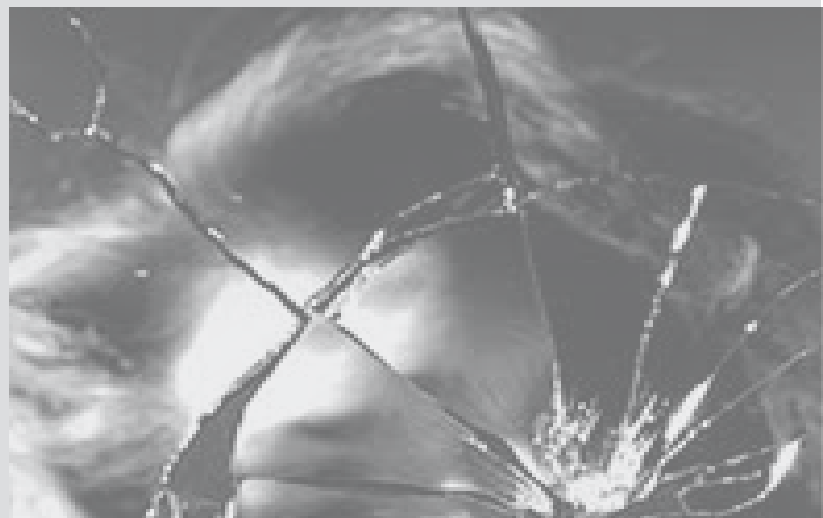




# MONITORING OF SERVICES FOR THE VICTIMS

Monitoring of practical implementation  
of Support services for victims  
of domestic violence against women and  
existing challenges



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# CHAPTER I

## Introduction



## 1.1. THE SIGNIFICANCE AND RELEVANCE OF THE STUDY

Violence against women and domestic violence are acute problems not only around the world but in Georgia as well. Based on the recent national study of violence against women published in 2018, **one out of seven women experience domestic violence in Georgia**. But, if we combine all forms of violence, **one out of four women has experienced gender-based violence in her life**.<sup>1</sup> Such an alarming statistic data and a big number of facts of violence against women indicate the existence of many victim women and the state is obliged to provide their support and rehabilitation. For this purpose, the country tries to offer some services to the victim women.

## 1.2. THE AIM AND METHODOLOGY OF THE MONITORING CONDUCTED BY FUND «SUKHUMI»

In October-December 2019, in the framework of the project “Strengthening of Women`s rights in Western Georgia” supported by the German international organization “Brot für die Welt”, Fund “Sukhumi” conducted the monitoring on domestic violence against women, to assess the access and quality of the existing services for the women victims of domestic violence.

Within the framework of monitoring, two focus-groups consisting of the victims and the NGO representatives have been carried out. Besides, 24 in-depth interviews have been conducted with victims/alleged victims and following service providers: directors of the state-run and NGO shelters/crisis centres, representatives of the Social Service Agency and Legal Aid Service, local self-government and the State Fund for Protection and Assistance of (Statutory) Victims of Human-Trafficking. 50 victims with no experience of state support, were surveyed through the quantitative questionnaire to identify the obstacles preventing them from access to these services. 10 victim women who received support have been also interviewed to assess the effectiveness of the provided services. In total, the number of respondents was 92.

The monitoring was carried out by using following qualitative and quantitative study methods: in-depth interview and questionnaire survey. In the framework of the desk study, existing legislative frame, international legislative acts, as well as acts adopted by Georgia, also studies conducted by different organizations on the issues of violence against women and domestic violence, reports and policy documents have been analysed.

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1 “One in seven women in Georgia experiences domestic violence, new national study finds” – <https://bit.ly/369JHH6>

# CHAPTER II

## Legal obligations and standards of State towards victims



Domestic violence is a quite common form of discrimination against women. **Protection of women from discrimination** and provision of rights and opportunities equal to men is **guaranteed by the Constitution of Georgia**.

Ratification of the **Council of Europe Convention on “Preventing and Combating Violence Against Women and Domestic Violence” (Istanbul Convention of 2011)**, Georgia has made a very important step forward in a struggle against domestic violence and violence against women.<sup>2</sup> One of its aims is the **protection and support** of victim women and victims of domestic violence.<sup>3</sup> Complex and coordinated policy should be carried out and **victims` rights should be considered to be its starting point**.<sup>4</sup>

Chapter IV of the convention covers the issues of victim protection and support. It identifies state obligations.<sup>5</sup> Under the convention, the state is obliged to provide the victim with clear, adequate and relevant information on the existing support services.<sup>6</sup> Besides, according to it (convention), in compliance with the appropriate geographic distribution, the state is obliged to set up or provide victims with the emergency, specialized short and long-term support services. The latter must be aimed at all the victim women and their children.<sup>7</sup>

The convention makes a difference between **general support** and **specialized services**. In the framework of general support services, victims should have access to the services which will help them to recover after the facts of violence. It must imply the services like legal and psychological consultation, financial support, shelter, education, vocational training and help with employment. Victims should have access to medical and social service. On their behalf, the services should have adequate resources and specially trained staff to help victims.<sup>8</sup>

The local legislation complies with international obligations undertaken by the state as well. Consequently, after the Istanbul Convention ratification, some amendments have been introduced not only in the statutory acts but in the law of Georgia on “Violence Against Women and/or Elimination of Domestic Violence, Protection and Support of Victims of Violence” too. Apart from combat against violence, the fields of regulation under this law also include guarantees of social and legal protection and assistance to victims and are

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2 Council of Europe Convention on “Preventing and Combating Violence Against Women and Domestic Violence” (Istanbul Convention of 2011) - <https://matsne.gov.ge/ka/document/view/3789678?publication=0>

3 *ibid*, art 1.c

4 *ibid*, art. 7

5 *ibid*, art. 18.1-3

6 *ibid*, art. 19

7 *ibid*, art. 22

8 *ibid*, art. 20

aimed to set up the basis to protect, support and rehabilitate victims.<sup>9</sup> Considering the compensation liabilities under the convention, it has been stipulated by the law that from January 1, 2022, **the victim/alleged victim will be entitled to receive a compensation from the state**, if the damage caused to her as a result of violence against women and/or domestic violence is not reimbursed by the abuser or/and other sources provided for by the legislative and sub-legislative normative acts of Georgia.<sup>10</sup>

The government of Georgia has approved the **2018-2020 action plan** for measures to combat violence against women and domestic violence and protect victims (affected people).<sup>11</sup> To allow the victim women and victims of domestic violence (affected people) to have access to and benefit from high-quality protection and support services, the plan implies different measures which aim to increase the opportunities of state structures and make services for women victims and victims of domestic violence (affected people) more effective. It also includes expansion of the crisis centre net in regions and making the infrastructure of state-run shelters and crisis centres more efficient; creation and implementation of guidelines for the standardization of psychological, social and economic rehabilitation of victims; provision of legal aid service to victims/alleged victims of domestic or gender-based violence; improvement of the mechanism of the group for determining the status of victim of violence against women and/or domestic violence (the victim identification group); provision of stability and efficiency of shelters, crisis centres and hotline; increase in the number of social workers working on the issues of domestic violence by 10-30%.<sup>12</sup>

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9 Law of Georgia on “Violence Against Women and/or Elimination of Domestic Violence, Protection and Support of Victims of Violence”, art. 1; 2.d - <https://matsne.gov.ge/ka/document/view/26422?publication=16>

10 Law of Georgia on “Violence Against Women and/or Elimination of Domestic Violence, Protection and Support of Victims of Violence”, art. 17.d

11 Resolution #175 of April 11, 2018 of the Government of Georgia on “Adopting the Action Plan for 2018-2020 on Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence and the Measures to be Implemented for Protection of Victims (survivors)- <https://matsne.gov.ge/ka/document/view/4144947?publication=0>

12 2018-2020 action plan, aim - 2 and activities to be carried out for this aim

# CHAPTER III

## Support services for the women victims of domestic violence





The available services for the victims of domestic violence include shelters/crisis centres, legal aid, social assistance and a hotline.<sup>13</sup> These services are provided by central, as well as the local government and the NGO sector. **The assistance provided by each service** is reviewed and **existing challenges are identified** below.

Despite the obvious progress, much work still should be done. On the one hand, a victim should be aware of her rights and on the other hand, society should respect and protect them. In the report on monitoring of the action plan against domestic violence, the ombudsman stated that the number of awareness-raising events implied by the action plan to combat domestic violence, interdepartmental trainings and meetings held with the target groups is insufficient. Besides, they do not meet the stereotypes of society and tolerance towards domestic violence. Most of the victims had little information on protection and assistance services, even those who had been assisted by the Social Service Agency and/or law enforcement bodies.<sup>14</sup> Challenges still exist in this regard.

Any effort to help a victim will be unilateral if nothing is done to rehabilitate the abuser. In this regard, the Istanbul Convention imposes an obligation on the country as well. Though the relevant programs have not been introduced yet. The state rejected rehabilitation centres for abusers since it had not been aware of their exact conception. The experience of another country (Austria) has shown that the abuser voluntary rehabilitation is not effective, as the abusers did not use those services.<sup>15</sup> Like some US states, it should be mandatory for the abuser to visit such centres and undergo a rehabilitation program. The introduction of prevention services would protect the victim from significant harm. For early detection of violent cases, it is necessary to involve educational, medical, social and other intermediate units in the process of violence detection.<sup>16</sup>

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13 We will not refer to the services implemented by the police such as the coordinator of the victim and affected person. For more information on evaluation of the police work on domestic violence, see the monitoring document of Fund “Sukhumi”: “The role of law protecting structures and existing practice - monitoring of the changes made against domestic violence and violence against women” - <http://fsokhumi.ge/images/2019/7/pub/1/policia-el.pdf>

14 The report of the public defender of Georgia - On the monitoring of action plan for 2016-2017 for the activities for combating the violence against women and domestic violence and for protecting the victims, 2017, p. 5, 15 - <http://ombudsman.ge/res/docs/2019041111594648023.pdf>

15 “Violence as a part of the culture” - <https://www.radiotavisupleba.ge/a/25264075.html>

16 Effectiveness Audit Report - The mechanisms of prevention and protection from domestic violence conducted by the state Audit Office of Georgia, p. 43 - [https://sao.ge/files/auditi/auditis-angarishebi/2019/ojaxshi\\_dzaladobis\\_dacvis\\_efeqtianobis\\_auditis\\_angarishi.pdf](https://sao.ge/files/auditi/auditis-angarishebi/2019/ojaxshi_dzaladobis_dacvis_efeqtianobis_auditis_angarishi.pdf)

## 1.1. STATE-RUN SHELTERS AND CRISIS CENTRES

The article of the convention covers the issue of shelters since the existence of such service is vitally important for the life and safety of the victim. It also stipulates that a state is obliged to take all the necessary measures to provide “for the setting-up of appropriate, easily accessible shelters in sufficient numbers to provide safe accommodation for and to reach out pro-actively to victims, especially women and their children.”<sup>17</sup>

Shelter service is truly fundamental and occupy a major place among state-run services. Such public support in Georgia is being provided by the LEPL State Fund for Protection and Assistance of (Statutory) Victims of Human Trafficking (hereinafter - State fund).<sup>18</sup>

According to the law, a **shelter is a place of temporary residence for victims, or temporary accommodation for victims which is intended for psychological and social rehabilitation of victims, their legal and medical assistance and protection.**<sup>19</sup>

Shelters have been functioning in Georgia since 2011.<sup>20</sup> There are 5 state-run shelters in Georgia now, two of them are in Tbilisi and Batumi<sup>21</sup> (Institutions for the Service of Victims of Trafficking and Domestic Violence (Shelters) serving the victims of trafficking and victims of violence. And three service institutions for domestic violence (shelters) are situated in Signagi, Kutaisi, Gori. They are only intended for the victims of violence.<sup>22</sup>

The rules of victim placement and rehabilitation are determined by the shelter’s charter (internal regulation), which regulates the activity of this institution.<sup>23</sup> A victim benefit from the shelter service for up to 3 months. In case of necessity, under the victim’s wish and

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17 Council of Europe Convention on “Preventing and Combating Violence Against Women and Domestic Violence”, art. 23

18 Goal of the State Fund for Protection and Assistance of (statutory) Victims of Human Trafficking- <http://atipfund.gov.ge/geo/static/27/mizani>

19 Law of Georgia on “Violence Against Women and/or Elimination of Domestic Violence, Protection and Support of Victims of Violence”, art. 4.i

20 “More Shelters for Victims of Domestic Violence in Georgia” - <https://georgia.unwomen.org/ka/news/stories/2016/04/more-shelters-for-victims-of-domestic-violence-in-georgia>

21 The shelter for the victims of trafficking - <http://atipfund.gov.ge/geo/list/34/trefkingis-mskhverplta-tavshesafari>

22 Shelter for the victims of violence - <http://atipfund.gov.ge/geo/list/35/odjakhshi-dzaladobis-mskhverplta-tavshesafari>

23 Law of Georgia on “Violence Against Women and/or Elimination of Domestic Violence, Protection and Support of Victims of Violence”, art 17<sup>2.3</sup>

the shelter statute (internal regulations)<sup>24</sup>, this period may be extended up to the period not exceeding 3 - 3 months.<sup>25</sup>

The victim of domestic violence is provided with a safe place of residence relevant for a normal life, with 4 meals a day, hygienic aids, clothes in case of necessity, legal, psychological and medical service, assistance for the social integration, translator`s service in case of necessity. An important guarantee for the victim is a fact that she can enjoy the right to suspend labour relations during her stay at the shelter/crisis centre. Though, the term of suspension shall not exceed 30 calendar days during a year.<sup>26</sup> Suspension of labour relations shall be a temporary non-performance of the work, not the termination of labour relations.<sup>27</sup> Shelters for victims of domestic violence are safe and well equipped, with the necessary conditions for children. Women victims of domestic violence are offered vocational trainings and assistance with employment to become ready for an independent life. Every beneficiary is treated individually.<sup>28</sup>

According to the UN Women Organization, more work should be done to fill the gaps in territorial coverage areal and quality of the services. For instance, more complex and effective measures should be taken to promote psychosocial rehabilitation of the shelter victims and better prepare them for independent work.<sup>29</sup> The part of political dialogue and reforms of Georgia-EU Association Agenda calls on a government to increase the accessibility of victim consultation services and shelters.<sup>30</sup>

**State-run shelters are only for people with victim status.** There are the following ways to obtain the status: the victim identification group, a victim recognition certificate, restrictive and protective orders.

