Invited grants for the InfoTun Network

Since November 1, 2020, until March 31, 2023, the Eurasia Partnership Foundation, Embassy of Sweden in Yerevan, and SIDA have been jointly implementing the Civil Society Support for Ensuring Impact on Reforms (CS Support) project, aimed at providing support to civil society in Armenia.

Throughout the project implementation period EPF has allocated 10 Invited grants to InfoTuns operating in 10 regions of Armenia.

InfoTuns received subgrants later than some of the Open Door grants started. By the time the InfoTuns were notifed about the invited grant opportunity, the project team studied the situation, consulted with them and jointly they came up with the topics and ideas which were most pertinent to be worked on in the CS Support project framework. The topics identified included:

1. conflict of interest;
2. anti-plagiarism;
3. violence and bullying; and
4. the Soviet past or the 20th century.

The applicants were free to apply addressing all, some or only one of these topics. Each of the InfoTuns covered almost all the directions and the additional directions of the topics. A new approach was applied in case of all InfoTuns projects, which included engagement of field experts in their projects, and cooperation with the "Open door" grant recipients. To ensure synergies between the two major components of the CS Support project, EPF staff created links between relevant topics and sub-grant projects by engaging field-specific grant recipients within the "Open door" scheme into the InfoTun projects. Since some of the topics were new for the InfoTuns, EPF, as part of the grant accompaniment, organized capacity building trainings, e.g. on anti-plagiarism with the engagement of expert Harutyun Vermishyan. This training aimed to raise awareness about the issue of plagiarism which is very common in Armenia. After this ToT, InfoTuns conducted similar trainings for the teachers, students and pupils.

EPF collaborated with the experts of the state agency Corruption Prevention Commission (hereinafter CPC) engaging them in projects implemented by InfoTuns directed toward the prevention of conflict of interest. This activity was aligned with the ongoing state strategy to adopt integrity standards for the public servants and LG representatives. The trainings can also be considered as a part of the awareness-raising activities by the CPC on the ongoing state reform.

During the final gathering of InfoTun Network, InfoTuns shared the main outcomes and impact of their projects. The event had an evaluation component aiming to gather feedback from InfoTun staff about CS Support project and the pilot initiatives on 4 directions. InfoTuns

highlighted that this scheme marked a remarkable milestone in their operational history, representing an advanced level of achievement. The initiative's success was evident in the launch of new projects outside the scope of CS Support, exploring fresh and diverse topics. The meeting also encompassed a brainstorming session to generate new ideas for further projects of the InfoTun Network.

Below are the descriptions of activities carried out by 10 InfoTuns:

Aragatsotn InfoTun: Lyupin NGO
Project duration: August 1, 2021-December 10, 2022
Budget: AMD 10,000,000

The Aragatsotn InfoTun project aimed to integrate the methods of non-formal education in schools. The InfoTun cooperated with several schools in the Talin community and studied the educational situation there. Within the project, ToTs for elementary school teachers were conducted on non-formal education, and a cooperation was established with Student Councils.

The project had three major components:

1. reforming the student councils and providing non-formal education opportunities for teachers and students;
2. integration of boys in the school activities;
3. rethinking the functions and utility of the Soviet buildings.

As a part of the first bloc, The InfoTun team held several meetings with school teachers and administration to assess the needs of teachers and define the main activities that can improve the formal education in schools. After the initial discussions, it became obvious that there is a strong need for integration of non-formal education methods in formal education system to boost the productivity and instructiveness of the educational process. Another need that was identified was to increase the effectiveness of student councils. To explore potential reforms for student councils, a series of discussions were held with the Talin High School, where the project was presented to the school principal and teachers.

The team, in cooperation with distinguished education experts, launched reforming process of the Student Councils. The InfoTun staff identified motivated students, who expressed their interest in actively participating in the reform process of student councils. These students were not only involved in the specific student council reform project but also played a crucial role in rethinking the socialization process of male students. They conducted series of trainings to boost schoolchildren's knowledge on the role of student councils, to present them how to be active citizens, how to improve school environment, etc. The schoolchildren of the Student Council of

Talin practiced the gained knowledge and conducted similar trainings for schoolchildren of other communities.

The boys who used to spend time outside started to get involved in various activities initiated by the InfoTun, specifically in the data collection process on the Soviet-time structures and organization of a community-wide event targeting youth and education. These activities were quite helpful in terms of showing them the positive side of volunteering. The integration process was going in parallel to trainings addressing bullying and its manifestations. The trainings were conducted by psychologist Shushanik Nersisyan, who conducted a number of sessions on bullying and its prevention methods for students, boys, teachers, parents, kindergarten teachers, etc. The trainings were highly important to deliver bullying prevention methods not only to educators but also to schoolchildren and parents to break the cycle of violence. The participants represented various communities, such as Talin, Nerkin Bazmaberd, Ashnak, Hatsashen, Shgharshik and Nor Artik.

Within the 3rd component of the project, together with the student groups and boys, the team started identifying the old and abandoned buildings situated in Aragatsotn region. This element aimed to show features and the current state of the buildings, assess the possibility of reusing those buildings after potential investments. The produced videos reflected the previous role and functions of the buildings thus drawing public attention to the possible usage of the structures. The InfoTun tried to present the videos to potential investors and establish IT center within the building. This idea was further crystalized after the study tour to Lithuania and learning about the reuse of abandoned buildings by the investors. The InfoTun established three volunteer groups, consisting of schoolchildren and boys who have integration issues, to undertake the task of mapping the abandoned Soviet-era buildings in Nerkin Bazmaberd, Katnaghbyur, and Partizak settlements of Talin. These groups extensively researched the buildings by studying archival records found in libraries, gathering stories and information from school principals, administrative heads, and local residents of the villages. The collected data on these structures was utilized to produce short video materials, which were showcased during the regional event.

