ANNUAL REPORT 2021

BULGARIAN FUND FOR WOMEN
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

1. Who We Are
2. An Introduction from BFW Executive Director
3. 2021 in Numbers
4. Grantmaking and Capacity Building
5. Programs Impact
6. Advocacy and Awareness Raising
7. Resource Mobilization
8. Donors and Partners
Bulgarian Fund for Women (BFW) is the only donor in Bulgaria that exclusively supports activists, grassroots groups and CSOs working to empower women and girls and achieve gender equality in all spheres of life.

We invest in the capacity building of civil society actors and stakeholders and in projects and initiatives that drive social change.

Our **vision** is that all women and girls live in a just world where their choices are respected, and their voices are heard.

Our **mission** is to build and develop the women’s rights movement in Bulgaria by mobilizing resources on a national and international level.

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**WHO ARE WE?**

OUR BOARD

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AN INTRODUCTION FROM BFW
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

We look back at 2021 and we realize that it was one of the hardest years ever – for us at BFW and we guess, for everyone else too. 12 months full of multiple global and local intersecting challenges – COVID-19, an unseen mental health crisis connected to trauma, uncertainty, loss, and grief, escalating numbers of domestic and gender-based violence, deepening political and economic crises, climate change, increasing poverty and social inequalities, attacks against democracy and fundamental human rights, a shrinking space for civil society, to name just a few.

In such difficult times, we realized it was not only our responsibility to continue to be a trusted donor and partner of the women's rights and gender justice movement, a reliable, accountable, and flexible grantmaker and capacity builder to all human rights activists, grassroots groups and civil society organizations (CSOs) in Bulgaria – it was our duty.

In 2021, we stood firmly by those fighting for the rights of the most marginalized communities in the country and working on some of the most contested issues – feminist and human rights defenders, LGBTIQ+ rights, empowering women and girls from ethnic minorities, refugee and migrant women, overcoming poverty and social inequalities, climate and gender justice, supporting single mothers, and many more.

Throughout the year, we gave 134 grants to 110 grantee partners in 41 cities and small towns in the total amount of €358 271. We invested in capacity building and increasing the resilience and the organizational and financial sustainability of our grantee partners. We offered online and in-person safe spaces for strategic meetings and knowledge exchange, we organized trainings and webinars connected to women's rights and specific skills, we created opportunities for networking and advocacy, we increased the visibility of our grantees and shared their success stories on our media channels. We did our best to unite the civil society sector in Bulgaria.

While navigating between an unpredictable and constantly changing environment and supporting our grantee partners in the best possible way, we were also able to mobilize more than €1 000 000 and increased our total annual budget twofold compared to 2020. We owe our success to our firm belief that it is us, our grantees and all marginalized communities who drive social change, and to our invincible hope that a better future for all is possible.
This is especially so if our work is well-funded. And because we believe in the power of multi-year core support, we are happy that 2021 was the second year in a row in which we provided **core support in the total amount of approx. €110 000 to 7 new groups** working on issues such as overcoming gender-based and domestic violence, empowering LGBTIQ+ people, advancing the rights of sex workers in Bulgaria and fighting for sexual and reproductive rights. In 2021, we also provided 5 other groups with ongoing core support which had started in 2020.

In the spring and summer of 2021, we undertook an unprecedented study into the needs of our grantee partners working in the field of women, girls and vulnerable groups’ rights and gender equality. Our comprehensive surveys revealed significant obstacles to building more interconnected and politically empowered feminist coalitions but also helped us pinpoint where the Fund could concentrate its future efforts.

2021 was the year in which we also launched our program for Gender and Climate Justice – because we know that, once again, it is women and marginalized communities who are the ones most affected by changes in the climate. We also started the program Ray of Hope, a mental-health initiative providing free psychotherapy sessions to the people bearing the brunt of the COVID-19 pandemic, still raging in our country. We also continued our programs for empowering girls and young women, community building and organizing, responding to the shrinking space for civil society in Bulgaria.

Lastly, when you navigate troubled waters, when the context is dynamic and uncertain, sometimes you need an anchor to keep you grounded and focused on your strategic work. For us, this anchor is our Theory of Change – a long and hard but very rewarding journey that we finished in 2021. Now, we know we are on the right track. We have our values to guide us. We have our grantee partners who continue to inspire and give us hope that social change and justice are possible! And we have all of you – our supporters and friends.