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24 Internal rules of Gori Service Centre (shelter and crisis centre) for the Victims of Violence (standard), art. 12.6 - [http://atipfund.gov.ge/res/docs/gori\\_shinaganawesi.pdf](http://atipfund.gov.ge/res/docs/gori_shinaganawesi.pdf)

25 Internal rules of Gori Service Centre (shelter and crisis centre) for the Victims of Violence (standard), art.12.6 - [http://atipfund.gov.ge/res/docs/gori\\_shinaganawesi.pdf](http://atipfund.gov.ge/res/docs/gori_shinaganawesi.pdf)

26 Law of Georgia on “Violence Against Women and/or Elimination of Domestic Violence, Protection and Support of Victims of Violence”, art 17.1.g

27 Organic law of Georgia -Labour Code of Georgia, art. 36.1, 36.2. h, 36.4 - <https://matsne.gov.ge/ka/document/view/1155567?publication=12>

28 “Urgent Issues of Domestic Violence and Violence Against Women”, p. 8 - [https://gyla.ge/files/news/%E1%83%A4%E1%83%9D%E1%83%9C%E1%83%93%E1%83%98/geo\\_full.pdf](https://gyla.ge/files/news/%E1%83%A4%E1%83%9D%E1%83%9C%E1%83%93%E1%83%98/geo_full.pdf)

29 “More Shelters for Victims of Domestic Violence in Georgia” - <https://georgia.unwomen.org/ka/news/stories/2016/04/more-shelters-for-victims-of-domestic-violence-in-georgia>

30 Policy paper «Social Service- Lost Part of Combat Against Domestic Violence“, p. 4 - <http://www.parliament.ge/uploads/other/75/75664.pdf>

If a victim does not want to cooperate with law enforcement authorities, she can apply to the group which determines the status of the victim of domestic violence. It decides to grant the status of a victim of domestic violence to a person. Such status is valid for 18 months after its granting. But, if a victim uses the shelter service, the status will be valid for the period of the placement of a victim in a shelter.<sup>31</sup> Granting of the victim status without law-enforcement authorities is very important, as, under the Istanbul Convention, the provision of services will not depend on the victim's willingness to press charges or testify against any perpetrator.<sup>32</sup>

**A crisis centre** is a place for temporary accommodation of alleged victims and victims, and it is intended for their psychological and social rehabilitation, primary and emergency medical aid and legal assistance.<sup>33</sup>

The crisis centre provides the victim of domestic violence with the following services: psycho-social rehabilitation, medical service, legal aid and service of a translator in case of necessity. One can use the crisis centre service for 3-months. In case of necessity, the term can be extended by a period not exceeding 3 months. Like the shelter, during the stay in the crisis centre, the victim may exercise the right to stop the employment relations.

**A crisis centre is not an organization providing 24-hour service** and unlike the shelter, it does not provide housing to the alleged victims. The only exception is the crisis centre in Tbilisi, which provides such a service for up to 12 days if needed, in especially high-risk cases. Besides, unlike the shelters, one can obtain the crisis centre service without having the official victim status. One more important circumstance is the confidentiality of the service. It is possible to use the services of a crisis centre even without reporting to law enforcement officers. There is a social worker, a psychologist and a lawyer in each crisis centre. They carry out complex work and study each case through/using the multi-team principle. They often find the problems even unidentified for the alleged victims.<sup>34</sup>

In case of not owning the victim status, based on a special questionnaire, entitled worker of a crisis centre will determine the alleged fact of domestic violence from the family member towards this person. The alleged victim of domestic violence can obtain the

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31 Law of Georgia on “Violence Against Women and/or Elimination of Domestic Violence, Protection and Support of Victims of Violence”, art 16<sup>1</sup>. 1, 3

32 Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence art. 18.4

33 Law of Georgia on “Violence Against Women and/or Elimination of Domestic Violence, Protection and Support of Victims of Violence”, art 18<sup>1</sup>.1-2

34 “Crisis centres - an important service for victims of violence“ - <https://georgia.unwomen.org/ka/news/stories/2019/03/crisis-centres---an-important-service-for-victims-of-violence>

crisis centre service for the term not exceeding 12 working days<sup>35</sup>. After the expiration, the term can be extended only if the procedures for identifying the status of a victim of domestic violence are not finished. In such case, the term of using the crisis centre service will be extended until the procedure accomplishment.

The first crisis centre for the victims of domestic violence was opened in Tbilisi by the state fund in 2016.<sup>36</sup> There had been no state-run crisis centres in Georgia and such services had been mainly provided by the NGO sector. By launching the crisis centres, the state met the needs of the victims who have no housing problem but need a different kind of assistance. There are 5 state-run crisis centres in the country now<sup>37</sup> (Tbilisi, Kutaisi, Gori, Marneuli and Ozurgeti crisis centres for the victims of violence). Their number is going to increase in future.<sup>38</sup>

The number of people using these services increases correspondingly to raising the awareness of society. According to the data of three quarters of 2019, 319 people (adult/teenager victim and dependent person) benefited from the shelter housing service (24-hour care). 228 people used psycho-social assistance/rehabilitation, medical (143) and legal aid (144). The number of shelter beneficiaries is growing<sup>39</sup>. As for the crisis centres, they have provided 185 people with the service.<sup>40</sup>

Unfortunately, we are unable to submit the recent statistic data of the number of women who returned to the abuser having left the shelter<sup>41</sup>. There are approximately more than one dependent people on a victim and having left the shelter, the victim has to find new housing with them.<sup>42</sup> It shows that, as a rule, the mother is fully responsible for her

35 Internal rules of Gori Service Centre (shelter and crisis centre) for the Victims of Violence (standard), art. 21.1 - [http://atipfund.gov.ge/res/docs/gori\\_shinaganawesi.pdf](http://atipfund.gov.ge/res/docs/gori_shinaganawesi.pdf)

36 “The First Crisis Centre for the Victims of Domestic Violence has been opened in Tbilisi” - <https://bit.ly/2GaUfet>

37 Crisis centre - <http://atipfund.gov.ge/geo/static/238/krizisuli-centri>

38 “Three new crisis centres for survivors of violence open in Georgia” - <https://georgia.unwomen.org/ka/news/stories/2019/01/three-new-crisis-centres-for-survivors-of-violence-open-in-georgia>

39 Statistic data of the beneficiaries (victims of gender-based/domestic violence/affected) of the shelter and its services since 2010, see at: <http://atipfund.gov.ge/res/docs/zaladobis-statistika-2019-IIIkv.pdf>

40 Detailed statistic data of the crisis centres` beneficiaries see at: <http://atipfund.gov.ge/res/docs/krizisulis-statistika-2019-IIIkv.pdf>

41 Based on the statistics, in 2014, after leaving the shelter, approximately 60% used to return to the family - <https://www.radiotavisupleba.ge/a/25264075.html>

42 Report on Efficiency Audit of State Audit Office of Georgia - Mechanisms for protection and prevention of domestic violence, p. 31-32

under-age children and a victim women has to cope with the problems alone. It makes a woman more vulnerable and compels her to make a difficult decision to return and live risking their life and health.

State fund actively **works to disseminate information about the crisis centres**. The service is permanently being improved and the employees retrained.<sup>43</sup> It is necessary to make more efforts in this direction. It a **paradox** that **despite the acuteness of the issue of domestic violence, there are few beneficiaries in the state-run shelters**. Having interviewed 21 beneficiaries of the shelters and crisis centres, the audit has identified that **only 10% of the beneficiaries had been aware of the mechanisms for protection against violence. 52% of the beneficiaries had had no information on the mechanisms**.<sup>44</sup>

A small number of beneficiaries may be affected not only by the lack of information but inadequate services for the victims as well. In 2018, the monitoring of the shelters and crisis centres conducted by the Public Defender demonstrated that **long-term protection of the victim safety and fear of recurrent violence, stereotypes of society are considered to be challenges**.<sup>45</sup> **80% of the beneficiaries apply to the administration to extend the term**. It makes the readiness of the beneficiaries to start an independent life doubtful.<sup>46</sup>

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43 «Crisis centres - an important service for victims of violence“ -

<https://georgia.unwomen.org/ka/news/stories/2019/03/crisis-centres---an-important-service-for-victims-of-violence>

44 Report on Efficiency Audit of State Audit Office of Georgia- Mechanisms for protection and prevention of domestic violence , p. 42-43

45 Public Defender(Ombudsman) of Georgia - Monitoring Report on Service Centres (Shelters) for Victims of Violence Against Women, Domestic Violence and Trafficking, 2018, p. 8 - <http://www.ombudsman.ge/res/docs/2019051715551159482.pdf>

46 *ibid*, p. 13



## THE MAIN FINDINGS OF THE MONITORING

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The interviews of the respondents inquired within the monitoring framework, have shown that the **shelter is the most important service offered to the victim by the state**. In the case of domestic violence, short-term shelter is very important for the victim. It will help her relieve stress and not to think about daily problems. Other providers have stated that *“This service is still essential regarding effectiveness”(in-depth interview with NGO shelter and crisis centre director, Zugdidi)*. The victims who got in the shelter reported this experience as a survival: *“Such support is of vital importance for the victim. When we got here, we were beaten, had no clothes or other things. The administration sheltered us, provided with some clothes, hygienic or other necessary things. We have also been provided with psychological and legal aid. A social worker is working with me. They have also provided me with work, solved the problem of school registration, etc.” (in-depth interview with a victim, Kutaisi)*. The service of a crisis centre is also important for the victim: *“ In the case of my family, the crisis centre has played an important role. It strengthens beneficiaries psychologically, as well as physically”(in-depth interview with a victim, Ozurgeti)*.

The respondents unanimously pointed out that **request for victim status prevents them from** getting these services - to get into the shelter the victim should have a relevant status. The crisis centre receives the victim for a short-term. If the victim enters the shelter on the tenth day after the issuance of the one-month restrictive order, 20 days are left before the term expiration. It is impossible to rehabilitate the victim during this period. So, the victim has to find some the way to extend the status term. It is difficult for the beneficiary. She has to become involved in the procedures. *“The victim is in trouble and at the same time has to think about getting “a victim`s diploma”(in-depth interview with a victim, Kutaisi)*.

Not only this, the victim status is also associated with some stigma. Women often avoid and are afraid of being called victims officially. The main reasons which prevent women from applying to the appropriate organs for granting the victim status<sup>47</sup> are the following: I do not want to be considered a victim (58%); I did not know how to get the status (36%); I do not want to deal with the police (28%); society attitude (32%); resistance and pressure of family/relatives/environment (20%).

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<sup>47</sup> Respondents could distinguish two reasons according to the priority and importance to this question.

***“If a had had the status of the victim, I know, I would have received more assistance, but this status irritates me very much. It causes some discomfort. I am ashamed and I do not know why” (in-depth interview with a victim, Zugdidi).***

The State Fund admits it to be a challenge. But according to the worked out conception, the status will not be an obstacle to obtain the service, especially regarding the shelter. ***“The work in this direction should start in the nearest future. It needs some legislative amendments” (in-depth interview with a State Fund representative).***

In this respect, the respondents emphasized the flexibility of the similar services provided by the NGO sector, since they (NGOs) do not require the official victim status from those asking for help - ***“The main difference between our and NGO sector service is that, they are more flexible” (in-depth interview with a state-run shelter/crisis centre director).***

Some respondents have pointed out that, at the beginning had no information on the shelters and crisis centres - ***“I knew nothing that there was a shelter, where the victim could go in case of the order. I neither knew anything about the crisis centre” (in-depth interview with a victim).*** Though the State Fund holds information campaigns, challenges still exist in this regard and a victim is unaware of the services of vital importance. If we compare the number of issued restrictive orders to the number of victims provided with service, there will be a disproportion. The information on this service is not actively spread by the actors of referral system either. One of the respondents has pointed out that had called the police six times but had not been informed about the shelter. She found some information on it and went to the police - ***“I declared that I was a victim of violence and had nowhere to go. If they had not taken me anywhere, I would have committed suicide. That is how I got to the shelter” (in-depth interview with a victim, Kutaisi).***

**The lack of coordination and information exchange mechanisms between the actors of referral system and service providers at the local level** also hamper spreading the information on the services. It was demonstrated that some institutions are not even aware of the assistance program or treat the obligation to spread information and redirect the victim with lack of enthusiasm - ***“There is no communication between the local institutions and it is one of the obstacles hampering the efficient work” (in-depth interview with a crisis centre director).*** ***“I want to point out that there have not been any cases sent by the police to the crisis centre. Though, since opening we have been spreading the information. It would be good if it started an active work” (in-depth interview with a crisis centre director).***

**The problem of coordination and bureauratic approach** has also been revealed by the fact that after arriving at the shelter, the victim is deprived of the social assistance and it needs a long time to restore/renew it. Correspondingly, a very vulnerable segment is left without any support - ***“When talking about efficiency, it should be solved quickly and***



**plyably by appropriate institutions. Either the assistance should not be stopped, or a letter from the shelter/crisis centre must be enough” (in-depth interview with a state-run shelter/crisis centre director).**

The State Fund collaborates with other service providers as a City Hall social service, social workers, police, doctors, as well as the NGO sector and tries to spread the information. The school was identified as a weak unit of the referral mechanism. It is important that collaboration should not be random and **a well-planned coordination system should be worked out**. Despite the existing problems, the State Fund representative emphasized the positive changes in the situation. According to him, three or five years ago the situation was much worse. The spread of information on services was not so efficient, but now the number of applications is increasing year-over-year.

**Geographical accessibility** also affects to the use of services. It is less relevant in the case of shelters than in case of crisis shelters. Changing the place of residence, taking children to a new and unfamiliar environment is difficult for some victims. Though, on the other hand, some of them prefer leaving their place - **“The most important was being in a remote and secure place, where my husband would not find me. I am going to stay here, I cannot return to my town” (in-depth interview with a victim, Kutaisi).** **Access to the crisis centres** is also a problem, as they are daycare centres and a victim should visit them regularly to get some result - **“If the centre had been in a different municipality, it would have required some financial support and my poor family could not have afforded it” (in-depth interview with a victim, Ozurgeti).**

The representative of the state fund has also admitted the existence of this obstacle - **“Despite of the obstacle, we have been quite actively working on the development of the crisis centres. I think that five crisis centres in three years are a quite good result “(in-depth interview with a State Fund representative).** Some special cases of sympathy have also been revealed: **“We had an elderly woman who lived in a village in the mountains. We used to visit her for consultations. We also had teenager beneficiaries. The municipality covered their transportation expenses and they used to visit the centre for the consultations” (in-depth interview with a crisis centre director).**

Though, such examples are exceptions rather than rules. Therefore, to compensate the lack of crisis centres and restriction of territorial access, it is important to find some alternative means which will help the victims to obtain the service. For instance, to provide victims with the transportation fee, to create mobile groups in crisis centres and in specific cases, to introduce visits to the beneficiaries into practice, etc.

Beneficiaries were mostly **positive about staff attitudes, competence and support** - **“All the staff members had a very good approach to me” “I was absolutely satisfied with their competence. All of them were attentive. We became friends” (in-depth interview with a victim, Kutaisi).** Working process in the centres is individual and adjusted to the needs of the victim.

Among the **problems regarding the living in the shelter**, the victims have identified the following factors: problems of adaptation to a new environment, what is especially apparent in case of children and affects mothers as well; difficulties of living with many different people, maintaining hygienic norms, sharing common duties, which causes some minor conflicts.

