



## ASSESSMENT OF SERVICES PROVIDED BY NGOS AND STATE-RUN SHELTERS/CRISIS CENTERS

**Brot**  
für die Welt

### Introduction

**The support system for women survivors of domestic violence in Georgia continues to face significant challenges.**

As of July 1, 2023, amendments to Georgia's Law on the Prevention, Protection, and Assistance of Victims of Violence Against Women and Domestic Violence removed the requirement for “victim status” as a prerequisite for accessing shelters and other services. This aimed to simplify and expand access to support services. However, the implementation of these legislative changes faces substantial difficulties at the municipal level, where many municipalities have not adapted their programs accordingly. This complicates access to local services and weakens the coordination between shelters and local governments.

Furthermore, issues persist with the limited geographical accessibility of shelters, the lack of childcare services for young children of survivors, and the absence of monitoring and support mechanisms following shelter departure. Research findings also highlight the critical role of partnerships with NGOs in improving shelter operations, which is essential for enhancing the efficiency and accessibility of services and ensuring comprehensive, tailored support for survivors.

This brief is based on research conducted by the Women’s Fund “Sukhumi” from May to October 2024. The study covered 11 municipalities (Chokhatauri, Kobuleti, Tskaltubo, Kutaisi, Khoni, Terjola, Samtredia, Senaki, Zugdidi, Tsalenjikha, and Khobi). Utilizing qualitative methods (interviews and focus groups), 52 respondents were surveyed, while the quantitative study included 553 women.

### Legal Framework

**Article 23 of the Istanbul Convention** stipulates that the state is obliged to establish an adequate number of **appropriate and easily accessible shelters for victims, particularly women and their children, offering them safe accommodation and the possibility to initiate contact on their own terms.**

**Shelter services** are a fundamental part of the state support system, encompassing the protection, assistance, and rehabilitation of victims of violence against women and domestic violence. These services are provided by the LEPL Agency for State Care and Assistance for Victims of Human Trafficking (“State Care Agency”).

In Georgia, there are **seven crisis centers** located in Tbilisi, Kutaisi, Gori, Ozurgeti, Marneuli, Telavi, and Zugdidi, and **five shelters** in Tbilisi, Batumi, Sighnaghi, Kutaisi, and Gori.

**Functions of crisis centers and shelters include:**

**Crisis Centers:** Provide psychological and social support to women survivors of violence, and if needed, temporary housing services.

**Shelters:** Offer temporary accommodation (from 4 to 10 months), as well as psychological, legal, and medical assistance, along with protection.

- ✓ As of **July 1, 2023**, amendments to the Law on the Prevention, Protection, and Assistance of Victims of Violence Against Women and Domestic Violence removed the requirement for “victim status” as a prerequisite for accessing support services.
- ✓ Access to shelter services no longer requires cooperation with law enforcement agencies, a restraining or protective order (Article 18.2), or verification of the “fact of violence” through the group responsible for determining victim status (Article 161, repealed).
- ✓ The provision or denial of shelter services is determined based on objective criteria and specially developed tools (Article 18.3).
- ✓ The duration of shelter stays has been extended from three to four months, with the possibility of further extension if necessary (Article 18.4).

## Findings

- Research data reveal that women survivors of violence are **more likely to seek assistance from NGOs for protection** (52.3%) and find their support **more effective in addressing problems** (67.6%) compared to state-run shelters (28.1%). **NGOs have also been more successful in creating a safe and secure environment** for beneficiaries (71.8%) and have **higher recognition** (125 cases) compared to state services (86 cases) (see Matrix #1);
- According to qualitative research findings, **the geographical accessibility of services remains a significant challenge**, particularly in mountainous and isolated regions. Due to geographical remoteness, women face difficulties accessing services in a timely manner, hindering the effective fulfillment of their needs. While online services, such as psychological consultations offered by crisis centers, have partially alleviated this problem, they cannot fully meet the existing demand;
- NGOs demonstrate greater mobility and flexibility**, allowing them to provide on-site psychological and legal assistance to women in regions, villages, and highland areas. For example, NGOs such as “Mercury,” Women’s Fund “Sukhumi,” “Sapari,” and GCRT actively operate in territories where access to services is limited by geographical or other factors, significantly simplifying the process of receiving support for women;
- One of the main challenges for women utilizing state-run shelters is the duration of shelter stays** (4 to 10 months), which is often insufficient for achieving independent living. **However, according to a representative of the Kutaisi shelter, this varies and depends on the woman’s motivation and capabilities:** *“Some make the most of available resources and quickly acquire the skills needed for independence, while others prefer temporary comfort at the shelter without engaging in work or self-development.”*
- Representatives of the Kutaisi state **shelter and crisis center** noted that they **actively assist women in employment**, which includes finding job opportunities, registering on websites, and offering professional courses (e.g., through a memorandum with the Women’s Fund “Sukhumi,” beneficiaries can attend courses in sewing, polymer clay crafting, basic computer skills, manicure/gel polish, etc.). However, **the majority of women are accompanied by young children, which poses a significant barrier to employment.**

