



GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE AND LABOR RIGHTS ADVOCACY: CHALLENGES, NEEDS, AND OPPORTUNITIES



The research was conducted on behalf of the Women's Fund Armenia with financial support from KVINFO. The views expressed therein may not coincide with those of KVINFO.

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Yerevan 2025

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Introduction

While advocacy has been considered one of the primary methods for solving or preventing problems in many countries around the world, many organizations in Armenia have only been able to study and apply advocacy as a method for legislative amendment in recent years. The reason in many cases is, of course, the oppressive political situation and wars, which are well-known means of silencing the voice of democratic forces in a country. Women's organizations in Armenia used to see advocacy as a complete set of steps, and in many cases, considered themselves an advocacy organization only if they had successfully initiated a legislative amendment. In the course of this study, however, it is important to correctly define advocacy, namely the mobilization of supporters, allies, and beneficiaries to have any impact on public policy.

Depending on the individual history, timelines, and directions of the organizations studied, the success stories also varied. Therefore, it is important to define 'success' differently for each target organization. In this study, 'success stories' are advocacy efforts, as a result of which:

- a) a legislative amendment was reached,
- b) the organization has approached a major legislative amendment, orders have been signed or government decisions have come into force that have improved the status of the target group,
- c) a change in policies has been documented and strategies have been adopted at various state levels.
- d) as a result, the organization has initiated ongoing change within the organization itself.

During focus group discussions, a number of positive legislative amendments implemented through individual and collective efforts of organizations were highlighted at the local, state, and international levels, which need to be documented before addressing individual organizations case by case.

A few of the success stories that emerged during the focus group discussions are presented below:

- Through the efforts of women's organizations and other supporting parties, the Law on Prevention of Domestic Violence, Protection of Victims, and Restoration of Family Solidarity was adopted in 2017, issues with its enforcement were identified, and ongoing consistency was ensured, for example, in terms of the application of the definitions of a 'partner' and a child as a 'witness' of domestic violence.
- Gender sensitivity analysis of the Goris community plans and appropriate changes to make the community plan more gender-sensitive as opposed to gender-blind.

- Expansion of the powers of the Health and Labor Inspection Body of the Republic of Armenia in accordance with the requirements of the ILO conventions ratified by the Republic of Armenia and the Revised European Social Charter.
- 26 or more amendments to the Labor Code of the Republic of Armenia to address legal enforcement gaps related to cases of violations of women's rights in the workplace.
- Proposal packages for the RA Government's state support program for housing provision for families forcibly displaced from Nagorno-Karabakh and their corresponding amendments.
- Introduction of regulations on hate crimes in the Criminal Code of the Republic of Armenia, as well as regulations on hate speech in Armenia.
- Exclusion of discrimination in the RA Law "On Donation of Human Blood and Its Components and Transfusion Medical Care" (Article 14, paragraph 6).
- Mechanisms and deadlines for organizing medication termination of pregnancy (abortion) in accordance with the RA Law "On Human Reproductive Health and Reproductive Rights".
- The adoption of the decision "2025–2028 Strategy and Action Plan for the Implementation of Gender Policy" in the Republic of Armenia, which was adopted thanks to a letter-statement addressed to the Prime Minister by women's organizations.

The following sections of this study present the internal and external challenges that hinder women's organizations in Armenia from improving their advocacy skills and achieving greater success. They also present the grouped needs of organizations, positive changes in which will contribute to improving and expanding the scope of advocacy activities. The study then concludes with a section of recommendations, built based on the organizations' needs and their visions for the future.

Methodology

Multiple-case study

Given the multifaceted nature of the research problem, a multiple-case study was chosen as the methodology for this study to identify the advocacy skills, experiences, and needs of women's organizations pertaining to gender-based violence (GBV) and labor rights. The study focuses on lobbying, influencing public policy, and public campaigning skills which are all aimed at preventing GBV and defending labor rights. A qualitative approach was deemed more appropriate for this study, mainly because it allows for an in-depth study of the experiences, stories, and practices of organizations, which would be impossible to achieve with quantitative methods. Qualitative methodology also provides an opportunity to discover new themes and perspectives for the study which at the beginning may have seemed alien and unrelated.

Within this study, each women's organization is presented as an individual case. Given the diversity of capacities and resources of women's organizations in Armenia, the individual case studies provided an opportunity to understand in detail the current situation within a given organization and at the same time to compare the collected data between different organizations. After the case studies and presentations of individual cases, a thematic comparison between organizations is provided. The comparisons provide an opportunity to understand which experiences used so far can be localized among other women's organizations in Armenia.

Here, however, it is necessary to note that one of the limitations of the research and methodology is that the study is conducted using the words of the members of the organizations, which in some cases can be incomplete due to lack of information, exaggerated due to fear of power dynamics, or even understated because the members are afraid of overestimating their capabilities, and vice versa.

This methodology was originally based on the Organizational Capability Theory, which highlights the skills, systems, and resources that enable an organization to function effectively, and conversely, those that impede and hinder, and the Organizational Empowerment Theory, which views the empowering capacity as part of a broader process directed at strengthening effectiveness and autonomy at both the organizational and community levels. The integration of these two theories was already visible at the stage of data collection, when the results were viewed in a grouped manner, while the individual findings were quite different between organizations.

Based on these two theories, the second, multiple-case comparative section of the research was then conducted using thematic qualitative analysis. The thematic analysis allowed to study the information collected through focus group discussions in a more targeted manner, based on semantic patterns and thematic similarities. The sequence of the steps of the analysis was as follows:

After transcribing the focus group discussions, the material was codes, and the codes would repeat in most or some of the discussions. Examples of such codes were 'staff turnover', 'lack of sensitivity in the state system', 'lack of financial resources', etc.

Each code was then thematically grouped, such as 'Thematic sensitivity of organization', 'Public awareness issue', 'State system resistance/attitude', etc.

After the thematic division, the themes were checked to ensure that each of the themes represented the complete idea of the organizations without change or distortion. Finally, all the themes were clarified and the actual analysis was conducted.

Coding and thematic analysis were done manually. No artificial intelligence or any other online tool was used.

Data collection

The primary method of data collection for the study was semi-standardized focus group interviews with women's organizations' and other similar initiatives' teams. A total of 11 focus group discussions were held with 11 organizations, both in Yerevan and in the regions.

Focus group discussions were conducted with the following organizations:

- Resource Center for Women's Empowerment /Kotayk/
- "Sose Women's Issues" NGO / Syunik /
- Women's Rights House NGO /Shirak/
- "Kanani" Social-Psychological Center NGO /Shirak/
- Coalition to Stop Violence against Women
- "You Are Not Alone" Women's Support Center NGO /Vayots Dzor/
- Sexual Assault Crisis Center NGO /Yerevan/
- Women's Support Center NGO /Yerevan/
- Women's Resource Center NGO /Yerevan/
- Women's Center Shushi NGO /Yerevan/
- PINK Armenia NGO /Yerevan/

The organizations were selected from the list of partner organizations of Women's Fund Armenia, based on several prerequisites, namely: project experience in the field of gender-based violence, any kind of gender-based violence advocacy experience, and experience in combating gender-based violence in a region.

Each discussion was held with either the entire team of the organization or the employees who primarily deal with advocacy issues, depending on the size of the organization and the existence of an advocacy working group. Two of the discussions were held with organization representatives only, and one organization answered the questions in writing, as it was not possible to organize the discussion due to a busy agenda, and other members of the organization not being informed of the advocacy work. The group format was quite a good way to hear different insights and perspectives within the organization. The discussions were conducted in a semi-standardized format, ensuring discussion of the main topics, but also giving participants the opportunity to raise issues that were important to them if those were not included in the questionnaire.

