

2023 ANNUAL REPORT



WOMEN'S RESOURCE CENTER NGO

ANNUAL REPORT

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A. Women's Resource Center's Mission and Vision

Women's Resource Center (hereafter, WRC) is a feminist human rights organization dedicated to achieving gender equality and self-determination for women in Armenian society by dismantling patriarchal structures that oppress and restrict women's freedoms. Through its various activities, WRC drives social and normative transformation influencing state policy, legislation and socio-cultural norms. Established in 2003, WRC focuses on three primary areas of women's rights:

Feminist Safe Space and Empowerment of Women and Girls

Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights

<u>'Womens Rights Advocacy</u>

Here is <u>a short video</u> describing the work of each department at WRC.

WRC's feminist approach lies at its core, creating a safe haven, with equal opportunities and mutual support, based on a non-discriminative and collaborative approach. At WRC, individuals are empowered to initiate and implement their ideas aligned with feminist principles and values.

B. HIGHLIGHTS

In 2023, Women's Resource Center celebrated its 20th anniversary. These past 20 years were full of various challenges as well as achievements. Hence, it was important for us to celebrate the fact that WRC is still operating and continuing its mission of empowering women even in these critical times.

Empower and support diverse groups of women and girls; Identify and reduce cultural and systemic manifestations of discrimination and violence against women; Spread feminist ideology and champion women's united struggle against inequalities perpetuated by the patriarchal system. Through its activities, the WRC is committed to: Driving social and normative change; Influencing state policy, legislative initiatives, and socio-cultural sphere.



WRC welcomed 128 visitors between January and November 2023, including 23 male and 105 female visitors. The table below provides a detailed breakdown of visitor demographics by month.

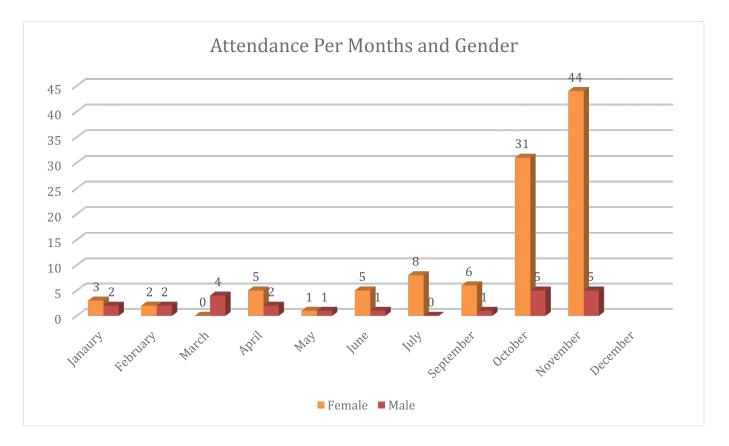


Chart 1: Distribution of visitors by Monthu and Gender

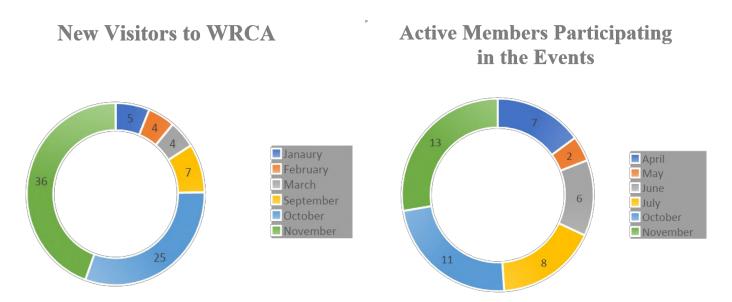


Chart 2. Distribution of New and Active Members of WRCby Month

• 4

Our Work with Forcibly Displaced Population

Following Azerbaijan's military aggression in Nagorno-Karabakh on September 19, approximately 100,000 Artsakh residents were forcibly displaced from their birthplace, seeking refuge in Armenia. Swiftly responding to the arrival of Artsakh citizens, our organization assumed a leading role. We conducted <u>a gender-sensitive needs assessment</u>, and extended humanitarian assistance to around 250 forcibly displaced women and girls. We began providing support to women residing in four shelters facilitated by the state for Artsakh citizens, as well as those in other

vulnerable communities in Ararat, Armavir and Kotayk marzes (regions).

