

ARMENIA

Civil Society Actors as Drivers of Change in South Caucasus and Moldova

2020 - 2022



INTRODUCTION

People in Need is a non-governmental organization that emphasizes the mechanisms of civil society and inclusive governance to create an opportunity for civil society actors to develop skills and experience to carry out their activities more effectively.

Within the framework of the European Union-funded project "Civil Society Actors as Drivers of Change in South Caucasus and Moldova", People in Need in Armenia has supported newly created civil society organizations, civil initiatives, and social and cultural movements in becoming reliable actors for the advance of democratic processes—particularly in the areas of human rights, community development, and youth engagement, as well as education.

With the support of the project team and skilled consultants, each of the 14 CSOs participating in the project in Armenia has developed its own strategic plan, charting its path, role in society, and the systemic changes it aims to influence. The participants representing different regions of the Republic of Armenia had the opportunity to assess their organizational abilities and participate in tailored training programs, receive professional feedback and advice, coaching and mentoring, and participate in a study visit. These CSOs also strengthened ties with their communities, supporters, and volunteers; and partnered with colleagues and peers in Armenia, Georgia, Moldova, and the Czech Republic. Participating CSOs also received grants for strategic development and campaigns.

In Armenia, the project "Civil Society Actors as Drivers of Change in South Caucasus and Moldova" was implemented with the funding of the European Union and the National Endowment for Democracy (NED). The project's budget in Armenia was the AMD equivalent of €387,608, of which €175,797 was allocated to campaign and operational grants.

INITIATIVE FOR EDUCATIONAL AND SOCIO-LEGAL INCLUSION

Support for the development of adapted educational materials and methodological guidelines and introduction of a unified inclusive educational system of the Republic of Armenia

Children with special educational needs often face the problem of realizing their right to quality education. This situation exists because of a lack of methods, guidelines, and conditions that do not meet their needs: the physical presence of children in the educational process does not guarantee full access to education, as noted by the Initiative for Educational and Socio-Legal Inclusion.



To address this, the Initiative for Educational and Socio-Legal Inclusion conducted a campaign, the goal of which was to implement significant changes in the field of inclusive education. Their goals would be achieved by creating adapted educational materials, a methodological guide on their application, and an introduction into the Republic of Armenia's universal, inclusive education system.

As a result of the campaign:

- ✓ Adapted "Mathematics 1" and "Native Language 1" workbooks were developed and applied in 11 schools within the framework of the program; these were subsequently introduced into the mainstream education system
- ✓ Training courses on the use of workbooks and methodological guidelines were conducted for 85 teachers and support specialists from 11 schools
- ✓ The notebooks were used by 55 children—ranging from 6 to 9 years of age—with special educational needs
- ✓ Follow-up visits and meetings with the authors of the books were conducted to improve the quality of the materials
- ✓ A survey was conducted among parents and teachers to find out about lesson planning and children's satisfaction

- ✓ An assessment checklist was developed to assess children's prior academic knowledge
- ✓ The campaign and the implemented actions were presented on three media platforms: Shant TV Company, Armenia TV Company, Public Radio of Armenia
- ✓ An informational meeting was held to summarise the campaign and its results with the participation of representatives of RA Ministry of Education, Science, Culture and Sports, People in Need, Yerevan Municipality, RA Education Inspectorate, UNICEF Armenian Office, State Medical University, [Yerevan Regional Pedagogical and Psychological Support Center No. 1](#) and other structures, teachers, parents

The methodological guide for teachers on the use of workbooks created thanks to the project was developed by specialists and approved by the State Pedagogical University of Armenia, the Ministry of Education, Science, Culture and Sports of the Republic of Armenia. In addition, 80 copies were printed within the framework of the program, and 200 copies were printed by the Pedagogical Psychology Center and provided to teachers in the selected schools and other schools as part of the campaign.

NORARAR

Development of reading skills

In developing economies, literacy is more than the ability to read fluently, understand, and write short statements. In general, it affects the development of basic skills such as analyzing, synthesizing, critically examining information and drawing conclusions based on evidence. All these advanced skills are essential for the development of a country because, in the long run, they determine the availability of a qualified workforce (UNESCO, 2000). According to the data of the Economic Cooperation and Development organization, if by 2030, all 15-year-old teenagers in Armenia pass the elementary level of mathematics and reading, then the country's economy could grow by 293%.