We look back at 2021 and we say – we made it. We fought, we survived and never gave up. Now we look ahead. Enjoy the next pages filled with words and numbers that all tell a very special story. And don’t forget to read between the lines too.

Nadejda Dermendjieva
2021 IN NUMBERS

95% increase of the total raised amount

€616 703 total budget

37 donors (21 new)

€358 271 distributed in direct grants

134 direct grants

110 grantee partners

207 351 direct beneficiaries and over 1 327 000 indirect

3 national information campaigns

2 million people reached

51 084 website unique visitors

3 284 newsletter subscribers

81 numbers of news on BFW website (2021)
BFW’s grantmaking and capacity building is driven by the belief that the right kind of support for the collective action of women, girls, LGBTIQ+ people and human rights defenders will lead to profound social, political, cultural, economic and environmental change – change that is urgently required for a just and equal world.

BFW contributes to building social movements and helps them to be more connected, coordinated, and effective. The activists, human rights defenders, and organizations we support are imagining, creating, and transforming systems and communities to build a better world and oppose the shrinking space for civil society.

BFW supports unregistered groups, as well as emerging and established organizations, by providing money, organizational strengthening, and networking opportunities to advance women’s and human rights, to fight for social and climate justice and achieve gender equality. The grantee partners we support are self-led and predominantly women-led and work on under-addressed and contested issues, including the root causes of impoverishment and inequality.

Our programming is based on regular assessment and analyses of their needs, and we strive to provide funding that is rapid, flexible, accessible, and responsive to the different contexts and needs in which movements and organizations operate. Most of our grants are made through seven thematic portfolios – Strengthening Movements; Invisible Issues and Communities; Freedom from Violence; LGBTIQ+ Justice; Environmental Justice; Girls and Young Women Empowerment; Controversial Topics.

Open Opportunity grants are available year-round to respond to emerging advocacy opportunities, crisis and security issues, opportunities to strengthen the visibility of women’s and human rights agendas, issues and narratives.
We deeply believe that multi-year core support is of crucial importance to making the grassroots groups and CSOs we serve sustainable and resilient. That is why we strive to increase our core support, to provide them with flexible and longer-term funding as it enables them to plan strategically, respond to new situations and set their own agendas.

All grantee partners receive organizational and capacity support to sharpen their skills, knowledge, and networks. This support ensures they are better equipped to reach their goals, fulfil their mission and make the changes they want to see in the world.

We act fast and our application and reporting procedures are both rigorous and accessible, thus ensuring that emerging groups can tap into critical funding. Such agility is critical for feminist and human rights pro-democratic movements to effectively counter the backlash they face.
TOTAL VALUE BY THEME

GRANTS BY TYPE OF SUPPORT
30% of grantmaking is for multi-year core support to allow CSOs to plan and stay agile.

16% of grants were distributed to emerging organizations (registered less than three years ago) that others might consider risky.

28% of grants were distributed to activists and grassroots collectives that are not registered as this can be considered a roadblock to progress.

40% of grants were distributed to first-time BFW grantees.

52% of grants were distributed to towns and villages outside the capital where access to funding is often limited.
**REGISTRATION TYPE**

- Registered CSOs: 56%
- Newly registered CSOs: 16%
- Unregistered groups & Individuals: 28%

**REGISTRATION PLACE**

- Capital: 46%
- Regional center: 34%
- Small town: 12%
- Village: 6%
- International: 2%
Investments in the development and civic participation of women and girls are a prerequisite for achieving greater public awareness and understanding of gender issues. Global initiatives and policy frameworks such as the Beijing Platform for Action and the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals pave the way for gender equality, including concrete measures to achieve it: increasing women’s political participation, combating gender-based violence and discrimination, ensuring the sexual and reproductive rights of women, etc.

We are proud to collaborate with our grantee partners who work tirelessly to meet the needs of their local communities – from ethnic minorities and survivors of gender-based violence to people with disabilities, or those living in rural areas. They are changing laws and policies to safeguard their rights. In the following pages, we share an overview of our impact, together with and thanks to the hard and consistent efforts of our grantee community.
In 2021, we announced a second call for core funding to address the organizational and administrative needs of organizations working for women’s rights, to improve their financial sustainability, capacity, planning skills and ability to measure their impact. We prioritize long-term and flexible funding and support the building of a movement of strong women’s groups and organizations to make this change possible.