In November, WRC began providing free medical service to displaced women and girls between 18 and 60 years of age. These services include:



- Counseling on abortion
- Free medical examinations in cases of sexual violence

In addition, WRC conducted training for displaced pregnant women and provided them with maternity packages.

On September 22nd, we launched our first solidarity gathering with Artsakh healing talks. The goal was to create a safe space for people to connect with like-minded individuals, share their worries, feelings, and thoughts on coping with the stressful times of the Artsakh blockade, war, and displacement. Since then, we have organized gatherings every Thursday, providing a platform for people to engage in discussions and creative outlets such as crafts, including clay, painting, and macramé, emphasizing the therapeutic aspect of artistic expression.



2.1

Feminist activism is a cornerstone of WRC. By expanding feminist initiatives, the Organization strives to contribute to the growth of the feminist movement and the dismantling of patriarchal structures. WRC Feminist Space operates in three key areas: capacity building of women and girls, feminist activism, and women's well-being.

SAFE SPACE

Since its inception, WRC has established a secure and welcoming haven for diverse women. Within this supportive environment, individuals can freely share their experiences, engage in open discussions, and express themselves without fear of discrimination or judgment. The WRC Feminist Space is open from Monday to Saturday between 12:00 PM and 6:00 PM, excluding Wednesdays. Our guests have complimentary access to facilities for work, study, library use, and personalized interactions with our staff. This space also serves as a venue for movie screenings, book discussions, and a variety of events designed to enhance the well-being and mental health of our visitors. This year, we have welcomed over 348 individuals to our safe space.

1. CAPACITY BUILDING FOR WOMEN EMPOWERMENT AND GENDER EQUALITY

Movie Screenings and Events:

Throughout the year, Fem Space organized three movie screenings, "Radioactive", "Everything Everywhere All at Once" and "One good song can do more than 5,000 protests". Additionally, the organization hosted a special event titled "Let's talk about relationships," facilitating open discussions on the nuances of healthy and unhealthy relationships, self-care, and challenges individuals face in navigating them.

Art Exhibitions and Thematic Workshops:

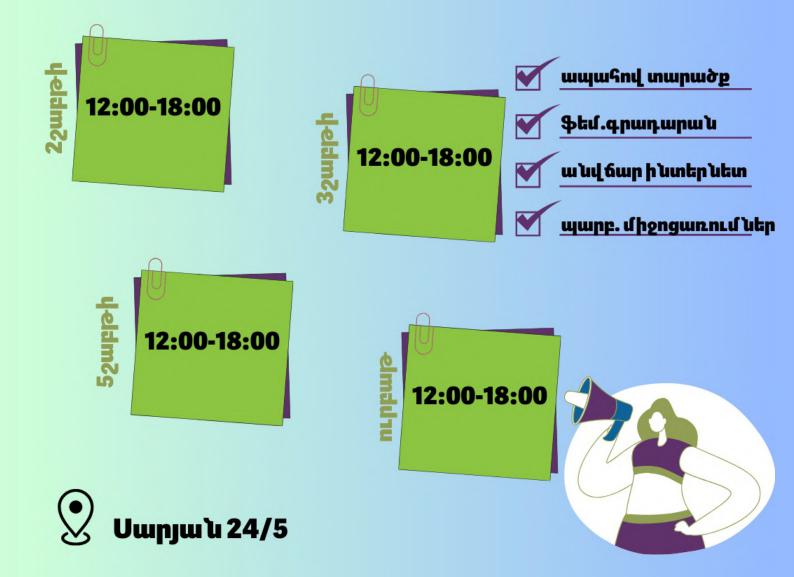
In March, Fem Space upheld its commitment to the arts by hosting the "Visible Name" exhibition. This exhibition showcased the diverse works of three talented female artists: Ani Tadevosyan, Houry Markarian, and Amasia Niziblyan. Expanding its creative initiatives, the organization launched thematic workshops on Art-Activism, Art Therapy, and Tufting on June 5th. These workshops attracted 50 participants from both the public and volunteers, fostering a dynamic and inclusive environment.

Annual Retreats and Empowerment Camp:

April marked the annual volunteer's retreat, where 10 dedicated volunteers actively participated in planning upcoming events and engaging in intellectual discussions. In August, Fem Space organized its annual Girls' Empowerment Camp in Tsaghkadzor, drawing 21 young girls aged 18-25. This camp served as a transformative experience, fostering empowerment and personal development.



