-2019 (in thousands)



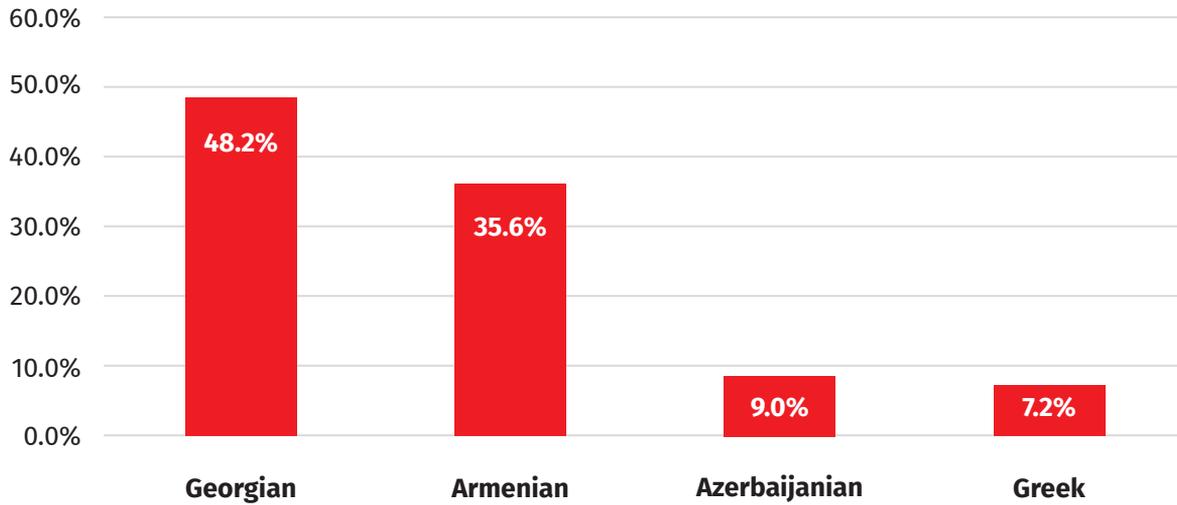
The reduced population size of Tsalka municipality is recorded mainly from 1994-2002, while during the next period – 2002-2019, the number of residents of the municipality slightly increased, mainly due to growing number of urban residents. There is 1 city, 2 urban settlements, 30 communities and 42 villages in Tsalka municipality.

Administrative units and main ethnic groups in Tsalka municipality in 2019²

№	Administrative unit	Settlements in the administrative unit	Main ethnic groups
1	Avranlo	village Avranlo	Greek 55%
2	Arjevan-Sarvani	village Arjevan-Sarvani, Choliani, Godaklari	Azerbaijani 99%
3	Tejisi	village Tejisi	Azerbaijani 99%
4	Tsalka	city of Tsalka, village Tbeti	Georgian 87%
5	Kokhta	village Kokhta, Khareba, Chrdilisubani	Georgian 86%
6	Bareti	village Bareti, Livadi, Imera, Sabechisi	Georgian 76%
7	Beshtasheni	village Beshtasheni, Akhalsheni, Samadlo	Georgian 73%
8	Bediani	urban settlement Bediani, urban settlement Khramhesi	Georgian 48%
9	Trialeti	urban settlement Trialeti, village Kavta	Georgian
10	Tsintsikaro	village Tsintsikaro, village Santa	Georgian 66%
11	Sameba	village Sameba	Georgian 91%
12	Gumbati	village Gumbati	Georgian 97%
13	Sakdrioni	village Sakdrioni	Georgian 95%
14	Gantiadi	village Gantiadi	Georgian 94%
15	Berta	village Berta	Georgian 88%
16	Rekha	village Rekha	Georgian 95%
17	Khando	village Khando	Georgian 99%
18	Artsiviani	village Artsiviani	Georgian 77%
19	Chivt-Kilisa	village Chivt-Kilisa, Tamala-Kharaba	Armenian 100%
20	Ashkala	village Ashkala	Armenian 100%
21	Aiazmi	village Aiazmi	Armenian 100%
22	Burnasheti	village Burnasheti	Armenian 99%
23	Dashbashi	village Dashbashi	Armenian 96%
24	Darakovi	village Darakovi	Armenian 99%
25	Kushi	village Kushi	Armenian 99%
26	Kizil-Kilisa	village Kizil-Kilisa	Armenian 99%
27	Kaburi	village Kaburi	Armenian 98%
28	Nardevani	village Nardevani	Armenian 99%
29	Ozni	village Ozni	Armenian 99%
30	Khachkovi	village Khachkovi	Armenian 98%
Total: 44 Settlements			

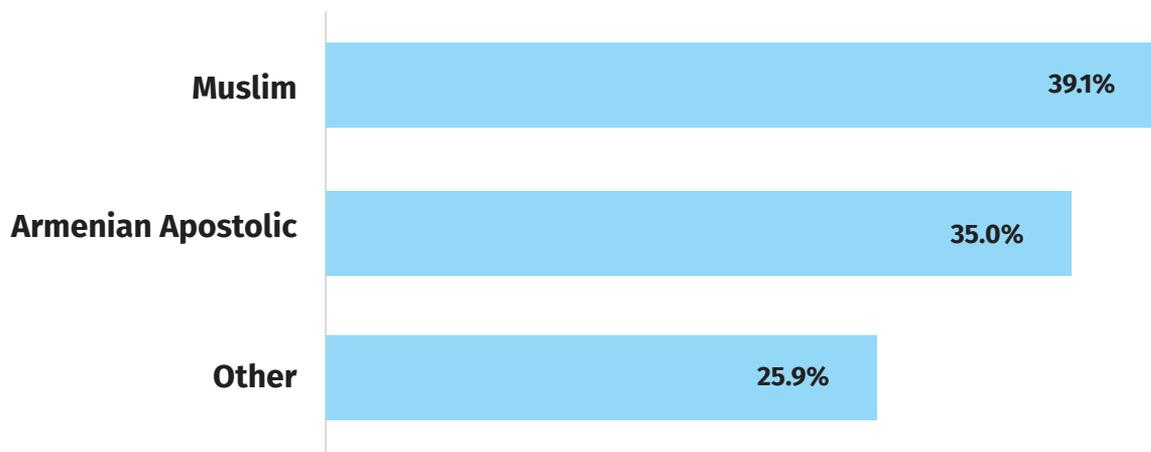
Out of 30 administrative units of Tsalka municipality, ethnic Georgians dominate 15 villages, ethnic Azerbaijanis in 2 villages, ethnic Greek in 1 village and ethnic Armenians in 12 villages.

