



**Women's
Support
Center**

ANNUAL REPORT 2024

Empowering Lives,
Transforming Futures:
A Year of Impact and Progress



Reflecting on 2024, I am filled with pride and gratitude to highlight this year's accomplishments at the Women's Support Center. It's been a year of both challenges and achievements as we've continued providing life-saving support to survivors of domestic violence, pushing for much-needed changes in the system, and working toward ending the cycle of abuse in Armenia.

Working with survivors—women and children who often arrive at our doors in despair—and witnessing their transformation is what drives us every day. Each person we assist has a unique journey, and seeing them regain their strength and take steps toward a better future, with their children, is a powerful reminder of the importance of our work. While assisting survivors is strenuous, and supporting them takes many weeks or months, our work is also focused on improving the system to combat violence in Armenian families so it doesn't leave lasting scars on children or perpetuate abuse in future generations.

As you will see in this report, one of our proudest moments this year was advocating for and finally obtaining major changes to the domestic

violence and criminal laws. This victory is a huge step forward for legal protections for survivors and reflects the hard work of our team, and especially Ms. Zaruhi Batoyan, a member of Armenia's parliament, who diligently worked to ensure these amendments were ratified. We must hold perpetrators accountable for their actions. This is crucial not only for the victim, but also as a message to society that abuse and violence are crimes.

One of our biggest challenges this year was the creation of a unified police force, which means that we will no longer have a specialized domestic violence police division. Now, we face the task of training 1,800 police officers who currently do not understand what domestic abuse is or how to respond to such incidents.

So, as we gain some and lose some, our fight to empower women, defend them, and address their needs to live a life free of abuse continues. I would like to thank our partners and donors who assist us in this journey, and especially our team, for their hard work around-the-clock, as most severe cases arrive in the middle of the night!

With gratitude,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Maro Matosian', written in a cursive style.

Maro Matosian
Executive Director
Women's Support Center



*A survivor speaking about the support she received at our center.
Photo credit: Sisak Rafaelyan.*

Our Mission, Vision, and Pillars

The Women's Support Center is Armenia's leading organization focused on preventing and addressing domestic violence. We are committed to protecting, rehabilitating, and empowering survivors while working to transform the legal, educational, and social systems that enable domestic abuse.

Our efforts drive change in three key areas:

- Providing comprehensive support to women and children affected by domestic violence
- Promoting healthy, respectful, and non-violent relationships by educating the community and providing training to first responders
- Strengthening institutional responses to domestic violence

2024 In Numbers

- 1,223 women and children received domestic violence services
- 274 women and children received safe shelter
- 2,320 hotline calls
- 1,907 social consultations
- 611 adult and child therapy sessions, along with parent consultations
- 808 legal consultations
- 167 court hearings and investigative actions
- 44 women and children received medical assistance
- 28 women and children from Artsakh received services
- 46 women received vocational training and/or professional tools to jumpstart careers



*Women residing at our safe houses.
Photo credit: Nazik Armenakyan.*



Survivors trained at the French-Armenian Vocational Education Center, with support from the French Embassy, pose alongside French Ambassador Olivier Decottignies. Photo credit: Sisak Rafaelyan



Growth and Impact

Since 2020, the Women's Support Center has seen a significant increase in the number of women seeking assistance, particularly those at high risk. This trend reflects a growing demand for domestic violence services, driven by heightened awareness, improved legal mechanisms, expanded service availability, and the ongoing impacts of war and displacement. The rise in numbers is also influenced by the police mandate requiring referrals of shelter cases to our organization, ensuring that high-risk survivors are directed to specialized care. Additionally, many survivors reach us through word of mouth, as the exceptional quality of our support inspires others to seek and recommend our services. The table below illustrates this growth:

Year	Women and children provided services	Women sheltered	Children sheltered
2020	724	73	101
2021	654	60	100
2022	984	80	123
2023	1,085	95	170
2024	1,223	98	176

