



[Eurasia Partnership Foundation](#) (EPF) is a civil society organization (CSO) with over 20 years of experience in institutional development, program implementation, and grant-making. EPF’s mission is to empower people to effect change for social justice and economic prosperity through hands-on programs, helping them to improve their communities and their own lives.

EPF has built networks of young leaders and CSOs across Armenia, working on issues related to [human rights](#), [conflict transformation and peace-building](#), [civil society development](#), and [local government reform](#); [youth engagement and empowerment](#), [media literacy](#), and [religious tolerance](#); as well as [anti-corruption](#) and [conflict of interest](#). EPF’s work is based on the principles of democracy, anti-discrimination, freedom of expression, equality, diversity, and human rights, which are all fundamental pillars of the programs EPF implements.

The Republic of Armenia has registered progress in terms of democratization of society and governance, however, major societal issues remain to be solved. These include widespread discriminatory practices against people with disabilities (PWDs), limited resources to comprehensively address those practices, inadequate representation of PWDs and other groups with special needs, as well as limited understanding of disability rights and policies in society. EPF programs address these issues by enhancing the capacities of relevant local actors through grant support, training, and empowerment, as well as by implementing programs that promote equal access to rights and services, supporting government agencies and service providers to adopt human rights-based approaches to issues, and engaging large segments of society in order to change attitudes.

EPF has been supporting CSOs that work for or are represented by disadvantaged groups such as PWDs, including those with mental health and psychosocial issues, representatives of various minority groups (religious, ethnic, sexual), and others. The CSOs have received support from EPF so that they may: (1) institutionally strengthen their organizations, (2) conduct policy research and advocacy work directed at full and effective participation of PWDs in society on an equal basis, and (3) implement projects aimed at removing prejudicial and environmental barriers in society, which hinder equal participation of PWDs in all spheres of life.

EPF is a disability-friendly workplace and has adjusted its office space and conference facilities to be wheelchair accessible.

Below are descriptions of various activities that demonstrate the results of EPF’s support and capacity building efforts for CSOs and informal groups working for the rights and interests of PWDs and other disadvantaged groups.

### **Strengthening CSO Policy Participation and Advocacy Efforts**

#### **“DATA: Data for Accountable and Transparent Action” Program (2020-2022) (Funded by USAID)**

Implementing Partners: “Institute of Public Policy” NGO, “Legal Research and Development Center” NGO, “Healthcare Policy and Innovation Center” NGO, Warm Corner Foundation.

The “DATA” program was designed to contribute to an improved, evidence-based policy making cycle by enhancing CSOs’ capacity to use sound, robust data, analyze and communicate it effectively, and generate expertise and support from other stakeholders. As part of the program, policy participation initiatives were funded, including a project that focused on advancing **rights-based approaches in the management of issues of persons with psychosocial and mental disabilities**. The goal of the project was to support the development of evidence-based policy for the introduction of an alternative system of small social housing and related services for beneficiaries in the field of mental health in Armenia.

As of January 1, 2020, the number of persons with disabilities in Armenia is 192,013, of which the number of persons with disabilities on the basis of mental health is 23,468. One of the key documents that enshrines the rights of people with mental health issues is the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, which was ratified by Armenia in 2010. By ratifying the Convention, Armenia has committed to supporting and protecting persons with mental health disabilities, as well as ensuring that they are able to fully and equally exercise their human rights and freedoms. Additionally, according to Article 19 of the Convention, Armenia recognizes the right of persons with mental health disabilities to live independently and to be included in society.

Despite Armenia’s legislative commitments to protect the rights of people with mental disabilities, the vast majority of individuals from this group still live in psychiatric and other healthcare institutions, isolated from society and deprived of the opportunity to make decisions. Additionally, the process of developing a mental health policy in Armenia is not participatory or research-based.