Ethnic composition of the population of Tsalka municipality in 2019

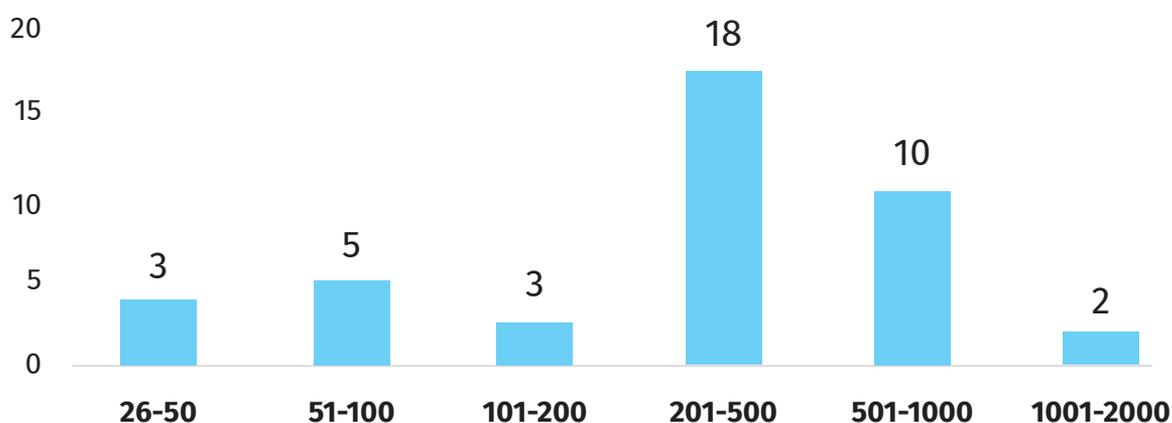


According to the information provided by Tsalka Municipality City Hall, 48.2% of the local population are Georgians, 35,6% – Armenians 9,0% – Azerbaijanis and 7,2% – Greeks.

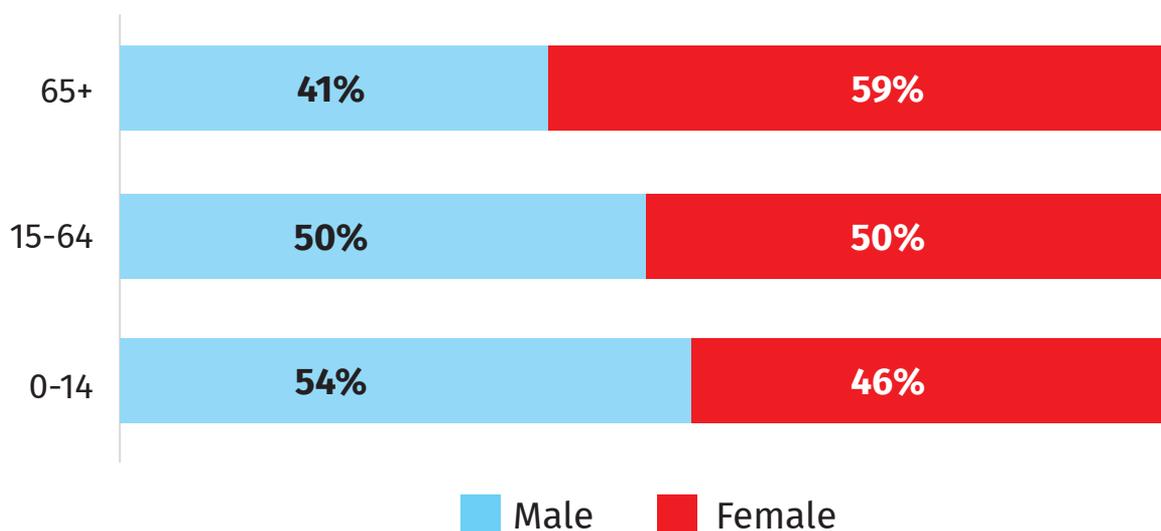
Distribution of the population by religion (%) as of 2014



Grouping rural settlements of Tsalka municipality by the number of their residents in 2014 (41 villages in total)



Distribution of population of Tsalka municipality by main age groups and sex in 2014



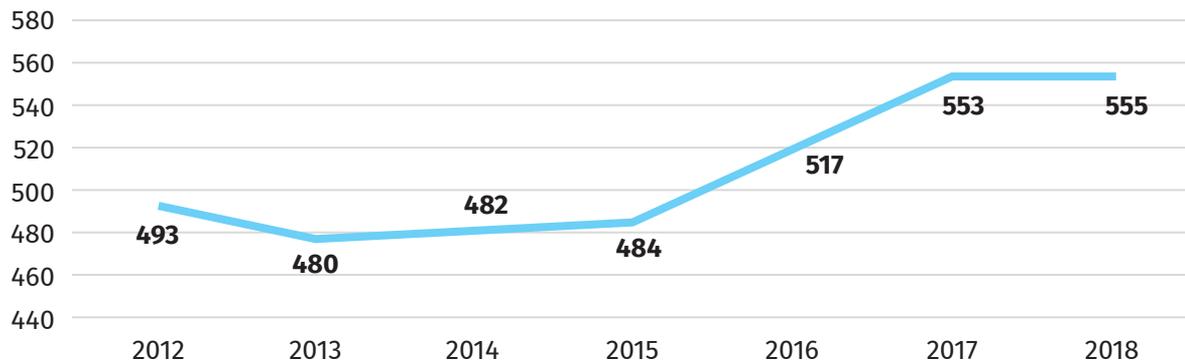
According to data from the National Statistics Office of Georgia, the number of those settlements with 201-500 residents is the largest – 18 villages, the number of settlements with 501-1000 residents is 10. There are only two rural settlements with 1001-2000 residents in Tsalka municipality.