Highlight on Safe Shelter

Our domestic violence shelters provide a safe and supportive environment, offering much more than just a place to stay. We focus on holistic care for women and children, ensuring they receive not only a safe refuge but also access to counseling, therapy, and legal assistance. In addition to shelter, we provide essential items such as clothing, hygiene products, and household goods, along with three nutritious meals a day. Residents enjoy private bedrooms, communal living spaces, and dedicated areas for children to play and learn. We cater to urgent and ongoing needs, including medical care and social services, ensuring families receive comprehensive support. Throughout their stay, women are encouraged to participate in workshops designed to enhance their well-being, covering topics such as safety planning, parenting skills, and personal development. Additionally, we offer an economic empowerment program that provides training in business and vocational skills, along with seed funding to help launch personal businesses.



*Children residing at our safe houses.
Photo credit: Nazik Armenakyan*



*A survivor residing at our safe house.
Photo credit: Nazik Armenakyan.*

Lilit's Story of Survival

Lilit endured two decades of harrowing abuse, facing relentless emotional and physical violence from her husband, who controlled every aspect of her life, including her finances. Isolated and fearful for herself and her three children, she felt trapped in a cycle of

escalating abuse. After a particularly violent episode in which her husband threatened her children, Lilit found the strength to escape. Seeking help from the police, who recognized the gravity of her situation, she and her children were swiftly transferred to our shelter for safety.

At our shelter, Lilit received comprehensive support to begin her healing journey. Our team provided immediate medical care, psychological counseling, and legal assistance, helping her secure a protection order. Therapy sessions helped her process years of trauma, while workshops on safety planning and financial independence empowered her to rebuild her life. With encouragement from our staff, Lilit discovered a talent for floristry and enrolled in a job training program, setting her on the path to self-sufficiency.

Today, Lilit and her children are rebuilding their lives free from abuse. With our help, Lilit secured employment, returned to her hometown, and moved into a safe home equipped with essential supplies to ease her transition. While challenges remain, Lilit's resilience and determination, coupled with the unwavering support of our center, have enabled her to create a brighter, fear-free future for herself and her children.



*Hasmik Khachatryan standing strong.
Photo credit: Daphne Armenia.*

Hasmik Khachatryan's Story

Hasmik Khachatryan's story is one of resilience and hope, and a landmark victory for domestic violence survivors in Armenia. Her case, which we ensured was extensively covered by the media, broke the long-standing silence surrounding domestic violence in

the country and brought this pervasive issue into public focus.

For years, Hasmik endured brutal abuse at the hands of her ex-husband, suffering devastating injuries, including a concussion, fractured nose, and ruptured eardrum. Despite her repeated reports to the police and clear evidence of violence, the authorities failed to act, hindered by her abuser's connections to influential figures. Even a public assault near her daughter's school went unaddressed. Undeterred, Hasmik, with the WSC's unwavering support, rehabilitated and took her fight for justice to the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR).

The ECHR ruling was a historic milestone. The court held Armenia accountable for failing to protect Hasmik, recognizing the systemic nature of domestic violence and the authorities' inaction. This landmark decision ordered Armenia to compensate Hasmik and underscored the urgent need for criminalizing domestic violence.

Hasmik became a powerful advocate, sharing her story to inspire change and fight for justice for all survivors. Her bravery earned her the Woman of Courage Award and catalyzed greater awareness and reforms in Armenia. Hasmik's journey remains a beacon of hope, proving that change is possible through courage and perseverance.



A performance by the Nairyan vocal ensemble in regional communities, with support from the UNHCR.

Advocating for Change

When we began this work 15 years ago, domestic violence was widely denied, both by state officials and the public. If it was acknowledged at all, the numbers were often dismissed as exaggerated. However, over the years, we've witnessed a significant cultural shift. Although resistance persists, particularly in framing domestic violence as a private family matter or attributing blame to the woman, societal tolerance for such violence has notably diminished. More people now recognize domestic violence as a real problem that requires urgent action. This change is visible even in some of the most conservative communities across the country.

