

Advancement of Refugee Women Advocacy Group Actions - Phase II

NGO Atina



Christa Maniratunga, Ingabire Lola Brigitte, Somaye Akhdarboldaji, and Jagvinder Paul Randhawa, members of the Refugee Women Advocacy Group, during the filming of the sequel to the film, in November 2024.

The Refugee Women Advocacy Group's Year of Impact

In 2024, the Refugee Women Advocacy Group significantly strengthened its advocacy impact, conducting **42 meetings and 10 targeted mentorship sessions** to enhance members' legal and strategic advocacy skills. The group actively contributed to national **policy discussions, submitting recommendations for three key legislative reforms**: the Law on Foreigners, the Law on Employment of Foreigners, and the National Action Plan for Combating Human Trafficking. One of the Group's most tangible successes was reducing the waiting period for asylum seekers to obtain work permits from nine to six months, a crucial step toward improving economic opportunities for refugees. Additionally, following the Group's advocacy contribution, the issuance of travel documents for asylum holders in Serbia benefited individuals previously restricted in their movement.

The group expanded its outreach and engagement through **27 workshops in asylum centers** and Atina's Reintegration Center, **reaching 180 refugee and migrant women** from eight countries, including Burundi, Iran, Afghanistan, India, Syria, Cuba, Ukraine, and Russia. The group **engaged over 150 students** in structured legal and advocacy discussions at Belgrade's Faculty of Law and Political Sciences, strengthening awareness among future legal and policy professionals. Internationally, Group members served as trainers in European advocacy programs, sharing their expertise on cultural mediation and migrant women's rights. Groups's participation in roundtable discussions in Bujanovac and Sombor with local institutions, civil society organizations, and state representatives strengthened multisectoral collaboration on trafficking and migration policies.

A significant advocacy tool was promoting the Group's **documentary film "Women on the Move," which over 70,000 people viewed** through social media, screenings, and policy forums. The film played a key role in shaping public perception and informing stakeholders about migrant women's experiences. In response to the film's impact, the **Group produced a sequel featuring "Voices for Justice"** testimonials from institutional partners and highlighting key advocacy achievements. Beyond film advocacy, the **Group engaged in over 8 public speaking engagements and 2 panel discussions at international events**, ensuring that refugee women's voices were heard in European policy spaces.

The group's advocacy has had an impact, as one of its members was awarded a complete master's scholarship at the University of Belgrade's Faculty of Law, marking an essential step in integrating refugee women into academic and professional fields. The group aims to expand legal advocacy, increase its membership, and deepen its engagement with national and international policymakers, ensuring the continued advancement of refugee and migrant women's rights in Serbia and beyond.

How the thing worked over the 2024 year

The Refugee Women Advocacy Group has made significant strides in enhancing its internal cohesion and sustainability throughout 2024, following a structured and strategic plan of activities initiated at the project's inception. Beginning with a detailed work plan and timeframe, the group conducted regular meetings and training sessions and engaged in mentorship programs, fostering a rich environment for learning and growth among its members.

Throughout the year, **13 Advocacy group members held 42 meetings and additional individual sessions**, focusing on various aspects of advocacy, including legal frameworks, communication skills, and strategic campaign development. The dedication to structured engagement was further evidenced by ten targeted mentoring and consultative meetings between senior and junior members, fostering a nurturing environment for knowledge transfer and professional growth. The involvement of senior members in mentoring junior members was particularly impactful, facilitating knowledge transfer and fostering a nurturing community within the group. These activities enhanced the group's capacity and allowed for personal growth and empowerment among its members. The group's active participation in international and national conferences and training programs has significantly contributed to its visibility and influence. Engaging in advocacy at this level has allowed their members to voice their experiences and insights, influencing critical issues affecting refugee and migrant women. Their contributions have been crucial in addressing systemic challenges and advocating for the rights and protection of their constituents. Moreover, the Group's focus on building partnerships and networks has been pivotal. The group has strengthened its local presence and impact by engaging with local stakeholders and participating in community actions. These interactions have allowed for the exchange of knowledge and experiences and fostered solidarity and understanding between different community segments, promoting a more inclusive and supportive environment for refugee and migrant women.

