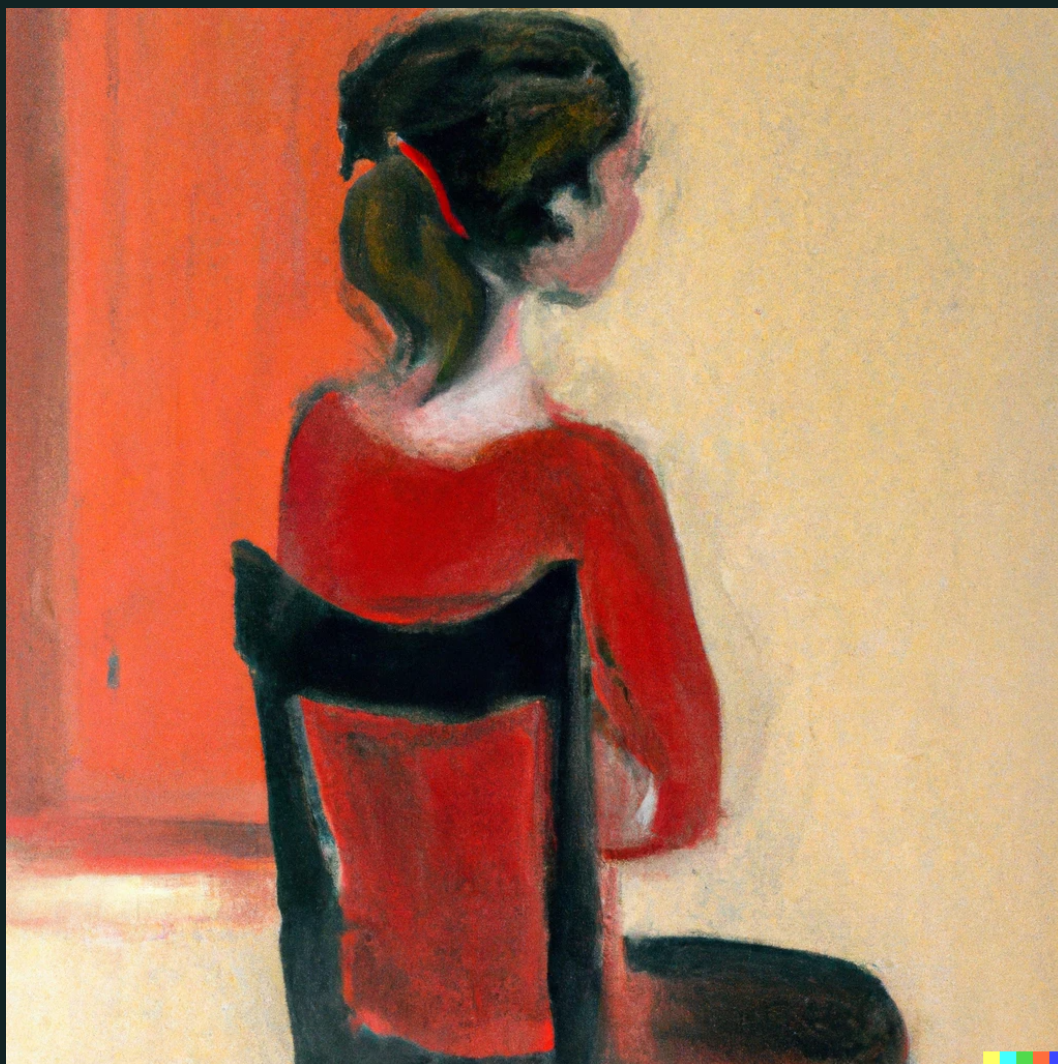


SUPPORT SERVICES AND MECHANISMS FOR THE VIOLENCE SURVIVOR WOMEN IN GEORGIA

Analysis of needs and challenges



Support Services and Mechanisms for the Violence Survivor Women in Georgia

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Social Justice Center
Tbilisi, 2023



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Introduction/Context overview

The initial response to and prevention of violence against women in Georgia began with the adoption of the national law on domestic violence in 2006, followed by the establishment of other critical response and protection mechanisms. Subsequent milestones include the opening of the first shelter and the launch of a telephone helpline for victims of violence in 2010. Domestic violence was criminalized in 2012, and in 2017, the Istanbul Convention was ratified. The year 2018 saw the establishment of the Human Rights Protection and Monitoring Department in the Ministry of Internal Affairs. Additionally, legislative changes regarding sexual harassment were implemented in 2019 (UN Women, 2021, p. 71).

According to the Istanbul Convention, the state is obliged to provide a wide range of services in response to the diverse needs of victims of violence, which, in addition to physical security, includes legal and psychological counseling, medical and social services, financial assistance, shelter, education, and job search assistance. In addition, the state is obliged to take all necessary measures to establish effective inter-agency cooperation to protect and support victims of violence. This implies the coordinated work of the judiciary, Prosecutor's Office, law enforcement agencies, non-governmental organizations, and other relevant organizations/bodies in the victim's interests (Council of Europe Convention on prevention and suppression of violence against women and domestic violence, Article 18). The Convention obliges the state to respond at the national, regional, and local levels through multi-sectoral and multi-agency interventions, which is especially important to receive services on a "one-stop shop" basis (GREVIO, 2022, p. 54). The National Action Plan on Combating Violence Against Women and Domestic Violence and Measures to be Implemented for The Protection of Victims (Survivors) for 2018–2020 stipulated the creation of a national referral mechanism. According to the baseline assessment report of the Group of Experts on Combating Violence Against Women and Domestic Violence (GREVIO), these procedures have been prepared but not approved, which prevents effective coordination and cooperation (ibid., p.41). Despite significant changes, there are many challenges in accessing services and protection mechanisms for victims of violence today, which we will address in this research report.

The research findings indicate that victims of violence often have less trust in public services due to the risk of re-traumatization. To maintain a system of protection and support for victims of violence and to create adequate services, it is necessary to introduce the principles of trauma-informed care. This approach involves maximally informing service providers about the effects of trauma and ways of its manifestation, which will help establish trust between the recipient and the service provider and build a healthy relationship. In addition, it is essential that victims of violence are actively involved in decision-making processes and that service providers respect their autonomy. Considering women's experiences with different cultural backgrounds and identities, cultural sensitivity is crucial. Trauma-informed care focuses on the victim's strengths and avoids pathologizing the victim's condition, which also reduces the risk of re-traumatization (Elliot, Bjelajac, Fallot, Markoff, & Reed, 2005). Introducing these principles will increase the effectiveness of the support system in terms of service delivery. According to

the research, non-governmental organizations are guided by these approaches, which is why they deserve more trust from violence survivors.

State services and legal mechanisms for protection and support for women victims of violence operate in Georgia, such as shelters, crisis centers, 112 - single emergency service number, 112 mobile application, 116 06 counseling telephone hotline, restraining and protective orders, electronic monitoring mechanism of abuser, Human Rights Protection Department of the Ministry of Internal Affairs (MIA), service of the witness and victim coordinator from the MIA and the Prosecutor's Office. In addition, non-governmental organizations play a crucial role as service providers, offering victims of violence shelters, social workers, psychologists, lawyers, medical professionals, and other necessary services. This study delves into each service and mechanism, discussing the steps taken and addressing the existing challenges.

The purpose and objectives of the research

The study aims to explore the perspectives of representatives from both governmental and non-governmental service-providing organizations on the existing services for victims of violence.

The specific objectives of the research include:

- Identifying currently available services for victims of violence and assessing their accessibility, considering geographic, cultural, and economic factors.
- Investigating the perceptions and attitudes of service providers directly regarding the effectiveness of existing services and challenges in this direction.
- Studying the practice of cooperation and coordination between different service-providing organizations/agencies.
- Assessing resource allocation in existing services in terms of both financial and human resources.

Methodology

The study comprised four stages: the initial stage, desk research, fieldwork, and analysis. (1) at the initial stage, the researcher developed a detailed research methodology and contacted potential research respondents; (2) in the desk research stage, the researcher analyzed relevant studies, policy documents, and the legal framework; (3) during the fieldwork, the researcher used qualitative research methods, in particular, the expert interview method to collect data. For data collection, a semi-structured interview guide was developed based on the research objectives. Fieldwork was conducted from May to July 2023 using face-to-face and online meetings.

A victim-centered approach was used in the analysis of service-related data, based on which different dimensions of service-related challenges were explored. This approach was employed

throughout all stages of the research, emphasizing the following considerations: prioritizing the safety and well-being of victims of violence; providing a dignified environment for them; and fostering cooperation and coordination among service providers, various agencies, and field specialists to establish a robust support network (EIGE, 2023); considering trauma-informed care, which involves taking additional measures at each stage of service delivery to avoid retraumatization and revictimization of the victim (Phillips, Lyon, Fabri, & Warshaw, 2015), and creating services that promote emotional, psychological, legal, and economic empowerment.

Sample:

The researcher employed a targeted method for selecting research participants, which involves selecting individuals based on their specific competence and characteristics, followed by contacting them. The selected study participants were directly involved in supporting victims of domestic violence/violence against women and providing various services. A total of 14 expert interviews were conducted, engaging representatives from the non-governmental sector and state agencies. These specialists, spanning different fields, have direct contact with support mechanisms and services and possess information on challenges related to various social groups, such as socially vulnerable women, representatives of the LGBTQ group, women with disabilities, and women from non-dominant ethnic groups. Expert interviews were conducted with the heads of service-providing non-governmental organizations, non-governmental and state crisis centers and shelters, as well as a representative of the Prosecutor's Office.