A large-scale educational-youth event was organized with active involvement of the student councils and the boys who have integration issues. The Municipality covered the refreshments for the participants of the event and provided a space and equipment needed for the event logistics. The event aimed at unifying teachers, students, school principals, community authorities, education experts, young people from Yeravan, Talin and other geographic locations to speak about the importance of community development, establish ties with young people from different communities, show alternative usage and potential of the abandoned buildings and, finally, promote the Aragatsotn InfoTun brand across the region. The event had plenary sessions with education experts, NGO representatives, leaders, etc., as well as encompassed networking parts, and presentation and discussion on alternative possible ways to reuse the abandoned buildings. Huge attention was paid to formal and non-formal education methods and the

importance of integration of non-formal education methods in the formal education. This was the first large-scale event in Aragatsotn region which brought together more than 100 people from all the communities of the region.

To support the formed groups of volunteers to implement small initiatives, Aragatsotn InfoTun organized a final closing event aimed at brainstorming ideas for community development and/or student councils' reforms. A Selection Committee was formed comprising representatives of various community institutions. The groups of volunteers presented their project ideas on activating the community life. The Selection Committee selected the idea of establishment of youth community center which was implemented jointly by the competing teams. The InfoTun provided small support to the team to buy necessary materials. The center is established in one of the rooms of the Culture house building of Talin.

Vayk InfoTun: Work and Motherland NGO
Project duration: August 1, 2021-December 10, 2022
Budget: AMD 10,000,000

One of the major components of Vayk InfoTun's project was addressing the issue of plagiarism and lack of academic writing skills among students of Vayots dzor region. To implement the project, the Vayk InfoTun signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the Armenian State University of Economics (ASUE) Yeghegnadzor branch. The InfoTun invited distinguished experts to conduct set of trainings on data collection and analysis, media literacy, research methodologies in the context of academic writing, as well as workshops on academic writing, how to avoid plagiarism, and local advocacy. There are a number of service providers who write academic reports and theses for a fee without acknowledging that it is an act of plagiarism.

During the project implementation, the Government decided to close the Yeghegnadzor branch of ASUE, leading to student protests. Vayk InfoTun coordinator and volunteers, along other activists, demanded a public discussion with ASUE and Vayots dzor region administrative officials to express their disagreement. The InfoTun activists gave interviews, participated in public discussions at the National Assembly, and conducted petitions to the ASUE rector and the minister of Education, Science, Culture, and Sport. While unsuccessful, these actions were significant as a civic voice against decisions not discussed with the stakeholders.

Another direction of the InfoTun activities was the popularization of "Green and smart city" concept among the Vayk community members and development of and advocacy for the adaptation of "Green and smart city" strategy in the Vayk community.

The Vayk InfoTun representatives met with the Deputy Mayor of Vayk community to discuss the concept and establish cooperation between the InfoTun and the Municipality for the development and adoption of the strategy. Some community developments, such as local

elections and community consolidation processes, resulted in delays of the working process of the group. To get deeper knowledge on urban planning principles, the InfoTun contacted urban planner and architect Sarhat Petrosyan, who expressed willingness to support the working group comprising Municipality staff, community council members, local citizens and NGO representatives to develop and adopt the "Green and smart city" strategy. The expert provided consultancy on how to shape the concept of the "green city" in a participatory way. The working group together with the expert distinguished 8 major sectors that could be crucial to consider while developing the concept, including energy, green areas, water management, transportation, garbage collection and sanitation, urban planning solutions, disaster resilience, smart city and active citizens. The concept includes ideas on possible improvement of the mentioned areas brainstormed by the citizens and decision makers. The finalized concept was presented to the wider public during the "Active citizen of Vayk city" annual award ceremony aiming to encourage the most active citizens and partners of InfoTun and presenting the main ideas of the "Green city." The local authorities promised to discuss and adopt several points in the strategic development document of the Vayk city to be implemented in the upcoming years.

Within the third component, the Vayk InfoTun revealed some important facts about the Soviet times of the Vayk city with the help of expert Lusine Kharatyan, who developed a questionnaire based on which oral stories were collected by the volunteers of InfoTun. The volunteers together with the expert decided to focus on the history of factories and monuments located in Vayk. The active group identified contacts of relevant elderly to interview them and record their memories, collect interesting stories on factories of the Soviet times. They recorded the stories and prepared the transcripts of the stories, which will later be used by Vayk InfoTun to develop materials for InfoTun's future projects.

Apart from the oral stories, Vayk InfoTun organized an exhibition on the Soviet past of the Vayk city in the Geological Museum of Yeghegnadzor. Through an online announcement, the InfoTun collected materials relating to the Soviet past of the Vayk city. The InfoTun team contacted the former owners and workers of the factories, former community heads, and prominent residents to collect information, photos, evidences, and items symbolizing the 7 factories, monuments, cultural and sport life, and other important events occurred during the Soviet times. They managed to also find a couple of examples of "Jermuk" newspaper which covered the daily life of the Vayots dzor cities during the Soviet era. The exhibition ran for a month and attracted around 200 visitors. The Syunik TV and Aliq media covered the opening ceremony. The InfoTun stored the materials and exhibits, which will enable them to organize a similar exhibition in the future. The Vayk Municipality supported the initiative and promised to offer a permanent venue in the Vayk city for displaying the exhibits.