The main directions of the interviews were:

- Enabling skills: For example, lobbying; communication with politicians and the media; forming coalitions; using research and statistical data and facts in the best manner; developing campaigns, etc.
- Enabling experience: Specific initiatives and campaigns implemented by the organization in the field of GBV prevention and labor rights; their successes and challenges.
- Lacking skills and resource needs: Areas where the organization experiences gaps in capacities, such as knowledge, financial or human resources, strategic collaboration, coalition building and maintenance, strategic communication with governments and international agencies, and other areas.

The general questionnaire is provided in Appendix 3.

The discussions lasted between sixty to ninety minutes, sometimes less, and were conducted in Armenian to ensure a comfortable environment and clear communication for the participants. In many cases, the group discussion also provided an opportunity to understand the seriousness of other team members towards their advocacy work. The discussions often also turned into opportunities to meet with staff and discuss the future of the organization out loud, since issues pertaining to the vision are rarely prioritized in the face of tight work schedules.

The discussion consent form is available in Appendix 4.

Study findings and analysis

This section presents the detailed findings and analysis of the study, especially from the perspective of challenges and needs. In line with the methodology, each organization's advocacy procedures and policies, if any, were also studied. Many organizations do not have advocacy procedures. Only three organizations had an advocacy plan or strategy, which, however, did not specify the sequence of implementation steps, but rather presented the strategic directions for the organization to follow.

Appendix 3 presents the advocacy procedures of all the organizations studied, with the step-by-steps that each organization implements to bring about legislative amendment of an appropriate level.

Analysis

This section of the study presents the external and internal challenges identified during the study that hinder the organizations from conducting proper advocacy work at the level typical for their organization: local, national, or international. In addition, the organizations' primary needs—and the capacity building program for women's organizations, built on their basis—will contribute to more systematic and targeted advocacy work in this area.

External challenges

- *Political situation*

In Armenia, advocacy work of women's organizations, and any other organization in general, depends on the political situation in the country. As noted by several organizations, the struggle before 2018 was mainly on the streets because the former government never gave an opportunity for women's organizations to bring important issues into the agenda. After 2018, when a new government was elected, women's organizations and coalitions adopted a passive role because the people representing the new government were on the same level of values and many even used to be members of civil society. However, the rapid change of the reality did not take long to take place, and women's organizations became active again.

For two years after the revolution, women's organizations were trying to assess the situation, but then the second Karabakh war broke out, then the snap elections, the Armenian depopulation of Artsakh, the peace treaty, and until now, many human rights issues are failing to become part of the agenda because on the other side of the scale are security issues. Thus, the advocacy work of many organizations is never implemented; it remains as a part of the context of packages or gets lost in the government bureaucracy, because due to security issues, the government and society do not prioritize the defense of rights and don't bring them to the agenda. As a result, even in relatively peaceful times, the state is able to manipulate the situation and simply leave serious legislative issues off the table.

This situation creates an advocacy gap for many human rights organizations. Long-term advocacy planning becomes difficult, as strategic issues are not adequately addressed after all, and the situation becomes unmanageable. As a result, human rights in society become threats to state independence and border security, which places an additional burden on the shoulders of the state and government.

- Lack of resources

The main challenge to the women's organizations' advocacy work and activities in general lies in resources: financial, human, material, security, collaborative, etc.

Financial resources: The civil society in Armenia, including women's organizations, is all financially dependent on international partners, the Diaspora, and other Armenian organizations. There are very few organizations that have been able to alleviate their financial difficulties through social entrepreneurship and other systemic funding sources. The remaining organizations are inextricably dependent on international partners. As a result, any international partner has a greater influence on the existence, activities, and changes in decisions of the Armenian civil society than the organizations themselves. Given the limited strategic directions of women's organizations and the sometimes politicized thematic focus of human rights organizations, financial opportunities are limited, especially after recent changes in the international policies of the US. As a result, organizations begin to compete against each other, they lose opportunities for solidarity and teamwork, some organizations are even unable to continue their activities in this competition. In the best case scenario, organizations with limited financial resources continue to some of their activities, but the work environment becomes anxiety-inducing, financial resources are scarce, and the work is not complete, with serious problems of efficiency and targeting.

Material resources: The lack of all types of resources largely depends on financial resources, but it is crucial to view them separately to make it easier to understand the need for financial resources. Similarly, if there are no material resources that are not project-based, then participation in discussions, maintenance of a physical office, operation of safe houses and spaces, etc. is impossible. Material resources are especially important for regional organizations, because unlike women's organizations based in Yerevan, where resources can be easily shared, the problem is more complex in the regions.

Human resources: Women's organizations in Armenia have scarce human resources; the organizations' teams no longer work according to their job descriptions alone, but rather do everything, are overworked and no longer able to take on another responsibility. It is especially problematic when an organization conducts advocacy but does not have a dedicated advocacy specialist or a lawyer who will prepare the packages, implement the advocacy activities, etc. Another human resources problem area is the lack of personnel.

Given the working situation of women's organizations, these organizations cannot afford to have good specialists who are, however, insensitive, because sensitivity is crucial in this line of work. And finding sensitive specialists in the labor market who would agree to work for a salary that is sometimes even lower than the average salary on the market, with twice as many responsibilities, and often under threats to the person's safety, is nearly impossible, especially in the regions. Therefore, hiring people and not positions in women's organizations takes quite a lot of time and effort. Another human resources problem is the underestimation of local specialists compared to international experts who are well educated in the theoretical side of the situation, create documents that are not localized, are not able to work in Armenia, and then the same documents reach the target women's organizations for voluntary review and consultation. Even in the case of women's organizations, we sometimes come across the same elitist mindset, that 'foreign' specialists are better, while 'local' ones are not. This is not only problematic because of the expectation of free consultation from busy organizations, but because it undermines the local civil society and professionals.

Security resources: Since the work with women's organizations can involve harassment, targeting, and even threats of violence against the team, investing in security resources in the field is of utmost importance. Safe resources will help the members and beneficiaries of the organization feel safe, at least in the workplace, and to dedicate themselves to their work without the fear and anxiety of physical violence at any moment. The lack of security resources also reflects the anxiety stemming from the nature of work, the overload, and financial insecurity in the work environment. People are constantly walking on eggshells, which in no way helps their career progress or mental health.

Time resources: Women's organizations and human rights organizations in general severely lack time. There isn't much time for organizations working in emergency situations, which means that the organization cannot wait days for a government order to protect a beneficiary. On the other side of time resources, which also overlaps with the next, collaborative resources, is the short-term nature of grants. Most of the programs lately have only been six-month to one-year long. This timeframe is too short to have value-based results, regardless of the organization. In the case of advocacy projects, the situation is more complicated, because the state's response or any program-related legislative amendment can take months, and an advocacy project with a six-month limit is worthless in this case.

Collaborative resources: The main prerequisite for smooth advocacy for women's organizations in Armenia is having a committed partner. The discussions have shown how important women's organizations are to each other, and the law on Domestic Violence has proven the impact of coalitions and consolidation. However, the lack of

collaborative resources is quite sizeable and requires additional efforts, especially for organizations doing advocacy work. Several organizations mentioned the difficulties of joining the Coalition to Stop Violence Against Women, especially for smaller organizations, as an example of the lack of collaborative resources. It was also considered problematic that the coalitions have limited numbers of members and if not all who wish to join are able to, only the views and opinions of the member organizations are presented during advocacy, which is not inclusive of other organizations. Another issue regarding collaborative work is the organization of Yerevan-centered events, to which regional organizations have no access.

Another example of collaborative problems is the lack of solidarity between different organizations towards each other. Some organizations noted that there is a high level of competition between organizations, which shuts down any possibility of cooperation. In some cases, organizations—both international and local—take over an existing problem, all to themselves, making it their monopoly. In these cases, if any other organization tries to make equal efforts to solve the problem, they face artificial challenges. As a result, we face 'monopolies' on public issues among organizations.