Data analysis:

At this stage, the researcher analyzed the collected data and combined it with the results of the desk research. The thematic analysis of the interviews focused on an intersectional perspective and how socioeconomic factors, gender identity, sexual orientation, disability, and ethnicity shape service-related experiences and the long-term rehabilitation of victims of violence.

Ethical issues:

Throughout the research process, careful attention was given to ethical principles. Prior to participating in the study, informed consent was obtained from all respondents. The research participants were fully briefed on the research and interview objectives, and they were made aware of their option to withdraw from the process at any time. The interviews were recorded with the respondents' consent. To safeguard the privacy of the participants, the researcher refrained from disclosing their names, surnames, and specific organizational affiliations.

Limitations of the study

Due to the scale and time limitations of the research, the number of respondents was restricted, and an in-depth examination of service specifics across different regions of Georgia was not

feasible. While the original intent was to explore the experiences of beneficiaries, contacting them within the limited time posed difficulties due to the potential risk of retraumatization.

Data Analysis

State services

Crisis Center

The first crisis center for victims of domestic violence in Georgia was opened in 2016 in Tbilisi. In 2010-2016, through collaboration between the State Fund for the Protection and Assistance of (Statutory) Victims of Human Trafficking and the United Nations Women, the first four shelters for victims of violence and the counseling hotline for victims of domestic violence (116 06) were created. Notably, until 2016, there was no state crisis center in Georgia that would offer free services to victims (UN Women, 2016). **As of now, seven crisis centers and five shelters are operational under the auspices of the state, as reported by the head of the crisis center for victims of violence.**

It is worth noting that the crisis centers, as well as the shelters and the hotline for victims of violence, were created with the financial support of the United Nations Women, although today all these institutions continue to work with state funding. The crisis centers are located in: Tbilisi, Kutaisi, Gori, Marneuli, Ozurgeti, Zugdidi and Telavi (Agency For State Care And Assistance For the (Statutory) Victims of Human Trafficking, 2023). Notably, the crisis centers in Zugdidi and Telavi, opened in 2019, is a result of collaboration between the non-governmental organization Women's Consultation Center - Home, the local municipalities, and support from the United Nations Women and the Swedish government. Starting from 2021, the local municipalities have taken up the financing of crisis centers.

If we trace the developments from 2006 to the present, initially, shelters and services were established exclusively for victims of trafficking. The mandate expanded in 2009 to include the protection and assistance of victims of domestic violence. Subsequently, in 2012, violence was criminalized and became punishable under criminal law, with specific provisions for violence against women and the protection and assistance for victims of domestic violence being introduced. The establishment of crisis centers commenced in 2016, beginning with the Tbilisi crisis center. Due to high demand for these services, an additional six crisis centers were subsequently added (the head of the Tbilisi crisis center).

Victims and alleged victims of violence against women, domestic violence, human trafficking, and sexual violence, along with their dependents, are eligible for enrollment in the crisis center for victims of violence, according to the State Care and Assistance Agency for (Statutory)

Victims of Trafficking in 2023. The crisis center extends various services to victims/alleged victims, including psychological-social rehabilitation, organization and reception of medical services, legal assistance, and interpreter services if necessary. Additional types of services may also be provided based on individual needs. It's important to note that only the crisis center in Tbilisi offers the function of a 24-hour shelter. Other crisis centers provide daytime services during business hours (9 am to 6 pm).

Tbilisi Crisis Center is different because it is a 24-hour service. The crisis center (in Tbilisi) also includes the function of a shelter. We are the only crisis center that provides 24-hour service (Head of Tbilisi Crisis Center).

According to the respondents, crisis center services are deemed particularly significant because individuals do not need an official violence victim status issued by authorities such as the Ministry of Internal Affairs, a judicial body, or the group determining the status of victims of violence against women and/or domestic violence under the Inter-agency Commission on Gender Equality, Violence Against Women and Domestic Violence. The decision on being a victim by the criminal prosecution body is also not a prerequisite. The services of crisis centers are accessible to both recognized victims and alleged victims who believe they have experienced violence. Crisis center employees are mandated to assess the probable occurrence of violence based on a specialized questionnaire. This assessment covers various forms of violence, including physical and psychological, economic, sexual violence, neglect, coercion, and alleged incidents of human trafficking

Our institutions have actively removed barriers that once hindered alleged or potential victims without official status from accessing counseling services provided by specialists in the relevant field (Head of Tbilisi Crisis Center).

The interviews revealed that the crisis center adopts a comprehensive and multifaceted approach to addressing the needs of victims/alleged victims of violence. By providing a range of services, including psycho-social, medical, legal, and shelter support, the center underscores the complexity of the victim rehabilitation process. Moreover, the center's policy of not requiring official victim status as a prerequisite for accessing services eliminates potential barriers that victims of abuse might encounter when seeking assistance. This policy is grounded in respecting the autonomy of service seekers, acknowledging that victims are often best positioned to assess their own condition and status. The requirement of the crisis center to determine the case of violence through a special questionnaire as an early intervention mechanism may be effective in planning further steps, preventing the escalation of violence and providing timely assistance.

Psychologists, social workers, lawyers, medical staff, other invited specialists who the victim needs are a combination of these persons, and they act on the principle of one window. In addition, specialists in all fields are trained with tools, guidelines, and work processes that are in line with international

standards, by local and international experts (Head of the Tbilisi Crisis Center).

Given the urgent and vital nature of the services provided by the crisis centers for victims of violence, it becomes evident that their geographical coverage is insufficient. To address this, there is a pressing need to establish municipal services tailored to the respective needs of diverse communities. Currently, services of the crisis centers are predominantly accessible in urban areas, posing a challenge for many rural women who may lack sufficient funds for regular travel to the city. Moreover, it is crucial to recognize that restrictions or prohibitions on mobility, as well as isolating victims from the outside world, are often employed as forms of violence that coexist with other types of abuse. The 2021 report from the Public Defender of Georgia, titled *Women and Mobility - Gender Aspects of Women's Daily Movement*, underscores the existence of mobility barriers for women, girls, and LGBT+ people due to the potential risk of psychological, physical, or sexual violence (Public Defender of Georgia, 2021).

Regional coverage is very small. The victim who, for example, lives in Samtskhe-Javakheti or the Kakheti region, is less 'lucky' because we cannot offer much, and what we do offer may lack quality. The quality of services in the regions, we must say for objectivity, is low (social worker).

Victims of violence often find themselves restricted in their interactions with loved ones, family members, access to health services, and opportunities for employment and education—essential elements for protection from violence and gaining independence. Challenges in accessing material resources, particularly transportation, are heightened for women in rural areas where public transportation is not easily available. Factors such as the proximity and safety of bus stops and well-lit streets become crucial considerations (Georgian Public Defender, 2021). Moreover, societal norms in some contexts may deem it unacceptable for a woman to move alone or with someone of a different gender identity. This further limits the access of violence survivor women to crucial services, including psychological support.

In the regions, there is a lack of services of a psychologist. In order to receive the services of a psychologist, a person cannot change place of residence and, therefore, cannot use this service. Remote services are almost non-existent, even the services of a psychologist; however, the category of people we are talking about now may not even have access to the Internet. At the same time, receiving the services of a psychologist remotely may also affect the quality. The scarcity of services and the conditions for victims residing in the regions are markedly unequal compared to those in the capital, and even in cities like Kutaisi and Batumi. While the situation in these cities is relatively better, it is important to note that it is not ideal either (social worker).

As highlighted by research participants, the creation and development of services for victims of violence must account for the interplay of various factors. Neglecting this intersection may

result in women who need these services the most being left without support. Currently, geographic and socio-economic factors play a crucial role in determining the access of women victims of violence to services, which is neither efficient nor fair. Barriers such as limited access to employment, financial resources, and underdeveloped transport infrastructure in certain regions should not hinder a woman who is a victim of violence from receiving essential services. Centralized services alone are insufficient, emphasizing the need to establish and develop services at the municipal level.

In practice, when it comes to an adult, and this is in Tbilisi, I refer her to the crisis center and she more or less receives this service. If she is in the region, I can hardly direct an adult woman anywhere, because even to come to the central city, she needs additional resources and does not have the financial resources to do so (representative of an NGO).

If a victim is referred to a crisis center, they are usually almost never left without services, but it is not enough and it is more like an initial response than a long-term endeavor and there are not enough resources in this regard (social worker).

The narratives of the respondents emphasize the challenge of limited resources in relation to crisis centers. While these centers effectively address the immediate needs of victims of violence, the absence of other services for long-term support can, in some cases, result in victims returning to violent environments. To enhance the effectiveness of this service, there is a pressing need for much more comprehensive and sustainable support services that can address and strengthen the long-term needs of victims. This underscores a flaw in the existing support system.

Another challenge is the cost of medical care. According to the respondents, the package of medical services within which victims of violence can receive this service is often insufficient.

The amount provided in the package is insufficient, particularly in cases where the victim has severe injuries, to cover the costs of their full rehabilitation. While individuals can potentially benefit from the state's universal health care program, particularly in emergencies, it's crucial to note that those who do not have a status of socially vulnerable may not receive full funding and compensation. In such cases, victims may be required to make some payment or incur interest. Often an individual might not have the resources, and in this case we have to find resources for additional expenses (NGO representative).

Service providers from non-governmental organizations have encountered situations where documenting traces of abuse becomes a financial burden for beneficiaries. After directing the individual to a medical facility, it becomes apparent that a substantial amount must be paid for

this documentation and counseling. According to one lawyer, certain institutions may refuse to prepare such documentation and actively try to avoid it

We paid about 150 GEL to get the epicrisis, just to document the injuries on her hand. It was Friday evening, recognizing that waiting until Monday for the examination would render the evidence less impactful. Some time had already passed and we did not want to completely lose the evidence. This has not been covered by anyone anywhere, not even the state. Although we have stated that the investigation is ongoing and there are victims of violence, etc. (attorney).

