



# **GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE AND LABOR RIGHTS ADVOCACY STUDY AMONG PARTNERS**





*The study 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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## **Introduction**

Within its “Strengthening Resilient Women’s Rights Organizations to Advance Gender Equality in Armenia project funded by KVINFO, in the period of August – September, 2025, the Women’s Fund Armenia (hereinafter referred to as WFA) implemented a survey and further qualitative assessment among its partner organizations on the topic of “Advocacy skills among partner organizations in the fields of combating gender-based violence and labor rights”.

## **Methodology**

To assess the advocacy capacities of partner organizations in the areas of gender-based violence prevention and response as well as labor rights, the WFA implemented a structured survey among its partner networks. The primary aim of the survey was to gather insights into existing capacities, identify potential areas for advancement, and inform future strategic support.

The survey applied a quantitative online approach, using a semi-structured questionnaire designed to capture both measurable indicators and contextual perspectives. The questionnaire included close-ended questions to generate comparable data across organizations, as well as open-ended items allowing respondents to elaborate on specific experiences, challenges, and priorities.

Participation was extended to the Fund’s partner organizations working in relevant fields, with a total of 15 organizations completing the survey. Ten partners represent regions of Armenia, while 5 operate in Yerevan. Of those, 2 CSOs had up to 5 years, 6 CSOs had up to 10 years, and 7 CSOs had more than 15 years of experience.

Data collection was conducted exclusively online, ensuring accessibility and efficiency for respondents from different regions. All collected data is used solely for informational and consultative purposes, supporting evidence-based planning and capacity development efforts. To ensure transparency and trust, respondents were informed about the purpose of the survey, whereas confidentiality of organizational data was respected throughout the process.

# Findings

## Section 1. Advocacy from the CSO perspective

### EXPERIENCE IN ADVOCACY

For many years, Women's Fund Armenia (WFA) and other women's rights defender organizations have been investing efforts into strengthening the skills and capacities of small local CSOs working on combating gender-based violence (GBV) and promoting human rights. Mapping the advocacy capacities of these CSOs is therefore crucial, both in a general sense and in relation to specific forms of advocacy activities.

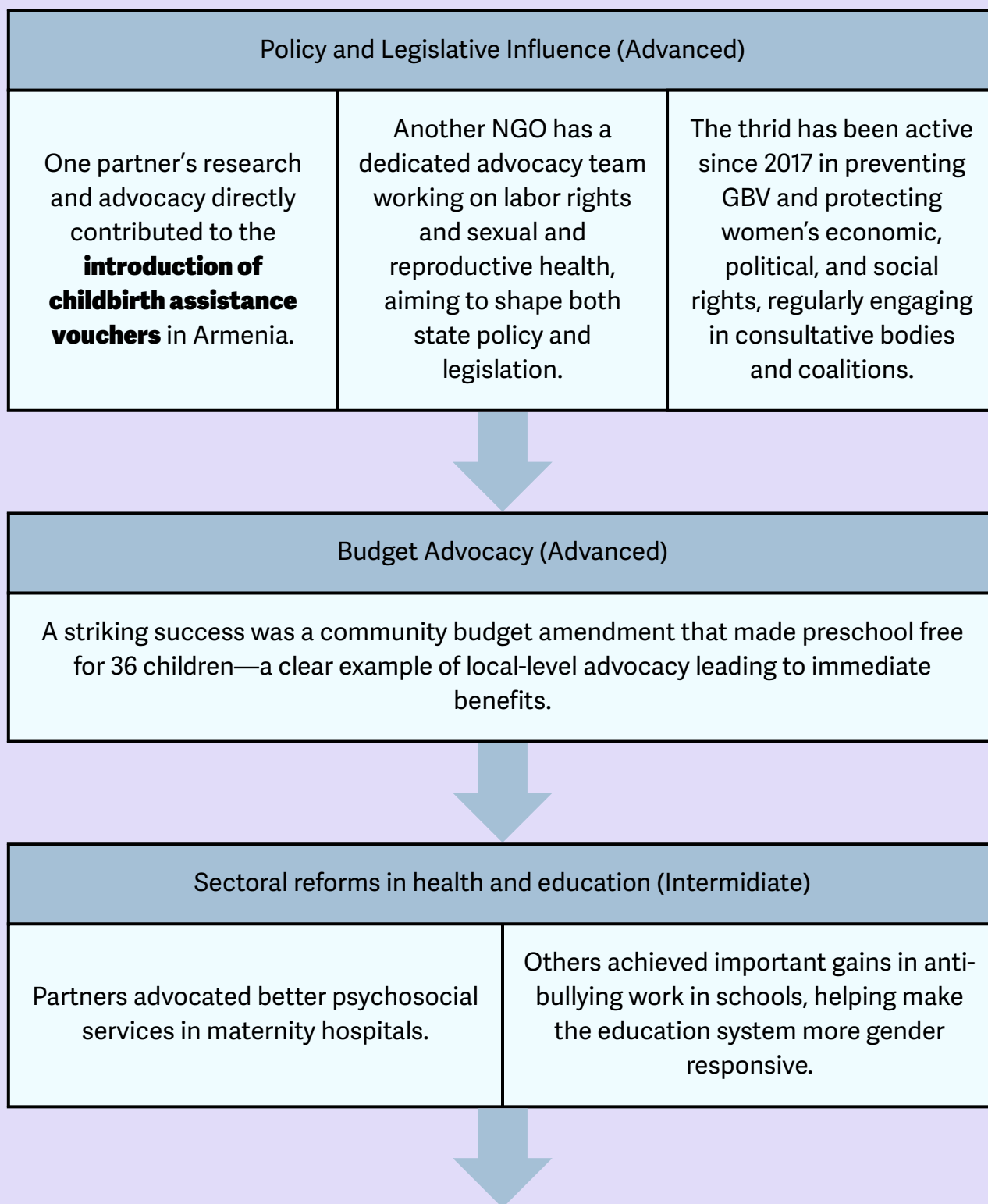
According to the data collected through the quantitative survey with partner organizations, 10 out of 15 respondents reported having prior experience in promoting women's rights and addressing GBV. Three organizations indicated that they were only *partially experienced*, while the remaining two stated that they had *no prior experience* in advocacy related to women's rights and GBV. It is important to note that the vast majority of respondents (93.3% - 14 out of 15) indicated that they lack financial resources to implement advocacy activities. At the same time, 6 of these 14 organizations also reported not having dedicated human resources, such as advocacy specialists, within their teams. In seven organizations, various staff members take on advocacy responsibilities alongside their primary duties when needed, while only two organizations reported having a designated specialist responsible for overseeing advocacy activities.