Given the lack of teacher capacity to develop reading skills, the campaign aimed to provide targeted interventions to develop the teaching skills of teachers teaching 11- to 15-year-old middle school students.

Nineteen teachers, one principal, and four vice-principals of seven urban and seven rural middle schools—who deal with the students of the most vulnerable groups in Lori province were included in the program.

The teachers participating in the campaign program were included in the process consisting of the following stages aimed at developing children's reading skills:

- ✓ Examining the current situation of developing reading skills with teachers
- ✓ Study of international experience of development of reading skills (comprehension and fluency), strategy examination, and their localization in the process of application and evaluation of strategies selected by teachers
- ✓ Mentoring for teachers and group meetings
- ✓ Monitoring and evaluation to understand program effectiveness and applicability

At the campaign's beginning and end, a question-and-answer session was conducted to assess the student's reading speed and fluency. From the results, it is clear that the students read more fluently at the end of the campaign. They were more motivated, self-confident, and more actively involved in the classroom process because they found it very enjoyable to practice reading skills with their classmates. In addition, their vocabulary was enriched. NorArar aims to repeat this course and include a larger number of schools and teachers.

FRONTLINE YOUTH NETWORK

Peacebuilding Education in Tavush province

Emphasizing the peaceful overcoming of the conflict, the attitudinal and behavioral change of young people regarding peace, and the creation of quality alternative content about peacebuilding, "Frontline Youth Network" NGO, combining the cooperation of teachers, schoolchildren, and schools, has carried out a number of works; in particular, attention was paid to the knowledge-based approach to peacebuilding and the active involvement of youth and women in peacebuilding processes.



With the involvement of experts and specialists, an [educational manual](#) was created under the name "Peacebuilding Education", which was approved by the Ministry of Education, Science, Culture and Sports as teaching material. To ensure the presentation and testing of the "Peacebuilding Education" manual among teachers, the training of 20 teachers of the Tavush region was also undertaken. The books became available thanks to the cooperation of the FYN and the employees of the education departments of Tavush, and other regional governments. To encourage peacebuilding among students and young people, the "PeaceON" mobile application was also created; this teaches peacebuilding through modern game methods and helps answer questions.

YOUTH OPPORTUNITIES CLUB

Stop COVID, start working



During the difficult pandemic and post-war period, there was a sharp increase in unemployment among the youth of Armenia. According to the data of the State Employment Agency of the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs, as of February 1, 2020-2021, the number of unemployed young people registered in the Territorial Employment Centers (TERCs) was 11,900. And it is a well-known fact that HoReCa (hotels, restaurants, cafes) and tourism are the sectors most affected by the epidemic and the war, where at least 2,000 Armenian youth became unemployed. To reduce unemployment amongst young people in the mentioned sector, the Youth Opportunities Club initiated a campaign to re-profile them: **Stop Covid, Start Working.**

Within the framework of the Stop Covid, Start Working campaign, various directions of re-profiling of young people were studied. Considering current labor market requirements, the campaign focused on digital marketing. Preliminary research was carried out on the main expectations required of a junior digital marketing specialist in the Armenian labor market, based on which the course plan was also drawn up. The training was open to Armenian youths aged 16-30 who became unemployed due to the pandemic or the war. Thirty direct beneficiaries participated in the campaign. The participants who completed the exam stage underwent a six-week internship in six organizations in marketing and related fields.

The model developed within the framework of the campaign is a set of internship activities that can be replicated by companies organizing internships in the given field. The successful campaign model became an excellent example for the relevant bodies and an impetus to mobilize, face the problems and find real solutions.

As a result of the campaign program, digital marketing specialists armed with theoretical and practical knowledge have been qualified. The competitiveness of young people previously employed in HoReCa and the tourism sector who became unemployed due to the pandemic increased in the labor market. Regarding ensuring of employment, at least 50% of the beneficiaries found a job in a new profession.

CIVIL YOUTH CENTER

Community consolidation for transparent and participatory local self-government

According to Article 11 of the Law On Local Self-Government, the participation of community residents in local self-government processes is defined as a process implemented in the community through which residents, without discrimination, are informed about the activities of local self-government bodies and can have a direct or indirect influence on local self-government's decisions.