As a result of the “DATA” program, 24 members of 14 organizations and expert groups representing the interests of people with mental health disabilities formed a network in order to influence deinstitutionalization policies, and to represent the rights and interests of people with mental health issues. Activities within the framework of the program were as follows:

- Project partners conducted a number of capacity building activities for CSOs and experts, as well as developed [Guidelines for researchers](#) of conducting research with people with the target groups.
- Partners also conducted a study on the system of small social care homes and related services for people with mental health disabilities, as well as on the possibilities of their large-scale implementation in Armenia, with the ultimate goal being to improve policy.
- A communication campaign was implemented to raise the awareness and issues of persons with psychosocial disabilities. With the permission of small social housing residents, videos specifically about them and their concerns were produced, giving them the opportunity to express themselves directly. [Media products](#), [radio-interviews](#) by experts Gohar Khachatryan, Bavakan Petrosyan, Syuzanna Petrosyan, Larina Nazaryan, Anahit Gevorgyan and others reflected on the the sectoral issues and possible relevant solutions.
- Based on the research findings and communication campaign, policy proposals on effective models of social care homes outlined their strategy and development priorities for both the short and long term. Discussions and advocacy meetings were also conducted, and a [policy paper titled “Group Homes in the Field of Mental Health in Armenia: Issues and Opportunities for Development”](#) was published and presented to the Armenian Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs.
- The Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs released its comprehensive [policy draft on integration of PWDs](#) in 2023, which included priorities articulated by the project’s policy paper.

More about the “DATA” program can be found [here](#).

### **“EU4Youth: Student Democracy Now” Program (2021-2024) (Funded by EU)**

The “EU4Youth: Student Democracy Now” program aims to protect the rights of young people and strengthen the capacities of students and student organizations, empowering them to engage in public

affairs, including students who lack access to resources and opportunities. One of the projects funded by the program titled **“We Are Together”** was implemented by the **“White Cane” OPD** focused on the challenges that students with disabilities face in the process of education.

**Project: “We Are Together”**

Project partner: “White Cane” NGO

In Armenia, **students with disabilities** encounter various academic challenges, such as inaccessible classrooms and other physical barriers. As the number of students with disabilities in each educational institution is relatively small, their problems are not consistently addressed. In response to this issue, “White Cane” NGO launched a project in 2022 called “We Are Together,” with the primary objective of establishing a student council for persons with disabilities in Armenia. The council's mandate is to tackle the challenges faced by students with disabilities who are pursuing higher and secondary professional education in Armenia. Specifically, the council will enhance communication between universities and the labor market, safeguard students' rights and interests, and promote the self-organization of disabled students.

**“Civil Society Support for Ensuring Impact on Reforms” Program (2020-2023) (Funded by SIDA)**

The “Civil Society Support for Ensuring Impact on Reforms” (CS Support) program is supported by the Embassy of Sweden in Yerevan and the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA). The program aims at building civil society capacities and strategic positioning to successfully address the needs of the post-revolution and post-war situation in Armenia in the areas of human rights, anti-discrimination and non-violence, anti-corruption and conflict of interest, environment, urban planning and development, and others.

The following projects specifically benefited disadvantaged people and vulnerable groups, such as people with disabilities, people affected by human and societal trauma, multiple crises, various psychosocial challenges, violence, issues of social exclusion, and others.

**Project: “Effective and Full Participation in Policy Development and Monitoring Procedures”**

Project partner: “Disability Rights Agenda” NGO (DRA)

People with disabilities often do not have the opportunity to participate in the development, implementation, and monitoring of policies regarding disability. These barriers became more evident due to the health, socio-economic, and communication challenges introduced by the COVID-19 pandemic, and the deep crisis in various areas of life following the 2020 Nagorny Karabakh (NK) war. The combination of these two factors has led to the severance of the connection between decision-makers and organizations of persons with disabilities (OPDs), which endangers the participation of persons with disabilities, both as a principle and as a right. The goal of the project was to **support the rights of persons with disabilities through the development, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation of the Comprehensive Social Inclusion Program for Persons with Disabilities**. The National Comprehensive Program for 2017-2021 on the Social Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities was assessed through the project. DRA supported the Armenian Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs for the participatory and accessible development of the National Comprehensive Program for 2021-2026. The second component of the program included ensuring the direct participation of PWDs in the development of a comprehensive social inclusion program for PWDs between 2022-2026. In this regard, [consultations](#) with NGOs were held. In particular, a consultation was held with "Equal Rights, Equal Opportunities" NGO, which was attended by 15 people. The recommendations made as a result of the previous consultations (three groups and six individuals) were included in the draft of the program. The organization has already developed the program and the list of envisaged activities. The program is based

on the study of the rights of PWDs or related sectoral strategic documents in more than 30 countries. As a result of the study, best practices were identified, and mechanisms corresponding to the Armenian context were integrated into the new program. The project offered a number of consecutive complementary actions to ensure that the participation of PWDs and relevant activities are rights-based. In addition, DRA strengthened its institutional capabilities of monitoring and advocacy (including through the development of necessary procedures, tools, and formats), and increased its own visibility as an organization.