To understand the level of experience of the partners in advocacy, their responses and specific examples were analyzed (see Diagram 1). According to the analysis, most partner organizations have tangible experience in advocacy in women's rights and GBV, though the depth and scope vary. This distribution highlights that while the majority of local CSOs possess advocacy experience, there is still a segment that requires targeted support to enhance their engagement and effectiveness in this area. Thus, within the WFA partners three groups of advocacy experienced organizations can be categorized into:

- Advanced capacity (4 out of 15), which already influence law-making, budgets, and systems (e.g., childbirth vouchers, free preschool, anti-bullying reforms).
- Intermediate capacity (5 out of 15), which are regularly engaged in consultations, research, and awareness campaigns but have fewer policy outcomes.
- Emerging capacity (6 out of 15), which are focusing mainly on public events or awareness, with limited strategic advocacy structures.

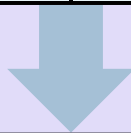
The Diagram 1 below illustrates various examples of advocacy achievements and approaches demonstrated by the partner CSOs. The diagram hierarchy presents the level of experience, which is also indicated next to the type of advocacy activity.

*Diagram 1: Advocacy Experiences of the Partner Organizations*

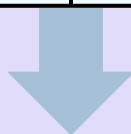




Strategic litigation and rights protection (Intermediate)	
One organization actively uses strategic litigation, case documentation, and international reporting to defend LGBT+ rights.	Another has engaged in long-term advocacy for legal gender recognition.



Narrative change and public awareness (Emerging)	
Theatre productions based on GBV survivors' interviews were staged in Yerevan and the regions, sparking public dialogue.	Partners also organized flashmobs, published survivor stories, and produced awareness videos, ensuring visibility of GBV issues.



Coalition-building and empowerment (Emerging)	
Several partners highlight their role in coalitions, advisory groups, and policy consultations, while also creating opportunities for women and girls to voice their concerns directly in decision-making spaces.	

Together, these experiences show that while most partners are active in advocacy, their capacities range from strong policy-shaping roles to early-stage awareness efforts, pointing to both achievements worth building on and areas where targeted support is still needed.

## Successful Advocacy Initiatives in Recent Years

The motivation for the CSOs to be involved in advocacy work regarding the GBV and Labor Rights (LR) often is dependent on the perspective of the changes and general picture that is observed in society. In many cases, the decision to take over this or that topic to advocate for is driven from the current success or real gap in the field. Considering this, the study prioritized outlining the perceptions of the partner CSOs on the successful advocacy initiatives implemented in the recent years. The reported examples highlighted a mix of legislative reforms, strategic campaigns, and public awareness initiatives that shaped Armenia's policy and social agenda around GBV and gender equality.

- Legislative Reforms and Policy Frameworks (*highlighted by 7 partners*)

Several respondents pointed at the adoption and continuous development of legislation on domestic violence as one of the most significant achievements. The 2017 Law on Prevention of Domestic Violence, Protection of Victims, and Restoration of Family Solidarity, later amended to include provisions such as recognizing violence by a partner as a punishable offense, was repeatedly mentioned as a landmark. This law not only set a legal precedent but also marked a shift in how the state approaches GBV.

In parallel, the development of Armenia's Gender Equality Strategy (2025–2028) was seen as a major success, signaling a growing institutionalization of gender-sensitive policymaking. For some, this reflected years of continuous advocacy by women's organizations, combining lobbying, policy proposals, and coalition work.

Another milestone cited was the introduction of workplace sexual harassment regulations, which represents a breakthrough in labor rights advocacy. Respondents highlighted the campaigns around domestic violence and workplace sexual harassment reforms. These efforts were seen as effective because they combined research evidence, coalition networks, and direct lobbying to government institutions. In some cases, strategic litigation and judicial precedents were used to push systemic change and secure stronger protection mechanisms.

- Public Awareness Campaigns (*highlighted by 4 partners*)

Another widely recognized success was the wave of public awareness campaigns around GBV, which helped break the culture of silence. These campaigns — often implemented in coordination with media and influencers — made the issues visible to a broad audience, normalized public discussion of violence, and amplified the voices of survivors. Respondents underlined their role in challenging stigma, shifting public opinion, and framing GBV as a public concern rather than a private family matter.

