



**UN JOINT PROGRAMME  
FOR GENDER EQUALITY**

# **MONITORING REPORT ON SERVICE FACILITIES FOR VICTIMS OF VIOLENCE AND TRAFFICKING**



**PUBLIC DEFENDER OF GEORGIA  
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## Introduction

Shelters and crisis centres for victims of violence against women and domestic violence play a crucial role in providing specialized support to those affected.

Victims of violence face a range of interrelated challenges related to their health, safety, financial stability and the well-being of their children. Shelters and crisis centres should be equipped to address these issues, providing women and their children with the support they need to cope with traumatic experiences, end violent relationships, regain self-confidence and start independent lives.

The Office of the Public Defender of Georgia periodically monitors these institutions to assess how well shelter and crisis centre services are provided, the extent to which conditions in these institutions comply with human rights guarantees outlined in national and international standards, and the problems and challenges faced by both the facilities and the individuals using their services.

In 2023, the Gender Department of the Office of the Public Defender of Georgia, with the support of UN Women, conducted monitoring of all State-run shelters and crisis centres operating in Georgia for the victims of domestic violence and trafficking. It is worth noting that the cooperation and willingness of the employees of each shelter and crisis centre greatly contributed to the effective implementation of the monitoring process and the collection of necessary information.

The Public Defender of Georgia hopes that the findings and recommendations of this monitoring report will contribute to the further improvement of existing services.

## Methodology

Based on Article 18 of the Organic Law of Georgia on the Public Defender, the Gender Department of the Office of the Public Defender of Georgia conducts monitoring of institutions that provide services to victims of human trafficking and violence.

Representatives of the Gender Department visited shelters and crisis centres for victims of violence without prior arrangement with the administration of each facility. Specifically, the monitoring team visited shelters in Tbilisi, Batumi, Kutaisi, Gori and Signaghi, as well as crisis centres in Tbilisi, Gori, Kutaisi, Ozurgeti, Marneuli and Telavi. During the on-site visit to the Zugdidi crisis centre, it was discovered that the facility was not operational; therefore, a visit to that institution could not be conducted.<sup>1</sup>

### **The following issues were assessed during the monitoring process:**

- The presence of an adequate, safe and secure living environment.
- Shelter and crisis centre services, including general services such as the provision of food, hygiene supplies, medicines and other essential items, as well as clothing when necessary.
- Specialized services focused on victim assistance and support, including legal assistance (including the protection of legal interests when necessary), psychological and social assistance/rehabilitation, the arrangement and provision of necessary medical care, and assistance in reintegrating into family and society.
- Management of cases and other procedures carried out by shelter and crisis centre staff.
- The situation and needs of the individuals employed at the shelter or crisis centre.
- Handling and responding to crises.

The Public Defender's staff monitored the shelters and crisis centres by conducting personal observations and individually interviewing each facility's staff and service users using a pre-developed, semi-structured questionnaire. The monitoring team reviewed their personal documentation and the management plans for the service users on-site and requested necessary information from the Agency for State Care and Assistance for the Victims of Human Trafficking (State Care Agency).

During monitoring, 15 victims<sup>2</sup> of domestic violence and women using the services were interviewed. Additionally, non-in-depth interviews were conducted with five beneficiaries to assess their satisfaction with the shelter services. Four victims of trafficking were also interviewed. The questionnaires were designed to evaluate the beneficiaries' awareness of protection and support services in the country, their experiences

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1 The visits were conducted on the following dates: 30 May 2023 at the Tbilisi shelter; 15 June 2023 at the Signaghi shelter; 20 June 2023 at the Gori shelter; 27 June 2023 at the Kutaisi shelter; 28 June 2023 at the Kutaisi crisis centre; 28 June 2023 at the Ozurgeti crisis centre; 29 June 2023 at the Batumi shelter; 12 July 2023 at the Marneuli crisis centre; 26 July 2023 at the Tbilisi crisis centre; 19 September 2023 at the Telavi crisis centre; and 22 September 2023 at the Samegrelo-Zemo Svaneti Regional Centre of the Agency for State Care and Assistance for the Victims of Human Trafficking. Due to the identification of several issues during the monitoring of the Gori shelter, an additional visit was made there on 24 January 2024.

2 Only beneficiaries who voluntarily participated in the monitoring process and were present in the shelter during the visit of the Public Defender's representatives were interviewed. Out of the 15 interviewed beneficiaries, eight were adults and seven were minors. The interviews were distributed as follows: eight beneficiaries in the Gori shelter, two in Kutaisi, one in Batumi, two in Signaghi and two in Tbilisi.

with these services, their satisfaction with the shelter environment and initiatives to empower victims and their children.

The monitoring questionnaire allowed for a comprehensive analysis of the practices in place to identify and address the needs of service users in shelters and crisis centres. It also sought to capture the perspectives and experiences of employees regarding the challenges faced within the shelters.

The Office of the Public Defender requested statistical information on the users of services provided by shelters and crisis centres from the Agency for State Care and Assistance for the Victims of Human Trafficking. Additionally, the Office sought details on thematic training and seminars conducted for shelter and crisis centre staff, as well as other issues pertinent to the study.

