CIVIL SOCIETY BRIEF

ARMENIA

Civil Society: An Overview

In Armenia, civil society dates back to the early 20th century when intellectual elites in the country implemented civil and volunteer activities to respond to the needs of communities. During the first independent Republic of Armenia in 1918–1920, intellectual elites Hovhannes Tumanyan¹ and Zabel Yesayan led humanitarian, cultural, and educational organizations.²

During the period of the former Soviet Union, Armenian civil society activity was weak, except for underground nonformal activity. However, diaspora-based organizations in Europe, the Middle East, and the United States—such as the Armenian General Benevolent Union, American Assembly of Armenia, and others—implemented various cultural, educational, and other programs and activities throughout that period. Since 1991, such efforts have gradually contributed to civil society development in Armenia. Diaspora-based organizations also protected the Armenian national identity outside the country by establishing schools and community clubs supporting the Armenian Apostolic Church. The fall of the Iron Curtain resulted in Armenian society's greater interactions with the outer world, which gave the diaspora-based organizations an opportunity to be better involved in Armenia. The diaspora's support

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Country Context

Armenia is a landlocked country in the South Caucasus region. It borders Azerbaijan on its east and south (where it borders the Azerbaijani enclave, Nakhichevan), Iran to the south, Turkey to the west, and Georgia to the north. The overall land area of the country is 29,742 square kilometers and the population is about 3 million, of which approximately 64% is urban and 36% is rural,^a and 52.7% female and 47.3% male.^b The official language is Armenian and the capital city is Yerevan, which has approximately 1 million inhabitants, or a third of the country's population (footnote a).

Armenia declared its sovereignty from the former Soviet Union on 23 August 1991 and proclaimed its independence through the referendum on 21 September 1991. In December 2015, Armenia held a referendum, which approved the country's transition from a semi-presidential regime to a parliamentary republic that was concluded in March 2018. According

^a The population of Armenia as of 1 January 2019, based on the 2011 census estimates. Government of Armenia, Statistical Committee of the Republic of Armenia. 2019. *Statistical Yearbook of Armenia*. https://www.armstat.am/file/article/nasel_01.01.2019.pdf.

^b Government of Armenia, Statistical Committee of the Republic of Armenia. 2019. *Women and Men in Armenia*. <https://armstat.am/en/?nid=82&id=2215>.

▲ **Country identity.** Armenia was the first country in the world to adopt Christianity as a state religion in around 301 A.D., a fact of which Armenians are justifiably proud (photo from Asian Development Bank).

to the new constitution, the President is the head of the country with representative functions, while the Prime Minister is the head of the government and the executive branch of power.

Armenia has a unicameral parliament that is elected every 5 years. After the constitution's amendment and the electoral system reform in 2016, parliamentary elections are the only national elections held in Armenia. Parliament is elected through semi-proportional lists with a 5% threshold for parties and 7% for coalitions. Parliament has a minimum of 101 seats; however, that number may increase, depending on the disbursement of the quota for the national minorities and the additional mandates necessary for ensuring that the opposition has at least one-third of the mandates.

After the collapse of the former Soviet Union, Armenia entered a transition from a centrally planned to a free market economy, which happened alongside

a move from the authoritarian Soviet political system to democracy. Three main events made life challenging in Armenia during this period. First, the Spitak earthquake on 9 December 1988 killed about 25,000 people and resulted in the massive devastation of the northern regions of the country. Second, the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, which started before the collapse of the former Soviet Union. Third, the act of terrorism in Parliament on 27 October 1999 involved the assassination of Prime Minister Vazgen Sargsyan, Speaker of Parliament Karen Demirchyan, and other officials, which shocked the political system of Armenia.

In spring 2018, then President Serj Sargsyan's attempt to remain in power as Prime Minister after serving two consecutive 5-year terms as President sparked protests led by then-opposition politician Nikol Pashinyan. The protests, often referred to as the Velvet Revolution, resulted in Sargsyan's resignation. Subsequently, Parliament was dismissed, and snap parliamentary elections took place in December 2018. The political union My Step Alliance, led by the acting Prime Minister Pashinyan, won the absolute majority of seats and formed the new cabinet.