From this perspective, a five-year Community Development Plan (CDP) is the most important document that can be drawn up based on the internal assessment of community needs and the organization of open public hearings. Despite the demands of the law, the participation of Ijevan residents and especially young people—as the most vulnerable group in the work of policies and strategic documents of community development—continued to be at a low level, as a result of which the programs created partially expressed the real needs of the community in their content, for example, the previous 2017-2021 CDP.

In 2021, considering the problems mentioned above, Civil Youth Center launched an advocacy campaign aimed at promoting public participation in decision-making processes at the local level. The advocacy campaign's ultimate goal was to encourage public participation in developing the five-year (2022-2027) development plan for Ijevan. It is expected that various community stakeholders will have the opportunity to be involved in the decision-making process and voice their positions on the development of the community.

The tools used in the advocacy framework made it possible to monitor and detect cases of incomplete implementation or non-implementation of the law and their publication and protection of interests.

As a result of the campaign, the local self-government bodies of the enlarged Ijevan community **developed the 2022-2027 Ijevan plan. This five-year development program** follows all the norms established by the Law "On Local Self-Government". To ensure the participation of the community's residents and, in general, all interested parties in the development of the document, the community authorities made great use of and applied all the recommendations on participation mechanisms presented by the Civil Youth Centre community development NGO. In addition, at the request of the community authorities, the organization was involved in the consultative body formed to develop the document to provide expert advice and support.

DIRECT DEMOCRACY

Development with Internal Resources



There are many problems in the communities of Lori province; these include the safe operation of mines and hydroelectric power plants (HPP), environmental protection, collection of property taxes allocated to the community, and fulfillment and review of companies' obligations. Therefore, Direct Democracy is considered vital to increase the involvement of young people in community processes, help them self-organize in the decision-making process, promote public participation, and increase the role of public interest protection.

A workshop was held with the participation of young people representing 16 settlements of 7 enlarged communities of Lori province, and the primary issues were raised. In addition, questionnaires were developed. A survey was conducted to highlight existing problems and contribute to raising problems in these communities, assessing the population's attitude towards the community, and finding solutions to problems presented.

During the implementation of the campaign program, Direct Democracy mobilized young people living in Lori, with whom further long-term cooperation memoranda were signed. The project team held a meeting with the governor of Lori province and discussed the primary issues, after which a representative of the organization—the project coordinator—was included in the public council attached to the governor.

Works were also carried out in the communities with the members of the council of elders. For example, in the framework of the public hearings organized for permission to carry out the exploratory works planned for mining purposes in the Gogaran settlement, diligent work was carried out with the members of the Spitak council, as a result of which the residents and the council did not allow the implementation of mining works.



MITK

Young ambassadors of Armavir: promoting a participatory culture for reform

According to research conducted in the Republic of Armenia, a very low level of youth participation in social and political life in regional and community management has been recorded. This problem stems from the indifferent attitude of young people and the atmosphere of mistrust formed around social and political processes. The problem is more deeply manifested in the provinces due to the disproportionate development of economic, communication, infrastructural, educational, and other spheres compared to the capital. The same problem is manifested in the provinces close to Yerevan because the capital city is the main place of work and self-expression, and their communities very often serve as places for just overnight stays.

One of the reasons for the problem is that the decision-making bodies are insufficiently inclusive. Not only do bodies fail to take steps at the necessary level to promote youth participation, but also the participation mechanisms provided for by the European Charter and state policy, the activities of youth councils and affiliated bodies, are often organized formally, or they exist only on paper. Furthermore, budget allocations to youth NGOs and initiatives are largely insufficient or non-existent. To raise and solve these problems, MITK carried out the "Young Ambassadors of Armavir, promoting a participatory culture for reform" public campaign, which resulted in the following:

- ✓ Conducted research "Problems of young people of Armavir region and the level of social and political activity"
- ✓ Formed a team of 20 young ambassadors from Armavir and signed memorandums with the communities leaders to solve community problems
- ✓ A team of 60 young people mobilized by the ambassadors was formed: they represent different communities of Armavir and have different experiences of participating in youth/community programs
- ✓ Partnership ties with regional state and public bodies have been strengthened
- ✓ Memorandums of cooperation were signed with community leaders, actions were developed, and agreements were reached to solve the problems. In particular, formal memoranda of cooperation were obtained with the communities of Khanjyan, Bagaran, Yervandashat, Zartonk,

Lukashin, and cooperation agreements with the enlarged communities of Armavir, Baghramyan, and Metsamor.