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► 1. FEMINIST ACTIVISM AND WOMEN'S RIGHTS

Women's History Month Campaign:

In March, Fem Space led a Women's History Month campaign using a creative QR approach with the public. Volunteers prepared promotional posters with "pre-holiday" discounts, subtly incorporating information about gender-based violence (GBV), domestic violence (DV), and women's rights. The campaign extended beyond Yerevan, with WRC engaging with feminist and queer community youth in Vanadzor on March 4th and Gyumri on March 18th. Collaborating with WFA, the feminist map of Yerevan was presented to the public on March 21st. The month concluded on March 28th with a gathering featuring young scientists Shoghik Ghazaryan and Hasmik Torosyan, inspiring 20 young girls to pursue careers in the STEM.

Volunteer Engagement:

During the past year, WRC has maintained a steady team of 15 active volunteers, welcomed 12 new additions, and received applications from 4 prospective volunteers, showcasing a growing community of dedicated individuals committed to the Organizations' mission.

Women's Rights Training:

In 2023, WRC organized two Women's Rights Training sessions, held in April and September, respectively. Covering a wide range of topics, including human rights, gender, gender-based violence, feminism, sexual and reproductive health and rights, and women, peace, and security, these training sessions sparked project initiatives post the April session. These initiatives focused on critical issues like feminism, human rights, eco-activism, challenging gender norms in schools, and combating gender-based violence. In September, WRC launched the "A Step towards Equal Rights" initiative, which actively engaged 20 children and 20 parents in Bavra village through Forum Theater and a hiking excursion. This experiential learning activity aimed to foster a deeper understanding of gender equality among participants. Other initiatives included discussions on parents' role in normalizing conversations about Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights, advocating for the protection of these rights for women offenders, and educating young students on choosing professions without gender stereotypes using innovative tools like flashcards.

1. ENHANCING WOMEN'S WELL-BEING

Psychological support

In the face of challenges presented by the post-war situation, instances of women's rights violations, gender-based violence, domestic violence, and other harmful practices have intensified. Responding to the discriminating impact of these challenges on women, WRC has initiated group meetings designed to offer psychological support and alleviate the adverse effects. Throughout the year, WRC conducted six personal growth courses, each comprising 6 to 8 sessions. The overwhelming response witnessed 212 women applying, with 44 actively participating in the courses. Additionally, we provided 89 hours of counseling to ten individuals, reinforcing our commitment to nurturing emotional well-being.

Legal Support

Our legal support services reached 217 callers and 21 in-person visitors, offering crucial consultations to address legal concerns and empower women with knowledge and resources.

Yoga and Well-Being Sessions

From February to December, we conducted regular yoga sessions, aimed at fostering physical and mental well-being. These sessions, held both indoors and outdoors, attracted new participants while maintaining a focus on self-care.



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2.2

The Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR) program has been a cornerstone of the Women's Resource Center's (WRC) initiatives since its establishment in 2008, symbolizing a steadfast commitment to advancing women's well-being. This program holds a pivotal position among the organization's priorities, serving as a catalyst for discussions on critical issues within society.

The SRHR program addresses concerns related to women's sexual and reproductive health and rights, bringing attention to barriers that hinder women's autonomy in decision-making about their bodies. It challenges the prevailing perception of sexuality as a stigmatized and closed topic, aiming of dismantling taboos that impede open dialogue.

CAPACITY BUILDING AND AWARENESS RAISING

WORKSHOPS FOR OBSTETRICS/GYNECOLOGISTS AND GENERAL PRACTITIONERS

WRC has actively undertaken capacity building and awareness raising efforts, specifically through workshops designed for obstetricians/gynecologists and general practitioners. The comprehensive "Training Module on a Rights-Based and Non-Discriminative Approach to Providing Reproductive Health Services" was developed by the Reproductive Rights Advocacy Network, an initiative spearheaded by WRC in 2017. Accredited by the Ministry of Healthcare of Armenia in 2019, this module not only imparts critical knowledge but also grants participants credits upon completing the course.

The implementation of the reproductive rights and non-discriminatory approach training course for healthcare providers, conducted by members of the Network, has been instrumental in reaching 150 obstetricians/gynecologists and general practitioners through two-day sessions.