Following the economic downturn of 14.1% in 2009, Armenia experienced a low-growth phase in 2010–2016 with average growth of 3.5%. The significant increase of growth to 7.5% in 2017 and 5.2% in 2018 led to the reclassification of Armenia as an upper middle-income country in 2018.^c The growth accelerated further to 7.6% in 2019, but then reversed because of the COVID-19 pandemic and the military conflict with Azerbaijan.

Armenia joined the Eurasian Economic Union of the Russian Federation, Belarus, Kazakhstan, and the Kyrgyz Republic in January 2015. In November 2017, Armenia also signed the Comprehensive and Enhanced Partnership Agreement (CEPA) with the European Union (EU). Armenia has a unified custom regime with the Eurasian Economic Union member states and has Generalised Scheme of Preferences status with the EU that grants duty reductions on exports to the EU on 6,200 tariff lines. Due to these factors, Armenia's two largest external trade partners are the Russian Federation and EU. Armenia's major export goods include mining products (aluminum, copper), food products, and beverages.

^c Government of Armenia, Ministry of Economy. EU Preferential Trade scheme GSP+. <https://www.mineconomy.am/en/page/790>.

Source: Asian Development Bank.

▲ **Diaspora support.** Citizens of Armenia abroad provided support that shaped Armenian civil society in the late 20th century. This was instrumental in providing knowledge and expertise after the country's independence in 1990 (photo by ADB).

to Armenia, particularly after the Spitak earthquake and the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, initially focused on humanitarian assistance to vulnerable groups and infrastructure rehabilitation. Gradually, from 2005, however, support of diaspora-based intellectuals and activists has shifted to human rights and electoral processes. Over the years, the support of diaspora-based organizations and intellectuals evolved to include activities supporting sustainable development in education, health, agriculture, science and technology; community development; human rights, democracy; and environment, among others.³

The diaspora's support shaped Armenian civil society's structure and landscape in the late 20th century. Organizations in the regions of the country affected by the earthquake mainly provided humanitarian assistance (particularly for disabled people), child rights protection, women's empowerment, and community development. Diaspora organizations such as the Armenian General Benevolent Union, the Armenian Assembly of America, and the Fund for Armenian Relief also strengthened ties between Armenia and the diaspora.

After 1994, human rights and peacebuilding organizations began operating in the country, focusing on refugees and internally displaced persons issues and dialogue across the conflict divide. From the late 1990s to the early 2000s, with the support of the international community, Armenian civil society professionalized. Various international actors such as the Council of Europe, EU, Organization for the Security

and Cooperation in Europe, United Nations, and United States Agency for International Development (USAID) supported this transformation. Civil society organizations (CSOs) now focus on ecology, women's rights, fighting against corruption, and media development. Civil society has gradually gained expertise in various fields; developed organizational structures, standards, and practices; and formed institutional memory.

At the end of the 2000s, several international organizations were localized, such as the Eurasia Partnership Foundation, Open Society Foundation, and OxYGen (Oxfam's legacy institution), which enriched the local civil society landscape. The registration of these organizations as local entities, as well as the strengthening of the local chapters of well-known international networks such as Internews and Transparency International, had spread the Western management culture into Armenian civil society. This coincided with the rising formation of local coalitions and consortia to implement projects on local governance and social sector reform, fight corruption, and develop civil society and media. The EU and USAID principally supported these coalition efforts, which in turn boosted the local organizations' efforts in policy development, advocacy, civic education, and the protection of human rights.

Since 2010, civil society development in Armenia has further intensified. The international community

▲ **Civil society as a force for democratic consolidation.** Civil society plays an important role in the political life of Armenia (photo from Photolur).

