

ANNUAL REPORT 2023



BULGARIAN
FUND FOR
WOMEN

Strategic Initiatives

- 3** **About Us**
- 7** **Introduction**
- 11** **Funding and Capacity Building**
- 21** **Support for Administrative and Organizational Needs (Core Funding)**
- 27** **Open Opportunities Program and Urgent Fund Ukraine**

33

Thematic Funding Programs

38

Capacity Building

39

**Advocacy and Awareness
Raising**

48

Fundraising

52

BFW's Donors in 2023

53

Support our Work!

About Us

Bulgarian Fund for Women (BFW) supports feminist organizations, collectives and activists who challenge the patriarchal status quo and work towards a systemic change for women, girls, and all marginalized communities.

OUR MISSION is to support the gender equality movement in Bulgaria through developing philanthropy for social change.

OUR VISION is that all women and girls live in a just and equal world where their choices are respected, and their voices are heard.



We strive to overcome numerous structural problems such as lack of gender justice, ubiquitous sexism and misogyny, increasing social inequalities, shrinking space for civil society, attacks against liberal democratic values, insufficient social engagement and philanthropic support for human rights movements and for achieving social justice.

OUR VALUES are solidarity, self and collective care, diversity, accountability, fearlessness, responsiveness and celebration.

BFW IS A MEMBER OF



In 2023 BFW introduced a new management model called co-leadership. It has been in place since April 2023, when, with the consent of BFW's Board of Trustees, Nadejda Dermendjieva (former executive director) and Gergana Kutseva (former deputy director) officially stepped into their new roles of co-directors of the Fund.

For BFW, shared leadership (or co-leadership) is the natural direction of development given the rapid growth rates of the organization in recent years, the expansion of the team, the constantly increasing mobilized resources and funds distributed, as well as the strategic plans for even greater growth of the organization.

Co-leadership is essentially about sharing power and caring for yourself and others – feminist values that BFW identifies with, and is becoming increasingly popular, replacing the traditional hierarchical mode of

management where a single person can and should make decisions and carry the entire responsibility for an organization.

In the context of BFW, the co-leadership will more successfully direct the complementary knowledge, skills, qualities and many years of experience of Nadejda Dermendjieva and Gergana Kutseva toward improving the sustainability and capacity of the Fund for the implementation of the strategic goals set in the 'Theory of Change' of the organization in order continue fighting for its mission and vision.

Redistribution of work and responsibility sharing between the two co-directors further aims to contribute to the adaptability of the organization, making better and bolder decisions, preventing professional burnout, better risk management, as well as empowering and promoting the leadership skills of all team members.

Board of Trustees



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Lyuncheva



Vanya
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Dermendjieva**

Co-director



**Gergana
Kutseva**

Co-director



**Denitsa
Mishonova**

Accounting
Manager



**Daniela
Raycheva**

Financial Planning and
Analyses Director



**Rada
Elenkova**

Program
Director



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Expert



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Dobрева**

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and Learning Manager



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**Siyana
Raykovska**

Office
Manager

Introduction

Bulgarian Fund for Women measures its success by the depth and intensity of the collective fights and achievements of the organizations led by women, LGBTIQ+ activists and representatives of vulnerable communities that we support. Our partners protect feminist ideas of opposition and overcoming the challenges that the most marginalized and stigmatized communities in Bulgarian society face. In our Annual Report for 2023 we summarize what we have achieved over a year in which we strengthened the transformative power of feminist activism.

2023: The year of sharing feminist power

Transferring power, sharing power, and most importantly – transforming power – are essential for feminism and at the heart of BFW's vision and values. Our commitment to rethinking the power relations led to a change in BFW's management structure. With the unanimous support of BFW's Board of Trustees, we successfully established a new model of co-leadership in the organization so as to challenge the patriarchic models that are the norm in the global sector of philanthropy and other spheres as well. The new structure reflects our values and helps to improve the quality of our work and decisions as well as the sustainability of the organization. It further brings us joy and shared care, which is always the case with collective and co-operative efforts. For a second year in a row we experimented with a designated fund where we left grantmaking decisions in the hands of the activists applying for grants. Thus, we prove that feminist activism and feminist leadership do work!

2023: The year when we exceeded our own ambitious goals, again

We managed to mobilize approximately € 3 million, which is a growth of 62% compared to 2022. This led to a new doubling of our annual budget reaching € 1,898,193. For the

first time we managed to attract significant European funding, which represents 61% of the funds raised. This allowed us to increase the institutional support (core funding) for our partners: we distributed approximately € 1,3 million, which represents 91% (an increase of 43% compared to 2022) of all 2023 funds, to strengthen the sector and support the organizations in achieving their mission. We optimized costs and reached a 5% increase – up to 74% of the budget that we directly invested in financial support and capacity building for our partners.

2023: The year of significant mobilization and visibility of feminist struggles

The fight against gender-based violence and domestic violence entered a new phase following the adoption of the amendments to the Protection against Domestic Violence Act. This was achieved thanks to the strong alliance of women's rights organizations and the unprecedented public mobilization across the country! We put Bulgaria on the world map of the fight against anti-gender movements by organizing the European meeting of the international initiative 'On the Right Track'. Donors, women's funds and representatives of human rights organizations from Bulgaria, Armenia, Georgia, Poland, Ukraine, Columbia and many other countries shared their experiences related to the attacks by fundamentalist movements against democracy in their respective countries and mobilized to design strategies to overcome threats and build up a positive vision for the future. We made women artists more visible. Their unique interpretation of the current world problems was the focus of the 'Needles in a Haystack' exhibition in the 'National Gallery – The Palace', which attracted thousands of visitors.