Among **the advantages of the shelter**, the respondents emphasized security, assistance with employment and the opportunity of obtaining different types of support services at the same time. According to the feedback of the victims, the **employment issue is more or less successful**. Though, it should be pointed out that it is easier in the centres - *“Provision of our beneficiaries with a job is easier in big cities like Tbilisi, Batumi, etc.”* (in-depth interview with a State Fund representative). **“There are some beneficiaries in the centre who have been strengthened and now promote the economic strengthening of others”** (in-depth interview with a crisis centre director). Short-term service and leaving the victim without any support after the shelter were considered to be **the shelter disadvantages**.

The study has revealed that **short-term service of the shelter is the main problem for the majority of victims**. After the term expiration, they **do not feel strengthened enough and are left alone with a vague perspective** - *“The provided services are really important to support us but they are not sufficient. After leaving the shelter you face the hard reality again. I feel that need more help and strengthening”* (in-depth interview with a victim, Kutaisi); *“It is a bit unserious to stand up on one`s feet again in three months or even a year”*(in-depth interview with a victim, Senaki).

After leaving the shelter, the victims **needs to be provided with housing and economic support**. Most of them have a secondary or incomplete secondary education and have difficulty to find a well-paid job, which would cover not only their rent but expenses of their children as well. There is one more serious challenge: the interviewed victims from the shelters and State Fund pointed out that **victims are not enthusiastic to participate in programs of vocational training**. The problem is also the **time necessary for the training**. Because of their primary needs, **victims do not have enough time to attend them**. As a rule, victim women are responsible for their children and they have to fight alone to save them. Although the victim in the shelter is provided with a transportation fee to attend the courses and she is provided with all the necessities, yet the shelter service is temporary. **In the case of long-term training, it is difficult for women to handle everyday needs**.

**“It is difficult for these people to find a source of income if they are not equipped with specific skills for employment and have minimal knowledge. Even in the shelter, the indicator showing the eagerness of the victim to participate in the training is very low. Consequently, our psychologists work in this direction to show them the importance of education and profession to make it easier to find a job”**(in-depth interview with a State Fund representative). But the victims

give their argumentative answer: *“Economic income is more important for me now and I think that I do not have time for professional courses. I must work to save money when I am left alone”*(in-depth interview with a victim, Kutaisi). *“My daughter could not work in the market because she had nobody to leave the child with. We rejected the professional courses as transportation from village to town was expensive and our family could not afford it”* (in-depth interview with a victim, Ozurgeti).

According to the above mentioned, given the specific situation of women victims of violence, it is important to introduce a short-term plan of vocational training programs adjusted to the needs of the beneficiary. It is also possible to award women some grant during the training. It will enable the woman to upgrade qualification and provide children with food, cover transportation or other necessary expenses, etc. Besides, it would be better to suggest more online, distance or mixed training course.

Another obstacle to the employment of female victims is a lack of a babysitter. This cause prevents many women from getting employed. There is no babysitter in the crisis centre. Although the shelters are provided with babysitters, they work during working hours too. Working hours of the kindergartens are not either adjusted to the necessity of the single mother and there are no free kindergartens for children under two. The shelters cannot help mothers who have different working hours. Though there is a 24-hour nurse, she has many other functions as well. According to the State Fund representative, often victims do not understand the specifics of the service correctly - *“We should understand that the shelters are not educational institutions. They are aimed at social and psychological rehabilitation. One should not think that the shelters are fully responsible for these children. It will help mothers to some extent but will not take full responsibility”* (in-depth interview with a State Fund representative). The organization administration representative had the same opinion: *“If crisis centres become like a social house, their real function will be lost. It is not the organization which will solve social problems or has such an obligation. It solves the problems of the victim of violence and the state should have such services as well”* (in-depth interview with a state-run shelter/crisis centre director).

According to the above mentioned, the state should adequately respond to the challenges of single mothers and introduce the appropriate services. For instance, it should set up a day centre of non-standard time-table, where women can leave their children till they finish work. It is important to make free/public nursery schools available to everyone. Besides, the working hours of the public school and kindergarten day-care centres should be extended. It will be the service adjusted to the victim necessities - *“I work from 12:00 to 24:00. It would be good if there was a centre where children would be provided and do their lessons before their mothers finish work”* (in-depth interview with a victim, Zugdidi).

Because of the lack of such support, victims have to refuse to start work, as they cannot leave the children anywhere. It makes them socially more vulnerable. It is also admitted by the service provider: ***“The fact that employers require time-table unacceptable for the victim makes some obstacles. That is why we have to refuse the existing vacancies”***(in-depth interview with a state-run shelter/crisis centre director).

The service providers have emphasized the importance of victim motivation and responsibility. The victim should not become slack and lazy. They think that in some cases the term should be shortened: ***“When the victim is provided with the service longer than necessary, it becomes regressing as if it was harmful to her. A victim cannot be dependent on you for the rest of her life”*** (in-depth interview with a state-run shelter/crisis centre director).

Though the NGO sector has a different opinion on this issue: ***“We know that being a victim is not a short-term condition/state and a person lives with this stigma for quite a long time. To strengthen and be able to start an independent life, she needs some time. In specific cases, it should be possible to extend the time to stay in the shelter for up to two years. It is very difficult to stand up on one`s feet in a year or six months in a country like Georgia since there is a very difficult socio-economic situation and people have many problems regarding the employment”*** (in-depth interview with an administration representative of the NGO shelter).

It is obvious that these social services do not provide social assistance but we think that **the identified acute problem needs some real and adequate solution**. The victim should have more time to stay in the shelter and crisis centre. Besides, she cannot be left alone after the time expiration. **The victim should be provided with permanent support from the state** before she can stand on her feet.

After leaving the shelter/crisis centre, a victim is under the monitoring of a social worker. ***“It is important to have information about the location of the victim, how she is doing and how her socialization is going”***(in-depth interview with a state-run shelter/crisis centre director). The NGO sector considers the effort made in this regard to be insufficient. According to it, the victim should not be left without support after leaving the shelter and she must stay in the register at least for three years, under the monitoring of the specialized social worker. ***“This is an extremely vulnerable category provided with special care by the state. All kinds of resources which promote the victim socialization should be used in such case”*** (in-depth interview with an administration representative of the NGO shelter).

## 1.2. FREE HOTLINE

Under the Istanbul Convention, the parties undertake all the necessary legislative or other kinds of measures to provide 24-hour (24/7) free hotlines around the country, which will consult people preserving their privacy and anonymity on all forms of the violence under the scope of convention action.<sup>48</sup>

Under the law of Georgia on “Violence Against Women and/or Elimination of Domestic Violence, Protection and Support of Victims of Violence”, victims/alleged victims will be provided with assistance and consultation through the **free 24-hour emergency service line**. It is **available throughout the country**. Through this number, any interested person can get the information on **the response mechanisms** against gender-based and/or domestic violence and **the protection measures**. This service keeps the information confidential with exceptions established by the law.<sup>49</sup>

**The number of the state hotline in Georgia is 116 006 (+995 32 116 006)**. The service has been created by the State Fund for Protection and Assistance of (Statutory) Victims of Human Trafficking with the support of UN Women Organization and funding of the government of Sweden.<sup>50</sup> By calling it, one can get the a free service (from any operator, including international calls) and it is anonymously available 24 hours a day.<sup>51</sup> The service is also available for the national minorities. In general, the service is available in Georgian, English, Russian, Turkish, Azerbaijani, Armenian, Arabic and Persian languages.<sup>52</sup> The duration of the phone call is not limited.<sup>53</sup>

The line has been working since 2010 and through it, the victim/alleged victim or an interested person can get **a qualified consultation on the issues of domestic violence, different services**, shelters for victims, responding to the crisis cases and legal protective mechanisms against domestic violence, legal proceedings, **governmental or**

48 Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence, art. 24

49 Law of Georgia on “Violence Against Women and/or Elimination of Domestic Violence, Protection and Support of Victims of Violence”, art. 19<sup>1</sup>

50 “Capacity building of the service providers for domestic violence survivors launched” - <https://bit.ly/3aplej8>

51 “Public Attitudes Towards Domestic Violence in Georgia - Trends at a Glance”- <https://georgia.unwomen.org/ka/news/stories/2016/02/public-attitudes-towards-domestic-violence-in-georgia---trends-at-a-glance>

52 Hot line of State Fund for Protection and Assistance of (Statutory) Victims of Human Trafficking - <http://atipfund.gov.ge/geo/static/427/dzaladobis-mskhverplta-krizisuli-tsentrebi>

53 “Public Attitudes Towards Domestic Violence in Georgia - Trends at a Glance”<https://bit.ly/2R7xcHK>

## non-governmental organizations working on the issue of domestic violence and other relevant issues<sup>54</sup>

The issue of hotline staff qualification is important as well. They are provided with trainings on the issue of domestic violence by the State Fund.<sup>55</sup>

UN Women Organization with the local partners **tries to spread the information on the hotline service.**<sup>56</sup> Despite popularization campaigns, a big part of the society is unaware of the hotline, especially in regions, where nearly nobody has heard about this service. The State Fund collects statistics on using the hotline and based on the data, it is obvious that the tendency is not increasing.<sup>57</sup> **The information campaign on the service should become more active.** It will also contribute to informing the victims/alleged victims and other interested people on other existing services and assistance programs. Based on the Geostat data, the calls made in 2018 on the issue of domestic violence are as follows: 1 482 women phones<sup>58</sup> (for comparison, the same data in 2017 comprised 1793 calls), 334 men and 287 unidentified persons.

The women (victims and alleged victims) interviewed in the framework of the monitoring **were not aware of the hotline service** and consequently had never used it. It emphasizes the lack of information and shows the necessity to spread it.

To solve the problems identified through the monitoring of the State Fund services and fill their gaps, we consider it necessary to suggest the following **recommendations**:

1. The State Fund, as one of the main organs providing services, should raise the issue of meeting needs of the victims more acutely and work proactively to advocate for the solution of the problems facing the government ( for instance, the problem of the long-term housing, economic strengthening, etc.);
2. Active work should be done to raise the awareness of the target groups on the State Fund services, especially in regions; including, by strengthening cooperation with units of referral mechanisms;
3. It is necessary to extend the term of the shelter and crisis centre according to the needs of the victim. It is better to establish the time of using the service for up to two years;

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54 *ibid*

55 “Prevention of Domestic Violence and Sexual Abuse” - <https://bit.ly/30Dg0x2>

56 “Elimination of Violence against Women” - <https://georgia.unwomen.org/ka/what-we-do/ending-violence-against-women>

57 Calls received on the Hot Line on the issues of violence against women/domestic violence and sexual violence according to years see at: <http://atipfund.gov.ge/res/docs/zaladobis-cxeli-xazis-statistika-2019-IIIkv.pdf>

58 Data of Hotlines of Domestic Violence - <https://bit.ly/38qpJJM>

4. It is necessary to maintain and activate the existing trend of increasing accessibility and geographical expansion;
5. To increase the geographical access to the services of the crisis centres, it is necessary to offer additional assistance to the victim/alleged victim, including provision with money for transportation, creation of mobile groups in crisis centres and in special cases, the introduction of the practice of visiting beneficiaries, etc.;
6. It is important to eliminate the need for the official victim status in a timely manner as a barrier to receiving services;
7. It is necessary to fill the gaps of the monitoring system and produce in-depth statistics on the effectiveness and results of the services (for instance, how the lives of the victims continue after the shelter; how many women returned to the abuser after receiving the service and why?);
8. It is necessary to improve the assistance services for the victim mothers - to promote the employment of women even in case of non-standard working hours, the babysitter should be available at the shelter after 6 p.m. It would be better if a non-standard schedule day centre was set up where women will be able to leave their children till they finish work. It is important to provide a free kindergarten for the children under the age of two, as well as to increase the working hours of the day care centers, extended groups in public kindergartens and schools;
9. During the vocational trainings of the beneficiaries, it is necessary to consider meeting the basic necessities of the victims and people dependent on them (for instance, by providing a grant, offering an online or mixed type course which will be adjusted to the work, etc.).

### 1.3. LEGAL AID

Legal aid is one of the vitally important services for the victim.

Under the Istanbul Convention, the country is obliged to provide victims with access to the services which will contribute to their strengthening after the facts of violence. This obligation implies offering legal aid as well.<sup>59</sup> Besides, the convention obliges the state to ensure that “victims have information on and access to applicable regional and international individual/collective complaints mechanisms”. The party should promote the provision of sensitive and knowledgeable assistance to victims in presenting any such complaints.<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence, art. 20.1

<sup>60</sup> *ibid*, art. 21

The right of the victim in Georgia - to receive legal assistance at the public expense - is provided for by the Law of Georgia on “Violence Against Women and/or Elimination of Domestic Violence, Protection and Support of Victims of Violence”<sup>61</sup>. As for the rule of its realization, support and terms, they are established by the law on “Legal Aid”.<sup>62</sup> The provision of this service is ensured by the LEPL Legal Aid Service.<sup>63</sup> The organization provides two types of services:

1. **Legal Consultation** (It implies the provision of any interested person with free legal consultation on any issue. One can obtain it either by visiting the Legal Aid Service offices or through the website, online assistance service or e-mail ([info@legalaid.ge](mailto:info@legalaid.ge), Facebook: [www.facebook.com/legalaid.ge](https://www.facebook.com/legalaid.ge)).<sup>64</sup>
2. **Legal Aid** (It implies drafting legal documents and free lawyer’s service in a specific direction).<sup>65</sup>

Since 2018, the Legal Aid Service call centre has also been operating.

Following the ratification of the Istanbul Convention and the approval of the accompanying legislative package, the legislative framework and the legal aid system for victims has also been improved and legal support has become more accessible to the victim. Nowadays, the prevention of domestic violence, protection of victims and assistance provided by the Legal Aid Service is recognized to be one of the priorities.<sup>66</sup>

In terms of geographical accessibility, there are Legal Aid Offices throughout the country. Nowadays, 13 legal aid bureaus<sup>67</sup> and 9 consultation centres are operating. 5 bureaus and 4 consultation centres (Ambrolauri, Mestia, Sachkhere and Tsageri) cover western Georgia except for Adjara (Kutaisi, Zestaponi, Zugdidi, Poti and Ozurgeti. The latter has been operating since September 19, 2019).<sup>68</sup> There is the following difference

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61 Law of Georgia on “Violence Against Women and/or Elimination of Domestic Violence, Protection and Support of Victims of Violence”, art. 17.1.i

62 Law of Georgia on “Legal Aid”, art. - <https://matsne.gov.ge/ka/document/view/21604?publication=23>

63 Official site of Legal Aid Service - <http://www.legalaid.ge/ka>

64 Legal consultation - <http://www.legalaid.ge/ka/services/176/legal-consultation>

65 Legal aid general conditions - <http://www.legalaid.ge/ka/p/123/general-conditions>

66 Legal Aid Service on domestic violence - <https://bit.ly/378bd97>

67 “A legl Aid Bureau is a division of the Unit that renders legal aid under the procedure established by this Law and within its justification”- “Law of Georgia on Legal Aid“, art. 16.1 - <https://matsne.gov.ge/ka/document/view/21604?publication=23>

68 Legal Aid Service offices - <http://www.legalaid.ge/ka/p/1/offices>



between them: Legal Aid Bureau provides complete legal service, while consultation centres provide legal consultation.<sup>69</sup> The consultation is free and does not exceed an hour.<sup>70</sup>

Free legal consultation service for women victims/alleged victims of domestic violence is provided either **personally** or by **telephone** and **online** (through Skype:legalaid.ge, Facebook:legalaid.ge<sup>71</sup>, e-mail or website “online chat”), as well as through the call centre (call centre number -0 32 292 00 55) from any part of Georgia.<sup>72</sup>

Legal Aid Service has gone a long way of development. Since 2017, it has been obliged to protect the victims of violence.<sup>73</sup> The service implies the following types of assistance: **when issuing a protective order**, a victim/alleged victim of gender-based violence and domestic violence, **irrespective her ability to pay** exercises the right to draw up a legal document and have a representative in an administrative organ/court, while the court considers issuing the protective order under the rule stipulated by Article 21<sup>13</sup> of the Administrative Procedure Code of Georgia<sup>74</sup>. When **issuing a restrictive order**, a victim/alleged victim is provided with a free legal aid if she is **unable to pay**. According to the Law on Legal Aid<sup>75</sup>, a victim of domestic violence irrespective her ability to pay, has a right to exercise a legal aid (draw up a legal document (a proposal, suit, complaint, counterclaim, petition and other documents) have a representative in the court on administrative and civil cases) on civil and administrative cases connected to the case of domestic violence.