▲ **Familiarity with and support of CSOs from the general public.** The image of CSOs in Armenia has improved. More than half of the population now favor their activities (photo from Eurasia Partnership Foundation).

that provided the Armenian authorities with financial support to implement sector reforms has also been funding and monitoring activities of CSOs. In 2014, for example, USAID awarded several large-scale projects to a number of civil society consortia to monitor and support implementation of anticorruption, local governance, and social sector reforms.⁴ Furthermore, since the launch of its Eastern Partnership initiative, the EU's overall financial support to Armenia and to civil society in particular has increased considerably.⁵

In 2012–2018, Transparency International's Corruption Perception Index scored Armenia between 33 and 35 points (0 being highly corrupt, 100 being very clean). However, in 2018, Armenia's score increased drastically to 42, illustrating a significant improvement.⁶ Media freedom has demonstrated improvement in the annual Media Freedom Index, developed annually by the Reporters Without Borders, as Armenia jumped from 80th to 61st in the global ranking between 2018 and 2019.⁷

Civil society is of paramount importance for Armenia's democratic consolidation and development. For a small landlocked country with limited natural resources like Armenia, the effective involvement of human capital and the productive utilization of human resources in the planning, implementation, and evaluation of development actions is essential. Thus, the institutional involvement

of Armenian civil society, both formal (CSOs, think tanks, foundations, labor unions, and employer associations) and informal (movements, nonformal coalitions, and initiatives), is crucial to safeguard and advance democratic process.

According to the State Registry of Armenia, as of 1 January 2019, the number of officially registered civil society entities is as follows: 4,222 CSOs; 1,120 foundations; 645 professional unions; and 244 legal entity unions.⁸ However, a large majority of these CSOs are either not implementing a large variety of activities or nonfunctional. The Delegation of the European Union to Armenia estimates that only 15%–20% of the registered organizations are active.⁹

Because many CSOs have multiple areas of expertise and their operations do not focus on one sector, providing an exhaustive database of CSOs with their relevant sector expertise is challenging. However, according to a recently published study, education, community development, humanitarian assistance, social services, and youth issues are the top sectors for Armenian CSOs. The same study indicates that the national and international vs. local and regional levels are almost equal in terms of CSO representation.¹⁰ The distribution provided by the EU Delegation to Armenia slightly differs, claiming that

▲ **CSOs and civic education.** The civil society sector plays an important role in contributing to critical thinking, civic education, and human rights education (photo from Eurasia Partnership Foundation).

the majority of Armenian CSOs focus on education, community development, children and youth, and human rights; it mentions awareness raising, capacity building, consultancy, and service provision as the major types of their activities. The report also states that there is a strong disparity between the Yerevan-based and regional CSOs, mentioning a lack of strategic vision as a major issue among the majority of regional organizations (endnote 9).

CSO organizational capacity in Armenia is gradually improving. Since the early 2010s, several large-scale European Union and USAID-funded civil society development programs have focused on CSO organizational capacity development, as well as communication and advocacy skills and financial viability.¹¹

Since 2018, the image of CSOs in Armenia has improved and citizens have become more familiar with their activities. This is first, because many members of the new political team came from civil society, and second, civil society actors contributed critical thinking, civic education, and human rights education—with a special focus on youth—to Armenian society.¹² International community support also contributed through a large variety of development programs. According to a 2019 International Republican Institute public opinion survey, 52% of respondents favor the activities of CSOs while only 32% do not support them. In terms of overall levels of public trust, this places CSOs in eighth place after the army, the President's and Prime Minister's offices, the Armenian Apostolic Church, the Human Rights Defenders Office, the Cabinet of Ministers, and national and local authorities. Interestingly, CSOs have a higher ranking than the Central Electoral Commission of Armenia, political parties, and the courts.¹³

Government–Civil Society Relations

The role of civil society in contributing to reforms, human rights protection, civic education, the fight against corruption, as well as in voicing various problems existing in the country has been growing since 2000 (endnote 12). One of the most important functions of civil society during the period before the Velvet Revolution was the generation of knowledge alternatives to mainstream sources of information. Election observations, monitoring programs implemented with international funding, and providing critical analysis of government reforms provided civil society first-hand information. This was also essential during the days of Armenia's peaceful change of power in spring 2018.