**In 2021, BFW supported 7 organizations with €111 477.** This follows the pilot edition of the 2020 Core Funding Program when we supported 5 organizations with a total value of €88 609.

One of our grantee partners is the **LGBT Organization Deystvie**. Through their Legal Program, co-funded by BFW, Deystvie undertakes strategic litigation, for example, in legal cases related to the recognition of marriages carried out abroad, birth certificates issued by other countries, discrimination, hate incidents and crimes against LGBTIQ+ people. The free legal program provided more than 120 legal consultations and filed more than 30 lawsuits in national courts in 2021.

One of them is the now well-known **Baby Sara case**, for whom authorities in Sofia had refused to issue a birth certificate because Bulgaria does not recognize same-sex marriages. Through the Legal Program Att. Denitsa Lyubenova filed a lawsuit due to the refusal of the Sofia Municipality.

On December 14, 2021, the Court of Justice of the European Union (CJEU) ruled that Bulgaria must issue identity papers to the child of the same-sex couple without requiring a Bulgarian birth certificate.

According to Veneta Limberova, Chair of Deystvie, the judgment is significant for the whole European community, but also for Bulgaria, as the institutions will now be obligated to recognize and not deny the rights of children of same-sex parents.
In March 2021, BFW launched its pilot program focused on *Climate and Gender Justice*. The program provides an opportunity for active people and community leaders to participate in initiatives protecting the planet, tackling climate change, and addressing social inequalities. The initiative stimulates civic participation in the protection of the Earth, raises awareness of the intersections between equality and climate justice, and engages local communities and activists in generating solutions.

The program consisted of two phases – theoretical and practical, and in the first stage, the participants took part in a three-day training led by national and international experts. We received 34 applications from 14 different cities in the first phase and then selected 20 participants from all over the country. The second phase started after the training, with the announcement of an internal call for projects, which allowed the participants to develop a concrete project idea and receive funding from BFW to inspire their communities to action and jointly implement an initiative that addresses climate change and social inequalities. BFW supported 11 of them and each project received an individual grant of up to €800.

“Everything I learned during these three days is extremely useful. I took something from everything and everyone and, with great excitement and inspiration, I am moving forward,” – Stella Nedyalkova, a participant in the program shared with us.

Rada Elenkova, BWF Program Director and Program Coordinator, commented:

“The main takeaway for our organization is that there are many active citizens in the country, full of ideas and energy to work at the local level for social change and climate justice. We are happy that our *Climate and Gender Justice Program* can offer opportunities to support key causes and achieve real change. We are motivated to continue our efforts in this direction, to further develop the program and to seek opportunities for cooperation with all participants and future activists”.
Program's Highlights

*Summer Camps for Climate and Gender Justice in the Rhodope Mountains, implemented by Valentin Kehayov*

The idea is related to the construction of an eco-camp for training young people on environmental protection, gender equality, connection with nature and active civic participation. All this happened in a fun and informal way, while the young people joined a tent camp in the area near the village of Mogilitsa, Smolyan region.

*Equal to Climate in Sofia, Yagodina, Smolyan, implemented by Vihren Mitev*

The project aims to expand the existing network of volunteers by uniting new groups through social activities in nature. It promotes volunteering and active citizenship as a driving force for positive social change, protection of human rights and the fight against climate change.

*Climate Change and Women’s Health, implemented by Zornitsa Spasova*

The World Health Organization identifies climate change as the greatest threat to our health in the 21st century. Within this project, a leaflet on *Climate Change and Women’s Health* was published based on an overview of scientific publications and WHO materials related to climate change and gender inequality.
Feminist Boot Camp is our flagship training program, part of the strategic Program for strengthening young feminists’ movements. It is open to girls and women between 18 – 35-year-old and it has been successfully taking place since 2016.

During the Boot Camp, we explore the history and theory of intersectional feminism, then learn how to take action together to dismantle sexism within our communities. Our sessions are a mix of inspiration, in-depth learning about theory, skills for mobilizing, networking and collective care, as well as learning about specific campaigns. As part of the program, we organize an internal competition for conceptual projects and every year we support the boldest and bravest ideas.
Program’s Highlights

In 2021 BFW funded the project Big Deal (Goliama Rabota) which highlights the issues women face as they navigate their work-life balance. The topic is even more relevant in our current situation where essential work is a central topic of public discourse, and as care work and unpaid women’s labor, in general, are once again proven to be the essence of what holds society together. Later that year Big Deal became one of the 20 runners up for the Young Feminist Award of NGO CSW NY (NGO Committee on the Status of Women, New York) and Women Have Wings. The project was selected out of 900 contestants.