According to the report of the Legal Aid Service activity of 2018, to ensure qualified and professional representatives of victims **provides the lawyers with vocational trainings. Due to the sensitive nature of cases of gender-based violence and protection of victims of domestic violence**, the service, **on its initiative**, has created **a specialization of lawyers** on this type of cases. “It implies the protection of interests of victims/alleged victims primarily by the specialized lawyers with appropriate qualification and communication skills”.<sup>76</sup> **They undergo three-day vocational course which implies provision of complete information on issues of protection of victims**

69 Law of Georgia on “Legal Aid”, art..17

70 Register of contracted public lawyers - <http://www.legalaid.ge/ka/c/2/register>

71 Services - <https://bit.ly/378bd97>

72 Report on the activities of the Legal Aid Service activity, 2018 , p. 22 - <http://www.legalaid.ge/files/2019-05/LAS%20Annual%20Report-2018.pdf>

73 *ibid*, Legal Aid Service development stages, p. 17

74 Law of Georgia on “Legal Aid”, art. 5.2<sup>4</sup>

75 *ibid*, art. 5.2<sup>5</sup>

76 Report on the Legal Aid Service activity, 2018 , p. 30

**of gender-based or/and domestic violence, as well as teaching psychological aspects.**<sup>77</sup>

The representatives of the local self-government are provided with the information on the Legal Aid Services. It will help them to redirect people correctly.<sup>78</sup> Besides, meetings are held with the representatives of the social services, shelter staff and beneficiaries, university, school and college students.<sup>79</sup> To inform the population, the bureau also holds meetings with them.<sup>80</sup> The Legal Aid Service and the State Fund have signed a memorandum. It implies/stipulates redirecting the victims of gender-based and/or domestic violence, as well as victims of trafficking in case of necessity.<sup>81</sup>

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77 *ibid*

78 *ibid*, p. 35

79 *ibid*, . 36

80 See the detailed information about meeting at: Public lawyers and our beneficiaries - <https://bit.ly/2udTzSN>

81 Legal Aid Service report, 2018 , p. 24



## THE MAIN FINDINGS OF THE MONITORING

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To identify the existing challenges, in the framework of the study, Fund “Sukhumi” has interviewed not only the service beneficiaries but the providers as well. According to the Legal Aid Service director, cases of the victims are not very difficult regarding their legal side, but they are quite difficult from an emotional point of view.

The fact that the legal aid service (hereinafter- the Service), **on its own initiative, provides the specialization of lawyers**, periodically conducts legal and psychological trainings for them, has been positively evaluated by the respondents. It has been also revealed that at the given moment, the Service does not provide victims of different types of violence with a differentiated approach or does not have any internal instruction on the issue. The gap is filled with trainings. The trainings allow participants to get aware of the issue beyond the law, to understand their role, to get acquainted with the practice and acquire additional skills which are necessary for the relationship with the victim considering its specifics - **“Trainings allow us to get acquainted with the news and share the practices. Unfortunately, we have no instructions on how to treat the victims of sexual violence. At trainings, we are often given informal instructions and advice on how to deal with various forms of violence.” (in-depth interview with the Legal Aid Service consultant)**. Thus, to protect the victim`s interests more efficiently and promote the professional development of lawyers, the trainings should be continued: **“The staff competence should be raised. The specialization should be specific at the legislative level as well.” (in-depth interview with the Legal Aid Service director)**.

It should be pointed out that **women lawyers promote the gender sensitivity of the service** provided by the Legal Aid Service. The victim respondents show their preference to women lawyers - **“It would be better if women lawyers prevailed. There was a women lawyer in the crisis centre and we became friends. I share the details with her. Though, I would not speak about them with men.” (in-depth interview with a victim, Zugdidi)**. Such an approach has been supported by the providers as well - **“ Often, women victims of domestic violence mainly prefer to talk to a woman consultant. They think that she will show more solidarity and better understand the victim. There is no problem regarding this issue in the bureau.” (in-depth interview with the Legal Aid Service consultant)**. Providing the victim of sexual violence with legal aid, our service tries to involve a women lawyer in the case. Though, the cases which happen during the non-working hours make some

problems, since women lawyers are not always on duty at that time. But the cases are put in their hands then.

The study has identified that as a rule, the applicants get legal aid without any obstacles, preserving their confidentiality. So, the victim does not have to wait. On the plus side, the legal bureaus and representatives are **available in every municipality** and women can apply to any of them **regardless of the place of registration.** *“A victim may be registered in a different municipality but apply to us.” (in-depth interview with the Legal Aid Service consultant).*

On the negative side, the legal aid service does not have **statistics on the cases of violence against women or/and domestic violence separately.** *“We do not have statistics on the assistance of victims of domestic violence and perhaps, this is one of the challenges of the work done in this direction” (in-depth interview with the Legal Aid Service director).*

**The main challenge is to spread the information on the legal aid service and raise awareness on the service.** The majority of the victim respondents had had no information about the service before they got in the crisis centre or the shelter. They like the free legal aid service very much, though consider the inability to spread the information on it among the population as a disadvantage - *“The population is not informed about the free legal aid service and I think it to be a disadvantage.”(in-depth interview with a victim, Zugdidi).* The service providers have also admitted the problem. They think that more work should be done to *“Raise the awareness of people on the service which will provide with qualified legal aid.” (in-depth interview with the Legal Aid Service director).*

The lack of information on the service is the main reason why victims are less likely to benefit from the aid necessary for them. Consequently, despite domestic violence acuteness, such cases are few in the bureau- *“Our statistic data is not high, though we have never refused to help.” (in-depth interview with the Legal Aid Service consultant).* One of the factors affecting the lack of applicants is the fact that the State Fund offers legal aid service to the beneficiaries as well. There is a lawyer in the shelter and a victim will be provided with a consultation.

To fill the gaps with the spread of information, legal aid bureaus **held up meetings in villages and cities**, spread the information booklets on the issue of domestic violence. **Collaboration with the self-government organs is considered to be especially important regarding the closeness to the population.** *“The strategy of our service is to make our contact information, as well as the information on our partners and the organizations working in this direction available in every municipality, village administrative unit building. It will allow them to get in touch with us on every important issue.” (in-depth interview with the Legal Aid Service director).*

Though, it is insufficient and more work should be done to raise the awareness of society.

The monitoring process has revealed that, since victims consider a physical escape to be sufficient, they often avoid having legal disputes with abusers. **In terms of the lack of information, victims are not aware of their rights and obligations of the abusers. They also do not know anything about the aid they can be provided with -** *“They will say that divorce is not a problem. I am not interested in it. How can they help me? The father and his family take care of the child and in case of divorce, they may not pay the alimony. Because of his will, the father provides the child with some financial support. I can do nothing if one day he changes his mind and stops giving him the money.”* (in-depth interview with a victim, Kutaisi). If the victim had had a qualified legal aid she would have known that father can be imposed to pay his juvenile child the alimony. Consequently, the victim does not need to be married with the abuser.

Since **the deeply-rooted stereotypes make a big obstacle** to punish the abusers and generally eliminate the problem, **the necessity to raise awareness of the society and strengthen victim women** has especially been emphasized - *“Sometimes, in the middle of the process, the victims want to terminate the case. They name the society attitude and economic instability as factors affecting it. There were some cases when the victim was under the pressure from the relatives. They make her help the husband.”* (in-depth interview with the Legal Aid Service consultant).

More work should be done regarding the stereotypes of society. It has been identified that people still **distrust free public legal aid services** because of their low-quality - *“I was offered a free lawyer, but I decided to hire a one since I do not trust free lawyers. I do not know, maybe it is a stereotype. I must be sure that a lawyer will perform his/her duty well. So, I prefer to pay money to be more confident.”* (in-depth interview with a victim, Zugdidi). The work should become more active to increase the trust of the population towards the service and raise its reputation so that stereotypes do not hinder people from receiving important assistance. The respondents have also noted that adequate communication eliminates the problem - *“At the beginning, people had some distrust towards a free lawyer.. Though, our work has changed their attitude.”* (in-depth interview with the Legal Aid Service consultant).

We asked the victims with the relevant experience **to evaluate the legal aid services provided by the Legal Aid Service and shelters/crisis centres**. According to them, there is a more familiar and less official environment in a shelter and a crisis centre and it makes them feel comfortable - *“In the centre, you feel that everyone tries to help you, while in other organizations you feel that they treat you officially, just like*

*an ordinary client. Relationship in the centres is more human.”(in-depth interview with a victim, Zugdidi).*

Relationship with a victim of domestic violence has specific characteristics. Other providers have also noted that such attitude from victims is quite natural since each employer of the Legal Aid Service has thirty cases to deal with and working with a victim is **“a very delicate issue specified with different nuances and requiring a big-time resource.”** (in-depth interview with the NGO shelter administration representative). Though, sometimes legal aid service is unchangeable. For instance, **“criminal cases (juvenile crimes) are sent by the State Fund to us”** (in-depth interview with a Legal Aid Service director).

Victims mainly apply to the Legal Aid Service **through other services**, like the advice of the shelter, social service, NGO, police, court or the former beneficiaries. Besides, when a service cannot provide a specific beneficiary with the necessary help sends/redirects her to the appropriate service. Consequently, it is a mutual process and shows **the coordination between the service providers and the importance of information exchange**.

The lawyers of the Legal Aid Service have considered the self-government and educational institutions to be the weak units of the referral mechanism. According to the respondents, to make the fight against gender-based domestic violence more efficient, **cooperation between the referral mechanism units should be more intensive and systematic**. Every unit should have a person responsible for the cooperation, information exchange and coordination, who will systematically contact them (for instance once a month or a quarter).

The service providers consider the positive decisions passed with their help and satisfied citizens to be their achievements. They think that it would be better if the service consultation group was included in the form filling process and arrangement of the documents necessary for the victim status granting.

Except the low awareness, the **lack of staff, manuals, instructions or rendered service quality control system** have been identified among the service challenges. The service does not have a monitoring mechanism or a plan to control the efficiency of the rendered work. The project of professional evaluation system should be implemented next year. In case of mandatory protection, spending of the state resources and quality of the provided services should be controlled - **“Since there is no effective measure at the given stage, we are unable to control the quality of the service provided by us or see whether it meets the service challenges.”** (in-depth interview with a Legal Aid Service director).

Apart from the above mentioned obstacles, the respondents emphasized **the lack of communication between the units of referral mechanism, low awareness of the society on legal issues, delayed trials** (**“Though based on the law, such lawsuits**

***must be examined in a short period, they are still delayed.” in-depth interview with a Legal Aid Service consultant) and vocational training quality of the referral units - “For instance, despite the trainings, teachers are less likely to identify the cases of domestic violence. Vocational training of teachers, medical staff, police or other units is still a challenge.” (in-depth interview with a Legal Aid Service consultant).***

To solve the issues identified during the monitoring, we consider it to be necessary to **suggest the following recommendations to the Legal Aid Service:**

1. The Legal Aid Service should actively work to advocate resolving the issues under its jurisdiction (for instance, to submit a proposal or initiative to the parliament on solving the problem of delayed cases, etc.);
2. The Law should determine the issue of specialization of employees of legal bureaus to promote their work on cases of domestic violence against women;
3. It is necessary to continue work to increase gender sensitivity and contribute to the professional training of the Legal Aid Service providers;
4. More work should be done to raise awareness of the population on the Legal Aid Service, especially in regions; to raise trust towards free legal aid service and raise its reputation; including by strengthening the cooperation with units of the referral mechanism;
5. Separate in-depth statistics should be gathered on the services provided to the women victims of domestic violence (for instance, how many women victims of domestic violence have been provided with the service; including the case type, etc.)
6. Monitoring system should be implemented to control the quality and efficiency of the provided legal aid service and to identify its deficiencies.

## 1.4. SOCIAL SERVICES

Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence obliges the parties to take all the necessary legislative or other measures, to provide access to the social service for the victim and states that, services should have the adequate resources and trained specialists to help the victims and in case of necessity to send them to the special services.<sup>82</sup>

Domestic violence is an acute and multidimensional social problem. Consequently, a complex social policy should be adopted to combat it and protect a victim. The most important thing which contributes to achievement of good results in the fight against domestic violence is prevention. It involves the improvement of social service. Unfortunately, there are many gaps in this direction. Social Service Agency (hereinafter -Agency) is responsible for the social services in Georgia<sup>83</sup>.

According to the Georgian legislation, mechanisms of prevention of domestic violence against women imply a combination of social, economic, legislative and other types of measures aimed at prevention of causes and preconditions of such violence, elimination of violence, victim rehabilitation and adaptation.<sup>84</sup>

To implement measures to prevent violence against women or/and domestic violence, social service implies<sup>85</sup>: analysis of family disputes; implementation of victim support and assistance measures; identification of risk groups of abusers with the corresponding state organs and contribution to their problem-solution; development of the assistance and social rehabilitation programs for victims and promotion of their implementation.

The law on “Social Work” was adopted in 2018, which implies quite progressive regulations. Some of them contribute to the integration of the victim of domestic violence into society and her rehabilitation. Though, implementation of its main part is delayed till January 1, 2021.<sup>86</sup> Although the legislation envisages the obligation of social service, its implementation is still a problem.

The problems existing in the sector, such as **the lack of social workers and insufficient budget** have been issues to discuss for a long time. But, despite some positive changes, the condition has not been improved yet. The document adopted in the framework of the second cycle of the UN Universal Periodic Review recommended an increase of the

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82 Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence, art. 20.2

83 Social Service Agency - <http://ssa.gov.ge/>

84 Law of Georgia on “Violence Against Women and/or Elimination of Domestic Violence, Protection and Support of Victims of Violence”, art. 6.1.