The percentage of people aged 0-14 in the total population of the municipality is 21.8%, the percentage of the able-bodied population (15-64 age category) reaches 65.5%, while the percentage of people aged 65 and older is 12.7%.

4.2 SOCIAL CONDITIONS IN TSALKA MUNICIPALITY

According to data from the Social Service Agency, the number of recipients of social packages in Tsalka municipality from 2012-2018 was growing. In 2013, the number of beneficiaries was 480, and in 2018 - 555.

Number of recipients of social packages in Tsalka municipality (end of the year)



According to data from the Social Service Agency, the number of recipients of social packages in the Kvemo Kartli region as of December 1, 2018 is 13,995, including 555 (342 men, 213 women) beneficiaries from Tsalka municipalities.

Number of recipients of social packages in Tsalka municipality by age groups (as of December 1, 2018)		
№	Beneficiary group	Number
1	Persons with disabilities aged 0-18	27
2	Persons with severe disabilities	87
3	Persons with significant disabilities	291
4	Persons with moderate disabilities	43
5	Persons with disabilities (in total)	448
6	Household members in case of death of head of household	95
7	Victims of political repression	1
8	Recipients of state compensation	8
9	Recipients of subsistence allowance	3
10	Other	0
		Total 555

The largest group of beneficiaries is made of people aged 50-59 (171 beneficiaries), followed by 0-17 age group (122 beneficiaries), 19-39 age group (109 beneficiaries), 40-49 age group (98 beneficiaries) and people older than 59 (55 beneficiaries).

Number of people receiving pensions and allocated amounts			
№	Municipality	Number of beneficiaries	Allocated amount (GEL)
1	Bolnisi	10,037	1,813,216
2	Gardabani	12,320	2,236,212
3	Dmanisi	4,250	772,920
4	Tetritskaro	4,390	796,140
5	Marneuli	15,213	2,758,862
6	Rustavi	20,038	3,635,838
7	Tsalka	4,121	763,164
	Kvemo Kartli	70,369	12 776 352

As of December 1, 2018, the number of people receiving pensions in Tsalka municipality is 4,121 (2,813 women and 1,308 men). In total they have received pensions in an amount of 763,164 GEL.

In addition to state pensions, as of December 1, 2018, 2,645 permanent residents (827 men and 1,818 women) of villages in a high mountainous zone receive allowances established for high mountainous regions. In total, they have received allowances in an amount of 95,364.

According to data from the Social Service Agency, the number of people receiving pensions for being IDPs is 35 as of December 1, 2018. They have received 6,300 GEL in total.

According to data from the National Statistics Office of Georgia, 97 preschool institutions in total have been registered in the Kvemo Kartli region for the 2018-2019 academic year. Only 3 preschool institutions attended by 230 children are registered in Tsalka.

**Data on public preschool institutions by municipalities
(Kvemo Kartli, at the beginning of the academic year, unit)**

№	Municipality	2018/2019		
		Number of preschool institutions	Number of children in preschool institutions	Caregiver-teacher/caregiver/caregiver assistant
1	Marneuli	24	2699	151
2	City of Rustavi	21	6241	448
3	Tetritskaro	16	711	52
4	Bolnisi	15	1373	105
5	Gardabani	9	721	49
6	Dmanisi	9	334	28
7	Tsalka	3	230	14
8	Kvemo Kartli	97	12309	847

As for schools, 267 schools with 69,606 students were in operation in Kvemo Kartli during the 2018-2019 academic year. 31 schools with 2,889 students were registered in Tsalka for the same period.