Finally, based on the analysis of the requested information and documented interviews, a draft monitoring report was prepared outlining the main findings and accompanying recommendations. At the same stage, the special report was shared in writing, and a discussion was organized with representatives of the Agency for State Care and Assistance for the Victims of Human Trafficking to address key issues. As a result, some of the recommendations and remarks proposed by the Agency were incorporated into the final report.

## Main findings

The monitoring process revealed that, in most shelters, beneficiaries feel calm and safe, are satisfied with the services provided and maintain positive relationships with the shelter administration.

The Tbilisi crisis centre deserves special recognition, as its services are continually improving and developing, and there has been an increase in referrals both to the hotline and directly to the centre. Notably, the number of employees at the Tbilisi crisis centre has also increased in response to the rise in referrals.<sup>3</sup>

Despite the positive developments, the services provided by shelters and crisis centres continue to face several challenges, including the following:

- During monitoring, the situation at the Gori shelter was found to be particularly problematic. It was observed that crises were not being properly managed, resulting in a violent, stressful and unfavourable environment for the beneficiaries in the facility.
- As in previous years, social rehabilitation remains particularly problematic. The activities in this area are so limited that they fail to provide long-term and consistent rehabilitation for shelter beneficiaries. This issue is especially acute in the regions, where opportunities are already scarce, necessitating even greater efforts to ensure proper social rehabilitation for the beneficiaries.
- The refurbishment of children's entertainment spaces and the shortage of toys remain significant problems at shelters. This issue is particularly acute in the Batumi shelter, which lacks a library and an entertainment space for children.
- Although all shelter beneficiaries have access to the Internet, the shelters do not have computers available for them to use when needed.

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<sup>3</sup> According to the Agency's letter SCA 4 23 01030837 dated 29 September 2023, the Tbilisi crisis centre employs three psychologists, two social workers, two lawyers and a manager.

- The living environment in shelters has not improved significantly. Many shelters still require repair work and the replacement of outdated inventory and furnishings.
- There is no unified list of basic hygiene and personal care items that the shelters should supply to the beneficiaries.
- The locations of the Batumi and Kutaisi shelters remain a concern. The situation at the Batumi shelter is particularly problematic, with constant crowds and conflicts leading to feelings of insecurity and fear among beneficiaries. Despite repeated recommendations from the Public Defender regarding the institution's location and the need to fence the garden, the issue remains unresolved.
- During monitoring, it was revealed that the referral rate to crisis centres located in the regions is low. Additionally, these centres still need both human and material resources to enhance their effectiveness.
- The professional capabilities of employees are crucial for effective service delivery. Unfortunately, staff working in shelters and crisis centres often cite a lack of training as a significant issue. Efforts to provide training and enhance their professional capacity should be strengthened in this regard.

## Access to protection and assistance services for the victims of violence

During the reporting period, significant steps were taken to improve access to services for victims of violence against women and domestic violence. A major barrier that persisted over the years was the requirement for victims to have official 'victim' status as a prerequisite for receiving protection and assistance services. This barrier was removed through legislative amendments. Today, services provided by shelters and crisis centres are determined by the specific needs of the victim and based on objective criteria in the existing regulations.<sup>4</sup> Based on the recent changes, new questionnaires were developed to identify potential victims better. Additionally, a new shelter is planned to open in Tbilisi, which will accommodate 10 beneficiaries.<sup>5</sup>

The analysis of information gathered by the Office of the Public Defender during interviews with victims of violence and those at the shelters reveals<sup>6</sup> that many victims had limited knowledge about protection and support services before entering the shelter. This problem was particularly evident in the case of ethnic Azerbaijani minor-aged victims.<sup>7</sup> Most of the beneficiaries interviewed were also unaware of the counselling hotline for women victims of violence and domestic violence (116 006). This underscores the need to continue efforts to raise awareness, particularly in regions populated by ethnic minorities. It also highlights the importance of providing information in a language that is understandable to those receiving shelter services.

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4 Law of Georgia on the Elimination of Violence against Women and/or Domestic Violence, and the Protection and Support of Victims of Such Violence (Article 18, paragraph 3).

5 It should be noted that the new shelter will feature a high standard of amenities, with each beneficiary's room equipped with a private bathroom.

6 We interviewed a total of 15 beneficiaries (as well as five additional beneficiaries), of whom seven were minors, although they were housed independently in the shelter. We interviewed one adult beneficiary in Batumi, two adult beneficiaries in Kutaisi, two minor beneficiaries in Tbilisi, one adult and one minor beneficiary in Sighnaghi, and four adult and four minor beneficiaries in Gori. In addition to these 15 beneficiaries, we interviewed one adult trafficking victim in the Gori shelter and three adult trafficking victims in Kutaisi.

7 Three out of four Azerbaijani beneficiaries interviewed indicated that they had no information about protection and assistance services.