Some organizations even pointed at creative advocacy tools such as documentary theatre, which brought survivors' stories to life and engaged audiences in new, powerful ways. These cultural forms of advocacy reached diverse audiences, from youth to community leaders, creating both empathy and public pressure for change.

- Advances for Marginalized Groups (*highlighted by 2 partners*)

For LGBT+ advocacy, a specific success mentioned was the easing of the legal process for transgender women to change their names, which reduced barriers to formal recognition and dignity. Although narrower in scope compared to domestic violence reforms, this was seen as a critical step in advancing equality for one of the most vulnerable groups.

Together, these initiatives show that the most effective advocacy in Armenia has been multi-layered, combining legal reform, coalition pressure, and public engagement. Even smaller but targeted wins — such as improved rights for transgender women — illustrate that progress is possible when advocacy is persistent, evidence-driven, and strategically framed.

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Thus, the overall perspective of partner CSOs regarding advocacy for GBV and LR is positive and highly motivating. Some partners have already taken part in advocacy initiatives that are now recognized as successful examples positioning them among the more advanced organizations in this field. Others, inspired by the visible changes and achievements, demonstrate strong motivation and are eager to further develop their advocacy skills with the support and mentorship of more experienced peers.

## Section 2. Existing Gaps and Obstacles

### Urgent GBV Advocacy Issues in Armenia

The perspectives of partner organizations reveal a complex picture of gender-based violence in Armenia where urgent needs are shaped both by immediate protection gaps and by long-standing structural inequalities. A central thread across nearly all responses is that domestic violence remains the most pressing GBV concern. Despite some legislative progress in recent years, 4 out of 15 partners emphasized that effective systems of prevention, protection, and recovery are still missing, particularly outside Yerevan. Survivors often lack awareness of available services, face stigma and victim-blaming, and have little trust in the state's ability to protect them. This combination of limited access, social shame, and institutional inaction leaves many women in situations of repeated violence without meaningful recourse.

*"Gender-based violence against women—especially domestic and sexual violence—remains the most urgent problem. Despite legal reforms, there are still no effective systems of prevention, protection, and recovery, especially in the regions. This problem is urgent because GBV violates fundamental human rights — the rights to life, liberty, safety, dignity, and personal development — and has long-term effects on women's health, education, employment, and public participation."*

*Partner from Region, 6 years active in the field*

*"Our national tradition of secrecy within the family normalizes covering up violence. Children grow up in this environment. Even teachers may live in the same culture of silence for years. Schools could show young people that another world is possible."*

*Partner from Yerevan, 6 years active in the field*

*"According to our latest research, women with disabilities experience more violence than those without disabilities. This often goes unspoken, especially for women with mental disabilities who are not sufficiently informed about their rights. Isolation and inaccessibility of services worsen the problem."*

*Partner from Region, 28 years active in the field*

Two out of fifteen partners went deeper into the cultural roots of GBV, describing patriarchal norms as the underlying driver of all inequalities. One organization offered a striking depiction of how girls are valued as "commodities" whose worth depends on obedience, beauty, and virginity, while boys are given freedom to explore, fail, and build social confidence. This unequal upbringing, they argue, translates directly into disadvantages for women in the labor market and political life, even when they are more capable academically. From this perspective, domestic and sexual violence are not isolated phenomena but symptoms of a society that positions women as property and men as autonomous individuals. Changing laws and policies is necessary, but without transforming patriarchal values, partners warn, true equality will remain out of reach.

*“Girls are raised as commodities whose value depends on obedience and virginity, while boys are free to live, make mistakes, and gain life experience. By adulthood, men are far more socially prepared, even if women are more capable academically.”*  
Partner from Yerevan, 22 years active in the field

The theme of economic justice was also strongly present in 4 out of 15 partners’ perspectives. They underlined that without economic independence; women remain trapped in violent situations. They point to the heavy burden of unpaid care work, the gender pay gap, workplace harassment, and the concentration of women in low-paid “feminized” sectors such as education, health, and social work. One partner argued forcefully that advocacy must now focus on the recognition and remuneration of care work, as well as ensuring dignified labor conditions for women in the informal economy. Another partner highlighted women’s labor rights and fair pay as urgent, connecting these to the broader fight against workplace discrimination and violence.

*“Unpaid care work and the barriers it creates to women’s economic independence are urgent issues. Advocacy must ensure recognition, remuneration, and decent work for women in the informal sector. Economic independence is key. A woman’s liberation and independence depend essentially on her financial independence and stability.”*  
Partner from Region, 3 years active in the field

*“The state’s employment and demographic policies highlight women’s increased participation in the labor market and the rise of major employers in Armenia. In this context, eliminating workplace discrimination and addressing the role of women’s care work become especially urgent.”*  
Partner from Yerevan, 22 years active in the field

Representation and decision-making were also identified as urgent areas by another 2 out of 15 partners. Partners expressed concern that women remain largely excluded from political and peace processes, even as they carry the social costs of conflict and displacement. The exclusion of women’s voices from ongoing peace negotiations was described as a particularly pressing problem. The lack of political participation intersects with the invisibility of marginalized groups — transgender women, women with disabilities, and women from minority communities — whose perspectives are rarely taken into account in policymaking.