85 *ibid*, art. 8

86 Law of Georgia on “Social Work”, art. 1.1; 65.2 - <https://bit.ly/2G6WrDw>



social workers and the budget.<sup>87</sup> Professionals and social workers consider the working conditions and environment of the agency to be an important obstacle.<sup>88</sup>

A total number of social workers in Georgia is very small. 600 social workers operate in the public, as well as the NGO sector and only 240 of them work in the Social Service Agency. For comparison, there are 1851 social workers per 100 000 inhabitants in the EU. While in Georgia, 7 social workers serve 100 000 people. It lags behind the practices of other countries.<sup>89</sup> To make social work more successful, it is necessary to determine the reasonable amount of work of social workers.<sup>90</sup>

In addition to the abundance of rights and duties, there is a lack of staff. The Social Service Agency administers several dozens of state social and health care programs. Every month, the agency provides nearly the third of Georgian population with the appropriate service.<sup>91</sup> The social workers operate approximately in 32 directions (socially vulnerable children, elderly people, disabled people, procedures of child adoption, foster children, guardianship, etc.). Cases of domestic violence make 5%. Based on the 2017 data, a social worker in Georgia had approximately 120 cases a month. It is 6 times more than the recommended number of cases<sup>92</sup>. In these conditions, the full performance of the functions provided by the law, is excluded.

The action plan for domestic violence for 2018-2020 envisages a 10-30% increase in the number of social workers. Though, the number of social workers decreased from 279 to 255 in 2018.

In 2019, social workers went on strike to protest against the working conditions and services offered by the state to the most vulnerable people.<sup>93</sup> One of their demands was to increase the number of workers. The agreement with the ministry

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87 Policy paper “Social service - lost part of the fight against domestic violence“, p. 5 - <http://www.parliament.ge/uploads/other/75/75664.pdf>

88 “Working conditions and challenges of the Social Service Agency workers“ - <https://emc.org.ge/ka/products/sotsialuri-momsakhurebis-saagentos-sotsialur-mushakta-shromiti-pirobebi-da-gamotsvevebi>

89 Efficiency Audit Report of the State Audit Office -Mechanisms for Protection and Prevention of Domestic Violence, p. 51

90 “ Working conditions and challenges of the Social Service Agency workers”, p. 5-6 - <https://bit.ly/38YL8KC>

91 About the agency - [http://ssa.gov.ge/index.php?lang\\_id=GEO&sec\\_id=14](http://ssa.gov.ge/index.php?lang_id=GEO&sec_id=14)

92 Efficiency Audit Report of the State Audit Office -Mechanisms for Protection and Prevention of Domestic Violence, p. 52

93 “Protest of the social workers” - <https://bit.ly/2TqvaT9>

was partially reached, the number was increased by 50 in 2019 and by 50 in 2020 as well.<sup>94</sup>

Instead of consistent increase, the number of social workers started to decrease at the beginning of 2020. The ministry explained it to be affected by the present reorganization in the agency and noted that the number of workers would not decrease after the process completion. Besides, within the reorganization framework, it is planned to transfer the functions of care, child and domestic violence administration, protection and assistance of (statutory)victims of human trafficking and victims to the State Fund.<sup>95</sup> As a part of the ongoing reorganization of the ministry, a new LEPL will be established - State Agency for Protection and Assistance of Victims of Human Trafficking. Functions and obligations of guardianship and care will be assigned to it.<sup>96</sup>

According to the NGOs` evaluation, the dismissal process of the social workers involves some violations. Some of them were actively involved in a strike organization and publicly expressed their protest. It makes the civil sector think that they have been punished because of the protest.<sup>97</sup>

A limited number of social workers on the one hand and **the abundance of obligations**, on the other hand, make a negative impact on the quality of their work and create a risk that the duties stipulated by law will remain only on paper. Based on the given situation, the social workers are unable to monitor the issues covered by the order efficiently.<sup>98</sup>

Responding to the emergency crisis cases of domestic violence, which happen during non-working hours, is a problem as well. In Georgia, social workers have regular working hours. Involvement of the social workers in the protection measures in cases of violence happening during non-working hours is complicated. Besides, because of emergency state, a social worker volunteering during non-working hours is not paid.<sup>99</sup>

Based on the audit service evaluation, at the given moment, the social service is only included in cases of violence of children. Because of the above mentioned problems,

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94 “Number of social workers will increase in 2019 – Sergeenko“ - <https://reginfo.ge/people/item/12894-2019-xels-sozialur-mushakta-raiodenoba-gaizrdeba-%E2%80%93-davit-sergeenko>

95 “Explanation of the state to the dismissal of the social workers” - <https://netgazeti.ge/news/423196/>

96 «A new LEPL « State Agency for Protection and Assistance of Victims of Human Trafficking” is to set up in the Ministry of Healthcare - <https://bit.ly/368ocGF>

97 «Dismissal process of the social workers involves some violations“ - <https://emc.org.ge/ka/products/sotsialuri-mushakebis-gatavisuflebis-protsebi-darghvevebit-mimdinareobs>

98 Efficiency Audit Report of the State Audit Office -Mechanisms for Protection and Prevention of Domestic Violence, p. 52

99 *ibid*, p. 53-54

their functions stipulated by law are not fully undertaken. Full implementation of the functions by the Social Service is very important since it contributes to the protection of the interests of victims, provision them with information on services intended for victims and redirecting them to the relevant services. Therefore, the Audit Office considers it necessary to increase the number of social workers, reduce their workload and introduce a shift mechanism for the social workers to provide quick response to the emergency cases.<sup>100</sup>

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100 *ibid*, p. 54-55



## THE MAIN FINDINGS OF THE MONITORING

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**The Social Service Agency is one of the weakest units** in combatting violence against women and support of victims. The victims and social workers, as well as the providers of other services, emphasize the necessity to make the agency more active: ***“The Social Service Agency should play a more important role in prevention of domestic violence and assistance of victims, though it does not” (in-depth interview with a legal aid bureau consultant). “The issue of social workers is a very sensitive one. We, as well as the UN had suggested the recommendations to increase the number of social workers, improve their working conditions and increase their salary. Though, it has not been taken into account”(in-depth interview with a representative of NGO shelter administration).***

All the respondents of the study, have emphasized the importance of social work on the one hand, and on the other hand, they have noted its deficiencies. Service providers are very well aware of their challenges - ***“The services offered to the victims are not long-term and fully adjusted to their needs. This is the main gap of the social work” (in-depth interview with a social worker).***

**The function of social workers to help victim women only implies their informing and redirecting.** Because of the heavy workload, it is impossible to work in the direction of prevention. Besides, it is difficult to allocate appropriate time and attention to particular cases. Social workers are well aware of this problem as well - ***“We know that we should be more actively involved in the process but due to our heavy and inadequate workload, unfortunately, we are unable to implement preventive, therapeutic and educational work” (in-depth interview with a social worker).*** In specific cases, the social worker has demonstrated special attitude/sympathy. But, the system should not be based only on the diligence and honesty of a particular person.

Some victims had not been informed about the agency service. Cases of direct appeal are rare. As the victims have pointed out, after applying to the police, the latter involved the social workers in the cases - ***“If the police had not called them, probably we would not have applied to the social service, as had not been aware of their services” (in-depth interview with a victim, Zugdidi).***

**In addition to the small number of social workers, one of the major problems is a lack of psychologists.** For example, at the end of 2019, only two psychologists were envisaged for 12 municipalities of Imereti region. Naturally, it prevents the victim

from receiving quick and necessary psychological assistance, while this is vital for women victims of violence and children. ***“It is one of the weakest units... We cannot contribute to rehabilitation because of the lack of psychologists. In the case of children, if a child is a pupil, we apply to the psychological centre of the Office of Resource Officers of Educational Institutions. As for violence against women, we apply to the crisis centre or NGO”(in-depth interview with a social worker). “There was no psychologist in the Social Service of Imereti region and I was sent to Fund “Sukhumi”. No other services have been offered to me and my children” (focus-group of Fund “Sukhumi” with victim beneficiaries).***

Because of overloading, social workers are mainly included in a case of gender-based and domestic violence if there is a victim child - ***“If there is no child in a family, we only cover the consultation and sending the victims to different services” (in-depth interview with a social worker).*** Though social workers get involved mainly to help children, it is an important support for victims. It must be considered as a service provided to them as often, children are under the responsibility of their mothers. To handle it, women need help and support - ***“I have been offered a child assistance program. It implied the assistance of a tutor for a school pupil, as well as psychological support. After the agent evaluation, I have obtained some points and based on them, I get some social assistance. Besides, they have suggested a rent provision program to me”(in-depth interview with a victim, Zugdidi). “The social worker had helped us to write an application and then, we have been provided with clothes, shoes for children and school supplies”(in-depth interview with a victim, Zugdidi). “There is also nutrition, rehabilitation-habilitation program, early development daycare centre, different kinds of assistance for disabled children, etc.” (in-depth interview with a social worker).***

The monitoring has revealed **the necessity of psychological rehabilitation of violence survivor women.** Sometimes, victim women aim their aggression at their children. The state responds to such behaviour by punitive measures instead of psychological help - ***“Sometimes, we get informed that the mother abuses her child. The women victim of violence should be rehabilitated. Such woman cannot be deprived of the parent`s rights as it will worsen her situation”(in-depth interview with a social worker).***

It is impossible to rehabilitate a child without rehabilitation of a mother. **Services for mothers and children should be included in one package.**

**Most of the victims have evaluated personal relationship with a social worker in a positive way.** Though the same cannot be said about the services. The monitoring has shown that victims have to wait for a long time to receive the assistance - ***“I would positively evaluate the attitude of the social worker to me and my children. Though the months have passed, I have not fully received all the services I had applied for.***

***It might be the deficiency of the agency, not the worker”(in-depth interview with a social worker).***

Some respondents have pointed out the incompetence and indifference of social workers - ***“Intervention of the social service was neither timely nor effective. Nothing can be said about sympathy. The only thing the social worker has done, was the evaluation of sanitary-hygienic conditions, to see if they are appropriate for a child. Nobody got interested in the psychological state of the child”(in-depth interview with a victim, Terjola).***

**Social workers cannot manage supervision and monitoring of every case -***“I had been redirected but the worker not got interested in the further development of the case” ( focus-group of Fund “Sukhumi” with victim beneficiaries); “The social worker has visited us twice but then s/he has not even inquired about the condition of me and my children”(in-depth interview with a victim, Zugdidi).*

The study has revealed that when NGO gets involved in to protect the rights of the victim the agency shows more attention - ***“I had been warned that I would have to wait for a long time for the agency psychologist. I was lucky. With the help of Fund “Sukhumi”, the Public Defender took our case under the control and immediately involved the agency psychologist in the case” (in-depth interview with a victim, Terjola); “If not the application of the NGO, I am sure they would not have responded so quickly as I had applied to them for several times”(in-depth interview with a victim,Zugdidi).*** Because of this reason, some respondents emphasized that the work of social service should be controlled by the civic sector - ***“It would be better if the NGOs had more control over this field”(in-depth interview with a victim).***

Sometimes, victims blame social workers for being unfair and lacking competence. ***“Social workers drove me crazy. Based on the questions asked to the children, the mother is an abuser. Is it possible to ask a child whether mother speaks aloud or just yells at you? You promot the child the answer. My children ran away at mentioning the social worker. Their questions badly affected on them” (in-depth interview with a victim, Senaki).***

A respondent from Ozurgeti spoke about **the negative role of the social worker**. According to her, the social worker was incompetent and had a negative impact on children. S/he incited them against the family members. Based on certain doubt, the Social Service Agency in Ozurgeti tries to send as many children as possible under the foster care, as ***“for taking care of children, a foster family gets some financial assistance from the state”(in-depth interview with a victim, Ozurgeti).*** It is important to carry out an in-depth study of such issues and provide adequate answers, not to leave any questions on the **honesty of social workers and the reputation of the Social Service.**

Lack of social workers and psychologists, heavy workload, lack of motivation, the problem of transportation, low salaries, staff flow, security vulnerability of social workers have been named among **the disadvantages of the Social Service**. Though, the existence of trained personnel has been considered to be its advantage. Most of the social workers are not trained on the issue of domestic violence.

The respondents have emphasized **the necessity to increase the number of social workers and provide them with vocational trainings** - *“There is a lack of social workers. Besides, they have low salaries and bad working conditions. A specific social worker should work with women victims of violence” (in-depth interview with the NGO shelter administration representative)*. They, they have also mentioned the necessity of rehabilitation of an abuser and importance of the social work in this regard, since the issue of violence cannot be solved without his rehabilitation.

Cooperation with municipalities has become more active recently. After the redirection from the agency, the self-government helps victims. Though, according to the respondents, it is necessary **to fill the gaps in coordination at the local level**. It will contribute to the dissemination of the information on the existing services and more efficient provision of the victims with assistance.

To solve the problems identified through the monitoring, we consider it necessary to suggest the following **recommendations to the Social Service Agency**:

1. It is necessary to advocate the necessity before the relevant organs that the Agency should start efficient social work to help the women victims of domestic violence, including the introduction of preventive social work, covering all the needs of a victim, etc.;
2. It is necessary to better disseminate the information on the existing services of the Agency, including by strengthening cooperation with referral entities;
3. It is important to make the work more intensive to raise the reputation, credibility and qualification of the Agency and its staff; It is necessary to answer the existing doubts clearly and comprehensively;
4. It is necessary to cardinaly increase the number of social workers and psychologists, as it is impossible to fully provide the victims with help by the existing resources. Besides, there is a need to provide the Agency with material support;
5. It is better to identify specialized social workers to work on cases of women victims of domestic violence;
6. It is necessary to start some social work to promote the rehabilitation of an abuser, since it is impossible to solve the problem of domestic violence without his rehabilitation.

