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## GENDER COMPETITION 2024

### Nomination for the Gender Mainstreaming

Country: Armenia

OU:3900

Applicant team:

1. *Sona Grigoryan – Country Gender Focal Person, Gender Focal Person for Economic and Social Participation of Vulnerable Displaced and Local Population in the South Caucasus*
2. *Eleanor Mika - Gender Focal Person, Innovative Tourism and Technology Development for Armenia (ITTD), PSD TVET Armenia, South Caucasus*
3. *Lika Mkrtychyan - Gender Focal Person, Good Governance for Local Development (GGLD) South Caucasus Project Armenia*

### Introduction

GIZ Armenia implements targeted initiatives to promote gender equality and women's empowerment via its Gender Focal Point group. Events are aimed at improving women's networking and access to opportunities as well as their integration, equal participation and representation in society, governmental processes and the economy by providing platforms for women and men to share their experiences and knowledge on particular topics related to gender equality. Within this framework, the Women Experience and Success Sharing Platform (WESSP) and Women's Empowerment Club (WE) tackle specific and current issues, such as the inclusion and integration of forcibly displaced people from Nagorno-Karabakh into Armenian society. By showcasing women-led initiatives and highlighting the needs and disadvantages of women and children in such crises, these platforms not only provide opportunities for collaboration on important issues, but also provide a network of potential partners, visibility of successful women's initiatives, positive female role models and a better awareness of gender equality.

### Armenian Context – Unequal representation and restricted resources

Women and girls represent over 53% of Armenia's population<sup>1</sup>, but the representation of women in decision-making processes in Armenia, especially in communities outside Yerevan and larger cities, is very low. Currently in the Armenian Parliament there are only 32 female MPs out of 107, which is 35.51%. This means that decisions are often made without sufficiently considering the interests and ideas of women, but also other groups in society.

The gendered division of labour within society and the fact that women carry out most of the unpaid care work (three times that of men) has been identified as a primary cause of women's insufficient economic activity in Armenia<sup>2</sup>.

Women's low representation in formal economic life and decision-making processes stems from societal norms and stereotypes in Armenia. Those are deeply ingrained societal beliefs and expectations about the roles and capabilities of women, often perpetuated through cultural norms, media portrayals, and traditional viewpoints. Collective expectations of women having to be a good mother and wife first and foremost restrict women from positioning themselves as leaders or breadwinners. In addition, there is a lack of successful female role models in politics and the private sector for young women and girls to look up to. There is also a surprising gap between women's educational level and their involvement in leadership or high managerial positions, which can indicate discrimination based on unconscious bias, referred to as the "glass ceiling". Because

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<sup>1</sup> Source: UN (World Population Prospects 2019). Statistics on Armenia

<sup>2</sup> United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework for Armenia 2021-2025



of these disadvantages, women face greater barriers to assuming leadership positions, economic independence as well as access to information, capacity building and mentorship.

## **Promoting Gender Equality as GIZ Armenia**

### GIZ Armenia's Gender Focal Points

The Gender Focal Point (GFP) group in GIZ Armenia comprises one selected focal person from each project active in Armenia. Once selected, each GFP participates in an induction session, which provides them with information on gender equality particularly in Armenia and BMZ's Feminist Development Policy. The group's mission is to mainstream gender in all aspects of GIZ Armenia's work, both internally with staff and externally with partners and beneficiaries. This includes awareness raising initiatives, capacity building, providing platforms for different voices to be heard, and advising and supporting management and colleagues on integrating a gendered perspective in their projects. In addition, the GFPs developed and maintain the country's gender analysis, and provide continuous knowledge and recommendations based on the report.

### Women's Experience and Success Sharing Platform Networking

On April 4, 2023, the Gender Focal Points of GIZ Armenia launched the Women's Experience and Success Sharing Platform (WESSP) initiative. It aims at providing a stage for GIZ Armenia's female programme beneficiaries who have become successful in their social, economic or political context as a result of GIZ Armenia's support.

The main purpose of the events are to:

- ✓ Provide a space for sharing women's experiences and success stories in different fields
- ✓ Inspire other women to become change actors, to be engaged in development processes, and be open for empowerment and positive change
- ✓ Foster networking, cooperation, and new collaboration opportunities between the beneficiaries from different projects and different fields

The events are also used to gather feedback on GIZ Armenia's support mechanisms for women's empowerment measures.

For the first WESSP event, GIZ Armenia's Gender Focal Points selected four successful women beneficiaries or partners from each project to participate in person at GIZ offices in Yerevan, with their travel costs covered by their respective projects. Online participation was extended to participants from the regions who were not able to join physically. The topic of discussion for this first event was women's empowerment in general, but with a specific focus on each of the professional fields or sectors that the participants represented.

The event provided a safe space for the participants to talk about challenges and barriers in their work, but also to share success stories. Many participants already had a solid understanding of feminism and gender equality. In general, participants mentioned how important it was to see and hear about other women's similar experiences, to see that their goals are achievable, and that there are women who are open to giving advice, support and mentorship along the way.