The final collaborative challenge is the unrealistic demands made by donor organizations and the unrealistic concessions made by local organizations to receive the same grants. It turns out that in Armenian civil society, international donors determine the amount of work employees do, the effort they put in, the hotel prices, etc., and the organizations silently agree. There are no complaints raised, no disagreements, no discussions...

- **'Behind-the-scenes advocacy' or Change of Personnel**

'Behind-the-scenes advocacy' is the most sensitive and energy-intensive process of advocacy work, a beautiful interpretation of which has been noted by one of the organizations as the greatest and most influential of the external challenges to advocacy. According to the study, advocacy by participating organizations has three actors: the organization implementing the advocacy, the state (and other related structures), and society. Therefore, when organizations carry out advocacy, they fight not just on one front, but on two. The difficulties with society will be presented below, but the state is the primary institution that, even in the event of disagreements with society, has the opportunity to implement the amendment and then begin the normalization of public opinion around the amendment (resolution vis-a-vis normalization).

Organizations, however, face immense challenges when it comes to 'behind-the-scenes advocacy.' All the challenges mentioned in this subtopic were named by all the participating organizations, thus we can conclude that the problem is systemic. Advocacy with government institutions is person-centered. The organizations have several government or political figures with whom they cooperate, and they consistently pursue the same collaborations. For instance, as mentioned above, if Arsen Torosyan is

now at the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs of the Republic of Armenia, then advocacy is being carried out with Torosyan, and then if Torosyan leaves, for example, for the Ministry of Education, Science, Culture and Sports, then advocacy work in that ministry and in that direction will become the next priority.

Personnel, however, is fluid, especially if appointed politically. If Arsen Torosyan really moves to the Ministry of Education, Science, Culture and Sports tomorrow, then the ties with the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs will cease and the organization will have to start working with state personnel from the ground. The fluidity of non-political personnel is also an issue, because there are cases when organizations manage to become close to deputy ministers and state figures holding important bureaucratic positions, who if at any point decide to switch to the private or public sector, the doors to the given state agency will be closed again for the organization.

Thus, organizations carry out their advocacy based on a network connection or two, and the rest is 'a matter of luck.' This greatly affects the advocacy work of organizations, because the issues of time and politics will now arise, thus organizations miss important advocacy windows, invest double efforts every time, and this keeps going for years. The problem is that organizations cooperate not with the ministry itself, but with people, with individuals. Cooperation with the state system is not institutionalized, memoranda and agreements are formal in nature, and there is no lobbying organization to which some of the work can be outsourced so that organizations do not spend additional time and resources. The state system does not have institutional memory.

- **Strategic directions/topics of the organizations**

Depending on the political situation, the direction of some organizations and their advocacy in said direction are targeted by the state or society, making human rights advocacy work more complicated. As hard as it might be to believe, there are still many definitions that, when used by women's organizations, make them a target, such as 'feminism,' 'gender,' 'LGBT,' 'sexual,' or 'domestic violence,' etc. The use of these words and definitions makes the organization's daily work, advocacy, and protection harder. These labels given to organizations are fundamental to many, including state system representatives (police, judges, civil servants, etc.). These words are also signals for society, which stems not only from the denial of the problem, which is one of the main problems of our society, but also from the traditional and patriarchal mentality. For example, "Domestic violence? We don't have that, but yes, we need a shelter for women" or community leaders refusing to cooperate because they saw the word 'gender' in a social media post. All of this is often compounded by the politicization of sensitive topics by the former government and the current opposition in order to advance their political agenda, and their advocacy becomes an unachievable direction (the narrative of Europe going against Armenian values).

- **State system**

For women's organizations working with the concept of feminist, cooperation with the state system could have been impossible had it not been for the discussion and appropriate improvement of a number of important issues on the scale. Another important challenge for women's organizations in Armenia in carrying out advocacy is the state system itself and its work culture. Almost all organizations agreed that the state system is not human-centric, people are just statistics, and in some cases not even sufficient statistics (for example, legislative decisions on sexual violence are not moving forward because organizations cannot provide clear statistics on how many people have been affected). Just as Taron Acemoglu and James A. Robinson compared the bureaucracy of the state system (1) to the Italian dish of gnocchi in one of their theories, because it is bloated and useless, this comparison is also relevant here: the state system is full of artificial challenges even for internal employees, it is bureaucratic, and very slow. Many organizations note how in many cases the state system shows resistance stating one reason or another, such as the use of the word 'gender', or promises to bring about quick positive changes, but as a result, no steps are taken, and cooperation only takes formal/fictitious nature.

The organizations have also encountered many cases of advocacy where the state structures were not inclusive enough to include other supporters when making decisions, or where the overall sensitivity and professionalism of the state system was lacking (for example, in one case, the police officer himself led the perpetrator to an organization that had provided or was providing protection). In many cases, state representatives do not intentionally create these challenges, but instead, this is the result of an illiterate, unspecialized, and unprofessional job description, which is caused by vague answers or attempts to bury the problem in the bureaucratic system. Finally, some organizations, especially in regional collaborations, see the threat of corruption, but do not speak out about the problem due to all the likely losses they might face.

Only one of the organizations had a more or less positive experience with the state system, the Women's Empowerment Resource Center, when the state quickly responded to the identified problems, tried to solve them, and in some cases even set a precedent for changes in these regions. It is, however, important to note here that this organization is a state service provider and it is in the state's interest to ensure the smooth implementation of this part of their work. Cooperation with other organizations is full of difficulties.

It turns out that the state can be both a guiding and a hindering body.

(1) Acemoglu, D., & Robinson, J. A. (2019). *The narrow corridor: States, societies, and the fate of liberty*. Penguin Books, pg. 170-176

- **Public awareness and trust**

The issue of public awareness has several angles from the advocacy perspective. Public stereotypes and lack of awareness about 1) NGOs, 2) certain services, 3) certain groups in society. In such a situation, all three points directly impact the organization's advocacy work.

Society has a set of stereotypes about NGOs, which are the product of many years of lack of awareness and misinformation. Certain scales for measuring the public's trust in NGOs can be found in various surveys (for example, according to the results of the Caucasus Barometer 2024, only 19% of participants partially and 7% fully trust the civil society (2)). Non-governmental organizations have often been politicized, targeted and labeled as 'fund-grubbers', 'family destroyers', and 'value-less' structures. Such stereotypes still exist in many layers of society and this hinders the activities of organizations, including advocacy. The lack of trust in NGOs is also reflected in the difficulty to mobilize beneficiaries or their failure to use the organization's services, even in cases when they need them.

Society and the state system, where representatives of the same society work—in addition to their suspicions and lack of trust towards NGOs—have distrust and stereotypes towards certain services, such as the work of psychologists, the work of human rights organizations protecting from violence, the work of organizations providing support after sexual assaults, etc. Distrust for these services makes it harder to raise awareness and pull appropriate levers during 'behind-the-scenes advocacy' or discussions with state representatives. If the other side does not accept or believe in the existence of the problem, the struggle leads to a dead end, or the advocacy organization does not present the problem that needs to be solved, but instead explains the reasons why the problem actually exists.

Finally, as a relatively traditional society, distrust and stereotypical attitudes towards certain groups in society make it difficult to defend the interests of organizations. Society is not fully aware and does not understand the impact that domestic violence can leave; has a cultural misunderstanding of the value of women's role in society; is in denial or blames the victim when it comes to sexual assault of women, and does not even perceive LGBT people as eligible citizens, and therefore does not see its obligation—both social and state—to protect this community. In many cases, people from these communities are simply dehumanized, which leads to the perception of legislative projects related to their problems as meaningless and, in some cases, even illegal.