However, the journey was challenging. Maintaining motivation, balancing personal and group commitments, and ensuring meaningful participation from all members required ongoing effort and adaptation. Yet, through these challenges, the group has demonstrated its commitment to its mission and its members, continually evolving to meet the needs and aspirations of its community. By fostering an environment of learning, empowerment, and collaboration, the group is well-positioned to continue its vital work, advocating for the rights and well-being of refugee and migrant women. Refugee Women Advocacy Group is recognized as an essential actor and resource for creating policies and practices that improve the security and socio-economic position of refugee and migrant women.

Since the group has been present and active for four years, the first results of its advocacy activities, campaigns, and actions are here. These tangible and clear results bring greater satisfaction and additional motivation to both the senior and to both the senior and junior members of the group. A methodology for involving new members in the group has been established, as has further mentoring work between junior and senior members.

1. Refugee Women Advocacy Group increases its inner cohesion and works on its sustainability

The advocacy group's systematic approach to **capacity building, mentorship, and engagement** throughout 2024 exemplifies a deep-rooted commitment to sensitive and professional advocacy.

The work plan was shaped through detailed preparatory discussions that engaged all members, ensuring a collaborative approach to defining the group's objectives and strategies. This year, the group's strategic involvement was in various **international and national forums**, where they engaged in **training, presented at conferences, and participated in crucial meetings**, underscoring their role as pivotal voices in the discourse on migration and violence. Their engagement was particularly notable in contexts requiring nuanced understanding and advocacy, such as the effects of the war in Ukraine led by Russia on women refugees and migrants in Serbia. The **advocacy training** emphasized acquiring knowledge and developing practical communication and public engagement skills. Through theoretical learning and hands-on exercises, members were trained in public speaking, strategic communication, and campaign execution, preparing them to raise awareness and advocate for change in various public and policy-oriented contexts.

A significant component of the group's agenda focused on **enhancing the members' advocacy capabilities**. Specialized training was designed to familiarize them with Serbia's legal frameworks regarding asylum, labor laws, and protections against human trafficking and exploitation. These sessions were instrumental in equipping the members with the knowledge necessary to navigate and challenge existing systems, advocating for improved practices and policies that respect and uphold the rights of women and migrants.

This year has been necessary because new provisions from the Law on Amendments and Supplements to the Law on Foreigners and the Law on Employment of Foreigners were implemented during it. Additionally, during this year, the Program for the Fight Against Human Trafficking in the Republic of Serbia and the Action Plan for implementing the Program were adopted. Work is also ongoing on the drafting of the Law on the Prevention of Human Trafficking and the Protection of Victims of Human Trafficking. These are all processes in which the Group members were involved at two levels. One level was through **meetings with system representatives**, and the other was through **providing comments on draft versions of legal proposals**. Thus, the group members have drafted these laws from the beginning of the process. In addition to working within the group to provide comments on the drafts of the legal proposals, there have also been numerous meetings with representatives of relevant parts of the system.

The group's endeavors culminated in structured mentorship activities, during which senior members guided juniors in **engaging with stakeholders, planning public events, and executing local initiatives**. These activities reinforced the group's collective expertise and solidified the individual members' roles as informed, skilled advocates capable of driving meaningful change in their communities and beyond.

2. Community engagement and partnership and meetings of members with relevant stakeholders

During the designated mentoring period, the group's members engaged in structured activities, including participating in **two roundtable discussions**, one in Bujanovac and another in Sombor, and collaborating with Local Teams to combat human trafficking in Sombor. Additionally, the group actively organized and participated in **two training sessions for professionals, two meetings with relevant national stakeholders and NGOs, and an event at the Faculty of Political Science Summer School**. More than **90 professionals** were involved, and more than **300 youth and students** were engaged. Additionally, this year, the group worked on creating a script for the second movie dedicated to the work and advocacy successes of the group. In November and December 2024, they also filmed the movie and discussed their involvement in the film with professionals.