Ijevan InfoTun NGO
Project duration: August 1, 2021-December 10, 2022
Budget: AMD 10,000,000

The Ijevan InfoTun held information sessions with different groups of volunteers, who got engaged in the four thematic directions of the project.

One of the main components of the Ijevan InfoTun project was the improvement of the quality of academic writing, development of analytical skills and introducing effective anti-plagiarism systems via the development and adoption of a module on academic integrity for the st and 2nd grade students at the Yerevan State University Ijevan Branch. The Ijevan InfoTun arranged a meeting with YSU Ijevan branch representatives to introduce them to a major project component: prevention of plagiarism. The university welcomed this unique initiative and promised to support the InfoTun. Overall, the InfoTun staff (after the ToT for InfoTuns conducted by expert Harutyun Vermishyan) conducted four training sessions on anti-plagiarism and academic integrity for about 75 students and volunteers.

To draw public attention to the Sculpture Park and rethink its role as a public place for Ijevan citizens, the Ijevan InfoTun revitalized the memories and the functional role of the Sculpture Park of Ijevan via collection of oral stories, analysis of these stories and the archived materials. The stories were collected from elderly about the sculptures, the role the garden had for citizens during the Soviet times. An interesting finding was that in the Soviet times an annual symposium was held, when in the summers, sculptors gathered from all over the Soviet Union and worked in the Park, in the open air, creating their stone scultures which were then given as a gift to the community. There are few people who remember about these events. The studied archives and most important facts about the garden were placed on the digital platform, which was developed in collaboration with the Cultural and Social Narratives Lab founder Tigran Amiryan (an Open door grantee), architect Arsen Abrahamyan from Storaket architectural company, web-designer Nvard Erkanyan and illustrator Harutyun Tumaghyan. The developed digital platform visualizes the map of the city, the Park and the river, and contains oral stories and visual attributes. This was an alternative approach to utilizing the public spaces set up during the Soviet times; it was important to bring citizens' attention to the main environment that shape their current community.

The third component of the project aimed to put the spotlight on bullying and violence prevention in the Ijevan community since it remains a taboo topic due to the conservative views of citizens. The project aimed to establish a Consultative body adjacent to the LG to prevent crimes or at least draw decision makers' attention to the issue. The project engaged various community stakeholders and crucial actors, such as schools, the police, social workers, municipality, the media, etc. A prominent expert Gayane Hovakimyan supported the InfoTun to conduct facilitated discussion on views and ideas of violence prevention with aforementioned institutions. It was the first discussion in Ijevan which brought together all the relevant stakeholders and decision-makers and the flow of the discussion was quite active and engaging. All participants emphasized the importance of establishing effective communication among stakeholders and collective efforts to combat bullying and violence within the community.

As part of the project's [cost-extension](), Ijevan InfoTun, in collaboration with the expert Gayane Hovakimyan, created a questionnaire for conducting focus group discussions. The objective of the questionnaire was to explore public perceptions of violence and bullying, as no prior studies on this topic had been conducted in Ijevan.

The focus group discussions were led by the expert and InfoTun staff, aiming to study public perceptions in order to shift the culture of violence and public attitudes toward violence prevention. Four focus groups were conducted, including [youth](), school representatives, [women](), and [decision-makers](), focusing on violence cases. The discussions led to data analysis and a comprehensive [report]() to draw the attention of decision-makers to the issue. Participants expressed their individual perspectives, with the majority emphasizing the importance of open dialogue and raising awareness about bullying and violence to prevent future cases.

As part of the project's fourth component, the InfoTun organized a training about conflict of interest for community servants and municipality staff in the recently consolidated Ijevan community. The InfoTun collaborated with the [Corruption Prevention Commission]() (CPC) by engaging an expert from CPC, which closely aligned the event with the government's current public policy and integrity agenda aimed at preventing corruption at the local level. The training revealed that public servants lacked recognition of various forms of corruption, highlighting the urgent need to raise awareness and work with them on this issue.

Armavir InfoTun: Armavir Development Center NGO
Project duration: August 1, 2021-December 10, 2022
Budget: AMD 10,000,000

The first direction of the project aimed at addressing expressions of violence, bullying, and discrimination in the school system through workshops for teachers and support in implementing small projects initiated by teachers. These activities laid the ground for the establishment of the Armavir [Teachers' Club](), which focused on four main issues: *critical thinking and media literacy, addressing bullying in schools, promoting academic integrity and preventing plagiarism, and promoting inclusive education for vulnerable groups*.

An open call among teachers was disseminated via the InfoTun's [website](). The InfoTun contacted 60 teachers to identify their major needs and expectations that could be addressed by retraining. The school principals were also informed about this initiative. To effectively launch this component, EPF arranged a meeting of the Armavir InfoTun with education expert Vahram Soghomonyan to discuss the idea and receive practical advice on possible steps.

