



# **MONITORING REPORT ON SERVICE CENTERS (SHELTERS) FOR VICTIMS OF VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN, DOMESTIC VIOLENCE AND TRAFFICKING**

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**PUBLIC DEFENDER OF GEORGIA**

2020

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The report was prepared with the financial support of the Swedish government within the framework of the UN Joint Programme for Gender Equality in Georgia.

## Table of Contents

Introduction .....	3
1. Report Methodology.....	3
1.2 Monitoring Phases .....	4
2. Main Findings.....	5
3. Access to Protection and Assistance Services by the Victims of Violence .....	6
4. Placement in the Shelter .....	8
4.1. Assessing Environment and Services at the Shelter.....	9
4.2 Shelter Administration and Personnel.....	10
4.3 Shelter’s Internal Regulation and Issues Related to Them.....	11
5. Protection of Health .....	11
6. Living Conditions and Hygiene.....	13
7. Nutrition.....	15
8. Rehabilitation of Beneficiaries and Preparing them for Life Free of Violence.....	16
8.1. Employment .....	17
8.2 Role of municipalities in the empowering victims of violence.....	17
9. Assessment of Crisis Service Centers for Victims of Domestic Violence.....	18
10. Assessment of Services Related to Protection and Assistance of Victims of Trafficking .....	22
11. Concomitant Monitoring and Activities for Protection and Support of Victims During Pandemic .....	23
Recommendations.....	27

## Introduction

The number of cases of violence against women and domestic violence is increasing every year. Against this background, special importance is attached to the provision of adequate protection and assistance services to victims of violence.

Service centers for victims of violence against women and domestic violence, same as shelters and crisis centers, are one of the main legislative mechanisms against violence against women and domestic violence; hence the proper provision of legal, psycho-social, medical or housing services by these centers plays a decisive role for victims to escape violence and prepare for a life free from abuse.

In 2019, the Gender Department of the Office of the Public Defender of Georgia, with the support of the UN Women, carried out monitoring of all state shelters and crisis centers in Georgia for the victims of domestic violence and trafficking. The monitoring team payed visits to the shelters of Batumi, Kutaisi, Gori and Signagi<sup>1</sup>, as well as the crisis centers of Tbilisi, Gori, Kutaisi, Ozurgeti and Marneuli.

Additionally, the Office of the Public Defender of Georgia monitored all state shelters<sup>2</sup> and crisis centers operating in Georgia in 2020 in order to check the shortcomings identified during the monitoring in 2019 and implementation of the issued recommendations. Also, along the spread of the novel coronavirus, it was important to obtain information on the extent to which shelters and crisis centers address the dangers of the Covid-19 pandemic and what regulations exist in institutions to prevent the spread of the virus and to protect beneficiaries. The present report reflects the problems identified as a result of the monitoring.

## 1. Report Methodology

Pursuant to Article 18 of the Organic Law of Georgia on the Public Defender, the Gender Department of the Public Defender of Georgia monitors the service center (shelter) for victims of domestic violence.

The shelter/crisis center is a service facility for the protection, assistance and rehabilitation of victims (including their dependents) of domestic violence and trafficking, which aims to provide adequate, safe and secure living environment to the beneficiaries living in the shelter. Also, it aims to protect their rights and interests; ensures health of the beneficiaries, psycho-social rehabilitation and integration into the family and society, if the beneficiary wishes so.

The Gender Department of the Public Defender's Office visited shelters and crisis centers unplanned, without prior agreement with the shelter administration.

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<sup>1</sup> Tbilisi Service Center (Shelter) for Victims of Human Trafficking and Violence was closed due to ongoing construction work during the monitoring period, therefore no monitoring was conducted at this shelter.

<sup>2</sup> By this time, the renovation works at Tbilisi Service Center (Shelter) for Victims of Human Trafficking and Violence had been completed and it was operating, therefore, a visit was payed to the shelter.

The purpose of the monitoring was to assess the situation at shelters and crisis centers, as well as to determine its compliance with international and local standards.

The target group of the monitoring consisted of adults using the shelter services and persons employed there. Semi-closed questionnaires were applied.

The monitoring focused on the implementation of the recommendations issued by the Public Defender in its report for 2018 on Monitoring Service Centers (Shelters) for Victims of Domestic Violence and Trafficking. Particular attention was paid to the issue of providing psycho-social rehabilitation programs to beneficiaries, which has been a significant challenge in recent years.<sup>3</sup>

## 1.2 Monitoring Phases

During the **first phase** of the monitoring, the representatives of the Public Defender's Office checked the physical environment and nutrition at the shelters and crisis centers through unscheduled visits. Information was also collected about the services offered through the survey of shelter staff and beneficiaries.

Beneficiaries were interviewed individually. A total of 15 beneficiaries were interviewed<sup>4</sup>. The questionnaires were formulated in a way that it was possible to assess the extent to which beneficiaries had information about protection and assistance services in the country, their experience with enrollment in the services, whether they were satisfied with the services received at the shelter and whether their capacities were enhanced.

As for the questionnaire for persons employed in shelters/crisis centers, it was compiled individually for each employee, depending on the specifics of their work. The questionnaires provided the maximum opportunity to analyze the practice of shelters with regard to the identification and meeting the needs of the service users. At the same time, it was important to detect the challenges and problems in the shelters as seen by the staff themselves.

At the **second stage** of the monitoring, the Public Defender's Office requested statistics from the LEPL Agency for State Care and Assistance for the (Statutory) Victims of Human Trafficking<sup>5</sup> on using service

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<sup>3</sup> In 2018, the Gender Department of the Public Defender of Georgia conducted a monitoring of the service centers (shelters) for the victims of domestic violence and trafficking and issued relevant recommendations regarding the physical environment of the shelter, employment, scarcity of psycho-rehabilitation and educational programs, checking the health conditions of the beneficiaries and other issues. Information is available on the website: <https://bit.ly/2uPMJmC>

<sup>4</sup> Only those beneficiaries who voluntarily participated in the monitoring process and who were at the shelter during the visit of the Public Defender's representative were interviewed. Out of 15 beneficiaries surveyed, 13 were using shelter services (including 5 beneficiaries surveyed in Gori Shelter, 3 in Kutaisi, 1 in Batumi, 4 in Signagi, respectively), 1 was using the Tbilisi Crisis Center shelter component, and another was using the Tbilisi Crisis Center day service.

<sup>5</sup> As a result of the amendments introduced in 2020, the LEPL State Fund for Protection and Assistance of Victims of Human Trafficking was transposed to the LEPL the Agency for State Care and Assistance for the (Statutory)

centers for victims of domestic violence and trafficking and beneficiaries of such services. In addition, we requested information on ongoing psycho-social rehabilitation, cultural and educational programs at shelters as well as thematic trainings/seminars for shelter personnel and crisis center staff.

Finally, at the **third stage**, a monitoring report and recommendations were prepared based on the analysis of the requested information and documented interviews.

## 2. Main Findings

In 2019, a Crisis Center for Victims of Violence Against Women and Domestic Violence was opened in Kvemo Kartli region, which is an important step forward in terms of access to services. At the same time, Public Defender welcomes the fact that during the reporting period, the Tbilisi Service Center for Victims of Violence against Women and Domestic Violence was renovated, and the shelter will offer improved living conditions to the beneficiaries.

Despite the positive changes, the service provided by the shelters faces a number of challenges against the increased number of reporting. In particular, the monitoring revealed that:

- Psycho-social rehabilitation of victims and the provision of adequate living conditions for them remains a challenge; particularly problematic is the limited number of psychosocial rehabilitation, educational and employment programs, recreational, sports and cognitive activities. Support and assistance to beneficiaries after leaving the shelter also remains a problem due to the small number of relevant programs, and in some cases their absence.
- Providing psychologist services to ethnic minority beneficiaries due to language barriers constitutes a problem.
- As in previous years, the health status of the victims placed in the shelter is mostly checked based on oral interviews, which, in case of transmittable diseases, poses a risk to the beneficiaries and staff of the shelter. In this regard, it is important to proactively offer beneficiaries routine studies (with a therapist).
- Part of the victims of sexual violence did not have the necessary examinations within 48 hours after being placed in the shelter.<sup>6</sup>
- Managing the cases of beneficiaries with mental health problems is an important challenge. According to the shelter administration, the number of beneficiaries with mental health problems has increased and the administration has difficulty dealing with cases. The monitoring revealed that the cases of confrontation between the beneficiaries (including

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Victims of Trafficking due to the name change. Accordingly, the LEPL the Agency for State Care and Assistance for the (Statutory) Victims of Trafficking is a legal successor of the State Fund for Protection and Assistance of Victims of Human Trafficking; nevertheless, as this subject did not exist during the monitoring, the agency will be referred to as the State Fund for Protection and Assistance of Victims of Human Trafficking.