## 1.5. THE SERVICES OF LOCAL SELF-GOVERNMENT

The Istanbul Convention obliges the state to provide adequate mechanisms to promote a successful cooperation between all the state, as well as regional authority organs for protection and support of victims. The state should regularly conduct awareness-raising campaigns at all levels. It is noteworthy that, the convention obliges the party to ensure accessibility of the support services to the victims.<sup>101</sup>

Inclusion of self-government in combat against gender-based violence is some novelty. In 2016, the amendments were made in the code of the local self-government<sup>102</sup> and law of Georgia on “Prevention of Domestic Violence, Protection and Support of Victims of Domestic Violence”<sup>103</sup>. They have significantly strengthened the role of self-governing organs regarding the prevention of violence and support of victims. **The municipality is entitled to implement measures to promote gender equality, prevent violence against women and/or domestic violence, protect and support victims of violence against women and/or domestic violence.**<sup>104</sup>

The municipality is allowed to participate in creating and funding shelters and crisis centres.<sup>105</sup> The examples of the above mentioned are the crisis centres in Telavi and Zugdidi, opened as a result of cooperation between the local NGOs and municipalities, with the support of the UN Women organization and the government of Sweden. From 2021, the appropriate local municipalities will take the responsibility to finance these crisis centres.<sup>106</sup>

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101 Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence, art. 5, 7, 13, 18.2-3, 22

102 Organic Law of Georgia on amendments to the Organic Law of Georgia on “Local Self-government Code”, art.1- <https://matsne.gov.ge/ka/document/view/3195491?publication=0#DOCUMENT:1>

103 Law of Georgia On amendments to Law of Georgia on “Elimination of Domestic Violence, Protection and Support of Victims of Violence” envisaged implementation of preventive measures against domestic violence, by the municipal units under their authority as well. art. 1 - <https://matsne.gov.ge/ka/document/view/3195515?publication=0>

Such formulation of the norm is not in the force, see : Law of Georgia on “Violence Against Women and/or Elimination of Domestic Violence, Protection and Support of Victims of Violence”, art. 7 - <https://matsne.gov.ge/ka/document/view/26422?publication=15>

104 Organic Law of Georgia “Local Self-government Code”, art. 16.4 - <https://bit.ly/2NKY2mT>

105 ibid, art. 106<sup>1</sup>.1-2

106 “Three new crisis centres for survivors of violence open in Georgia“ - <https://georgia.unwomen.org/ka/news/stories/2019/01/three-new-crisis-centres-for-survivors-of-violence-open-in-georgia>



Also, from January 1, 2021, the municipality will have social workers who will work against domestic violence.<sup>107</sup> Closeness/proximity to the population will make it easier for them to identify and prevent the facts of violence.<sup>108</sup>

**The monitoring has emphasized the identified problem referring the housing of the victim women.** Municipalities can play a vital role in this regard. Unfortunately, the services of self-government are not aimed at long-term elimination of the problem and they are only short-term. In this regard, the most common form of the municipality service is covering the rent for some period. Though, after the expiration, the issue of housing of the victim women still remains unsolved

In regard to violence against women, to evaluate the implementation of new laws by self-governing units and perception of new reality by people employed there, Fund “Sukhumi” has conducted the monitoring of the local self-governments.<sup>109</sup> The study has shown that awareness of the issue of domestic violence and sensitivity towards victims is being raised in municipalities. Though, a number of challenges which significantly prevent the progress, still remain.

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107 Law of Georgia on “Social Work”, art. 65.2 - <https://bit.ly/37dzYAO>

108 “Guideline on Law of Social Work”, p. 236-237 - <https://bit.ly/38r0WoU>

109 “The role and practices of local self-government in combating violence against women and domestic violence(Monitoring of practical implementation of legislative changes for combating violence against women and domestic violence)”, see at:  
<http://fsokhumi.ge/images/2020/1/public/broshura-iuristi-geo.pdf>



## THE MAIN FINDINGS OF THE MONITORING

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Municipality plays an important role in the creation and implementation of victim supporting programs and relevant services. The progress is evident compared to recent years. **Self-government mainly provides the victim with one-time assistance** (the amount differs according to the municipalities) **and rent**. Generally, municipalities do not have specific programs for the victims of domestic violence and they are provided with assistance in the frameworks of other programs. The services are mainly the same, though there are some differences between self-governing units. Some of them provide more assistance to victims. Despite some gaps, Zugdidi municipality is one of the progressive - ***“We were the first to implement one-time assistance and rent program for victims and we are proud of it. Our program has developed: in 2015, monetary assistance comprised 300 GEL and now, the sum for every victim is approximately 800 GEL. There are no restrictions regarding the number of victims, as well as the amount the funds” (in-depth interview with a City Hall social service representative, Zugdidi).***

As a rule, a specific program aimed at the victims of domestic violence is not common. Assistance is implied in the sub-programs of the social program. Assistance programs for young children in some self-governments are also helpful for the victim women. Such programs imply ***“provision with food and firewood supplies” (in-depth interview with a City Hall social service representative, Zugdidi).*** It should be noted that Zugdidi municipality also tries to switch to long-term services. The municipal service - Crisis Centre for the Victims of Domestic Violence, created with the support of the international organization, will start self-financing from 2020.

The **competence of self-government officials** is important as well. Some of them are trained on the issue of domestic violence. Training sessions are mainly provided by the NGOs and Fund “Sukhumi” is among them. These sessions of training have contributed to implementation of support programs for the victims of domestic violence in many municipalities - ***“We try to provide our personnel with vocational training sessions in this direction and make the communication with victims more efficient” (in-depth interview with a City Hall social service representative, Zugdidi).*** It is necessary to continue work to raise awareness and qualification - ***“Sometimes they help victims, though the employees do not know how to provide them with relevant assistance” (focus-group of Fund “Sukhumi” with victim beneficiaries).***

As a rule, a victim has to get over many difficulties to benefit from the self-government support services: one should have a **victim status**, should be **registered in a specific municipality** and sometimes is required to submit the certificate providing the stay in the shelter (for instance, in Kutaisi municipality <sup>110</sup>).

**Bureaucratic barriers which prevent victims from receiving services, disappoint them.** Of course, it makes a negative impact on the number of applications. Municipalities help victims according to the place of their registration. *“It is a municipal program and only serves the needs of people registered at the municipality. There have been several cases of applications from the people registered at the municipality. In such cases, we inform them about at the municipality existing services”*(in-depth interview with a City Hall social service representative, Zugdidi).

Accordingly, people cannot receive assistance at the place of their residence. Since it needs some additional efforts to change the address of registration and it is often difficult for them. The fact that the assistance depends on the place of registration, makes problems regarding the provision by rent. Often, a victim cannot use the opportunity of using the rent offered by the municipality, since she does not want to return to the old environment risking meeting the abuser.<sup>111</sup> Such **formal approach** introduced by municipalities is a **subject to criticism by NGO sector**: *“Every social program is linked to the registration and “linking” was mechanical. They admit it either, though do not know how to fill the gaps. The place of registration of the victim should not matter. If she lives here, should be provided with the assistance by this municipality. Municipalities are not only obliged to repair roads and arrange infrastructure. Their main function is taking care of people”* (in-depth interview with the NGO shelter administration representative).

Besides, the main criterion to obtain assistance from the municipality is a **victim status**. *“I could not have benefitted from the rent provision program for the victims of violence implemented by the City Hall as they had required the status. But, I did not have it and consequently did not obtain the assistance. I understand that they act under the law, but they should have more humane attitude”*(in-depth interview with a victim, Zugdidi). Because of such formal obstacles, the disappointed victim loses trust towards the support system: *“I have not been helped as I do not have a status and has not been at the shelter either. I regret having gone to City Hall. I am not going to apply to anybody since I am sure that will not get any benefit”* (in-depth interview with a victim, Kutaisi).

110 “Assistance of victims of domestic violence” - <http://kutaisi.gov.ge/ge/ojaxuri-zaladobis-msxverplta-daxmareba>

111 Public Defender(Ombudsman) of Georgia - Monitoring Report on Service Centres (Shelters) for Victims of Violence Against Women, Domestic Violence and Trafficking, 2018, p. 21

We have already mentioned, the state has realized that it is a problem and is going to repeal the barrier. **Self-government should independently set up an instrument** like crisis centre and **determine whether a certain person is a victim of violence or not**. It will help the victim to receive municipal support.

**Dissemination of the information on the municipal services is a problem.** Most of the victims have noted that had not been aware of the assistance programs. Most of the respondents have admitted that **raising awareness of society is one of the main challenges**. Consequently, it affects the number of applications for victim services. The study has demonstrated that beneficiaries apply for the self-government services through shelter/crisis centre, NGOs and then they try to disseminate the information - *“I had not been aware of the City Hall assistance programs before I got at the shelter. Now, I know and whenever I have a chance I share the information to everyone. Every woman should be informed on it” (in-depth interview with a victim, Zugdidi).*

Municipalities try to disseminate the information in population in different ways but often, these measures are not effective. **In peripheral villages information is spread only by NGOs**, but they cannot manage working everywhere. The number of applications to the self-governments is increasing, though it still does not demonstrate the real picture - *“It was difficult to imagine how the self-government could get involved in this issue. At Fund “Sukhumi”, I was explained that I could apply to the municipality” (in-depth interview with a victim).* The work to raise awareness of the population should become more intensive, even at schools, kindergartens or at the level of City Hall.

The lack of information and gap between population and self-government organs make a negative impact on trust between them and expectations of people: *“I am not sure that self-government will provide me with any assistance . I am not neither interested to find out any information on them nor their programs” (in-depth interview with a victim, Kutaisi).*

The lack of information and distrust promote some harmful stereotypes. The awareness of the population in regions is still low. Self-governments should work harder to ensure that search for support and victim recognition not to be a shame - *“When I told my mother that I had applied the City Hall for help, she was almost shocked. She condemned me for admitting that I was a victim of violence” (in-depth interview with a victim, Kutaisi).*

The victims who have benefited from the self-government services have pointed out with gratitude that the assistance provided to them was kind-hearted and coordinated - *“There was a very kind-hearted and benevolent attitude from the Mayor and the Social Service Agency” (in-depth interview with a victim, Ozurgeti); “They have treated me very well. I did not go anywhere. They found out at the police that an order had been issued on my name. They have explained everything to me and told me that they would help me with rent. I am so grateful” (in-depth interview with a victim,*

**Lanchkhuti).** The standard of self-governments should be as follows - fast, non-bureaucratic and coordinated support for a victim.

Self-governments actively cooperate with the NGO sector to redirect victims, as well as to introduce the joint services by co-financing. Zugdidi municipality has a good experience in this regard - *“In 2019 we funded 10 projects with NGOs. They were aimed at support and strengthening of victims of domestic violence by offering legal aid, as well as vocational courses”*(in-depth interview with a City Hall Social Service representative, Zugdidi).

One of the weaknesses of the self-government work is the lack of monitoring mechanism. After the service time expiration, nobody controls how the victim lives or what kind of necessities she has. Besides, municipalities tend to work less regarding prevention.

Introduction a coordination mechanism at a municipal level and periodical exchange of the information between the service providers tends to be a challenge. Fund “Sukhumi” contributes to the creation of such mechanism by organizing periodical information meetings with the local referral entities. It would be better, if such meetings were held regularly. It would promote the exchange of information on the services of different parties and identification of deficiencies.

The main economic support for victim women is employment. Unfortunately, the existing one-time assistance will not strengthen her. Unlike private enterprises, local self-government can create an employment system - *“There should be some work in the self-government, where the victim of violence would have some privilege”* (focus-group in Fund “Sukhumi”). According to some respondents, in terms of adequate support, *“It is easier to stand on one`s feet in a region than in Tbilisi. Since the environment is more competitive there and demand for qualified personnel is higher”* (in-deph interview with the NGO shelter administration representative).

Considering the housing issue and the temporary character of the self-government assistance, the respondents have pointed out that the creation of municipal social housing service would be a great relief for victims. They would be able to reside there free of charge and they would not be afraid of being left without housing. According to the beneficiaries, the self-government services are of course insufficient but in terms of heavy social background, even a little help matters. They also worry about utility expenses and the fact that provision by rent is short-term assistance - *“I am afraid what to do in a year. If they help me with utility expenses, it will be a big relief”* (in-depth interview with a victim, Lanchkhuti).

Despite the number of challenges, progress is apparent. If self-governments had neglected *“the victim before, now they perceive victims as well as their needs”*(in-depth interview with a state-run shelter/crisis centre director). A provincial factor has been especially emphasized in Kutaisi. The vice mayor Nino Tvaltadze has played an important role to promote the defence of rights of victim women. The respondents have

also emphasized kind-heartedness of Zugdidi City Hall Social Service director - Gogi Revia.

To settle the problems identified through the monitoring, we consider it necessary to suggest the following **recommendations** to the **municipalities**:

1. Self-governments should work proactively to improve support for victims and better introduce their needs in a local budget. Self-government organs are elected by people, and it legitimates them to make independent decisions on the issues under their authority. For instance, they can repeal bureaucratic barriers and by establishing easy, flexible criteria make the services more accessible for victims;
2. The information on the self-government services should be better disseminated in the local population, including by strengthening the collaboration with referral entities ;
3. It is necessary to intensify work with the population, to raise the reputation of the self-government organs and gain the trust of the local citizens. Efforts carried out in this regard are not sufficient, since the municipalities do not have close contact with the population;
4. It is necessary to make the work more intensive regarding prevention and to raise awareness of the population. Introduction of the social worker institution in the self-governments will be considered to be a step forward;
5. It is necessary to make a cooperation with the NGO sector to better understand the needs of victims, introduce the adequate services and raise the qualification of the self-government personnel;
6. It is necessary to strengthen the joint efforts of municipalities to offer the necessary services to victims, set up crisis centres and daycare centres for children. The practice of outsourcing can be used for this purpose;
7. Instead of standard and common social programs, it is necessary to set up and implement programs for specific victims and adjusted to their needs; to change one-time assistance by long-term services. For instance, to activate care and support services for socially vulnerable victims( for example, covering utility expenses, the assistance of victim mothers through child care programs, implementation of psychological assistance services, etc.);
8. It is necessary to start creation and introduction programs of municipal social housing. Since the lack of shelter is one of the acute problems for the victim women;
9. It is necessary to set up and introduce monitoring mechanisms to check the efficiency of the municipal services for victims and identify the deficiencies.

## 1.6. NGO SERVICES

The Council of Europe Istanbul Convention takes the role of NGOs and civil society into account and necessity of their support by the state, regarding the provision of women victims of domestic violence with services. Namely, based on the convention, every party is obliged to promote the work of the NGOs and civil society which actively combat violence against women and effectively collaborate with such organizations.<sup>112</sup>

The convention envisages the provision of NGO sector with material and human support by the state as well.<sup>113</sup> Besides, the state is obliged to work out the adequate mechanisms<sup>114</sup> to promote the successful cooperation between all the appropriate state institutions and NGOs, involve the civic sector in provision of common support and specialized services.<sup>115</sup> It would not be exaggerated to point out that the NGO sector was a pioneer in Georgia to combat against gender-based domestic violence and support the victims. Consequently, the work of these organizations has made the issue more important and efficient.

Many NGOs operate in our country in this direction. Their work covers not only advocacy at the state and local levels (developing a legislative framework and efficient policy, introducing the problems of women to the relevant institutions, etc.), but the support of the women victims of domestic violence as well (their psychological rehabilitation, legal aid, etc.). The sector also plays an important role in raising awareness of the society on the problem and raising the qualification of the state, as well as local level.

