

# Feminist movement in Armenia between crises and achievements

*research results*



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**FEMINIST MOVEMENT IN  
ARMENIA BETWEEN CRISES  
AND ACHIEVEMENTS**

Between 2022 and 2023, Women’s Fund Armenia conducted 33 interviews to understand the current state of the women’s/feminist movement in Armenia. Alongside these in-depth interviews, a movement capacity assessment tool developed by the Global Fund for Women was utilized.

The following questions have been tackled during the interviews:

- Is there a feminist/women’s movement in Armenia? What is the agenda of the Armenian feminist movement? What are the main focus areas (topics, issues, discourses, etc.) that today’s feminist movement in Armenia is addressing?
- How is the women’s/feminist movement expressed in the context of multiple crises of the last years?
- Who are the main participants/members of the Armenian women’s/feminist movement?
- Does the Armenian women’s/feminist movement require funding?
- What are “the procedures” and the process of becoming part of the feminist movement? Who decides, or how can one become involved?
- Is the Armenian feminist movement intersectional and inclusive enough?
- What challenges exist within the women’s/feminist movement, and how are they being addressed?
- What does feminist solidarity mean?
- What is the future of the women’s/feminist movement in Armenia?

## Is there a feminist/women's movement in Armenia?

According to many research participants, there is a feminist movement in Armenia, and it is going through distinct stages. One of the main indicators is the shift in consciousness, particularly among young women.

*"I examine the results to see how much awareness has changed, especially among young women and girls. I compare it to the period when the movement had just begun, or when individuals who considered themselves feminists—or at least expressed rebellion—were not yet fully identifying as feminists. They were dissatisfied with injustice, inequality, and women's alienation. Compared to their thoughts, perceptions, and expectations back then, you can now see how active these young women are, how much knowledge they have, and how clearly they understand discrimination and differential treatment."*

*(from interviews)*

*"To me, it [the feminist movement] exists and has existed for a long time. Perhaps it has been disunited at times and united at others, but that is part of the movement. Overall, yes, I believe it exists."* (from interviews)

*"Both yes and no. If we follow the theories of classical social movements—what defines a movement, how it emerges, its stages, and outcomes—we might conclude that it does not exist. But I think it exists in any case*

*because the issues are present. There are various groups, initiatives, people, and activists addressing these issues to achieve certain goals. In that sense, yes, it exists.” (from interviews)*

*“There is a movement in itself, but I do not feel there is a large, cohesive community. There is a small community, some people, but not a broader, more extensive community that transcends a countable number of individuals. There is no community as such, but there is a movement of varying intensity.” (from interviews)*

Some interviewees suggested differentiating between the concepts of “movement” and “community.”

Nevertheless, a small number of interviewees believe that there is no women’s movement in Armenia as such. Instead, they argue there are groups that engage in feminist actions.

*“There are some fragmented initiatives regarding women’s issues in Armenia, but there is no organized movement as such, in my opinion.” (from interviews)*

*“There is a need to define what we mean by a feminist movement. In my opinion, there is no movement, only separate groups, individuals, and initiatives advocating for these issues due to the nature of their activities. Overall, there is no movement; we are in a state of stagnation after the revolution and the war. There is no significant public*

*mpact. But before that, at certain times, mobilization was quite strong. However, the energy has since dissipated. We failed to politicize women's issues at the right time." (from interviews)*

At the same time, all research participants agreed that the feminist movement in Armenia needs to be redefined, especially in the context of the post-war situation. This redefinition is primarily linked to the 2020 war and its subsequent tragic events.

*"I think there is a temporary pause at the moment, or there isn't much activity. I hope this pause isn't negative. Of course, COVID-19 and the war contributed to it, but I think that women working on women's issues now need to redefine their work. In my opinion, this pause is positive, allowing us to reconnect. The war raised many questions, both about the conflict and about the attitudes of international partners working in women's rights. Their indifference during the war posed significant questions for us." (from interviews)*

Overall, it can be said that the current phase of the feminist movement is marked by widespread despair and exhaustion. The crises of recent years have weakened the movement and created uncertainty within it. Participants are asking, *"How will we move forward? Where did we go wrong? If mistakes were made, what were they? What should we do next? What should our stance on the conflict be?" (from interviews)*

*"I believe the war intersects with the feminist movement. The war forces us to revise our agenda and justify our work. Why do I say this? Because war is existential—a matter of survival—and during such times, it's not easy to talk about women's issues. Although militarism and feminism are strongly connected, it's challenging in our context. The war sometimes forces us to adjust our feminist discourse, to make it softer so that people understand, instead of saying everything we want and feeling like we're talking to a wall. If we want to bring about change, we need to maneuver. In our reality, the war inevitably affects the process and content of advocating for women's rights." (from interviews)*

All research participants noted that, for various reasons, the feminist movement has ceased to be a street movement. Instead, advocacy and research activities are now more prominent.