<sup>6</sup> This problem was identified during the survey of beneficiaries in Gori and Batumi.

physical confrontation) and calling the police to the shelter have become more frequent, which naturally disrupts the calm and safe environment in the shelter and worsens the situation of the psychologically difficult beneficiaries.

- Protecting the personal data of the beneficiaries is also problematic, in particular, the monitoring revealed the problem of disclosing information about each other by the beneficiaries. In one of the shelters, the fact of alleged disclosure of special data about the health condition of one of the beneficiaries probably took place by the shelter administration.
- In some cases, the issue of providing clothes/shoes appropriate for the season and age is problematic.<sup>7</sup> At the same time, most shelters have problems in providing basic clothing/linens to the beneficiaries.
- In some shelters there is a problem with the provision of medicines. Some challenges were also identified in terms of controlling food diversity and food timing.
- The issue of infrastructure is still unsettled, the shelters need to be repaired and the inventory updated, the location of some shelters does not meet the safety standard.
- There is a problem with the observance of sanitary-hygienic norms in the shelters, in some shelters the unsanitary conditions in the toilets were especially problematic.
- Access to shelter for persons with disabilities remains a challenge, shelters are partially adapted for wheelchair users,, while they are not adapted for persons with other types of disabilities.
- The hotline (116 006) operators, in some cases, inform the victims on the need of an alleged victim status in order to receive the service. While studying individual cases by the Public Defender's Office, several victims indicated that the hotline consultation focused on victim status as a prerequisite for receiving the service.
- The number of service recipients in crisis centers in the region is critically low, which raises questions about the proper delivery of services and information by these service centers.

It is important to note that, despite the problems, most of the beneficiaries, who had difficult living and social conditions and were living at constant risk of violence prior to the placement at the shelter, are satisfied with the shelter services and appreciate the efforts of the administration and staff.

### 3. Access to Protection and Assistance Services by the Victims of Violence

During the reporting period, a number of steps were taken<sup>8</sup> to improve access to services for victims of violence against women and domestic violence, however, monitoring revealed some problems in

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<sup>7</sup> For example, the Signagi shelter had no stock of clothes at all, while the Batumi and Gori shelters had small quantities. Beneficiaries at the shelter indicated the need for clothing.

<sup>8</sup> It is important that a tool for assessing the risks and needs of a person seeking support services is being developed.

accessing services. It can be stated that, an important barrier for victims is the requirement of victim status as a prerequisite for receiving protection and assistance services.

It is noteworthy that most of the beneficiaries surveyed in the monitoring process addressed the law-enforcement agency about the violence and were mostly satisfied with the police response. However, some of the respondents have not applied to the law enforcement bodies or focused on the negative experience while dealing with the representatives of the agency.

Fear of the law enforcement agency and the work of a family member in the police department were named as reasons for not addressing the police. It should be noted that the status and influence of the abuser, in some cases, raises doubts about the unbiased consideration of the case. Beneficiaries also pointed out the problem of the lack of special survey rules for victims of sexual violence at the law enforcement agency. According to one of the beneficiaries, she was not ready for the interrogation, at the same time she was interrogated by the male investigator and had a feeling of awkwardness while talking about the details of the case.<sup>9</sup>

It should be noted that one of the representatives of the shelter administration also spoke about cases of improper response by the police. According to the information provided, there was a case when the information on the forms of violence indicated in the restraining order did not fully reflect the nature of the violence committed.<sup>10</sup>

Some of the beneficiaries surveyed directly pointed to economic dependence as a major factor in being systematically patient with the violence. It can be said that most of the beneficiaries were placed in the shelter due to the difficult socio-economic conditions alongside the violence, most of them have no income and no real estate is registered under their name. Consequently, for those who have escaped violence, placement in the shelter and socio-economic empowerment are particularly important.

Long-term protection of victims' safety remains a problem. Several victims stated that they did not have a sense of security and feared that they would be abused again after leaving the shelter. In their opinion, placing the abuser in a penitentiary institution alone is not enough. Beneficiaries focus on the need to correct the perpetrators' behavior, otherwise they think that the perpetrators will still be a threat to them after leaving the prison.

Information gained during the monitoring shows that stereotypical attitudes towards victims of violence against women and domestic violence remain significant challenges in the society. Most of

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<sup>9</sup> The Public Defender already addressed the Ministry of Internal Affairs with the recommendation to develop a special survey methodology for victims of sexual violence (№08 / 15654 24/12/2018); This issue is also discussed in the report of the Public Defender of Georgia on the Situation in Human Rights and Freedoms in Georgia, 2018. Information is available on the following link: <https://bit.ly/39Z1689>

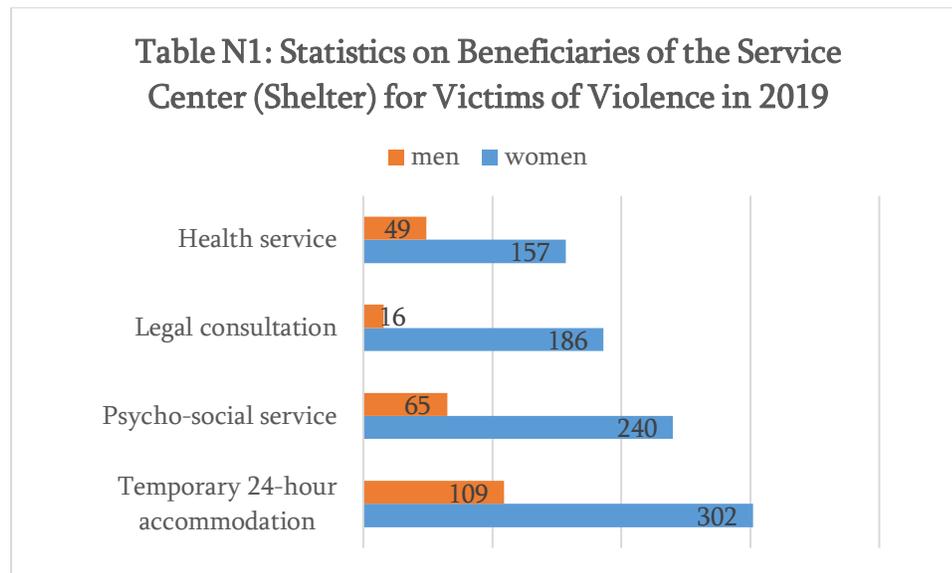
<sup>10</sup> This related to a case where, despite the traces of physical violence, the report only referred to psychological violence.

the victims surveyed indicate to the public indifference. They say they were left alone to face the problem, had no supporters, and as a result had to be placed in a shelter.

#### 4. Placement in the Shelter

Beneficiaries are admitted to the shelters on the basis of restraining and protective orders, the conclusion of the Victim Identification Group and the recognition as a victim in a criminal case. The victim is placed in a shelter for up to 3 months. After the expiration of the term, this term is extended if necessary, in accordance with the rules established by the shelter (internal regulations) and the decision of the shelter administration. After assessing the beneficiary's condition, grounds for the extension are reflected in the decision.<sup>11</sup>

**According to the LEPL Agency for State Care and Assistance for the (Statutory) Victims of Human Trafficking, 411 persons (including: 173 adults; 41 juveniles and 197 dependents) used the shelter service in 2019.** <sup>12 13</sup>



The analysis of the statistics provided by the LEPL Agency for State Care and Assistance For the (Statutory) Victims of Human Trafficking reveals that the beneficiaries living in the shelter were most often provided with psycho-social assistance.

<sup>11</sup> In 2019, 37 (thirty-seven) beneficiaries applied for extending the tenure at the shelter and all of them were satisfied.

<sup>12</sup> According to the shelter's internal regulations, a dependent is the child of a victim of violence under the age of 18, as well as a person whose legal representative is a victim/alleged victim of violence.