A social worker participating in the study shared a case in which a beneficiary required a relatively expensive elective surgery. Given the person's status as a victim residing in a shelter, the Ministry of Health fully financed the operation, as insurance did not cover these costs. Notably, a non-governmental organization took the initiative to communicate with the Ministry of Health and advocate for the victim's needs. It was on the initiative of the social worker of the non-governmental organization that this communication took place, which in the end produced a positive result.

This funding was obtained with the help of an NGO social worker, not a state. This may be an indication that the state services do not entirely go into the depths of people's needs (social worker).

In addition to insufficient geographic coverage and lack of resources, a factor preventing victims of violence from receiving services may be due to mistrust towards government agencies. This issue is especially relevant in the case of psychological services. This may be related to lack of information, negative experience with other state institutions, and public perceptions of these institutions. The existence of this problem indicates that for many victims of violence, the non-governmental sector has more trust and legitimacy, and the state has important work to do in building trust.

Some of the victims do not want to receive even psychological services from the state institution, because they have some mistrust. Although we often explain that this is not the Ministry of Internal Affairs and that it is a completely different agency, whose direct obligation is to provide assistance to victims, unfortunately, they still distrust us and prefer us to find a psychologist in another non-governmental organization, rather than receive the psychological services of the crisis center (representative of a non-governmental organization).

It can be said that the creation and development of crisis centers is a progressive approach to support and rehabilitation of victims of violence. Over the years, the number of these institutions has increased, and the scope is expanding, which is related to the change in the legal framework and cooperation with international organizations. Crisis centers, along with shelters

and violence hotlines, play an important role in providing multi-dimensional support, including psycho-social, medical, legal and, in the case of the facility in Tbilisi, round-the-clock services. The center's inclusive policy, extending services to beneficiaries without a formal victim status, signifies positive strides in breaking down barriers to services. Nevertheless, important challenges are limited resources, insufficient geographical coverage, distrust of the population towards the state institutions and lack of awareness of the population, as well as the absence of more sustainable and long-term victim empowerment work (GREVIO, 2022). The insights from individuals in regular contact with female victims of violence, actively working with them, highlight the imperative to establish a support system that is sustainable, comprehensive, competent, and highly sensitive to the diverse needs of different groups. Such a system is essential for addressing both the immediate and long-term needs of female victims of violence

Shelter

Five shelters for victims of violence operate in the following cities: Tbilisi, Gori, Marneuli, Kutaisi and Ozurgeti on the basis of the State Fund for the Protection and Assistance of Victims of (Statutory) Human Trafficking in Georgia. Victims of violence against women and/or domestic violence and sexual violence together with their dependents are eligible to enroll in shelters. A victim is considered to be a person who, in accordance with the procedure established by the legislation of Georgia, is recognized as a victim by the criminal prosecution body for family crimes and domestic violence crimes provided for by the Criminal Code of Georgia. A victim is a person who has experienced physical, psychological, economic or sexual violence or coercion and who has been determined to be a victim by the Ministry of Internal Affairs, a court or a victim identification group (State Care and Assistance Agency for Victims of (Statutory) Trafficking, 2023). As for the dependent person, it is the child of the victim under the age of 18 or a person whose legal representative is the victim. If until 2023 it was possible to get into the shelter only with the status of victim, from July of the same year, the status is no longer a prerequisite for receiving this service.

Until now, you couldn't get asylum if you didn't have an approved restraining order, victim reporting order from the Prosecutor's Office, a court protective order, or a report from a victim identification group, which will no longer be in effect from July 1st. This does not mean that the status will be abolished, it is just that there are people who do not want to contact law enforcement agencies. Therefore, those who come to crisis centers and do not want to cooperate with law enforcement and prosecuting authorities and judicial authorities will be identified at the crisis center and then they will have the opportunity to benefit from benefits without status (head of the Crisis Center).

This change increases the accessibility of the service and removes bureaucratic obstacles for women who do not want to cooperate with investigative agencies, but need to use the shelter service immediately. On the other hand, there is a possibility that this change could

diminish the rate of documenting cases of violence, initiating investigations, and providing the necessary legal responses.

NGO service providers report that they have had both good and bad experiences with the victim identification group. In many cases, it took quite a long time to convene a meeting, even when the abused woman needed the service immediately. Other respondents also had positive experiences of cooperation with the group. For example, in cases where the victim did not want the police to get involved, or when a violent incident had already occurred. According to one respondent: 'Every time a person was a victim of violence, they got a status and got a service.' The Group of Experts on Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (GREVIO), in its 2022 baseline assessment report, expressed concern about the obligation of the survivor to obtain victim status through contacting state agencies, such as the victim identification group, which is contrary to Article 18(4) of the Istanbul Convention (GREVIO, 2022, p. 48). The expert group also highlighted the stigma associated with victim status, which creates an additional barrier to accessing services.

It is important that the Office of the Public Defender monitors service institutions (shelters) for victims of domestic violence with a certain frequency, unplanned, and without agreement with the administration. In the monitoring reports, it is mentioned that despite the positive changes, the service provided by the shelter in the context of increased referrals has many challenges; for example, lack of psycho-social rehabilitation of victims, employment and educational programs, recreational and cognitive activities (Public Defender of Georgia, 2020). The absence or scarcity of relevant programs poses a challenge for the long-term support of beneficiaries. The Public Defender's report draws attention to the issue of inclusiveness of the services, particularly highlighting that beneficiaries from non-dominant ethnic groups encounter difficulties accessing psychological services due to language barriers (ibid). This concern is echoed by respondents in the study who are directly involved in providing services.

We had a case when we took a minor from an ethnic minority to a shelter as a precaution, and the child stayed there for several months. The child received services, but the quality of this service was a problem, because the language barrier is an obstacle in general when receiving all services (a person providing legal services).

The primary challenge for ethnic minorities is the language barrier, as effective communication with the psychologist is essential. This barrier not only impacts the service's effectiveness but also significantly influences trust. For people from ethnic minorities, these services are virtually unavailable (social worker).

In addition, according to the respondents, it is a problem to use services for people with **psycho-social needs**. For example, service providers have experienced difficulties finding services tailored explicitly for victims of violence at risk of suicide. According to one of the respondents, shelters try not to accept such beneficiaries because they do not have additional protection

mechanisms, and services are not adapted to their needs. As the respondent noted: 'If they find out that there is a risk of harming themselves or others, they will not be allowed in a shelter.' The difficulty of finding services for women with critical psychosocial needs reveals the shortcomings of the existing support system for victims of violence. This fact highlights the infrastructural and human resource problems in the asylum system. It points to the critical importance of services tailored to the complex needs of psycho-socially vulnerable individuals. Psychological support may also include assessment of psycho-emotional condition by the team working with the victim, which may become one of the evidences in the case and which adds additional value to the psychologist's service. Moreover, according to the respondents, one of the most common forms of violence is psychological violence, which in most cases is combined with other forms of violence. Very often, it is difficult for the victims themselves to identify psychological abuse, which is so necessary to start the rehabilitation process.

There is almost no physical abuse without psychological abuse; however, identifying psychological abuse is more difficult for a victim (social worker).

Shelter services are also less adapted to the needs of the LGBT+ group. According to the respondents, representatives of non-governmental organizations are trying to train the persons employed in the shelter on LGBT+ issues. Often shelters are willing to help a beneficiary from this particular group, but lack the relevant knowledge. That is why representatives of LGBT organizations conduct training in state shelters and crisis centers and then maintain communication with the persons employed there. There are often cases where there is a hostile environment towards LGBT people in shelters, not from shelter staff but from other beneficiaries.

Conflicts between beneficiaries are common. In terms of security, the representatives of the asylum administration should be more involved in the interaction between the beneficiaries. If they do not create problems for each other while living together, due to overcrowding in the living space, some problems are created by themselves. This can lead to additional stress and conflict (lawyer).

For this reason, many members of the LGBT+ group themselves refuse to use state asylum. Along with this problem, there are critical infrastructural challenges, especially for non-binary and transgender people. In this case, the shelter has a hard time figuring out where to place the beneficiary. According to the representative of one of the community organizations, there were several cases when the beneficiary was placed in a shelter and became a victim of violence by other beneficiaries. In order to manage such situations, it is necessary for the state to provide training for shelter workers. In addition to training, it is necessary to solve infrastructural problems and work on structural changes of the asylum system in order to take into account the needs of the LGBTQ community.

For many years, there has been advocacy for the creation of a shelter service that takes into account the specifics of the LGBT community. This was

reflected in the 2018-2020 Human Rights Action Plan. But nothing was done in this direction. We wanted this service to appear in the 2022-2030 Human Rights Strategy, we also sent a recommendation on this, but LGBT issues were not included in this Strategy at all (representative of a community organization).

For LGBTQ people, as in the case of representatives of other groups, the absence of a vision related to the long-term empowerment of these victims is particularly acute. According to representatives of community organizations, minors are especially vulnerable to this problem, and even more so are representatives of the transgender community. According to them, in the case of a transgender community, leaving a home of a minor means that he/she will not be able to return home. Although the state shelter and crisis center have the services of social workers and psychologists, these services are insufficient, especially when they do not work with families.

It is impossible to bring such child back home, which means that this child stays on the street and then has to engage in sex work, meaning continuously being a victim of violence. For people involved in sex work, violence is so common that they only go to the police when their lives are in danger (representative of a community organization).