*"But we've entered a period of maturity. It should be noted that we're working to bring about change at the legislative level through advocacy. More people now have advocacy skills and work on legal reforms. In this sense, resources have grown, and perhaps there is less need for street protests. Still, when I think of movements, the first thing that comes to mind is street actions." (from interviews)*

*“Before 2018, the feminist movement was largely focused on activism, which has diminished since the revolution. Now, the movement seems invisible to the wider public because there are almost no street actions.” (from interviews)*

The research also incorporated **a movement capacity assessment tool** developed by the Global Fund for Women to understand the development phases and priorities of the movement. According to this research, **the feminist movement in Armenia is in a phase of formalization/institutionalization**. This means that the movement is becoming more professional through formal organizations, paid staff, and coalition strategies. It is gaining more access to and recognition from the political elite but is engaging in fewer mass action strategies.

According to respondents, the most pressing priorities of the feminist movement are **forming theory and narratives** and improving **cooperation and coordination**. The quantitative survey results indicate that most respondents believe members of the movement have drawn the attention of those in power through collective actions. At the same time, respondents feel the movement is not very effective in engaging the broader public.

Regarding **leadership**, participants stated that the feminist movement does not require specific leaders and that each

group determines its own leadership. However, respondents noted that younger members of the movement rarely take on leadership roles.

When evaluating the movement's vision and narratives, participants agreed that members share a clear understanding of what they are fighting for and the kind of world they aim to create. However, they felt the movement **is not very effective in communicating this vision to the general public.**

Participants also noted that there are recognized organizations or coalitions in Armenia that support members of the movement in effective communication. A positive aspect is that even when disagreements arise, members continue to work towards a common vision. However, interviewees emphasized a lack of unity in developing a joint strategy.

Overall, participants rated the movement poorly in terms of safety and security. They noted that *"members of the movement almost never come together to identify risks and develop digital security plans."*

## **The main features of the Armenian feminist movement today and its core topics**

According to research participants, some feminist groups and organizations in Armenia use colonial language and perpetuate power relations. Issues such as fair payment and institutional exploitation frequently surface.

*"I understand that it's possible to get financing from some Western fund—almost all or the majority of these organizations get funding from there—but how it's presented and what language is used also matters. Often, there's a use of very strong colonial language, and I'm surprised how normalized it is within feminist circles or how it's acceptable to reproduce those power structures."*  
*(from interviews)*

*"I've noticed two problems regarding women's issues. First, the language we use is wrong. We need to communicate in a way that resonates with people; we are using slang that they don't understand. We should explain the issues in terms they can relate to. Second, we need to decide whether we should simply talk about the issue or create an environment where women can express themselves freely."*  
*(from interviews)*

*"The language we use is crucial. It's important to choose words that help us connect with people and articulate issues in a way they can understand. Sometimes it's*

*exhausting, but we need to make an effort. This not only helps people understand us but also equips them with tools—the words they can use to think about these issues collectively.” (from interviews)*

Another negative trend within the movement is its professionalization, which some participants see as detrimental.

*“There are also harmful tendencies. Feminism has become somewhat professionalized. People think feminism is just a job, or that working in a feminist organization automatically makes them feminists. It’s problematic because feminism is being reduced to a profession rather than an ideology or a value system that one genuinely believes in.” (from interviews)*

Another characteristic of the Armenian feminist movement is its concentration in Yerevan and relatively large cities.

*“It’s concentrated in cities and university circles. It hasn’t reached the masses, the workers, or those in rural areas.” (from interviews)*

Participants also noted that the feminist movement in Armenia currently lacks a clearly defined agenda. In previous years, represented by the Coalition to Stop Violence Against Women, the movement had a focused goal: the adoption of the domestic violence law. However,

since the law's passage, a new agenda has not emerged. The absence of a clear agenda is further exacerbated by successive crises in Armenia and the region.