<sup>13</sup> The crisis center's day service (shelter component) was used by 30 victims/statutory victims (together with the dependents). Accordingly, these 30 beneficiaries are reflected in the shelter statistics.

Recently, a positive trend has been observed, with fewer and fewer victims returning to a violent environment after leaving the shelter. In most of the cases, the beneficiaries move to a rented apartment or return to a biological family.<sup>14</sup> In addition, the shelter staff and administration try their best to find a support network for the beneficiaries and integrate them into the biological family or relatives.

#### 4.1. Assessing Environment and Services at the Shelter

Most of the beneficiaries surveyed stated that they found a safe and friendly environment while being placed at the shelter and their expectations in this regard were met. Most of the beneficiaries have friendly relationship with the shelter staff as well as other persons receiving the service.

Beneficiaries surveyed noted that they received legal assistance at the shelter on a variety of issues, including issuing restraining or protective orders, ongoing investigations on the fact of violence, as well as private disputes such as property disputes, alimony, divorce, and more.

Experiences of psychological, sexual, physical and economic violence were mainly revealed during the interviews with the beneficiaries. They also pointed out the facts of stalking and threats. As stated by the victims, if there was no shelter, they would not be able to survive physically and would still have to live in a violent environment or on the street. Consequently, shelter services are vital for victims of violence.

It should be noted that all shelters are provided with a babysitter and, if necessary, an interpreter. Beneficiaries have the right to conduct the desired religious ritual in their room if they wish so.

The monitoring revealed that the level of sensitivity of a number of beneficiaries towards victims of sexual violence, ethnic minorities and LGBT individuals is low.<sup>15</sup> It is important that the shelter administration plans and takes appropriate measures to minimize discrimination while using the service.

Most of the surveyed beneficiaries did not have information about the anonymous complaint mechanism in the shelter and further procedures. According to the information provided, the problematic issues are mainly resolved through *personal communication with the administration*. The involvement of the monitoring service in raising the issue was also positively assessed.

Solving problems through direct communication shall be welcomed, but it is also important for the administration to take steps to ensure that the feedback and complaint mechanism is functioning properly.

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<sup>14</sup> According to the information provided, in 2019, a total of 12 beneficiaries returned to the abuser. Letter of the LEPL Agency for State Care and Assistance For the (Statutory) Victims of Human Trafficking № 07/91, 27/01/2020.

<sup>15</sup> The victim of sexual violence was called a "slut" by another beneficiary; Beneficiary called the ethnically Azerbaijani female victim a "Tatari"; as we were informed there were challenges with regard to LGBT individuals too, for example, "why should LGBT person live together with my child".

## 4.2 Shelter Administration and Personnel

The list of persons employed under labor contracts at the shelters of the LEPL Agency for State Care and Assistance For the (Statutory) Victims of Human Trafficking is as follows: Head of Shelter, Lawyer,<sup>16</sup> Psychologist, Social Worker, Nurse (4), Babysitter, Accountant, Cleaner, Security Guard (4) and a Driver.

Most shelter staff have been trained in women and domestic violence issues. According to the information provided by the Fund, in 2019, a number of trainings were conducted for the staff of the Shelter and Crisis Center.<sup>17</sup> However, there were no trainings on mental health issues, the need for which was identified during the monitoring.

The monitoring highlighted the issue of service delivery to beneficiaries with severe mental health problems by the shelter personnel. Management of cases of beneficiaries with mental health problems is particularly problematic in shelters. Management should not impose more responsibility on the shelter staff than it can handle.<sup>18</sup>

In the absence of adequate mental health services in the country, it is essential to train shelter staff and add an appropriate specialist to oversee and manage the condition of beneficiaries with mental health problems.

Given the workload and its specifics, it is particularly important that a large proportion of shelter and crisis center staff cited low wage as a problem.

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<sup>16</sup> The position of a lawyer in Signagi Shelter has been vacant for more than a year. According to the administration, the beneficiaries are assisted by the Legal Aid Bureau, while a social worker helps them to be referred to the Bureau. According to the Shelter Administration, no suitable candidate has been selected for the position of a lawyer, however, considering that the position of a lawyer in the shelter has been vacant for more than a year, it is doubtful whether proper efforts are made to find relevant candidates. Given the specifics of the shelter, it is important for a lawyer to be on site to provide timely legal assistance to beneficiaries.

<sup>17</sup> "Strengthening the social work component in the shelters for victims of violence and crisis centers"; "Working with perpetrators of domestic violence who cannot cope with aggression and cannot control their anger"; "Empowerment of Refugee Women in Georgia"; "Public Services for the Implementation of Gender Equality Policy"; "Child Labor Exploitation"; "Tools for the Identification, Risks and Assessment of Needs of the Support Service Seeker "; "State Anti-Trafficking Policy (National Referral Mechanism) and Challenges"; "Responding to Sexual Harassment"; Two EU Directives: Directive 2011/36/EU of April 5, 2011; Directive 2004/81/EC of April 29"; "Trauma Informed Approach to Identification of Victims of Trafficking"; "Policy Planning and the 2020 EU Integration Action Plan." Letter №07/91, 27/January /2020.

<sup>18</sup> Problems during working days and hours are more or less dealt with by a social worker and a psychologist, while during non-working hours the nurse has to resolve a conflict, the knowledge and skills of which she/he may not possess.

### 4.3 Shelter's Internal Regulation and Issues Related to Them

Most of the beneficiaries state that, while being placed in the shelter, their rights and responsibilities are explained orally and in writing; current rules are acceptable to them, and the restrictions are due to their own safety.

According to the internal regulations, the personal information of the beneficiary must be protected in the shelter, and it is the responsibility of the shelter staff to take care of this. Personal information includes: correspondence of the beneficiary, telephone conversations, e-mail, personal meetings, information received during the provision of medical, psychosocial, legal services, etc.<sup>19</sup> When disclosing information, it is important for the shelter administration to have informed consent from the beneficiary to utilize this data when using different services.<sup>20</sup>

The monitoring revealed some problems with the protection of personal data. In particular, the problem of disclosure of information by beneficiaries about each other was identified. In Signagi Shelter, the fact of alleged disclosure of special data about the health condition of one of the beneficiaries took place by the shelter administration.<sup>21</sup>

It is important for the administration to pay special attention to and work on the protection of personal data by both shelter staff and beneficiaries.

## 5. Protection of Health

Systematic violence and a severe socio-economic background pose a significant threat to the health of victims of violence. Persistent violence may lead to reproductive health problems, various functional disorders, chronic pain syndrome, and may also have an impact on mental health.<sup>22</sup> Consequently, social, psychological and health services must be provided to victims in a comprehensive and uninterrupted manner.

The monitoring revealed that some beneficiaries did not have complete information about the medical services they could use during their stay at the shelter.

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<sup>19</sup> Internal Regulations of the State Fund for Protection and Assistance of Victims of Human Trafficking, available at: <https://bit.ly/2RQ85JR> [last viewed on March 18, 2020].

<sup>20</sup> On the Necessity of Informed Consent, UN Women (2017). Available at: <https://bit.ly/2uWeAli> [last viewed on March 18, 2020].

<sup>21</sup> The beneficiary, whose special health information became known to other beneficiaries, spoke only Azerbaijani and was unable to interact with other beneficiaries, raising suspicions that the information was disclosed by the shelter staff.

<sup>22</sup> Human rights in the context of sexual and reproductive health and well-being: Assessing the human rights situation in the country, Public Defender, 2018, p. 103. The survey is available on the following link: <https://bit.ly/2vualxW> [Source last viewed on 18.03.2020].