We stand by our commitment to ensure better funding for feminist activism in the future! In a world facing significant challenges such as a growing authoritarianism, deprivation of basic human rights and climate crisis that threatens people's health and well-being, feminist movements around the world take the lead while growing in significance. We thank our extremely enthusiastic team for the support, and extend our gratitude to the donors for their trust and ongoing support. We also thank all grantee partners who transform the world so that social justice prevails.

Inspired and committed,

Gergana Kutseva and Nadejda Dermendjieva

THE YEAR 2023 IN FIGURES



**BUDGET
GROWTH
COMPARED
TO 2022**

€ 1 898 193

**ANNUAL
BUDGET**

53 DONORS

**INSTITUTIONAL
AND INDIVIDUAL
DONORS**

€ 1 354 052

**ALLOCATED
THROUGH
DIRECT
GRANTS**



**GROWTH
COMPARED
TO 2022**



**66
DIRECT
GRANTS**



**23 862
DIRECT
BENEFICIARIES***

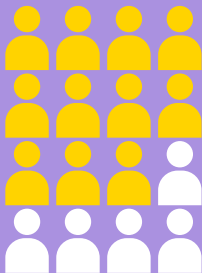
*39% of these belong to marginalized groups such as women and girls who are victims of gender-based violence; live below the poverty line and/or are socially marginalized; with physical/mental disabilities; LGBTQ+ communities; victims of human trafficking; migrants and refugees; sex workers.



**45
SUPPORTED
PARTNERS**



**1 289 946
INDIRECT
BENEFICIARIES**



4 277 623 DIRECTLY REACHED AUDIENCE

44 681 SITE VISITORS

1 769 MENTIONS ON MEDIA AND OTHER WEBSITES

45 PUBLICATIONS ON OUR WEBSITE

47 MEDIA INTERVIEWS

2 CAMPAIGNS

FUNDING AND CAPACITY BUILDING

For BFW, the provision of grants and capacity building go hand in hand – two inextricably linked processes guided by our conviction that the appropriate holistic support for the collective actions of women, girls, LGBTIQ+ people and human rights defenders will lead to systemic and in-depth social, political, cultural, economic and environmental changes that are urgently required for a fairer and more equal world.



BFW contributes to the development of social movements and helps their interconnectedness, coordination and effectiveness. The activists and organizations we support create and transform systems and communities so as to build up a better world and counteract the shrinking space of civil society.

We seek to prioritize the so-called grassroots partners – those led by communities whose rights they support; small-budget organizations; organizations with modest project history; newly registered and/or those that work in remote places because BFW's philosophy has been and always will be to support and give chance to vulnerable groups and communities that know best the problems and plausible solutions yet whose capacity and access to funding are often limited.

Our programs are premised on organizations' needs assessments that we carry out regularly. The most recent one (2022) demonstrated that limited tailor-made funding opportunities, prevalent project-based funding which prevents strategic planning and sustainability and limited access to public funds are among the main challenges.

Seeking to respond to all identified difficulties, we regularly adapt our funding mechanisms so that they remain transparent, accessible, timely and flexible. Through a combination of operational support, project funding and access to emergency funds for crisis situations or emerging opportunities, funds are distributed in six thematic portfolios: invisible problems and communities, strengthening social

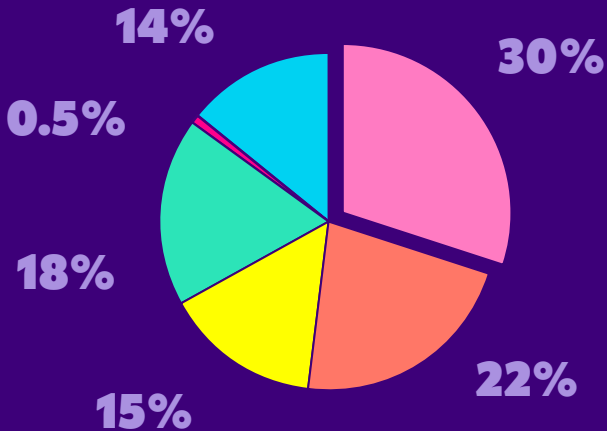
movements, freedom from violence, LGBTIQ+ justice, climate justice and empowerment of girls and young women.

We believe that multiannual administrative and organizational support is crucial for ensuring the sustainability and stability of the civil sector. Therefore in 2023, we supported tens of organizations within the framework of our program **'Mission: Possible'**, providing long-term and flexible funding free of restrictions.

BFW's year-round program for emergency funding **'Open Opportunities'** aims at providing funding to organizations even when there is no open call for applications. It allows organizations to respond to crises and threats as well as to emerging opportunities requiring immediate reaction such as advocacy, enhancing the visibility of messages, problems or experiences related to women's and human rights, without the need to compete with each other.

BFW's **project funding** is effected through fast and simplified procedures that render it accessible to even emerging organizations, thus supporting them in gaining experience and acquiring financial history so that they become eligible for other donor funding in the future. The key to the success of the supported projects is that BFW provides the funds in advance, without requiring own contribution.