## Matrix #1 (Quantitative Data)

<p><b>Sought Protection From:</b></p> <p><b>NGOs</b> (52.3%)</p> <p><b>State-Run Shelters/Crisis Centers</b> (17.7%)</p>	<p><b>Assistance in coping with problems</b></p> <p><b>NGOs</b> (67.6%)</p> <p><b>State-Run Shelters/Crisis Centers</b> (28.1%)</p>
<p><b>Felt Safe and Secure:</b></p> <p><b>NGOs</b> (71.8%)</p> <p><b>State-Run Shelters/Crisis Centers</b> (27.5%)</p>	<p><b>Are most Familiar with:</b></p> <p><b>NGOs</b> (125 მუშობვევვა)</p> <p><b>State-Run Shelters/Crisis Centers</b> (86 მუშობვევვა)</p>

**Note 1:** Several quantitative research findings pertain exclusively to non-governmental organizations and state-run shelters.

**Note 2:** It should be noted that in the case of non-governmental organizations, shelters are not the only service considered, though they constitute a significant portion of the beneficiaries included in the survey.

*“It is challenging for mothers with young children to start working, but both private businesses and state-funded employers can facilitate this process. When we intervene, job opportunities are identified; however, women often find the salary insufficient and the working hours unfavorable, as they struggle to leave their small children. It is crucial for employers to offer part-time positions, particularly state-funded LEPLs. Furthermore, it is essential to work with women to help them better understand the importance of independent living and actively take advantage of the opportunities available.” – Social Worker, Kutaisi Shelter*

## Findings:

- **Qualitative data revealed that state-run shelters insufficiently address the specific needs of mothers with young children.** During the process of receiving psychological and social support, mothers often have to provide constant supervision for their children, exacerbating their already challenging psychological state and hindering effective rehabilitation. **The establishment of specialized childcare services and the provision of qualified staff to care for young children during their mothers' psychological or social support sessions or vocational training is essential;**
- **NGOs respond more flexibly and promptly** to the childcare needs of women survivors of violence. For instance, the rehabilitation center of the Women's Fund "Sukhumi" **has a designated qualified specialist who provides care for young children while their mothers receive psychological or social support.**
- A **significant challenge** at the Kutaisi shelter and crisis center **is the lack of a permanent psychologist.** Psychological assistance is provided through outsourced specialists, which complicates the continuity of services. Additionally, there is a clear **need for multilingual services.** For example, a Ukrainian beneficiary required the assistance of a Russian-speaking psychologist, which was facilitated only through the involvement of the Women's Fund "Sukhumi."
- **Securing safe housing for women after leaving shelters remains a serious issue.** In most municipalities, housing assistance programs depend on registration criteria, excluding women who attempt to establish themselves in a new environment after escaping violence.

*"In NGO-run shelters, women have access to professional training and employment opportunities, which are essential for all women survivors. In my case, the NGO provided combined services, and if state-run shelters also offer these services on-site, it is especially noteworthy. However, as far as I know, the duration of stay [in state-run shelters] there is limited, and employment services are not available on-site"*  
– **Beneficiary of Shelter of Anti-Violence Network of Georgia**

*"How can I visit a psychologist or attend vocational training courses? And how can I start working if I don't know who will look after my young child? I really need there to be a children's room or center in the shelter where my child can be cared for, their development can be supported, and they can have educational activities while I organize my life"* – **Women violence survivors**

*"Since we began providing 24/7 rehabilitation services for women, it quickly became evident how essential it is to create a personal space for women dealing with psychological trauma. During the time when a mother of young children is working with a psychologist, social worker, or lawyer, attending medical appointments, or participating in vocational training courses, childcare is provided by a qualified specialist. This support helps both the women and their children establish a stable and safe environment."* – **Representative of Women's Fund "Sukhumi"**

*"Since I've been working here, almost all beneficiaries have been residents of other regions. If a woman is admitted to the Kutaisi or Batumi shelter, a solution must be found, or an exception must be made to ensure she receives the necessary support after leaving the shelter. It is crucial that a woman who is a violence survivor is not restricted to receiving housing assistance [from municipality] only in the region where she is registered. What matters most is that the victim can start a safe and independent life in a place where she feels secure."* – **Social Worker, Kutaisi Shelter**

## Findings:

- Qualitative research confirms that the **elimination of “victim status” as a prerequisite for accessing services has yet to be reflected in municipal programs.** As a result, women survivors of violence who do not possess “victim status” or lack a restraining order cannot access municipal support and assistance services. **Some municipalities further restrict access criteria.** For instance, under the social program of Kutaisi Municipality, women **survivors of violence are eligible for a monthly allowance of 200 GEL only if they have resided in a shelter and apply for assistance after leaving it.** This not only significantly limits the number of recipients but also creates additional barriers for women who have no shelter experience or do not wish to live in one.
- **The lack of a monitoring and support system for women after leaving shelters is a significant challenge.** Although in some cases, social workers from shelters maintain contact with former beneficiaries, this depends on their personal initiative and does not represent a structured or systemic approach. This greatly complicates the process of reintegration and empowerment for women. **Strengthening post-shelter support mechanisms by adopting best practices,** such as Norway’s model, where case managers coordinate employment, housing support, and psychological assistance, is crucial. Similarly, Canada’s reintegration programs provide long-term support and help women develop skills necessary for independent living, while the UK’s IDVA model ensures continuous involvement of “independent advisors” in the empowerment process.
- **Beneficiaries of NGOs emphasize that they maintain consistent contact with shelter staff after leaving,** which enables them to receive timely and targeted assistance when needed.
- **Fear of the future and uncertainty also pose significant challenges that prevent women survivors of violence from seeking shelter.** In many cases, they are unsure whether they will be able to strengthen themselves sufficiently and secure a livelihood to continue living independently and create a safe environment for their children without having to return to an abusive partner.