Failure to fulfill the recommendation of the Public Defender of Georgia, on the routine screening of beneficiaries at the moment of their placement in the shelter for checking their health condition, in order to provide timely and effective treatment in case of infectious disease and to prevent further spread of possible diseases/infections, is problematic.<sup>23</sup>

The monitoring revealed that some of the victims of sexual violence against whom the violence was perpetrated by a family member, have not conducted the necessary examinations within 48 hours of being placed in the shelter, which is a wrong practice and contrary to existing regulations and international standards.<sup>24</sup>

The survey of beneficiaries revealed problems with reproductive health services as well. In particular, the number of beneficiaries who have undergone relevant surveys is small. Using such medical services is also problematic for victims of sexual violence. It should be noted that one of the beneficiaries have not used the consultation service with a gynecologist in the postpartum period, nor did she undergo a prophylactic examination to assess the condition in the postnatal period.<sup>25</sup>

According to the administration, the bureaucratic barrier of the past years has been eliminated and medicines are delivered to the shelters on time.<sup>26</sup> In view of the above, it is important to point out the fact that during the monitoring no types of medicines were found in the Batumi shelter, including primary medicines.<sup>27</sup>

The outcomes of protecting health of victims/beneficiaries revealed during the monitoring indicate that shelters need to provide more information to victims about their right to health. It is important to understand that a beneficiary's subsequent life free from violence is directly related to the status of her physical and mental health. Consequently, the shelter should make every effort to improve the health of the beneficiaries and to meet their basic needs in this regard during their stay in the shelter.

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<sup>23</sup> Monitoring Report on Service Centers (Shelters) for Victims of Domestic Violence and Trafficking, 2018, p. 15-16, information is available on the link: <https://bit.ly/2Qplck4>

<sup>24</sup> The problem was identified in Gori and Batumi shelters. Internal Regulations of the Gori Service Center for Victims of Violence (Shelter and Crisis Center), Article 11 (4,“e”). Information is available on the link: <https://bit.ly/2xQE0T3>

<sup>25</sup> It should be noted that the state has not introduced a postnatal care system in terms of maternal health as such, which one of the factors is contributing to the high rate of maternal mortality in the country. See. Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights: National Assessment, Public Defender, 2019, p. 17. Information is available on the following link: <https://bit.ly/2UeVSOR> [Source last viewed on 18.03.2020].

<sup>26</sup> The problem of timely delivery of medicines is discussed in the Monitoring Report of Service Centers (Shelters) of Victims of Domestic Violence and Trafficking (2018), p. 16. Information is available on the link: <https://bit.ly/2QqzZLe> [last viewed on March 18, 2020].

<sup>27</sup> It is also noteworthy that each beneficiary surveyed at the Kutaisi and Gori shelters indicated the problem of timely delivery of medicines.

## 6. Living Conditions and Hygiene

According to international standards, it is desirable for the building of the shelter to be constructed specifically for this purpose, as in this case, particular safety standards and requirements, layout, design, and other important factors are taken into account.<sup>28</sup> According to safety standards, it is necessary for the building to have a fence and be protected from unwanted visitors. Access to water, proper operation of heating systems and conditioning are important. The location of the shelter should be convenient for the beneficiaries to use services such as health facilities, police, law firms, school, market, public transport, etc.<sup>29</sup>

The monitoring revealed that 2 shelters in Georgia (Batumi and Kutaisi) are still located in buildings where other types of organizations operate, which calls the issue of security into question. Also, the issue of shelter security is still the most problematic in Gori, where it is easy to get the information about the address of the shelter.

Nothing has changed in **Gori Shelter** compared to previous years. The whole building is outdated and needs to be repaired, the walls in the building are damp and dilapidated, furniture and other inventory shall be renewed.<sup>30</sup> The shelter yard fence, which is too low and cannot ensure the protection of confidentiality, needs to be repaired. It is important that, according to the information provided, the yard/fence is planned to be repaired and will be completed by the end of this year. In **Kutaisi shelter**, the walls of the building need to be repaired, part of the inventory needs to be renewed.<sup>31</sup> **Batumi shelter** needs reconstruction works, part of the furniture needs to be replaced.<sup>32</sup> In **Signagi Shelter**, part of the furniture and inventory also needs renovation,<sup>33</sup> there was not enough lighting in the beneficiaries' rooms, and the power cable in 2 rooms was artificially inserted, which is dangerous for the people living in the shelter.

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<sup>28</sup> German, Liska (2013) Shelters for Girls and Women at the Risk of Violence. Shelters for women victims of violence. Available at: <http://www.sheltersafe.ca/> [last viewed on March 18, 2020].

<sup>29</sup> Shelter Standards and Regulations, International Organization for Migration, 2007.

<sup>30</sup> The window handles in the Gori shelter are broken, the curtain/blinds are torn and need to be replaced. Sanitary works should be carried out in the bath-toilets, there is no hot water in the bathrooms/toilets on the first floor. There are still no blinds on the window and one can see the bathroom directly from the house standing in the yard. All bathrooms have broken showers and faucets. Several toilets lack a toilet flush.

<sup>31</sup> The floor in the entrance room of the second floor is collapsed. The faucets in the bathroom do not work. The blinds on the windows need to be replaced.

<sup>32</sup> The lower part of the stove in the kitchen in the Batumi shelter does not work.

<sup>33</sup> A number of items in the beneficiaries' rooms in the Signagi Shelter were damaged, wardrobe doors were broken and collapsed, and the pump drawers could not be closed. The kitchen lacked ventilation, the kitchen cupboard doors were loosened and visually outdated. The second-floor bathroom in Signagi was out of order. There were 2 cabins in the bathroom on the first floor, only one of them is isolated by a curtain. One of the cabins has a damaged shower with no head at all. The second-floor toilets (intended for beneficiaries) were also damaged. In Signagi, the TV set in the common room has not been working for a long time.

Additionally, plumbing needs to be put in order in the Signagi shelter already for several years now. According to beneficiaries, the front door of the building is open in winter and summer to prevent the smell of sewage from spreading on the second floor of the building where their living rooms are located.

The shelters are partially adapted for wheelchair users.<sup>34</sup> Shelters are not adapted for persons with other types of disabilities.

The shelters are more or less equipped with the central heating/cooling systems, although problems were identified at the Batumi and Signagi shelters in this regard. The heating system at the Batumi shelter was turned off, the reason behind being good weather as stated by the administration.<sup>35</sup> As for the Signagi shelter, the heating in part of the building was turned off. During the survey, the beneficiaries mentioned that the heating system in this part of the building is used only for bathing the child in order to save utility costs.

The contact information of the service providers is available in the shelters. It should be noted that the hotline number of the Public Defender of Georgia was not posted in the Gori, Signagi and Batumi shelters. There was no feedback magazine in a prominent place at the Gori shelter. There was also no complaint box<sup>36</sup>. Numbers of water supply and other local services were not posted in the Signagi shelter.

Most of the surveyed beneficiaries stated that they were satisfied with the personal hygiene items provided during the placement in the shelter, although some expressed dissatisfaction with the quality of the items provided.<sup>37</sup> During the monitoring, the supply of hygienic items in all shelters was sufficient, however, it was found that in some cases it is problematic to provide beneficiaries with

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<sup>34</sup> It should be noted that in Signagi, Gori, Kutaisi and Batumi shelters, information material is posted quite high on the walls, therefore, it will be difficult for a person using a wheelchair to get acquainted with this material. Complaint box and feedback magazine are also located on a higher level in Kutaisi, too. Additionally, in the Gori and Kutaisi shelters, the windows in the room for the disabled are high. The door of the room in the Kutaisi shelter is opened from inside, which makes it difficult for the wheelchair user to move. Only ramps and toilets are adapted at Batumi and Signagi shelters. Additionally, the liquid soap dish at the Signagi shelter is located higher, and the sink is not adapted.

<sup>35</sup> In recent years, during visits conducted in the autumn-winter period, heating has never been turned on at the Batumi shelter, which raises the suspicion that the administration does not turn on the heating in order to save resources at the Batumi shelter.

<sup>36</sup> According to the information provided, the box was removed during the reconstruction and then hanging it was forgotten, although it should be noted that the renovation was done a few months ago (part of the walls was painted).

<sup>37</sup> Each beneficiary of Kutaisi, Signagi and Gori shelters expressed dissatisfaction with the quality of the provided hygienic items. For example, in Signagi they complained about the quality of the shampoo, while in Gori and Kutaisi they criticized the quality of the hygienic pads, and it was also mentioned that disposable hygienic pads were not provided despite their desire. In addition, the beneficiary of the Kutaisi Shelter noted that the means provided were of poor quality. Beneficiaries at the Kutaisi shelter stated that the shelter lacks hygienic items (for example, soap, shampoo) for children.

clothes/shoes suitable for the season and age. Lack of supply of basic clothing at shelters is particularly problematic.<sup>38</sup>

The monitoring revealed that the beneficiaries themselves are responsible for cleaning their own rooms. Unlike last year, the beneficiaries have less complaints about cleanliness. However, during the unexpected visit of the representatives of the Public Defender to the shelters, problems related to cleanliness were revealed. In particular, the shelters in **Kutaisi, Gori and Signagi** were unsanitary, especially the toilets, while insects were observed in the kitchen of the Signagi shelter.