A representative of one of the organizations had a case when a lesbian woman, who was a victim of violence after coming out, became a victim of violence from family members and had to move to a state shelter. She was a student and needed money every semester to pay her tuition. After moving to the shelter, the family stopped supporting her financially.

This issue is particularly pressing within the community, notably during the university years when many individuals come out en masse. In the Georgian reality, this often results in a loss of support from family members, with instances of individuals being kicked out of their homes. It is necessary to study what the state does in such a case. Doesn't it matter that this person is left completely without support? (representative of a non-governmental organization).

In such cases, members of the abused LGBTQI community often turn to the service sector to gain financial independence, which, unfortunately, may exclude the possibility of pursuing education due to long working hours and low pay. Especially if this person also has to pay rent, which today is very expensive. According to the respondents, there is no vision in the state regarding the fact that this group is particularly marginal and needs proper support in order to integrate into society. Due to these and other problems, a large part of the LGBTQI community emigrates and seeks asylum in another country. According to the representatives of the organizations, today the state policy is openly homophobic and capitalizes on homophobia, that is why the advocacy of creating services in these conditions is difficult and unclear.

Now, especially after Covid, there is a notable trend of LGBT individuals leaving Georgia in large numbers to seek asylum in other countries and a number of issues on which we thought it was appropriate to advocate are now complicated, because the main argument that the Ministry of Internal Affairs has is that this is not a very frequent problem. Why ask questions about systemically changing things when it could affect ten people a year. We have to explain that it's 10 now when you do not have sufficient services and it will be 100 when you have (NGO representative).

Based on the practice of lawyers, the Ministry of Internal Affairs does not recognize transgender women as women, which limits their access to services. Lawyers note that, in cases where the police did not issue a restraining order or the court did not grant a protective order, transgender women were neglected, as previously the status of the victim was tied to the possibility of receiving services. Once the status of a victim will no longer be a prerequisite for the use of asylum services, the situation may change in this regard.

Also, there are services for women victims of violence, and 'a woman' is mentioned, and 'a woman' is also mentioned in the victim compensation rule, we also issued statements about this, that transgender women cannot benefit from it, and we are trying very hard to see and interpret it correctly based on Article 4 of the Istanbul Convention (lawyer).

It's being treated like a domestic violence case, not a hate crime, and that's the problem. The police always respond, an investigation is launched, accountability is established, but the problem is that even when it is clearly a hate crime, it is not identified as such and is simply identified as domestic violence (NGO representative).

This issue is echoed in the report of Victor Madrigal-Borloz (2019), the UN's independent expert on protection against violence and discrimination related to sexual orientation and gender identity. During his visit to Georgia in 2019, Mr. Madrigal-Borloz assessed the implementation of national and international human rights legislation and, together with other agencies, visited shelters for victims of violence. According to the expert, there is a lack of information in the country regarding homelessness and the causes of homelessness in the LGBTQ community, including the possible correlation between domestic violence and homelessness. The expert highlighted the lack of state policies and programs and the problem of access to temporary shelter. According to him, the existing shelters for victims of violence are not adapted to the needs of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and people with different gender identities (Madrigal-Borloz, 2019). According to the expert, young people of other sexual orientations and gender identities in Georgia often experience exclusion from their families after coming out, with many of them also losing their place of residence. Such young people may become victims of poverty, homelessness, violence, and discriminatory attitudes in public spaces (ibid). The expert calls on the state to ensure decent

living standards and to create a state program that will offer temporary shelter for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and people with other gender identities.

According to the experiences shared by research participants, shelters and integrated services are generally accessible for most beneficiaries. Nonetheless, challenges arise in situations where there is no available space in a particular city, compelling victims to seek shelter in another region. This practice is problematic, because the victim of violence may have a job and social ties in the place of residence, and changing the city means losing a source of income for them. This goes against the principle of victim empowerment and, on the contrary, puts them at risk of economic vulnerability. In addition, in some cases the victim's dependents (children) may go to school or kindergarten, and the stress caused by the violence may make it even more difficult for them to change their place of residence. While there are beneficiaries who may prefer to move to another city for safety reasons, such occurrences are rare. More often than not, women decline to use shelter services precisely because of the challenges associated with relocation.

There is another problem, for example, the investigation started in Tbilisi, while the survivor woman was transferred somewhere in Western Georgia. Then, in the investigation process, in order to be included in various investigative activities, it is necessary to bring this woman and she has to go back and forth such a long distance, which is quite stressful. She may arrive in the morning and be taken back again by the police in the evening (lawyer) .

We had a case when a victim of domestic violence, a member of the LGBTQI community, needed a shelter. It turned out that there was only room in a regional shelter. He was a student and it was impossible to move there. Again we were forced to seek the services of an NGO and we had a victim there for a while (lawyer).

In addition to a lack of space, shelters have a human resource challenge. According to one respondent, who has many years of experience working in both the government and non-government sectors, the pay of shelter social workers is so low that most of them leave their jobs in less than six months. The GREVIO report states that five specialists work in each shelter: five psychologists, five social workers, five lawyers, five nurses, and five childcare workers. Naturally, it is difficult for this number of specialists to respond to the demand for violence services in the country. In addition, in shelters and crisis centers (except the Tbilisi crisis center), the same specialists work on all types of violence, including sexual violence, which is problematic (GREVIO, 2022, p. 49). For example, one of the respondents mentioned that a few years ago, a very important document was created in the care agency - a manual for working with the LGBT community for the shelter, which is a very positive step. However, the working conditions of the employees are so fragile that an employee trained in a specific direction may leave the workplace very soon. The knowledge gained is no longer helpful to

the institution. Due to employee turnover, such principles cannot be implemented sustainably, ultimately creating a big problem.

Among the social workers that I have known, the longest time they have worked in shelters is 6 months. Everyone is leaving their jobs, because the salary range for social workers in shelters is the lowest among state structures. I don't know why they have such a policy. It is quite a responsible job. This is a very big challenge. Sometimes the worker leaves work earlier than the beneficiary and one beneficiary has to be contacted by several social workers (social worker).

There are three shelters in Tbilisi, Akhaltsikhe and Zugdidi managed by non-governmental organizations. According to research participants, employees in the NGO sector experience better working conditions and a more supportive working environment. Additionally, they have opportunities for professional development, allowing them to apply acquired knowledge for the benefit of their beneficiaries. This stark contrast is highlighted when compared to the conditions in state services.

To summarize, it can be said that the findings of the study highlight the difficulties and challenges that women who are victims of violence face when seeking shelter services in Georgia. On the basis of the State Care and Assistance of (Statutory) Victims of Human Trafficking, there are shelters in five different cities that offer different types of services along with housing to victims of domestic violence, violence against women, trafficking and sexual violence. Until now, the stage of obtaining victim status and the need to cooperate with investigative agencies or the victim identification group to receive services created a barrier in terms of access to asylum, which will change from July 1, 2023 and will be in line with the requirements of the Istanbul Convention. In addition, the study highlights the challenges facing marginalized groups, including the LGBTQ group, non-dominant ethnic groups and people with psycho-social needs, in accessing services. In addition to the fact that the shelters are not adapted to their needs, the state does not offer these people long-term empowerment programs. In the case of the LGBTQ group, the lack of a supportive social network and difficult socioeconomic conditions further exacerbate the situation. Women from non-dominant ethnic groups are excluded from essential services such as psychological support. The study also shows problems with human resources and compensation of specialists employed in shelters, which are linked to systemic challenges and prevent effective support for victims. It is necessary to see and work on all the dimensions of these problems in order to create a robust shelter system that is tailored to the needs of the victim and focused on their long-term well-being.

Helpline

One of the first mechanisms that victims reach for is 112 - the single emergency service line. 112 is a legal entity under public law (LEPL) of the Ministry of Internal Affairs. In 2019, within the framework of the system renewal of the Ministry of Internal Affairs, the 112 Public Safety Command Center and the Joint Operations Center were merged, and the Public Security Management Center 112 was created, which handles emergencies. The main tasks of the center are: operatively and effectively managing emergency aid in emergency situations and other cases determined by the legislation of Georgia, receiving messages through the unified telephone number - 112 and implementing 24-hour, continuous video surveillance for the detection of crimes, attempted crimes and offenses and appropriate response to them.¹

The sources of funding of the Public Comand Management Center 112 are the funds allocated from the state budget, the service fee of 112, the income received from the work performed on the basis of the contract and other incomes allowed by the legislation of Georgia.² According to public information, 112 employees regularly undergo training on the topic of domestic violence and sexual harassment, which is conducted by employees of the Human Rights Protection and Quality Monitoring Center of the Ministry of Internal Affairs.³ Among the main directions of the Public Security Management Center is the effective fight against domestic violence⁴, and therefore it is an important tool for victims or potential victims of violence.

In 2020, a study was conducted by the United Nations Development Program and Sapari, which evaluated both the response of the police to cases of domestic violence and the effectiveness of the 112 helpline. As part of the quantitative component of the research, 76 women beneficiaries of civil society organizations from Tbilisi and regions were interviewed. According to the research, only 44% of respondents say that they called 112 helpline after the incident of violence. Of the remaining respondents who did not call 112, 35% cited a lack of trust as the reason for this; 18% believed that it was pointless to call because of the long waiting time; 30% did not have information about 112; 27%, on the advice of relatives, turned to a non-governmental organization; And 10% went directly to the police (Pataraya & Urchukhishvili, 2020, p. 13-14). It is worth noting that the study was conducted in the period of March-June 2020, when 112 was also transformed into the Covid-19 hotline.