Online feminist media Vechernica – a space dedicated entirely to feminism, is among the other projects we have supported. Its aim is to serve as a platform for various feminist voices and to amplify the voices of vulnerable and marginalized groups.

Fem Forte podcast presents 8 stories of inspiring women who break taboos while grappling with gender stereotypes on the job. They tell us about both the difficulties and the successes they achieve in professional fields still considered as “male”.

Illustration: Borislava Madeit
The Invisible First Line program raised funds on behalf of crisis and counselling centers for GBV survivors across the country. The initiative was launched on November 25th, the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women and continued within the framework of the UN global initiative 16 Days of Activism against Gender-Based Violence. Part of the program included a fundraising campaign that managed to raise over €38 000 from individual and corporate donors.

In order to meet the needs of all 13 crisis and counselling centers that participated in our preliminary study of their needs, we at BFW raised the amount to almost €66 000 and distributed the funds immediately.

Our grantee partners emphasized that only such timely support could guarantee that survivors’ needs are met consistently – from temporary shelter to legal aid – thus, breaking vicious cycles of violence and trauma in the process. As challenging as helping vulnerable women and children return to normalcy might be, it is also the end goal that keeps an entire community of dedicated change-makers going, even though they may not necessarily get the recognition they deserve.

As a token of gratitude, we collected the stories of the specialists from the crisis and counselling centers and collected them in the book *The Invisible First Line*, which was a special gift for our donors.

“We have supported many successful women who once faced unbelievable adversity. We know that assisting them was an investment in their future,” a social worker shared with us.
Raising a child on your own doesn’t mean you failed as a parent. On the contrary, it requires exceptional courage and strength. That is why, for us, “single mothers” are “super-mothers” who need and deserve our full support.

BFW supports mothers in their journey towards a better life for themselves and their children. We provide funds for vocational courses, so that women can improve their competitiveness in the labor market and become economically independent. Our goal is to provide sustainable, long-term support and financial independence for those who deserve it most – single mothers who have taken on the enormous responsibility of caring for and educating the next generation.

Our Chance for Invisible Super Moms program was launched in 2018 and since then we have supported 35 women and their children. Though the skills they have acquired are diverse, from foreign languages to catering, a common theme of reclaiming their dignity and autonomy runs through their testimonials.

“I would very much like to complete a driving course, as being licensed to drive would enable me to find a suitable job for myself – as a sales representative, distributor or similar. It would allow me to be mobile, to respond quickly when my child needs me,” – a Super mom from Silistra shared with us.
At the beginning of 2021, BFW launched the third edition of its **Community Development Program**, which aims to support community leaders and grassroots activism in their efforts to unite and mobilize their communities, to promote initiatives related to bringing citizens together for a better social environment, to enable encounters and exchanges between different groups, and to promote women's involvement in community development. The overarching objective of the program is to promote and support informal involvement and unity of citizens in solving societal problems that have been left out of government support.

We received 101 applications from 43 different places, our jury selected 17 of them. They went through a two-part program – theoretical and practical – and in the first stage, the 17 participants took part in a three-day training at the end of April, aimed at developing skills for community building and organizing. During the second stage, they had the opportunity to apply for funding for the projects they submitted, thus helping them to inspire their communities for action and together implement an initiative to improve everyone’s life in the community.

11 women leaders were approved for funding and each of them developed their project according to the needs of their community and their competencies.

**Lyudmila Sultanova** organized a petanque tournament for senior sports clubs in the capital, Sofia. This enabled the senior participants to focus their thoughts and actions on positive events, to be physically active and overcome isolation during the COVID-19 pandemic.

**Radka Toteva** created the website *Pensioner.bg* which is aimed entirely at people of retirement age and its purpose is to serve as a place for socialization.

**Stella Kehayova** started an *Academy for Women Entrepreneurs* in the city of Kazanlak. With her project, she wants to counteract unemployment and the economic dependence of girls and women in Kazanlak, thus giving them a chance to grow and to participate in the management and decision-making processes as part of their professional development.
In 2021 BFW celebrated March 8 with an Open Call for Creative Ideas for Empowering Women. We selected 20 out of 112 projects and supported them financially so that they happen simultaneously throughout the country. The initiatives involved hundreds of women and girls from local communities and made us feel extremely proud and inspired.