**Project: “Oral Stories About the War: Lessons Learned”**

Project partner: Aghasi Tadevosyan, Anthropologist

Projects related to the 2020 NK war have mainly assessed refugees' needs and provided assistance according to those needs. However, one urgent and significant issue is the healthcare and rehabilitation of veterans. Soldiers who experienced the horrors of war and thus bear the heavy burden of the experience have often been neglected and ignored by projects. The 2020 NK war was specifically characterized by the powerlessness and insignificance of humans in the face of technology, the use of modern technology to cause fear, the brutality of human death, its intensity (specifically the large number of casualties in a short period of time), and several other features that left a **heavy and traumatic impact on people**. The issues of **documentation of the war, the study of its consequences, and its influence on people’s worldviews, values, attitudes, and views toward war and peace specifically** are not often given the attention they deserve. The changes in the attitudes of veterans’ family members and relatives, changes in their values, and the factors that shape them, in general, are also important to study. The project partner, anthropologist Aghasi Tadevosyan, studied the impact and consequences of the 2020 NK war on ex-combatants, both in terms of the **traumatic repercussions** and the transformation of their values and worldviews. The research team studied the literature on war anthropology, and based on this, designed the scope of the study. The transcribed content of in-depth interviews with 60 people from Goris, Gyumri, Vardenis, and Yerevan, was summarized in a research publication. The research results and conclusions have been presented several times, including through television programs, to inform the public on the impact that the war has had on direct participants. The project partner also [prepared a publication](#) based on the research results, which is a resource available for educators, organizations, and individual experts that promote peace-building and human security.

**Project: “For the Benefit of a Healthy Society: Preventing Violence in Schools”**

Project partner: “Intra Psychological Club” NGO

Half of students aged 13 to 15 worldwide – around 150 million – report having experienced peer-to-peer violence in and around school, according to a new report released by the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF). The consequences of bullying can be severe and irreversible. The goal of this project was to raise the level of awareness of students and teachers from 20 schools in the Shirak region about bullying, and to provide psychological support to those who experienced bullying. As part of the project, teachers and students were trained, a hotline was established, beneficiaries were interviewed, and around 200 information posters about the bullying prevention and hotline services were disseminated. [Trainings](#) for the development of **emotional intelligence and empathy** were conducted for 212 students in 20 schools, during which students learned skills related to self-perception, self-management, and effective communication. Additionally, a communication campaign, including a [press conference](#) and a [radio program](#), was implemented. Through the project, bullying as a serious societal concern and as a form of violence, was presented and widely discussed in schools and within broader society.

**Project: “Post-War Post-Tuths”**

Project partner: “4Plus Documentary Photography Center” NGO

The goal of this project was to document and reveal the hidden post-war issues and unspoken realities following the 2020 NK war through visual narratives. The project, supported by international visual artists' expertise, introduced a model of ethical coverage and publication of human stories that revealed the social and psychological trauma of those affected by the war – widows, missing persons, parents of prisoners of war, the disabled, military service members, displaced persons, and people who have undergone life-changing transformations as a result of the war. Citizen journalists, photo, and video producers were trained, [six photo stories](#) by six photographers covering **post-war realities** were created and published on the 4Plus website and social media pages. To ensure that post-war trauma be addressed at a broader level, the project partners also raised awareness among the international community on the crises experienced by war-affected populations.

**Project: “Legal and Psychological Support to LGBTQI Community”**

Project partner: “Right Side” Human Rights Defender NGO

LGBTQI people need psychological support due to the discrimination, psychological and physical abuse, as well as the violence they are often subjected to by their relatives, communities, the press, and the general public. LGBTQI people also need legal advice and support to rehabilitate their violated rights in Armenia. The project contributed to the **legal and psychological protection of the LGBTQI community through the provision of legal and psychological support**. It also addressed hate speech and discrimination against LGBTQI people by registering court cases that concluded in favor of minority representatives. Through the project, at least 140 legal and 80 psychological counseling sessions were provided to people from the LGBTQI community, ensuring that their rights were protected or rehabilitated. The project partner also improved its capacity of providing legal counseling services by working with legal experts.