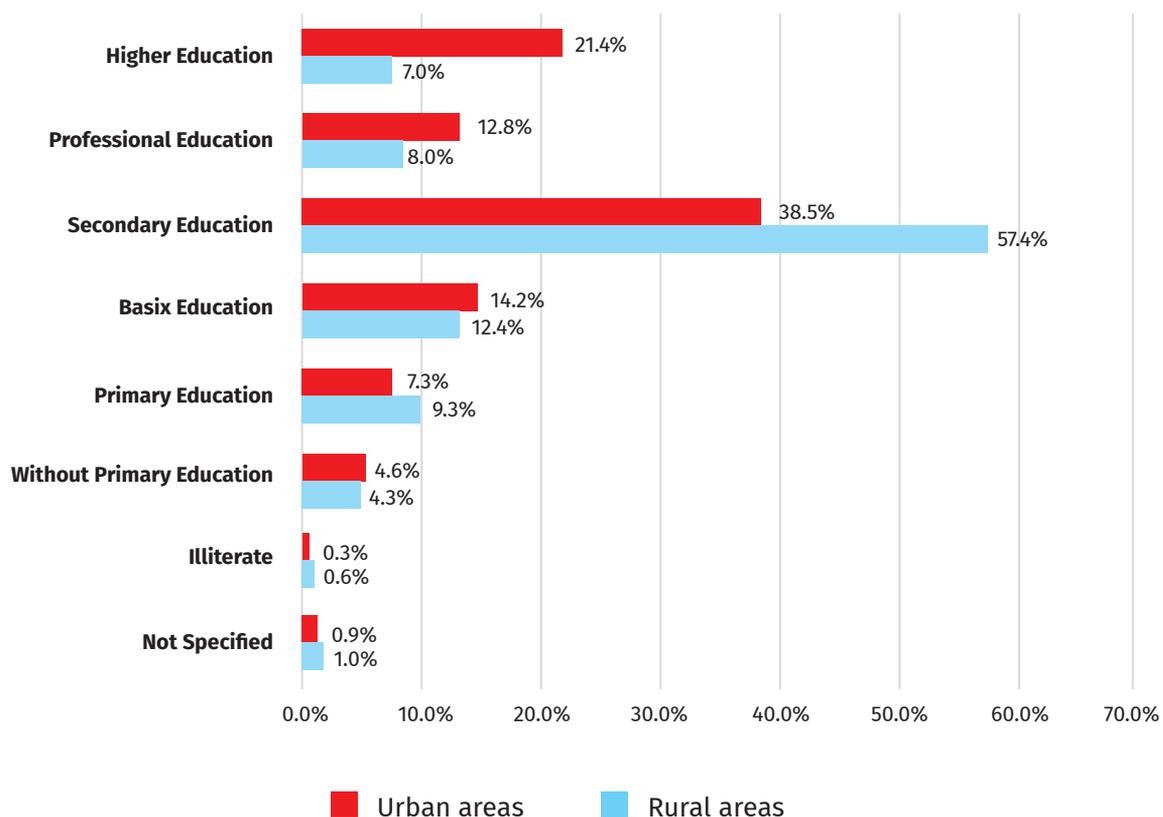
**Number of schools and students in Kvemo Kartli by municipalities
(at the beginning of the academic year, unit)**

№	Municipality	Number of schools		Number of students	
		2017/2018	2018/2019	2017/2018	2018/2019
1	Marneuli	75	76	18067	18347
2	Gardabani	36	36	12602	12840
3	City of Rustavi	35	35	21422	21906
4	Bolnisi	34	34	7721	7816
5	Tsalka	31	31	2963	2889
6	Dmanisi	27	27	2886	2894
7	Tetritskaro	28	28	2924	2914
8	Kvemo Kartli	266	267	68585	69606

A few secondary vocational education institutions are in operation in the Kvemo Kartli region, however none of them are located in Tsalka municipality.

In the 2017-2018 academic year, two private higher education institutions were operating in the region, but none of them are located in Tsalka municipality.

Distribution of population aged 10 and older by the level of education and the type of settlement



16,122 persons aged 10 and older reside in Tsalka municipality, out of which 9.4% have received higher education (bachelor's, master's or doctoral degree). The percentage of persons with higher education in urban areas is 21.4%, in rural areas – 7.0%.

The length of the international highway with asphalt-concrete pavement within the limits of the municipality is 52 km. The interstate motor road (69 km long) is also covered with asphalt-concrete, while the local access road (75 km long) is covered with gravel.

There are six drinking water abstraction points (Ozni, Nardevani, Baret, Ar-Sarvani, Beshtasheni, Khando, Gumbati) in the municipality. A water pump with the capacity 75 kwt is in operation in Tsalka municipality, in the village of Dashbashi.

Natural gas is provided only to the population of the city of Tsalka. Electricity is available in all villages of the municipality. Only one landfill with 5,000 m² total area is in operation in the municipality.

5. AGRICULTURAL NEEDS ASSESSMENT IN TSALKA MUNICIPALITY

An agricultural needs assessment has been carried out to support the development of the Tsalka Municipality Local Redevelopment Strategy. The aim of this study was to analyze the current situation in the agricultural sector of Tsalka municipality and identify the needs of local farmers and other stakeholders and priority directions for the development of agriculture in Tsalka municipality.

The assessment included desk research involving the analysis of statistical data and the results of studies and research carried out by different international or donor organizations at different times. The documents are also based on the results of interviews, focus-groups and phone surveys carried out during field work.

To identify and assess key issues for the study, both information acquisition and analysis, as well as qualitative research methods have been used to ensure an in-depth analysis