Previously, civil society had two major tools for achieving success in its communication with the government. The first was the large civic consolidation in the form of movements and protests, which took place several times in response to the government's actions. Issues such as ecology, historical monuments, urban planning, privatization of public spaces, and actions resulting in increase of the economic vulnerability of the population (price hikes on energy, public transportation, pension system reform) were all triggers.¹⁴ These movements were reactive, relatively short term, and situational. However, they were characterized by increased civil society activism and engagement of different segments of the population. The second tool was the connection of civil society advocacy efforts to the government's international commitments. The EU-initiated Eastern Partnership created a good avenue for CSOs to exercise their advocacy efforts for achieving more progress in the formulation and implementation of reforms supported by the EU. In this process, civil society often attempted to communicate its advocacy concerns and suggestions through international organizations to avoid direct criticism from the government, pro-government organizations, and state-owned media.

▲ **Addressing pressing issues.** The role of civil society in voicing various problems existing in the country has been growing over the past decade (photo from National Assembly of Armenia).

▲ **The focus of CSO work.** Over the past decade, CSOs have been contributing to reforms, human rights protection, and the fight against corruption in Armenia (photo from Eurasia Partnership Foundation).

The authorities tried several times to initiate government–civil society cooperation. After the events of 1 March 2008 which resulted in the death of 10 people, the Public Council was formed. Its objective was largely to compensate for the lack of internal legitimacy caused by the problematic elections and the events of 1 March, and to fill the gap between the authorities and civil society resulting from the elections and the deaths on that day.¹⁵ One of the 2008 opposition presidential candidates was appointed as head of the council and civil society representatives loyal to the authorities were made members.

Significant changes emerged to the country’s sociopolitical landscape. The overwhelming majority of the political establishment was affiliated with the former regime and public trust toward political parties was low. Also, there was a need for generation change among the political leadership who had been in power for decades. Thus, civil society was one of the major human resource providers to the new political establishment. Many prominent civil society leaders joined the government and the Parliament to contribute to the new reform agenda. Government–civil society cooperation changed as they jointly promoted democratic reforms.

Since 2018, the Eurasia Partnership Foundation coordinated and convened civil society, government, media, and experts to discuss the future of civil society

for post-revolutionary Armenia’s strategic development.¹⁶ This process demonstrated the willingness and readiness of both the new authorities and civil society to cooperate. However, there remains a need to develop and adopt a framework of strategic cooperation and to utilize the post-revolutionary momentum to establish a new culture of cooperation between civil society and the new government. A process aimed at formulating strategic communication between the authorities and civil society has recently started as part of ongoing implementation of the Comprehensive and Enhanced Partnership Agreement signed between Armenia and the EU. This is further related to the development of strategies for justice sector reform and the format of public hearings as initiated by the National Assembly.

There are mechanisms at public council and ministerial levels that allow CSOs to engage in policy implementation, mainly through thematic groups relevant to the mandate of a particular ministry. The effectiveness of these councils varies depending upon the ministries themselves. High-level platforms in the framework of the Open Governance Partnership and the Eastern Partnership allow representatives of civil society and government to interact with each other on relevant topics.

Legal and Regulatory Frameworks for Civil Society

Article 46 of the Constitution of Armenia ensures the freedom of association of the citizens of the Republic of Armenia and states that each citizen has the right to form or join groups voluntarily.¹⁷ After its adoption in 1996, the Republic of Armenia Law on Civil Society Organizations was amended several times; major amendments took place in 2001 and 2016.¹⁸ The Law on CSOs defines the status of a CSO, regulates their registration and closure, the formulation of the aims of such organizations, and describes the legal framework and principles of their operations. The law establishes two types of formal CSOs in Armenia. First is a membership-based public organization, regulated by the Law on CSOs mentioned above, and the second type of organization is a nonmembership foundation, regulated by the Law on Foundations.¹⁹

In 2016, one of the most important amendments to the Law on CSOs allowed CSOs to conduct entrepreneurial activities and use the profit of these activities to implement the organization’s statutory objectives. This amendment provided CSOs additional income sources to improve their sustainability.