TOTAL AMOUNTS BY BFW THEME



Invisible Communities and Problems



Freedom from Violence



Climate Justice



Strengthening Movements

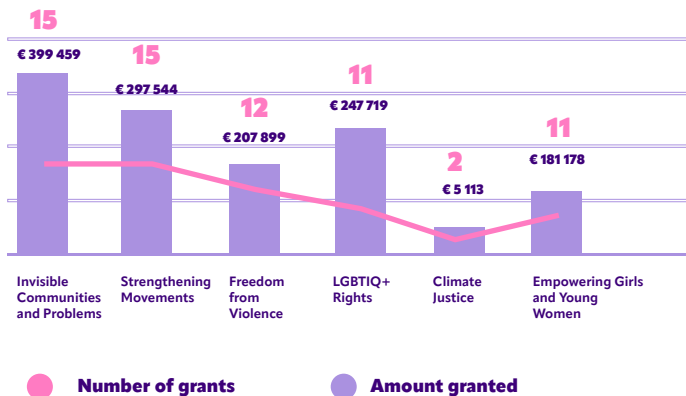


LGBTQ+ Rights

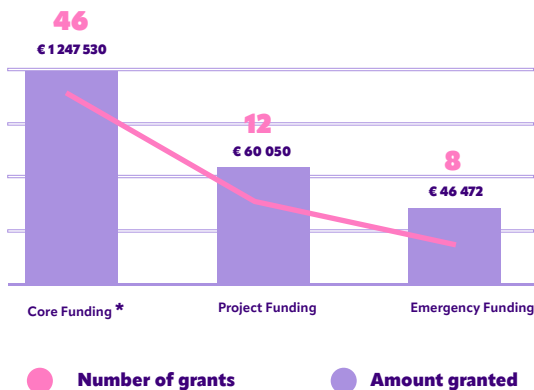


Empowering Girls and Young Women

TOTAL AMOUNTS BY BFW THEME



GRANTS BY TYPE OF SUPPORT




* € 15,139 of the core funding provided in 2023 is an additional payment to seven organizations that were approved for this type of support in 2022.



91% (43% increase compared to 2022) of the funds were directed towards multiannual organizational support to allow civil society organizations (CSOs) to plan strategically, adapt quickly and focus entirely on pursuing their mission.



100% of the funds were distributed to organizations led by women or by representatives of the groups whose rights they defend.




32% of the funds were allocated to organizations working outside the capital – in towns and villages where funding opportunities are scarce.



20% of the funds were allocated to organizations and/or initiatives with national scope.



18% of the funds were allocated to partners which BFW supports for the first time.



9% of the funds were distributed to newly established organizations (registered less than three years ago) which could be considered risky by other donors.

STATUS OF THE SUPPORTED ORGANIZATIONS

50 GRANTS

€ 1 212 058



REGISTERED

15 GRANTS

€ 123 787



NEWLY REGISTERED

1 GRANT

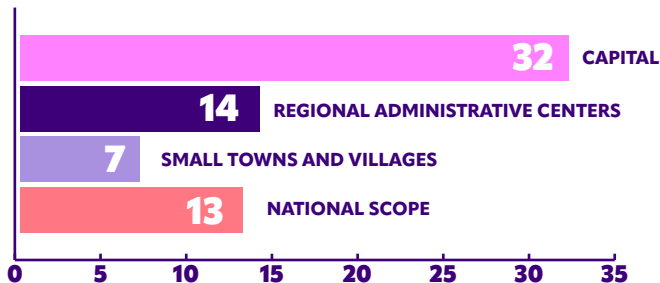
€ 3 068



NOT REGISTERED

LOCATION / NUMBER OF ORGANIZATIONS IN TERMS OF THE SCOPE OF THEIR WORK *

*The number of unique locations is 19.



Impact of our Programs

Relying on BFW's 'Theory of Change', in 2023 we supported our partners' development and sustainability, thus allowing them to take part in the local and national decision-making process, mobilize and transform their communities and be at the forefront of the gender equality movement.



In addition to providing direct funding, our efforts were further enhanced by trainings and initiatives tailor-made to their specific needs and designed by experts in the respective areas with whom we work in partnership. Although progress toward our ultimate aim – a fairer society respecting women’s rights and choices – takes time and is difficult to measure, the mutual trust we enjoy with the organizations we fund, and the impact assessment of their efforts demonstrate that we are on the right track.

In 2023 our partners successfully advocated for important legislative amendments despite the political instability; they led strategic litigation; mobilized their communities and local authorities in joint actions; laid the foundations of new organizations; stood through crises; researched and solved ‘invisible’ social problems; did fieldwork with refugees, victims of violence and human trafficking, and more and more... In the following pages, we provide an overview of their successes, and we thank them for their dedication.



Research and Publications Supported by BFW



Image: 'Ekaterina Karavelova Foundation'

'Ekaterina Karavelova Foundation' (EKF) advocates for gender equality policies based on data and evidence. In 2023 part of EKF's efforts translated into the study **'Women in Politics. Analysis of the 2 April 2023 Early Parliamentary Elections'**. In the context of a series of recent parliamentary elections, the survey brings attention to the tendentiously low representation of women in politics – highest at 27% since 1990 and barely 24% in the government formed in 2023.

The report indicates the reasons behind these statistics: lack of women on the electoral lists, lower media coverage of women candidates, traditional roles assigned to women, as well as poor opportunities for women to multitask work, care for children and elderly relatives and political career, etc. The survey concludes inter alia that political parties fail to acknowledge the problems women experience. A number of recommendations are made, both specifically to parliamentary groups and in general.

'Roma Women and Economic Inequality' is yet another publication by the 'Ekaterina Karavelova Foundation'. It sheds light on problems such as segregation, early school leaving, poverty and poor professional chances, as well as discriminatory attitudes toward this vulnerable group that affect negatively women's economic well-being. The report extends recommendations to the organizations working with Roma to enhance their sensitivity to the gender dimensions of inequalities, educational mediation and the need for a campaign to overcome the stereotypes related to the Roma community.