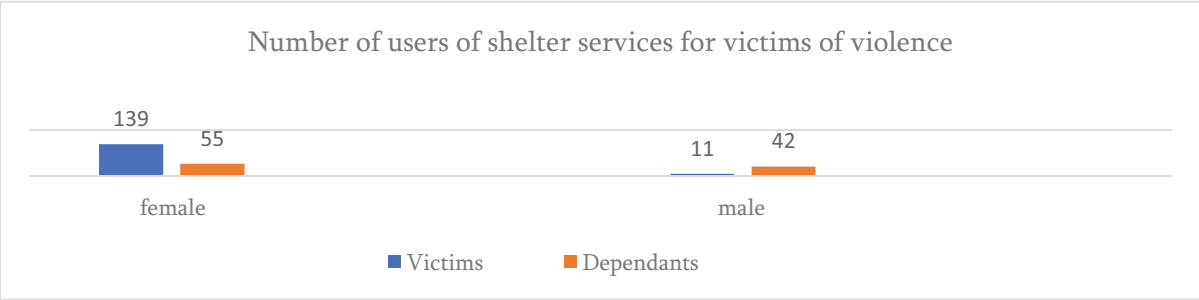
Although awareness of the hotline is low among shelter seekers, it is encouraging to note that the number of calls received and consultations provided by the service is increasing. In 2023, the hotline (116 006) of the Agency for State Care and Assistance for the Victims of Human Trafficking received 4,100 messages.<sup>8</sup>

It should be noted that most of the beneficiaries interviewed during the monitoring process evaluated the police response and their relationship with the police positively. However, they also reported some negative experiences.<sup>9</sup>

The analysis of the information obtained during monitoring also reveals that societal stereotypes regarding domestic violence remain a significant challenge. Many victims ended up in shelters due to the lack of a support network. One beneficiary noted that when she reported domestic violence, “everyone turned me away”.

**Statistics on service users and the shelter environment**

In 2023, 247 individuals benefited from the services of shelters for victims of violence.<sup>10</sup> Among the existing shelters in the country, the Tbilisi shelter provided services to the greatest number of people, accommodating 63 individuals, while the Batumi shelter provided services to the fewest, accommodating 24 individuals. Figure 1 illustrates the number of people using the service.



Shelters and crisis centres should create an environment for beneficiaries that protects them from discrimination, violence and neglect. A calm and safe environment in the shelter is essential for the proper rehabilitation of beneficiaries.

In this regard, the monitoring group of the Public Defender’s Office identified significant challenges at the service facility for victims of violence in Gori. According to information obtained during the monitoring process, an adult beneficiary at the facility psychologically abused three minor-aged beneficiaries placed in the shelter, used coercion and exhibited a transphobic attitude towards one of the beneficiaries. Although the shelter administration was informed, they failed to take the necessary measures.

8 Letter of the Agency for State Care and Assistance for the Victims of Human Trafficking SCA 7 24 00089791, 25 January 2024.  
 9 According to one beneficiary, the police did not issue a restraining order and refused to take them to the shelter. The proper response was provided only after the beneficiary requested a change of investigator and police station. Another beneficiary reported that the police did not respond appropriately, and they were admitted to the shelter only with the assistance of the prosecutor.  
 10 Letter of the Agency for State Care and Assistance for the Victims of Human Trafficking SCA 7 24 00089791, 25 January 2024.



It is important to note that the minors sought help from the monitoring group of the Public Defender, stating that their stay in the shelter had become unbearable due to the violence they were subjected to. Despite bringing this issue to light,<sup>11</sup> the State Care Agency did not respond promptly. The alleged abuser was only separated from the children after an investigation was launched; the person was identified as a suspect and was subsequently arrested.<sup>12</sup>

The individual cases examined by the Public Defender highlight a conflicting environment at the service facility for victims of violence in Gori. Throughout 2023, conflicts arose among the beneficiaries and between the beneficiaries and the administration.<sup>13</sup>

The detected violations indicate that managing crises and consistently adhering to the charter's norms to ensure peaceful coexistence among beneficiaries are problematic for the Gori shelter. Special control and attention are crucial to prevent similar cases in the future and to protect beneficiaries from experiencing violence again in a place where they should feel safe and rehabilitated.

When service users ignore the by-laws, it creates chaos at the shelters, making it impossible for beneficiaries to live together peacefully, undergo rehabilitation and prepare for an independent life. This, ultimately, undermines the very purpose of the service.

Most beneficiaries interviewed at the shelters of Tbilisi, Signaghi, Batumi and Kutaisi reported finding a safe and friendly environment upon their arrival. They also stated that their rights and duties were explained to them both orally and in writing and that the existing rules were acceptable to them. Additionally, the interviewed beneficiaries mentioned having a good relationship with the shelter staff.

## Health care

Upon admission to a shelter, beneficiaries' health conditions are assessed through an oral interview, and a special form is filled in. If there are any health complaints, they are referred to the appropriate specialist.<sup>14</sup> Some of the interviewed beneficiaries utilized the available medical services, including consultations with doctors and funding for health-related examinations, and they did not express any complaints about the services obtained. According to the State Care Agency, medical services were provided to 138 service recipients.<sup>15</sup>

It is important to note that, according to the shelter administration representatives, victims of sexual violence undergo a medical examination<sup>16</sup> for sexually transmitted diseases<sup>17</sup> within a specified period after their

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11 The Public Defender's Monitoring Group immediately provided information to the Agency for State Care and Assistance for the Victims of Human Trafficking, as well as the Human Rights Protection and Investigation Quality Monitoring Department of the Ministry of Internal Affairs.