▲ **CSOs after the Velvet Revolution.** Many prominent civil society leaders joined the new government and serve in Parliament, contributing to the reform agenda. From left: Margarita Hakobyan, Executive Director of OxYGen Foundation; Hamazasp Danielyan, Member of Parliament; Lena Nazaryan, Deputy Chairman of the National Assembly (photo from OxYGen Foundation).

To register a CSO in Armenia, an organization has to apply to the Ministry of Justice Agency for State Register of Legal Entities. The application package must include the charter of the organization, general meeting minutes, and the passport information of the founders of the organization. The written confirmation or rejection from the Ministry of Justice Agency for State Register of Legal Entities must be provided within a 21-day period. The registration fee is AMD10,000 (approximately \$20). International CSOs operating in Armenia are also subject to these regulations and registration requirements. The information about all registered CSOs is uploaded in the database of the Ministry of Justice's State Registry. The registration procedure is open to everybody. CSOs present mandatory annual financial reports to the State Revenue Committee of Armenia. In case of certain financial turnover, receipt of state funding, and other circumstances, other reports may also be required. CSOs may also be mandated to submit information on its activities on the request of an authorized state body.

Although CSOs are nonprofit organizations, the state tax policy for commercial entities still applies. According to the Law on Profit Tax of the Republic of Armenia, property, monetary funds, as well as services that were provided to the CSOs free of charge are exempt from

the profit tax. This is the only tax privilege offered to CSOs. However, in case of projects implemented with the financial support of international donors CSOs receive value-added tax exemption. The relevant commission grants a value-added tax exemption to charitable projects, which the State Revenue Committee decides on a case-by-case basis. CSOs advocate for a more favorable tax regime for CSOs; however, the tax regulations for CSOs remain unchanged.

Networks, Coalitions, Umbrella and Coordinating Bodies

Umbrella and coordinating bodies in Armenian civil society coalesce around the following situations: networks to contribute to an ongoing official process, sector or thematic networks or coalitions around shared interests, nonformal movements to unite organizations and individuals, and coalitions and consortia formed to implement large-scale projects. Examples of such networks, coalitions, and consortia are described below.

Umbrella or network organizations may form to contribute to an official process, usually affiliated with an international development program. For example, in order to contribute to the implementation of the EU Eastern Partnership Initiative, the Civil Society Forum was created along with its Armenian National Platform, which currently has more than 240 member organizations. Besides this, the Open Society Foundation-Armenia initiated the Partnership for Open Society network to support EU-Armenia cooperation with around 60 organizations. Many organizations are involved in both networks.

Other formal and nonformal sector or thematic networks or coalitions in Armenia focus on environmental protection, human rights, and electoral observation, among other areas. For instance, the environmental policy led by the former Government of Armenia drew together environmental activists and organizations into the Armenian Ecological Front. This nonformal movement addresses the protection of nature. Other initiatives and movements active in this same sphere include Save Teghut,²⁰ Mashtots Park Movement,²¹ Save Amulsar²² and others. In addition to environmental movements, other nonformal initiatives have resulted in the consolidation of society on various matters: the 100 Dram²³ movement protesting the increase of public transportation fees (2013), *Dem em*²⁴ (I am against) protests against pension reform (2014), the Electric Yerevan movement protesting against the increase of electricity fees (2015), and student

movements protesting against changes to the educational quota regulations on the law on military service (2017).²⁵ These civil society consolidation movements were short term, informal, and reactive.

In parallel with informal coalitions, formal civil society has developed the practice of forming more long-term coalitions and consortia working in a particular area or sector. One of the most active coalitions in human rights at the end of the 2010s is the Non-Discrimination and Equality Coalition that unites organizations and individuals aiming to contribute to the realization and protection of human rights and to promote respect for equality and human dignity in Armenia. The coalition was actively involved in the discussion of the draft Equality Law and contributed to the Universal Periodic Review²⁶ in Armenia.²⁷

Often coalitions and consortia are being formed within the framework of particular large- scale USAID- and EU-funded projects. In 2014, several consortia formed to implement USAID-funded transparency and accountability projects (led by Transparency International

Anti-corruption Center), civic engagement in local government (Community Finance Officers' Association), and media for informed citizen engagement (Media Initiatives Center). All these projects, apart from those involving other organizations in their consortia such as the Eurasia Partnership Foundation, Yerevan Press Club, Asparez Journalists Club, and others, also engage regional organizations through financing regional networks or sub-granting projects. Similar coalitions and consortia formed in the framework of several large EU-funded initiatives. For instance, the Armenian Lawyers' Association established the Anticorruption Coalition and the Constructive Dialogue Coalition with the EU's support.