(2) Caucasus Research Resource Center. (2024). Caucasus Barometer 2024 – Armenia: "Trust – NGO (TRUNGO)". <https://caucasusbarometer.org/am/cb2024am/TRUNGOS/>

Abstract awareness-raising activities are not enough to correct the situation, as many organizations, even with large awareness-raising events, are only able to reach very limited groups of society, while the remaining groups remain ignored, underinformed, and continue to be a challenge in the advocacy work and public perception of women's organizations.

Internal challenges

- **Person-centered organization, person-centered advocacy**

One of the problems that threaten civil society in Armenia is its person-centeredness. Organizations that are created and managed by one person are perceived as the property of that person. The leader is primarily the program manager, the head, the fundraiser, the advocacy specialist, the public figure. All of this not only negatively impacts the mental health of the leaders themselves, but also the overall demographics and visions of NGOs. During the discussions, this gap between leaders and employees was quite noticeable. For example, the team had absolutely no idea as to what was happening in terms of advocacy, and in many cases they were even afraid to express their opinions that could contradict the opinion of the manager. Moreover, discussions about organizations use communal vocabulary: "Let's take Marina from Tavush," which undermines the role of the entire organization and its members as civil society.

The limits of the study did not allow the researchers to understand the impact of this phenomenon within the organization, but in case of advocacy, this can be dangerous because the advocacy knowledge, connections, and collaborations are not institutional, but person-centered. Thus, we observe that NGOs have the same problem as the state system. Advocacy becomes largely the monopoly of the leader of the organization's. In this case, if many members of civil society once again suddenly choose to become part of the government, like back in 2018, then the already weak civil society will not have a young generation that will be committed to its work. The staff is not changing, we do not see young leaders coming, there are no young advocacy specialists, there is a shortage of staff and this is still not perceived as a problem because it is the accepted organizational norm, and no one wants to break the status quo. This also goes hand in hand with the indifferent attitude of young people in many cases, and the organization-youth relationship falls into a contagious blame chain.

- **Team: Opportunities and Obstacles**

The most important internal challenge highlighted in this study is the overburden of teams in women's organizations. Women's organizations are exhausted and burnt out. Due to the capitalist mentality of having a multidisciplinary team and the lack of financial resources, employees of organizations work day and night, with no regard to working hours, days off, and proper wages. The job responsibilities are many, multifaceted, and sometimes unevenly distributed among employees, while the salary is

project-based and never clear. The short-term grants that organizations receive do not allow them to provide mental health or even basic healthcare packages to employees. In many cases, people work on service contracts instead of employment contracts because the organization is unable to take on the responsibility of retaining an employee long-term. In addition to all this, people face safety issues, especially when employees work in dangerous conditions, which is typical of almost all women's organizations.

As a result, many committed people working in women's organizations have two options:

a) change the field, go work in a field with a relatively high salary, clear divisions of labor, insurance, and other work benefits.

or

b) stay in women's organizations and reach the point of a burnout from being overworked.

This dilemma drives many out of women's organizations, and then it becomes a problem to try to bring new, sensitive, specialized personnel into the field. Based on the principle of justice, let's say that in the face of the above-mentioned challenge, managers had a problem with proper delegation of work. In this case, it becomes even more dangerous, because in the event of manager burnout, the organization is fully shut down or its activities are frozen.

Conclusion

Thus, the study of 11 women's organizations revealed the key gaps and challenges organizations face in their efforts to carry out advocacy successfully. The difficulties are undoubtedly many and depend especially on the size and development level of the organization. Organizations that are large and have a systematic approach and a clear vision are more likely to succeed in their advocacy efforts than those with limited staff, resources, and time to anticipate and plan their future actions.

The findings of the study clearly demonstrate that women's organizations face a number of significant challenges that hinder both fieldwork and cooperation with other partners. External challenges that can be fatal for organizations are:

- the political situation: the political will or lack thereof of state representatives, security and political issues that push human rights off the agenda, etc.
- lack of resources: the lack of material, financial, human, and collaborative resources of organizations, which limit the organization and its activities.

- networks and connections: people, state and political figures, whose change of sector or position causes months-long setbacks in women's organizations' advocacy work, and makes the establishment of systematic connections nearly impossible as the employee turnover rates in the state system are skyrocketing.
- the working directions of organizations: due to the insensitive approaches of many groups in society, artificial challenges are created for organizations when potential supporters refuse to cooperate because of the use of terms and definitions that carry a 'signal'.
- state system: the multitude of challenges that the state system carries and that a number of organizations face, such as the illiteracy of the system, bureaucracy, time consumption, etc.
- public awareness: the problems that organizations face because there is no multi-layered public awareness.
- organizational problems: complications related to the organization's lack of resources and professional burnout.

Specific solutions and work towards these challenges will not only improve advocacy work, but will also enable smaller organizations to engage in different levels of advocacy and take on a greater role in civil society.

However, under critical thinking, many organizations sometimes forget that the work they do is enormous, and without them, many vulnerable groups would be isolated and would not have any representation in various sectors of civil society. In all of this, it is necessary to consistently remind women's organizations of how important their role is, how important they are, and how much work these organizations are managing to accomplish with their small teams. Words of appreciation and gratitude are appropriate here, and it is of utmost importance to make sure these organizations are aware of that.

Recommendations

This list of recommendations was created based on the needs voiced by participants during the focus group discussions within this study, as well as on points highlighted by the researcher's study, which can help provide targeted support for organizations not only to become better at advocacy, but also to improve their organizational structure inside the organization.

1. Many of the organizations included in the study have lost clarity in the rapidness of daily project implementation and lack of a vision for the future. In many cases, there is no break to take for self-evaluation and self-reflection after the program ends. This is highlighted in several directions:
 - a. through unfinished or unimplemented strategies, but with but with well-written—yet formal in nature—organizational policies that are in no way used to regulate the organizations' daily operations.
 - b. through the person-centered nature of the organization, when new staff are almost invisible, apart from the management.
 - c. they implement programs that sometimes are not even within their strategic directions, and they have no long-term planning. There is no vision for the future.

Therefore, the first recommendation is to discuss with women's organizations what their long-term activities are and what their vision for the future is. It is important for women's organizations to understand their own mission for the benefit of society and their beneficiaries, rather than becoming service providers that deliver project-based results.

2. The second recommendation directly depends on the first. Many procedures and processes in organizations are not systematic. It is necessary to convey the importance of institutional and coordinated work to organizations, especially in Armenia, and especially before the 2026 elections. It is necessary that the knowledge and information the organization has so far collected do not belong to the hands of individuals within the organization, but rather be documented in some way.
3. The third recommendation is an important advocacy topic for all women's organizations and civil society organizations in Armenia in general. As demonstrated in the focus group discussions, so far the organizations have not had much say in how the donor organization manages the project's timeline, budget, results, and their success and failure. Guided also by feminist principles, women's organizations should advocate in meetings with international donors for their autonomy and agency to be restored, as well as for greater project flexibility, allowing the organization to exercise authority internally. This will bring solidarity to women's organizations and make international donors be more respectful of the organization and the situation.
4. Some of the organizations, or at least third-party partner organizations of the organizations studied, have a problem with the increasing sensitivity. There are a number of women's organizations that do wonderful work in the general field of women's rights protection, but they still have prejudice against other, more vulnerable groups, such as the LGBT community. Therefore, it is extremely important to have organizations that do not display sensitivity at will.