**Project: “Rethinking the Code of Conduct in Media”**

Project partner: “Haverzh” NGO

In post-war reality, content disseminated on social and mainstream media has the power to improve or worsen the crises situations. As a result, the responsibility of the media has become more important, and it is imperative to monitor the quality and impact of content, the ethical procedures implemented during the content creation process, as well as the coverage of sensitive topics and conflicts. The project was aimed at enhancing the media quality of responsible coverage in war and post-war crises situations, and encouraged free and objective coverage by mass media. Mothers of fallen soldiers specifically came together to assist and **sensitize the media sector on war and post-war crises situations**, following the principle of “do not harm.” The project partners worked with professional journalists to assess the problems in the media sphere, created a manual on increasing media sensitivity, as well as developed guidelines for **working with affected people in war and post-war situations**.

As part of the project's implementation, the project partner analyzed media articles covering issues related to soldiers and their families in war and post-war situations. They developed the methodology of the analysis and identified media outlets to observe the quality of their production from the perspectives of sensitive issues. Based on the media analysis a guidebook was developed and published. The guidebook offers ethical norms that should be followed by journalists and media outlets to properly work with conflict-affected soldiers and their family members. It should be mentioned that the guidebook is unique as there is no similar handbook in the Armenian language aiming to sensitize the media sector.

**Project: “Bibliotherapy as a Way of Overcoming Post-War Trauma”**

Project partner: “PEN” Cultural NGO



In the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic and the 2020 NK war, Armenian society was faced with a multi-component and multi-layered crisis, one that created a societal context of **public trauma** and that required a well-thought out and sound set of solutions. The project introduced the science-based practice of **bibliotherapy** as a solution to the crisis, adapting it to local realities, and sharing it among an informal local network of bibliotherapy advocates. The project partner created a database of organizations specialized in book therapy, studied international practices of bibliotherapy, published articles and analytical reports on the subject, and conducted a workshop on bibliotherapy for the local network of advocates.

**Project: “Post-War Stories”**

Project partner: “Visual Innovation Studio”

To capture the reality of post-war Armenia, the project supported the production of **videos depicting human stories** by novice content creators from across Armenia and NK. Video producers covered sensitive topics that are not usually included in public rhetoric, even one and a half years after the war. The idea was to promote well-known stories with new approaches, captured through the eyes of young people. Eleven applicants developed [documentaries on human stories](#) and held public presentations on their stories followed by discussions.

**[Institutional Capacity Building Support to CSOs Working with PWDs and OPDs](#)**

**“Civil Society Organizational Development” Program (2014-2019) (Funded by USAID)**

The “Civil Society Organizational Development” Program (CSO DePo) implemented the “CSO Sustainability Strategy” grants program between 2019-2021 in order to create a pool of CSOs in Armenia with strong organizational capacity, the ability to implement high quality programs, and the experience to wage advocacy campaigns. Several institutional development projects were implemented by organizations working with people with disabilities and mental health issues.

**The Child Development Foundation (CDF)** implemented a project called “Let’s Play to Develop.” As part of the project, CDF produced a [methodical module](#) for CSO experts and specialists working with children with development issues. CDF trained 30 child care specialists, among them 16 CSO representatives, using the module. An electronic version of the module is available for use by relevant CSOs and experts. The module and three additional games are also included in CDF’s social enterprise, ZarMan LTD, as additional services.

**The Child and Family Development Foundation (CFDF)** is the only CSO in Armenia’s Kotayk region that works with children with disabilities as well as their families. The organization was founded in 2017 by Marine Yegoryan, the mother of a child with disabilities, in order to address the challenges that she and other parents faced, as well as the need for a support center in their community. Due to EPF’s capacity building support, the organization was able to secure a large office space for its operations and for use as a daycare recreation space for children. CFDF has since recruited staff members and volunteers, hired consultants to develop its three-year development strategy as well as its public relations and communication procedures, and underwent training on fundraising. As part of the project, CFDF conducted a crowdfunding campaign called “[Charity Run](#),” which resulted in the expansion of its cooperation network and generated moderate unrestricted funding. CFDF cooperated with over 15 organizations and entities for the campaign, which assisted in the organization, logistics, and promotion of the event. The regional governor of Kotayk attended the event and presented awards to participants.