12 Letter of the Ministry of Internal Affairs MIA 1 23 01900849, 3 July 2023.

13 Cases 11447/23, 11553/23 and 11780/23.

14 It is important to note that according to one of the employees interviewed at the shelter, it would be good to conclude a contract and sign a memorandum with one medical institution so that there is no need to explain the services every time.

15 Letter of the Agency for State Care and Assistance for the Victims of Human Trafficking SCA 7 24 00089791, 25 January 2024.

16 A victim of sexual violence is examined for sexually transmitted diseases within two calendar days after registration at the shelter. If the last calendar day falls on a holiday or non-working day, the examination will take place on the next working day.

17 It is also worth noting that medical examinations are conducted for beneficiaries who report experiencing sexual violence after a certain period following their placement in the shelter.

placement in a shelter. The head of the Gori shelter stated that all beneficiaries are examined for sexually transmitted diseases if they choose to do so. The examination is provided by the NGO “Step to the Future”.<sup>18</sup>

As was the case in 2022, supplies of basic medicines in the institutions remain scarce.<sup>19</sup> According to the monitoring information, in urgent medical situations, nurses employed at the shelters call for emergency medical help. However, there are instances when providing first aid before the arrival of emergency services may be necessary. Therefore, it is crucial to systematically train nurses and other shelter staff. However, according to the monitoring information, first-aid training is not currently provided for nurses.<sup>20</sup>

Case management for beneficiaries with mental health issues is problematic. According to shelter administration, complete information about a beneficiary’s mental health is not provided before placement in the shelter.<sup>21</sup> Shelters must receive detailed information about a person’s mental health condition. This allows shelter administration to identify beneficiaries with mental health issues and address their needs effectively, ensuring appropriate case management and minimizing risks to both beneficiaries and staff.

## Legal aid, rehabilitation and employment

Shelter beneficiaries also receive legal and psychological services. The shelter lawyer offers legal consultations, informs beneficiaries about the mechanisms for obtaining restraining and protective orders, and advises beneficiaries on their rights. Additionally, the lawyer provides guidance on civil legal issues such as divorce, alimony, child custody and property disputes. According to the provided information, 202 beneficiaries received legal consultations in 2023, and legal services were provided to 38 beneficiaries.<sup>22</sup>

Some beneficiaries who use the services of a psychologist are satisfied with the support provided. They report receiving psychological services once a week as a standard and more frequently if necessary.

It should be noted that, according to the psychologist at the Sighnaghi shelter, the facility does not have a separate workspace available, which poses the risk of violating beneficiaries’ privacy. To provide psychological services effectively, it is crucial to establish a dedicated space that offers a suitable environment for psychological services, including for minors. This space should allow for confidential interviews without disrupting the work of other shelter staff.<sup>23</sup>

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18 The information provided by the shelter director is reassuring. However, according to one beneficiary, who is a victim of alleged sexual violence, she has not been tested for sexually transmitted diseases. This suggests that the opportunity for such an examination is not always implemented in practice.

19 The Gori shelter is particularly noteworthy in this context, as no first-aid medicines were found during the initial monitoring visit. During the follow-up visit, some medicines were present, but one beneficiary reported that the shelter does not have strong or effective pain medication available.

20 According to one of the nurses, she has experience in the medical field and can provide first aid. However, not all nurses have similar expertise.

21 Sometimes, a person using the shelter’s services is registered at an outpatient psychiatric facility, and the shelter only becomes aware of this when the person’s health condition worsens.

22 Letter of the Agency for State Care and Assistance for the Victims of Human Trafficking SCA 7 24 00089791, 25 January 2024.

23 At the Sighnaghi shelter, where the psychologist and lawyer share the same workspace, protecting the beneficiary’s confidentiality requires that the lawyer vacate the shared space and continue their work elsewhere during therapy sessions.

The lack of educational, entertainment and rehabilitation events at the shelters has been identified as a problem. Shelter staff noted that they organize such events on their own initiative.<sup>24</sup> Although the shelter employees mentioned various rehabilitation and entertainment events, the interviewed beneficiaries could not recall participating in any events organized by the shelter.<sup>25</sup>

The proper rehabilitation of beneficiaries and comprehensive case management are unequivocally hindered by the exclusion of key specialists, such as lawyers and social workers, from the multidisciplinary team of the shelter. During the monitoring process, it was observed that the position of lawyer was vacant at the Batumi shelter,<sup>26</sup> there was no social worker at the Tbilisi shelter, and the Signaghi shelter also lacked a social worker, whose functions were handled by a lawyer and a psychologist.<sup>27</sup> It is crucial to fill these vacancies promptly to ensure effective rehabilitation and support for the beneficiaries.

The refurbishment of children's entertainment spaces and the purchase of necessary and safe toys remain significant problems at shelters. Monitoring has revealed an ongoing shortage of children's toys and a lack of interesting entertainment facilities for adults.

The absence of a library and children's entertainment spaces in the Batumi shelter is particularly problematic, both inside the shelter building and in its garden. Additionally, the garden of the Kutaisi shelter lacks children's entertainment facilities, such as a slide or swing.