According to the legislation of Georgia, a shelter/crisis centre for the victims of domestic violence can be established as NNLE by a private organization. NNLE can establish a shelter if s/he complies with the minimum standards for such type of organization established by Ministry of Internally Displaced Persons from the Occupied Territories, Labor, Health and Social Affairs of Georgia.<sup>116</sup> The same rule refers to the crisis centre.<sup>117</sup>

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112 Council of Europe Convention on «Preventing and Combating Violence Against Women and Domestic Violence» art. 9

113 *ibid*, art. 8

114 *ibid*, art. 18.2

115 *ibid*, art. 18.2, 20-22

116 Law of Georgia on “Violence Against Women and/or Elimination of Domestic Violence, Protection and Support of Victims of Violence”, art. 17<sup>2</sup>.2

117 *ibid*, art. 18<sup>1</sup>.2

One of the first shelters in Georgia for the victims of violence has been established by the NGO.<sup>118</sup> The NGO sector was a pioneer to open a crisis centre as well. Many services in Georgia were introduced by the NGOs at the beginning and then run by the state sector. It should be pointed out that these organizations contribute to the implementation of new support services. After the NGOs, the state has also introduced a crisis centre service. Nowadays, two out of seven organizations in the country are run by the NGOs<sup>119</sup> and since 2021, these crises centres will be funded by the local self-government.<sup>120</sup>

NGO sector has a legal aid service too. In terms of restricted resources, it cannot provide all applicants with legal aid. It either has to select strategic cases or is aimed at the specific target group. In such case, they advise the applicants to apply to the legal aid bureau. Though, in the beginning, when the public/state legal aid service was not actively working, the service of NGOs greatly contributed to the protection of the rights of victim women by their legal support.

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118 Georgian Harm Reduction Network - <http://hrn.ge/content/333?grid=1>

119 «Crisis centres - an important service for victims of violence“ - <https://georgia.unwomen.org/ka/news/stories/2019/03/crisis-centres---an-important-service-for-victims-of-violence>

120 “Three new cricic centres for survivors of violence open in Georgia“ – <https://georgia.unwomen.org/ka/news/stories/2019/01/three-new-crisis-centres-for-survivors-of-violence-open-in-georgia>





## THE MAIN FINDINGS OF THE MONITORING

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**The service of NGOs is more flexible and less formal.** It serves the alleged victims of domestic violence even when they do not have the victim status. Because of the lack of bureaucratic procedures, this service has vital importance for those women and children who need first and emergency aid.

**Fund «Sukhumi» also works to help the victims of domestic violence.** It operates in two directions: prevention of domestic violence and protection and support of victims. Prevention is aimed at raising awareness of society in different ways. For instance, by holding information meetings, workshops or training sessions.

**Women supporting centres**<sup>121</sup> of Fund «Sukhumi» operate in 10 municipalities. Its mobilizers hold monthly information meetings with the population. At the meetings, some beneficiaries express their wish to continue cooperation. Our psychologist and lawyer provide them not only with information but with individual consultations too. *“Fund “Sukhumi” helped me and my child to strengthen psychologically. It is a result of their work.” (in-depth interview with a victim, Khoni).*

There is a **daycare** centre in the organization, to support victims of violence. The victims/ alleged victims of domestic violence are allowed to be involved in different training courses there. The courses involve different fields: working on polymer clay, culinary, dressmaking and accounting.

Work with young people is more recent activity. It contributes to better communication, conflict management and aggression reduction.<sup>122</sup>

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121 The women supporting centres involve the following municipalities: Kutaisi, Tskaltubo, Khoni, Terjola, Senaki, Poti, Zugdidi, Lanchkhuti, Ozurgeti and Tsalenjikha. The centres are aimed at strengthening the women victims of violence and crisis families, their provision with social, psychological and legal aid.

122 Work with young people involve the schools of 11 municipalities from western Georgia (Kutaisi, Tskaltubo, Khoni, Terjola, Senaki, Poti, Zugdidi, Lanchkhuti, Ozurgeti, Tsalenjikha and Samtredia), where young people get aware of gender and domestic violence through the information meetings and workshops. They make discussions on their role in elimination of violence. In 2011-2019, the project involved 9950 pupils from 144 schools.

Having won the national competition, since 2015, Fund “Sukhumi” is the **only organization in western Georgia entitled to submit recommendations for the victim status granting to the status determination group, working in the framework of the inter-departmental commission.** Victims mainly apply for the status granting to use/extend the shelter service or to submit the “status” to the court, as proof and official document. The representatives of state organs (representatives of State Fund for Protection and Assistance of (Statutory) Victims of Human Trafficking shelter, administration of crisis centres, social workers of the Social Service Agency, employers of the local self-government, etc.) send alleged victims to Fund “Sukhumi” to submit a recommendation for them to the group for determining the status of victim of violence against women and/or domestic violence (the victim identification group).

Fund «Sukhumi» prepares a special questionnaire and arranges the beneficiary documents (ID, divorce certificate, restrictive order and other documents), the organization psychologist prepares a special opinion attached to the case. All the documentation and the questionnaire are submitted to the status granting/determination commission for discussion. In case of necessity, to answer the additional questions, the organization lawyer gets involved in the process of victim status granting. Since 2015, Fund “Sukhumi” has helped 16 victims to get the status. It should be pointed out that the commission has considered all the recommendations submitted by the organization for granting the status.

**Fund “Sukhumi” does not make any obstacles for those asking for help** and age, sex, the official status of the victim, housing do not provide any obstacles. Apart from 11 target municipalities, Fund “Sukhumi” tries to cover the peripheries and villages where none of the organizations has worked - ***“There are no services in Khoni to get some psychological or legal aid. The only organization which provides with such help is Fund “Sukhumi” (in-depth interview with a victim, Khoni).***

Like employees of governmental services, the staff of NGO shelters and crisis centres **is trained and specialized to work with victims.** All of the respondents emphasize the competence and goodwill of the staff. Examples of the **sympathetic attitude** of the workers to beneficiaries are common. ***“Our lawyer followed the victim to one of the organizations and gave some recommendations to her. Though it is not their obligation, our specialists often give examples of such support”(in-depth interview with the director of the NGO shelter and crisis centre, Zugdidi).***

Regarding the structure of provision, there is no difference between the public/state services and those provided by the NGOs. Though the services of the NGOs are more **flexible and are not restricted in time.** Based on the individual case, work with the victim may cover a year. So, **the shelters of the NGOs are more adjusted to the needs of the victim. In every specific case, they identify the duration of stay in the shelter, plan their legal and social aid or rehabilitation.** *“We determine the stay duration of the*

victim in the shelter. They leave the place when they are ready to start an independent life. We are aware that being a victim is not easy, and it leaves its trace quite for a long time” (in-depth interview with the NGO shelter representative).

Because of such attitude, **the victims prefer the services of the NGOs**. According to them, their services are better and different (70%), while the public/state services are more formal and bureaucratic (20%). **“I did not have any obstacles. This organization has taken my condition into account and has not demanded any documents. I still feel myself home here. I know that NGO will treat victims sympathetically. I wish the state had a kind-hearted attitude and quality service like this organization”** (in-depth interview with a victim, Zugdidi).

The staff of the shelter and crisis centre, helps the victim to choose a career according to her abilities and tries to meet her expectations. **“In our case, training courses are the most efficient. Having undergone the courses, the majority of victims became employed”** (in-depth interview with the director of the NGO shelter and crisis centre, Zugdidi). **“I have undergone the courses and I have been working since then. I have obtained economic sustainability and can provide my children financially. I do not depend on the abuser.”** “ (in-depth interview with a victim, Zugdidi).

As for the general evaluation of the services, **50% of the respondents who have used them, prefer the NGO sector**, 20% - the local self-government and 30% - the social service. **“I can admit that there is a perfect environment in the NGO where mother and her children feel safe and comfortable”** (in-depth interview with a victim, Zugdidi).

NGOs try to find different ways to help the victims more efficiently. It makes the sector stand out. Their work differs from the bureaucratic one. It is **proactive and encourages/promotes the work of others too** - **“For example, we got in touch with the local self-government and asked them to help the victims from our shelter. We did the same regarding doctors and raised their interest. We should make each other involved and move to the common goal”** (in-depth interview with the director of the NGO shelter and crisis centre, Zugdidi).

The respondents have especially emphasized the importance of **civil sector advocacy**. According to them, it encourages and makes them hopeful - **“The NGOs have authority and make an impact on the state. They can demand to do what you can not do alone”** (in-depth interview with a victim, Kutaisi).

The respondents think that the state should use the experience of the NGOs since this sector has **“a quite different approach to all issues”** (focus-group of Fund “Sukhumi” with victim beneficiaries) and it (state) should introduce the outsourcing practice. On the one hand, it will save the state resources and on the other hand, will provide a better service - **“In terms of service provision, the European model considering the**

**healthy competition, fair and transparent tenders, should be introduced ( focus-group of Fund “Sukhumi” with victim beneficiaries).**

In terms of the need for services, **the crisis centre should be expanded and geographical accessibility increased.** It turned out to be more important than the issue of shelter. The victims like the environment of the NGO crisis centre as it makes their rehabilitation easier - **“Now I can say that being in the crisis centre has made me a completely different person” (in-depth interview with a victim, Zugdidi).** But it is difficult for the beneficiaries from the villages to visit the centres regularly. Consequently, it is better to expand the crisis centres - **“If such crisis centre was in Poti, I would not go to Zugdidi. My children are there and I would see them more often. Transportation needs money and my salary is not enough to cover such expenses and it also makes obstacles “ (in-depth interview with a victim, Zugdidi).**

Regarding the service provision, the majority of respondents (58%) **evaluate the working experience with the NGO sector as useful and adjusted to their needs.** While for 12% the service was general and did not help. As for 10% and 6%, they think that the service provided by NGOs was very brief and less adjusted to their needs.

The respondents consider dependence on projects and the issue of long-term support to be **the disadvantage of the NGOs.** As for their **advantage,** they consider it to be reliability, sympathy, confidentiality and safety( focus-group of Fund “Sukhumi” with victim beneficiaries).

The respondents have suggested some **recommendations to the NGO sector.** The lack of services for children makes a big disadvantage - **“It would be good to establish a daycare training centre for the children of women victims of violence. They would be able to leave the children there after school or kindergarten. The children would be prepared in different school subjects while mothers are at work.”(in-depth interview with a victim, Zugdidi).** The main problem for the vast majority of victims is poverty, housing or/and employment. They demand to make the services more active and require NGO sector to advocate the existing issues before the state.

To solve the problems identified through the monitoring, we consider it necessary to suggest the following **recommendations** to the **NGOs:**

1. NGOs need to intensify the advocacy of the use of outsourcing practice before the relevant authorities. The implementation of some services provided by the state would be much more efficient and economical in the hands of NGOs;
2. Among the other needs of the victim, the NGO sector must make such need of vital importance as social housing more acute for the state. It must not be a reason for the victim to return to the abuser;

3. Though the services provided by the NGO sector are more trusted and recognized among the victims, information campaigns should become more active to raise awareness of the alleged victims on their rights and existing services;
4. The crisis centre should be expanded and geographical accessibility increased since there are some places in the regions where women are left without support services;
5. It would be better to change the services and adjust them to the needs of the victims. For example, to suggest children daycare centres to the employed mothers, etc.

# CHAPTER IV

General  
recommendations  
and existing challenges  
of the service system



The study has demonstrated the common challenges of the assistance system for the women victims of domestic violence.

First of all, it should be emphasized that every victim is individual, they have different stories, psychoemotional resources and endurance. Anybody providing them with some service should treat them individually and sensitively. It is clear that victims **need some support**. Since they have low self-esteem and are discouraged, they should know that **they are not alone** - *“The most important was finding out that I was not alone. I became encouraged and hopeful. I have been told that there was nothing shameful and humiliating about it and there are thousands of women in the same condition. I think it was the first time I raised my head.” (in-depth interview with a victim, Terjola).*

It turned out that **in the provision of victims with any kind of service, their psychoemotional support is vitally important**. *“Often, we serve as psychologists to our beneficiaries” (in-depth interview with legal assistance bureaus consultant).*

It has been shown that **women find it difficult to recognize that they are victims**. Besides, after the recognition, they do not get support and feel depressed. Because of the deeply-rooted stereotypes of society, they are left alone - *“I cannot explain to anybody that I was a victim. Nobody understands me. As time went on, I realized that I had nothing. I do not understand why women like me are not considered to be victims of violence? Is it necessary to be killed?” (in-depth interview with a victim, Kutaisi).* Such women do not have a sense of security and social support.

While discussing the deficiencies of the violence victim protection system, it should be pointed out that there are some **gaps regarding the prevention**. Since the system **mainly operates in the response mode**. The study has revealed that existing services are mainly aimed at victims of physical violence, and there is a **lack of experience and awareness of the adequate approach to other forms of violence**. Generally, it is a challenge for bureaucracy and the state. But sooner or later the state succeeds in handling a specific problem. Though, challenges regarding flexibility, mobility, variability and adaptation of approaches to the different types of victims stay acute. For example, the victim of economic violence cannot be treated in the same way as a victim of physical violence. On the one hand, the established standards and guidelines set up some frame rules, exclude arbitrariness but on the other hand, it makes the system bureaucratically rigid and prevents its flexibility. Probably, the solution is constant development and aspiration to perfection.

There are **many obstacles** which prevent women victims from **using the services** and asking for help - *“Many still do not dare and do not know what to do. Many still do not believe that anyone will help. Many are ashamed to go to the City Hall and admit that they are victims of violence.” (in-depth interview with a victim, Khoni).* Nearly 66% think that the main reason preventing women from applying to any of the organs which

provide the services for victims, is distrust; some of the respondents (59%) think that it is due to their shyness and some believe that it is affected by the negative experience of other women (“Those who have applied to, have not been properly helped” -25%). Other factors imply distance (41%), lack of the information in case of necessity (36%), mentality, obstacles from society, having no support from their families, the necessity of the victim status, avoidance of dealing with law enforcement bodies, etc. There is a big difference between women living in cities and villages. Those living in the countryside have more difficulties to benefit from the services. To strengthen them, more efforts are necessary to spread the information in the regions.

The study also showed the **vulnerability of victims living on the occupied territories** - ***“This problem is fully neglected in Abkhazia, where I lived. Laws do not protect people and human rights.” (in-depth interview with a victim, Zugdidi)***. The services are not fully accessible for IDP women. Because of their status, they have to apply to the ministry.

**The lack of information on most services** has also been identified - ***“First of all, the issue of informing people must be raised. If I had been properly informed, my child and I would have avoided much stress.”(in-depth interview with a victim, Kutaisi)***.

As we can see almost from every case, victim women are never alone. The services offered to them should also refer to the people dependant on victims. **The services should involve the interests of mothers, as well as their children.** The children of women victims of violence need special psychological assistance. ***“The children of these women are victims as well. As for me, I speak on behalf of my child as well” (in-depth interview with a victim, Kutaisi)***. It is vitally important to offer these women services which will take care of their children during their working hours.

In case of all services, especially those referring to **the public/state ones, there is a problem of geographic availability.** Based on the study conducted by the “Anti-violence network of Georgia”, the victims of domestic violence are mainly vilage residents. Consequently, the services for victims are especially important in regions. ***“ou know that the public/state services are not easy to find. One should actively look for them. All of them are in big cities and none of them is available in regions.” (in-depth interview with a victim, Senaki)***.

