



## COMMUNIQUE

### **Women and the humanitarian crisis in Armenia: Challenges of the war and pandemic**

#### Meeting of the National Assembly-Civil Society Cooperation Platform

On December 4, an online meeting of the National Assembly-Civil Society Cooperation Platform was held. The topic of the meeting was **Women and the Humanitarian Crisis in Armenia: Challenges of the War and Pandemic**.

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## **The goal of the meeting:**

- To discuss the humanitarian crisis problems resulting from the war and pandemic and ways of and proposals for overcoming them with participation of civil society organizations, National Assembly MPs and representatives of the executive power.
- To present the problems women confront as a consequence of the humanitarian crisis and their role in overcoming these problems.

## **Assessment of the situation**

The humanitarian crisis resulting from the war unleashed by Azerbaijan in Artsakh on September 27 of this year requires urgent solutions. Today, the state structures and the public are confronting the problems of thousands of families who were displaced from Artsakh and found refuge in Armenia, problems of thousands of families of soldiers lost, missing and taken prisoner on the battlefield. After the trilateral statement on cessation of hostilities, residents of a number of borderline regions of the republic find themselves in an uncertain and troubled situation connected with the demarcation of the Armenian-Azeri borders. The growing dangers of COVID-19 pandemic are also part of the humanitarian crisis and require urgent and coordinated solutions.

The problems of overcoming the crisis, ensuring stability and security in the country, restoring the moral-psychological atmosphere in society and putting an end to the humanitarian catastrophe demand united efforts by the Parliament and civil society. Women's role is especially important in this context. Women are the primary bearers of the burden of the devastating consequences and impact of wars and humanitarian crises. At the same, as evidenced by all historic trial and tribulations befallen the Armenian people, it is women, who find the strength to survive the pain of cruel human losses and suffering, to withstand the catastrophes, and to fight against daily hardships. Today, when more than ever it is necessary that the public, who is living through an extremely difficult psychological situation, unite to support each other, to empathize, to overcome the defeat, grief and loss together, women can become the unifying and initiating force that will give everyone hope to live and create.

## **The course of the meeting**

- 1. Possible ways of overcoming the humanitarian crisis within the context of the ceasefire:**
  - CSO partners voiced those main gaps and problems that they confront while implementing programs and initiatives aimed at overcoming the humanitarian crisis. Anna Zhamakochyan, Deputy Minister of Labor and Social Affairs, responded to the questions on behalf of the executive power.
- 2. The role of the Parliament in overcoming the humanitarian crisis**

The issue was discussed within the scope of the rationale of the NA-CSO Cooperation Platform and parliamentary governance system:

- Ani Samsonyan, MP of *Bright Armenia* Faction presented their initiatives aimed at overcoming the humanitarian crisis after the cessation of hostilities. She specifically dwelled on the legislative package authored by their faction with a view to regulating the social problems of missing and captured compatriots.
- CSOs presented their expectations as related to specifically female MPs within the context of the RA National Assembly functions of mitigating the political tension and ensuring an atmosphere of political dialogue, as well as managing and overcoming crises. Emphasized was the necessity of the National Assembly-Government- CSOs effective cooperation aimed at overcoming the humanitarian crisis.

### **3. Proposals to the Parliament: the pandemic and gender issues**

- Presented was the special issue of the information bulletin EQUAL on the topic of *Women in Struggle against the Pandemic* , which highlights gender peculiarities of COVID-19 impact and the role of the Parliament in the fight against the pandemic.

#### **Key discussion issues**

##### **I. CSOs voiced the following issues in overcoming the humanitarian crisis connected with the consequences of the war:**

- Absence of the structured database on compatriots who have come from Artsakh, absence of a comprehensive database on a multi-faceted assessment of the needs, absence of the mapping of the assistance programs in implementation.
- The necessity of mechanisms for protection of data on persons displaced from Artsakh, and, in particular, the data on persons benefiting from social support today find their way into Internet and the principle of privacy of personal data is violated.
- Issues related to the support of host-families, who lost their residences in Artsakh, and, in particular, the details of, omissions in and obstacles to the project on host support adopted by the Government on December 3.
- Lack of assessment of the needs of those who suffered from the crisis, including women and children, the necessity of relevant studies.
- Problems with access to 114 hotline services created by the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs, lack of official information, including on the official website pages of the ministries, as a result of which people needing support are subjected to additional stress due to uncertainty and contradictory information provision.
- Problems with accessibility of social support programs, in particular, for those people, who reside in Artsakh (for example, in the Kashatagh region), but have the Republic of Armenia passports and for that reason cannot benefit from social support.
- The necessity of special attention to displaced people with disability and to those families who have disabled persons.