Developed ["How to achieve behavioral changes among young people"](#)- Armavir Youth Ambassadors' model guide aimed at helping youth organisations, initiatives, youth workers, and anyone who wants to achieve behavioral and attitudinal change among young people

RESTART GYUMRI

A campaign to share experiences and empower high school and college students



Because community youths lack the opportunity to communicate with each other and participate in programs with inter-community youth, they are passive in decision-making processes. Therefore they need public awareness; thus, Restart Gyumri conceived the idea of conducting a campaign program to unite youths—school and college students— from three different communities of Shirak province to share their experiences and develop their skills. As a result of the campaign:

- ✓ The awareness of democracy among youths of the communities has increased; this has been expressed in the media works and initiatives carried out by young people in the targeted communities
- ✓ Increased involvement of community youth in the context of solving community problems: campaign participants actively followed and participated in the activities of Local Self-Governing Bodies
- ✓ Increased literacy, media literacy/skills, and capacity building of the targeted youth. The training at the initial stage of the campaign, combined with post-campaign activities and media work, positively impacted young people's media literacy
- ✓ Identifying, highlighting, and presenting community issues. Development of possible solutions to the problems raised

As a result of the campaign, the community participants began to show more interest in the operation of the community structures and the activities implemented by the local government. First, they tried to find out what works and how they could be effective and then decided to support and become an active participant in the community development programs, as needed.

The abilities and skills of the young people participating in the campaign were developed, and a more active youth core has been formed in these three communities, positively impacting community development. In addition, media platforms and Facebook groups were created, which unite hundreds of young people studying in the community educational institutions of Gyumri, Artik, and Amasya and promote the development of communication and cooperation between them.

INTRA

Make your workplace into a safe environment, Protecting your right to refrain from discrimination



Today the right to work has become the most vulnerable and unprotected right. By restricting or threatening the right to work, a person is forced to give up other rights: freedom of assembly, association, expression of opinion, electoral, and other rights.

Mobbing—psychological harassment in the workplace—occurs when one or more individuals systematically and regularly inflict psychological abuse on another. Mobbing can occur between employees, from employees to a superior, from a superior to employees, or from an organization to one of its own employees. Mobbing affects work performance, causes serious controversy, and can cause severe psychological problems for the person who experiences it.

The Labour Code lacks the use and definition of the term "Mobbing", leading to its latent manifestation in workplaces. This omission prevents victims of the practice from finding appropriate protection measures from the state. Furthermore, by its very nature, the phenomenon is difficult to prove, and there is a need to introduce appropriate mechanisms to define and defeat it. The psychological club/NGO Intra has addressed the problem of Mobbing, by implementing the campaign "Make your workplace a safe environment, maintaining your right to be free from discrimination". The campaign aimed to contribute to the prevention of psychological harassment and Mobbing in the workplaces of Shirak province. It aimed to provide appropriate protection mechanisms for targeted persons. Through the campaign, a [survey](#) was conducted among 1000 employees and employers to highlight the presence of mobbing in workplaces, the forms of manifestation, and the impacts on the targeted persons. 45.90% of the respondents answered that they had witnessed incidents of violence at the workplace.

During the campaign, large-scale awareness was carried out in the Shirak province through visits, within which 367 employees were informed about the phenomenon of Mobbing, and the campaign established a hotline service. Following many recommendations, a course was organized for employees of Voskehask, Mets Mantash, and Artik communities of Shirak province.

307 employees and 30 employers of 20 institutions of Shirak region participated in the course "Increasing the level of emotional intelligence as a means of preventing mobbing".

In the framework of the campaign, an educational [video](#) was also created to inform society about the phenomenon of Mobbing.

HEALTH POLICY AND INNOVATION CENTER

Promotion of free health screening



According to the World Health Organization (WHO), non-communicable diseases (NCDs) kill more than 41 million people every year, which is 71% of deaths worldwide.