*"It's a significant problem that the feminist movement doesn't have an agenda. There used to be one—the adoption of the domestic violence law—but after that, I haven't seen any specific goals. There are different directions, but no unified agenda. There's also a lack of communication between groups and individuals. They don't sit down together to have honest conversations about their visions, where they need help, or how to share the burden. That's why I don't see an agenda."* (from interviews)

*"Feminist movements have long ignored the impact of crises in their lives. Despite all the discussions about war and peacebuilding, including my own efforts, analyzing the aftermath of the war has revealed so many gaps. That's why I founded an organization focused on war, peace, and coexistence. The crises magnify existing issues, and while we work on their consequences, we fail to take preventative measures. For instance, we've been addressing domestic violence for years, yet its severity worsened after the first war, and now we're dealing with its second and third waves. We haven't made systemic changes or addressed human security in a broader sense. Many feminists even avoid the term 'Women, Peace, and Security,' dismissing it as irrelevant to feminism. But this mindset needs to be challenged, and that's my mission now."* (from interviews)

Research participants highlighted that, given Armenia's context, the feminist movement should have prioritized peacebuilding.

*"One of the most critical components of the fight against patriarchy is also the struggle against militarization, wars, and conflicts. Globally, feminist and peace movements go hand in hand. However, in Armenia—despite living in conflict conditions for over 30 years and being four years past the Second Karabakh War—peace remains a taboo topic. There's no opportunity to establish a peace movement." (from interviews)*

## **Who are the participants of the feminist movement?**

Interviews reveal that participants of the feminist movement in Armenia are those who identify with the movement and have, from an early age, recognized and fought against the injustice and discrimination they or other women in their lives have faced.

*"The first thing is probably self-identification—how I see myself and whether I consider myself a feminist. I think this notion is also shaped by patriarchy, which imposes entrance, exit, and initiation periods to be considered a member of a group. In my opinion, feminism should not have official entrance or exit requirements. I declare myself part of a group of people who believe in this cause." (from interviews)*

*“As a woman living in Armenia, I’ve experienced significant gender discrimination. Trying to understand it led me to read feminist literature and connect with friends who shared similar experiences. As a journalist, I started covering women’s issues, though I noticed that any topic I reported on revealed a gender dimension—for example, sexism in public speeches. Observing and writing about these patterns made people in the movement recognize my contributions, and they began sharing materials with me.” (from interviews)*

*“To me, anyone who considers themselves a feminist and does not reconcile with injustice or gender-based discrimination is a feminist.” (from interviews)*

According to the research participants, the feminist movement in Armenia includes both “independent,” spontaneous feminist groups and more institutionalized feminist associations.

Some interviewees noted that participants of the Armenian feminist movement often have limited personal resources. However, they also observed that most participants are urban women with certain social privileges. These participants tend to live in Yerevan, are middle-aged, have higher education, and have managed to achieve a level of independence that allows them to organize their lives.

*“Mainly both organizations, NGOs, and individual activists are involved. In Armenia, however, it’s primarily NGOs that drive initiatives and push the movement forward.” (from interviews)*

## **Does the feminist movement need financing?**

According to the research participants, every movement, including the feminist movement, requires resources. While financial support has largely come from abroad, certain forms of mutual assistance within the movement have emerged, contributing to its growth and development.

At the same time, the sources of funding and methods of resource generation are critically important.

*“It definitely needs financing, but if we are mature enough to create resources ourselves—through social entrepreneurship, for example—we could become more independent. Financial support is essential because, from a socialist feminist perspective, inequality stems from financial dependence on patriarchal structures. Achieving financial independence would align with these principles.” (from interviews)*

*"Naturally, it does need financing. When we say 'feminist movement,' we're talking about something broad. What do we need finances for? To grow the movement, to increase visibility. Right now, only 40-50% of Armenians know about feminism, and in rural areas, awareness is even lower. Visibility must be raised, and funding should consistently support women's rights. It should focus on issues like violence against women and sexual violence, addressing these problems comprehensively." (from interviews)*

**Participants also highlighted the lack of long-term and institutional funding, which hinders the feminist movement's progress.**

*"The most important problem is limited financial resources, which don't allow us to implement longer projects." (from interviews)*

## Feminist solidarity

Among the research participants, feminist solidarity is deeply valued as a political tool to dismantle patriarchal, capitalist, and colonial systems. This solidarity is rooted in principles of sisterhood, care, and the rejection of any form of misogyny.