*“At this moment, it is also urgent to address the fact that women are excluded from the peace negotiation process. Their perspectives, needs, and visions of peaceful coexistence are absent from political discourse.”*  
Partner from Region, 3 years active in the field

*“Women’s positions are often given for political convenience, which improves statistics but does not guarantee real participation or stability.”*

For one of the organizations, the absence of comprehensive anti-discrimination legislation stands out as a major advocacy target. LGBT+ persons continue to face discrimination and violence in nearly every sphere of life — from families and workplaces to schools, hospitals, and public services. Although Armenia’s Criminal Code and Law on Domestic Violence contain relevant provisions, partners stress that their implementation is blocked by systemic prejudice among those tasked with enforcement. In this sense, legal protections exist on paper but remain hollow in practice, perpetuating the vulnerability of marginalized groups.

*“Every year, only one organization records on average 40–60 cases of rights violations based on sexual orientation or gender identity (65 cases in 2024). Public stereotypes and disinformation about LGBT+ people block access to legal and psychosocial support. They remain vulnerable in daily life but have no effective mechanisms to protect themselves. This is urgent because it is a violation of fundamental human rights, which in turn produces many other problems.”*  
*Partner from Yerevan, 18 years active in the field*

While domestic violence is the most consistently cited urgent issue, partners view it as inseparable from broader systemic problems: the absence of strong anti-discrimination protections, the lack of economic independence for women, entrenched patriarchal norms, and exclusion from decision-making. On the other hand, education emerges as a space where change can begin. School as a system is the key site for breaking cycles of violence and unequal values.

The participants viewed GBV not only as a matter of individual safety, but as a reflection of structural injustice across law, economy, culture, and politics. What emerges from their voices is a call for intersectional advocacy: one that simultaneously demands better protection for survivors, challenges discriminatory laws and practices, and tackles the patriarchal values that sustain violence in everyday life.

## Obstacles Challenging the GBV and Labor Rights Advocacy in Armenia

The roots of the above-mentioned gaps lie in several overarching obstacles that continue to hinder effective advocacy on GBV and labor rights. In practice, these gaps and obstacles are deeply interconnected and often overlap, making it difficult to clearly distinguish between the causes and their manifestations. The major obstacles outlined in the course of the study can be categorized into four groups:

1. Policy and legislation
2. Scarce resources and coordination
3. Social norms and attitudes
4. Low awareness level

#1. A recurring challenge is the absence of genuine political will and the weakness of state institutions in enforcing gender-sensitive policies. While Armenia has adopted certain strategies and laws, their implementation is often formalistic and disconnected from real needs. Enforcement is weak, oversight mechanisms are underdeveloped, and violations — especially in labor rights — remain largely unpunished. This erodes trust in institutions and makes advocacy outcomes fragile. On the other hand, even though Armenia has legal frameworks addressing discrimination, GBV, and labor rights, these remain incomplete and inconsistently applied. Protective orders are difficult to enforce, perpetrators often go unpunished, and mechanisms for workplace equality are either missing or ineffective. For labor rights specifically, wage transparency and equal pay reportedly remain unregulated, sexual harassment is rarely addressed, and unions where functional are otherwise weak. The result is a legal environment where laws exist on paper but fail to protect in practice.

#2. Civil society's involvement in policymaking is often symbolic rather than substantive. Many partners describe dialogues with state bodies as formal exercises, with little room for meaningful input. In addition, weak cooperation among NGOs themselves — combined with lack of trust and limited contact — reduces collective influence. This fragmentation prevents the sector from speaking with a strong, unified voice. Along with the poor coordination and low representativeness of the CSOs on policy level, organizations face serious shortages of financial and human resources, across both GBV and labor rights advocacy. Many CSOs operate with minimal staff and unstable funding, particularly in the regions. This limits their ability to sustain campaigns, expand outreach, or provide consistent services. For smaller CSOs, survival often overshadows long-term advocacy planning.

#3. Deeply rooted patriarchal culture and gender stereotypes remain a core barrier. Violence against women is often treated as a “private family matter,” leading to silence and victim-blaming. Women fear shame, stigma, or community backlash if they speak out. In labor rights, these stereotypes channel women into undervalued, low-paid “female” professions while leadership roles are reserved for men. Advocates themselves are frequently targeted by hate speech and organized “anti-gender” campaigns, which seek to delegitimize feminist and LGBT+ organizations. This environment not only undermines public support but also threatens the safety and credibility of advocates, making it harder to sustain visible campaigns. Such norms both normalize inequality and resist advocacy messages slowing the progress.

#4. Low levels of rights awareness among beneficiaries and the broader public deepen the problem. Survivors of violence often do not know about available support mechanisms, while workers lack information on labor protections. Education systems frequently reproduce stereotypes instead of challenging them, reinforcing cycles of inequality. Without broader public understanding, advocacy faces limited resonance beyond formal civil society circles.

Partners see the obstacles to GBV and labor rights advocacy as multi-layered and interconnected. At the structural level, weak political will, inadequate enforcement, and scarce resources restrain the necessary systemic change. At the societal level, entrenched patriarchy, stereotypes, and stigma undermine public acceptance and silence survivors. Throughout the advocacy efforts, limited collaboration, fragmentation, and lack of awareness reduce impact. Taken together, these barriers mean that organizations often operate in a hostile environment, where their legitimacy is questioned, resources are scarce, and the state remains hesitant to act. Overcoming these obstacles requires both internal strengthening of CSOs (skills, coalitions, sustainability) and external change in state institutions and social norms.

## **Section 3. Capabilities and Opportunities**

### *Capability and Feasibility for Advocacy*

The identification of gaps in the fields of GBV and LR, along with the simultaneous recognition of the obstacles that hinder progress, leads to another important component of this Study — assessing the capacities of CSOs and their willingness to actively engage in the GBV and labor rights advocacy agenda. Even though it is important to distinguish the existing capacities and further needs of the partners for GBV and LR separately, the findings suggest that the needs are common for both directions. To avoid overlaps the advocacy capacity needs analysis for GBV and LR are presented jointly.