NCDs have various risk factors; however, it is possible to prevent the development of NCDs. Early detection is essential. For example, the survival rate of patients with malignant neoplasms (MNS) is strongly related to early detection of the disease. It is unfortunate to note that almost every second case of MNS is detected in the 3rd and 4th stages of the disease when the treatment is less effective than in the earlier stages. According to WHO data from 2020, the share of all types of MNS detected in the early stages, i.e. in the 1st and 2nd stages were 42%.

Preventive medical services also include state-guaranteed health screening services. Even though a screening program for diagnosing Diabetes, Arterial Hypertension, and Breast and Cervical cancers has been in operation since 2015, a small percentage of the population applies for it.

Society has taboos for several preventive services, such as cervical cancer screening. At the same time, health screenings are not widespread because patients do not know what will happen after the examination, do not imagine the procedure, or the actual need, have many fears, and are in a state of uncertainty.

Considering these details, the NGO Health Policy and Innovation Center implemented the "Promotion of free health screening program" campaign. The campaign's purpose was to provide the public with reliable and accessible information about screenings and their necessity to increase the applicability of screenings.

The campaign started with the commencement of research, through which the data obtained would direct the project's future strategy. Research has shown that one of the main reasons for avoiding screenings is a lack of awareness. To remedy this, four information clips were shot; these were widely circulated through a variety of social media channels (YouTube, FB, Instagram) to break stereotypes regarding medical services and to provide reliable information.

In response to the videos, there was a lot of feedback about how helpful they were and how they encouraged people to seek preventive screening.

At the same time, active cooperation with opinion makers on Instagram (influencers) was carried out within the campaign program. The latter regularly talked about preventive examinations and screenings from their platforms, held live discussions with specialists, and urged people to conduct preventive examinations by their example or by organizing marathons.

Within the framework of the project, four information booklets were prepared on the following topics:

✓ Cervical cancer

✓ Diabetes

✓ Breast cancer

✓ Arterial hypertension

There was also a live Facebook broadcast with a medical specialist, where the importance of preventive medical care, the symptoms of various non-infectious diseases and the methods of their early detection and prevention were presented.

Even after the end of the program, the Health Policy and Innovation Center continues to receive many responses, where people tell how, thanks to this program, they applied for research, detected a disease early, and took appropriate measures.

POINT-33

Comfortable environment for women in early-motherhood



Women in Armenia are often faced with a dilemma: to lose income and career growth or to sacrifice proper child care and violate the baby's right to breastfeed.

"Married couples have lower rates of employment for mothers, especially those of young, reproductive age, and thus a larger gender gap in employment." [The survey](#) of the Statistics Committee also mentions the size of the gender gap: 40%. Also interesting are the [data](#) that, on average, 13,000 of the families with 35,000 children are given childcare benefits per year; that is, it can be assumed that the mothers of about 22,000 babies do not work. And around 13,000 workers leave the labor market at least temporarily every year. This is one of the reasons for the gender gap in the labor market.

In carrying out a campaign program, Point 33 planned to improve the conditions of early motherhood and working mothers, contributing to the implementation of legislative reforms and advocacy of this process.

During the campaign, the rights of working mothers with children up to 2 years of age to breastfeed and balance work and family were considered a priority issue.

Within the framework of the campaign, a study of international and local experiences on having a family-friendly environment in workplaces and ensuring family-work balance was carried out; as a result of discussions with interested parties, a set of recommendations was drawn up, which was transferred to the government, in particular to the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs and the permanent member to the commission of the National Assembly of Labor and Social Affairs.

Meetings were held with the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs representatives, the National Assembly's Standing Committee on Labor and Social Affairs, UNFPA Armenia, UNICEF, "Madame" women entrepreneurs' union, Human Rights Defenders to discuss the proposals for legislative changes, and their justifications.

The Armenian National Assembly Standing Committee on Labor and Social Affairs members have expressed their willingness to cooperate with Point 33 on legislative regulations to create a comfortable working environment for breastfeeding women in the early stages of motherhood.

Thanks to the project, the organization's [website](#) was launched, and innovative media products (videos, illustrations, photo stories, infographics, etc.) were also created.