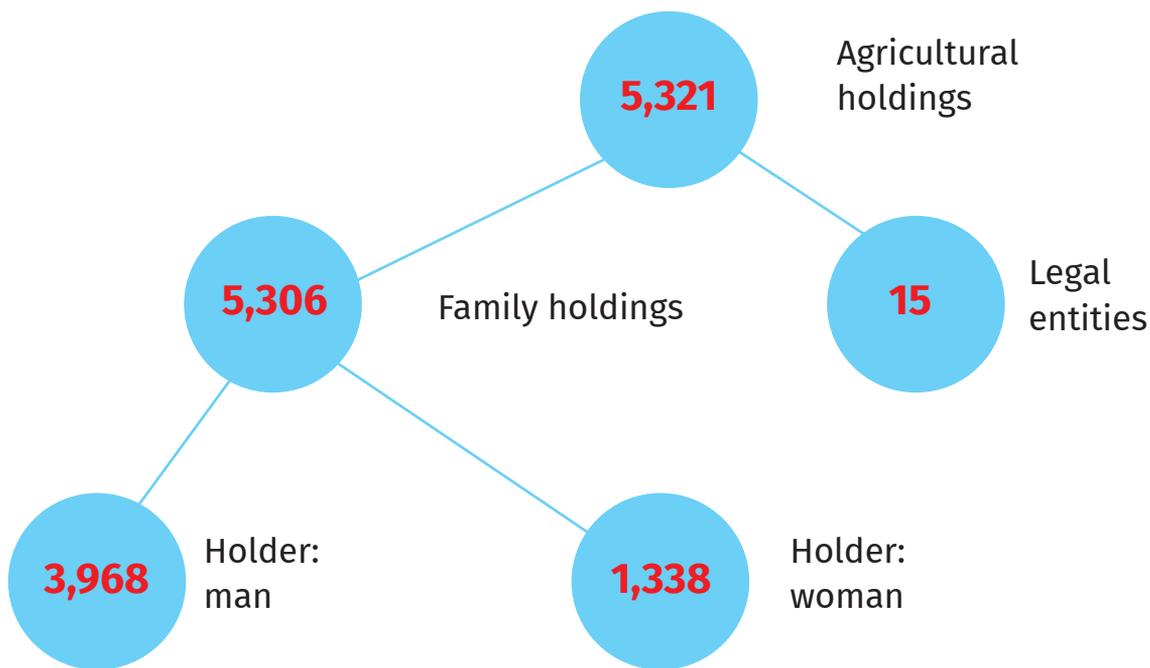
5.1 RESULTS OF THE ASSESSMENT

General agricultural profile of Tsalka municipality

Based on the analysis of available statistical information and relevant literature, the following main directions in agriculture have been identified: livestock breeding, potato growing, grain growing, and bee-keeping.

According to 2018 data from the National Statistics Office of Georgia, 43.1% of the population is engaged in agriculture, accounting for only 7.7% of the country's GDP. In Tsalka municipality, more than 50% of households are engaged in farming. Based on the results of agricultural census of 2014, there are 5,321 agricultural holdings in Tsalka, out of which 99.7% are family holdings. Only 15 agricultural units have a status of legal entity. 74% out of 5,306 facility holdings operating in Tsalka municipality are held by men.

Diagram 1. Agricultural profile of Tsalka municipality



Source: National Statistics Office, Agricultural Census 2014.

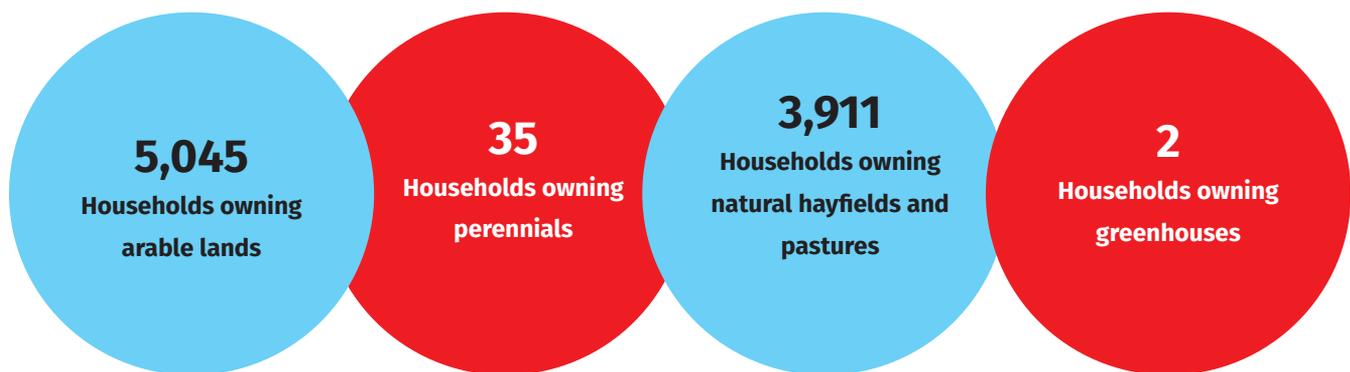
The analysis of the distribution of family holdings by sex of their holders shows that 29% of family farms are held by a person older than 65, followed by 45-54 age group (22.2%). The number of family farms which are held by a person aged 34 and younger is 618 (11.6%).

The analysis of the level of education of holders of family holdings shows that the majority of family holdings (3,196 out of 5,306) are held by persons with secondary education, out of which only 603 have higher education and 575 – professional education.

The majority of households own land parcels. The average area of these land parcels is 1.02 ha. It should be noted that some households also use rented agricultural land parcels.

Most households own arable lands, followed by the households having in their ownership natural hayfields and pastures. Perennials and greenhouses are owned by only 37 households.

Diagram 2. Number of households by the type of agricultural land use (unit)



Source: National Statistics Office, Agricultural Census 2014.

According to the 2014 Agricultural Census, potatoes occupy the largest areas of arable lands – 1,918 ha, followed by barley and wheat - 698 ha and 328 ha respectively. Beans, peas and oats occupy 286 ha, corn – 18 ha. Analysis of family holdings show that 4,815 households making 90% of the total number of family holdings are engaged in potato growing. Vegetable growing (2,718 holdings) and oat growing (1,329 holdings) are also widespread in Tsalka municipality. Only a few households are engaged in growing other annual crops, such as wheat, corn and other forage crops.

4,097 family holdings, taking up 78% of the total number of family holdings in Tsalka municipality, are engaged in livestock breeding. In 2014, the number of heads of cattle was 28,038, including 15,909 cows. Local households are also engaged in sheep breeding (1,047 family holdings) and goat breeding (82 family holdings). In 2015, the number of sheep in the municipality was 14,514, and the number of goats – 325. Local households also own poultry, however poultry breeding is not a main source of income for locals.

Along with the above-mentioned agricultural activities, bee-keeping also plays an important role in the local economy of Tsalka municipality. Although the number of beekeepers as of 2014 is 140 and their majority (65 family holdings) owns only 1-4 bee families, this sector has the potential for development. During the study, important factors providing opportunities for the development of bee-keeping in Tsalka municipality (e.g., natural conditions) have been identified.

In 2014, the number of family holdings owning irrigated land was 48. The area of such land parcels does not exceed 0.2 ha. At the same time, the majority of family holdings are not equipped with irrigation systems and they irrigate land plots through their own efforts. For instance, in 2014, 814 family holdings managed to irrigate their land parcels. Of these, 564 owned up to 0.1 hectares of land. These figures indicate that only those family holdings that own small parcels manage to irrigate their lands and only through their own efforts.