*"I think if we compare with other movements, the feminist movement is the most solidary with others. For example, there is involvement in the environmental movement and protests related to murders and torture in the armed forces. The women's movement consistently shows solidarity with these causes. However, this solidarity is not always reciprocated. Other movements often hesitate to engage with the feminist movement, perhaps due to fear of association with feminism or skepticism about its agenda. Still, the feminist movement demonstrates greater solidarity toward other causes than it receives." (from interviews)*

One tangible manifestation of feminist solidarity is the creation of safe spaces for women—places where they can gather and share experiences without fear.

However, participants noted that the feminist movement in Armenia is not sufficiently intersectional or inclusive. Trans individuals, queer identities, and women from marginalized communities, such as the Yezidis, remain excluded.

*"The feminist movement in Armenia has made efforts toward inclusiveness, particularly by addressing gender-based violence, reproductive rights, and women's political participation. There are attempts to involve voices from diverse backgrounds, including ethnic minorities like the Yezidis, in decision-making. However, these efforts are insufficient. Most women from national and ethnic groups, especially Yezidi women, continue to be excluded from major agendas and programs." (from interviews)*

*"There is ideological intersectionalism in Armenia, but liberal-socialist feminists who are reform-oriented engage in conversations that exclude more radical voices. While this exclusion is often self-imposed by radical groups, it highlights the fragmentation within the movement. In the past 15-20 years, I haven't seen significant changes from these radical groups, but their presence also has its place." (from interviews)*

Solidarity within the movement also extends to decision-making and defining feminism. When asked who has the authority to decide who qualifies as a feminist, most participants agreed that no one has that right.

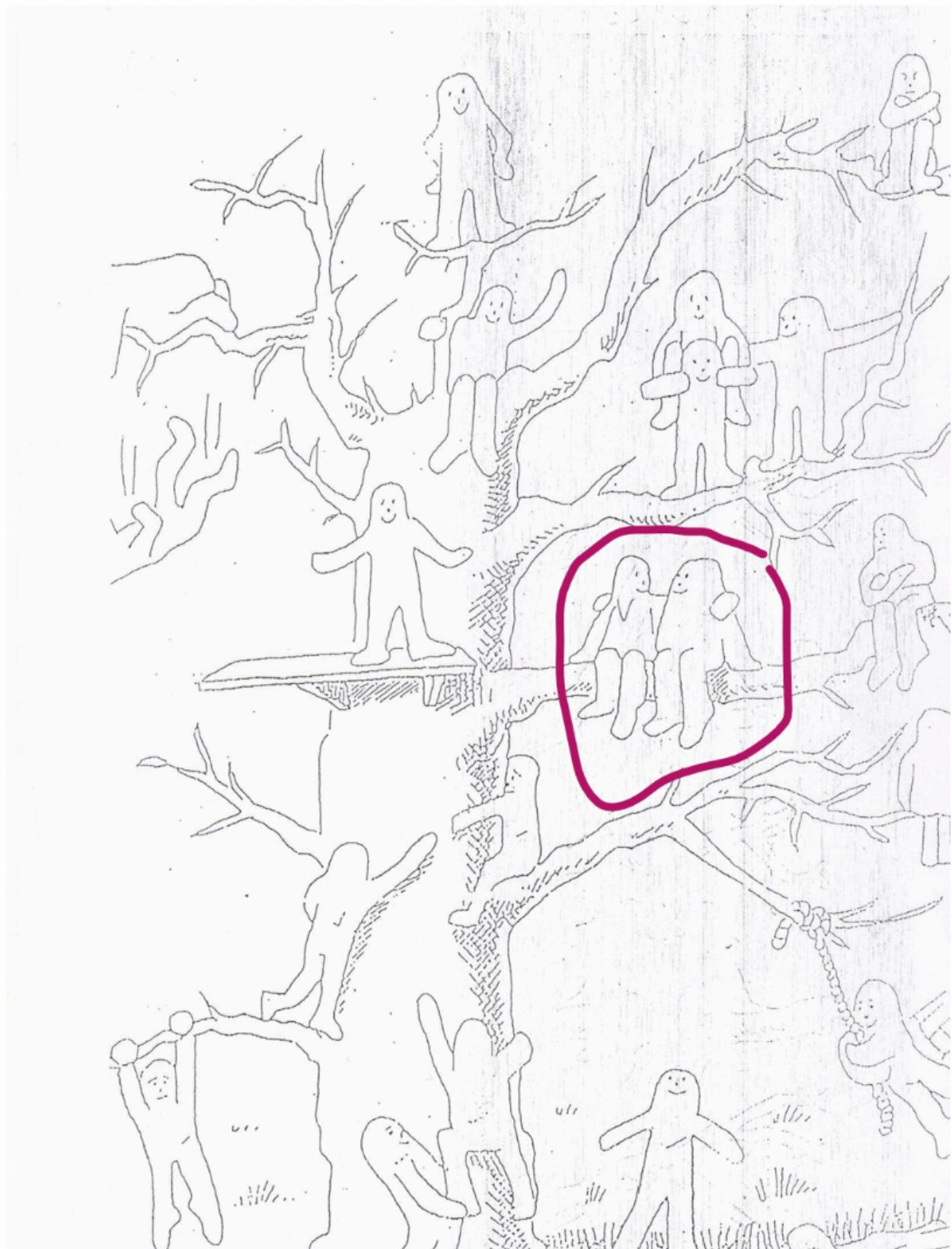
*"Of course, no one decides. Feminism isn't a policing system where someone determines who is or isn't a feminist. It's an individual choice. A feminist is someone aware of their rights as a woman and willing to fight for them. Unfortunately, some women in Armenia claim, 'This*