To gather teachers' ideas on education-related topics and assess their needs, a town hall meeting was organized as a kick-off event. Subsequently, [trainings]() were [conducted]() for the [teachers]() based on the identified needs. These [trainings]() were facilitated by renowned education experts,

including Lusine Kharatyan, Serob Khachatryan, Vahram Soghomonyan. As a next step, the teachers' projects initiative was announced. Teachers worked in groups to discuss issues and brainstorm ideas to be addressed through small projects.

Out of 60 teachers, 25 were selected to implement their initiatives as part of small projects. These teachers represented 7 schools from the Dalarik, Armavir, Artimet, Nor Artagers, Geghakert, Mrgashat, and Vanand communities. The projects brought about several positive outcomes:

- The launch of alternative extracurricular activities for schoolchildren in the form of a puppet theater, involving disabled schoolchildren. The schoolchildren with disabilities created dolls for performances, with a sewing machine provided by Amcor Armenia. The initiative was covered by the Public TV and Arma TV.
- The establishment of a media literacy club for teachers, parents, and schoolchildren.
- The publication of a school newspaper to showcase school life and student achievements.
- Strengthening teachers' skills and competencies relevant to the ongoing education reform.
- Promotion of inclusive cultural activities for disabled children, including tours to art centers, museums, and cultural events.
- Engagement of 23 students in civic education activities to foster civic activism, enhance students' legal awareness, and encourage human-centered decision-making.
- Promotion of Yezidi people's traditions and national events among the Armenian population to foster a non-discriminatory attitude. Several events were organized with the participation of Yezidi schoolchildren.

The Armavir Teachers' Club provided a unique communication format for the involved teachers to discuss various challenges and opportunities in the field. The responses and feedback coming from the teachers show the significance of such non-formal initiatives. These initiatives provide valuable opportunities for educators to exchange experiences, engage in lifelong learning, and enhance their professional development. Two of the teachers used the project writing skills provided during the trainings to apply for funding opportunity and won two computers for their respective schools.

Within another project component, the InfoTun established a civic journalists club to cover local issues and promote civic journalism, trying to fulfill the gap of absence of local media in Armavir. After selecting 12 participants, the InfoTun organized an event that featured prominent journalists. During this session, the renowned journalists discussed the values of journalism and emphasized the ethical principles that professional journalists should adhere to. Among the guests were Tigran Paskevichyan (Aliq media, Open door grantee), Gemafin Gasparyan (Boon TV, Open door grantee), Ani Hovhannisyan (Hetq), Anzhela Stepanyan (Alt TV, Open door grantee). Besides this training, media mentors were recruited to support participants in

production of media articles. The three mentors represented established media outlets: Mkrtich Karapetyan (Civilnet), Anush Titanyan (Boon TV), Arman Galoyan (Aliq media). They targeted three community issues and conducted a number of interviews with [decision-makers](), [citizens](), etc. to have comprehensive understanding of the issues. As a result, three [media articles]() were produced by civic journalist groups, featuring community [library issues](), [unemployment and volunteerism]() in Armavir, advantages and disadvantages of newly [consolidated Armavir]() community. The mentor from Boon TV invited her group to [Boon TV]() to record an interview which was disseminated online. During the closing event of this project component, all the articles were presented to media specialists, who evaluated the articles and provided professional feedback.

As a part of the third project component, Armavir InfoTun conducted a training on conflict of interest for the staff members of Municipalities. Initially, it was planned to conduct the training only for Armavir and Metsamor communities. However, the Armavir regional administration and Baghramyan consolidated community expressed interest and willingness to take part in such important training. The Corruption Prevention Commission representative Mariam Galstyan conducted training on anti-corruption mechanisms, integrity standards and methods to prevent conflict of interest in LGs. Mariam Galstyan presented major points of the integrity policy that is adopted by the Government and mentioned that a template of integrity standards and ethical rules will be soon developed and disseminated among the LGs.

Gyumri InfoTun: KhoranArd NGO
Project duration: August 1, 2021-December 10, 2022
Budget: AMD 10,000,000

The project aimed to study the role of the local authorities in resolving inter-residential, family and neighbor conflicts and cases of violence in Sarapat, [Amasia](), [Ashotsk]() communities and reveal how the non-formal function of "dispute resolver" affects the traditional functions of LG. The function of "dispute resolvers" is not institutionalized and there is no detailed specification of its role. Consequently, some people with high reputation and specific titles (such as administrative representatives, mayors, social workers, etc.) undertook this role in remote villages.

The Gyumri InfoTun targeted Amasia, Ashotsk, Sarapat, Aregnadem, Toros, Byurakn, Bavra, Mets Sepasar, Ghazanchi villages, where the situation was studied through field work. Sociologist Gayane Hakobyan was involved to coordinate the research activities. The research methodology was developed, according to which one [focus-group]() discussion consisting of 8-10 male [participants]() was held in each settlement, and in-depth interviews with 2 females, and 3 interviews with community authorities (that is mayors, school principals, priests, etc.) were conducted. To engage the InfoTun volunteers in research activities, Gayane Hakobyan conducted a capacity building training for those who took part in interviewing process based on the

questionnaire. The collected materials were analyzed, and a report with major findings and recommendations was developed. Based on the report, 2 additional analytical reviews were developed, the first one by Aghasi Tadevosyan aiming to reveal the causes of the disputes from the social-cultural perspective, reflecting human behavior, patriarchal family life and traditional life in rural areas that cause disputes and conflicts. The second analytical review was developed by local governance expert Abraham Artashesyan aiming to analyze and bring out some new possible functions to be delegated to LG representatives to effectively address the disputes. The general report incorporates perceptions and dispute cases told by former and current community heads, administrative governors, and citizens. It was quite difficult to engage them in this kind of studies considering social norms and the taboo topics in traditional communities.