We remain at the forefront of efforts to raise awareness about domestic violence and gender-based issues in Armenia. Our initiatives include awareness campaigns, events, workshops, and community outreach, as well as the strategic use of social media to amplify our message and drive meaningful change.

Press conference about the amended domestic violence law.



Community gathering in Providence organized by the ARS "Ani" Chapter.



16 Days Activism Against Gender-Based Violence campaign, in collaboration with MediaLab.

Gathering to discuss recent amendments to the domestic violence law.



Training for police officers and investigators, in collaboration with the Council of Europe.

Strengthening Systems

Enhancing domestic violence legislation

In 2022, the WSC presented a package of amendments to the domestic violence law and criminal code. After two years of deliberation, the vast majority of amendments we proposed were accepted and approved by the National Assembly on April 12, 2024. This landmark achievement represents the first major overhaul of the law since its adoption in 2017 and stands as a significant feminist victory in the struggle for social justice. The amended legislation expands the definitions of all forms of domestic violence and introduces the concept of intimate partner violence, such that now those outside of registered marriages are also protected. Additionally, the law introduces stricter penalties for domestic violence, criminalizes stalking, and ensures better health and legal protections for survivors, including children who are witness to the violence. These changes, if properly enforced, will offer stronger safeguards for victims and reinforce the message that domestic violence is a serious crime.



Discussion with partners on the amendments to the domestic violence law, led by Zaruhi Batoyan, Member of Parliament and co-author of the bill.

Building partnerships and professional capacity

The WSC continues to foster collaborations with key stakeholders to strengthen domestic violence prevention and response in Armenia. In partnership with the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs and the Police, we have developed sub-legal orders—detailed procedures that outline how to implement the domestic violence law. These orders are critical for translating legislation into actionable steps to protect survivors and hold perpetrators accountable. We are also focused on capacity building, and this year alone have trained hundreds of law enforcement and criminal justice actors to better address domestic violence cases. Additionally, we have conducted monitoring missions and provided valuable training and mentorship to specialists at all 10 regional domestic violence centers across Armenia, enhancing their expertise and improving the quality of service delivery.



WSC team members discussing the protection of children in domestic violence households.



A Council of Europe two-day course for RA Investigative Committee investigators, led by WSC Criminal Lawyer Zaruhi Mejlumyan.



Training for social workers and psychologists, led by California-licensed Clinical Psychologist Dr. Ruzanna Ohanjanyan.



Participating in a panel discussion on online violence.



Workshop with school directors focused on improving referrals to domestic violence centers and supporting affected families.



Book launch of the Armenian translation of "Truth and Repair", with support from the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation.



Advancing research, policy, and professional resources

The WSC has made key contributions to research and policy aimed at enhancing protections for domestic violence survivors. This includes conducting a comprehensive review of domestic violence legislation and police responses, with support from the renowned Minnesota-based Global Rights for Women, and preparing a police handbook for handling domestic violence cases alongside the Council of Europe. Additionally, we submitted a report to the United Nations as part of the Universal Periodic Review, a key process that pushes the government to take action on fulfilling their human rights obligations and commitments. To further support professionals in the field, we translated Judith Herman's seminal book *Truth and Repair: How Trauma Survivors Envision Justice*. With very limited resources on trauma and its impact in the Armenian language, this publication provides critical insights and tools for addressing trauma in domestic violence cases.



Study tours to explore best practices in handling domestic violence cases.



Working with Global Rights for Women to examine the police response to domestic violence.