Internet access is available to beneficiaries at all shelters. However, according to the beneficiaries, the Internet service at the Gori shelter is faulty.<sup>28</sup>

Shelter employees identify cooperation and personal contact with the State Employment Support Agency as a key source of employment opportunities for beneficiaries. According to the Agency, 11 beneficiaries from the Tbilisi shelter found employment in 2023 (although none were placed through the shelter's employment programme). At other shelters, the rates of employment and retraining are either very low or non-existent.<sup>29</sup> Both the monitoring information and statistics indicate that shelters need to intensify their efforts to enhance training and employment opportunities for beneficiaries.

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24 Therefore, organizing educational, rehabilitation and recreational events at the shelter depends solely on the contacts and capabilities of the shelter director and other employees.

25 The information officially provided by the Agency also confirms the lack of recreational and entertainment events. In most cases, these activities are limited to walks in the park or attending festive and entertainment events organized by the city hall in the municipalities. Letter of the Agency for State Care and Assistance for the Victims of Human Trafficking SCA 7 24 00089791, 25 January 2024.

26 Although the director of the Batumi shelter states that beneficiaries receive legal consultations from the Legal Aid Bureau, a representative from the Legal Aid Bureau does not join the shelter's multidisciplinary team and does not participate in the process of assessing or reviewing the beneficiaries' needs.

27 According to the officially provided information, the position of one lawyer has been vacant at the Batumi shelter since 24 October 2022, and the appointment of an employee is in progress. Similarly, the position of one social worker has been vacant at the Signaghi shelter since 1 October 2022 (SCA 7 2400089791, 25 January 2024).

28 According to the beneficiaries, Internet access at the Gori shelter is only available on the first floor. As a result, one beneficiary reported using mobile Internet due to this limitation.

29 At the Gori shelter, 10 beneficiaries were offered employment opportunities, but none expressed interest. None participated in the professional training programme. At the Kutaisi shelter, two beneficiaries were registered with the Kutaisi office of the State Employment Support Agency, but none benefited from the vocational training programme. At the Signaghi shelter, five beneficiaries participated in the vocational training and employment promotion programme, and two were employed in private businesses. The Batumi shelter has experience working with the "Employment Centre" for employment opportunities, but they did not provide employment statistics.

It is important to note that one beneficiary identified their inability to obtain the materials or equipment necessary to support their employment as a problem. Therefore, shelters should make greater efforts to collaborate with non-governmental organizations or municipalities. This would help beneficiaries who have skills in certain crafts or have undergone vocational training to be better supported in finding employment or starting their own businesses.

## Adequate, safe and secure living conditions and hygiene

Shelter monitoring indicates that the living environment in State-run shelters has not significantly improved since the previous reporting period.

All State-run shelters have a security guard to ensure the safety of beneficiaries and staff. However, the shelters lack video surveillance (except at the entrance) and do not have an alarm system connected to the police, which would guarantee the rapid implementation of security measures.

The monitoring process did not reveal any cases in which a shelter's privacy was violated or the security of its beneficiaries was compromised by abusers. However, as in previous years, the locations of the Batumi and Kutaisi shelters remain problematic. The address of each shelter has not changed, and they are still situated in crowded areas, which poses a risk to both the confidentiality of the shelters and the safety of the beneficiaries. In addition, it is particularly worrying that despite numerous appeals and recommendations issued by the Public Defender, the garden of the Batumi shelter is still not separated from adjacent public areas by a fence. This situation poses significant challenges in terms of protecting the shelter's territory from outsiders and ensuring the safe use of the garden by minors. According to the Agency for State Care and Assistance for the Victims of Human Trafficking,<sup>30</sup> the construction of a separation fence is planned for 2024, and the implementation of this measure will be monitored by the Public Defender's Office. It is encouraging that efforts to renovate the garden of the Tbilisi shelter and build a fence have already begun.

Sanitary and hygienic norms are generally observed at the shelters, except for the cleanliness and hygiene conditions in the bathrooms of the Kutaisi shelter.<sup>31</sup> Monitoring also revealed that the plumbing in all shelters needs to be replaced.<sup>32</sup> Although the Signaghi, Tbilisi and Gori shelters have been renovated and repaired in recent years, the monitoring process revealed a need for cosmetic repairs.<sup>33</sup>

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30 Letter of the Agency for State Care and Assistance for the Victims of Human Trafficking SCA 7 24 00089791, 25 January 2024.

31 In the common bathrooms of the Kutaisi shelter, the shower walls were dirty. According to the employee of the Kutaisi shelter, the cleaning staff of the shelter clean the restrooms together with the beneficiaries.

32 At the Gori shelter, none of the toilet flushing system is functional, there is no hot water in the taps, and only one of the three showers is working. During a follow-up visit to the Gori shelter, it was found that the heating system had been broken for a month, resulting in a lack of hot water and creating difficult living conditions for the beneficiaries. This issue has since been resolved. At the Signaghi and Kutaisi shelters, a tap is broken and leaking. At the Kutaisi shelter, the toilet is also broken, violating sanitary and hygienic norms. At the Batumi shelter, the toilet's flushing system is broken, and there is a leaking tap. Part of the bathroom on the second floor, which is not functional, requires technical repairs. Additionally, the toilet flusher in one bathroom is broken, the faucet in the toilet for persons with disabilities is broken, and the shower needs to be replaced.