For social media coverage about the workshops with obstetrics/gynecologists and general practitioners, please visit the following links:

WORKSHOPS FOR PREGNANT WOMEN

WRC organized a workshop with the objective of empowering pregnant women. A total of 35 participants, divided into two groups of 17, actively engaged in a six-session series facilitated by a qualified midwife from Finland, who applied a feminist approach. The workshop covered various aspects of pregnancy, spanning from physical well-being and pain relief exercises to preparations for delivery and postpartum care. The WRC's commitment to holistic reproductive care was prominently demonstrated, ensuring that the workshop not only addressed the physiological facets of pregnancy but also emphasized and enhanced women's empowerment throughout their reproductive journey.

"MY BODY/MY RIGHT" WORKSHOP FOR YOUNG WOMEN

The "My Body/My Right" workshop was conducted in June-July and September-October 2023 for two groups of young women, with a total of 35 participants. The workshops comprised eight meetings covering topics such as sexual and reproductive anatomy and physiology, personal hygiene, the menstrual cycle, healthy sexual relations, STIs, contraceptive methods, and other relevant subjects.

Throughout the sessions, participants noted not only the acquisition of accurate information on sexuality but also a transformative change in their perspectives on self-perception, resulting in increased self-confidence.



2.3

Advocacy represents a phased process designed to transform and enhance policies and legislation developed and implemented by decision-makers, predominantly state actors. The foundation of our advocacy work is rooted in feminist values and approaches that take into account the diverse needs of women across various groups. By elevating individual experiences into political discussions, the Women's Resource Center (WRC) advocacy team strives to address these issues at the legislative or policy level.

In 2023, our advocacy initiatives were shaped by the aftermath of the post-war situation, particularly the events of September 2023, which witnessed the forced displacement of the population of Nagorno Karabakh. Building on our efforts from previous years, we focused on both local and international levels.

Local Advocacy Efforts:

At the local level, our primary objective was to influence state policies and legislative processes, with the goal of making them more gender-sensitive and inclusive for women. By actively listening to the challenges faced at the personal level, we transformed these concerns into actionable items. Subsequently, we brought them to the attention of state agencies, proposing solutions that address the systemic issues impacting women.

1. ADVOCACY IN SEXUAL AND REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH AND RIGHTS

Post-war events have exerted a profound influence on the fulfillment of women's sexual and reproductive rights. Notably, in the aftermath of conflicts, states are actively promoting pro-natalist policies, and Armenia is no exception in this regard. The fertility programs in our country specifically target women; however, there's a glaring absence of adequate safeguards for childcare within these initiatives.

Another concern is related to the implementation of the Comprehensive Health Insurance system in 2024. Unfortunately, the state reform lacks sufficient coverage for sexual and reproductive health services, particularly for diverse groups of women. Within this framework, the protection of patients' rights to receive sexual and reproductive health services in a confidential and private manner faces persistent challenges, often overlooked by healthcare providers.

The lack of comprehensive and rights-based sex education in Armenia is another challenge, towards which we continued our work.

To address these challenges, WRC implemented various activities:

In collaboration with the "Reproductive Rights Advocacy Network," WRC conducted meetings with the Ministry of Health and National Assembly representatives in 2017. The focus was on safeguarding patients' rights in receiving sexual and reproductive health services confidentially. Recommendations were presented to the Ministry of Health, contributing to ongoing discourse and seeking to influence policy development for the benefit of diverse groups of women.

Collaboration with the Ministry of Education involved the revision of teacher's manuals for the "Healthy Lifestyle" course spanning grades 5 to 11. <u>Recommendations</u> specifically addressed sexual and reproductive health and rights, aiming to enhance educational materials with accurate and inclusive content grounded in a comprehensive and rightsbased approach.

The advocacy team developed a policy fact sheet focusing on pro-natalist policies in Armenia. This document analyzes implemented state programs, assessing their impact on women's rights, providing valuable insights into the implications of existing fertility policies on women's rights and well-being.

Regular meetings with members of the monitoring group of care houses aimed to develop a manual outlining uniform standards for reproductive health in care centers. The drafted handbook, presented for discussion, aims to establish unified standards, facilitating more effective monitoring and evaluation of reproductive health practices within care facilities.

These initiatives collectively demonstrate the WRC's commitment to addressing challenges in sexual and reproductive health and rights, influencing policy development, enhancing education, and promoting standards for reproductive health in care facilities.