International Recognition and Collaboration

The WSC's achievements and expertise in domestic violence prevention and response have garnered increasing international recognition. In 2024, we were honored to host delegations from Germany and Denmark, whose visits underscored the value that international partners place on our work and the growing impact of our efforts in Armenia. Additionally, WSC staff were invited to participate in international conferences, such as those organized by the Armenian International Women's Association, Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, and Women Against Violence-Europe, as well as working visits to Hungary, Sweden, and the Netherlands. These exchanges facilitated collaborative discussions and knowledge-sharing on best practices, policy innovations, and implementation strategies.

2024 Financial Overview

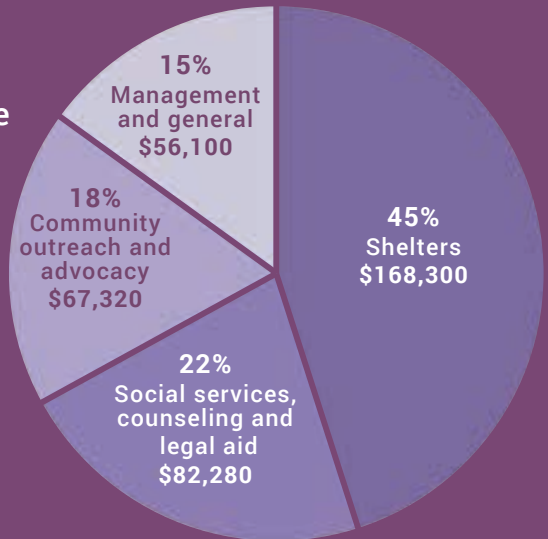
► Revenue

Our funding sources for 2024 were diverse, including grants, donations, and contributions from both individual supporters and institutional partners.

The total revenue for the year was **\$374,000**.

► Expenditure

The funds we received were used efficiently to support our work across key areas, as outlined in the diagram.



Strategic Goals for 2025

- ▶ **Expanding Life-Saving Services:** Next year, alongside our two emergency shelters, we will launch Armenia's first transitional shelter for domestic violence survivors. This new service will support women in finding employment, saving money, and preparing for independent living.
- ▶ **Raising Public Awareness:** We will continue awareness campaigns to educate communities about domestic violence and available support services.
- ▶ **Building Professional Capacity:** We will continue to provide trauma-informed training to our team, regional specialists, police, and other professionals.
- ▶ **Advancing Legal and Policy Changes:** We will advocate for legal amendments to strengthen survivor protections and hold perpetrators accountable.
- ▶ **Collaboration with the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs:** In partnership with the Ministry, we will offer specialized guidance on initiatives such as a national helpline, referral protocols, shelter programs, and a perpetrator rehabilitation program.

Honoring Our Team and Supporters

The Women's Support Center extends its deepest gratitude to all the donors who have supported our work throughout 2024. Your unwavering commitment has enabled us to continue providing critical services to survivors and advocating for change.

A special thanks to:

- Adobe Foundation
- All Armenia Fund, with a generous donation from Mrs. Srpug Sarkisian
- Armenian International Women's Association
- Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation
- Council of Europe
- Embassy of the French Republic in Armenia
- Embassy of the United States of America in Armenia
- European Union-OxYGen Foundation
- H. Hovnanian Family Foundation
- JHM Foundation
- John Mirak Foundation
- L'Oreal Fund for Women

- Manoogian Simone Foundation
- Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs
- Nora Terzag Hampar Charitable Trust
- Saint Sarkis Charity Trust
- Social Investors
- United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
- United Nations Population Fund
- United Nations Trust Fund
- United Nations Women
- Vital Voices
- World Vision-Armenia

*WSC team members.
Photo credit: Sisak Rafaelyan.*





Photo credit: Olive Branch Arts.

Be a Part of the Change

Together, we can make a lasting impact on the lives of women and children across Armenia. Support our mission today by:

- **Donating at www.womensupportcenter.org/donate (WSC is a registered 501c 3 organization)**
- **Volunteering with us by contacting ani@womensupportcenter.org**
- **Staying updated on our latest news by following us on Facebook [@WomensSupportCenter](#) and Instagram [@womensupport.armenia](#)**



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