33 At the Tbilisi shelter, the walls in the corridor on the first floor are damp and peeling. At the Gori shelter, the baseboards in the corridor have come loose, and the protective tape on the stairs is also loose. At the Signaghi shelter, the rooms need repairs, and the walls need to be repainted.

The Batumi and Kutaisi shelters require a complete renovation and the replacement of furniture, as the furniture in both the common areas and bedrooms is damaged and outdated. Additionally, some of the damaged items in the Batumi and Kutaisi shelters pose a risk to underage beneficiaries.<sup>34</sup> The shelters in Tbilisi and Signaghi also need the furniture replaced in specific areas.<sup>35</sup>

The monitoring process revealed that there are no computers available in the common areas or libraries of the shelters for the use of beneficiaries.<sup>36</sup> As a result, beneficiaries must use the computers belonging to shelter employees when needed. This not only limits the beneficiaries' access to computers but also poses a risk to the data stored on the staff's computers, compromising information security.<sup>37</sup> The Batumi shelter lacks a dedicated space for a library and does not have the necessary books for adults, teenagers and children.<sup>38</sup> Although the common space in the Signaghi shelter has been renovated, there is still no dedicated space for a library.

All shelters had an adequate supply of hygiene products.<sup>39</sup> However, despite the recommendation of the Public Defender, the shelters still lack important necessities.<sup>40</sup>

It should be noted that there is no list<sup>41</sup> of basic hygiene and personal care items that must be supplied to all shelters according to the requirements. The provision of seasonal clothing and footwear<sup>42</sup> remains problematic, as shelters primarily depend on donations and clothing provided by the shelter staff themselves.<sup>43</sup>

It should be noted that shelters and crisis centres have a complaint box and a feedback log. However, the complaint box in the Gori shelter is not placed in a location accessible to everyone,<sup>44</sup> which hinders the beneficiaries' ability to use the complaint box.

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34 In one of the bedrooms of the Batumi shelter, the plug socket is damaged. Additionally, in the common room of the Kutaisi shelter, the central heating radiator is damaged.

35 In the bedroom designated for persons with disabilities, the wardrobe drawers are damaged.

36 Additionally, the library in the Tbilisi shelter is closed and is opened by the staff only when needed.

37 It should be noted that during the monitoring process, no violations of personal data were detected.

38 According to the shelter staff, they bring interesting books for the beneficiaries from home.

39 It is worth noting that several beneficiaries reported that the personal hygiene products were both insufficient and of low quality.

40 According to the shelters, the Agency for State Care and Assistance for the Victims of Human Trafficking has been informed about the need for underwear. However, despite this request, underwear was not provided. In contrast, a letter dated 29 September 2023 (SCA 4 23 01030837) from the State Care Agency included a list of personal hygiene products delivered in February and March according to the institutions' requirements. This list clearly shows that underwear was not included.

41 The list of basic hygiene and personal needs should include such items as a comb, deodorant, underwear, socks, slippers, a bra, a nightgown, etc.

42 According to a beneficiary of the Gori shelter, when she arrived at the shelter, she only had the clothes she was wearing. She reported that she slept in the same clothes for six days, as the shelter staff did not offer her any additional clothing.

43 Consequently, the availability of clothing and footwear supplies in shelters often depends on the contacts and capabilities of shelter directors.

44 The complaint box is placed in an elevated location.

## Nutrition

All State-run shelters had a variety of food supplies,<sup>45</sup> including seasonal fruits and vegetables available at the time of monitoring.

Monitoring revealed that all shelters follow a standard menu. However, practices for replacing or removing food vary between shelters. For instance, the director of the Gori shelter stated that she does not have the authority to change the menu, so beneficiaries must eat what is provided that day. In contrast, an employee at the Signaghi shelter indicated that if a beneficiary does not want or cannot eat the food on the menu, it can be changed based on a relevant document. Additionally, according to established practices, if a beneficiary does not or cannot eat a particular main meal, the only alternative offered is often low-calorie food, such as a salad. Moreover, most of the food is concentrated in the afternoon at lunch, while breakfast and dinner offer a limited choice of options.

Some shelter beneficiaries have reported that food is an issue. According to some beneficiaries at the Gori and Batumi shelters, while they receive four meals a day, these meals are insufficient and lack variety.<sup>46</sup>

Beneficiaries also reported feeling hungry because they did not like the provided food (such as cabbage salad, butter and porridge for breakfast). Additionally, the daily menus do not include options for vegetarians, and there are no separate menus to accommodate specific dietary needs, such as for diabetics.

According to the shelter staff, one of the beneficiaries had an eating disorder.<sup>47</sup> However, they did not apply any specific approach to address it.

## Assessment of crisis centres for victims of violence

In 2023, the geographic coverage of services for victims of violence was expanded, and new crisis centres were established in Zugdidi and Telavi—an undoubtedly important step. However, monitoring revealed that these crisis centres were only nominally opened and were not ready to provide full services. Moreover, as of September 2023, the crisis centre in Zugdidi was found to be completely non-functional.<sup>48</sup> It is also problematic that the newly opened Telavi crisis centre was still undergoing renovation, and neither the Telavi nor Zugdidi crisis centres are accessible to people with disabilities.<sup>49</sup>

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45 Dairy products, beef and chicken, fish, cereals, etc.