Roundtable in Bujanovac, February 2024. The round table was attended by representatives of various local institutions and civil society organizations

The first round table, entitled **"How to achieve a more effective joint response to human trafficking and violence in the migrant population"**, was organized in Bujanovac in February 2024. The round table was attended by representatives of various local institutions and civil society organizations: the Center for Social Work Bujanovac, the Center for Social Work Preševo, the Center for the Development of Local Social Protection Services, the Bujanovac Health Center, local civil society organizations, the IOM and the Commissariat for Refugees. Another round table under the same name was organized in Sombor in March 2024, attended by representatives of the Center for Social Work Sombor, the Red Cross, the City Administration, the Center for the Provision of Local Social Protection Services, the Commissariat for Refugees and local civil society organizations.

The conclusions from the event would be the following:

- the existence of a need for greater familiarization of all relevant actors with both the international context and the national context in the area of the fight against human trafficking and violence in the migrant population,
- the necessary coordinated action of the competent authorities, both those dealing with criminal prosecution, as well as those who deal with providing support to victims,
- conducting continuous training for professionals from different systems to monitor new trends,
- better cooperation of state institutions with civil society organizations and a multisectoral approach to protection and support.



Roundtable in Sombor, March 2024. The round table was attended by representatives of various local institutions and civil society organizations

Both events were attended by three members of the advocacy group of migrant/refugee/asylum-seeking women. One woman is from Iran, one from Burundi, and one from India. They first presented the idea of the existence of advocacy groups and what has been done so far. They then informed the attendees about their experiences with the protection system in Serbia and their path to integration. They emphasized the challenges they faced along the way and the importance of ensuring the participation of those concerned. These women's goal was to advocate for the full participation of migrant women in political, democratic, and social life in Serbia and European countries. Also, in the previous period, the first mentor sessions were realized as upgrading peer support to prepare and introduce new members to the group's work.

The members of the group also talked about the prejudices that exist against refugees and migrants in Serbia and referred to some examples from everyday life. This participation of group members contributed to a **better understanding of the position of refugee and migrant girls and women by the local population in Serbia** and to their mutual rapprochement. The panelists also spoke about other challenges related to the integration of migrants in Serbia. They gave some suggestions so that the system could be improved, underlining the importance of the participation of the migrants themselves in creating solutions to the problems they face. In the last part, they presented recommendations for improving the protection system for women victims of violence and human trafficking from the refugee population. Group members were prepared for several days for each of the realized roundtables. They were presented with their roles, structure, audience composition, and concrete goals for each engagement. A team consisting of a group facilitator and a psychologist participated in their preparation; they were also supervisors of the entire preparation process for each public performance.

The event aimed to encourage the **reduction of the social distance between the resident and migrant population**. Those present pointed out that they were glad they had the opportunity to hear the stories of women with migration experiences directly from themselves, even those in the field daily.

In May 2024, members of the Advocacy Group of Women with Refugee Experience attended **one meeting and two lectures** at the Faculty of Law and the Faculty of Political Sciences in Belgrade. Over **150 young students** from both faculties participated in these events. Building on the long-standing partnership between NGO Atina and Belgrade University, the Advocacy Group met with professors at the Faculty of Political Sciences in May 2024. Following this, they interacted with students from the Summer School. Professor Natalija Perišić, a vice-dean and professor at the Department of Social Policy and Social Work and the coordinator of the MIGREC project, invited them to speak at the "Women and Forced Migration" panel, part of the "Populations on the Move—Journeys and Beyond" session.



Members of the Advocacy group at the Faculty of Political Sciences, panel with students and professors

Over 80 students from two universities attended a lecture led by the Center on Forced Displacement at Boston University and the Faculty of Political Sciences in Belgrade. **Three senior members shared their experiences during the panel**, and three junior members attended the event. The panelists discussed their perspectives on forced displacement and explained why many people from their countries leave their homes. They primarily focused on the violence and discrimination faced by women and members of different communities in their countries. A particularly notable contribution came from a member of the Women Advocacy Group from India, who is both a victim of human trafficking and a Hijra. She spoke about the rights of people in Asia and worldwide, highlighting the threats they face. In May, members of the Advocacy Group participated in a lecture at the Faculty of Law in Belgrade as part of a legal clinic on human trafficking. During the lecture, they presented the work of the group. They discussed **the risks of violence and human trafficking (HT) that women and girls face during migration and in refugee situations**, with a particular focus on the different communities. They also explained why women leave their countries of origin—such as Afghanistan, Syria, India, Burundi, and Iran—emphasizing the denial of fundamental human rights. These women often do not have the freedom to choose their education, employment, healthcare, or partners, and their fundamental right to life is at risk.