Civil Society Directories

There are several sources of information about Armenian civil society organizations. The state registry contains basic information (name, date of establishment, tax registration number) about registered CSOs at www.e-register.am, and more information can be obtained on a paid basis. The Eurasia Partnership Foundation's web portal, www.hkdepo.am, invites NGOs to register in its directory. This platform also contains tools, training modules, and announcements about civil society in Armenia. The directory contains information about more than 240 local organizations. The NGO Center's NGO database, <http://www.ngoc.am/>, lists more than 100 NGOs and their contact details; organizations can also register in the database.

Some Distinguished Local Nongovernment Organizations in Armenia

The number of CSOs has grown in the past decade. The list below provides some of the active CSOs, presented by their activities and sector of interest.

▲ **Civil society and environmental protection.** Nonformal civil society movements have become some of the loudest voices for environmental advocacy in recent years (photo from Photolur).

PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION, GOOD GOVERNANCE, AND ANTI-CORRUPTION

- Transparency International Anti-Corruption Center (<https://transparency.am/en>) is one of the major anti-corruption watchdog organizations working on good governance, anti-corruption, policy advocacy, and monitoring.
- Community Finance Officers Association (<https://cfoa.am/>) has expertise in public administration and local governance; major areas of work include policy advice, monitoring of local government system reforms, and capacity building.
- Asparez Journalists Club (<https://www.asparez.am/en/>) is known for its expertise in freedom of information, electoral observation, protection of freedom of speech, and monitoring of public institutions.
- Urban Foundation for Sustainable Development (<https://urbanfoundation.am/our-history/>) mainly focuses on urban and community development and participatory governance.
- Union of Informed Citizens (<https://uic.am/en/>) works on fact-checking and participatory democracy.

HUMAN RIGHTS ORGANIZATIONS

- Helsinki Association for Human Rights Protection (<https://hkdepo.am/en/org/helsinki-association>) focuses mainly on observation of elections, court monitoring, protection of human rights defenders, and providing legal consultations for citizens on various aspects of human rights.
- Helsinki Citizens Assembly Vanadzor (<https://hcav.am/>) works on rights protection, legal consultations, court monitoring, awareness raising, policy, and legal advice.
- Journalists for Human Rights (<https://forrights.am/news/>) monitors closed institutions, army, and the media.
- The Europe in Law Association Armenia's (<https://ela.am/en>) major areas of work are human rights education, support to European integration, legal consultations, and legal and policy research.
- Article 3 For Equal Rights (<https://www.forequalrights.org>) focuses mainly on gender equality, freedom of speech, awareness raising, and civic education.
- Pink Armenia (<https://www.pinkarmenia.org/>) promotes lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transexual rights protection; and antidiscrimination through training, public events, counseling, and advocacy activities.

MEDIA ORGANIZATIONS

- Media Initiatives Center (<https://mediainitiatives.am/en/>) works on capacity building of media organizations, development of media products, and media literacy.
- Yerevan Press Club (<https://ypc.am/>) focuses on monitoring of media, policy and legal advocacy on media, and capacity building for media outlets.
- Ampop Media (<https://ampop.am/>) monitors media outlets, does research, fact checking and news verification, and provides visualization of data related to state statistics.
- Hetq Investigative Journalists' (<https://hetq.am/en>) major areas of work include providing support to investigative journalism and implementation of media investigations, news verification, and data collection and visualization mainly related to assets of the state officials and their affiliates.