2. ADVOCACY IN WOMEN'S LABOR RIGHTS

In 2023, WRC's advocacy team maintained its focus on advocating for legislation against workplace sexual harassment. Their efforts culminated in March with the release of the study titled "The Issue of Sexual Harassment in the Workplace in Armenia," presented to RA Members of Parliament and the Deputy Minister of Labor and Social Affairs. Continuous meetings and <u>discussions</u> with decision-makers persisted until May, resulting in the National Assembly's approval of amendments to the RA Labor Code, explicitly prohibiting sexual harassment in the workplace.

Post-legislation, WRCA remains dedicated to <u>fostering awareness</u> and facilitating <u>discussions</u> to ensure the effective implementation of the law. Simultaneously, the organization sustains its collaboration with the Solidarity Center Armenia, actively participating in a 2023 study to identify instances of gender discrimination in the workplace, with plans for publication in 2024. The WRCA's ongoing commitment underscores its dedication to promoting a workplace environment free from sexual harassment and gender discrimination.

3. ADVOCACY IN WOMEN, PEACE AND SECURITY AGENDA IN ARMENIA

The second Karabakh war, marked by the forced displacement of Artsakh citizens by Azerbaijan in September and a subsequent 10-month blockade, significantly impacted women's rights. Recognizing the unique challenges faced by women in conflict and post-conflict scenarios, WRC directed its advocacy efforts towards addressing these issues and amplifying the role of women in peace processes.



Amidst the activation of militaristic rhetoric during crises, potentially leading to regressive trends in the status of women, the WRC advocacy team pursued several key directions:

- On March 7, preceding International Women's Rights Day, the WRC organized a roundtable discussion titled "Women's rights in the context of multiple crises: challenges and opportunities." The focus was on addressing the challenges to women's rights in the postwar period and exploring collaborative efforts to address global security issues.
 - In 2023, a <u>feminist analysis</u> of the National Plan of Action for UNSCR 1325 was published. The report is available in Armenian.
 - In 2023, we conducted two consultations with civil society representatives on the agenda of women, peace, and security in the post-war period. For more details about the meetings, please visit<u>https://shorturl.at/ntGY3</u> and <u>https://shorturl.at/dtNY9</u>
 - On May 3 and 16, WRC facilitated urgent consultations concerning a legislative proposal related to the voluntary conscription of women into the army. Collaborating with colleagues from diverse CSOs, <u>a statement</u> was prepared outlining the adverse effects of this change on women's rights and disseminated it through various communication channels. Despite our concerted efforts, the National Assembly proceeded to adopt this legislation on June 26, 2023. Our plan now involves monitoring the implementation of the law, which is set to take effect from February 2024.
- In the light of Azerbaijan's blockade of the Lachin Corridor since December 2022, which has resulted in a humanitarian disaster and significant implications for women's rights, as well as the September 2023 attack on Nagorno-Karabakh by Azerbaijan leading to the forced displacement of the local population, our team has diligently prepared <u>four crisis alerts</u> for our international partners.
 - On November 6, WRC convened <u>a consultation meeting</u> with the EU mission monitoring the border between Armenia and Azerbaijan. The objective of this meeting was to discuss the role of women in the security agenda of Armenia. The organizations focused on women's issues in border communities and advocated for the "Women, Peace, and Security" agenda.

Through these diverse initiatives, WRC demonstrated its commitment to addressing the multifaceted challenges arising from conflict situations, promoting gender-sensitive approaches, and ensuring the active participation of women in peacebuilding efforts.

WATCHDOG OF THE STATE POLICIES AND LAWS

The WRC advocacy team played an active role in scrutinizing state policies and laws, engaging in the following key activities:

Participation in the discussion of the draft RA Gender Strategy and Action Plan for 2024-2026, contributing insights to shape gender-related initiatives for the upcoming period.

Submission of recommendations for legislative and policy draft documents via a unified website for the publication of draft legal acts. This included active involvement in shaping the National Human Rights Protection Strategy's Action Plan for the period of 2023-2025, where proposals were presented to enhance mechanisms for protecting women's rights.

In discussions on integrity ethics for teachers, WRC suggested the inclusion of provisions to prevent sexual violence and harassment.

Submission of recommendations related to the draft Law on Voluntary Work, the Comprehensive Health Insurance System concept, and several other draft acts and policies.

Utilization of public management mechanisms for civil society, actively participating in various public councils' discussions, including the Women's Council by the Deputy Prime Minister, Public Councils by the Ministries of Labor and Social Affairs, by the Ministry of Justice, by the Ministry of Health, and Education. Additionally, engagement in the Women's Council by the Human Rights Defender's office.