Group members also attended meetings organized in Atina's Reintegration Centre. There, they met with **representatives of organizations from the region, Albania, Armenia, and Serbia**, that deal with violence issues and provide direct support to the beneficiaries. They presented the idea of establishing the Group and their activities so far. Representatives of six organizations attended the meeting.

Members of the Group also met with the director of the **University Library in Belgrade** and library employees in early 2025 regarding potential cooperation, the organization of joint activities, and a set of training for migrants. Representatives of the University Library attended a workshop at the Krnjača Asylum Center, held by Group members and a cultural mediator. One **result of the long-standing collaboration** between the Group and the Faculty of Law at the University of Belgrade is that the **Master's program in Law** began this October, and one of the group members received a full scholarship.

Group members also participated as trainers in a November 2025 **training session for organizations supporting migrant women across Europe**. A cultural mediator and members of the group held two sessions. Their topics were the importance of participation and the work of NGOs in responding to the needs of women with migration experience. A member of the Group and cultural mediator of Atina, together with a member of the Atina team, also participated in a training in September 2025. The training was dedicated to the importance of women's participation in migration and originated as an idea at an event in Prato, which representatives of the Atina team attended. The training aims to exchange the knowledge and expertise of cultural mediators and train new ones.



Training with organizations from Europe, cultural mediators, and Group members held two sessions in November 2024

The first joint participation of senior and junior members was essential, as it proved very successful and is the right approach to building mentoring and peer-to-peer work. Group members were prepared for several days for each of the realized meetings, lectures, and conferences. They were presented with their roles, structure, audience composition, and concrete goals for each engagement. A team consisting of a group facilitator and a psychologist took part in their preparation. The senior members played the most crucial role in this phase and were supervisors of the entire preparation process for each public performance.

3. Promotion of the film that was created as part of the work of the Refugee Women Advocacy group

A film dedicated to the Advocacy group's work was further promoted and seen by more than 70 thousand people. The promotion will be continued further on. Since this film touches on both the challenges and the needs that refugee and migrant women in Serbia face, it served as a good advocacy tool to raise awareness among decision-makers and other interested parties about the necessity of a better response to the protection and support system to the needs of this vulnerable group. The film's promotion was also done on social networks, including Atina's official accounts on Facebook, LinkedIn, and the newsletter and Atina's YouTube channel. A complete campaign was created, with photos and messages designed for the members.

The film is available online at the following links:



https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RK_6MRLrB84
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HTyoIQcJTp8>

The group plans to continue leveraging the film as a cornerstone of its advocacy strategy, utilizing it in various forums to catalyze discussions and drive policy change. The group also used 2024 to open talks at all the events it participated in. The film was also promoted in Italy.

On June 27, members of the Atina team held a **one-day training session in Florence on the Identification and Support of Women and LGBTQI+ Individuals** who are Victims of Violence in the Context of Migration: Best Practices at the European Level. At the event, two members of the Atina team, a Social Worker and a Facilitator of the Advocacy Group of Women Survivors, presented on the topic of Psycho-social Support for Women Survivors of Violence in Serbia: Best Practices and Referral Actions. The conference brought together professionals from social welfare, law, and psychology to discuss key topics related to support for vulnerable groups and to exchange experiences. During the presentation, the work of the Atina organization was presented in detail. A special focus was on working with women from the migrant population who face additional challenges and obstacles in the process of integration and recovery. The attendees learned about the program goals and the specific methods and principles that Atina beneficiaries adhere to in their direct work with victims. Also, the idea of establishing and working with the Advocacy Group of Women with Experience of Refugees and Migration, which plays a key role in raising awareness and advocating for the protection of rights and improving the support system for women victims of violence, as an example of a unique practice in Europe, was presented. The film *Women on the Move* was also screened, and it talks about the role, significance, and work of the Advocacy Group from the perspective of the women members of the group. Organizations and institutions focused on preventing violence and supporting migrants and refugees were present.