To **make the victim support services more available**, 76% of the respondents think that they should become more diverse and extended. Besides, the information on services/ support programs should be widely spread (66%) and cover bigger areal(48%). For the respondents, the women victims of domestic violence should be primarily provided with housing (52%), work (36%) and child care service (28%).

It turned out that **the existing services are not sufficient for strengthening and preparation of victims for an independent life.** Consequently, it makes the victim



return to the offender. ***“Not many people understand it. It does not make me surprised. Since you see that nobody supports you, you do not have any kind of income, you do not have a house and will not be able to work with little children, you come to such decision. Do not believe that women are either eager to return home to the offender, or they hope that he will change. They just have nowhere to go and have no way out.”*** (in-depth interview with a victim, Kutaisi); ***“My friend has reconciled with her husband as she had no other choice. She has returned to the worst to see the better.”*** (in-depth interview with a victim, Kutaisi). The victim women need **some extended and coordinates services**. ***“For example, the daycare centre retrains and employs victims, but the government should create other services for such people not to stop their assistance.”*** (in-depth interview with a victim, Zugdidi).

Because of the existing traditions and stereotypes, most of the victim women do not have any real estate. **Housing** is the main problem for them. The state and self-government should solve this problem not only by providing them with shelter or rent but by complex approach and **offering such women social housing**.

The interviewed respondents expressed their special gratitude to **the services provided by NGOs**. Having **little resources, these organizations efficiently manage provision of victims with help**. In case of choice, most of the interviewed victims would prefer an informal service of NGOs. It turned out that the state also trusts the NGO sector and uses its services when it is unable to help the victim. The respondents have pointed out that the state should promote the NGOs to provide victims with different services and financial support.

Besides, the respondents consider the lack of rehabilitation programs for abusers to be a challenge. It hinders the systemic settlement of the issue of violence and prevents the long-term safety of the victim. ***“Only “sending to jail” will not do. It will not make him different. When he leaves, he will be more annoyed with his wife. The abuser needs to be rehabilitated as well”*** (in-depth interview with a victim, Kutaisi).

**50% of the respondents evaluate the existing services in a positive way** (it helped, made me stronger). 30% think that services do not provide victims with support and strengthen them, while 20% think that they insufficiently provide. According to 70%, to improve results and victim support programs, it is necessary to increase their financing/funding and resources. As for 30%, they think that information about the services should be actively spread.

It turned out that, in spite of many obstacles, women who are victims of violence, manage to escape it (violence) because of their courage. But for victory they need support from state and society - ***“I found some strength in myself. It is impossible to change anything without your support. It was very difficult for me too. I was alone with***

*children. I have undergone through psychological and emotional difficulties but I could” (in-depth interview with a victim, Kutaisi).*

aking the above mentioned into account, it is necessary to suggest the following recommendations. The state and all the service providers should work with united efforts to:



1. **Distribute the information on the services and support services, rights of the victims more actively and efficiently** - It is especially important in regions, where there is a lack of such information, as it contributes to risk the life and health of victim women;
2. **Work more actively to raise the society awareness on domestic violence** - It is necessary to intensify efforts to change the gender-based stereotypes in of population, to raise sensitivity to the issue of victims and domestic violence;
3. **Eliminate the obstacles to make the services more available** - An official status of victim as a barrier should be abolished at all levels as soon as possible. As formal procedures should not prevent a woman from obtaining the necessary help;
4. **Raise the gender sensitivity of the self-government support programs** - Formal requirements to get the assistance from municipality should be cancelled/abolished and bureauratic approach to the problem changed. Victim women should get assistance at their dwelling easily and quickly;
5. **Introduce the coordination mechanism** - The local entities should have regular meetings with the local referral units and service providers, exchange the information and introduce an efficient system to establish common approaches for dealing the challenges. For instance, under the aegis of the municipality gender council;
6. **To provide geographical accessibility to the services-** Support services should be accessible geographically and reaching the specific service provider should not require big financial expenses. It is very important in regions. Since everyday transportation is a big obstacle due to the lack of transport or/and its price;

7. **Special support for victims at the initial stage of starting an independent life** - To strengthen the victim and help her overcome a “victim syndrome”, hard work should be done to improve the self-esteem and mental health of the victim and provide emotional support to her;
8. **To introduce permanent and coordinated services** - Support of the victim should not be terminated at the expiration of the service term and should consider an individual need of the victim. It should be coordinated and provided to her through “single window principle”;
9. **To extend the shelter service** - Existing term/time of using the state-run shelter (maximum 9 months) is not sufficient for the victim`s complete rehabilitation and preparation for an independent life. The time/term should be extended up to two years;
10. **To introduce the effective mechanism of monitoring** - After the expiration of the service term, the result cannot be effectively controlled and evaluated. It is necessary to analyze the condition and challenges of the victims who left the system and make statistic data;
11. **To offer social housing for victims** - Because of the patriarchal tradition, most of the victim women do not have their own realty or housing. It is one of the main challenges which cannot be solved by one-time assistance or paying the rent;
12. **To offer a care service for the victim dependant people** - Young children, as a rule, are only under responsibility of their mothers and are victims at as well. Consequently, psychoemotional rehabilitation and daycare centres are necessary to be provided to them. It will allow women to work;
13. **To provide public nursery schools for children under two and extend working hours of the public kindergartens** - Due to the lack of free nursery schools and the working hours are unadjusted to the schedule of employed mothers, victim women even in difficult social conditions are deprived of a chance to work;
14. **Financial support of the victims during the vocational training sessions** - Majority of the victim women have secondary or incomplete secondary education, and it makes them noncompetitive at the labour market. Furthermore, because of the difficult financial situation, it is difficult for them to find time for advanced trainings. The provision of victims with grant during the vocational training sessions, will promote their professional growth;
15. **Social help for victims** - Since the victims have special needs, the social assistance programs should be aimed at them. Being a victim of domestic violence should be an additional criterion of the target programs. It is important to assist them in covering utility expenses or provide with child food programs;

16. **To start the immediate implementation of measures necessary to carry out preventive social work** - The state should change its responding mode by proactive actions. It is necessary to increase the number of social workers, retrain and specialize them in case of domestic violence;
17. **To introduce rehabilitation programs for abusers** - It is impossible to eliminate the problem of domestic violence and provide the safety of victim without rehabilitation of an abuser;
18. **To delegate a number of state services to NGOs** - Outsourcing allows provision of better service to victims, using less resources.

# The stories of the victims



## Violence chronicle



*“I started to work and at the same time, conflicts started in the family. My husband is very jealous and looked at everything with suspicion. He asked the questions like: Why are you leaving late? Why are you coming late? Who are you sitting with? Why are you wearing such clothes? Now I realize that I had been a victim of violence much earlier. I just had not thought it to be violence. I used to be a victim of psychological violence from my mother-in-law and father-in-law. Then he started beating me. After leaving the house, they did not allow me to talk to my children and incited them against me.”*

## PHYSICAL VIOLENCE

*“My husband was a drunkard. I felt very bad. My child was in a difficult situation. He became the witness of the fact which has affected his psychics. Because of emotional tension, he had insomnia. He has not been completely rehabilitated yet and has some memory gaps. I prefer having been beaten by him to going through such hell.”*

## PSYCHOLOGICAL VIOLENCE

*«I am a victim of psychological violence from my mother-in-law and brother-in-law. I have been abused and humiliated by them. The brother-in-law deceitfully has taken our part of the house away. Every time he gets drunk, he humiliates and abuses me. I am a victim of psychological and sometimes physical terror. It is something terrible when you ask yourself, whether it is going to end or not? Is it my destiny? Nothing makes you happy. Your weakness and vulnerability make you cry.”*

## ECONOMIC VIOLENCE



## ECONOMIC VIOLENCE

*“For 14 years, I have been a victim of physical, economic and psychological violence from my husband. There was a lack of food, clothing and other necessities. Verbal abuse was common. Then he started beating me. He did it in the presence of the children. He treated them badly as well. He often became drunk and kicked me. My daughters of 11 and 13 saw many bad things at an early age. The elder daughter has serious psychological problems, nervous tics.”*

## PSYCHOLOGICAL VIOLENCE

*“My son-in-law injures my grandson’s ear. He is quite successful in football and had to go to Tbilisi to participate in the tournament. He asked the father for the fare but he refused and demanded him to give up sports. Since the child refused to quit, father physically abused and left a big scar on his ear. Because of violence, the children had insomnia. My daughter had some anxieties.”*

## PHYSICAL VIOLENCE

*“For three years my husband has been verbally and physically abusing me. He had threatened with a gun and blackmailed to take the child from me. After leaving the house, I could not see the child until I came there with police. You cannot even imagine the condition of my three-year-kid. One day he asked me if I was going to leave him. It was not only me who was the victim of violence. They had asserted the child that the mother had left him and would not have come. Even now, when he is 6, every time I leave the house, he is afraid that I am leaving him. He had been seriously stressed.”*

## NO TO VIOLENCE!



*“I am very concerned about the issue of children raised in violent families. Very few people are interested in their stories. I work in the kindergarten as a speech therapist and I assure that all of them are in need of a psychologist and a speech therapist help. Most of the children from such families tend to have logoneurosis and stammering. Being witnesses of domestic violence, most of them become bullies. They are not being raised in a healthy environment.”*

## PSYCHOLOGICAL VIOLENCE

*“I did not realize it suddenly that I was a victim of domestic violence. Though, when he started beating me and I saw that life of my child and me was in danger, it was not difficult to understand. My husband was a drug addict. Conflicts and aggression gradually escalated into physical violence. Everything happened in the presence of my child. Nobody cares about his feelings and I had to take him to the psychologist. He heard endless threats and felt very bad.*

*When I reported about my husband’s behaviour, it took ten days to arrest him. During that period, I was completely vulnerable, in constant fear. I could not leave home and go to work. Besides, even in the case of issuing a restrictive order, it is only written on paper. If a person wants to harm you, nothing will prevent him. I have experienced it and there are plenty of such cases around which end with homicide. It is very important that since you report about such case in the police, everybody should realize that your safety is in danger unless the violator is isolated.”*

## VIOLENCE IS EVIL!

*“I have been a victim of all kinds of violence. Sexual violence was also familiar to me. My husband and I could not reach an agreement on anything. He got drunk and flustered us. Everyone in the family was aware of it but nobody supported me. I left the family with kids for several times but we reconciled again. He was and a jealous man. My child and I were victims of constant psychological and physical violence. The child lived in a fear that the father would kill me. He suffered from nervous tic and insomnia.”*





# ECONOMIC VIOLENCE

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*«My husband and I have lived 14 years together. Though we had some conflicts all the time, I could somehow cope with them. The last five or six years have been a complete hell in my life. It was caused by drug addiction. I have experienced all kinds of violence, even a sexual one. It is terrific to remember. But when he started to put cigarette butts on my body and pull my hair it was unbearable. One can see only such horror scenes in the movie! When I look back on all this, I get angry with myself. Why have I endured it? Why did I think that everything would end soon? Then, finally I told myself I could not go on like this. Either I would kill myself, or my husband would kill me. When I mentioned the police, he threatened to kill me.»*

# SEXUAL VIOLENCE

*«I cannot explain to anyone that I was a victim. No one understands me. My husband and I have lived for thirteen years together. He disregarded me, did not allow me to work and said to take care of the child. He thought that a woman had to stay at home. Whenever he gave money to me, I had to explain the reason for my expenses. Then he argued that I was wasting it on foolish things. I would endure the situation if there was only my husband. I had a single sister-in-law. She took decisions about anything concerning my child (what to wear, where to study). As time was passing, I realized that I had been deprived of my rights. I had to be obedient and every day listen to the words "You know nothing". I found out that I had lost my identity. I had been programmed like a robot and would perform all the commands. I was even humiliated in the presence of my child. It was the culmination. My child heard the words like "Your mother is a fool" and repeated them too. Is not it violence?! It is more than beating. Consequently, I became deprived of my rights. Everybody disregarded me in the family. Besides, he turned out to have a love affair with a woman. I had to get used to it but then I decided to leave my family. I took my child and returned to my mother's house, who still says that I had to bear it. It is hard to imagine that still, nobody understands me.»*

# NO TO VIOLENCE!



## PHYSICAL VIOLENCE

*"I have no idea what a good life means. Soon, after the marriage, my husband started drinking. It was also followed by conflicts in the family. Yelling and swearing were so common for me that I did not even respond. Soon, he started beating me. He quarrelled about everything. Every time he came drunk, I held the child to protect myself. But later it did not help. He could throw something at me even when I was holding the child. I could not dare to tell anyone. I did not want to cause a family breakdown. My second pregnancy was quite difficult and I felt very sick. Once, when I was having a nap, some yelling woke me up. He threw a wooden stool at me. Though it did not hit me, I fainted. When I got conscious, he was beating me. The second child was born with some problems (has epileptic seizures). Once, when he came drunk started to beat me. He hit me in the head and bit my little finger so hard that even broke the bone. I fainted from the pain. I remember nothing. It turned out that my sister called an ambulance. I did not know that the police followed it. Then I learned that my husband had been arrested. I told the doctors that I was trying to escape and stuck my finger under the door. They probably believed me because asked nothing more. I did not tell anything to the police. I told them that it was the first time and there had not been other cases of violence. They issued some document. I even do not know what I signed. I did not feel anything at that time. With the help of my family , I left my husband."*

## SEXUAL VIOLENCE

## PSYCHOLOGICAL VIOLENCE

**VIOLENCE IS EVIL!**



# PHYSICAL VIOLENCE

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*“My father was a difficult person. He always had conflicts with my mother. All of us were scared. Whenever he got drunk, he would stab us with a knife. Violence and conflicts were common for me. At the age of 18, I was abducted. I was eager to return home, but the mother warned me that father would kill all of us. Because of my father, our house was a real hell, and I hoped to find some peace in my new family. But unfortunately, such situation lasted only for a year. Soon, he started conflicts and became aggressive to me. I have an explosive mood and did not compromise. He often beat me. When I was six months pregnant with my second child, he came home drunk. We quarrelled. He pushed me against the wall and turned me out of the house in the middle of winter. The mother-in-law was on his side. She blamed me that I drove him mad when he was drunk. In Gudauri, in severe frost, I walked in the snow to the taxi stop. I arrived in Tbilisi and came to my father. I felt terrible pain and gave a premature birth (the baby was 6 months old). I felt very sick. My toenails were frostbitten. Dad helped me a lot. I had not expected it from him. My husband asked him to forgive. He said that it had happened because he was drunk and promised not to behave like that. When I was discharged from the hospital, I went to my husband’s house. After coming back, he did not , but soon he started again. I called the police six times during that period. Every time, after issuing the order he behaved well, though soon he started again.*

*I seem to be a brave girl as if I can manage everything. Every time I thought it would not happen again. At last I guessed that if I did not quit, I would either commit a suicide or just go crazy. I found all the necessary information through the internet about getting into a shelter and saved myself and my children. I went to the police and told them that I was a victim of violence and had nowhere to go. If I was not taken anywhere I would commit a suicide. That is how I got to the shelter.”*

## PSYCHOLOGICAL VIOLENCE

### NO TO VIOLENCE!





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