ENVIRONMENTAL ORGANIZATIONS

- Ecolur (<https://ecolur.org>) raises public awareness on ecological issues in Armenia and conducts research in spheres of nature protection and monitoring of natural resource management.
- Khazer Ecological and Cultural NGO (<https://khazer.org>) focuses mainly on monitoring water resources management and assessing the effectiveness of state environmental protection subventions.
- Ecoright (<http://ecoright.am/>) specializes in mining sector monitoring, protection of ecological rights, research on international and local environmental policies, and legislation.
- Shen (<https://shen.am/ongoing-projects>) works mainly on environmental education, reforestation, and community landscaping.

SOCIAL SECTOR REFORM ORGANIZATIONS

- Mission Armenia (<https://www.facebook.com/MissionArmenia/>) supports vulnerable groups, promotes community development, and works with elderly people.
- Children of Armenia Foundation's (<https://www.coaf.org/en/>) major areas of work are inclusive education, children rights, and support to healthcare institutions.

MULTISECTOR ORGANIZATIONS

- Eurasia Partnership Foundation (<https://www.epfarmenia.am>) is working in civil society development, cross-border cooperation and peacebuilding, support to judiciary reform and media outlets, civic participation in local government, participatory democracy, and policy and legal advice.
- Open Society Foundation-Armenia's (<http://www.osf.am>) major areas of work are civil society development, policy and legal advice, grant giving, protection of human rights, and supporting good governance.
- OxYGen (<https://oxygen.org.am/en>) focuses on economic development, elections, equal rights, youth, and community development initiatives.

RESEARCH ORGANIZATIONS AND THINK TANKS

- Caucasus Resource Research Center's (<https://www.crrc.am/en>) data work includes data collection and analysis and periodic surveys such as the Caucasus Barometer, which is conducted in the entire South Caucasus region. They also carry out qualitative research and lead capacity building on research methods.
- Socioscope is focused on qualitative research in civil society processes and activism, sexuality and gender, discourses, and ideologies.
- Yerevan State University's Center for Civilization and Cultural Studies (<https://cccsysu.com/en>) conducts research on regional and global processes and organizes conferences and training.
- Yerevan State University, Center for Gender and Leadership Studies (<http://www.ysu.am/gender/en/1383045644>) focuses on research, awareness raising activities, and training on gender and equality.

REGIONAL GRASSROOTS ORGANIZATIONS

- Martuni Women's Community Council (<http://martunicenter.am/>) works on women's rights, social entrepreneurship, local government, and election monitoring.
- Goris Press Club (<https://hkdepo.am/en/org/gpc>) is one of the major grassroots organizations working in the south of the country that focuses on media development, local government, election monitoring, and community development.
- Center Vanadzor (<http://ngoc.am/en/>) supports local government, elections, civil society development, social entrepreneurship, and community development.
- Armavir Development Center (<http://www.armavirdc.org/>) is a major grassroots organization in the central part of the country. Its principal areas of work include local government, social sector reform, electoral observation, and civil society development.
- Community Center for Development Territorial Cooperation NGO (<https://ccd.am/en>) operates in the Tavush region and works in spheres of civil society development, community development, and social entrepreneurship.
- Youth Cooperation Center of Dilijan (<http://yccd.am>) has significant experience in spheres of youth engagement, community development, and social entrepreneurship.

WOMEN'S ORGANIZATIONS

- Women's Resource Center (<https://womenofarmenia.org>) supports women's rights, leads research, and provides legal consultations.
- Women's Rights Center (<http://www.wrcorg.am/en/home>) focuses on such issues as domestic violence, women's sexual and reproductive health, and women's rights.

PROFESSIONAL UNIONS AND ASSOCIATIONS

- The Union of Manufacturers and Businessmen of Armenia (<http://umba.am/eng/>) focuses on economic reforms and the promotion of international economic cooperation.
- The Small and Medium Entrepreneurs Cooperation Association's (<http://sme.am/>) major areas of work include protection of economic rights, promotion of small and medium-sized enterprises–state dialogue, and capacity building of member small and medium-sized enterprises.
- The Confederation of Trade Unions of Armenia (<http://www.hamk.am/?lang=eng>) mainly works in spheres of labor rights protection, the promotion of social partnerships, and policy and legal advocacy.