We supported the horizontal collective **Feminist Mobilizations**, which organized the annual March for Women’s Rights: Always on the Front Line. The march was held for the 5th year in a row and once again stated that March 8 is, above all, a day for political activism and for remembering the achievements of women.

The young LBT and feminist organization **Sappho-Bulgaria** has developed a zine, which briefly presented the historical roots of the March 8 celebrations in Bulgaria and around the world. The zine included excerpts from historical documents, photographs, original illustrations, and was distributed in public spaces such as galleries, museums, libraries, beauty salons, community centers, universities and more.

Another project we supported was **Motherhood on Hold**, which introduced us to the stories of women from the only women’s prison in Bulgaria. They shared with us their personal stories of pain and guilt but most importantly, hope that one day they will be able to share a life with their children again.
In 2021, BFW successfully ran the **Feminism in Action Program**. It aimed to foster the development of the feminist movement in the country by supporting organizations and groups working for women's rights. The program is also part of the strategic activities of BFW to address the needs of different groups of women and girls, to achieve gender equality and a society free of violence, discrimination, and inequality. **We selected 12 out of 50 projects submitted by 49 NGOs from 21 cities and towns, allocating €59 497 among them.**

Another organization we supported is the **St. Nikolai Chudotvorets** which works with people with intellectual disabilities and those placed under guardianship. Their new program aims to give training to women and girls so that they gain knowledge of their rights and exercise their right to work by starting a training program in the social enterprise of the foundation - the "Wonderful Garden" in the town of Dobrich.

**Arte Urbana Collective Association's** **My Place in Cinema** is a film education programme targeting girls and young women aged 12-19 years old. Its goal is to introduce students and their teachers to the role of women in cinema through film screenings, resources and discussions.

**My body – my rights** project by **Dignita Foundation** addresses the issue of the rights of sex workers and women at risk of trafficking. A lawyer and social worker met with women from north-western Bulgaria, the poorest region in the country, where many choose sex work as their temporary occupation and clarified how they could fully exercise their civil rights, including by seeking legal recourse and compensation.
RavniBG is a diverse and intersectional coalition, which unites 38 progressive civil society organisations predominantly based outside the capital city of Sofia, with small budgets and limited access to resources. Since 2018, the coalition, led by BFW, has grown and adopted various measures to increase solidarity between its members. One of the instruments is the RavniBG Solidarity Fund. The fund introduces a participatory grantmaking model, which is an innovative mechanism for Bulgaria and aims to democratize decision-making processes and involve organizations applying for funding and other stakeholders in the evaluation process.

Most notably, the coalition has strengthened its advocacy efforts through continuing communication campaigns on a local level in 2020-21. The partners of RavniBG aimed to influence public perception and to inspire confidence in CSOs through promotion and a better understanding of their work as representatives of a variety of public interests and communities; to develop a positive shift in the narrative and counter the trend of stigmatization of the role of CSOs; to offer opportunities for volunteering and active civic participation, thus activating local communities, providing support to the most vulnerable groups, and expanding their network of supporters.

Some of the coalition’s latest communication efforts focused on advocacy for the protection of the human rights of vulnerable groups (Hayaci Association, Psychosocial Support and Personality Development Association, LGBT Youth Organisation Deystvie); while others established successful partnerships with public services and institutions (Ivor Foundation, Smoke-Free Bulgaria Association, VT Events Organisation, Mission Wings Foundation).

Lastly, the partnership between RavniBG and BCNL in the To the Parliament With a Click campaign created spaces for increased dialogue between citizens and decision-makers.
The **BFW Open opportunities program** offers rapid response grants - flexible funding instruments which can help organizations to adapt to external changes or respond to new challenges, i.e. provide a little additional support if and when justified. This tailor-made financial support is available year-round to respond to emerging advocacy opportunities, crisis and security issues, opportunities to strengthen the visibility of human rights agendas, issues and narratives.

We have been financially supporting Sofia Pride since 2011, providing funds for security and safety during the march for equal rights, as it is still a target of provocations and attacks. In 2021, Sofia Pride was held for the 14th consecutive year, we again marched together with the thousands of people from the growing LGBTIQ+ community in Bulgaria who are fighting for their right to live a dignified life and have equal rights.