News about the meeting:

<http://www.atina.org.rs/sr/klju%C4%8D-uspeha-je-u-povezivanju-ekspertkinja-po-znanju-i-ekspertkinja-po-iskustvu>

<https://www.facebook.com/NGOAtina>

Also, on September 23, a representative of the NGO Atina and a member of the Group participated in the event organized by Oxfam for cultural mediators, who spoke about Atina's experience of the participation of migrant women and the work of the AG. Group has been recognized as a good practice example in Europe.

"Voices for Justice" – Official Film made in 2024

In times when the loudest sounds are weapons, threats, and uncertainty, the hardest thing to hear is the human voice. Yet, against all odds, these voices rise.

"Voices for Justice" is a powerful documentary that follows the journey of the Advocacy Group for Refugee Women, a movement that has redefined resistance, solidarity, and change. Through deeply personal testimonies, the film captures the strength, courage, and relentless pursuit of justice by women who refuse to be invisible.

We hear from the founding members, whose first steps laid the foundation for a movement, and from new voices who have joined, finding empowerment in activism. Their stories unfold in parallel with those of their allies—lawmakers, prosecutors, equality commissioners, and university professors—who have witnessed the group's impact firsthand. These women are not just sharing experiences; they are shaping policies, advocating for legal reforms, and demanding systemic change.

The film brings to life the fight for inclusion, equality, and safety—not as abstract ideals, but as real and urgent needs. It is a testament to what happens when voices unite when stories become advocacy, and when solidarity turns into action. From legal battles to public advocacy, from roundtable discussions to the streets, this is their journey.

"Voices for Justice" is more than a film. It is a call to listen, to act, and to stand alongside those who refuse to be silenced. Their voices will not fade. Their fight will not stop. And their justice will not wait.

We extend our deepest gratitude to all the participants in this film—the incredible women of the Advocacy Group who bravely shared their journeys, as well as the allies, experts, and professionals who responded to their call, offering their insights and experiences in working alongside them. Their voices have enriched this story, highlighting the strength of collaboration in the fight for justice and equality.

A special thank you to the Rockefeller Brothers Fund (RBF) for making this film possible and ensuring that the achievements, struggles, and victories of these women are preserved and shared. Their support has allowed us to bring these voices to a wider audience, amplifying the urgent call for systemic change.

The opinions and statements expressed in this film are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Rockefeller Brothers Fund.

The film is available online at the following links:



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=p3hU3YLn3h4>

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1_HkC03RSGs

Since October 2024, Advocacy Group members have been working on the script and planning a **new movie** about their work. Their vision was to feature representatives from the institutions they've collaborated with over the years, including those with whom they've held meetings, participated in roundtables, and received training. The film is being filmed during the end of 2024 and was completed in early 2025, serving as a testament to the group's efforts and reflecting their results. On Atina's website, news related to the activities and work of the Group are regularly published.

A **special paper about the group** itself, the motivation of its members, the dynamics within the group, and the challenges in its functioning was written by Ilaria Michelis, a PhD candidate at the University of Oxford. This report is based on interviews and small group discussions conducted with active Atina NGO's Advocacy Group members in October and November 2024. Ilaria Michelis conducted these interviews as part of her PhD project on Intersectionality and Violence Against Women and Girls. She also participated in Advocacy Group activities as an observer, including team meetings and peer-to-peer activities in a migrant settlement. The findings presented here include data collected during those observations.

Improved support services for refugee women

Members of the advocacy group created and conducted **27 workshops for women and girls** in the Asylum Centers and Atina's Reintegration Center. One hundred eighty women and girls from Burundi, Iran, Afghanistan, India, Syria, Cuba, Ukraine, and Russia participated in these workshops.

In a conscious effort to empower junior members of the advocacy group, a **comprehensive training program** was implemented, focusing on workshop facilitation and peer-support methodologies. These sessions, grounded in pedagogy, emphasized collective learning and empowerment, addressing critical issues such as violence, human trafficking, and equality. The training underscored the importance of **understanding rights and legal frameworks, particularly in the context of violence, aiming to equip the women with the knowledge and confidence to advocate** for themselves and others. This educational journey was about imparting information and nurturing a sense of agency and solidarity among the women, celebrating their resilience, and fostering a supportive community where they could learn, grow, and empower each other.