The monitoring shows that special attention should be paid to the provision of material and technical resources for shelters for victims of violence against women and domestic violence, to the improvement of yards and child-centered infrastructure and to updating household inventory. It is equally important that the shelter administration pays more attention to the sanitary-hygienic norms.

## 7. Nutrition

According to the State Fund for Support and Assistance of Victims of Trafficking, nutritionists elaborated food rations for beneficiaries in shelters; beneficiaries receive food in accordance with the standard (as well as diet/diabetic) menus. The Fund purchases food through centralized system (according to the tender procedures), and delivery is made locally upon request.<sup>39</sup>

During the visit of Public Defender's representatives, daily menus in shelters matched existing food stocks, but while checking out the food stocks themselves, lack of product variety was obvious. Namely:

While inspecting the **Gori** shelter, it turned out, that stock of vegetables was monotonous. There were no fruits in stock of **Kutaisi** shelter. Lack of variety of dairy products and fruits were revealed in **Batumi** shelter. It should be mentioned, that there was no meat for beneficiaries in the stock of **Signagi** shelter; the meat stored in refrigerator had caption – “Administration”.

There was no indication of expiration date on the frozen products in the **Signagi** shelter. As we were informed the date is indicated on the whole package, and after separation of the products, it is not

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<sup>38</sup> For example, the Signagi shelter had no stock of clothes at all, while the Batumi, Kutaisi and Gori shelters had only slippers and T-shirts. Beneficiaries of Gori and Kutaisi shelters said that they were given some clothes; problem in this regard was identified in Batumi and Signagi, where, despite the need, the beneficiaries could not be provided with clothes.

In addition, while talking to the beneficiaries in Signagi, it was found that they do not have basic necessities such as combs, underwear, etc. In the shelter they were handed rubber room slippers, the use of which is not advisable in winter. It was also reported that the very small sized shoes damaged the feet of the school-aged child of one of the beneficiaries. Due to the lack of shoes, the teenager is unable to go to school. According to the social worker, the shelter is not responsible for handing over basic necessities (mostly underwear) or clothes. The shelter kept clothes they had received as a donation.

<sup>39</sup> № 07/91, 27/January/2020.

indicated any more. This is unacceptable, as it makes impossible to control the unseaworthiness of the products.

Separate attention should be paid to the process of food distribution among beneficiaries in the **Signagi** shelter. In particular, named containers with food are stored in refrigerators. According to the accountant service of the shelter, administration distributes food to beneficiaries according to preliminary defined quantity and weight. In case the beneficiary requests additional amount of food, accountant creates a protocol.

According to the information received during the monitoring, beneficiaries share products between themselves and address the administration for additional amount of food rarely. It is normal that product sharing might cause conflict, therefore it will be good if administration alters existing practice.

While monitoring it became clear, that the food portions are not satisfactory for some beneficiaries. In particular, some beneficiaries of Gori, Kutaisi and Batumi shelters mentioned that food portions are sometimes not enough, and there is no possibility to have extra amount. It was also mentioned, that fruits in the Signagi shelter are rare.

Existence of nutrition standards is welcome, but it is important that administration pays more attention to the realization of the established standards, to elimination of existing gaps and to provision of variety of nutrition and food for beneficiaries and their dependents, based on season specifics.

## 8. Rehabilitation of Beneficiaries and Preparing them for Life Free of Violence

Psycho-social rehabilitation programs are vital for persons in shelters, as well as providing them with skills to be prepared for an independent life.

Social assistance within reasonable amount of time and long-term housing remain important challenges<sup>40</sup>, from the perspective of rehabilitation of victims of violence and preparing them for life free from abuse.

Monitoring results reveal that most of beneficiaries are satisfied with the psychological service and think that it helps them in the process of rehabilitation.<sup>41</sup> Meetings are held in groups, as well as

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<sup>40</sup> One of the recommendations of the Public Defender mentioned in Monitoring Report on Service Centers (Shelters) for Victims of Domestic Violence and Trafficking of 2018 was regulation of procedures for receipt and termination of social assistance in a way that after leaving the shelter, victims of domestic violence would be able to restore status automatically. The recommendation is available on the following link: <https://bit.ly/2IzILlG> [Last visited on March 18, 2020].

<sup>41</sup> The visit to the psychologist depends to the will of the beneficiary; nevertheless most of them use this opportunity.

individually. However, it is difficult to provide psychological service to ethnic minorities due to language barrier.

According to the information obtained during monitoring, number of psychosocial rehabilitation programs in shelters and activities planned in this direction are still small, hence it cannot ensure long term and consistent rehabilitation programs for beneficiaries. According to information provided by administration, different recreation and entertaining events are organized for beneficiaries, but most of interviewed beneficiaries did not take part in such events, or could not remember them.

Psychosocial rehabilitation of minor/juvenile dependent persons constitutes an important problem in shelters. At some institutions, lack of toys and books appropriate to children, as well as lack of cognitive events appropriate for them were observed. The Batumi shelter should be mentioned separately, as there is not library for children, nor any kind of entertainment tools, including toys.

### 8.1. Employment

Most persons placed in shelters are facing hard social-economic problems. Accordingly, employment plays crucial role for their empowerment.

Shelter provides different training programs for beneficiaries and assists them in the process of employment. The shelter within the program Worknet cooperates with social service, and helps beneficiaries to find vacancies in private sector based on their skills and abilities. Shelter assists them also through personal networking.

Shelter manages to train and employ some beneficiaries (mainly in the service field), but this issue remains problematic in numerous cases. In particular, during monitoring it turned out, that beneficiaries are divided according their abilities. If the beneficiary is not motivated himself/herself, he/she has fewer chances for employment. Shelter does not make any efforts to raise motivation of beneficiaries and makes nothing for their empowerment. This is obviously wrong practice.

According to the cases studied by the Public Defender, there were occasions, when the same beneficiary used shelter service several times. Of course, this was in situation when there was danger of repetitive violence, and the victim has the right to do so. In addition, very often, repetitive use of shelter service is caused by improper rehabilitation. However, it is important that shelter should care about the employment and empowerment of beneficiaries with no required skills and/or motivation.

### 8.2 Role of municipalities in the empowering victims of violence

Local self-governing bodies have an important role in prevention and elimination of violence against women and domestic violence, as well as in empowering victims of violence. Therefore, during monitoring certain attention was paid to practice of cooperation between the shelters and municipalities.

Throughout the monitoring process, practices of **Kutaisi** and **Gori** municipalities were considered as positive examples, as they took into account recommendation of the Public Defender.<sup>42</sup> As a result, they ensure apartment rent based on the actual residence of victim of domestic violence and not on her/his legal address.

The cooperation of Ozurgeti, Gori and Kutaisi shelters with the gender councils of local boards in the process of needs assessment and budget planning should also be assessed positively.

Because of variety of practices related to gender equality, most local self-governments are indifferent to needs of victims of violence and do not offer specific support services to them.

In particular, problem is obvious in case of cooperation with gender equality council of Batumi municipality. According to the provided information, members of council do not have enough sensitivity to the cases of violence against women and domestic violence. Representatives of municipality often give verbal promises, but specific steps to assist victims of violence are never taken.<sup>43</sup> The problem of sensitivity towards violence against women and domestic violence was also stressed in Signagi Shelter. In the mentioned municipality, services for victims are not flexible and ensuring of long-term housing for them depends on the legal address of the victim.

Accordingly, providing support is challenging after the beneficiary leaves the shelter. We should also mention here that it is impossible to take minors under 2 to the kindergartens all over the county, as this fact prevents employment of single parents.

It is important to make local self-governing agencies more active in strengthening cooperation with shelters and crisis centers and elaborating special support programs based on the needs of the victims of violence.

## 9. Assessment of Crisis Service Centers for Victims of Domestic Violence

Crisis center is the place for temporary placement of the alleged victims of domestic violence; here they are able to receive urgent services. Person who does not have a status of a victim, or who is supposed to be victim of violence is able to get services of crisis center.