*'person is not a feminist,' or 'That one isn't a radical feminist.' These are anti-feminist, divisive ideas that harm the movement." (from interviews)*

Despite these challenges, disagreements and conflicts within the movement are often seen as opportunities for growth.

*"Conflict is always okay for me in that sense. Having different views and criticizing each other's approaches can lead to the development of the movement. Criticism should aim to improve the fight, not target individuals or create elitism. No one should decide who, what, or how a feminist should be." (from interviews)*

When asked to place themselves on a spectrum of involvement in the feminist movement, half of the survey participants indicated an image signifying they have at least one close supporter within the movement.



## The future of the feminist movement in Armenia: What should be done?

In general, the research participants found it difficult to make any predictions about the future of the feminist movement, let alone their own futures.

*"I think it is very unfair to ask someone to describe anything that might happen in five years in Armenia. I also try not to focus too much on the questions of what I will do and where I will be in five years." (from interviews)*

*"To be honest, I don't know. It's a bit difficult to talk about the future in Armenia, even in the range of five years, and about the feminist movement. Honestly, I can't say—I don't even have an idea about myself. In general, I do, but it's really very difficult to criticize. I don't know what I will do in five years. I know some things in general, but especially in the case of the feminist movement, I can't say. It seems to me that there will be some new people, maybe new things will be formed. I can't say." (from interviews)*

According to the research participants, the actions below are important and relevant now to make the feminist movement stronger and more visible. However, it should be noted that some participants were reserved about the phrase **"becoming more effective"** and emphasized the need to critically assess why increased influence and visibility are desirable.

*"We need to understand why we want the feminist movement to be more influential and attract more people. We think that the more people are aware, the more things will change. But many things, when they become popular, lose their potency. For example, I don't think it's important to have more involvement. For me, it is more important that those who are involved do very deep work." (from the interviews)*

## **1. Continue to promote the development of the feminist movement and strengthen solidarity**

*"I think we should just continue building the network—women who know each other, with whom you also create certain semantic ideological connections, who understand each other simply when they talk to each other. It doesn't matter if it's over a cup of coffee or something else. I think there is nothing in the regions, in the city. I go to the village. I think our presence in unexpected places, in unexpected ways, will activate [the movement]. It is now necessary to make it an objective to appear in unexpected places, in unexpected ways. What does that mean? This stage is very objective, and we have to go through it. We also need to understand what we want." (from interviews)*

*"Talking about the importance of the movement, having different conversations with different groups, maybe listening to each other, introducing conversations between different groups, showing that intersectionality.*

*I think also the spaces—finding a common ground, having physical spaces to talk, gather, to share, and try to preserve those spaces.” (from interviews)*

The idea of getting to know each other better and sharing personal stories more honestly was also frequently mentioned.