As a concluding event, the Gyumri InfoTun organized a presentation-discussion centered on the 3 reports and the importance of mediator institute in general. The analytical review developed by Aghasi Tadevosyan titled "The dispute solver institute in Armenian villages: anthropological observations," was disseminated among the participants. The authors of the reports presented the studies to the participants to revitalize public discourse on the issue. The event was attended by administrative representatives of Amasia and Ashotsk communities, Unified Social Service employees, LG representatives, sociologists, NGOs and psychologists. Aghasi Tadevosyan, who runs a broadcast on Boon TV, invited researchers Gayane Hakobyan and Abraham Artashesyan to talk about disputes in Shirak region on Boon TV. Aliq media produced an article based on the research.

As a part of the project's second component, the Gyumri InfoTun analyzed the priorities of Amasia consolidated community and compared the priorities with the five-year development actual plan of the community with the aim of improving it. To achieve this objective, the InfoTun team initially met with Jemma Harutyunyan, the mayor of Amasia consolidated community, to present the initiative. The InfoTun collaborated with an expert to design a questionnaire aimed at identifying the key priorities suggested by the residents of Amasia. Through the assistance of volunteers, the InfoTun conducted interviews with 187 residents from all settlements within the Amasia community. Additionally, focus group discussions with various groups including expert communities, NGOs, municipality staff, and community councils were held.

Based on the findings from the interviews and focus group discussions, a comprehensive report highlighting the main perceptions and sectoral priorities proposed by the residents of Amasia was compiled. The report was presented to the local authorities of Amasia, and they intend it to be considered in the community governance process. Utilizing the report and interview data, the InfoTun volunteers produced several articles published on asparez.am website. Asparez is also a Sida CS Support grantee. These articles covered topics such as the cooperation between local government and civil society organizations (CSOs), analysis of Amasia community budget,

agricultural issues within the community, and non-transparent decision-making by Amasia community councils.

Within another project component, Gyumri InfoTun collected information about the historical buildings of Gyumri to revitalize the former functions of the selected buildings and try to draw public attention to them. This component of the project aimed at preventing the likely dismantling of the buildings taking into consideration the contemporary urban standards, urbanization perspectives and the Yerevan case (dismantling of the old structures and districts, and construction of new ones without preserving the old and historic structures). The buildings were categorized based on the functionality such as factories, cultural houses, theater, library, cinema and clubs. The mapping of these buildings also illustrates the potential of the city from cultural and social dimensions.

The Gyumri InfoTun engaged experts Gayane Mirzoyan and Anahit Manasyan representing Urbanista to get professional feedback and guidance from experts on urban planning. Their focus was on 24 buildings constructed during the Soviet era. The InfoTun prepared official letters addressed to the Ministry of Education, Science, Culture, and Sport, Gyumri Municipality, and Kumayri museum, seeking information and data about these buildings. To ensure the active involvement of young people, the InfoTun recruited volunteers who would contribute to this aspect of the project. Volunteers underwent training sessions on the history of the buildings and received instruction in architectural photography to make high-quality photos. Under the coordination of experts and the InfoTun, volunteers gathered information and took photographs of the buildings. This data was used to develop a book that showcased the cultural and social dimensions of Gyumri, including the historical transitions of the city's name from Alexandrapol to Leninakan and eventually to Gyumri. The completed book, encompassing information on the selected 24 buildings, was presented to the representatives of Shirak regional administration, Gyumri Municipality, Kumayri museum, librarians, CSOs, and other stakeholders. Additionally, a document on the buildings was made available on the Shirak regional administration's website, providing public access to the information.

Vanadzor InfoTun: NGO Center NGO
Project duration: August 1, 2021-December 10, 2022
Budget: AMD 10,000,000

The first component of the project aimed at addressing bullying, discrimination and violence in educational institutions. The InfoTun addressed the issue via trainings and the development of visual materials (posters and comic strips) on these issues. Series of trainings on prevention of violence and bullying for the teachers and students of the six selected educational institutions were organized. Initially, participants enriched their understanding on the types of violence and bullying at schools through a lecture, which was later illustrated through the development of comic strips. In parallel, a workshop was organized dedicated to the process of creating comic

strips, which became the major tool for addressing the issue. The InfoTun hired an expert who consulted the participants on how to develop sketches and deliver messages through comic strips. During the training participants were given practical tasks to develop images and pilot their own comic strips.

As a part of the second component of the project, the InfoTun staff conducted a number of trainings on academic writing principles for students and teachers to raise awareness on plagiarism.

Within the third component of the project, the InfoTun announced a video-story production competition titled "The Soviet Past of Vanadzor." The competition resulted in the selection of four video-stories, ranging from 9 to 26 minutes in length, which were granted further funding. The video-stories feature the active theater life in Vanadzor, the cinema house and film presentations during the Soviet times, chemical and other factories of Kirovakan, and draw comparisons between the past and current states of cultural and social life. The four produced films were premiered at the inaugural film festival held in Vanadzor. The event attracted a substantial audience, with over 350 attendees representing regions of Lori, Shirak, Kotayk, Vayots Dzor, Syunik, Armavir, Gegharkunik, and Yerevan. As a recognition of their work, all four video-story producers were presented with certificates during the festival. The films were also showcased online through Boon TV's "HayDoc" broadcast. Additionally, the films were presented at the Soviet club café in Yerevan. The InfoTun took the initiative to negotiate with the Vanadzor Municipality, aiming to establish this event as an annual signature occasion of Vanadzor, with the municipality's support.