The analysis of statistical data shows that family holdings in Tsalka municipality actively use agricultural equipment and machinery. For instance, 4,194 family holdings making 79% of the total number households of Tsalka municipality used a tractor in 2014. Hand tractors were used by 1,057 family holdings, tillage equipment – by 3,590 family holdings and trucks – by 3,924 family holdings. It should be mentioned that only 7% from those family holdings that use tractors own a tractor. 296 (93%) tractors out 318 tractors owned by the municipality are serviceable.

5.2 CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The study shows that the farmers in Tsalka municipality have different work experience and are simultaneously engaged in different agricultural activities. Based on quantitative and qualitative study, several priority directions have been identified: livestock breeding, potato growing, vegetable growing, bee-keeping, and grain growing.

The farmers who participated in focus-groups and a phone survey specified issues that affect their activities. Lack of finances and limited access to agricultural machinery is the major impeding factor for local farms, therefore improved access to infrastructure, machinery and finances is a key precondition for development. The majority of surveyed farmers plan to stay in the agricultural sector and expand farming activities.

The study revealed the basic needs of agriculture in Tsalka municipality:

- ensure state financial backing;
- improve access to markets;
- improve access to soft agricultural loans;
- improve livestock breeds;
- purchase bee families;
- improve seed stock of grain crops and potatoes;
- encourage local entrepreneurship, e.g., through the introduction of a quality mark and standards for products;
- improve infrastructure and the availability of machinery;
- improve access to educational resources;
- provide opportunities for international experience sharing;
- improve access to information about international markets;
- improve knowledge on product branding;
- improve knowledge on new agricultural practices;
- provide improved opportunities for experience sharing in successful agricultural practices.

The study revealed that supporting priority directions in agriculture is a key factor for the economic development of Tsalka municipality. The development of related sectors, such as agro tourism and strengthening intersectoral relations are also important. It should be noted that the priority sub-sectors of agriculture are closely interrelated and characterized by the shortage of qualified personnel and limited infrastructure.

Although the implementation of sector-specific recommendations will facilitate the development of relevant sectors, integrated rather than sector-specific approaches will be required to ensure agricultural development in Tsalka municipality. Integrated approaches focusing on the development of Tsalka municipality as a whole should be applied.

Finally, it should be noted that effective and innovative training and informational campaigns with the involvement of the governmental, private and non-governmental sectors and follow-up monitoring can be carried out in Tsalka municipality on a regular basis, as these activities provide prompt and strong feedback of relatively low-cost interventions.

Note: for details please refer to “Agricultural needs assessment in Tsalka municipality” carried out within the framework of the project.

6. STUDY OF TOURIST POTENTIAL AND CULTURAL HERITAGE OF TSALKA MUNICIPALITY

The Local Development Strategy is based on the study of tourist potential and cultural heritage of Tsalka municipality.

Several national and regional strategic documents which are directly related to tourism development in Tsalka municipality are available and used as guidelines in the process of the development of this sector in the municipality:

- **Georgia Tourism Strategy 2015-2025**, developed and approved by the National Tourism Administration of Georgia;
- **Kvemo Kartli Regional Development Strategy 2014-21**, developed by the Government of Georgia;
- **Tsalka Tourism Development Strategy 2016-2021**, developed within the framework of the FAO project, Capacity Development of the Ministry of Agriculture of Georgia.

The law on the Development of Mountain Regions of Georgia, offering benefits to local tourist service providers is applied to all settlements of Tsalka municipality, which is an important factor favoring the development of local tourism.

6.1 TOURIST RESOURCES OF TSALKA MUNICIPALITY

Natural attractions

Tsalka municipality is characterized by specific natural attractions due to its physical and geographical conditions:

- **Dashbashi Canyon** - a canyon developed by the Ktsia River in volcanic lavas
- **Bareti Lake**
- **Oliangi (Berta) Vauclusian spring** – natural monument, a clean spring with abundant water flowing from volcanic layers, with a centuries old church and stone pool
- **Mount Chikiani** – a dormant volcano built of Neogene and liparite-dacitic lavas
- **Saint Sophia Oak (Tsalka Oak)** – about 500-600 year-old oak tree in the village of Dashbashi

Other natural sites that are located on the territory and may be attractive from the tourism point of view include: Jamushi Lake located near the village of Kizilkilisa, canyon of the Chilchili River and a small waterfall in the village of Beshtasheni. The Tsalka water reservoir, the largest water reservoir in Georgia by surface area, is also noteworthy.

TOURIST ATTRACTIONS

Tsalka municipality is one of the distinguished administrative-territorial units of Georgia in terms of the abundance of monuments of cultural heritage and their importance, consisting mainly of churches and megalithic structures. The municipality is rich with archeological sites. Important petroglyphic images have been found within the territory of the municipality. According to the National Agency for Cultural Heritage Preservation of Georgia, more than 600 monuments of cultural heritage are registered in Tsalka municipality.

CULTURE

The culture of Tsalka municipality is an important tourist attraction along with its physical cultural monuments. The multi-ethnic population of Tsalka municipality have diverse and unique traditional cuisine, folklore and traditions. The Georgian ethnic group consists mainly of Svans and Adjarians, therefore visitors to Tsalka municipality can become acquainted with the cultures of Svaneti and Adjara as well.

AVAILABLE TOURIST ROUTES

Some tourist routes are so-called combined routes consisting of equestrian, cycle and hiking trails. Moreover, the available tourist routes cover not only the territory of Tsalka municipality, but also the areas of neighboring municipalities. Some routes are marked in accordance with the Technical Regulation on Hiking Routes, however, these rules are not observed at all routes, where some trail markings are outdated and require an update. Unfortunately, the infrastructure of marked routes are limited to signs and lacks picnic/camping sites and shelters, notwithstanding their complicity and distance.