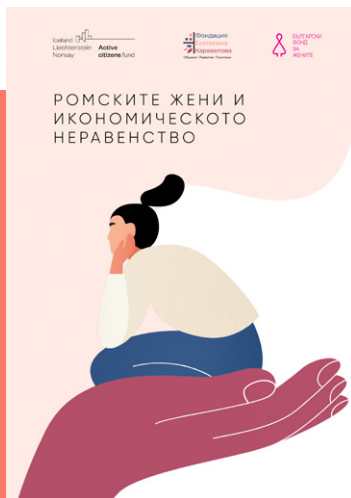


Image: 'Ekaterina Karavelova Foundation'



Image: 'Bibliofem Collective'

The accumulation of feminist knowledge in the Bulgarian language is one of the main objectives of the **'Bibliofem Collective'**. In 2023 it published 18 articles in its [blog](#) covering new and translated content on various topics such as feminism, domestic violence, rights of LGBTQ+ people, etc.

SUPPORT FOR ADMINISTRATIVE AND ORGANIZATIONAL NEEDS



 CORE FUNDING



Photography: Emil Metodiev

In 2023 BFW continued providing flexible funding within 'Mission: Possible' – the only donor program in Bulgaria that provides funds for the overall functioning of organizations without restrictions. The core funding covers teams' salaries, office rent, purchase of equipment and other needs that project funding leaves unmet. This type of support improves organizations' sustainability and adaptability and allows them to focus entirely on pursuing their objectives and developing their capacity and skills for strategic planning and measuring the effect of their work.

This support is crucial for the development of the whole civil society sector as a participant in advocacy and decision-making at the highest level, as a source of expertise, and as a corrective to public institutions and businesses. 'Mission: Possible' seeks to provide long-term funding because the most meaningful changes take time.

In 2023 the program was realized as part of the 'BIRDS in BG' project supported by the European Commission and launched in March.

Over the next three years BFW, together with the 'Bulgarian Center for Not-for-Profit Law' (BCNL) and Impact 'Drive Foundation' (IDF) will invest close to € 2.8 million in the sustainability of civil society organizations across the country. The aim is to strengthen and develop the non-governmental sector through 360-degree support: strategic long-term funding through three types of programs and capacity building designed on the basis of studying the specific needs of small and local non-governmental organizations that work for social change, defend human rights, democracy, rule of law and European values. More than

€ 960,000 has already been directly invested in the organizations and their activities through BFW's core-funding program while our partners from BCNL and IDF carried out 11 trainings and initiatives for capacity building encompassing 322 people, mostly civil society representatives.

In 2023, through 'Mission: Possible' we provided 43 grants of a total amount of € 1,222,477. The sum includes final payments to seven NGOs (€ 15,139) and ongoing support to organizations approved in the course of former editions of the program (€ 240,190) as well as additional 25 partners (€ 967,148) approved in 2023 in the fourth edition of the open call. It received a total of 268 applications in its first phase and 138 applications in the second one. A total of 25 organizations working in seven locations and/or nationwide were approved with the help of external evaluators.

Thus, in 2023 the number of grants for organizations that have received or are receiving core funding from BFW reached 52 for all editions of the program since 2020. We described some of the achievements of our partners in a [report on the program](#), and we are glad to tell you about others here.

Center for Legal Aid – Voice in Bulgaria

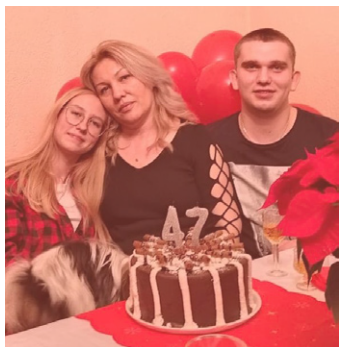


Image: 'Center for Legal Aid – Voice in Bulgaria'

'Center for Legal Aid – Voice in Bulgaria'

's team continued to work on complex cases of vulnerable people who have arrived in Bulgaria from different countries affected by war or undemocratic regimes.

An example of a happy outcome is the successful reunification of an unaccompanied minor girl with her family in the USA – a story that will be told in a transatlantic documentary

production. The organization works on key high-profile cases, including on prevention of deportation of vulnerable foreign nationals, sometimes with the interference of the European Court of Human Rights.

Among the highlights of the team's work in 2023 was the case of Marina and Danail, mother and son from Uzbekistan who had been living in Bulgaria for 22 years but in November were detained in the Special Centre for Temporary Accommodation of Foreigners (SCTAF) in Busmantsi pending deportation following failure to acquire the needed documents, which the organization explained was the result of a complicated family situation, lack of cooperation, manipulation and domestic violence. Following the interference of 'Center for Legal Aid – Voice in Bulgaria', Marina and Danail were released from SCTAF Busmantsi.

Beyond their fieldwork, the organization managed to further focus on expanding their managerial team, strategic planning, revision of their mission, vision and objectives, etc.

Association Médecins du Monde – Branch Sliven



Image: 'Médecins du Monde – Branch Sliven'

In 2023 '**Médecins du Monde – Branch Sliven**' continued working on access to sexual and reproductive health services and rights, family planning, support for psycho-social health of women and young people, improvement of the surrounding environment, etc. focusing on enhancing the quality and expanding the scope of these activities. A midwife and a psychologist joined the team in 2023, which contributed to obtaining the organization's objectives and attracting teenagers and young people to the organization's programs.

One of the achievements of 'Médecins du Monde' in recent years is that the Municipality of Sliven recognized the need to provide free gynecological examinations and contraceptives to health uninsured women. These efforts of the organization are complemented by an amendment to Regulation No. 26/2007 as a result of which pregnant uninsured women are entitled now to four gynecological examinations a year instead of the single one that was previously available.