Strengths and Weaknesses of Civil Society in Armenia

The major functions of Armenian civil society over the past decade fall into four areas: (i) civic education and awareness raising on various aspects of public life, (ii) watchdog and monitoring activities, (iii) human rights protection, and (iv) advocacy and development activities. Previously, where there was limited democratic governance, transparency or accountability, and with low levels of public trust toward government institutions, civil society contributed toward the protection of human rights, guaranteeing freedom of speech, freedom of assembly, and monitoring government. Even if civil society was not forcing the authorities to address the situation, they were at least providing all interested parties with alternative information. Educating the wider public through civic education, raising awareness about their fundamental rights and freedoms, and supporting bottom-up initiatives also contributed to the effective consolidation of society in spring 2018 and had an impact on and had an impact on the peaceful change of power.²⁸

After the Velvet Revolution, Armenian civil society began to reflect on its role and functions in the new context (endnote 28). Some used the momentum for establishing new relations between the government and civil society. However, these attempts were not always successful because of the lack of institutional capacities of both parties, and because of the lack of strategic communication between state institutions and civil society (endnote 28). Thus, these attempts themselves are forming a new tradition of cooperation.

The civil society environment in Armenia is characterized by a development tendency. This is well reflected in the improvement of parameters such as public trust toward civil society in Armenia, improved organizational

▲ **Women's civil society organizations.** Women's CSOs amplify the voices of women and work toward increasing their political, social, and economic participation (photo from OxYGen Foundation).

capacities, a greater advocacy footprint, and increased financial viability (endnote 11). The most dynamic development of Armenian civil society has been related to advocacy and the infrastructure supporting the civil society sector, while financial viability is the weakest area (endnote 11).

One major problem CSOs in Armenia often face is weak connections to their constituencies and the broader public.²⁹ There are several reasons for this: many CSOs depend upon donor funding and prioritize accountability to the donors more than to their own constituencies. The proportion of membership fees and public donations to CSO budgets is extremely low. One reason for poor CSO financial viability is that membership to a CSO is not widespread in Armenian society, nor is there

▲ **Strengthening citizenship through nonformal citizenship education.** Nonformal citizenship education, especially directed at the younger generations, has developed in various forms and is predominantly provided by CSOs (photo from Eurasia Partnership Foundation).

a strong tradition of donating to CSOs. The level of public trust and awareness about the activities of CSOs is also not high (endnote 11).

The changes in NGO law allowing entrepreneurship for implementation of statutory objectives has not been successful in enabling CSOs to become financially independent. Several crowdfunding mechanisms have financed one-off projects and some nonformal movements; however, this tradition must be developed further. CSOs face similar challenges across the globe, and Armenia can continue to identify what solutions would be most suitable for its context.

Cooperation with Other Development Organizations

The EU and USAID are the major international donors supporting Armenian civil society. Their main areas of focus include anti-corruption, community development, environmental protection, human rights, and media development. Asian Development Bank cooperates with civil society in Armenia around policy development and review, country programming, and throughout the project cycle. Other important international donors are the Council of Europe and the United Nations, which focus on such issues as human rights, public administration reform, community development, and e-governance. In addition, civil society receives support from some EU member states including Austria, Germany, the Netherlands, and Sweden; the focus of these donors depends on the particular country priority and ranges from the environment to minority rights. Private and public donors in the United States and the EU, such as the Black Sea Trust, European Endowment for Democracy, National Endowment for Democracy, and others support activities that may not be in the mainstream of the major donors' funding. These issues include support to local initiatives; issues related to domestic violence, lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transexual rights protection; and support to research activities in such areas as the Soviet past, violence, and nondiscrimination. Some of these donors also support cross-border and regional cooperation. Diaspora-based donors, such as the Armenian General Benevolent Union, the Gulbenkian Foundation, and the Izmirlian Foundation, are more focused on education, culture, healthcare, the social sector, and youth.

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On the cover: Khor Virap monastery is located upon the hills of Ararat Plain in Armenia. (photo from Asian Development Bank)

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