### *CSOs' Engagement in GBV and LR Advocacy Agenda*

Study results indicate strong and sustained engagement of partner CSOs in both GBV and LR advocacy. An overwhelming 93.3% of respondents confirmed their intention to continue advocacy work in regard to GBV. Only one organization reported not planning further GBV advocacy, citing a shift in focus toward refugee women's rights, particularly sexual and reproductive health.

A nearly identical pattern was observed for LR advocacy: 93.3% of organizations plan to remain active, while one respondent expressed uncertainty due to limited staff and time resources. These findings reflect a high overall commitment among partner CSOs to maintain and strengthen their advocacy roles within both thematic areas.

The needs and further capacity development aspects were outlined. Thus, the voices of partner organizations reveal that while many of them are already actively engaged in advocacy around gender-based violence, there are clear and recurring needs that limit their ability to act as strong and influential actors in Armenia's policy and social landscape.

The analysis of gained data is presented in a comparison highlighting the common needs for both dimensions and specific needs for GBV and LR related advocacy activities.

**Knowledge-Based Skills**

**Practice-Based Skills**

	Shared Dimension	GBV-Focused Needs	LR-Focused Needs
<b>Knowledge-Based Skills</b>	<p>Both advocacy fields require a stronger evidence base to move from moral or humanitarian arguments to <i>data-driven influence</i>. Organizations acknowledge that effective advocacy must rest on local research, documented cases, and comparative learning.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Strengthening gender-sensitive research capacity and access to disaggregated GBV data at both community and national levels.</li> <li>• Building the ability to collect, analyze, and interpret gender-related data (survivor profiles, service access, legal outcomes).</li> <li>• Studying international frameworks on gender equality, gender recognition, and anti-violence mechanisms to contextualize within Armenia.</li> <li>• Developing monitoring and evaluation systems that track changes in attitudes, service use, and institutional response quality.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Deepening knowledge of labor legislation — fair pay, working conditions, and protection mechanisms.</li> <li>• Understanding labor rights violations through empirical research and policy analysis.</li> <li>• Learning international standards (ILO conventions, EU social charter) and applying them locally.</li> <li>• Documenting discrimination cases (especially of women, displaced, and vulnerable groups) to build an advocacy evidence base.</li> </ul>
<b>Practice-Based Skills</b>	<p>Across both fields, CSOs emphasize a need for <i>applied advocacy and lobbying competencies</i>: designing campaigns, communicating persuasively, and maintaining dialogue with state and non-state actors.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mastering advocacy planning — how to set achievable policy targets, identify stakeholders, and select entry points in state systems.</li> <li>• Building confidence for engaging with policymakers and resisting backlash on gender-related topics.</li> <li>• Improving media literacy: framing sensitive topics (GBV, sexual rights) in ways that inform rather than polarize.</li> <li>• Running effective awareness campaigns that challenge stigma and transform social norms.</li> <li>• Using storytelling and survivor-centered narratives ethically and effectively.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Strengthening lobbying and negotiation skills with <i>employers, trade unions, and state inspectors</i>.</li> <li>• Conducting dialogue-oriented rather than confrontational advocacy — positioning CSOs as expert partners.</li> <li>• Learning to design and evaluate communication campaigns around labor equality, pay transparency, and workplace harassment.</li> <li>• Integrating participatory advocacy tools (focus groups, worker-led storytelling, documentary theatre) to humanize issues of workplace injustice.</li> <li>• Translating complex labor law into accessible messages for workers and employers alike.</li> </ul>

**Advocacy & Influence Skills**

<p>Both areas require a strong command of legal frameworks to ensure that advocacy recommendations are technically sound and resonate with decision-makers.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Understanding national legislation on domestic violence, sexual harassment, and reproductive rights.</li> <li>• Linking national frameworks to international commitments (CEDAW, Istanbul Convention).</li> <li>• Learning how to draft policy proposals and amendments to strengthen GBV response mechanisms.</li> <li>• Engaging with judicial institutions for strategic litigation or legal precedent setting.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Developing literacy in Armenia’s Labor Code and its implementation mechanisms.</li> <li>• Identifying enforcement gaps and proposing amendments to improve accountability.</li> <li>• Understanding social protection laws (maternity leave, parental leave, pensions) and advocating for gender-sensitive revisions.</li> <li>• Familiarizing with court processes for workplace discrimination and rights violations.</li> </ul>
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**Organizational Capacities**

<p>Advocacy in both areas is constrained by limited organizational infrastructure and sustainability challenges. Partners highlight the need for stable teams, networks, and funding to ensure continuity beyond project cycles.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Strengthening coalitions among women’s rights, feminist, and crisis-response organizations.</li> <li>• Ensuring equitable participation of smaller, regional CSOs in national platforms.</li> <li>• Building systems for staff wellbeing and collective care to prevent burnout in high-emotional-load GBV work.</li> <li>• Developing donor diversification strategies to reduce dependency on single funding sources.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Creating dedicated labor rights advocacy teams or focal points within existing CSOs.</li> <li>• Establishing long-term partnerships with trade unions, legal aid organizations, and employers’ associations.</li> <li>• Building joint monitoring mechanisms for labor law enforcement.</li> <li>• Increasing organizational visibility through data publication and participation in labor policy consultations.</li> </ul>
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Taken together, these reflections suggest that organizations are eager to move beyond ad-hoc or issue-based campaigns towards systematic, evidence-driven, and well-coordinated advocacy efforts. They know what they want: stronger knowledge to inform their positions, sharper skills to influence powerholders and public opinion, and stronger organizational foundations to sustain the work. What they need most is support that would bridge these three areas, allowing them not only to react to issues as they arise but to shape Armenia’s GBV agenda with authority, confidence, and resilience.