According to Sapari's study, victims of violence who have been consulted by non-governmental organizations are informed about the existing mechanisms, including 112, and therefore know exactly how to talk to an operator, while calling 112 without a consultation is associated with a negative experience for many victims. (Pataraya & Urchukhishvili, 2020, p. 25). Based on these data, it can be concluded that there is a lack of information among women victims of violence about the existence of an emergency hotline and its functions. In addition, the lack of trust indicates doubts about the hotline's effectiveness and personal information,

¹ Law of Georgia on the Legal Entity under Public Law of the Ministry of Internal Affairs – the Public Safety Comand Centre 112, 24/12/2019, available:

<https://www.matsne.gov.ge/ka/document/view/4738372?publication=3>

² Ibid.

³ 112 Official website: <https://112.gov.ge/?p=4061>

⁴ 112 Official website: https://112.gov.ge/?page_id=262

which is less evident towards the NGOs. To address the different barriers mentioned above, it is imperative to work towards raising awareness, enhancing transparency and accountability, implementing quality control measures, establishing a feedback mechanism, and analyzing existing data. These actions collectively contribute to the ongoing efforts to improve and refine the service.

In addition to the hotline, there is a 112 mobile application that can be downloaded for free by anyone and is available in Georgian, English, Russian, Armenian, and Azerbaijani languages. One of the main advantages of the application is the function of determining the citizen's location. Through the application, it is possible to make a call to 112 and communicate with the operator through a chat in parallel, with which, in the case of active GPS, the location is also shared. For deaf people and people with hearing impairments, it is possible to make a video call with the application. In addition, the 112 application has a silent alarm function, which is recommended to be used in cases when making a call may involve a high risk. By using the SOS button in the application the coordinates are shared and the police are dispatched to the scene.⁵ According to a 2020 study, a large proportion of victims of domestic violence had no information about the app. In addition, many of them could not use a phone in the vicinity of the abuser, especially during the pandemic. According to the research, there is a possibility that women do not use the application because of access to the location (Pataraiia & Urchukhishvili, 2020, p. 23-24), which again indicates distrust towards the Ministry of Internal Affairs and lack of information about the services it has created.

Along with 112, there is a counseling hotline for victims of domestic violence of the State Care and Assistance Agency for (Statutory) Victims of Trafficking - 116 06, which operates 24 hours a day and offers counseling to citizens in 9 languages (Georgian, English, Russian, Ukrainian, Turkish, Azerbaijani, Armenian, Arabic and Persian). Calls are anonymous, except as required by law. This hotline software was implemented with the support of UN Women.

In summary, the 112 hotline, the 112 mobile application and the 11606 helpline play an important role in the management of violence cases, but despite their potential benefits, there are clear challenges that need to be addressed in order to fully serve their intended purpose. Existing studies show that women victims of violence are not sufficiently informed about the existence of the hotline and the functions relevant to them. However, factors such as mistrust of the hotline's effectiveness and fear of privacy create significant barriers. The importance of awareness is also shown by the fact that after consulting with non-governmental organizations, women are able to use the existing services much more effectively. Addressing these challenges requires a multifaceted approach: awareness campaigns, a strong quality control mechanism, establishment of effective feedback mechanisms, and ongoing analysis of existing data to improve the hotline and app and tailor it to the interests of victims.

⁵112 official website: https://112.gov.ge/?page_id=22690

Services of non-governmental organizations

As part of this research, interviews were conducted with representatives of various non-governmental organizations in Georgia, offering psycho-social, legal, and shelter services. According to the respondents, women victims of violence often learn about the existence of various services and protection mechanisms after consulting with non-governmental organizations, as in most cases lawyers, investigators, prosecutors, courts do not provide the abused woman with the information she needs.

Many women victims of violence are unaware of available services, especially when they lack legal representation or have lawyers unfamiliar with these issues. In such cases, victims may either go without services or attempt to secure them at their own expense, adding further stress (lawyer).

In the case of a minor, the Coordinator is automatically involved. If it is about an adult, I have had the experience of requesting that the victim needs to use the services of a Coordinator because no one has proactively offered this (NGO lawyer).

Although non-governmental organizations are trying to fill the gap in terms of services, according to their representatives, these services are not enough. Scarcity of the services is less critical in Tbilisi, because most of the service-providing organizations are concentrated in the capital, although this problem is acute in the regions. Psychologist services are particularly problematic, as this service is almost non-existent in some regions. Some regions have only one or two psychologists who work with both adults, children and survivors with other specific needs, which naturally excludes the provision of quality services. It is problematic to have a specialized service, such as services tailored to children or people with disabilities, especially if they have psycho-social needs.

If you ask me, after physical safety, the most important thing for a survivor is to receive emergency psychological services, because rehabilitation is impossible if psychological, therapeutic work is not done. Complete rehabilitation is impossible without this service (social worker).

To receive psychological services, both state and non-governmental sector representatives actively refer beneficiaries to the Center for Psychosocial and Medical Rehabilitation of Torture Victims (GCRT), which also has regional offices in Gori, Batumi and Kutaisi. Since 2010, the center has expanded its services in the direction of domestic violence and sexual violence, including providing assistance to women, children and adolescents who are victims (GCRT, 2023). Psychologist services are particularly in demand in the LGBTQ community and organizations providing these services include Equality Movement and Women's Initiatives Supporting Group (WISG). Together with the psychologist service, non-governmental organizations try to learn from the existing services in the European Union and work through a joint principle.

We don't just offer a one-time service to a person with a single specialist like a psychologist, but we provide long-term support, including rehabilitation if the experience of violence is severe. The analysis of the needs is done by a social worker, who identifies the specialist that the person needs. e.g. lawyer, psychologist, sexologist. In the future, we are going to add an addiction specialist (lawyer).

We have a multidisciplinary team - lawyer, social worker, psychologist - every case is considered individually and depending on the specific needs of the victim of violence, the appropriate service is provided (employee of the community organization).

Specialists employed in the team must be sensitive to LGBT issues and people close to the community. Because the representatives of different fields in Georgia do not have sufficient knowledge about gender identity and sexual orientation, and there are no manuals related to these issues, non-governmental organizations are trying to find people who have received education abroad or have studied these specifics of their own volition, to prevent additional victims retraumatization. In addition, psychologists from the Women's Initiative Support Group (WISG) translate national guidelines and resources for professionals in the field.

We work primarily in terms of mental health. This is very relevant and necessary, because in our country the profession of psychologist is not licensed, it is unregulated and creates big problems; We create knowledge in this direction, and then we share it with the academy; Also, Ilia University tries to make these materials available to students; Thus we try to fill the university gap to improve services in the country (WISG representative).

From the conversation with the respondents, it is clear that especially in relation to the LGBT community, only non-governmental organizations have services tailored to the needs of the victims. According to lawyers, it is also important that the status of a victim is not a prerequisite for using services for the LGBT community, because for many, contact with law enforcement agencies carries a very high risk of retraumatization and revictimization, and there is also a fear of coming out, because personal information may reach a family member. That is why community members prefer to go to non-governmental organizations and seek services there, especially in cases of violence from a partner.

Among other services, it is very important for the victim of violence to receive quality legal services, which is also an acute problem. Non-governmental organizations play a very important role in this regard, too. Legally, the responsibility for providing services to victims lies with the Legal Aid Service. However, respondents note that the utilization rate of this service is generally low. Investigators often fail to inform victims about this available support, leading victims to either represent themselves in court or seek legal assistance from non-governmental organizations. As research participants say, very often, the lawyers of Legal Aid

show extremely discriminatory and stereotypical attitudes towards women who have experienced violence. In this regard, the situation with children is also problematic because there is a lack of specialized lawyers in the country. There are no less severe challenges with persons with disabilities, especially persons with psycho-social needs. According to the respondents, the lawyer may not even consider the position of the disabled person during the case.

A person with a disability may want to appeal the decision, but the lawyer may consider otherwise and act against the interests of the victim. We have had such cases in practice. Which means that in practice disabled people cannot get this free service. This is probably the most important problem (NGO lawyer).

Non-governmental organizations have to fill this void regarding psychological and legal services. In many cases, the same organizations must also provide financial resources for the victims. For example, during legal disputes, in the case of a claim for damages, there is a court fee, which the survivor woman may not be able to afford. Non-governmental organizations often cover this cost as well. Or if it is not possible to find the amount, they reduce the requested amount, as it impacts the court fee proportionally.

We often have to reduce the demand, which is not the best idea for the beneficiary. Conditionally, we can see that 10,000 is due for damages, but because the plaintiff cannot pay the fee, is not exempted from the payment, and does not have the means to pay, we reduce the demand amount and pay the price we can afford (NGO lawyer).

Service providers talk about the need for more resources in the non-governmental sector. For example, one lawyer may have taken on more cases than recommended. That is why it is essential to strengthen the organization, which should also consider the protection of employees from professional burnout and thus stop the outflow of personnel. Due to the lack of personnel, the leading organizations providing legal services may focus only on strategic litigation and have to refuse cases unrelated to systemic change. The same problem is with psycho-social services. Even if an NGO employs several psychologists, the demand is so high that there is a waiting period. As a rule, each beneficiary needs the services of a psychologist for at least several weeks. At this time, other beneficiaries cannot receive the service and are on the waiting list.

There may be enough resources throughout the year. However, there are still periods, for example, in the last 2-3 years, related to Pride Week and the period after and before it, when the cases of violence increase so much that this resource is not enough. Therefore, coordination is done with partner organizations to redistribute these resources (representative of the community organization).