46 At the Gori shelter, it was further noted that bread, some fruits and coffee are of low quality.

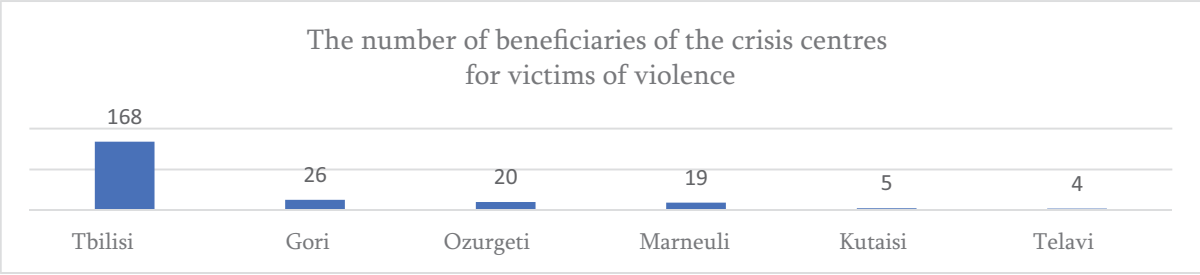
47 No diagnosis was provided by a specialist.

48 The visit to the Telavi crisis centre was carried out on 19 September 2023 and to Zugdidi on 22 September. As mentioned above, the Zugdidi crisis centre was not functional at all, and the manager of the Telavi crisis centre was appointed in April 2023. During the visit, the director of the crisis centre noted that they have selected employees to fill the positions of psychologist and lawyer, and the crisis centre will be able to provide a perfect service after proper staffing.

49 We were not given the opportunity to assess the physical environment of the Zugdidi crisis centre since it was closed. However, according to the representatives of the State Care Agency, the crisis centre is located on the second floor of the building and is not adapted for people with disabilities.

It is commendable that during the reporting period, the crisis centre for victims of violence in Tbilisi underwent renovation and implemented several organizational changes, all of which will enhance the quality of service delivery.<sup>50</sup>

During the interviews, crisis centre employees recalled several awareness-raising events.<sup>51</sup> However, despite these information meetings and campaigns, Figure 2 shows that referrals to crisis centres in the regions are still low compared to Tbilisi.



It is important to further strengthen the information campaigns and equip the regional crisis centres with the necessary resources. Achieving an increase in referrals closely depends on the work of the crisis centre representatives and their cooperation with relevant agencies in contact with victims of violence.

It is commendable that crisis centres offer online services to beneficiaries. However, a representative from one of the crisis centres noted that providing online services in the region poses challenges. According to the information provided, there are instances in which victims of violence decline the services of the crisis centre because they cannot afford the cost of transportation to the facility. The representative of the Ozurgeti crisis centre suggested that it would be beneficial to establish dedicated spaces in municipalities where beneficiaries from rural areas could receive consultations in a more accessible location.

**Protection and assistance for victims of (human) trafficking**

The service centres for victims of trafficking in Tbilisi and Batumi offer 24-hour accommodation (at the shelters), psychological rehabilitation, provision/arrangement of medical services, legal support and, if needed, interpretation services.

According to the information provided by the State Care Agency in 2023, 11 victims of human trafficking benefited from the shelters and crisis centres. In 2023, eight victims of human trafficking also received compensation.<sup>52</sup>

50 One lawyer and one social worker have been added to the Tbilisi crisis centre. Additionally, an integrated children’s centre (Barnahus) operates within the facility. During the monitoring process, the head of the institution noted that employees assist one another with their functions as needed, ensuring smooth service delivery to the beneficiaries. Furthermore, hotline software has been implemented, and plans are under way to adapt the hotline for persons with disabilities.

51 Heads of the crisis centres participate in TV programmes and hold meetings with various focus groups. They also actively engage in the annual 16 Days of Activism against Gender-Based Violence campaign. Additionally, awareness-raising efforts on gender equality and violence against women are ongoing with the beneficiaries of the crisis centres.

52 Letter of the Agency for State Care and Assistance for the Victims of Human Trafficking SCA 7 24 00089791, 25 January 2024.

According to the information obtained during monitoring, assistance provided to victims of trafficking is primarily limited to receiving compensation and returning to their families. Shelters collaborate with the Migration Department of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Georgia and with the Ministry of Justice of Georgia.

During the monitoring process by the Public Defender's Office, no victims of trafficking were placed in the shelters for victims of trafficking in Tbilisi and Batumi. As a result, the report did not include their opinions about their inclusion in the shelter or their satisfaction with the service. However, representatives of the Public Defender of Georgia met with three victims of trafficking at the Kutaisi shelter for victims of violence, where their placement was due to investigative interest. According to the information received, the shelter was working on compensation issues and planned to return the victims to their home country. Additionally, two of the trafficking victims found employment with the help of the shelter. As the victims spoke neither Georgian nor any other language besides their native tongue, communication was facilitated by the use of online translation tools (e.g. Google Translate), and they expressed satisfaction with the service provided. Furthermore, representatives of the Public Defender of Georgia met with one victim of trafficking at the Gori shelter for victims of violence who also expressed satisfaction with the service.