IN THE NAME OF FREEDOM

We can

The "We can" campaign aims to improve the articles relating to the process of parole of a convicted person, particularly the situations related to the evaluation point system and the terms of examination of applications for parole by the court.



"In the Name of Freedom" has conducted social surveys with 150 former and current convicts and their relatives to develop a [study](#) on the procedure of parole from punishment in Armenia.

The expert group worked on the project to make changes in the procedure of conditional release from punishment, and the proposals of the beneficiaries were taken into account. The draft (Article 5), which formed part of the research, was put to public consultation, completed, and finalized. It is available on the In the name of Freedom [website](#); it can be printed and sent to the interested parties: the RA Ministry of Justice, the penal and probation services, the RA Prosecutor General's Office, the RA National Assembly Standing Committees on State-Legal, Human Rights Protection and Public Affairs, the Human Rights Defender. The proposal will be put into circulation after the expert opinion of the Ministry of Justice. "In the name of Freedom," NGO plans to contribute to the adoption of the proposal with its actions.

The information about the proposed changes was also distributed among the people serving sentences in the penal institutions of Armenia. In addition, information leaflets have been posted in penitentiary institutions with the contact information of "In the name of Freedom" so that, if necessary, prisoners can quickly contact CSO employees.

A memorandum of cooperation was signed with the Probation Service of RA Justice, regular awareness meetings are organized with registered beneficiaries, and continuous actions are undertaken to solve the issue of beneficiaries' employment.

DiverCity SOCIAL-CULTURAL, HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDER NGO

Social-Cultural Human Rights Defenders contributing to reducing discrimination in Armenia



In violation of human rights in Armenia, vulnerable and targeted groups: LGBTQ+ people (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans, Queer), people with disabilities, or people belonging to the counterculture and subculture groups are sometimes discriminated against during pre-conscription, because of the lack of sensitivity and ethics in working with vulnerable groups in military commissariats during the medical examinations. Historically, there have been no studies, reports, or other informational materials available about such discrimination and rights violations, throughout the implementation of the conscription processes. To redress this oversight, the NGO DiverCity researched the issue and made its materials available to the public.

DiverCity began monitoring conscription from the summer conscription of 2018 until 2021; DiverCity conducted research through fieldwork, leading to the publication of the [report](#) "Discrimination against conscripts during medical examinations".

As a result of the research and the issues it highlighted, a manual was also prepared for "Vulnerable and targeted citizens of draft and conscription age", which is available on the DiverCity [website](#).

Presentation of the research results was also carried out for vulnerable and targeted citizens of draft age, as well as for mental health center employees involved in the draft medical commission.

Taking into account the long-term goal of the project, which is to enshrine into RA Law a law "On Ensuring Equality", DiverCity has also prepared a [video](#) on the need for a separate law known as: "Legislative Regulations and Gaps for the Prevention of Discrimination in RA | 2021".

RESOURCE CENTER FOR WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT

Post-war recovery and social policy improvement

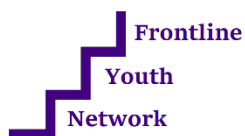
Conflict changes a person's way of life, and women and children are particularly vulnerable during wartime. The problems are particularly pronounced when various vulnerability factors coincide, such as health problems, additional needs, disabilities, etc. Tense situations imply a new reality, new requirements and conditions, and programs and measures aimed at prevention and intervention must be implemented by each state. The aim of the “Post-war recovery and social policy improvement” campaign sought to identify all these needs through research and bring these needs to the decision-makers so that the post-war social policy of the state would be more need-based and targeted.



The campaign consisted of two main parts: research and the campaign itself, the advocacy phase. The post-war policy of RA and implemented support programs and the experience of other countries in post-war crises were studied. Based on the analysis, a [report](#) was prepared, where the opinions of the interested parties were taken into account. Within three months, the report was presented to the general public through various visual materials on social networks; it was sent to interested public organizations, the RA National Assembly, and the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs. In December 2021, the organization had the opportunity to present the results of the research as well as the essential outlines, based on the report to the Minister of Labor and Social Issues of Armenia, for discussion with the representatives of Artsakh operational headquarters and non-governmental organizations.



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