Despite this positive development in recent years, we remain cautious of the fact that Bulgaria still does not have legislation criminalizing hate crime and hate speech on the basis of a person’s sexual orientation, gender identity, expression, or sex characteristics. In 2021, we witnessed a series of anti-LGBTIQ+ attacks the most serious of which occurred on October 31, when during a trans community gathering, ten people linked to the far-right Bulgarian National Union stormed the LGBTIQ+ community center **Rainbow Hub**, hit a representative of the community and proceeded to vandalize the space and destroy property. Thanks to our rapid response grantmaking an emergency grant of €5 000 for the restoration of the community center.
In 2021, we were proud to present the prize of €1,500 to the Slovenian director Marija Zidar who was awarded Sofia DocuMental Best Female Director for her film Reconciliation. During the ceremony, BFW Executive Director Nadejda Dermendjieva noted that women are not properly represented in the visual arts scene in Bulgaria or around the world. Insufficient representation, in turn, diminishes the very truthfulness, novel perspective and emotional intensity of art. Therefore, every creative act of a woman must be supported.

BFW, together with GLAS Foundation, supported the production of Bulgarian pop singer Ruth Koleva’s new video Salty. The video is a bold representation of female beauty in all its forms, advocating for the rights of the trans community, which is still often under attack in Bulgaria. "Giving a voice to the voiceless, showing the invisible, exposing the unjust, empowering those who are not accepted by society - this is still considered courage and provocation" commented Gergana Kutseva, Deputy Director of BFW.

Another project we proudly supported was Mina Mileva & Vesela Kazakova’s latest film Women Do Cry starring Academy Award nominee Maria Bakalova. Based on a true story, the film examines the (arguably worsening) gender inequality in Bulgaria and has toured a number of national and international festivals, gaining critical acclaim in Bulgaria and abroad. BFW supported 10 screenings with follow-up discussions in small towns across Bulgaria.
BFW, Taso Foundation (Georgia), Women’s Fund in Georgia and the Ukrainian Women’s Fund joined forces to explore and document the (post)pandemic economic effects, caused by COVID-19, on women’s rights civil society organizations.

The Read Between the Lines project will conduct research, propose recommendations, and inform different stakeholders about the situation that at least 60 women’s groups in Bulgaria, Georgia and Ukraine are facing.

The motivation behind the one-year initiative stems from the fact that, in the pandemic, women’s voices have been left unheard and human rights issues pushed to the periphery of the social and political discourse. We can say the same for civil society organizations – many were at the forefront of fighting the pandemic, yet decision-makers rarely sought out their expertise or amplified their voices. Funding for critical human rights areas has been cut, redirected, or left unallocated. These circumstances have lasting economic repercussions on the civil rights sector that exceed statistics and which can impact human lives.

Therefore, the Read Between the Lines Project will contribute to strengthening the regional cooperation between the 4 women’s funds and their grantees partners based in the three countries by developing a common methodology and framework for collecting data, enriching the knowledge of the region and creating a collective story and a voice so that better response and resilience models to the crisis are created and multiplied locally, nationally and regionally.
Our support for 31 distinct but intertwined advocacy initiatives reflects our conviction that it is often the most vulnerable and politically underrepresented groups that are best positioned to drive social change. We aspired to give activists and grassroots groups the confidence and tools to engage decision-makers and their wider communities through meaningful advocacy.

The wide geographic reach of these initiatives – including Sofia, Pleven, and Veliko Tarnovo, but also smaller towns such as Karlovo and Botevgrad – is encouraging, as it challenges the typical big city/province divide that has often thwarted the equitable roll-out of public policies in Bulgaria. We believe that by demanding greater accountability from their municipalities, placing gender and environmental issues on the agenda at the local level, and by participating in the articulation of legislation and strategic documents at the national level, our partners are contributing to these policy-making processes with invaluable knowledge and insights gained in the field.

To outline just a couple of examples, our grantees have actively pushed for long-overdue amendments to the *Protection against Domestic Violence Act (PADVA)* that would finally expand the circle of victims eligible for protection, increase the scope of interventions available to authorities, and ensure more equitable access to social services for survivors.

Others have worked at the intersection of gender and environmental issues, contributing to the first *National Declaration for Environmental Justice*, which was recently discussed with policymakers. Signed by a diverse coalition of activists, academics, and NGOs, the Declaration provides a valuable point of departure for reconciling the monumental transitions envisioned in the EU Green Deal with social justice concerns in the local context.