Given the resources, NGOs would be better able to cope with the demand for their services and more effectively fill the void left by the shortcomings of government services today. At this stage, non-governmental organizations engage in active coordination, frequently referring beneficiaries to one another and effectively distributing the workload. This is especially necessary in the regions because many large organizations have offices only in Tbilisi and cannot provide timely services to the beneficiaries living in the area. **In terms of services, non-governmental organizations replace the state in almost all aspects.** Aside from legal, psychological, psychiatric, social worker, and other services, non-governmental organizations often have to take on such responsibilities as covering the costs of transportation for the beneficiary to the place of service delivery, temporarily paying the rent, mobilizing the court fees and expenses for medical treatments, etc.

Due to the fact that the majority of the community members have economic problems, they are unable to pursue a legal case, as they are economically vulnerable that cannot pay for transportation and for court fees. Regarding medicines, when a beneficiary receives the services of a psychiatrist and needs to buy a medicine, it may be an issue and therefore we have to provide these services too (representative of an LGBT organization).

According to the research participants, specialists in the non-governmental sector have the specific competence to work with different, non-homogeneous groups. Along with contributing to competence and knowledge, the country's primary service provider is the non-governmental sector. According to the respondents, there were also cases when one of the state asylums in the region did not have the services of a lawyer for a certain period, and lawyers from a local non-governmental organization filled this gap.

For the representatives of non-dominant ethnic groups, it is essential to have a translation service, especially for ethnic Azerbaijanis living in Kvemo Kartli. Most of them do not know the state language; therefore, it is problematic for them, on the one hand, to have information about the services and obligations of the state and, on the other hand, to use these services independently. Also, non-governmental organizations that work in regions inhabited by ethnic minorities are essential actors.

Translation is almost never done unless it is an investigation. If it is under investigation, it is stipulated by law that an interpreter must be present during the interrogation. In this context, receiving psychological services in the crisis center is difficult to imagine (representative of a non-governmental organization).

Additionally, there are frequent instances where a survivor woman faces severe financial hardships, struggling to provide food for herself and her children. In such cases, she turns to non-governmental organizations for support. Representatives of these organizations emphasize the need for state-provided food vouchers specifically tailored for female victims of violence

in these circumstances. This issue underscores the importance of recognizing the unique needs of individual victims. While some may require shelter services, others may find such services unsuitable. To minimize the risk of retraumatization and revictimization, **a personalized approach that assesses the specific situation and needs of each person is crucial**, rather than applying a one-size-fits-all approach. Respondents highlight that the state typically concludes its support for victims within nine months at most. While this timeframe may be sufficient for some, the majority may require at least 2-3 years for rehabilitation.

It is not only a shelter. Shelter is connected with many other services. The experience of living in a shelter may have been traumatic, not desirable at all. A person might have a space but not money for food. The state does not provide assistance in all this (social worker).

As mentioned, non-governmental organizations also provide shelter services in Georgia. The Anti-Violence Network of Georgia has shelters in both Tbilisi and Batumi. Since 2017, the Network has been included in the state program, subordinated to the Ministry of Health and works with a voucher system. According to the employees, the shelters have 24-hour service with four meals a day. Upon arrival, the victim's needs are determined and the next steps are planned. The following specialists work with the victim: social worker, psychologist, lawyer and administrator. Shelter representatives help victims place children in nearby schools and kindergartens, provide them with seasonal clothes and hygiene items - all this is done according to needs. The amount provided by the voucher only covers utility bills, and the rest of the costs are covered by external funding obtained by the organization.

We have a memorandum with the state agencies, and with their involvement, the beneficiaries come to us. There are also cases where a woman is a victim of violence, however, due to some problems, she cannot be identified as a victim. We also place such people with us (employees of the Anti-Violence Network).

Representatives of an NGO encountered a situation where their beneficiary availed shelter services for a year. Subsequently, there arose a necessity to cover housing and educational expenses. The beneficiary's income was meager, only sufficient for rent. The organization's representatives sought assistance from various state agencies, but their efforts proved futile. Over the next two years, the NGO's staff collectively fundraised to cover the beneficiary's tuition fees.

In conclusion, NGOs play a crucial role in delivering essential services to victims of violence. The interviews underscore the significance of legal, psycho-social, shelter, and other support services offered by these organizations in addressing systemic deficiencies in government services. Non-governmental organizations employ an individualized approach, considering the diverse nuances of survivors' needs based on their extensive experience and expertise in working with various social groups. Collaborative efforts and coordination between different

NGOs, along with their engagement with state agencies, are essential practices. Beyond service provision, these organizations actively advocate for systemic change.

Legal measures

Restraining and protective order

A restraining order is issued by an authorized police officer as a protective measure for victims of violence against women and/or domestic violence. The restraining order is issued on the basis of the risk assessment questionnaire determined by the protocol of the restraining order approved by the order of the Minister of Internal Affairs of Georgia.⁶ This tool was launched in 2018 and is a structured questionnaire consisting of 22 questions, which is used to collect information about the victim of violence, the perpetrator and the fact of violence, as well as to assess the risks of repeated violence, which is necessary for planning the monitoring process. Each question is assigned a point. When there is a high risk of violence, the police officer communicates with both the victim and the perpetrator (Chichua, 2018). Even if the victim declines to answer questions, the police officer retains the authority to initiate a restraining order or investigation if visible signs of violence are present.

According to the law, a restraining order may cover the following issues: keeping the victim out of the perpetrator's residence; distancing the victim and the dependent person from the abuser and placing them in a shelter; denying the abuser the right to sole use of co-ownership; separating the perpetrator from the minor; denying the rapist's approach to the victim, her work and other places where the survivor is; issuing electronic supervision; limiting or prohibiting the right of the perpetrator to use weapons; warning the aggressor of the legal repercussions in case of non-fulfillment of the requirements and obligations provided for in the orders; and other issues necessary to ensure the safety of other victim. The restraining order is valid for up to one month.

A protective order is a legal document issued by a judge in the administrative proceedings of a court of first instance, outlining temporary measures for the protection of the victim.⁷ The protective order is valid for up to 9 months, with the specific duration determined by the court. The court has the authority, according to the law, to decide on altering the validity period of the protective order. The protection order's validity can be extended for a maximum of 3 months if there is a continued danger to the victim or another family member. It is crucial to emphasize that both restraining and protection orders directly impact the victim's access to the services provided, underscoring their significance.

⁶On Violence Against Women And/Or Elimination Of Domestic Violence, Protection And Support Of Victims Of Violence; 25/05/2006; available at:

<https://matsne.gov.ge/en/document/view/26422?publication=18>

⁷ On Violence Against Women And/Or Elimination Of Domestic Violence, Protection And Support Of Victims Of Violence; 25/05/2006; available at:

<https://matsne.gov.ge/en/document/view/26422?publication=18>

According to the participants of the study, there are frequent cases of appealing a restraining order by the abuser. The involvement of NGO lawyers is critical here, as they have to fill the competence gap. According to them, as a rule, the Ministry of Internal Affairs employee who issues the restraining order provides representation in the cases. These employees (law enforcement officers) do not have legal training, which is often problematic and may harm the victim. As a result, NGO lawyers are often overworked as they accompany victims in appeals of restraining order proceedings.

They [victims] have no information regarding the process. They don't know when and what motions to put forward, and most of the time, they are silent when they go through the process. Their silence often ends badly, costing the victim dearly as the court may overturn the restraining order. When we follow the process, the victim is involved as a third party, and we are her representative. However, almost the entire process is handled by us, and it is mainly because of us that these restraining orders remain in place (from a legal services NGO).

According to the study respondents, psychological violence often lacks clear signs of a criminal offense and is addressed under the Code of Administrative Offenses, leading to the issuance of a restraining order. During this process, there is a consistent risk that the victim may not provide a complete interview or might withhold information from the police due to various reasons. As a result, other forms of violence may coexist with psychological violence, but remain undisclosed. Legal service activists note that this is a contributing factor to the higher prevalence of restraining orders compared to criminal investigations.

In addition, there are frequent cases when representatives of various minority groups face problems when communicating with law enforcement officers, which in the case of representatives of non-dominant ethnic groups may be due mainly to a language barrier and, in the case of the LGBTQ+ group, to an attitude problem. In the case of women with disabilities, the issue of privacy is problematic. In many cases, when women with disabilities go to the investigative agency, they need an accompanying person because the forms are not adapted, and this violates the principle of confidentiality.

According to one of the research participants, if the law does not explicitly include the LGBT group because of the cultural and historical pressure of homophobia and transphobia, individuals do not expect that if they turn to the authorities, they will provide protection. The law is so sterile concerning issues of sexual orientation and gender identity that people's confidence that restraining and protective orders will protect them is very low.

In practice, I had a case when a person in an extreme situation applied to the police, and the Ministry of Internal Affairs issued a restraining order. Then the order was canceled, and the ministry began to prosecute the person who

issued the order, as the case was about a gay and bisexual couple, and the subject of protection of the restraining order could not be a gay man (a person providing legal services).

Furthermore, instances were reported where a transgender woman sought a protective order from the court and faced rejection from two court instances. The reason cited was the absence of a female gender indication on her ID card, leading to the conclusion that she was not eligible to utilize this legal mechanism. This response directly contradicts the principles of the Istanbul Convention, which expressly prohibits discrimination based on gender identity and sexual orientation.

The Ministry of Internal Affairs has a stated position that a transgender woman is not a woman. If a victim of a hate crime becomes a victim and they need to be charged with gender identity under article 53, they collect this evidence, and then she is a woman, but if a warrant is issued as a preventive mechanism, then she is not a woman (person providing legal services).