5. Many organizations need specific advocacy skills, even if they have advocacy specialists. Therefore, it is important to give these organization representatives the opportunity to improve their knowledge and have a more practical impact in their organization. Several formats for acquiring skills can be:
- Exchange of advocacy experience or mentoring with more experienced organizations.
 - Study visits to other countries to understand how advocacy is carried out in more developed countries and how those approaches can be localized.
 - Training on advocacy skills that provides not only theoretical knowledge, but also more practical skills. In such a format, it is also possible to involve an advocacy mentor/coach who will provide more personalized guidance.
 - Some organizations also expressed interest in learning about lobbying, and while it is something pertaining to the more private sector, many of the organizations believed that a more aggressive and targeted lobbying training course could reveal paths for them to replace and sensitize these methods.
6. Develop coalitions and network groups and actively recruit new members so that there are mutual aid groups and no organization feels left out. It is especially important for such coalitions and groups to have a clear division of labor for both internal employees and external members, so that there are no technical and organizational misalignments and disagreements. Such networking groups are the only opportunity for small organizations to grow and become a small yet capable advocacy body, especially in the regions. Open and transparent governance in such coalitions will also contribute to the involvement of new groups.
7. Having a school for young professionals in women's organizations can be a brilliant method for both attracting young specialists and ensuring the involvement of young people in women's organizations.
8. Despite the requirements of many donor organizations, it is necessary to provide employees with health packages, which can include mental health support, health insurance, annual leave, and respectful working conditions. This could be another direction for advocacy with international organizations, and if it becomes a reality, the organization's employees will feel more appreciated, will be able to fight against professional burnout, and commit entirely to one job, which will also increase the productivity of women's organizations.
9. Since women's organizations are not only active in Yerevan, it is necessary to take every possible step to ensure that such organizations do not stay behind while events and meetings are held in Yerevan. Possible solutions could be to allocate a small institutional budget to the meetings for organizations that come from the region or to create an opportunity to remotely participate in the events so that these participants have representation.

11. Have discussions with state authorities on how to institutionally regulate cooperation between organizations and ministries/law enforcement agencies/other state bodies so that job changes do not set back advocacy work on either side.
12. After studying the procedures of various organizations, it becomes clear that organizations find it difficult to carry out public campaigns and reach almost all layers of society. It is extremely important to arm the organization's representatives with the skills to carry out public campaigns, work on their structure, communication channels, and other details.
13. The final suggestion concerns an advocacy firm or agency that can follow the structural and systemic model of American lobbying organizations, while adhering to the value system of women's organizations. The creation of such a company/partnership will allow for the outsourcing of a number of technical advocacy tasks to this entity, so that organizations can focus more on field work.

Appendices

Appendix 1: Advocacy Procedures in Women's Organizations

This appendix presents each organization's specific areas and levels of advocacy expertise, technical skills, advocacy tools and policies, if the organization has any relevant documentation.

Resource Center for Women's Empowerment

The Resource Center for Women's Empowerment (RCWE) advocates on local, national, and in some cases international platforms, representing the interests of women subjected to domestic violence, women from Artsakh, and other women in difficult situations. The organization does not have an advocacy working group or dedicated staff.

Any advocacy work is largely carried out by the head of the organization, as part of their job description. Since WERC also provides a public service, advocacy at the state and local levels has been relatively successful, although numerous challenges remain, as outlined in the thematic analysis. It turns out that the state can support any issue, but also oppose it, as observed in the experience of this organization.

Much of the organization's advocacy efforts are based on the experiences and everyday lives of individual beneficiaries. The organization's advocacy topics arise during the interaction between psychologists or social workers and beneficiaries, using a "bottom-up" approach. Although the organization does not have a clearly written policy, there is a mechanism on which individual advocacy efforts are based. That mechanism is as follows:

- Problem identification from the bottom-up, based on the lived experiences of beneficiaries.
- Resource mapping to understand how well the organization will be able to push the work forward, since they do not have an advocacy specialist, and in some cases they do not even have a lawyer, since the position is project-based, and the rest of the staff are overloaded.
- Stakeholder mapping: depending on the problem, all possible candidates are considered. Some problems can be resolved very quickly just through communication with the state system, but in some other cases, greater pressure is required.
- The next step is to identify risks and challenges, since much depends on the sensitivity of the advocacy topic, particularly in the regions and for regional NGOs.
- Possible solutions are ten suggested and their feasibility is assessed, because in some cases the problems are bigger than what the organization can handle. Depending on the case, the organization either turns to coalitions for help or tries to move forward one small step at a time.

- Then, preparation and submission of a legislative amendment package to the relevant state body.
- At the same time, identification of like-minded people in the target structure, as well as targeted advocacy.

The organization does not take on labor rights advocacy, as this would require much greater human and material resources, which the organization does not have. According to the organization, there is no need for additional professional development opportunities to conduct advocacy because it overloads the organization and does not lead to any structural change.

Sose Women's Issues NGO

“Sose” Women’s Issues NGO advocates at the local, regional, and state levels. However, due to the organization’s operational constraints, state legislative amendments are primarily pursued in collaboration with another women’s organization, amplifying their voice as a regional NGO. The organization's target areas are gender-based violence, women's right and empowerment. However, the organization is not represented at the international level: only in reports submitted to international partners does it mention the need for certain changes, but they do not carry out more specific efforts in this direction.

All advocacy work is carried out by the head of the organization, who is joined, if necessary, by other experts who have more expertise in the issue being advocated. As with most organizations, advocacy issues in this organization are primarily raised in a bottom-up format, due to the extensive fieldwork it conducts.

The organization does not have any documented policy or strategy governing advocacy. In the case of legislative amendments, the organization joins the initiatives of larger organizations, and in the case of smaller changes, the following procedure applies:

- Continuous discussions with a multidisciplinary team: psychologist, social worker, etc., who are constantly in touch with beneficiaries and are fully aware of their status, difficulties, and gaps in laws and regulations.
- When a thematic issue arises, the organization consults with a relevant expert to determine the best way to proceed.
- The current issue is compared with the organization’s strategy for the year to determine whether it aligns with the organization’s target objectives.
- The remaining actions are then situational. In case of local changes, the organization tries to organize discussions with local self-government bodies. If the issue is legislative, the organization tries to understand which other organizations are willing to advocate for that topic.

Unfortunately, in the absence of resources and supporters, the development of larger legislative packages is delayed until the issue becomes more prominent on the agenda.

The organization is not yet engaged in labor rights advocacy because of a lack of appropriate capabilities, but the need is great in the region, and the organization would like to work in this direction.

Women's Rights House NGO

Women's Rights House is still one of the organizations with greater capacity for advocacy among those included in the study, but even in this case, advocacy largely depends on the organization's projects for the given year. Many important job positions for advocacy are provided by individual project budgets, such as a lawyer, advocate, etc. The organization is an active and founding member of several coalitions and, even when the team is overloaded, it tries to advocate in three directions. These areas are: domestic and gender-based violence, labor rights, and women's political involvement.

Advocacy in all three directions is carried out together with the head of the organization and an attorney or a lawyer. Field workers also play a major role in this process, presenting issues related to the implementation of the law, which then become a proposal package for legislative reforms or a public campaign. A prerequisite for successful advocacy is bringing together like-minded individuals, as "the problem becomes more visible and audible when addressed collectively." By presenting joint packages and organizing campaigns, organizations also unite their beneficiaries, which adds credibility to the overall initiative. Continuous collaboration with like-minded organizations is also beneficial, as it fosters more multidisciplinary solutions for legislative amendments. Partner organizations bring different specializations, resulting in more comprehensive solutions.

The organization carries out its advocacy in accordance with an advocacy action plan, which is based on focus group discussions and meetings with beneficiaries and the resulting recommendations of a multidisciplinary team. However, legislative advocacy as such is not a procedure documented in writing. Even if it were, it would be subject to constant change, as it is difficult to ensure clarity in Armenia due to state procedures. As a result, the sequence of steps based on the team's experience is as follows:

- Collection of legislative issues through social workers, psychologists and lawyers.
- Team discussion, listing and prioritizing amendments, as the organization's capabilities and the problems that need to be solved or changed are incomparable.
- Discussion with the relevant agency to understand their enforcement issues. For example, if beneficiaries encounter problems with the police system, what is the underlying cause: the police system itself, the legislation, or limitations in its enforcement? If the issue can be resolved through capacity building, the work begins, otherwise the next steps take priority.