BFW's grant supported 'Médecins du Monde' in making the necessary structural and program changes in 2023, which helped improve the quality and scope of our activities. This allowed the team to reconsider its strategy and the structure of the organization in Bulgaria and rechanneled our efforts to improving the approach towards the different groups of beneficiaries.

Excerpt from the report of 'Médecins du Monde – Branch Sliven'

The Women of Kazanlak Association



Image: 'The Women of Kazanlak Association'

In 2023 **'The Women of Kazanlak Association'** worked on gender equality in the labor market and decision-making as well as combating gender-based violence, stereotypes and discrimination. The Association organized and took part in thematic regional and national events. Furthermore, to achieve its objectives, the Association secured the support of the local government and is optimistic about their future work with the Municipality of Kazanlak for tackling long-standing problems. In addition, the Association concluded an agreement for cooperation with the local police department and Social Assistance Agency.

Examples of their work demonstrate that these important partnerships are effective. Members of the team told us the story of a woman who reached the Center for Prevention of Violence during the night,

on a day off – a victim of physical, psychological, economic and sexual violence who suffered from a mental illness. The organization responded immediately and provided everything necessary, from clothes to temporary shelter, and several days later, with the support of the local government, even a municipal residence. A psychologist started working with the woman, and the organization supported her in finding a job where she was soon promoted. Several months later 'The Women of Kazanlak' described her as a completely 'transformed' woman – she was smiling, confident and independent.

The organization further reported successes related to their very functioning: expansion of the team, increased capacity through a series of trainings, stronger communication presence etc.



OPEN OPPORTUNITIES PROGRAM AND URGENT FUND UKRAINE

'Open Opportunities Program' is a year-round accessible and flexible instrument designed by BFW specifically to support organizations in adapting to unforeseen external changes and new challenges such as crises, security problems, emerging opportunities for advocacy and awareness-raising, organization of protests, etc. Applications may be submitted throughout the year and the funding provided is consistent with the partners' specific needs and context.

In 2023, under the 'Open Opportunities Program' a total of € 79,864 was distributed among 12 organizations working in eight cities or nationwide. In addition, through the 'Urgent Fund for Women and Children Affected by the War in Ukraine', we supported five organizations working in four cities by providing € 17,088.

Support for Victims of Human Trafficking



BFW provided emergency funding to **'Demetra Association', Burgas** and **'SOS Families at Risk Foundation', Varna**. These are among the few organizations in Bulgaria that provide 24/7 specialized services for victims of human trafficking. In February 2023, due to a series of administrative, financial, and bureaucratic difficulties, these organizations were left without public funding, despite the numerous signals to all relevant institutions.

BFW's support ensured their functioning for respectively three and four months, which allowed them to continue supporting the people they work with, looking after their mental and physical health, involving external specialists, ensuring school materials for the children accommodated in the shelter. The emergency funding bought them valuable time to look for a more sustainable solution to the situation.

BFW's targeted support prevented the closing down of the specialized services for victims of trafficking in Varna. This prevention is in fact the most important aspect since women could not be relocated elsewhere, nor were they ready for independent life and reintegration.

Excerpt from 'SOS Families at Risk Foundation' report

Urgent Fund for Women and Children Affected by the War in Ukraine



Image: 'Arms Wide Open Association'

BFW established the Fund in 2022, only a few days after the conflict emerged and has funded today the efforts of 26 organizations supporting 8,533 persons.

Your donation contributed to the necessary sustainability, comprehensiveness and efficiency of the support that the team of 'Arms Wide Open' will continue to provide to refugees and other marginalized groups with whom we work. We are grateful for yet another support from BFW, for the trust and belief in our common cause. We are positive that the Fund plays a significant role in timely supporting important current topics and has a positive effect on the development of civil society in Bulgaria and the support of marginalized groups.

'Arms Wide Open Association'

Advocacy and Enhancing the Visibility of Equality-Related Problems

Within the context of the disgraceful rejection of the Law Amending and Supplementing the Protection against Domestic Violence Act in January 2023 and the numerous cases of brutal violence and murder of women, **'The Wake Up Foundation'** turned to representatives of various institutions and (then) future MPs with an appeal signed by 37 civil society organizations from the 'Together against Violence Coalition' calling for urgent measures to tackle the problem of domestic violence. The event brought together experts, authorities, embassies, media, etc. who united around the need to tackle the problem. Both the event and the accompanying advocacy campaign were widely covered.

With BFW's support, **'Elizabeth Kostova Foundation'** realized the first edition of 'Women in the Mountain', a residency for ten women writers from marginalized groups whose costs, including one social scholarship, were fully covered. With the help of mentors, the women worked in the course of ten days on their literary projects and at the end presented them during a public reading event carried out with the support of the Municipality of Chepelare. Afterwards, the literary works were put together in a digital booklet. The participants and the organizers alike draw particular attention to the obstacles to the creativity and professional development of women in literature.

I think that women's literature is largely marginalized. Things written by women are always looked upon with certain condescension. And the fact itself that something is written by a woman gets it classified as women's writing as they call it these days to avoid the awful term 'chick lit'. Furthermore, when a woman stays at home to write, this means that she is at home, hence she must be constantly busy with household chores. Things that distract. The profession of writing is not looked upon seriously.

A participant in the residency as quoted in 'Elizabeth Kostova Foundation' report

Support for the LGBTIQ+ Community in Bulgaria



Image: 'People of Sofia'

'**Rainbow Hub**' is a community LGBTIQ+ center that provides support and a space for queer people in Bulgaria. Unfortunately, it became a target of numerous attacks, hence it had to move its location several times. In 2023 it discovered its home for the next 10 years. 'Rainbow Hub's team strives to turn it again into a safe space for the community, offering the full range of free services and attracting new visitors, partners, etc.