The workshops provided a platform for members to share experiences and insights, fostering a collaborative learning environment where refugee women could gain a nuanced understanding of the asylum process and their rights within it. By engaging with Atina's diverse activities and the advocacy group's initiatives, participants were encouraged to recognize their strengths and potential for advocacy. The invitation for workshop attendees to join the advocacy group further illustrated a commitment to inclusivity and empowerment, ensuring every woman felt valued and could contribute to and benefit from the collective effort to improve refugee women's socio-economic and safety conditions.

The proactive engagement of an advocacy group member as a cultural mediator underscored the initiative's commitment to leadership development and capacity building within the feminist framework. This transition, facilitated by mentorship from a seasoned cultural mediator, exemplified the project's dedication to fostering leadership and expertise among women, empowering them to take on influential roles and contribute meaningfully to the community's support system.

Acknowledging the profound impact of personal histories of violence and trauma, the project prioritized psychological support for its members, recognizing the critical need for emotional well-being in advocacy work. During the implementation of the project, 18 individual sessions and 8 group sessions were held. The sessions were held at the initiative of the group members or the suggestion of Atina's expert team when it was felt that a specific situation was challenging for one of them. During the project implementation, all sessions were realized to protect the group members' well-being. In the supervisory work, the role of senior members was also significant in supporting the new group members emotionally and psychologically.

4. Challenges, Lessons Learned, and Refugee Women's Voices

Maintaining consistent motivation among members and fostering a positive, constructive team spirit posed significant challenges throughout the Refugee Women Advocacy Group project. The group employed various team-building techniques to address this and organized special meetings to strengthen group dynamics. Balancing personal, professional, and advocacy-related commitments was a hurdle, especially for those still navigating their asylum processes in Serbia. The members' engagement was also influenced by their life plans outside the group, adding complexity to maintaining consistent participation. Senior members who had moved away from Serbia remained committed to contributing remotely, showing the strong sense of dedication and purpose that permeates the group. The members, especially those who have experienced significant hardships, found immense value in supporting others within their community. They discovered that aiding others fostered their recovery and imbued their lives with meaning and purpose. Through active participation in the Group, members could explore and develop their talents and professional skills, often discovering previously unknown strengths. This empowerment was particularly pronounced in advocacy activities, where members could influence policies and public perception. The sense of personal empowerment also translated into a deep commitment to effecting change in areas directly impacting their lives and those of their peers. However, the path was not devoid of frustration, as progress can be slow, and outcomes are only sometimes immediately visible. What was a success this year is that they felt personal satisfaction and added value from the group, as the first visible results of their advocacy actions were evident.

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**"Now I know that they have heard us, that they have listened to us. We have already made a visible change. We feel it, but so do the migrant women we represent."
(Christa)**

The statement of Christa Maniratunge, a senior member of the group, best reflects how involvement and work in the group contribute not only to professional development but also to personal growth and development: "As a member of the group with years of experience and as a senior member, I learned who I am and how to be myself."

The group's success is **reducing the period for obtaining a work permit from 9 months to 6 months** from when the asylum application is submitted in the Republic of Serbia. This was a demand the group raised at every meeting with stakeholders and decision-makers. Another success is the **implementation of amendments to the Asylum Law and the issuing of travel documents** for people granted asylum in the Republic of Serbia. This is also another matter the group has advocated for all these years. One of the group members, a trans woman from India who was granted asylum in Serbia, received a travel document in February this year, allowing her to travel outside the borders of Serbia. These two successes have motivated the group to continue its work and have validated the reason for its establishment and the necessity for its sustainability, growth, and further development. The Group needs to be further strengthened with new members, but senior members should remain as pillars, serving as witnesses to these advocacy successes.

Peer work within the Group has emerged as a cornerstone of its approach, embodying the principles of mutual aid and shared growth. Senior members provided mentorship and guidance to newer members, creating a supportive environment that fostered confidence and skill development. This peer engagement is crucial for individual empowerment and the group's overall efficacy in advocacy and support activities. It reinforces the understanding that experiences shared among members, especially those overcoming similar challenges, are invaluable in creating a robust and cohesive advocacy platform. Importantly, members' experiences inform the group's broader strategies, ensuring their actions are grounded in the real-life contexts of the women they aim to support.