- If clear legislative gaps complicate the application of the law, the issue is briefly analyzed and presented to stakeholders, particularly coalitions.
- Development of a package of legislative amendments, presentation to partners, feedback and review of the package.
- The complete package is shared with the target government entity.
- Next, monitoring and follow-up are carried out to ensure that the package moves forward, otherwise the change gets lost in bureaucracy. This is also carried out through targeted individuals or government personnel.
- A series of public discussions is held to bring the issue onto the public agenda as well.
- In the event of a response from a state law enforcement body, appropriate measures are to be taken.

The sequence of these steps is effective in the case of this organization, but the process often takes more time: some steps are omitted, some are added, depending on the legislative amendment, its importance, and political will.

"Kanani" Social-Psychological Center NGO

The "Kanani" social-psychological center was one of the few organizations studied that still does not have major legislative amendments in their biography, but has managed to bring about certain local changes. "Kanani" was able to analyze the Shirak region's budget from a gender budgeting perspective and provide a report with recommendations to make local government budgeting more gender-sensitive. In addition, under the same program, the organization conducts a series of training courses for representatives of local government bodies and facilitates dialogue with women in the community to enhance the accountability and gender equality of local government. In addition to legislative amendments, the organization has had a number of awareness campaigns and research on topics that fall under the organization's strategic directions, such as women's mental and physical health, labor rights, especially mobbing, etc. Research generated through outreach and studies generally helps the organization make its subsequent programs more evidence-based; however, they still have not included an advocacy component in any program.

Advocacy programs are mainly implemented in accordance with the organization's advocacy plan. Even in the case of advocacy campaigns, the team generally manages the work together, led by the organization's director. Everyone on the team tries to contribute to the process in some way, from the accountant to the program assistant.

The organization does not have any clear advocacy procedures, but during the discussion it was clear how interested they are in acquiring new opportunities and skills, if resources and team workload allow. As a smaller organization, creating partnerships and intersectionality in those relationships is also important for Kanani. As a regional organization, Kanani is often unable to participate in networking events, discussions, research presentations, and working group meetings because those are Yerevan-centered and often inaccessible to regional organizations. Such situations, which are frequent, isolate "Kanani" and other similar regional organizations. Perhaps with additional institutional funding, the organization would have more freedom to engage in such discussions, even if they continue to take place mostly in Yerevan.

In addition to and in contrast to this situation, as a relatively small organization, the feminist and horizontal partnerships it has with several women's organizations are important to Kanani. Such relationships inspire the organization and its small team.

"Women's Center" Shushi NGO

"Women's Center" Shushi is one of the few organizations displaced from Artsakh to Armenia that has continued its activities. While in Artsakh the organization was hardly involved in legislative amendments because they considered them pointless, in Armenia the organization was even able to hire a specialist to carry out special advocacy. The organization is now trying to join groups initiating legislative amendments so that the voices of displaced Artsakh women can be heard at the legislative level as well.

Although the organization has an advocacy specialist, general advocacy is mainly carried out in a working group format. The advocacy specialist primarily focuses on developing legislative packages and communicating in the appropriate official language, while the organization's head and program coordinator handle other aspects of advocacy. The difficulty is that due to the organization's lack of financial resources, almost all positions are part-time and specialists also have other responsibilities in other organizations, which limits both their availability and the smooth transfer of information within the team.

The organization does not have any procedures as such. According to them, even if they existed, they would not be implemented because the policies adopted by the organization become unimportant in the midst of daily responsibilities. However, based on its involvement in legislative amendment initiatives over the past two years, the organization has developed a general sequence of steps that guides its preparations. The sequence of those steps is:

- Problems are identified and addressed from the beneficiary to the organization through frontline professionals, such as psychologists, social workers, and, in some cases, other staff, as these discussions often occur informally, around a cup of coffee.

- Identification is followed by fieldwork and fact-finding on the issue, otherwise it will be impossible to support or even join the organizations leading the advocacy, given that in the state system, statistics and facts speak louder than words.
- This is followed by a team discussion of the collected facts and stories to understand whether there is a need to scale up the issue and seek other like-minded people. The role of an advocacy specialist is important here, because this specialist presents the current state of the law, possible changes that could alleviate the situation, etc.
- Then, if general agreement is reached, the package is developed by an advocacy specialist and reviewed by other team members.
- Finally, the package is either shared with the organization leading the advocacy work or the amendments are directly submitted to and reflected in the e-Draft system.

At the moment, the organization is not advocating for legislative amendments regarding labor rights, but they see a huge gap in this regard, especially among displaced women, where discrimination is not only on the basis of gender, but also age, ethnicity, language, etc. The organization's goal is to have the opportunity to specialize in advocacy at some point and even independently initiate legislative amendments that are of primary importance to displaced people.

PINK Armenia NGO

PINK Armenia, as a founding member of coalitions, an active advocacy organization, and a cornerstone human rights organization in its field, has quite a few examples of success stories, even despite the fact that working with the LGBT community is one of the most politicized directions.

The organization mainly advocates on state and international platforms, as society is not yet ready for awareness-raising at the local and community levels. Therefore, PINK focuses on legislative amendments and regulations that will be more liberal for its beneficiaries, at least in legal terms, and in case of failure at the state level, it tries to influence political will through advocacy at the international level. PINK is represented in a number of international organizations, such as the Council of Europe (CoE), the European Union (EU), the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), the United Nations (UN), etc., and thanks to successful partnerships, it has been able to play its unique role in a number of international amendments as well.

The organization has a working group that handles almost all advocacy work, regardless of whether it is local or international. The working group has core members, but in different situations new specialists are often involved. The team primarily consists of specialists with multidisciplinary education and/or experience, ensuring that advocacy work is presented from multiple perspectives. The advocacy group works according to the organization's advocacy plan, which is drawn up at the beginning of each year and aligned with the organization's long-term strategy. Nevertheless, in the event of rights violations, the organization may also initiate unplanned but urgent advocacy work.

Even when an organization has years of successful advocacy experience, a dedicated procedure is lacking. As with many organizations, at PINK, the procedure is a sequence of practical steps that have worked in the past, but it is not available in the form of a documented policy. The documented procedure that could be in place in such cases is partially presented in the overall PINK strategy and other related documents.

The sequence of steps that govern advocacy in the case of PINK is as follows:

- All employees submit their annual reports at the end of the year using a documentation form. The reports not only present the completed work, but also highlight the topics that should become priorities for advocacy work next year.
- Then, based on the patterns and similarities among these topics, the organization develops the advocacy component of its strategic planning policy.
- Team discussions are held, preliminary tasks are outlined, and efforts are made to link each topic to existing research that can form the basis for developing a legislative amendment package. Alternatively, fact-finding work is conducted based on beneficiaries and their experiences.
- Then, a package is developed, which is either presented to state structures with the expectation of change, or is later included in an international report and presented to international organizations.
- In some cases, the organization combines this work with public awareness campaigns, but with very subtle communication, as it is necessary to understand the sentiments of all parties on a given issue: society, the state, stakeholders, beneficiaries. Otherwise, the amendment may not only not be accepted, but also be frozen.

Unplanned but urgent issues are generally considered during separate meetings and within a separate agenda. However, the organization is often forced to prioritize certain topics, depending on circumstances, resource availability, and the team's workload.

Some advocacy on labor rights has been carried out by PINK, but only in cases where it had a direct link with discrimination and entered PINK's field of work. PINK has also joined working groups fighting against labor rights violations, but they are not very active yet.

Coalition to Stop Violence against Women

The Coalition to End Violence Against Women is the main and primary platform for advocacy at any level, because it represents several human rights organizations and is the 'audible voice' that several previous organizations have mentioned.