The needs of the partners in these two dimensions can be combined and presented in the form of three pillars that will further develop their advocacy skills:

## Comprehensive Advocacy Capacity Needs (GBV & Labor Rights)

### Knowledge & Legal Expertise

- Comparative research & best practices
- Gender-sensitive data collection & analysis
- Labor law & GBV legal literacy
- Policy analysis & drafting

### Organizational Strength

- Coalition-building & partnerships
- Stronger teams & allies
- Sustainable funding & donors
- Monitoring & demonstrating impact

### Advocacy & Influence Skills

- Lobbying & negotiation
- Strategic communication & media
- Awareness campaigns & storytelling
- Innovative outreach (e.g., theatre)

Thus, the partner organizations see their future in advocacy as dependent on three interlinked pillars: stronger knowledge and legal expertise, sharper advocacy and influence skills, and more sustainable organizational foundations. By combining evidence-based research, strategic communication and lobbying, and resilient coalitions with stable resources, they can move from fragmented efforts to systematic, impactful advocacy that shapes Armenia's GBV and labor rights agenda with authority and confidence.

### *Opportunities for Advocacy in Armenia regarding Labor Rights and GVB*

The partner organizations also point to a range of opportunities that can strengthen their efforts and amplify their voices. These opportunities exist at international, national, societal, and community levels and, if strategically combined, could help move from fragmented interventions to more systemic influence. Although somehow reflected in the capacity and feasibility assessment sector, it is important to outline the opportunities as seen by the partners.

**International Frameworks and Support:** According to the partners a key opportunity lies in international cooperation and Armenia's human rights commitments. The country has ratified several conventions and collaborates with organizations such as the Council of Europe, the UN, and the EU. These institutions, alongside donors, continue to fund and politically support gender equality initiatives. Civil society can use Armenia's international obligations as leverage in negotiations with the government, advocating for stronger implementation of existing laws (such as the 2017/2024 Law on Domestic Violence) and for new protections around labor rights, childcare, and anti-discrimination. International partnerships also provide access to comparative experience, resources, and legitimacy.

**Civil Society Networks and Coalitions:** Partners highlighted that coalition-building and networking present strong opportunities for more effective advocacy. Women's organizations, LGBT+ rights groups, and CSOs working with intersecting vulnerabilities can join forces to push for reforms with a stronger, unified voice. Existing women's coalitions already provide some of this structure, but expanding them to include grassroots, regional, and cross-sector actors could increase reach and credibility. Shared knowledge, capacity development, and coordinated campaigns are viewed as multipliers of impact.

**Media, Storytelling, and Digital Platforms:** The growing reach of social and digital media creates new spaces for awareness-raising and public debate. Feminist pages, independent media outlets, and influencers already shape conversations around gender inequality. Tools like storytelling, podcasts, documentary films, and social campaigns can humanize GBV and workplace discrimination, especially for younger audiences. Media platforms also provide an avenue to counter disinformation and anti-gender narratives, reframing gender equality as a social benefit for all.

**Public Discourse and Social Shifts:** While resistance remains strong, gender issues have gained more visibility in the political and social agenda in recent years. This creates a window of opportunity for organizations to influence reforms and hold the government accountable. Moreover, youth in urban areas are more open to gender equality, offering fertile ground for education initiatives in schools and universities. Partnerships with progressive educators and student groups can shape future generations' understanding of gender roles.

**Engaging Men and Families:** Some organizations are already working with men to redefine masculinities and promote engaged fatherhood. Framing gender equality not as a "women vs. men" issue but as a path to healthier families, fairer workplaces, and stronger communities is seen as a way to reduce resistance and broaden support.

**Community Knowledge and Local Partnerships:** Local CSOs bring deep knowledge of their communities and strong ties to beneficiaries. This connection allows them to design advocacy that is grounded in real experiences, making it more relevant and persuasive. Linking this grassroots knowledge with national-level policy advocacy can create a powerful bottom-up force for change.

## Stakeholders and Collaborations

From the partners' point of view, addressing GBV in Armenia requires a broad coalition of actors working at political, institutional, community, and cultural levels. While state institutions are consistently mentioned as the main duty-bearers, partners also stress the central role of civil society, education, media, and international allies in driving sustainable change.

### The State and Political Institutions (Top level)

Partners repeatedly emphasize that government bodies and lawmakers must take primary responsibility for the systemic change. The Government of Armenia, the National Assembly, ministries (especially Labor and Social Affairs, Education, and Health), as well as the Police and judiciary, are seen as essential for strengthening legal protections, enforcing existing laws, and guaranteeing justice. At the political level, female MPs and officials are seen as important allies, particularly those willing to champion gender-sensitive reforms. At the same time, some partners note that women's appointments are often politically symbolic, without ensuring real participation or stability.

### Civil Society Organizations (Middle level)

Civil society organizations are viewed as the backbone of GBV advocacy, particularly those working on women's rights, youth, and LGBT+ rights. Local CSOs are recognized for their ability to connect with communities, understand local contexts, and translate lived experiences into advocacy agendas. Unions, informal women's groups, and grassroots activists are also considered critical. Importantly, partners also insist that women themselves must be at the center of advocacy, though they acknowledge that women often lack resources, time, and capacities to lead these efforts without support.