As part of the project's fourth component, the InfoTun organized an Integrity camp for a group of young activists. The camp aimed to empower them with knowledge about corruption, its different types, the potential manifestations of corruption within the public sector, and the possible ways to avoid it. A study tour was organized to various organizations dealing with anti-corruption actions. The young people visited the office of the Corruption Prevention Commission and got introduced to the roster of the Income Declaration System created for the public servants. Then the participants visited the office of Civilnet and met with fact-checking specialist Ani Grigoryan, who presented the role of media and press in combating corruption cases. The participants also met with the Armenian Association of Lawyers, Union of Informed Citizens and the Center for Freedom of Information.

As part of another component of the project, volunteers from the InfoTun organized tours in Vanadzor city with the aim of exploring forggotten structures and buildings. During these tours, volunteers discovered a lesser-known former music shop called Melody. The volunteers collected data and used it to create a multimedia article that delved into the story of the building.

As part of the "cost-extension," the InfoTun developed a [Volunteer Management Procedure](#) to establish clear guidelines and principles for recruiting and working with volunteers. This procedure aims to define the responsibilities and relationships between NGOs and the volunteers they engage. During the final event of InfoTun network, the document was presented to other InfoTun participants, allowing them the opportunity to adopt and implement it within their respective organizations.

Ararat InfoTun
Project duration: August 1, 2021-December 10, 2022
Budget: AMD 10,000,000

The first component of the project aimed to present and compare the role and engagement of Yezidi women in the Soviet and post-Soviet Armenia's labor markets through the collection and presentation of oral stories. The InfoTun visited the library in the Ararat city to explore the available literature and newspaper publications related to the labor market of the Soviet times. They also explored online sources, but encountered challenges in finding specific literature related to Yezidi women online. The InfoTun partner Haje Bakoyan, who is a school teacher and Yezidi, was interviewed. Based on this interview a script was developed and used for research and media articles. Haje Bakoyan engaged Yezidi pupils in research activities: they studied the archives related to the labor market of the Soviet Armenia. This helped them enlarge their understanding about the history of their communities. The InfoTun also engaged the expert [Eviya Hovhannisyan](#), who helped to develop the methodology for collecting oral stories. The [interviewed](#) Yezidi women were mainly involved in agricultural activities, in kolkhozes or collective farms of the Soviet times, and could not recall any discrimination cases against the Yazidi people. The Ararat InfoTun produced and [published](#) an [article](#), interviewed and filmed two [video-stories](#) on [Yezidi](#) women. The first one covers the issues of engagement of [Yezidi](#) women in the labor market during the Soviet times. The second interview was conducted with a Yezidi activist [Zemfira Kalashyan](#), who spoke about the main activities carried out by Yezidi women. This project component resulted in dissemination of anti-discrimination values, as well as provided insights about areas of engagement among Yezidi women during the Soviet times. To widely publicize the videos, Boon TV put the videos online and disseminated them among broader public. Friendly relations between the Armenian and Yezidi young people, in particular the Sinjar Yezidi National Union NGO, who took part in the collection process of oral stories, were established.

The Ararat InfoTun coordinator took part in the Annual Media Award contest, organized by EPF and supported by the Embassy of the Kingdom of the Netherlands to Armenia. The aim of the competition was to encourage balanced and sensitive coverage of religious tolerance, peaceful coexistence and diversity, focusing on the issues of religious and ethnic minorities in Armenia. Among the three best journalistic materials was Ararat Infotun's video (produced as part of CS Support project), which covers the issues of engagement of Yezidi women in labor market

during the Soviet times. The Media Award Ceremony was held on June 2, 2023, at the residence of the Ambassador of the Kingdom of the Netherlands to Armenia, where the author of the video received the award.

The second component of the project aimed at addressing bullying and other expressions of violence via visual materials. The Ararat InfoTun engaged Lucy Karamyan from the Non-Discrimination and Equality Coalition and Nazik Armenakyan from 4Plus NGO (both are recipients of "Open door" grants), who provided the participants with knowledge on such issues as discrimination and bulling, as well as technical knowledge on how to use various multimedia tools and photography skills for storytelling. After these lectures and seminars, participants created visual posters and disseminated them via Facebook to address discrimination and violence issues.

As part of the project's third component, the InfoTun conducted a series of trainings on academic writing and anti-plagiarism for students and teachers of the Ararat community. The InfoTun initially conducted a focus group discussion involving teachers and students to identify the main needs concerning academic writing standards. Through the discussions, the InfoTun gathered insights to develop the scope of the training, which included the main principles of anti-plagiarism standards, copywriting principles, academic writing, etc. It was very important to increase teachers' and students' understanding of plagiarism.

As a part of the project component related to the conflict of interest, the InfoTun established cooperation with the CPC office experts to increase the public servants' understanding of integrity standards with a special focus on prevention of conflict of interest cases. The expert Lilit Aleksanyan from CPC introduced the law which regulates the main principles of the integrity strategy to be adopted by the LGs.