Membership in three coalitions - the Coalition to Stop Violence against Women, the Nondiscrimination and Equality Coalition, and the Human Rights House Yerevan. Through joint advocacy within these coalitions, the focus is on combating gender-based violence, advocating for comprehensive anti-discrimination legislation, and enhancing the protection of human rights defenders.

INTERNATIONAL COLLABORATION:

Simultaneously, our advocacy extended to the international front, where we engaged with UN treaty bodies and other global partners. These collaborative endeavors were dedicated to addressing the multifaceted needs of women affected by forced displacement. Our goal was to ensure that our advocacy efforts had a meaningful impact on the ground while contributing to broader global conversations on human rights and gender equality.

Guided by feminist principles, the WRC advocacy team, remains steadfast in its commitment to channeling efforts and capacities into providing political solutions to women's issues and addressing rights violations. Through our multi-faceted approach, we strive to create lasting change, locally and on the global stage, advocating for a world where the rights of all women are not only recognized but also respected, and protected.



WRC's Communication department is dedicated to showcasing the organization's work on different social media platforms, including the WRC <u>website</u>, <u>Facebook</u>, <u>Instagram</u>, <u>Twitter</u>, <u>LinkedIn</u> and <u>YouTube</u> pages, as well as the <u>Facebook</u> and <u>Instagram</u> pages of "My Body/My Right" project. The primary objective is to communicate and promote the organization's goals and vision in the online space, making communication more sensitive, inclusive, intersectional and grounded in feminist values.

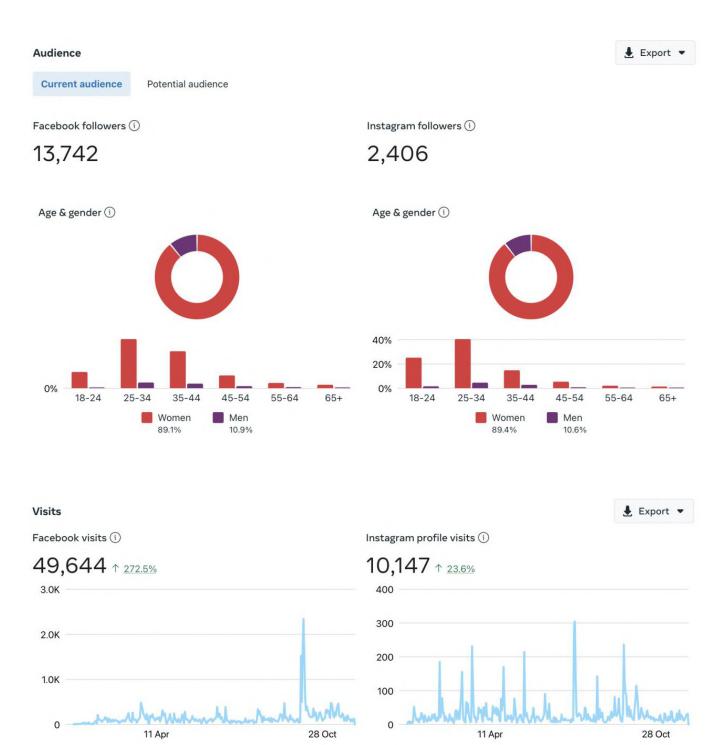
Starting from January 2023, the Communication Department has undertaken the following activities:

- Creation of monthly communication plans, incorporating a feminist and social events calendar to celebrate significant days throughout the year.
- Weekly posts featuring photos from the WRC archive dedicated to the organization's 20th anniversary.
- A series of posts dedicated to the Sexual Assault Awareness Month (SAAM) 2023 covering the theme of the year, reposting a <u>PSA</u> on sexual assault, and another one addressing the concept of <u>"leaving the burden of assault,"</u>
- Summary and presentation of the WRC 2022 activity <u>report</u> by departments feminist safe space (<u>part 1, part 2, part 3, part 4</u>), <u>implemented projects</u>, <u>radio</u>, <u>and communication</u>.
- A series of posts to inform the public about the recently adopted regulations in the RA Labor law to prevent sexual harassment at the workplace, providing details <u>about the law</u>, and an explanatory <u>video.</u>
- Informational posts on the Nagorno-Karabakh blockade, war, and humanitarian crisis situation, keeping our English-speaking audience updated and informed.
- A series of posts within the framework of <u>16 days of activism against gender-based violence</u>, highlighting the organization's longstanding in activism.