Nowadays five crisis centers are functioning in Georgia – in Kutaisi, Gori, Ozurgeti, Marneuli and Tbilisi. Victim/alleged victims of domestic violence and/or violence against women, trafficking and

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<sup>42</sup> Very often victim of violence, tries to change region of residence in order to prevent repetitive violence. In case if apartment rental program is not flexible, the victim of violence remains beyond this support. This makes the situation of victim of violence who faces social-economic problems harder.

<sup>43</sup> Providing support for victims registered in other municipalities is problematic in Batumi. Besides, despite the negotiations, issue of privileged use of transport is not solved yet.

sexual abuse (hereinafter “violence”) (with the persons dependent to them) might be enrolled in the crisis centers.

Service of the crisis centers cover following needs: psychosocial rehabilitation; medical support; legal support, and in case of necessity, interpretation services. Within the scope of the monitoring, services of all five crisis centers were inspected and assessed. It should be mentioned, that full accommodation for beneficiaries is only offered by Tbilisi crisis center. As to the Ozurgeti, Marneuli, Gori and Kutaisi crisis centers, only daytime services are available.<sup>44</sup>

According to the information received from State Fund for Protection and Assistance of Victims of Human Trafficking, total number of beneficiaries getting services of crisis centers was 242 in 2019. Among these persons 188 were adult victims, 31 were dependents, 26 - alleged victims and 10 - dependents of the alleged victims, respectively.

During the reporting period, most part of beneficiaries got services in Tbilisi crisis center – 186 persons in total. Despite this fact, the number of persons who received 24-hour accommodation service is very low.<sup>45</sup>

As to the crisis centers located in regions, total number of provided services is critically low,<sup>46</sup> posing a question of proper delivery of services and information by them.

Low number of beneficiaries in crisis centers is caused by several factors: on the one hand, the existing services are not popularized and local population is not informed properly. On the other hand, several victims mentioned that during consultation through the hotline<sup>47</sup> focus was made on necessity of victim status that was a precondition for service delivery (but in practice, person might not have status of victim and this might be the reason why he/she needs support of the crisis center. For example, support in getting a protective order). Besides, in some cases alleged victims of violence were redirected to non-governmental organizations for support.

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<sup>44</sup> In crisis centers of Marneuli, Gori, Ozurgeti, Kutaisi for victims of violence service might be received during working days from 10:00 to 18:00, as to Tbilisi crisis center it works for 24 hours; though, administration of Tbilisi crisis center works from 10:00 to 18:00.

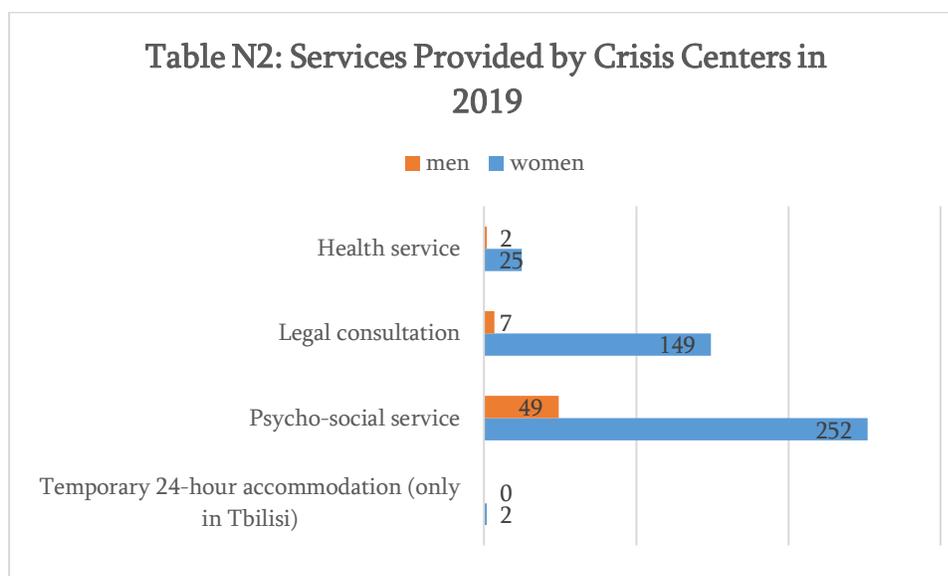
<sup>45</sup> See table #2

<sup>46</sup> During reporting period (2019), 19 persons received services in Gori crisis center, 25 persons received services in Ozurgeti crisis center, 9 - in Kutaisi crisis center and only 3 persons - in Marneuli crisis center, respectively.

<sup>47</sup> Regarding the number and topics of messages received by the Hotline (116 006) for violence against women, domestic violence and sexual violence under the State Fund for Victims of Trafficking in Human Beings, we were informed that in 2019 1455 calls were received (including: 1112 women and 343 men, respectively), while a total of 25 calls were received on trafficking issues (including: 15 women and 10 men, respectively). Letter №07/91, 27/January/2020.

In addition, employees of Gori and Kutaisi crisis centers are also working in shelters for victims of domestic violence. According to the position of LEPL Agency for State Care and Assistance For the (Statutory) Victims of Human Trafficking, separation of the staff will be on agenda if the number of beneficiaries applying to the centers increase; according to the Agency, there is no such necessity in Gori and Kutaisi at the moment.

Based on the information provided to the Office of Public Defender, Gori crisis center is often closed. In such situation, it is difficult to increase the number of applying persons. It is important to make efforts towards raising awareness on the crisis center services, by the staff itself. Eventually this will rise number of persons applying to the centers. At this moment, based on the monitoring results, we can conclude that sharing of the staff between shelters and crisis centers has negative impact on service delivery, as well as on the number of the persons receiving the services.



Lawyer, Psychologist and Social agent are employed in **Gori Crisis Center**. Beneficiaries are mainly referred to the centers from the social services and prosecution offices. Following challenges were identified in the crisis center, offering only daytime services: location which is difficult to access, lack of professional trainings, necessity of additional staff.

**Kutaisi Crisis Center** offers beneficiaries service of a lawyer, psychologist and social agent during the daytime. Beneficiaries are mainly referred to the centers from the social services and prosecution offices.

Social Service refers beneficiaries to the **Ozurgeti Crisis Center**. Beneficiaries to the **Marneuli Crisis Center** are mainly referred from Kvemo Kartli branch of the Public Defender’s Office. Unfortunately, local police and social services are not cooperating with the crisis center properly. It is important that

the position of a lawyer did not exist in Marneuli crisis center in 2019; this was hindering delivery of legal support to the victims.<sup>48</sup>

Gori, Kutaisi, Ozurgeti and Marneuli crisis centers lack places for children. The problem is related to the fact that the social worker and the psychologist must clean office by themselves and do office work as well; transportation was also named as a problematic issue.<sup>49</sup>

Full staff of **Tbilisi Crisis Center** was interviewed, along with two beneficiaries, physical environment was observed, and food examined. During the monitoring process, 9 persons were using shelter services, and 5 of them were dependents.<sup>50</sup> The demand for services in the Tbilisi Crisis Center is in general higher than in the regional centers. Due to the increased demand allocation in the Tbilisi crisis center is based on special criteria: in particular such placement is possible if victim of violence is employed in Tbilisi, if he/she has health issues and receives health services in Tbilisi, and if his/her relocation is dangerous.

According to the social worker and the lawyer, number of beneficiaries applying in Tbilisi Crisis Center has increased recently. They think that it is necessary to add more staff to deliver high quality services.

As to the situation related to food and physical environment in Tbilisi Crisis Center, unlike other shelters the building is in good condition, but the sanitary-hygienic issues were also revealed in this case.<sup>51</sup>

Tbilisi Crisis Center was fully supplied with food products and hygienic items. However, some problems related to food expiration dates were still revealed.<sup>52</sup>

The crisis centers are adapted only to those persons with disabilities who use wheelchairs, but for others the center is not accessible.

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<sup>48</sup> In 2020 lawyer, who knows Azerbaijani language, was employed in Marneuli crisis center.

<sup>49</sup> As it was mentioned, by social agent, when she plans informational meetings, or if there is a need to check out conditions of beneficiaries and it is necessary to travel in the villages, transportation is problematic and is hindered due to hierocracy reasons.

<sup>50</sup> There was only two persons in place, who also participated in the monitoring process. One of the interviewed persons was living in the crisis center, and the second was receiving only day services, respectively.