Route	Implementing agency
From natural wonder to German heritage	UNFAO
Gate of Trialeti history	UNFAO
Megalithic past of Tsalka	UNFAO
Manglisi - Choliani	National Tourism Administration
Rkoni-Kldekari-Choliani	National Tourism Administration

6.2 CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

To develop tourism in Tsalka municipality, the following key issues must be addressed: the development of infrastructure and new services, improvement of already available services and increasing the visibility of the municipality.

Accommodation and catering infrastructure should be improved. For the development of different types of accommodation (hotels, guesthouses) facilities, the engagement of local stakeholders is important. It is necessary to construct camping sites and the infrastructure of tourist routes, establish a tourist information center, encourage the development of tourist packages and strengthen contacts with relevant national and international agencies.

Active engagement of stakeholders and local communities, through encouraging local production, finding new ways for generation of local incomes and creating an attractive environment for tourism-related businesses, is one of the most important factors for sustainable tourism development.

Availability of skilled labor is very important to achieve desirable results and develop tourism in Tsalka municipality. Based on the analysis of the background situation, two areas, where the capacity development is required, have been identified:

- Trainings for local communities to raise their awareness on tourist resources;
- Training for potential providers to improve tourist services.

Low visibility of the area is one of the major weaknesses of Tsalka municipality. It is important to improve the image of the region and increase the capacity of local tourist operators to develop incoming tourism along with the improvement of accommodation facilities, performance of local tourist service providers and tourist attractions with the assistance of international tourist operators. All of these factors will increase the visibility of the municipality both at national and international markets and help transform Tsalka into an attractive tourist destination.

7. CHALLENGES IN THE MUNICIPALITY AND THEIR SOLUTIONS

№	Challenges	Solutions		
		Grant competition	Capacity building	Lobbying-advocacy
1	Agriculture			
1.1	Low level of awareness and education of farmers		●	
1.2	Shortage of skilled human resources		●	
1.3	Fragmented lands		●	●
1.4	Unregistered land plots			●
1.5	Underdeveloped agricultural markets	●	●	●
1.6	Low productivity of primary production	●	●	
1.7	Underdeveloped processing industry	●		
1.8	Lack of irrigation systems	●		●
1.9	Spread of plant and animal diseases		●	●
1.10	Eroded agricultural lands	●	●	●
1.11	Low level of mechanization and insufficient agricultural equipment	●	●	
1.12	Natural hazards (e.g., hail)	●		

Stakeholders:

- Government of Georgia;
- Ministry of Environment Protection and Agriculture of Georgia;
- NNLE Agricultural Projects Management Agency (ARDA);
- LEPL National Food Agency;
- LEPL Enterprise Georgia;
- Tsalka Municipality City Hall;
- Banks and microfinance organizations;
- Suppliers of agricultural equipment and inputs;
- Agricultural cooperatives.

Based on the results of the SWOT analysis, the strengths of Tsalka municipality include the abundance of water resources and soils and climate of the municipality, which create favorable conditions for livestock and poultry breeding, fish farming, bee-keeping and vegetable, potato, grain and berry growing. An ecologically clean environment of the municipality and its proximity to the capital of Georgia, as well as the benefits applied to the residents of highland settlements, provide opportunities for the development of organic farming.

№	Challenges	Solutions		
		Grant competition	Capacity building	Lobbying-advocacy
1	Tourism			
1.1	Underdeveloped infrastructure	●		●
1.2	Limited availability of tourist services	●	●	
1.3	Inadequate condition and limited availability of accommodation and catering facilities	●	●	
1.4	Lack of tourist information centers	●		●
1.5	Shortage of skilled human resources		●	
1.6	Low level of public awareness		●	
1.7	Low visibility of the municipality		●	●
1.8	Limited access to quality and affordable health care services		●	●
1.9	Language barrier		●	

Stakeholders:

- Government of Georgia;
- Ministry of Economy and Sustainable Development of Georgia;
- LEPL National Tourism Administration;
- LEPL National Agency for Cultural Heritage Preservation of Georgia;
- LEPL Enterprise Georgia;
- Tsalka Municipality City Hall;
- Banks and microfinance organizations;
- Private businesses.

The strengths of Tsalka municipality identified via the SWOT analysis (proximity to the capital of Georgia/ location, natural resources/minerals, distinctive landscape, natural and historical monuments, climate, natural agricultural products) provide opportunities for the development of extreme, cycle, equestrian, culinary and agro tourism in the municipality.

№	Challenges	Solutions		
		Grant competition	Capacity building	Lobbying-advocacy
1	Non-agricultural economic activity			
1.1	Underdeveloped infrastructure	●		●
1.2	Chaotic business activities, unregistered businesses		●	●
1.3	Low level of knowledge of business and marketing		●	
1.4	Problems with the registration of immovable property (unregistered land plots)			●
1.5	Shortage of skilled human resources		●	
1.6	Low level of awareness of the local population		●	
1.7	Low visibility of the municipality		●	
1.8	Limited access to loans and state programs		●	●
1.9	Language barrier	●	●	●
Stakeholders:				
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Government of Georgia ● Ministry of Economy and Sustainable Development of Georgia; ● LEPL Enterprise Georgia; ● Tsalka Municipality City Hall; ● Banks and microfinance organizations; ● Private businesses 				

Tsalka municipality enjoys special benefits guaranteed by the Mountain Law, which creates favorable conditions for the development of businesses in mountain regions.

The territory of the municipality is crossed by the roads of national importance, as well as Marabda-Akhalkalaki railway, putting the area in a better position in terms of logistics.

Primary agricultural products that are locally available can serve as a basis for the development of food processing industry.