The assessments of adequate, safe and secure living conditions, as well as hygiene and nutrition, for the victims of trafficking are detailed in the relevant chapters above.

### **Situation and needs of persons employed by the shelters and crisis centres**

During the monitoring of shelters and crisis centres, attention was given to the working conditions of employees, their opportunities for professional development and the potential for staff to participate in activities aimed at preventing professional burnout.

Most employees<sup>53</sup> interviewed by the Office of the Public Defender highlighted a lack of training and retraining opportunities. Psychologists were an exception, as they received training throughout the year.<sup>54</sup> Personnel in these institutions need to be periodically consulted about their training needs and for their retraining to be updated regarding their profession, rights and duties.

Considering that only a nurse remains at each shelter during non-working hours and holidays, special emphasis should be placed on training nurses and strengthening their ability to effectively handle crises. Additionally, it is important to train all shelter employees on the specifics of domestic violence, including its forms.<sup>55</sup>

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53 During the monitoring process, the persons employed at the shelter were interviewed based on specially prepared questionnaires, namely for the following positions: psychologist, social worker, nurse, lawyer and director of the shelter. The interviews were conducted with the following persons: a nurse, an accountant and a nanny.

54 It should be noted here that only professional trainings are conducted for psychologists. Moreover, no thematic trainings (e.g. on gender equality, the rights of LGBT+ persons, etc.) were conducted for psychologists.

55 These employees include specialists, accountants, drivers, security personnel and employees within the programme of employment of socially vulnerable persons.



The LEPL Agency for State Care and Assistance for the Victims of Human Trafficking provided the monitoring team with information about the training conducted in 2023 for the employees of shelters and crisis centres. The scarcity of training topics and employees participating in them is visible from the provided information.<sup>56</sup>

According to the information obtained during monitoring, a psychologist provides support to employees to help prevent professional burnout. However, it was noted that at the shelters and crisis centres located in the regions, such support is not provided in an official capacity. Additionally, employees expressed the need for training sessions that include joint meetings, as such meetings would help facilitate the sharing of experiences.<sup>57</sup>

It should be noted that many employees identified low pay as a significant challenge. To retain qualified staff in shelters and crisis centres and to attract more professionals to fill vacant positions, it is essential to offer remuneration that is commensurate with the level of responsibility involved.

## Recommendations

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

- Conduct an awareness-raising campaign on the topic of violence against women and domestic violence, including the existing victim protection and support services in the country, with a targeted focus on regions inhabited by ethnic minorities;
- Ask the personnel employed at the institutions about the need for training and retraining;
- Systematically train nurses and other shelter staff in emergency care;
- Provide all shelters with first-aid medicines;
- Update the basic list of hygiene and personal items, which will be mandatory for all shelters;
- Instruct the Gori shelter to take appropriate disciplinary action against any beneficiary who violates the obligations and rules stipulated by the statute (internal rules) of the Gori institution with respect to providing services to victims of violence;
- Plan and implement rehabilitation, recreation and entertainment programmes and events;
- Ensure the placement of computers in the shelter libraries, which the beneficiaries of the shelter can use without hindrance;
- Create a library in the Batumi shelter, and include appropriate literature for different age groups;

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56 A letter dated 29 September 2023 (2023 SCA 4 23 01030837) outlined the topics of various trainings conducted for shelter staff: Simulation training on human trafficking: one lawyer, one psychologist, one other staff member. Practical skills of cognitive behavioural therapy: 12 psychologists. Improvement of the system against gender violence: two lawyers, one psychologist, three social workers, five other personnel. Identification of minor-aged victims of human trafficking and specifics of service provision: four social workers, eight other staff members. Counselling and psychosocial support for families with vulnerable children: one social worker. EMDR training by international experts: five psychologists. Issues related to combating violence against women and domestic violence: two lawyers, one psychologist, three social workers, six other staff members. Stress management and communication skills: two employees. Additionally, the following trainings were planned for 2023: Strengthening child protection systems and services in Georgia. Ensuring hotline accessibility for children with disabilities.

57 For example, at the Ozurgeti crisis centre, it was noted that the crisis centres do not have a single standard by which to calculate the statistics, and a joint meeting will help to solve the issue.

- Carry out appropriate works to improve Internet access at all points in the Gori shelter;
- Provide entertainment and cognitive games for adults at all shelters;
- Arrange the garden at all shelters in such a way that it is possible to install and/or update the equipment necessary for the entertainment and rehabilitation of the minor-aged beneficiaries;
- Review the inventory in shelters and crisis centres, and update as needed;
- Assess the current condition of the shelters in Batumi and Kutaisi; and, as a result of the assessment, carry out repairs and replace the furniture;
- Periodically assess the issue of children's safety in shelters, and replace the electric sockets and heating systems in the rooms as soon as they are damaged;
- Promptly construct a fence on the territory of both the Tbilisi shelter and the Batumi shelter;
- Place the Gori shelter's complaint box in a location that will be accessible to everyone, including people with disabilities;
- Review existing menus, and adjust them accordingly; and develop separate menus to accommodate dietary and diabetic needs;
- Develop a common approach to making substitutions to menu items at all shelters.