### International Organizations and Allies (Middle level)

International organizations are described as critical external stakeholders, providing resources, expertise, and political pressure on national policymakers. Their support can strengthen local voices and legitimize advocacy in a resistant environment.

### Community-Level Stakeholders (Middle level)

Community leaders, local self-governments (LSGs), youth centers, and activists are mentioned as vital in amplifying women's voices and ensuring that GBV prevention efforts are rooted in everyday realities. Partners stress that newly established schools and youth centers in towns and villages must be actively engaged in raising awareness on gender issues within their communities.

## Education System and Cultural Actors (Base level)

Schools and universities are highlighted as crucial sites for prevention and long-term change. Teachers, curriculum developers, and the Ministry of Education, Science, Culture, and Sports are seen as responsible for breaking the reproduction of patriarchal norms through textbooks and teaching methods. Cultural and media actors — television, cinema, social media influencers, and journalists — are also recognized as powerful shapers of public opinion. They can either reinforce harmful stereotypes or help shift narratives by highlighting stories of successful women and sensitive men.

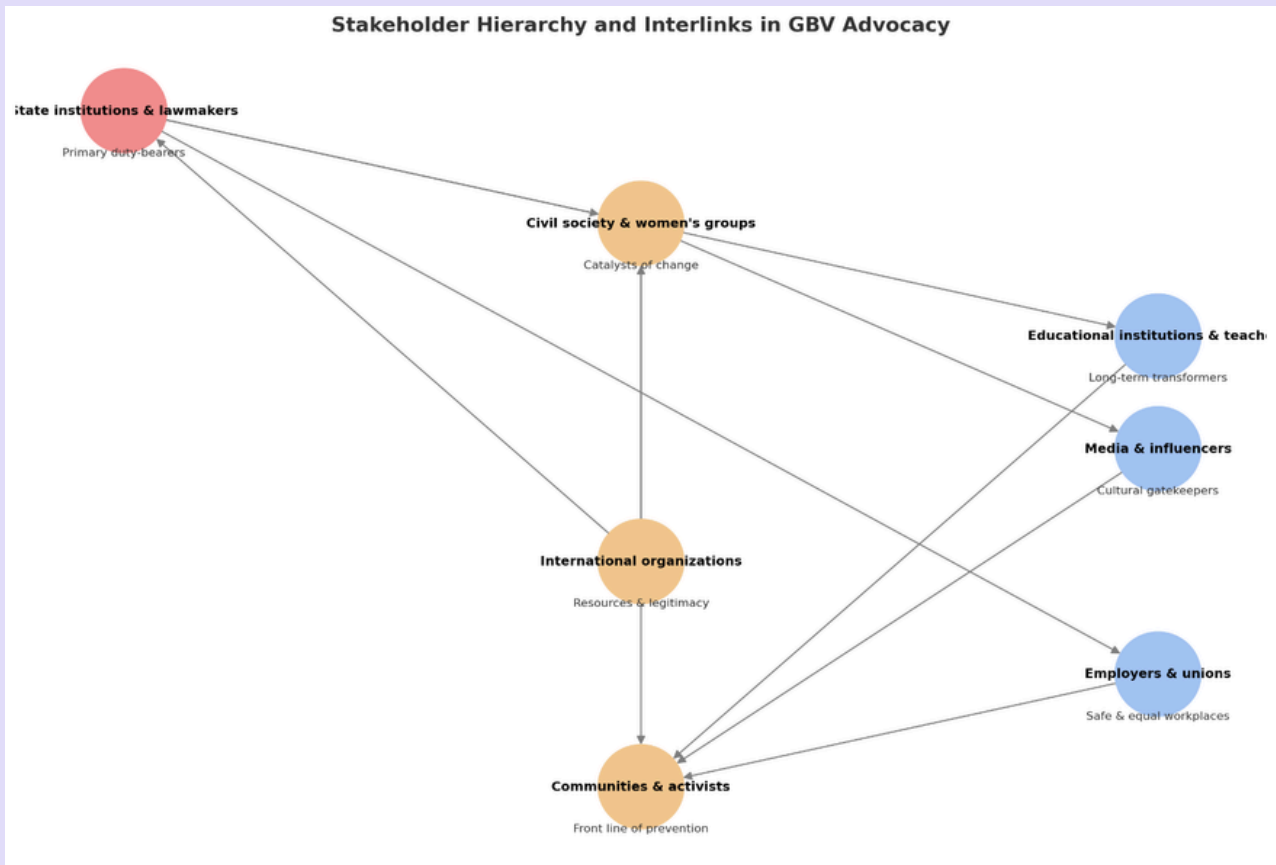
## Private Sector and Employers (Base level)

Some partners specifically point to employers and the private sector as stakeholders in the fight against workplace discrimination, harassment, and the recognition of care work. As women's labor market participation increases, companies are seen as both potential contributors to equality and as settings where GBV issues must be addressed.

Based on the suggestions from the partners, it was possible to create a hierarchical and interconnected map of GBV advocacy stakeholders.

- Top level (red): State institutions as the primary duty-bearers.
- Middle level (orange): Civil society, international organizations, and communities that bridge between state and grassroots.
- Base level (blue): Education, media, and workplaces shaping long-term norms and everyday realities.

The AI generated graph presented below shows the described interlinks. The arrows show influence and interlink—for example, civil society linking international support to community action, or media and education reinforcing community-level change.