<sup>51</sup> There was anti sanitary conditions in toilets and bathrooms, walls and sinks were dirty, there was no soap and handkerchiefs. The mirror was damaged.

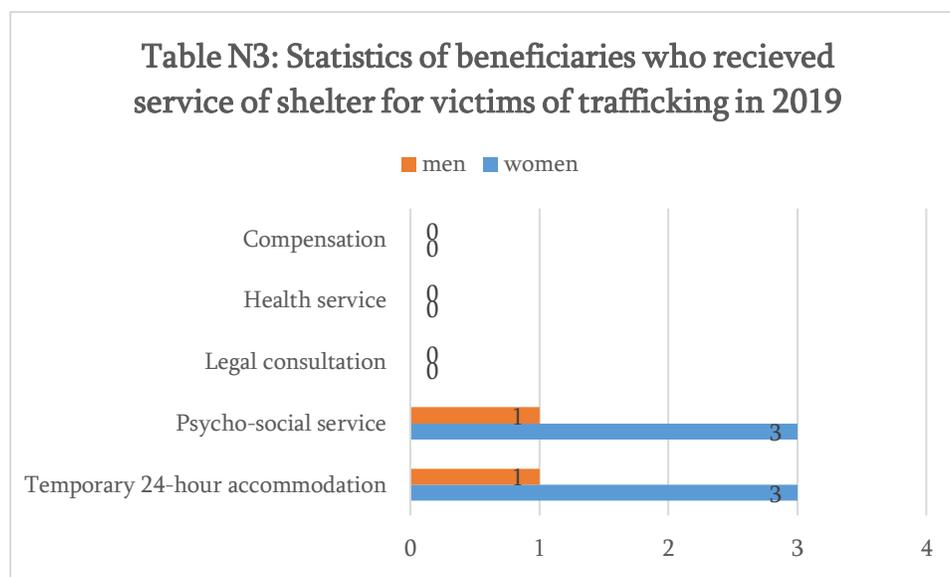
<sup>52</sup> There was expired matsoni and moldy salad in refrigerator. As it was explained, expired matsoni and dairy products were used to prepare cakes. It should be mentioned, that no expiration date was indicated on frozen products, as it was mentioned, the date is indicated on the whole package; after the separation the date is not indicated.

## 10. Assessment of Services Related to Protection and Assistance of Victims of Trafficking

Service Centers for Victims of Trafficking in Tbilisi and Batumi (Shelters) are structural units of the State Fund on protection and assistance of victims of trafficking. Victims of trafficking (along with their dependent persons) are subject to enrollment in the shelters. Shelters for victims of trafficking and domestic violence provide following services to the beneficiaries: 24-hour accommodation (in the shelters), psychological rehabilitation, delivery/organizing of medical services, legal support, and in case of need, interpretation services.

Monitoring of service centers (shelters) for victims of trafficking took place only in Batumi, as Tbilisi Service Center was closed due to the reconstruction work. The aim of the monitoring was assessment of services and level of satisfaction of victims.<sup>53</sup>

According to the information of the State Fund for the protection and support of trafficking victims, in 2019 four persons received services of shelter for victims of trafficking.



According to the director of the Batumi shelter, enrollment of beneficiaries is based on their recognition as victims and on the victim status.<sup>54</sup> Victim of trafficking might stay in the shelter from 3 to 9 months, and juvenile might stay there up to 10 days.

<sup>53</sup> It is possible to accommodate 10 persons in Batumi Shelter at the same time. During monitoring there were no beneficiaries in the Batumi shelter. Accordingly, monitoring results were based on the interview with the director of the shelter.

<sup>54</sup> Mainly sexual abuse, coercion and labor exploitation is revealed.

Rehabilitation/reintegration of the victims of trafficking means that they return to their county, but when they stay, this implied arrangement of documentation, professional development and employment.<sup>55</sup> As to the legal support provided to the victims of trafficking it was mentioned that mostly, they need support in receiving compensation.

According to the received information, no special services exist for victims of sexual trafficking, the shelter mainly cooperates with the international organization of migration and informational medical-psychological center “Tanadgoma”. Within 48 hours after victims receive the shelter, his/her state of health is examined in “Tanadgoma”. Nurse, social agent and babysitter have undergone training on trafficking.

After monitoring, we can conclude that the situation has not changed dramatically in terms of providing services in comparison with the past years. The low numbers of revealing of cases and low level of awareness remain challenging. Small number of services offered to the victims of trafficking shall be mentioned separately.

## 11. Concomitant Monitoring and Activities for Protection and Support of Victims During Pandemic

The Office of the Public Defender of Georgia carried out monitoring of all state shelters and crisis centers operating in Georgia in 2020, in order to check gaps revealed during monitoring in 2019 and indicators of implementation of subsequent recommendations. Besides, it was important to receive information in the situation of the new Corona pandemic, and monitor whether shelters and crisis centers take into account threats of Covid-19 and what kind of regulations are in place to prevent spread of the virus and to protect beneficiaries.

Monitoring took place in **Tbilisi,<sup>56</sup> Gori,<sup>57</sup> Kutaisi,<sup>58</sup> Batumi<sup>59</sup> and Signagi<sup>60</sup> shelters for victims of violence**, as well as in **Tbilisi,<sup>61</sup> Gori,<sup>62</sup> Kutaisi,<sup>63</sup> Ozurgeti<sup>64</sup> and Marneuli<sup>65</sup> crisis centers**. Monitoring was unplanned without any preliminary agreement with administration and staff of shelters and crisis

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<sup>55</sup> The Social Service Agency makes all decisions related to juvenile victims.

<sup>56</sup> Monitoring took place on August 18, 2020

<sup>57</sup> Monitoring took place on July 27, 2020

<sup>58</sup> Monitoring took place on July 28, 2020

<sup>59</sup> Monitoring took place on July 29, 2020

<sup>60</sup> Monitoring took place on August 19, 2020

<sup>61</sup> Monitoring took place on September 8, 2020

<sup>62</sup> Monitoring took place on August 25, September – 3,7,9; 2020

<sup>63</sup> Monitoring took place on August 26, 2020

<sup>64</sup> Monitoring took place on August 27, 2020

<sup>65</sup> Monitoring took place on September 10, 2020

centers. During monitoring physical environment and food were examined, staff and beneficiaries were interviewed.

According to the Director of the **Tbilisi shelter** for victims of violence, the number of applying persons had not increased during last 5 months. However, the number of cases related to psychological violence was increased, together with social problems revealed during pandemic.<sup>66</sup>

Despite the renovation of Tbilisi shelter in 2019, monitoring detected certain problems related to cleanness and plumbing<sup>67</sup> as well as damaged furniture<sup>68</sup>. In addition, there is deficit of basic necessity items in Tbilisi shelter.<sup>69</sup> During examination of food stocks, expired products were revealed.<sup>70</sup> We received information that products need to be removed from stocks officially and they are not in use.

As to the state of health and prevention measures for protection from pandemic, one of the beneficiaries who was in the shelter since quarantine period,<sup>71</sup> mentioned, that no daily thermo screening was conducted, beneficiaries mainly keep distance and are in the rooms allocated for them as an accommodation.

Based on information received during the visit to the **Gori shelter**,<sup>72</sup> the number of beneficiaries meaningfully increased in July. The recommendations of previous years related to cleanness and hygienic norms as well as to renovation of inventory<sup>73</sup> were not taken into account. As to the healthcare of beneficiaries, during first months of pandemic enrollment to the shelter was possible after quarantine, but now beneficiaries are accepted without this procedure. Based on the provided information measuring of temperature is the only measure of prevention.

During monitoring of the **Kutaisi shelter**, it was mentioned that there were no problems related to enrollment of beneficiaries. Beneficiaries continue employment without any hindrance. The cleanness and hygiene remains a challenge to the organization.

During the visit to the **Batumi shelter**,<sup>74</sup> there were mainly foreign citizens, as it was not possible to return them to their biological families. The physical environment is more or less arranged in Batumi shelter in comparison with previous years. The shelter was clean and food stocks were arranged. The

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<sup>66</sup> During monitoring nine adults and four juveniles, respectively were using services of shelter.

<sup>67</sup> One of the toilets was broken; there was pipe-leaking water.

<sup>68</sup> Kitchen furniture is damaged and needs renovation.