The coalition primarily implements legislative amendments at the state level and ensures a certain level of representation in advocacy on international platforms. No changes are being initiated at the local level because the Coalition's member organizations are uniquely responsible for local changes.

At the state level, the coalition's advocacy involves presenting legislative amendments packages by member organizations, initiating meetings, and conducting follow-up activities. At the international level, the Coalition submits reports to a number of international organizations, which later, using the Coalition's reports, send their observations and recommendations to the Government of the Republic of Armenia. Thus, the Coalition is able to pursue an effective advocacy policy. An important part of the coalition's work also includes awareness-raising meetings and events, which are carefully organized using subtle communication strategies to ensure the issues remain unaffected by public tension and are not undermined by counter-narratives.

The coalition, unfortunately, has limited staff, who are already carrying quite a large load. However, despite its important role, it does not have an advocacy specialist who would be able to coordinate advocacy work if it is carried out on behalf of the Coalition. This work is largely distributed among member organizations, with coalition staff ensuring the technical smooth running of the process. However, this can result in an unequal division of labor, leaving some organizations with the responsibility of pulling most of the weight.

Although the Coalition has advocacy success stories, it also faces a number of challenges that complicate its work (detailed in the thematic analysis). The Coalition does not have any procedures by which it carries out advocacy work, but it does have a Coalition Strategy and Advocacy Plan, which has only been partially implemented in recent years due to internal organizational difficulties.

The sequence of practical steps for implementing the Coalition's advocacy is as follows:

- A legislative amendment is submitted for discussion by a member organization.
- If the Coalition decides to pursue a specific amendment, potential actors across all relevant sectors are identified and discussed.
- If the Coalition does not become the guiding structure, then the changes are simply circulated among member organizations to receive appropriate comments, and the initiating organization assumes the responsibility for consistency and follow-ups.
- The amendment package is compiled with the comments of all coalition members and submitted to the e-Draft system. The coalition differs from other organizations in that when presenting the package, solutions to problem areas are also presented.
- Then monitoring meetings with government agencies and other identified stakeholders begin.
- In the best case scenario, the legislative changes are adopted, or the Coalition continues to be consistent, and several feedback loops start.

Although trust increases and voices become more audible in the case of several organizations, other difficulties also arise that need to be overcome if the Coalition wants to present itself with one voice. These include: pluralism, which sometimes becomes a problem, passive involvement or overload of members, which hinders the process, etc.

The coalition as a structure does not have any legislative initiatives on labor rights, but has forwarded observations to member structures, such as the WRC, the WRH, the CSVW, and other organizations, including several UN agencies.

"You Are Not Alone" Women's Support Center NGO

The "You Are Not Alone" Women's Support Center is primarily engaged in raising awareness about women's rights, domestic violence against women, as well as developing gender-sensitive policies in the region.

As a small regional organization whose activities are focused in Vayots Dzor, the organization mainly carries out advocacy at the local and regional levels. An important part of advocacy at the local level is working with community and regional governments, as well as partnerships with local organizations. Otherwise, talking about gender issues and violence would have been very difficult in the absence of like-minded people, especially in a regional environment. At the state level, the organization does not carry out advocacy work due to limited resources. Instead, the organization joins a collective effort with other women's organizations to bring about changes in national gender policies.

The organization does not have any procedures or advocacy plans that guide local or regional advocacy efforts. The organization's advocacy work is carried out by the head of the organization. The involvement of the remaining members is limited to presenting statistical data on the issues at the initial stage. At public awareness events, group discussions, and other meetings, the organization is represented exclusively by the leader.

However, even in the absence of a documented procedure, the organization has a sequence of steps it follows before initiating advocacy work:

- Thanks to social workers and psychologists, issues that need advocacy are raised.
- Then, if it is determined that advocacy on a given topic can be initiated at the community or local government level, the team collects all the cases that prove the presence of a gap in the given regulation.
- A package is developed, with recommendations included.
- Public awareness efforts are underway to build support at the local level as well.
- Finally, the effectiveness of the work is assessed in terms of resolving the issue or improving the situation.

The organization has no experience in labor rights advocacy; however, this is one of the areas where the gap is particularly large in the region, and the organization currently lacks the capacity to offer a comprehensive solution or effectively protect interests in this field.

Sexual Assault Crisis Center NGO

The Sexual Assault Crisis Center (SACC) is one of the few women's organizations whose main focus is on the issues of sexual violence. Currently, the organization works not only on the issues of victims of sexual violence, but also carries out advocacy work towards improving and introducing state support mechanisms.

The organization engages in advocacy at the state (legislative) level and through international mechanisms, including collaboration with local ambassadors and embassies, international organizations, and international platforms. An important prerequisite for advocacy at this level is the state's commitments and reforms directed at the international structures and platforms with which the organization cooperates. Thus, the organization's strategic priorities at the state level become part of the policy agenda not only through pressure from civil society, but also through engagement by international partners.

Advocacy within an organization is carried out either by the organization's head or by the program manager, depending on the topic. The organization does not have a dedicated advocacy specialist, which complicates the work, especially when other important positions, such as the attorney, are project-based and temporary.

The organization has neither a clear procedure nor a clear mechanism by which advocacy is carried out. Approaches vary depending on the problem and the situation. In many cases, certain advocacy issues become paramount, depending on the leadership of the target organization. For example, if Arsen Torosyan is in the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs of the Republic of Armenia, then it is necessary to immediately advocate on issues that fall under the jurisdiction of this ministry, since Torosyan is more cooperative. In a different situation, advocacy may be carried out because there is political will for it or it is a legislative change that is desperately needed.

If we attempt to outline the approximate sequence of steps that this organization follows across situations, the process will look as follows:

- Problem identification.
- Team meeting and discussion of potential solutions, both with the team and external partners. Taking into account a number of circumstances, the priority and timeline of the problem are determined.
- Identification of partners in ministries and other target institutions who will help consistently bring the issue forward at the state level.
- Next, either the organization collects facts and develops a package, or the given structure/ministry takes over the issue and continues the work independently or with another partner.

The organization has identified a number of external influences that pose a significant challenge to advocacy, especially in the context of such a sensitive topic and for an organization with limited resources.

The organization deals with labor rights only when they intersect with sexual harassment at work. Alternatively, advocacy for labor rights is pushed forward by other partner organizations.

Women's Support Center NGO

The Women's Support Center works in three directions: provision of services and protection, awareness raising, and advocacy. These three directions are interconnected, but each has its own challenges.

From an advocacy perspective, the organization operates at multiple levels: locally, by protecting interests; at the state level, by pursuing legislative changes; and at the international level, primarily through meetings and discussions with ambassadors and embassies, which, drawing on their bilateral relations with Armenia, seek to facilitate dialogue between the two sides. Unlike other organizations, the Women's Support Center does not advocate on international platforms, as the organization does not believe that it has a long-term impact on reforms in the legislative framework of Armenia.

Advocacy in the organization is carried out by a working team: the head of the organization, the program manager, and the attorneys-at-law. It is interesting that the adoption of the law on domestic violence was transitional for the organization. Before the law was passed, street struggle and demonstrations were the only method of advocacy for women's organizations, but now that the law has become a precedent, organizations are trying to implement changes from around discussion tables, given that the government has also been relatively more cooperative since 2018.

The organization does not have a written or documented advocacy procedure. Everything the organization does is based on the experience gathered over the years, including both failures and successes. The sequence of steps that the organization tries to follow is as follows:

- Bottom-up problem targeting, as it is impossible to understand the problems of enforcement of the law if the beneficiaries themselves do not fully present the situation and the complexities.
- Thematic discussions are held both within the organization and externally, including within coalitions or in broader discussion formats.
- Developing a package based on the problem together with the working team, including analysis, recommendations, and amendments.