**“Equal Rights, Equal Opportunities” NGO (EREO)** in Armenia’s Lori region invested in efforts to develop new skills and competencies of its staff members through their project, in order to diversify its

services. EREO staff received graphic design, photo-video shooting, and editing courses, as well as purchased professional cameras that will be used to improve the communications and visibility of the organization. EREO filmed two promotional videos about its [social enterprise](#) and [products](#), redesigned its communication materials, and redesigned its [online platform](#). Through the project the CSO also improved its service providing capacity, defining its list of services and income management cycle. During the project implementation the organization also moved to an improved office space and was awarded with a new project in coalition with “Journalists for Human Rights” NGO, another DePo grant recipient, and “Power of Right” NGO.

“**Skarp**” NGO in Yerevan implemented a project that allowed them to considerably improve their internal and external communications. Based on recommendations of a consultant, Skarp revised its administrative procedures and is now more structured. The CSO also developed a number of procedures, a strategic development plan, and amended its statute and by-laws, all contributing to its sustainable development. The organization also considerably improved its visibility and [online platforms](#). Upon completion of the project, Skarp received support from new donors to boost its social enterprise.

“**Mayri**” NGO in Yerevan invested considerable efforts in developing its staff training and resource center, which has become a hub of specialists who work with children with disabilities. Mayri’s staff acted as trainers by conducting methodical trainings for their peer specialists. These trainings attracted the attention of various stakeholders, with hopes to enlarge the cooperation network of the CSO. Through the project, Mayri developed training modules to share its methodology with others in its network for the first time. Mayri also invited international and local CSO consultants to participate in the project, allowing them to rethink their services and social enterprise concept to ensure long-term sustainability and self-sufficiency. Finally, the organization also launched a new, well-designed website, [mayri.am](#), improving its visibility.

“**Disability-Info**” NGO in Yerevan rebranded its organization through its project, renaming itself “Disability-Inclusive Development” NGO, and it launched a new website, [didarmenia.am](#), which is fully adapted to the needs of people with disabilities. The CSO revised its statute in order to have a clearer definition of its mission and vision, and also revised most of its policies and procedures, including its membership policy, board management, strategic plan, and communication procedure. For the first time since its establishment, the organization also organized a strategic retreat to discuss developmental priorities. Additionally, the organization’s new branding improved its overall visibility and communication effectiveness.

“**Astghavard**” NGO in Armenia’s Gegharkunik region received support to improve and expand its services to PWDs, expanded its partners network to cooperate more closely with doctors and child care services based in Yerevan. The CSO also established strong cooperation with regional hospitals and doctors, its child-care evaluation process was considerably improved, and a unified methodology was developed for its operations. Finally, the organization expanded its scope of activities and began working with parents of children with disabilities to prepare them to better cater to the needs of their children, and to have access to services for PWDs.

### **Critical Thinking for Behavioral Change**

#### **Critical Thinking Schools to Change Attitudes and Reduce Discriminatory Behaviors**

EPF has developed a specific proprietary methodology to enhance the skills of civil society members, particularly youth, in critical thinking, media literacy, information assumption, and conflict

transformation. EPF has developed and implemented the Critical Thinking School (CrTS)<sup>1</sup> methodology since 2017, with more than 240 young people from Yerevan and Armenia’s regions attending the school. EPF has also developed the first edition of its Critical Thinking Handbook<sup>2</sup> (2018, second print run in 2021), the only handbook that exists in the Armenian language on critical thinking. Many of the Critical Thinking Schools have been organized with the European Union’s support within projects such as “Student Democracy Now.”

As future leaders of their communities, investment in the education of young people and their critical thinking skills can have a significant impact on Armenia’s future. The CrTS are designed to challenge stereotypical thinking about societal norms and concerns, and empower local youth to become more conscious, literate media and information users and producers, as well as act as versed community leaders who adhere to the values of democracy, peace, diversity, respect for human rights, and the principles of equality and equity.

Participants enhance their ability to recognize and fight against disinformation, taboos, and stigma, as well as enhance their capacity to design innovative small-scale, youth-led projects addressing the social, human rights, or development needs of their communities.

The added value that EPF brings in supporting society and organizations specifically working on psychosocial issues, equality, and human rights is the mutual enrichment of various projects, including facilitation, grant-making, and partner coordination techniques brought to projects, as well as EPF’s large partnership base on PWD issues, via sharing experiences with partner organizations.

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<sup>1</sup> See more details on Critical Thinking School here: <https://epfarmeria.am/services/educational-services/critical-thinking-school>

<sup>2</sup> See Critical Thinking Handbook (available in Armenian) here: <https://epfarmeria.am/hy/document/Logical-Fallacies-and-Misleading-Rhetorical-Tricks-Critical-Thinking>