*“I think there is a need for such a conversation about how our reality, our personal and ideological feelings and experiences interact with each other. If some actions and processes will be formed from it, this is the problem—not the number of people involved [in the movement].” (from interviews)*

## **2. Collect stories of women from the past**

*“I think that by paying tribute to the heritage and remembering the women of the past—also the forgotten women, not only the famous ones—because that's essential. When you keep talking about famous women, you're taking an elitist approach to your past as well. Knowing the stories of women of 100 years ago is important.” (from the interviews)*

### **3. Strengthen the peace discourse**

*"I think all feminists should have their voice about peace. No one else would. Mothers should talk about their fallen sons—they should have the right to voice it. I'm not the one who has to say anything, but our voice should be everywhere. In other words, how do we imagine living with each other, and what will be the principle starting point on which we will talk with the other parties? Is it going to be a rejection of violence? And if it is the rejection of violence, then we will come to [the idea of] identity. With our ideas about identity, we will come to the point that we need to have an honest conversation with the other person. How we describe the other person and where the violence is."*

*(from the interviews)*

### **4. De-centralization of the movement**

*"Definitely, the connection with the regions, decentralization, taking into account the problems of the young and also the elderly, conducting research in that area. In my opinion, the main target so far has been research among young people aged 25 to 55, but other groups should be taken into account more, and more research should be done related to them. Even if we don't go out on the streets, we don't hold any demonstrations, those organizations that have advocacy plans should present those plans a lot, discuss them a lot, and definitely*

*include them in the discussions of other organizations and individuals. It's a lot of work, but it will help." (from the interviews)*

## **5. Be more prepared to respond to humanitarian crises**

*"They start providing humanitarian aid, and then they start criticizing: 'Oh, patriarchy, militarization is bad,' and so on. Then they criticize the feminists on the other side, their value system. But there's no preliminary preparation, no discussion, no attention to the early warning system—there's nothing, and there has been nothing. Even now, two years after [the mass exodus], we are trying to do things in that direction: to start a conversation, to discuss this issue in different circles. But there is still no such agenda, no such preparation. It's good that you are doing this research—maybe as a result, we will learn something and give an appropriate response." (from the interviews)*

## **6. Conduct feminist research and shape feminist knowledge**

*"As an organization implementing various research projects, we believe that more efforts should be made to conduct research on feminist topics, create essays, literary works, and works of art, and popularize them. Another issue we would like to address is the lack of an interdisciplinary approach in feminist communities. For*

*example, combining feminism with the colonial past and/or other topics. However, a number of steps are being taken on these issues by some feminist communities, organizations, and individual feminists, which is extremely appreciable.” (from the interviews)*

## **7. Translate feminist literature**

*“I am sure that first of all, good literature should be translated—not only theory but also fiction. That is, we should do translations because, of course, there is a huge volume, both theoretical and non-theoretical. That’s one thing. Secondly, we need to increase research to get to know our society better: its stratification, people’s moods. For example, I feel that if in 2008 I had mobilized [people] on Facebook for our actions—for the actions of Teghut or different groups—I feel that now, that young generation, the one coming after me... I am 40 years old now, and there are almost no 20-year-olds on Facebook; they are only on Instagram. That is, I have to go to Instagram to start mobilizing on those topics there. Those images are changing, and we, as those involved in these topics, must also have a very accurate understanding of those dynamics and processes so that we can approach the issues from the right perspective.” (from the interviews)*

## 8. Work with adolescents

*"Well, if the war didn't happen... It seems to me that working with adolescents changes a lot because adolescents are the people who can be activists in five years, who have a good idea of what feminism is, etc. Working with adolescents, I think, is a very useful and very effective contribution that the feminist movement in general can make. If we were more tolerant towards each other, I think that could also help the feminist movement in general to be bigger, more vibrant, etc. But there are also many questions there. I say now, 'Let's be tolerant,' but in many cases, it happens that I myself decide not to cooperate with a group or an organization because those ideological disagreements are very fundamental. That's why it's not very clear what should and can exist. Financial resources can also be a way to help people do more and with greater momentum. For example, I now see organizations whose financial resources are growing, and the number of their activities is also increasing. Therefore, they are involving more people."* (from the interviews)

## **9. Ensure the intersectionality of the movement**

*“Also, I think that we will slowly approach the idea of discussing intersectionality topics more, taking into account the opinions of more different groups, but we will go very slowly. Maybe in five years, we will have an idea of what intersectionality is, the issues of which groups are important, and what omissions we had that we did not take into account today. Only in five years will we have a final conclusion about it.” (from the interviews)*

## **10. Provide the feminist movement with various tools (work with communities, collective care, etc.)**

*“I’m going to give a cliché answer because I’m not going to reinvent the wheel. Movements are activated by funding, good visibility, good connections. If, yes, the members of the movement or activists have good funding, good tools—both public tools and tools for working with their communities—that helps. There’s nothing extraordinary. But also security issues: if they have well-being mechanisms and security mechanisms, that can help them.” (from the interviews)*



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