- The next step is 'behind-the-scenes advocacy,' which involves identifying contact people in ministries, law enforcement agencies, or other targeted government agencies and offering recommendations to promote the package developed by the organization.
 - In the meantime, the organization is trying to understand whether it is possible to solve the problem from behind the scenes or if there is a need for greater involvement.
- If finding a solution from within becomes difficult, then collaboration with the media and the public becomes paramount. The organization develops an outreach plan and starts to organize various outreach events with both beneficiaries, stakeholders, and international partners.
 - The organization also emphasizes the importance of prioritizing issues based on political will, as advocacy outcomes often depend on it. At the same time, there are cases in which legislative changes are adopted despite the absence of political or public will, particularly when they stem from the state's international obligations. For example, the organization does not consider advocacy for the adoption of the "Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence" a priority at this time, even if it is important, because if the Armenian government seeks European integration, the Istanbul Convention is a prerequisite and without additional efforts from women's organizations, the state will have to ratify it.

The organization's staff currently perceives the team as complete and does not see the need for additional human resources or training, because the working team is already specialized in its work.

The organization has not carried out labor rights advocacy, as its strategic focus is only on domestic violence and gender-based violence.

Women's Resource Center

The Women's Resource Center (WRC) is a co-founder of several coalitions and one of the organizations with the greatest experience in advocacy among women's organizations. The WRC has had many success stories, but there are also many cases where advocacy efforts have not been successful or have been frozen for years.

The organization carries out advocacy at two levels: national and international. At the state level, these activities mainly include monitoring legislative changes, government decisions and acts, holding meetings, and presenting and discussing policy packages.

At the international level, the WRC is a member of various committees, coalitions dealing with gender equality, working groups of international organizations, such as relevant UN groups, etc. The organization is also represented in other international structures, such as the EU, the Council of Europe, etc. At the local level, the organization does not conduct any advocacy at all. Instead, it offers various services and programs through which it supports beneficiaries, carries out advocacy, and raises awareness.

The organization has three core advocacy specialists who work on advocacy in two targeted areas. The first direction is reproductive health and any related changes and issues, and the second is issues related to overall gender equality and women's rights. Depending on the advocacy topic or situation, the organization's leaders or even the entire team may also join the discussions. Legal advisors also join in if necessary.

In addition to the general strategy, the organization also has a Feminist Advocacy Policy, which presents the values they fight for, hold, etc., but does not have a separate or accompanying policy that outlines the advocacy process. The reason is, in many cases, the unavailability of a single solution. Rarely is one direction of advocacy successful in working with two structures or people. Since the political and state system is person-centered, the organization also often implements advocacy in a person-centered manner, as this is sometimes the only way to solve a problem. Even in this case, the approximate procedure looks like this:

- Meetings with women in regions, villages, and parts of Armenia where the implemented changes must be reflected, otherwise the change will be meaningless. This may include village-to-village walks/hikes, discussions with various women's groups, etc.
- Highlighting specific topics/issues identified during these meetings. Similarly, identifying issues based on alerts that were received.
 - In some cases, the same extraction process is also carried out through research.
- After identifying the problems, a comparison of Armenia's legislative regulations and international experience is made related to the given issue.
- Creation and development of packages and documents
- Meetings and discussions with representatives of ministries and other government agencies.

The process then continues with package revisions, ongoing follow-ups, and monitoring until the change is implemented.

The WRC is one of the few organizations that deal with labor rights. Of course, advocacy is still limited to workplace harassment, violations of women's rights, and other situations related to violence, but the WRC will continue its advocacy in this direction, as the violation of labor rights in the private sector is a serious problem and, unfortunately, not a priority for the state.

Appendix 2: List of advocacy topics identified by women's organizations

- Advocacy for the resolution of issues and problems arising from the implementation of the RA Law "On the Prevention of Domestic Violence, the Protection of Victims and the Restoration of Solidarity in the Family"
- Regulations on child visitation in the Family Code of the Republic of Armenia. Mechanisms and regulations for the division of property in the event of divorce.
- Advocacy and awareness-raising on issues related to displaced people.
- Regulations of the Labor Code of the Republic of Armenia and labor rights: awareness on mobbing and unequal pay.
- Protection of women's rights during childbirth difficulties. Advocating for policies to alleviate postpartum trauma, empower women economically after childbirth, and reintegrate women into society.
- Employment of women aged 40 and over.
- Adoption of the draft law "On Ensuring Equality and Protection from Discrimination".
- Reforms to the Criminal Code of the Republic of Armenia and its application in the case of perpetrators of violence.
- Protection and criminalization of LGBT+ community rights.
- Continuous reforms of the police system.
- Introduction of gender-sensitive policies in local governments.
- Advocacy for inclusiveness and sensitivity in organizations.
- Public awareness about women's rights and the fundamental values of human rights in general.
- Team advocacy on the legislative gap regarding sexual violence.

Appendix 3. Focus Group Discussion Questionnaire

QUESTIONNAIRE

Women's Fund Armenia

1. Does your organization engage in advocacy (of any kind)?

a. If so, in which areas and on which platforms (local, regional, international, state, etc.)?

i. Please describe your organization's experience in advocacy. Does your organization have a dedicated advocacy specialist/team?

ii. What kind of actions have you taken? What were the outcomes? Who were the collaborators?

iii. What are the primary issues that women's organizations in Armenia should immediately advocate for? Why?

iv. Do you have advocacy experience in the areas of gender-based violence and labor rights protection?

v. Does your organization have clear mechanisms, tools, or methods through which you carry out advocacy work? Can you present a roadmap for advocacy on a specific topic your organization will be implementing?

vi. What were the external challenges you faced while conducting advocacy? (*community mobilization issues, lack of cooperation from state institutions, etc.*). How did you overcome those challenges?

vii. What are the internal organizational challenges you have faced while doing advocacy work?

viii. What are the professional/work skills that you have that are important in your advocacy work?

ix. What skills/resources does your organization need to conduct more targeted and clearly planned advocacy? Are these skills/resources currently missing at your work, or is there simply room for improvement?

x. What are the roles of other like-minded people in implementing successful advocacy campaigns by women's organizations in Armenia?

b. If not, why not? Do you consider yourself an advocacy organization or would you like to engage in advocacy at some point?

i. If not, why not?

ii. Should all women's organizations engage in advocacy? Please clarify.

iii. If so, what are the primary issues that women's organizations in Armenia should immediately advocate for? Why?

iv. If given the opportunity, what kind of advocacy campaigns would you like to carry out? Who would be the collaborators?

- v. Does your organization have a clear toolkit or methods through which it can carry out advocacy work? If you were part of such an initiative, what would be your roadmap as a women's organization?
- vi. What are the professional/work skills that you have that are important in advocacy work?
- vii. What skills/resources does your organization need to carry out advocacy work in the areas of BGV and labor rights? Are these skills/resources currently missing in your work, or do they simply need improvement?
- viii. What are the roles of other like-minded people in implementing successful advocacy campaigns by women's organizations in Armenia?

Appendix 4: Focus Group Discussion Consent Form

CONSENT FORM

I, _____, agree to participate in the focus group discussion on “Advocacy Capacities of Women’s Organizations in Armenia in the Areas of Gender-Based Violence (GBV) and Labor Rights Advocacy,” conducted by the Women’s Fund Armenia on __/__/2025.

The focus group discussion is aimed at highlighting the capacities and preparedness of participating organizations in advocacy in these areas.

The focus group discussion will be held at _____
_____ with guidance by Khanum Gevorgyan.

The findings of the focus group discussion will be used exclusively for general analyses, which will contribute to the planning of more needs-based and evidence-based actions of the Women's Fund in the future. The database of participants and the recording of the discussion will be preserved in the archives of the Women's Fund, but will never be released to a third party.

name, surname

position, organization

signature