BFW has been supporting financially **Sofia Pride** since 2011. In 2023 the 16th edition of the largest human rights event in the country celebrated the families in all their diverse colors, attracting thousands of visitors.



Image: 'People of Sofia'



Image: "Kikimora and Kikimora Foundation"

BFW funded the establishment of **'Kikimora and Kikimora Foundation'** and supported its positioning as a new lesbian feminist organization in Sofia. The support allowed the organization not only to carry out a series of events during Sofia Pride month and a multi-day workshop in the autumn but also to focus on formulating their mission, short- and long-term objectives, working processes, ideas for strategic development, etc.

... Thanks to the financial support we received from BFW, we had the opportunity to have a successful start that allowed us to truly start building an organization, focusing not only on organizing individual events but on the organizational and administrative needs of the team.

Excerpt from 'Kikimora and Kikimora Foundation' report

THEMATIC FUNDING PROGRAMS



Photography: Rosina Pencheva

Needles in a Haystack

The exhibition **'Needles in a Haystack'** comprised the results of the open call of BFW's second edition of the 'Fund for Art Projects by Women Artists' that took place in 2022.

Its display in the 'National Gallery – The Palace' from 30 May to 16 July 2023 attracted thousands of visitors who came to enjoy the works of the artists Boryana Petkova & Iskra Blagoeva, Boryana Rossa, Zelikha Shoja, Katya Dimova, Krasimira Butseva, Monika Popova, Natalia Jordanova, Neda Milanova, Oksana Kazmina, Rayna Teneva, Sophia Grancharova and nada ree.

Invited to respond to the state of emergency, challenges, and urgency in this day and age, the women artists react with varied intensity, character, style, and a great amount of sincerity. [...]

What inevitably connects them as women authors is exposing stereotypes about women's social roles and positions. They are also connected by the needle as a tool chosen by most of them, but also as a byword for that patriarchal image of the woman holding her needlework. An image rooted in the consciousness of generations, which all these women defy. [...]

Identifying a woman in a leadership position, or in politics, or in the museum is like trying to find a needle in a haystack. The general perception of feminist problematics, genuine understanding of women's issues, women's presence and participation in public life fits perfectly into this phrase.

Svetlana Kuyumdzhieva, curator of the exhibition



The paper edition of a bilingual catalogue containing detailed documentation of the exhibition was presented during the curator's tour whereby visitors learned more about the process preceding the exhibition and the individual works through Svetlana Kuyumdzhieva's perspective.

Women's Activism and the Fight for Clean Air in Bulgaria

In 2023 we looked into our Program 'A Breath of Fresh Air' within which we implemented the first 'Clean Air Academy' in Bulgaria a year earlier and funded project ideas of women, members of ethnic minorities, village communities and people with disabilities and chronic diseases.

The Roma women's 'Association Hayaci' not only created an open study room that will continue to inform the residents of the segregated neighborhood in Novi Pazar consisting mainly of Roma people and Bulgarians of Turkish origin on environmental issues but also managed to convince the local government that the problem of air pollution required an urgent solution and started cooperating with it to address it. The team of the Association proved that it was ready to adapt, cooperate with, and strive to acquire

and share experience on topics that at first appeared unrelated but proved to be appropriate in the context of their daily work with vulnerable persons and their successes in transforming the marginalized Roma community.

Dr Zornitsa Spasova filled a significant gap in the available in Bulgarian language literature on air pollution by making a gender-sensitive literature overview of the most recent international scientific works. The data concerning the disproportional vulnerability of women and children which she presents during conferences and public lectures challenged the idea that the air we breathe affects everyone equally and triggered a long overdue discussion in the Bulgarian scientific and media communities.



During the final hybrid event of the Program funded by **'Clean Air Fund'**, some of the participants shared their experiences in realizing their initiatives and discussed the difficulties along the way and the main conclusions. Please refer to [Challenges to Women's Activism and the Fight for Clean Air in Bulgaria](#) which BFW published at the end of the Program for detailed information about its stages and achievements.

Ravni BG's Solidarity Fund



Image: 'Civil Union Ravni BG' ('Equal BG')

To encourage solidarity among members of the informal **'Civil Union Ravni BG' ('Equal BG')** – an intersectional coalition uniting more than 30 progressive civil society organizations working towards empowerment of the civil society sector in Bulgaria – BFW established the 'Solidarity Fund'. It experiments with an innovative mechanism for Bulgaria popularly known as participatory grantmaking or providing grants with the participation of the applicants themselves.

The aim is to democratize decision-making and transfer power from the funding donor to the applicants thus involving them in the process of creating an open call:

from setting out the priorities, through fixing deadlines, endorsing evaluation criteria, and performing the evaluation itself. The third edition of the 'Solidarity Fund' took place in 2023 with an increased budget compared to the previous year, and all key steps and decisions were made by the coalition members. Four out of the five applications were approved and funded by a total of € 10,226: that of 'Young, Active, and Creative Association', of 'Knowledge Association Lovech', of 'For the Earth Ecological Association' and the 'Bulgarian Platform of the European Women's Lobby' working in Lovech, the village of Gorni Domlyan and nationwide.

CAPACITY BUILDING



For BFW financial support and capacity building are inextricably linked. In 2023 we invested € 45,448 in studies and capacity building of civil society organizations, experts, other women's funds, and their partners, thus reaching a total of 343 persons.