Martuni InfoTun: Martuni Women Community Council NGO
Project duration: August 1, 2021-December 10, 2022
Budget: AMD 10,000,000

The project aimed to study and introduce the cultural life of Martuni region during the Soviet times and analyze its influence on the present-day life. The study focused on the restrictions in cultural life and their influence on social behavior. The project also studied the current cultural life of the villages of Martuni region, available resources and opportunities for rethinking the cultural life and functional features of the Community Culture Houses, develop proposals and recommendations to be addressed by the local authorities and civil society actors.

The Martuni InfoTun targeted six communities, including Vardenik, Zolakar, Martuni, Madina, Tsovasar, Nerkin Getashen, where field research was conducted. The InfoTun contacted the directors of Culture houses in those communities, presented the project and planned activities to

engage them in the project. The Martuni InfoTun with its volunteers commenced the study process of cultural life during the Soviet era in the mentioned communities, influence of culture on the society at large, as well as of the repressions and limitations during the Soviet times. Archives, newspapers, photos and other materials were studied. These materials were analyzed by the distinguished experts, and a general report was produced incorporating cultural characteristics and features of each community and the prominent actors among the community residents. Based on the analytical report and the findings of research, a public discussion was organized involving experts, community representatives, artists, Culture house representatives, etc. to bring their attention to the main findings of the research. The report stresses the essence of culture for community cohesiveness, the role of cultural institutions in this, the absence of state policy or strategy on culture in general, and so on.

The research served as a basis for other interrelated activities: trainings were organized for the staff of Martuni Culture houses to equip them with skills and knowledge on project writing, management, and activities to stimulate cultural life in the communities. The Martuni InfoTun invited a number of prominent actors to talk about culture, such as Boon TV head Gemafin Gasparyan, The Puppet Theatre director Ruben Babayan, The Mkhitar Sebastatsi School principal Ashot Bleyan, The Cafesjian Art Center representative Yelizaveta Shirinyan and others aiming to boost creative thinking among the culture representatives. After the trainings, a competition was announced for the staff of Culture houses to generate culture development ideas to be implemented in the targeted communities. As a result of the competition, the InfoTun provided funding to three ideas to be implemented by the three communities. One of the projects resulted in the establishment of painting classes in the Culture House building of Nerkin Getashen. The classes were free of charge while the project continued, after which the Municipality continued covering the expenses from the community budget. Moreover, the Municipality opened a position for the painting classes with funding from the community budget. In Zolakar community, dancing classes were established for two age groups. The classes continued to function after the project. The Culture House of Tsovasar community used the research data to organize a festival on traditional cultural events. This format will be adopted and similar festivals will be organized by the Culture House each year.

Based on the research, a multimedia article was produced in collaboration with Urbanista experts Anahit Manasyan and Gayane Mirzoyan, which illustrates the main findings of the research, gives comprehensive data about the research and is an important material about the cultural heritage of the six communities.

The research findings were incorporated into the strategic paper/development plan of the Martuni community. Some of the key points include the formation of future initiatives to engage and empower the youth, support for youth NGOs, facilitating non-formal educational activities for young individuals, renovating the existing Culture Houses, establishing new functional cultural institutions such as sports clubs, swimming pools, boxing clubs, arts and crafts centers,

organizing festivals, and enhancing the overall management effectiveness of human resources within these cultural institutions.

Syunik InfoTun: Goris Press Club NGO
Project duration: August 1, 2021-December 10, 2022
Budget: AMD 10,000,000

The project aims to study the history of the Soviet-era repressions in the Syunik region and introduce the results to the wider public to boost the discourse on democracy and human rights. The InfoTun team held focus group discussions and interviews and conducted desk research to collect the necessary materials for the topic. The InfoTun also engaged the representatives of the expert community to provide methodological support for data collection and analysis. One of the selected methods for the study is the collection of oral narratives from the families who were victims of repressions.

The data on these families was assembled after the Syunik InfoTun disseminated an open call. In parallel to this process, Syunik InfoTun recruited Gayane Shagoyan, an anthropologist-methodologist, who provided consultation on conducting research and assembling oral stories. Gayane Shagoyan built the interviewers' capacities, provided practical knowledge on how to collect oral stories, form a questionnaire, study archives, analyze collected information, etc. Gayane Shagoyan assisted the team in developing a methodological guide/tool, which gives readers knowledge on how to collect oral stories. After the training, participants selected victims of Soviet repressions or their relatives to be interviewed. More than 100 interviews were conducted in Goris, Kapan, Sisian, Tegh and Tatev communities. After the research activities, discussions were held in Kapan and Goris with the beneficiaries. The Syunik InfoTun team and volunteers developed a book based on the stories and memories told by the people who had undergone repressions or their relatives, reflecting their stories, family photos and memories of exile. The volunteers collected documents from the Stalin regime era. Two video reportages were produced and disseminated on-line based on two stories. The InfoTun also studied the archive of "Zangezur" newspaper from the period of 1937-1955. The study shows the numerous cases of violation of human rights and freedom of expression typical to that era.

The book was presented during the closing event which brought together historians, anthropologists, interviewed people and others aiming to revitalize public discourse on the Soviet era in general, with a specific focus on Stalinist repressions and their effects on today's generations.