*“I know of many cases where women survivors of violence cannot access municipal services because they are required to have a restraining order or police involvement. While admission to shelters has become easier, if a survivor does not wish to engage with the police or enter a shelter, she still cannot receive assistance from the municipality. It seems that some things have been simplified, but in reality, many challenges have increased. For example, Kutaisi Municipality often turns us away if the survivor has not stayed in a shelter. Municipalities must tailor their services to the needs of beneficiaries because simply having an allocation in the budget is not enough. This would enable us to more confidently assure women that the state stands by them and that care continues even after they leave the shelter”*

**- Social Worker, Kutaisi Shelter**

*“There are not many victims who want to enter a shelter, but many wish to access municipal services and assistance. However, this is hindered by the absence of “status”. The Law states one thing, but when it comes to implementation, we encounter barriers - we see that the legal changes are not applied in practice. Municipalities stipulate that services are only available to victims who have “status”, a “restraining order”, and so on”*

**- Social Worker, GCRT**

*“We encounter numerous cases of domestic violence on the ground. We provide women with information about legal protection mechanisms and the services available in the country, and we offer them relocation to temporary shelters. However, many struggle to take that step because they fear—what happens after the shelter? Where will they go? Will they be able to become self-sufficient and avoid returning to the abusive environment, where they will face not only their violent spouse but also the judgment of family members and society? Often, this fear is what prevents them from taking real steps forward”*

**- Community Leader, Representative of an NGO (Zugdidi Municipality)**



## Findings:

- **Cases of physical and psychological violence remain the primary reasons why women seek shelter.** However, in recent years, **there has been a noticeable increase in shelter referrals related to economic violence**, indicating that women are increasingly recognizing this form of abuse. Nevertheless, qualitative research reveals that economic and psychological violence remain the most unnoticed and least acknowledged forms, with many women failing to realize they are trapped in a cycle of violence;
- Overall, the evaluation of both **NGO-run and state-run shelters/crisis centers** is predominantly positive. Beneficiaries emphasize the **“humane and attentive” treatment from staff**. According to qualitative research respondents, **NGO shelters are perceived as more “home-like,”** offering a **comfortable and warm “family-like” environment;**
- Among referral entities, shelters have the **strongest and most effective coordination with schools and kindergartens, significantly simplifying the resolution of child-related needs.** However, **coordination with local self-government bodies remains a challenge, particularly when municipalities impose additional barriers to accessing services**, such as requiring victim “status,” restricting housing rental assistance to the registered area, or making service provision conditional on shelter residency. It is also notable that in cases where state shelters or crisis centers cannot provide certain services, such as vocational training or psychological assistance, they actively cooperate with NGOs. This cooperation provides beneficiaries with additional support and access to the needed services;
- Effective management of shelters and crisis centers is a **significant challenge for NGOs due to fragmented external funding.** The example of “Mercury” clearly illustrates how funding instability can disrupt service delivery, compelling organizations to explore alternative solutions, including mobilizing community support through **crowdfunding**, to ensure uninterrupted assistance for women survivors of violence.

*“There is very low awareness about economic and psychological violence. There are frequent cases where women are denied basic necessities, such as hygiene products or adequate financial support, by their families. In Samegrelo, such situations are common, where women are dependent on their mothers-in-law, who decide what to purchase for them. Another example is a case where a husband prohibited his wife from turning on the heating during winter because the children were at kindergarten, and he deemed it “unnecessary for her alone” – Lawyer, “Sapari”*

## Recommendations:

- Introduce **institutional monitoring and follow-up support services** for women survivors of violence to facilitate their reintegration, employment, and the establishment of a safe and independent life.
- Ensure the **provision of childcare services** in shelters, enabling women to fully utilize the psychological, social, and vocational assistance programs offered by shelters and participate in employment without interruption.
- Guarantee the availability of **continuous psychological support services and multilingual assistance** in shelters, which is particularly crucial for ethnic minorities and beneficiaries who speak foreign languages.
- Adapt **municipal social programs** to align with legislative changes, allowing access to services without requiring “victim status.” Additionally, remove registration-based restrictions in housing rental assistance programs to enable beneficiaries to receive support in the region where they currently reside, not just their registered location.
- Establish a **long-term and stable funding model** to ensure the uninterrupted functioning of shelters and crisis centers operated by NGOs, thereby preventing service disruptions.