Trainings and events focusing and premised on the specific needs of CSOs in Bulgaria were provided within the 'BIRDS in BG' project by our partners from BCNL and IDF. Further information about these is available in the section 'Support for Administrative and Organizational Needs'.

ADVOCACY AND AWARENESS RAISING



Since its establishment, BFW has been working to tackle domestic violence and gender-based violence. In 2023 at least 21 women in Bulgaria, according to data in media publications, were killed by men – husbands, partners, sons, or other close relatives, while every third woman suffers from or used to suffer from violence.



Image: The Wake Up Foundation'

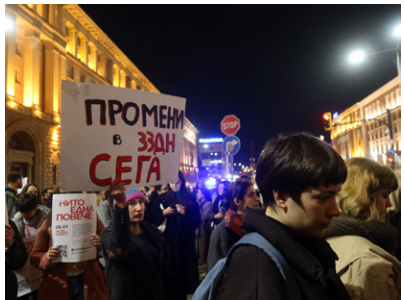
This is why in 2023 we continued to advocate for a more effective response to this phenomenon. We supported once again the Law Amending and Supplementing the Protection against Domestic Violence Act. BFW expressed its support for the amendments submitting a positive statement, took part in the work of the standing parliamentary committees, and joined the pleas of **'Together Against Violence Coalition'** towards the government.

After fighting for years so that more women may benefit from the right to a life free from violence, in July 2023 the Law was adopted by Parliament. It is expected that it will provide more effective prevention, protection, and support for those who suffer from the problem.



Our team joined the unprecedented public reaction to the brutal violence against the 19-year-old girl from the city of Stara Zagora. The attack against her prompted tens of thousands of citizens to protest across the country, reminding us that domestic violence and gender-based violence are public and not personal problems that also affect intimate partners. The public commitment forced the MPs to reconsider their opposition to including the definition of 'intimate relationship' in the Law and ultimately, although not completely full, it was added to the texts of the Law, thus expanding the scope of persons who are entitled to protection under it.

BFW supported financially the protests and made public statements at the now traditional **March for Women's Rights** on 8 March and the protest **'Not a Single One More'** held on the occasion of 25 November, the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women.





Council for Civil Society Development

BFW is one of the 14 organizations members of the Council for Civil Society Development, an advisory body with the Council of Ministers of the Republic of Bulgaria which is tasked with the elaboration and implementation of strategies and policies in support of the civil society sector in Bulgaria.

In 2023 the Fund supported 'Civil Union Ravni BG's media campaign #АзАеѸсмВамНеЧакам (I Act, Not Wait). The campaign aimed to outline the three key challenges CSOs in the country face following consultations with them. These appeared to be: limited access to funding opportunities, ineffective mechanisms for civil participation, and smear campaigns and harassment.

Specific measures to tackle those problems were discussed during nine meetings held with CSOs from all over the country.

The measures will be included in the proposal of a new Strategy for Support of the Development of Civil Society Organizations – one of the documents, together with the financial mechanism for support of publicly significant projects, which the members of the Council for Civil Society Development elaborated in the course of tens of meetings, working groups meeting, opinions, letters, etc. despite the political instability and administrative hurdles they encountered last year.

Read Between the Lines



Photographer: Marina Bandeluk

At a hybrid event held in May 2023 we presented the report: **'Read Between the Lines'** that brings together the results of three research efforts conducted in Bulgaria, Ukraine and Georgia on the basis of 67 in-depth interviews with representatives of women's and human rights CSOs, queer collectives and activists working in the three Black Sea countries in the context of the two successive crises from the last years – the COVID-19 pandemic and the war in Ukraine.



Photographer: Marina Bandeluk

'Read Between the Lines' maps out the organizations' problems, identifies their needs and good practices and provides guidance for the formulation of policies in support of the civil society sector and protection of vulnerable groups. The report studies the work of the organizations in the complex context and the deteriorated working conditions extending from imminent physical threat to degraded image, lack of human resources and professional burnout but also some positive reactions to the sector such as the wave of solidarity, the formation of groups of volunteers and their professionalization.

Some of the main recommendations of the 'Read Between the Lines' report concern revisiting the model of one-off funding in case of humanitarian crises;

more donors endorsing the model of flexible support for organizational and administrative costs, thus allowing organizations to set their own priorities in accordance to their needs, as well as introducing simplified application and reporting systems and ensuring public funding for the women's funds working in the region.

The presentation of the study was the final event of the project 'Read Between the Lines: (Post)pandemic Economic Effects on Women's Rights CSOs from Bulgaria, Georgia and Ukraine' funded by 'Black Sea Trust for Regional Cooperation' and co-funded by the European Commission. BFW as the main applicant worked in partnership with the 'Ukrainian Women's Fund', 'Georgian Women's Fund' and 'Taso Foundation', Georgia.

On the Right Track



Photographer: Milena Partuneva

Disinformation, sabotaged events, failed legislative initiatives in favor of vulnerable groups, threats on social media and physical assaults. This is the context in which human rights organizations all over the world have been working over the last few years. Fundamentalist attacks and attacks by far-right groups pose a threat not only to their safety and work but also to democratic principles.

These topics were discussed during the first European meeting of the international initiative 'On the Right Track' (ORT), which BFW organized in Sofia in spring 2023. Donors, funds, and representatives of human rights organizations shared their experiences related to the attacks by fundamentalist movements in their respective

countries – Bulgaria, Armenia, Georgia, Poland, Ukraine, Columbia and many others.

They united around their observations that they encounter identical problems, involving common actors and funded by the same conservative organizations as well as with counter-narratives and hybrid attacks.