We are together when it is difficult, but we also celebrate together, the celebration of the birthday of the Advocacy group member on the premises of the Reintegration Centre in June 2024

The **mutual trust and understanding** cultivated within the group underline the **transformative power of peer support**, a key element defining the group's advocacy and empowerment approach. The connections formed between members, particularly in the interactions between junior and senior members, highlight the profound impact of empathy and shared experience in building a resilient advocacy group. These relationships facilitate personal growth and recovery and strengthen the group's collective capacity to advocate for change, illustrating the enduring value of solidarity and support within the Group's framework.

Strengthening women's advocacy groups has contributed to the project's long-term sustainability.

As these groups develop incredible skills and capacities, they are better positioned to continue advocating for women's rights, ensuring they become a key part of the country's policymaking process. Atina's goal is to further engage the team in enhancing the skills and knowledge of Advocacy Group members while consistently involving new members. Atina succeeded in partially fundraising for direct support, accommodation services, psychological support, economic empowerment programs, and material and medical assistance, and they will remain project-funded. Although recommendations from GRETA and the State Department highlighted the need for state financial support to specialized civil society organizations, no concrete plan or solution for such funding in Serbia was made. Even though Atina's assisted housing service was licensed in 2018, the organization has not received state funding. However, all relevant state social protection institutions and international and local civil society organizations regularly refer beneficiaries to Atina's service. This year's positive development is that Atina secured long-term sustainability with the support of the United Nations Office for Project Services (UNOPS). UNOPS recognized the importance of Atina's 22 years of work and provided funding to purchase a house for the organization's services, which represents the new chapter in NGO Atina's development.

Conclusion: Strengthening Sustainability and Advancing Systemic Change

The Refugee Women Advocacy Group has successfully positioned itself as a critical voice in advocating for the rights and inclusion of refugee and migrant women in Serbia. Through structured advocacy, mentorship, and direct engagement with policymakers, the group has influenced legal reforms and created platforms for refugee women to shape policies affecting their lives actively. However, for the Group to transition from a project-based initiative to a sustainable, institutionalized actor, it must focus on securing long-term recognition within national and local governance frameworks. Institutionalizing its role in migration policy discussions, advisory councils, and municipal planning processes will ensure that the Group's impact continues beyond individual project cycles, allowing refugee women to be permanent stakeholders in shaping migration and integration policies.

The group must prioritize institutional recognition, expanding education and professional development access, and strengthening community-led support mechanisms to ensure long-term sustainability. The formal inclusion within integration councils, migration policy advisory boards, and national working groups focused on refugee protection. Expanding access to education is crucial—ensuring that refugee and migrant women have scholarship opportunities, diploma recognition pathways, and vocational training programs to enhance their economic independence and leadership roles. Collaborations with universities, legal clinics, and professional associations can enable members to contribute as experts, researchers, and practitioners in migration and human rights policy.

Beyond institutional advocacy, the Group must work to broaden its community engagement by fostering migrant-led support networks. Creating structured peer mentorship programs will allow experienced refugee women to support and guide new arrivals, ensuring greater self-representation in advocacy and service provision. Strengthening partnerships with municipal governments, social service providers, and civil society organizations will reinforce the role of refugee women as active contributors in local communities. Expanding Group's presence in regional and international policy discussions will further solidify its influence on broader migration policies, ensuring that migrant-led perspectives are integrated into cross-border frameworks.

The next phase of the Group's development should focus on **transitioning from a grassroots advocacy initiative to a formally recognized advisory body or an independent migrant-led organization.** This requires advocating for policy reforms that institutionalize refugee and migrant participation in decision-making structures and securing legal and structural recognition at municipal and national levels. Establishing a roadmap for the Group's institutionalization within governance and civil society networks will guarantee that its advocacy remains a permanent force for systemic change rather than a temporary project intervention.

The group's success has demonstrated the power of lived experience in shaping migration policies and transforming public discourse. However, the group must further embed its efforts within national policymaking, educational access initiatives, and community-driven support systems to achieve long-term, systemic change. By ensuring that refugee women are not just participants but leaders in migration and human rights advocacy, the Group will impact Serbia's migration policies and contribute to a more inclusive and equitable society.