According to the participating lawyers in the study, when a case is incorporated into criminal proceedings, their primary communication is typically with the Ministry of Internal Affairs. They engage in close communication and exchange information at various stages of the process. According to their observations, in the case of domestic violence, the investigation proceeds much faster, which has its disadvantages.

I have come across a case when the victim said that they told the police only about the last case of violence, about which she called 112, and they did not ask her whether she was a victim of violence from this abuser in the past. Accordingly, she herself did not have information that she should had to talk about the crimes that happened in the past and did not provide information to the police. This could apply not only to physical and psychological offenses committed in the family but also to sexual crimes (legal service provider).

In many cases, women lack information about sexual crimes committed within the family. A significant number of them believe that if sexual violence is perpetrated by a spouse, it is not considered a crime. According to the respondents, law enforcement officials often fail to inform victims about this, and pertinent questions are not raised. Furthermore, instances have been reported where violence is witnessed by a minor, yet investigations show less interest in this aspect, and it may not be documented in the testimonies. Because of this, lawyers of non-governmental organizations face the following problems: it is possible that the victim turned to their organization after the end of the investigation, when the substantive consideration of the case has begun. At this stage, it will not be possible to submit evidence and ask for an additional interview of the victim, they cannot even ask for an interview of the children. It is necessary to interview children because they are qualified as victims according to the Criminal Code. Also, the punishment for violence committed in the presence of a minor is more severe.

According to lawyers, it is not uncommon for the victim to inform the police about additional evidence, such as correspondence, video material, witnesses who will confirm physical violence, but the police do not respond appropriately.

For some reason, the police tell them that the evidence they have now is enough for a guilty verdict and not to delay the case and take it to court on time. Of course, women think that if the process is not delayed and the case goes to court on time, it is better for them, and they agree with the police. Then, presenting this evidence is a problem (legal service provider).

Respondents point out that although there is a different set of evidence for family crimes than for other categories of cases, lately the court is asking for additional evidence as well. In many cases, only the testimony given by the victim and one piece of evidence may not be considered sufficient and a verdict of acquittal will be issued. Between 2019 and 2021, approximately half of acquittals were regarding the domestic violence cases (Center for Social Justice, 2022). If there is evidence substantiating the occurrence of violence, the police are obligated to gather this evidence and include it in the case, a practice that is frequently overlooked due to the expedited processing of domestic violence cases. Despite the challenges mentioned, positive changes have been observed. Respondents noted that following the occurrence of two consecutive femicides, the Ministry of Internal Affairs initiated comprehensive changes. Notably, the risk assessment questionnaire underwent a complete update, including the adjustment of point allocations.

The electronic monitoring system of domestic violence entered into force in 2020 and is technically provided by the Public Safety Command Center - 112. The system was introduced in Georgia at the initiative of the United Nations Women, with the support of the European Union and the Government of Sweden, and in partnership with the Ministry of Internal Affairs (UN Women, 2020). According to the law of Georgia on Violence Against Women and/or Elimination of Domestic Violence, Protection and Support of Victims of Violence, in the presence of the fact of violence against women and/or domestic violence, an authorized police officer can establish electronic surveillance of the perpetrator to take temporary measures for the protection of the survivor. The relevant court must approve the protocol within 24 hours of its issuance. Electronic surveillance of the abuser can be imposed upon issuance of a restraining order, as well as during the period of validity of the restraining order, at any time, and it is carried out no longer than the period of validity of the restraining order (Georgian Law Gazette, 2006). During electronic monitoring, an electronic bracelet is affixed to the body of the perpetrator. This device is employed to monitor the proximity of the perpetrator to the victim's residence, workplace, and other designated areas. Electronic monitoring is compulsory in high-risk cases that exhibit indicators such as a history of violence, prior breaches of restraining or protective orders, and the use of weapons. The GREVIO report highlights that the utilization of electronic wristbands in such cases remains limited.

In summary, the discussion related to restraining and protective orders sheds light on the difficulties of fighting against violence against women, domestic violence, and discrimination

crimes in Georgia. The research shows that the mentioned mechanism, like other mechanisms, needs further improvement. It is essential to work to eliminate discrimination based on gender identity and sexual orientation, as well as to increase the competence and sensitivity of responsible employees to various issues.

Service of witness and victim coordinator

The office of witness and victim coordinator has been operating in the Prosecutor's Office since 2011. Its role is to enhance communication between the citizen and the prosecutor (court) throughout the criminal case and to provide the prosecutor with comprehensive information about the case's progress (Georgia's Prosecutor's Office, 2023). According to the legislative change implemented in 2018 in the Criminal Procedure Code of Georgia, the witness and victim coordinator became a party in the process. According to the representative of the service, this step significantly increased their functions and duties and gave them more leverage to support the victims.

The coordinator service's responsibilities include providing emotional support to the victim or witness. For example, informing the victim about the case's progress and being present during investigative and procedural actions, such as the victim's interview, participation in investigative experiments, and offender identification. In this process, the coordinator must explain the procedures to the victim simply and understandably and assess her needs. In addition, after the legislative change, coordinators now have the authority, if the victim desires and with the judge's approval, to be present during closed court proceedings where the victim is being questioned.

In practice, there was a case when the judge gave permission for the coordinator to stand directly at the tribune during the testimony and hold the victim's hand, provide water, etc. (Coordinator service representative).

Witness and victim coordinators have no right to interfere in the process of finding information or evidence. They attend the interrogation. However, they do not have the right to ask questions about the circumstances of the case, although they can advise the investigator about the wording of the question or the time of the victim's break. Coordinators also determine the needs of the victim, arrange for the services of a psychologist, a doctor, a lawyer (in terms of civil law). According to the representative of the service, they constantly cooperate with non-governmental organizations. The coordinator's service is obliged to pay special attention to those victims who represent an additional risk group or a vulnerable group. According to the internal manual of the service, coordinators are prioritized by the prosecutor in cases involving victims who are persons with disabilities, minors, victims of crimes based on discrimination, or belong to any other vulnerable group. Coordinators have completed specialization courses related to working with different social groups.

There are some services that the Prosecutor's Office cannot provide within its competence, for example, psychological help. If we could offer and redirect all victims who need psychological help... Unfortunately, we don't have the luxury of that. That's why we also have to offer this service to those who need it most and then to those who need it less (coordinator service representative).

According to the representative of one of the LGBT organizations, the active involvement of the coordinator's service in cases related to the LGBT group is particularly important. That is why they are trying to get the Prosecutor's Office to use this mechanism and maintain active communication with the coordinators. According to the representative, the coordinators know that the organization is ready to engage in the process according to the victims' needs and provide empowerment support. The Ministry of Internal Affairs and the Prosecutor's Office's approach is that the coordinator's activity is sufficient and that the non-governmental organizations provide good services for specific groups. This approach is problematic for representatives of non-governmental organizations. They say the state must see the benefits of victim support services to the criminal justice process.

In the Ministry of Internal Affairs, the witness and victim coordinator service was launched in 2019 within the framework of the Department of Human Rights Protection and Investigation Quality Monitoring. Coordinators are tasked with providing people with procedural information in simple and understandable language and assisting at all stages of the investigative process, as well as providing information about services. The coordinator is involved in cases of special complexity, where there are challenges in terms of cooperation with the victim.

It is the duty of the coordinators to protect the interests of the victim during the investigation. This means that the victims are relieved of the trauma of the court proceedings and secondly - to connect them with various state and non-state services. In the case of a minor, the coordinator is automatically involved. When it comes to an adult, I personally have had the experience of asking myself, saying that the victim needs to use the services of a coordinator, because no one proactively offered it, and then we asked the coordinator for the psychologist or crisis center services (lawyer).

According to the research participants, individuals who have experienced violence express less trust in the police, and communicating with investigative agencies proves challenging for them. The respondents noted that victims often have to visit the police station frequently, adding to their stress. Despite the MIA's obligation to limit the victim's involvement in the investigation process and restrict their presence at the department, this is not consistently implemented in practice. There have been instances where victims of violence had to return to the unit multiple times because those in charge did not ask all the necessary questions during their initial visit, highlighting a qualification problem.

There was a case where the victim who had suffered the most severe injuries was told by the investigator that she should be followed to the place where she was abused in order to conduct an investigative experiment. It was a huge challenge for the victim because she was in a very grave situation emotionally. We explained that there was no need for an investigative experiment or to bring the victim to that place. When I could not convince the officer, I was forced to go and find a witness who testified that an incident of violence had taken place at that place. Which was not difficult, I managed with limited resources. Lawyers don't have the resources that the MIA might have. They could have solved this problem in half an hour, but they didn't (NGO lawyer).

According to the respondents, asking a victim to trust the police under these conditions is very difficult. The involvement of coordinators is not sufficient, and communication with victims often occurs in overly formal, legalistic language, resulting in complete mistrust on the part of the victim.

Very often, women survivors say that they were so tired that they preferred not to raise their voice about this violence at all and to be silent to themselves (lawyer).

According to an alternative report submitted by the Public Defender to the UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women on January 9, 2023, the involvement of coordinators in violence cases is insufficient, and the number of employed coordinators is low (Public Defender of Georgia, 2023). According to the same report, in 2021, 18 coordinators employed at the Prosecutor's Office worked on 119 cases of violence against women and 1706 cases of domestic violence, and 14 coordinators employed at the Ministry of Internal Affairs worked on 108 cases of violence against women and 1682 cases of domestic violence (ibid., p. 7). The presence of such challenges underscores the necessity for more active and frequent engagement of witness and victim coordinators in cases related to violence, aiming to prevent the retraumatization of the victim and alleviate their psycho-emotional condition.