Elaborating strategies for overcoming the threats and building up a positive vision for the future were some of the main objectives of the ORT meeting. The most pressing needs appeared to be providing information and positive and clear messages through better communications campaigns, building wider networks, and self and collective care through emotional support, creating safe spaces, etc.

Civil Union Ravni BG (‘Equal BG’)



*Photographer: Vera Gotseva, from the
'Stories for Change' project*

‘Ravni BG’ is an intersectional coalition uniting together more than 30 progressive civil society organizations located mostly outside Sofia, with small budgets and limited access to resources.

The main priority of the coalition is the empowerment of the civil society sector in Bulgaria in order to allow it to take part in the decision-making process, including through representation and advocacy and improving the image of the non-governmental sector in Bulgaria through various local and national initiatives.

In 2023 these efforts supported by BFW led to the realization of the **‘Stories of Change’** campaign. Specialists, activists and volunteers from the ‘LGBT organization Deystvie’ (‘Action’), ‘Hayaci Association’, ‘Mission Wings Foundation’, ‘For the Earth Ecological Association’, ‘CVS Bulgaria’ and ‘Women’s Club Rhodopchanka’ stood up with their faces in front of the Bulgarian society to talk about the fights they lead in the name of a fairer world.

They shared stories about their efforts to tackle the difficulties before the LGBTIQ+ people in Bulgaria; to support the Roma community; the children survivors of violence; about the right to breathe clean air; about the roll-out of volunteering in Bulgaria and the work with local communities – just a small part of what they and all other organizations members of ‘Ravni BG’ work for despite the insecure environment and the shrinking space for civil society.

In addition to **‘Stories of Change’**, in 2023 BFW organized the now traditional annual meeting of the association where members of ‘Ravni BG’ shared success stories, experiences, and challenges and discussed the future of the coalition.

MyPath in Support of Migrant Women and Women from Ethnic and Minority Origin

In 2023 BFW, in partnership with three other organizations from Austria, Germany and Portugal, deployed its work on 'MyPath: Career planning – Participation of Medium and/or Higher Qualified Migrant Women and Women from Ethnic Minorities in the Labor Market' under the European Union Program for education, training, youth and sport 'Erasmus'.

BFW took part in the creation and trial of a **Training Kit** which aims at providing trainers, social pedagogues, service providers and others practical, inspiring and personalized materials and strategies to use in the training of qualified migrant women and/or women from ethnic minorities so as to support them to enter the labor market and realize their full potential.

Women participants in the project had the chance to attend mentor sessions as a part of their empowerment journey and career

development. The mentors who were also migrants shared their expert experience, knowledge and guidance in regard to participation in the labor market and the related challenges for migrant women and/or women from ethnic minorities.

In the final stage of the project, the inspiring stories of women who had overcome difficulties and succeeded were recorded in a [video clip](#) which we hope would serve as a strong motivation for other women facing similar challenges.

BFW's philosophy

Being the only feminist donor in Bulgaria, BFW develops philanthropy for social change, raises funds locally and attracts international resources to support, as a matter of priority, the movement for gender justice but also the crosscutting fights for social justice and for promotion and protection of human rights and all vulnerable groups.

We are part of these movements and that is why we are best positioned to support them – because we understand their needs and the challenges they face in their work.

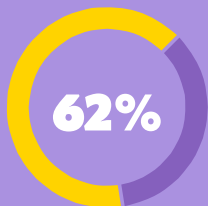
Our fundraising philosophy is premised on educating donors and raising awareness about our work and our partners' work, ensuring diversity of the funds raised and coming up with innovative, strategic, and effective models of funding such as pooled funding.

We raise funds from different local and foreign donors such as private foundations, other women's funds, international NGOs, European institutions and Bulgarian NGOs, embassies, companies, and individual donors thus encouraging them to invest in women's and girls' rights and social change in Bulgaria. We advocate for greater public funding and more resources for the civil society sector, in particular for covering CSOs' administrative and organizational costs.

BFW FINANCIAL FIGURES

€ 2 923 828

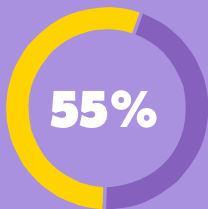
MOBILIZED RESOURCES



**INCREASE
COMPARED TO
2022**

€ 1 898 193

ANNUAL BUDGET



**INCREASE
COMPARED TO
2022**



74%

OF THE BUDGET WAS DIRECTED TOWARDS GRANTS AND CAPACITY BUILDING OF THE **PARTNERS** WE FUND



38%

OF THE FUNDS COME FROM **INTERNATIONAL PHILANTHROPY ORGANIZATIONS**, PRIVATE FOUNDATIONS AND WOMEN'S FUNDS



61%

OF THE FUNDS RAISED COME FROM **EUROPEAN FUNDING**



DONORS DONATED

€ 2 895 924



CORPORATE DONORS DONATED

€ 23 195



INDIVIDUAL DONORS DONATED

€ 4 708

TYPES OF EXPENSES



Salaries and other staff costs



Consultancy and external services



Office expenditure and equipment



Communications, advocacy, and fundraising



Capacity building



Other direct costs



Communications, advocacy, and fundraising

TYPES OF DONORS



Corporate donors



Private foundations



European funding



Women's funds



Others (Bulgarian foundations, embassies, international NGOs, individual donors)

BFW'S DONORS IN 2023

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FONDATION
CHANEL

filia
die frauenstiftung

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FUNDS**

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OTHER DONORS SUPPORTING BFW:

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DEVRIX

Elaboration of the Report

Text and coordination: BFW team
Corrections and revisions: Pavlina Varbanova
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