The strengths of Tsalka municipality identified via the SWOT analysis (proximity to the capital of Georgia/ location, natural resources/minerals, distinctive landscape, natural and historical monuments, climate, natural agricultural products) provide opportunities for the development of extreme, cycle, equestrian, culinary and agro tourism in the municipality.

№	Challenges	Solutions		
		Grant competition	Capacity building	Lobbying-advocacy
1	Environmental protection and sustainable use of natural resources			
1.1	Sustainable management of water resources		●	●
1.2	Sustainable waste management and recycling	●	●	●
1.3	Natural hazards risk reduction and management	●	●	●
1.4	Environmental awareness raising of the local population	●	●	●
1.5	WaSH-related issues	●	●	●
Stakeholders: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Government of Georgia; ● Ministry of Environment Protection and Agriculture of Georgia; ● National Environmental Agency; ● Tsalka Municipality City Hall. 				

Based on the results of the SWOT analysis, carried out within the framework of the project, the strengths of the environmental sector include the location, soils, climate and other natural resources present in the municipality.

№	Challenges	Solutions		
		Grant competition	Capacity building	Lobbying-advocacy
1	Education, culture, sport and youth			
1.1	Shortage of educational and cultural facilities	●	●	●
1.2	Outdated educational and cultural infrastructure and equipment	●		●
1.3	Shortage of qualified/skilled personnel		●	
1.4	Shortage of CAS courses	●		●
1.5	Lack of vocational education institutions	●	●	●
1.6	Low level of preschool education (shortage of preschool education facilities)		●	●
1.7	Inactive civil society		●	●
1.8	Child labor		●	●
1.9	Low quality internet		●	●
1.10	Language barrier	●	●	●

Stakeholders:

- Government of Georgia;
- Ministry of Education, Science, Culture and Sport of Georgia;
- LEPL Educational and Scientific Infrastructure Development Agency;
- National Center for Teacher Professional Development;
- National Center for Educational Quality Enhancement;
- Preschool education facilities and schools;
- Tsalka Municipality City Hall.

Based on the results of the SWOT analysis and needs assessment carried out with relevant target groups, financial allowances considered by the Mountain Law have been identified as a main strength in this area. Moreover, the cultural center available in the municipality provides good opportunities for the development. There is a clear interest and demand in the civil society for the maximum involvement of young people in cultural and educational activities.

№	Challenges	Solutions		
		Grant competition	Capacity building	Lobbying-advocacy
1	Health care and social issues			
1.1	Shortage of qualified healthcare personnel		●	●
1.2	Underdeveloped healthcare infrastructure			●
1.3	Inadequately equipped health care facilities	●		●
1.4	Availability of quality medical services		●	●
1.5	Underdeveloped transport infrastructure (public transport)			●
1.6	Lack of PwD friendly environment and infrastructure and low level of integration of PwDs in society	●		●
1.7	Lack of day care centers	●		●
1.8	Unemployment	●	●	●
1.9	Restricted access to water	●		●

Stakeholders:

- Government of Georgia;
- Ministry of Internally Displaced Persons from the Occupied Territories, Labour, Health and Social Affairs of Georgia and subordinated legal entities of public law;
- Tsalka Municipality City Hall.

It is important to note that state programs (Universal Healthcare Program), monetary and non-monetary assistance provided by Tsalka Municipality City Hall, address existing challenges to some extent, which is especially important for socially vulnerable groups, multi-child families, PwDs, etc.

№	Challenges	Solutions		
		Grant competition	Capacity building	Lobbying-advocacy
1	Gender equality and women's integration			
1.1	Early marriages		●	●
1.2	Mindset and stereotypes		●	●
1.3	Low level of awareness and education of the local population		●	
1.4	Discrimination and violence (physical and psychological) against women		●	●
1.5	Lack of formal and informal unions for women	●	●	●
1.6	Hard socio-economic conditions	●		●
1.7	Insufficient participation/involvement of women in decision-making	●	●	●
1.8	Restricted access to water	●		●
Stakeholders:				
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Government of Georgia; • Ministry of Internally Displaced Persons from the Occupied Territories, Labour, Health and Social Affairs of Georgia and subordinated legal entities of public law; • Tsalka Municipality City Hall. 				

The multi-ethnic traditions of Tsalka municipality, as well as local women's potential and experience in agriculture, craft making, cooking and other areas create opportunities for the active involvement of local women in ongoing processes.

№	Challenges	Solutions		
		Grant competition	Capacity building	Lobbying-advocacy
1	Public governance			
1.1	Limited budget		●	●
1.2	Lack of human resources		●	●
1.3	Language barrier	●	●	●
1.4	Nepotism			●
1.5	Shortcoming in communication and coordination between the local population and authorities		●	●
Stakeholders: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Government of Georgia; ● Regional Office of the State Representative; ● Tsalka Municipality City Hall. 				

Based on the results of consultations with relevant stakeholders and the SWOT analysis, high representation of ethnic minorities in the public sector has been identified as one of the strengths in the area. The willingness of public servants to cooperate in a participatory manner should be emphasized.

8. MONITORING AND EVALUATION

Creating an effective system of evaluation and monitoring is important for monitoring and assessment of activities and processes that are planned under the Tsalka Municipality Local Development Strategy. The goal of this system is to examine the process of fulfilment of tasks specified by the Strategy, assess obtained results and identify challenges.

The Management Council of the Tsalka LAG will be responsible for monitoring and evaluation. The Management Council will oversee the whole process, namely the implementation of activities specified in the Tsalka Municipality Local Development Strategy, achievement of results, need for Strategy and Action Plan adjustments, etc.

Moreover, the grant project evaluation committee, which will examine the compliance of the project with the objectives and priorities of the Strategy, will be composed of members from the Tsalka LAG Management Council. The committee will be guided by the Grants Manual, a useful and helpful guide in terms of project funding and project evaluation.