<sup>69</sup> For example, underwear, nightshirts, etc.

<sup>70</sup> Deodorant

<sup>71</sup> Tbilisi shelter for the victims of violence was altered to quarantine zone during the raised numbers of virus.

<sup>72</sup> During monitoring 16 persons were using the services of the shelter (dependent persons among them).

<sup>73</sup> There was not soap in toilets, not handkerchiefs. Shower faucets are still broken in bathrooms. In bathroom were beneficiaries make laundry, water heater is connected with the power supply in a such way that it is accessible for children.

<sup>74</sup> During monitoring there were seven beneficiaries, one of them was victim of trafficking.

recommendation of the Public Defender was taken into account and the inventory was also renovated. Besides, there were first aid items in stock.

During the visit to the **Signagi shelter**,<sup>75</sup> staff mentioned that in times of the pandemic, main problem for beneficiaries was related to entering and exiting the building, despite the fact that they obeyed existing rules and they were fully informed about new regulations. The number of beneficiaries did not raise during pandemic, but the number of beneficiaries with physical health problems increased.

After interviews with the beneficiaries, it turned out that in Signagi shelter the rule of distribution of food portions, amount of the portions and food quality is still problematic like it was in previous years<sup>76</sup>. Accordingly, beneficiaries need to buy food by themselves, as the rule of receiving an extra amount of food is problematic for them. One of the beneficiaries also mentioned that she buys hygienic items by herself, as the items provided by administration are minimal. Such rule of distribution of food and other items exists only in Signagi branch and is not a standard practice for other shelters. Therefore, it is important to review the existing rule.

**It should be mentioned that the thermo screening of employees of the Office of Public Defender did not take place in any of the shelters and the hands were not sanitized as well. Hence, we can suppose, that state of health of the visitors in shelters is not examined and the risk of the pandemic is not avoided.**

During the visit to the crisis center for victims of violence in **Tbilisi**, staff provided us with the information that thermo screening of the staff and beneficiaries is made with thermometer and not with the electronic device. The staff also mentioned that after quarantine the number of applying beneficiaries is increased, the reason for this might be lockdown and general annoyance among people. There is a quarantine zone for the dangerous beneficiaries. During pandemic, services for beneficiaries are provided online, including those related to the psychological, legal and social issues. Besides, daily cleaning of surfaces is in place and once a month cleaning company ensures disinfection of walls of the crisis center.

Hotline for protection from violence is located in Tbilisi crisis center – it is a workspace for operators of 116 006. The operators provided information that there were some cases of technical problems, but for such occasions they have spare personal number. Before the visit, employees of the Public Defender's Office made a call to hotline (116-006). During the call operator did not provided them with the information on address of the crisis center without identification and without appointment with the specialist. The Public Defender considers that the information related to the crisis centers should be provided without any obstacles, as the service should fit needs of beneficiaries as much as possible and barriers should not be created while providing information to them.

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<sup>75</sup> There were three beneficiaries in place, during the visit to the shelter and juveniles.

<sup>76</sup> The same problems were revealed during monitoring in 2019, when recommendation was issued to review the existing rule.

**Gori** crisis center for victims of violence was closed at the moment of monitoring. When it was opened and staff was interviewed, we received information that the number of applying persons has not increased during pandemic. No thermo screening for beneficiaries entering the crisis center is provided and the cleaner does not clean surfaces with special liquid. However, there are facemasks and sanitizers for persons who use services of crisis centers. Special action plan is elaborated at crisis center for such cases if beneficiary or staff of the center is tested positive for Corona virus.

**Kutaisi** crisis center for victims of violence was also closed during monitoring process. The interview with staff took place after we called the head of the center.<sup>77</sup> According to the provided information, the number of juvenile applicants is increased in the situation of pandemic. Services to the alleged victims are provided on phone or online. The staff of the center mentioned that after quarantine number of psychological, physical and sexual violence is increased. Crisis center is equipped with deso-barrier, facemasks and sanitizers.

A social worker was on site during the visit to **Ozurgeti** center for victims of violence.<sup>78</sup> During pandemic Ozurgeti center provided mainly psychological service, but there was also possibility to provide other services periodically. The mechanisms of redirecting of beneficiaries was considered problematic. There is low activity of police and local municipality, as they are not redirecting beneficiaries to the center. The staff is also responsible for cleanness of the office and they have appropriate disinfection items in place.

During monitoring **Marneuli** crisis center was also closed.<sup>79</sup>

We can **conclude** that despite positive changes, accessibility of the crisis centers in regions is still problematic. Monitoring Report of the Public Defender for 2019 mentioned, that the number of applying beneficiaries to the regional crisis centers was critically low, this fact raised certain questions related to the providing of correct information on the services of mentioned crisis centers. Unfortunately, during monitoring process, Gori, Kutaisi and Marneuli crisis centers were closed, leading to the conclusion that services are inactive and there is need for effective measures.

The existance of basic necessity items is still problematic in shelters, this includes seasonal clothing and clothes and shoes by aging categories. For example, items for the first need (slippers, shirt, etc.) are in deficit in all shelters except Tbilisi. As to the food, none of the shelters had fruits included in their menus. Beneficiaries focused attention on the variety of breakfast,<sup>80</sup> especially for small children, it was stated that it is necessary to have porridge and dairy products in the morning.

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<sup>77</sup> The interview took place with social agent of the crisis center, Ana Papinashvili and with a psychologist – Irma Bregadze.

<sup>78</sup> Social staff, Liana Mgeladze was interviewed, the lawyer and psychologist were on vacation.

<sup>79</sup> Monitoring took place in September 2020

<sup>80</sup> The breakfast included: tea, coffee and cookies

Staff qualification issue is also important to be mentioned. We welcome the fact that certain part of the staff receives trainings on thematic issues, but none of the shelters involves drivers and security personal in training process. Public Defender considers that it is important to raise awareness of all staff members to reduce non-predictable situations and to provide them with information on specifics of the violence and psycho-emotional conditions of victims.

## Recommendations

### To LEPL Agency for State Care and Assistance for the (Statutory) Victims of Human Trafficking

- To ensure proper functioning of feedback and complaint mechanisms in shelters;
- To ensure high quality psychological support to the victims representing ethnic minorities, on the language they understand;
- To separate staff of Gori and Kutaisi crisis centers from the staff of shelters and to ensure smooth provision of services;
- To eliminate facts of closing of crisis centers in Kutaisi and Gori during working hours and facts of their incomplete work;
- To instruct hotline operators that they should convince the victims initiating the call to use services of the crisis center and not to focus attention on formal statuses that often mislead the victim and leaves him/her beyond the service;
- To provide variety of appropriate seasonal food with appropriate nutrition value to beneficiaries and their dependents;
- To pay more attention to the sanitary-hygienic norms;
- To offer proactively routine tests (at the therapist) to the beneficiaries in order to prevent contagious diseases;
- To provide beneficiaries allocated in shelters with the clothes, shoes and underwear appropriate to the season;
- To pay more attention to creation of yards, inventory and good infrastructure for kids;
- To arrange libraries and supply them with books appropriate for certain age and language;
- To ensure adaptation of physical environment of the shelters and crisis centers, as providing services to all persons with disabilities should be refined;
- To ensure providing of information to Human Rights and Investigation Quality Monitoring Department of Ministry of Internal Affairs, in cases if there is suspicion that police reacts improperly;
- To ensure trainings for administration and personal in perspective of data collection, storage and protection;
- To ensure trainings for staff of shelter, including nurses and nannies on the healthcare issues;
- To plan and to implement informational campaigns for popularization and raising public awareness on services existing in the county, oriented to protection and assistance of victims of trafficking;

- To act appropriately for prevention of new corona virus (Covid-19) in shelters and crisis centers.

**To the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Georgia**

- Police employees should maximally inform victims of domestic violence on services of state shelters and crisis centers operating in Georgia.<sup>81</sup>

**To local municipal bodies**

- To provide service of apartment rent to victims of domestic violence based on actual residence of the victims and not based on their legal address.
- To increase cooperation with shelters and crisis centers and to create special support programs with involvement of victims of violence oriented to their needs.

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<sup>81</sup> Special instruction should be given to the Kvemo Kartli Police Department of Ministry of Internal Affairs on the issues of cooperation with the crisis center.