The second sub-project aimed to increase the knowledge and understanding of the Tegh Municipal servants on anti-corruption and conflict of interest. Through the prior monitoring activities, it was revealed that none of the communities in the Syunik region had policies in place to prevent CoI cases. The InfoTun specifically focused on the Tegh community, taking into

consideration the local government elections and the formation of a new LG body. In collaboration with Hamazasp Danielyan, an expert, the InfoTun conducted a study of the existing regulations and documents of the community council, examining them from the perspective of CoI. The findings demonstrated that the current policy does not adequately address or regulate the CoI cases. The CoI and integrity expert Hamazasp Danielyan conducted a CoI training for the Tegh community servants. After this, the LG made a decision to revise the policies and procedures of the community and include a section on CoI to prevent the possible CoI cases.

The team formulated and submitted two proposals aimed at addressing the identified shortcomings. The first proposal recommended the adoption of a distinct policy focused on integrity standards for the community council members. The recommendation suggested also to use the draft version of the rules of conduct for public servants, which is available online on e-draft platform. The second proposal suggested the modification of the current regulation relating to LG, specifically focusing on the section attempting to prevent CoI. As a result, the LG made the decision to enhance the existing document by incorporating additional provisions and amendments, thereby expanding the section dedicated to prevention of likely CoI cases.

Kotayk InfoTun: Child and Family Development NGO
Project duration: August 1, 2021-December 10, 2022
Budget: AMD 10,000,000

The project implemented by Kotayk InfoTun aimed to approach anti-corruption in the government procurement system through monitoring the state services in public healthcare system and studying corruption cases in medical institutions in the Kotayk region. The quality of the state services in the public healthcare system is not studied adequately. Usually, the main users of these services are poor people. According to many users, paid services provided by the hospitals or ambulatory facilities are higher quality than the free (government procured) ones. This implies probable corruption cases, which remain undiscovered and unvoiced. Trying to bring attention to this issue, the Kotayk InfoTun implemented a project aiming to monitor the social support services in healthcare system through the monitoring of services provided by hospitals and through interviews.

The InfoTun tried to understand the process of receiving government assistance in hospitals and ambulatory facilities with the support of an invited healthcare expert. The InfoTun team studied the major regulations and laws, as well as submitted letters to the Kotayk Regional Administration and the Ministry of Healthcare. After a while, they received answers from both institutions which were lacking clarity.

After that, with the assistance of the healthcare expert Hayk Mkrtchyan, the InfoTun team developed and disseminated an online questionnaire which was filled in by 11 patients, who used the government procurement services. Apart from the online survey, offline meetings with 30

beneficiaries were held, which have revealed various serious issues related to the process of receiving state assistance in healthcare.Given the insufficient information available to the public, the InfoTun created a hot line, promoted via online and offline communication among the beneficiaries to properly respond to potential patients' questions. The InfoTun created information materials on the diseases included in the government-procured system, a list of documents required for receiving state support, and other relevant communications. Based on the results of monitoring activities, a report was developed on the services provided by the state in the healthcare system. A number of deficiencies were revealed during the monitoring process, such as high level of bureaucracy, the unaffordability of services for regional citizens who cannot afford to pay for the transportation, since all the free services are provided in Yerevan, discriminative approach of doctors towards the beneficiaries of the state-procured healthcare services, and the absence of ethical norms towards disabled beneficiaries.

Several recommendations were developed, such as suggestions that electronic systems and services should be improved, user-friendliness of the electronic systems should increase, a doctors' assessment mechanism should be applied, and the usage of the ArMed eHealth application should be used for such a purpose. Other recommendations included decentralization of services provided to the regional residents, periodic relevant seminars for doctors, specific guides for parents and potential beneficiaries of state-procured services. Based on the findings, a public discussion/presentation was organized with the engagement of decision-makers and other stakeholders, including representatives of several departments of Kotayk Regional Administration, Hrazdan Municipality and parents of disabled children. The Kotayk InfoTun sent invitations to the Ministry of Healthcare too, however they rejected the invitation and did not attend the meeting.

Within another component of the project, the Kotayk InfoTun conducted a set of trainings on anti-plagiarism and standards of academic writing for schoolchildren. Six trainings were conducted for groups of students of the Kotayk regional state college.

As a part of the project's urban planning component, the Kotayk InfoTun planned to gather ideas from the public that can be used by the local authorities to rethink the concept of one of the public parks of Hrazdan. The InfoTun submitted a written inquiry to the Hrazdan Municipality for the provision of the list of the public parks and decided to target the Aghbyurak park. With the involvement of Urbanista experts, the InfoTun developed online and offline questionnaires to collect ideas directly from citizens on the potential functionality of the park, physical conditions necessary to spend time there, citizens' memories, etc. More than 260 people responded to the survey. The opinions were collected and analyzed by the urban experts and served as a basis for a public discussion. The experts involved also an architect Hayk Zalibekyan who worked on the map of the Aghbyurak park. After finalization of the documents, a public discussion was organized involving representatives from the departments of Hrazdan Municipality, youth, elderly citizens, NGO representatives and students. The participants worked in groups to discuss

possible ideas for improvement of the park. They used the map of the park and marked new infrastructures and facilities to be built there. The experts later analyzed the ideas presented by the groups and developed a new concept of the park. The concept was welcomed by the Municipality which promised to implement the project during the upcoming years. The Urbanista experts developed a [longread article](#) telling about the Aghbyurak park.