The thematic breadth of these advocacy efforts demonstrates once more that gender, class, ethnicity, and the environment are intertwined and permeate all/various aspects of lived experience. We believe shedding light on such complex issues which span multiple sociological categories and distinct communities is best served by involving the individuals who confront them daily in public discourse or in participant-oriented research.

Notable examples of our efforts in this direction include fostering feminist grassroots mobilization in *Roma communities*, supporting discussion forums that pinpoint barriers to women’s full political representation, such as *Zherav* in Kazanlak, and promoting active citizenship among Bulgarian youth.
We felt a few of the initiatives we supported illustrate the possible symbiosis between knowledge-creation and public service particularly vividly. One such project, conducted in collaboration with RAMUS laboratories, aimed to test 500 individuals from marginalized communities for HIV and Hepatitis, providing a snapshot assessment of an understudied public health challenge.

Roma citizens living on unregistered properties are another vulnerable group whose predicament has received insufficient attention from researchers thus far. Aiming to shed light on the issue and spur municipal authorities into action, the members of the women’s association Hayachi initiated an unprecedented mapping of such properties in Novi Pazar.

The ongoing crises – in the economic, geopolitical, and public health realms – we are facing underscore the importance of fostering solidarity, not least through recognizing the struggles of “the Other” – refugees and migrants, the elderly, and those with mental health conditions or intellectual disabilities. It is only through ascertaining the extent of these issues rigorously and giving their human face greater visibility that we can mobilize allies from the rest of the civil sector and beyond and build a truly diverse and inclusive feminist movement.

Capacity Building

In 2021, we implemented 8 capacity building activities on:

- Climate and Gender Justice
- Community Building and Organizing
- Feminist Theory and Practice
- Domestic and Gender-based Violence
- Advocacy

The overall number of participants was 264:

- 241 women
- 23 men
We amplify women’s voices in civil society as a means of promoting democracy because we believe that gender equality is fundamental to a truly democratic and economically developed society.

We raise awareness and build strong partnerships for campaigns in support of legislative initiatives/changes or against legal documents leading to inequality and discrimination.

We cooperate with our grantees and with other partners and create consortia for participation in various initiatives, campaigns, projects and movements.
In 2021, BFW was elected as a member of the **Council for Civil Society Development** with the votes of other partners CSOs. The council is an advisory body to the Council of Ministers and its function involves the development and implementation of strategies and policies supporting civil society.

It will also propose a plan on how to accomplish the strategic goals of the government, collect information about public funding of civic organizations, and issue statements about all civic organizations' legal act drafts.

BFW is one of the 14 organizations that are currently members of the Council and who was voted in among a list of 123 candidates.

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**On the Right Track** is a €4 million cross-regional initiative of 20 women’s funds from Europe and Latin America focused on responding to the anti-gender movement, the shrinking space for civil society and to the rise of fundamentalism and the far-right. The project started in 2019 and its main goal is to strengthen the feminist, LGBTIQ+ and human rights movements to preserve the values of freedom, democracy, and diversity.

The funds collaborate with grassroots groups, organizations, networks and feminist movements in the European and Latin American regions to support their efforts to counteract these regressive tendencies and to create a discourse that can communicate to the general public the importance of living in a democracy and of being able to exercise our human rights as women, LGBTIQ+ people and people from vulnerable communities.

The project advocates for better resourcing for grassroots CSOs, groups, activists and alliances who are at the forefront of the fight with radical ideologies, while advancing social justice. It has three main components – regranting and supporting women’s funds’ partners, research, documentation of the attacks against human rights defenders by the far-right, shifting the public narrative and (re-)building a positive image of a progressive civil society.
Between August and November 2021, BFW implemented the project *For Love Without Violence*, part of our campaign for the prevention of gender-based violence among girls and young women *Love Errors*. The project was implemented with the financial support of the Ministry of Justice.

Women from all over the country who had experienced domestic violence received over 30 free online consultations with a psychologist or lawyer. The project targeted victims of domestic violence, perpetrators of violence or those living in an environment of domestic violence, including witnesses of that violence.

BFW provided free online legal and psycho-social support, as well as easily accessible information on the subject. We reached people from small and remote settlements through flexible online forms of counselling and referral, as well as through a national information campaign.