Partners stress that only when all these actors are mobilized together — from Parliament to the classroom, from local NGOs to international allies — can Armenia make lasting progress in eliminating GBV towards zero tolerance.

## Conclusion

The findings of this Study demonstrate that Armenia’s civil society organizations, and in particular the partners of the Women’s Fund Armenia, have developed into an active, committed, and strategically aware network of actors engaged in advancing GBV and LR advocacy. Their work reflects years of accumulated experience, clear understanding of existing challenges, and a growing ability to influence both public policy and social attitudes.

A strong majority of partners (93.3%) confirmed their intention to continue advocacy in both GBV and LR. This reflects not only sustained engagement but also a shared belief in the transformative potential of advocacy to advance equality, justice, and protection for women and marginalized groups. The achievements already realized — including the adoption and strengthening of domestic violence legislation, the recognition of partner violence as a punishable offense, the approval of the 2025–2028 Gender Equality Strategy, the introduction of workplace sexual harassment regulations, and other concrete policy gains — demonstrate that civil society advocacy can produce tangible legal, institutional, and social results.

However, these accomplishments coexist with persistent structural barriers. Domestic and sexual violence remain pervasive, particularly in regions where survivors face stigma, social pressure, and limited access to support services. Women continue to bear disproportionate burdens of unpaid care work, experience wage disparities, and are concentrated in low-paid sectors of the labor market. Discrimination and exclusion affect women with disabilities, displaced women, and LGBT+ individuals, who remain largely unprotected due to the absence of comprehensive anti-discrimination legislation. Moreover, women’s representation in decision-making and peace processes remains inadequate, preventing gender perspectives from shaping policies that directly impact their lives.

The root causes of these persistent inequalities are multifaceted and interrelated. The Study identifies four overarching and interdependent obstacles that continue to hinder effective advocacy:

1. Weak political will and enforcement mechanisms, which result in laws existing largely on paper rather than in practice;
2. Scarce human and financial resources, combined with weak coordination and limited institutional cooperation among CSOs;
3. Entrenched patriarchal norms and gender stereotypes, which normalize violence and inequality; and
4. Low levels of awareness and legal literacy, both among rights-holders and duty-bearers.

These challenges create an environment in which CSOs must simultaneously act as service providers, advocates, mediators, and educators, often with limited capacity and insufficient institutional support. Despite these constraints, CSOs continue to demonstrate resilience and creativity, working to address structural inequality at both community and national levels.

The assessment of advocacy capacities reveals that WFA's partner organizations represent a diverse ecosystem of actors with varying levels of institutional maturity and influence. Advanced organizations have successfully shaped laws and public policies; intermediate organizations are active in consultations, research, and awareness campaigns; and emerging organizations are building visibility through public engagement and community mobilization. This diversity highlights the need for a more interconnected advocacy system — one that links grassroots experience with policymaking influence, ensuring that local realities inform national strategies and that legislative changes result in tangible improvements on the ground.

Across both GBV and LR advocacy, three interlinked pillars emerge as essential for strengthening CSO capacities:

1. Knowledge and Legal Expertise — CSOs require stronger research, evidence collection, and policy analysis skills to ground their advocacy in data and legal reasoning. The ability to produce monitoring, evaluation, and evidence-based recommendations is critical to achieving sustained impact.
2. Advocacy and Influence Skills — Partners emphasize the need for structured training in lobbying, negotiation, strategic communication, and rights-based messaging, allowing them to engage effectively with state institutions, employers, unions, and the public.
3. Organizational Sustainability and Alliances — Long-term advocacy success depends on stable teams, adequate funding, and well-functioning coalitions that unite national, regional, and thematic organizations under shared agendas.

Addressing these capacity needs is a prerequisite for moving from ad-hoc initiatives to coordinated, strategic advocacy capable of producing systemic change.

The Study also identifies a number of opportunities that can be leveraged to advance advocacy in both GBV and LR spheres. These include Armenia's international human rights commitments and cooperation with organizations such as the Council of Europe, the United Nations, and the European Union; the growing potential of digital media and storytelling to influence public discourse; the openness of younger generations to gender equality; and the possibility of engaging men and fathers as allies in redefining gender roles and responsibilities. Education systems, in particular, represent a strategic entry point for transforming social norms and preventing gender-based violence from an early age.

Finally, the Study underscores that meaningful progress in GBV and LR advocacy requires coordinated engagement across multiple levels of society. State institutions — as primary duty-bearers — must demonstrate genuine political will, strengthen enforcement mechanisms, and create participatory processes that include civil society voices. CSOs, in turn, must continue to build coalitions, document evidence, and sustain advocacy that bridges the local and the national. Media, educational institutions, employers, and community actors all play vital roles in shaping public attitudes and ensuring that equality becomes a lived reality rather than an abstract principle.

In conclusion, the evidence gathered demonstrates that advocacy in Armenia works — it has already driven legislative reform, raised public awareness, and changed the discourse around women’s rights, labor equality, and gender justice. Yet for these gains to become irreversible, CSOs must be properly resourced, institutionally supported, and meaningfully integrated into policymaking processes.

Gender-based violence and labor rights are not separate challenges but deeply connected dimensions of the same structural inequality. Sustainable progress will depend on addressing them together — ensuring women’s safety, economic independence, and participation as equal citizens. The organizations engaged in this work are ready and capable; what is needed now is consistent support, institutional partnership, and collective commitment to transform the progress achieved into enduring change.