There were several speeches from participants and one from the GIZ Armenia Country Director, Ms. Madeleine Rauschenberger, which moved the participants who said how significant it was to see someone accomplished and from abroad committed to their cause. There was also a speech from one of the participants on the strength and courage of displaced women in the country despite all their loss, grief and sorrow. After their speech, many spoke about the idea of having inner resources to rely on as external physical resources can be lost at any moment.



Throughout the event, participants spoke about the many strengths that women possess, including: goal-orientation and purposefulness, hard work, motivation for change, perseverance, teamwork, the need for change for their children's future, knowledge and leadership skills.

### WESSP results and feedback

Due to the active engagement of all the GFPs of GIZ Armenia, the WESSP event was organised very smoothly and successfully. The collaboration of the GFPs with each other and with their beneficiaries was instrumental in its success and they showcased exemplary teamwork and support throughout the planning and execution phases. However, the process did not come without its challenges for the GFPs, which are outlined below.

Challenge 1: Finding time to organise the event while also busy with their regular work schedules. Since the GFPs were committed to the cause, they took on the additional work alongside their project activities to meet with each other, brainstorm, plan and create a successful event.

Challenge 2: Organising the event in a hybrid format, as this may create technical issues, disruption in dialogue, and may have made the event less personal. However, this didn't turn out to be an issue, as the online participants stayed until the end of the event and exchanged opinions easily with those who were there in-person. The GFPs supporting the event also worked together with an IT expert ahead of time to ensure that all the technical equipment was set up and working.

Challenge 3: the doubts of some of the GFPs for a successful event, but this was overcome with their high level of motivation, commitment and trust. The active participation of each GFP was marked by mutual encouragement and shared responsibility, and not only ensured the event's success but also left a lasting impact on the GFP team spirit of unity and cooperation.

Following the WESSP event, the participants gave very positive feedback and mentioned how important, enriching and motivating it was for them. Many of them saw potential for future collaboration with other participants, such as a hotel manager and a food production entrepreneur. During the break, some participants started to plan mutual visits in various regional centres for further cooperation. Many women shared the event on social media, which further indicated how important it was for them and how appreciated they felt for being invited to take part in the event.

One final piece of important feedback received after the event was that this platform needs to be kept active and similar networking and experience sharing events should be organised with narrower scope and focus, which the GFPs took on board.

## **Boosting women's agency in a crisis**

### Women Empowerment Club

The low representation of women in decision-making disadvantages women from assuming leadership positions and feeds into a continuous cycle of non-representation. Nevertheless, it is of vital importance to increase women's presence in local politics, which in turn contributes to the social and economic development of the community, increases women's employment opportunities and leads to more democratic governance, peacebuilding and stability.

The purpose of the Women Empowerment (WE) Club is to pay tribute to the important role of women in Armenian communities and local self-government bodies, to serve as an instrument for women and men to come together to share their insights on how to address discrimination and ensure more gender equality in the public, political and social spheres of communities, and to improve participants' knowledge, abilities and skills for active involvement in decision-making processes.



Alongside other activities implemented by GIZ Armenia's Gender Focal Points, the WE Club takes steps to further advance gender equality by empowering women in political participation, addressing greater responsiveness to citizens' needs, and providing an opportunity for establishing a dialogue between local self-government body and citizens in order to increase participation of the population in decision-making. The issues raised during the discussions, possible solutions, as well as the best ways to share experiences among municipalities are applied in intermunicipal cooperation.

The goal of the Women Empowerment Club is to strengthen the capacities of women in communities and local administrations through establishing strong links and networks between representatives of different clusters, sectors, and entities thus enhancing the capacities of communities and public institutions to create more effective ecosystem in the country. It is an informal platform that enables women's active involvement in decision-making processes in Armenian municipalities, as well as equal participation of women and men in political life, public and social spheres.

As gender equality cannot be achieved alone, the Women Empowerment Club is an important platform for GIZ Armenia, as it also brings together the main stakeholders from sister projects and allows for greater cooperation. During the WE Clubs – depending on the topic – partners and beneficiaries of other projects are invited to present their success and tell inspiring stories about their heroes of the day, and create space for partnerships and support.

#### Women's leadership in emergency situations

As an immediate reaction to the recent emergency situation in Armenia, a WE Club was organised. In September 2023 as a result of an escalation of an unresolved border conflict, over 100,000 forcibly displaced people (FDP) from Nagorno-Karabakh fled to Armenia seeking refuge, which resulted in a 4% increase in Armenia's population. The major successes was bringing together stakeholders from the public and private sector, creating a network of people from diverse fields to join their efforts in support of FDPs.

#### **Conclusion**

GIZ Armenia's Gender Focal Points see empowering women to further their own agenda themselves and following the "3 Rs" not just as a moral obligation; it's a strategic imperative. Women bring unique perspectives, innovative solutions, and a collaborative spirit to the table. When women lead, we can see more inclusive policies, increased community engagement and a stronger focus on social welfare.

In times of crisis especially, efforts must be redoubled to empower and give agency to women in governance, management, economic independence and other opportunities for power and resources. They must be provided with the tools and chances to lead effectively and ensure that they have the support and resources they need to navigate the complex challenges that arise in emergency situations.