In addition to the individual consultations, three webinars were held, in which experts answered the participants’ questions and introduced them to the steps to get out of a toxic relationship. Simultaneous sign language interpretation made the events accessible for people from the deaf community, who have limited opportunities to access interactive information and actively participate and share their experiences.
In 2021, we continued our dedicated efforts to reduce and eliminate violence against women within the legal and institutional frameworks. In January 2021, the Ministry of Justice published a proposal for a number of amendments to the Protection against Domestic Violence Act (PADVA). BFW prepared an opinion piece in support of the amendments and submitted it to the responsible institutions.

In November, on the eve of the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women, we again called for urgent changes to the Law, as dozens of women continue to lose their lives at the hands of their close partners, husbands, fathers, and sons. We wrote and submitted an open letter to all newly elected MPs and future members of the government to take immediate measures to combat violence against women and domestic violence.

We also supported and spoke at one of the biggest protests against gender-based violence so far, which took place in 4 cities and was organized by one of our grantees, Feminist Mobilisations. Unfortunately, up to date, the Law on Protection from Domestic Violence has not been amended.

Photos: Emil Metodiev
November 25th 2021, Sofia
International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women
BFW and Kabinet.bg, a virtual clinic for emergency psychotherapy and emotional support, came together to meet the need for mental health support, especially among vulnerable groups, after the mass trauma caused by the COVID-19 pandemic and the associated lockdowns and isolation. Free access to the program is granted to any woman or girl facing difficulties or who is currently at risk, as well as Bulgarians living abroad.

In Bulgaria, similarly to many other places around the world, there has been an unprecedented deterioration and severe, long-term effects from the pandemic on the psyche and emotions of women who play difficult front-line roles: teachers, health workers, retail workers, employees without the option or right to a home office, entrepreneurs, women in the arts and freelance, mothers, daughters, and many others.

In the past two years, at least one woman has died tragically and violently every month, after years of abusive family circumstances. The campaign’s messages emphasize every woman’s right to feel the full range of experiences, including the most negative, without feeling guilty about what she is feeling or thinking, and to seek help from professionals.

It continues until the end of 2022 and we hope to support as many individuals as possible.
On March 8, the *International Women’s Day*, BFW, in partnership with the **Bulgarian Donors’ Forum** and the **BCause Foundation**, held an online discussion on *Philanthropy for Women’s Rights*. Representatives of business, civil society organizations, embassies, institutions were invited to discuss the importance of investing in the potential, talent and rights of girls and women.

The webinar discussed the importance of philanthropy, social change and the main link between them. The event emphasized the different forms of support that can be provided by donors: social assistance, empowering initiatives and how they can differ from long-term donation programs which are the most sustainable and effective in realizing social change. All participants agreed that investment in women and girls is an investment in the whole society and is always returned.
BFW is the only donor that exclusively supports the gender justice movement in Bulgaria and as such, our mission is to develop philanthropy for women’s rights and for social change.

We believe that because we come from the movements we serve, we are best positioned to support women and feminist movements directly. Our fundraising philosophy is based on donor education, diversity of resources and on creating innovative funding models, such as pooled funding, that have proved to be strategic and effective. We raise funds from local and foreign donors such as private foundations, other women’s funds, INGOs and Bulgarian foundations, embassies, companies, and we invest back directly in the activities and the capacities of feminist activists, grassroots groups and CSOs across the country.

We also believe in the power of individual philanthropy and, every year, we create and implement special fundraising campaigns encouraging people to invest in the rights of women and girls and in social change. We support cooperation between civil society organizations and the business sector because we are confident that social philanthropy should be part of corporate social responsibility and we know that when the non-governmental and the business sectors join forces and invest in human development, civil society in Bulgaria will become a significant and influential factor. Lastly, we advocate for more state funding and more resources, especially core support, for women’s and human rights CSOs.
62% of the budget was dedicated for grantmaking and capacity building of our grantee partners.

79% The main sources of funding remained international philanthropic organizations - private foundations and women’s funds.

95% increase compared to 2020

24% budget growth compared to 2020

€1 070 715 raised in 2021

€616 703 budget for 2021

102 individual donors raised €12 396

37 donors (corporate, foundations, INGOs, women’s funds, embassies)

21 corporate donors raised €110 026

€358 271 distributed in direct grants 49% growth compared to 2020

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