In addition to the activities mentioned earlier, the Communication Department has consistently provided regular updates almost every workday, posting information related to the WRCA's activities, projects, events, trainings, announcements, etc.

"My Body/My Right" page continued its annual informational campaign on various topics. The first one was dedicated to the Sexual Health Week in February - <u>Get the facts</u> - and included posts on <u>healthy communication in sexual relations</u>, <u>healthy sexual relations</u>, <u>types of sexual relations</u>, <u>parents role in healthy relations</u>.

Currently we have the following image of the followers of WRC social media pages:



Another campaign focused on <u>Sexual Assault Awareness Month</u> in April, with the theme "Drawing Connections: Prevention Demands Equity." The posts covered <u>statistics on sexual assault</u>, <u>glossary of terms (part 2 and part 3)</u>, <u>trauma-informed workplaces</u>, <u>repressive systems and sexual assault</u>,

To enhance visibility, a series of videos were created featuring members of the "Reproductive Rights Advocacy Network" showcasing their work, their collaboration within the Network, and informing the public about their activities. Videos featured member NGOs such as <u>WRC</u> (as the founder), <u>Real World Real People NGO</u>, <u>Pink Armenia</u>, <u>Center for Rights Development NGO</u>, and <u>Agate Rights Defense Center for Women with Disabilities NGO</u>.

A series of posts were crafted to present a manual written by Network members on <u>the rights and</u> <u>responsibilities of medical workers in providing medical care</u> The topics included standards of medical support in providing reproductive health services to persons who experienced

<u>sexual violence,</u>

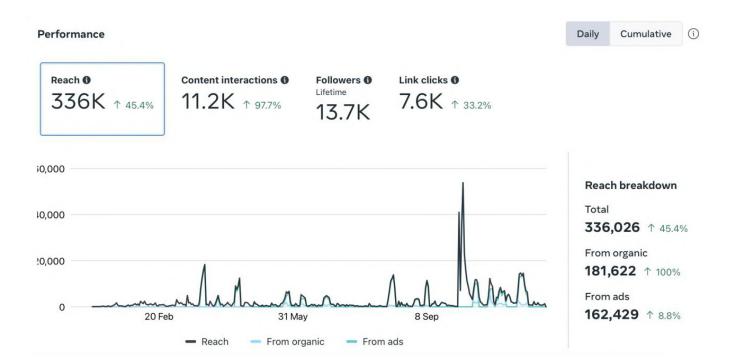
women with disabilities,

women living with HIV,

<u>LBT women</u>.

October, being the Breast Cancer Awareness Month, had a dedicated series of posts on the topic, starting from <u>general info</u> on the issue.

Throughout 2023, the WRC communication team strategically designed and implemented the organization's communication plans, ensuring the organization's visibility, and promoting the organization's social media pages. The reach of the WRC's Facebook and Instagram pages is as follows:



• Sustained Sub-grant Projects and New Grants:

Throughout the year, WRC sustained sub-grant projects with three partner organizations and awarded five new grants to enhance the internal stability of CSOs. Additionally, four grants were awarded for the implementation of advocacy projects. The selection of organizations was done through a participatory process, considering their needs.

• Training Plan and Implementation:

WRC developed a comprehensive training plan covering 11 topics crucial for organizational development and advocacy efforts. The topics included Strategic planning, Principles of strategic communication, Policy issue identification, working with the government/legislators, Social inclusion, Result-based management, Information campaigns, Working with the donor community, Gender analysis principles and tools, Feminist policymaking, and Budgeting process opportunities for CSO participation.

• Conducted Trainings:

A total of 15 trainings were conducted on aforementioned topics, involving 130 participants and facilitated by 12 trainers. The trainings aimed to empower organizations with the necessary skills and knowledge for effective advocacy and organizational stability.

• Implementation and Summary of Sub-grant Projects:

All sub-grant projects were successfully implemented and summarized, reflecting the impactful outcomes of the initiatives. An open call for new sub-grants has been issued, continuing the commitment to supporting and strengthening civil society organizations.

These projects underscore WRC's commitment to proactive engagement, capacity-building, and collaborative efforts in addressing challenges related to women's rights and broader societal concerns. The organization's emphasis on training and sub-grant projects reflects a dedication to fostering a robust and empowered civil society.