Long-term victim empowerment

Currently, the victim rehabilitation process in Georgia is fragmented and inconsistent. The resources allocated for rehabilitation are insufficient to address the complex needs of victims. The economic challenges in the country are so severe that individuals leaving shelters often struggle to secure decent employment and housing, elements crucial for the empowerment of the victim. While short-term services effectively provide emergency support, there is a pressing need for the state to adopt a holistic and victim-specific approach to rehabilitation. This requires coordination and active cooperation among representatives of various institutions.

Long-term empowerment necessitates access to economic, legal, psychological, and social services of an appropriate duration tailored to individual needs.

Non-governmental organizations play a crucial role in addressing gaps in government services, yet there is a need for the state to proactively work towards filling these existing gaps. It is necessary for the state to invest more resources to support victim-oriented initiatives and long-term rehabilitation programs. Victim empowerment is a dynamic process that requires ongoing dialogue, collaboration and interventions to achieve change.

It is essential to examine the distinct needs of various social groups and address their complex requirements. For instance, for transgender women, there is a need to establish a swift, transparent, and accessible mechanism for legal gender recognition. Lawyers emphasize that, in the context of the LGBT group, it is imperative to include civil partnership and intimate partner aspects in domestic violence legislation. Additionally, prioritizing the economic empowerment of women who are victims of violence, particularly those from vulnerable groups, is crucial since existing services and training courses may fall short of ensuring the autonomy of the victims.

According to representatives of the non-governmental sector, there is no official program in the country addressing the economic empowerment of women victims of violence while considering their specific needs. Currently, existing services are fragmented and are only available for a specific period of time. Moreover, they incompletely cover the needs of the victim, which is insufficient for effective rehabilitation. In some cases, state and non-governmental organization-based shelters and crisis centers have training courses for victims of domestic violence, although in most cases, these courses are not adapted to the requirements of the labor market.

Most of them are taught cooking, pastry making or some other such thing. We must stay up to date. Of course, this is also a very important craft, but it is very difficult to start your own business after leaving the shelter. You can acquire more practical and pragmatic professions that can be mastered in a short period of time. There are many like this. This service should be adapted soon. What is the demand, what will pay enough money to be able to continue living independently (social worker).

It is important that in November 2022, a decree came into effect, which regulates the issue of receiving compensation from the state by women victims of violence and children of women victims of femicide. A victim of violence against women/domestic violence is an individual who has been identified as a victim of the corresponding crime as defined by the Criminal Code of Georgia; directly suffered health damage or, in severe cases, has succumbed

to the violence.⁸ Compensation from the state is available only if the damage cannot be covered by the person who committed the crime. That is, if the court orders the offender to compensate for the damage, and this decision cannot be enforced within six months, the victim can apply to the state under these circumstances. The victim has the right to file the request within three years from the court's decision. The maximum amount issued is capped at 10,000 GEL. If the perpetrator pays the victim at least 40% of the specified amount, the victim forfeits the right to claim additional compensation.

In 2022, we developed a compensation mechanism for victims of violence. The ceiling is 10,000 GEL. The court determines the terms and rules of payment. However, the criminal case must be completed first. First it is borne by the aggressor, if he does not pay, it goes into enforcement and after 6 months, if compensation cannot be provided by the aggressor, the victim will apply to the court and the court will determine the method of payment. In the case of femicide, up to 10,000 compensation is awarded directly to minors and their legal representatives at the time of application to the agency. (representative of the care agency)

However, in addition to one-time compensation, ensuring sustainable financial well-being is crucial to minimize the likelihood of victims returning to a violent environment. According to the respondents, the state should possess both material and human resources to implement an individualized approach:

It may work for someone to provide rent and it will be quite enough, but for someone a multifunctional intervention is needed. Someone may need hospitalization, someone may need long-term psychological services, depending on what we're dealing with. Human resources are needed to research and plan this, and then support services should follow this. In the long term, one service cannot make such changes, unless different institutions broaden their views (social worker).

There are municipal services for victims of violence. The apartment rental program that the City Hall has (including the Tbilisi City Hall), but it is not only for women who are victims of violence, it is for the socially vulnerable. Program budget is only 300 GEL and renting an apartment with this amount is unrealistic (social worker).

For long-term victim empowerment, it is necessary to expand municipal services and develop programs such as the *rent security* program, which should also include the possibility of co-financing. Today, the biggest problem for women victims of violence is the issue of providing shelter and employment. Even in the case when the share of the residence belongs to the

⁸ Resolution of the Government of Georgia on determining the amount of compensation to be given to victims of violence against women and/or domestic violence and approving the manner of giving it, 09/11/2022, available at: <https://www.matsne.gov.ge/ka/document/view/5611339?publication=0>

woman, receiving this share is also related to financial resources, because the court does not accept such a claim without a fee.

In summary, it can be said that the current system of victim rehabilitation is not sufficient to respond to the multi-layered needs of victims. The lack of resources and the country's economic problems complicate the prospect of empowering victims after leaving shelter. Although the state plays an important role in providing short-term and temporary services, it is necessary to develop a comprehensive approach, which requires constant coordination between different institutions.

Conclusions and recommendations

Crisis centers

Crisis centers, along with shelters and violence hotlines, have an important role in providing multidimensional support. The services of the crisis center include psycho-social, medical, legal and, in the case of the Tbilisi institution, round-the-clock services. Nevertheless, important challenges are limited resources, insufficient geographical coverage, distrust of the population towards state institutions and lack of awareness among the population, and the absence of more sustainable and long-term victim empowerment programs.

Recommendation: Increasing access to crisis centers for women in rural and remote areas is necessary. In addition, it is essential to inform the population about specialized services and to work on existing mistrust towards state institutions.

Shelters

The shelters operating under the State Fund for the Protection and Assistance of (Statutory) Victims of Human Trafficking provide various types of services, including housing, to victims of domestic violence, violence against women, trafficking, and sexual violence. LGBTQI, representatives of non-dominant ethnic groups, and people with psycho-social needs have significant barriers to service accessibility. There are no long-term empowerment programs. The study also found a problem with human resources in shelters, which points to systemic challenges and prevents adequate support for victims.

Recommendation: It is essential to focus on existing barriers for marginalized groups and develop a culturally sensitive, victim-specific support strategy. In addition, work should be done on challenges related to human resources. Along with training employees, it is necessary to create adequate working conditions for them to maintain the qualified personnel.

Hotline

The 112 emergency service line, the 112 app, and the 11606 helpline play crucial roles in managing cases of violence; however, women victims of violence often lack sufficient awareness of these hotlines and their relevant functions. Barriers such as mistrust in the hotline's effectiveness and privacy concerns further hinder their utilization. The significance of raising awareness is underscored by the fact that women, after consulting with non-governmental organizations, demonstrate more efficient use of the existing services.

Recommendation: To enhance the hotline's effectiveness, it is recommended to conduct informative campaigns to raise awareness about its functions. Collaboration with non-governmental organizations is crucial for disseminating information and building trust in the service. Emphasis should be placed on promoting the hotline's accessibility and ensuring the protection of personal information.

Services provided by non-governmental organizations

Non-governmental organizations play a crucial role in delivering essential services to victims of violence. Through interviews, it becomes evident that the legal, psycho-social, shelter, and other support services offered by these organizations are crucial for addressing the systemic gaps in government services. At the same time, non-governmental organizations use a victim-centered approach and take into account different nuances of the needs of the victims. They have long experience and knowledge of working with different social groups. Despite limited resources, the work done by non-governmental organizations is important both for the immediate management of crisis situations and for the long-term empowerment of victims.

Recommendation: Donors are recommended to direct more resources to strengthen NGOs, as they play a leading role in supporting victims of violence in the country. In addition, it is necessary to work on strengthening cooperation between government agencies and non-governmental organizations, which will contribute to the formation of a holistic approach to victim support.

Communication challenges with different vulnerable groups

A restraining and protective order provides temporary measures to protect the victim and is vital, but there are often cases when representatives of various minority groups face problems in communicating with law enforcement, which in the case of representatives of non-dominant ethnic groups may be due mainly to language barriers, and in the case of the LGBTQ+ group - to attitude problems. The issue of privacy is problematic with women with disabilities. Often, when women with disabilities go to the investigative agency, they need an accompanying person, because the environment is not adapted and this violates the principle of confidentiality.

Recommendation: It is important to work on the sensitivity and cultural competence of law enforcement officers, which is necessary to support representatives of various marginalized groups. These groups may include people of different cultural and ethnic backgrounds,

representatives of the LGBTQI group, persons with disabilities. A willingness to communicate effectively with them is essential to creating an inclusive support system.

Involvement of the witness and victim coordinator service

It is essential to involve the witness and victim coordinator service to inform the victim and determine their needs. This service functions both in the Prosecutor's Office and the human rights department of the Ministry of Internal Affairs. However, due to the small number of employees, their involvement is insufficient and fragmented.

Recommendation: It is recommended to increase the number of employed coordinators, to train them continuously and to create adequate working conditions to maintain the trained staff. It is important to ensure the proactive involvement of coordinators at all stages of the case, especially in the case of representatives of vulnerable groups.

Strategies for long-term victim empowerment

The lack of resources and the country's economic problems complicate the prospect of empowering victims after leaving shelter. Although the state plays an important role in providing short-term and temporary services, there is no effective strategy for long-term victim empowerment.

Recommendation: It is important to allocate resources to long-term empowerment programs for victims of violence. Emphasis should be placed on economic empowerment programs that will equip survivor women with the necessary skills and be in line with labor market requirements.

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