- The necessity of special programs for residents of Artsakh's urban areas (for example, those displaced from Shushi and Hadrut), who have no permanent residence, but have the problem of realizing their professional skills and the need for permanent jobs (The RA Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs offers only temporary solutions).
- Special attitude should be shown to those families, mothers, whose members are missing. Cases have been recorded when missing persons were dismissed from work and their families are facing serious social problems.
- Deterioration of poverty indicators because of the pandemic and war, implementation of targeted programs with the engagement of women is potential as an effective means of overcoming the poverty.

**II. In connection with overcoming the crisis related to the pandemic, presented was the the information bulletin EQUAL's special issue on Women in Struggle against the Pandemic prepared within the framework of the project on *Modern Parliament for a Modern Armenia*. The special issue highlights the role of the Parliament in the fight against the pandemic.**

Studies demonstrate that the pandemic affects everybody everywhere; however, it affects different groups of people differently deepening the existing inequalities and revealing the vulnerabilities of the social, political, and economic systems. According to expert assessments, COVID-19 leaves a devastating impact of socio-economic nature especially on women, as well as adversely affects the progress that so far has been recorded in the area of gender equality and women's rights protection. In this respect, it is important that the responses of the governments to the pandemic, right from the start, take into account the disproportionate impact it makes on women and men. The fact that in the whole world, women, making up the majority in the areas of healthcare, education, and social services, are on the frontline of the fight against the pandemic and play an important role in resolving the crisis, only confirms that any intervention aimed at overcoming the pandemic and its consequences should incorporate gender-sensitive approaches.

The bulletin is comprised of the following sections:

- The special impact of the pandemic on women
- A guide for parliaments: COVID-19 and gender issues
- Why is sex-disaggregated statistics important?
- Women on the frontline of the fight against the pandemic
- Economic consequences of the pandemic
- Domestic violence – shadow pandemic
- Female leaders against the pandemic: the recipe of success
- It is time for joint actions.

## Proposals

- To take steps to engage in effective cooperation with all interested state and public structures for the purpose of needs assessment and creation of a structured database and unified information center, which will allow to provide operative information and purposeful and targeted assistance to all target groups who have suffered from hostilities, including:
  - Families evacuated from Artsakh
    - Families leaving for Artsakh
    - Persons disabled as a consequence of the war
    - Families, who have lost child/ren, family members as a consequence of the war
    - Families of killed soldiers and volunteers
    - Families of the missing
    - Families and relatives of persons taken prisoner and other victims.
- To ensure an effective cooperation of the National Assembly-Government-CSOs to overcome the humanitarian crisis, including the provision of support to families displaced from Artsakh, families of servicemen missing, captured, and killed due to the hostilities and struggle against the pandemic.
- To carry out the supervisory function of the National Assembly with a view to creating a unified database on the victims of hostilities and ensuring the targeting of support programs.
- To engage the CSO potential in needs assessment of people victimized due to the hostilities and in conduct of research on mapping the support initiatives.
- To initiate an effective dialogue between all the political forces represented in the RA National Assembly to overcome the governance crisis and to prevent the humanitarian disaster.
- To come up with initiatives and political statements aimed at consolidation of society and improvement of moral and psychological atmosphere by using the number one political tribune to eliminate hate speech and the splitting oppressive process artificially dividing society into the black and the white, the old and the new, the heroes and traitors.
- To use all means and opportunities of the parliamentary diplomacy to immediately return Armenian prisoners of war, to organize search activities of the missing, to condemn Azerbaijan's war crimes in Artsakh, to save the Armenian cultural heritage from destruction, and to achieve the recognition of the right of the Republic of Artsakh to self-determination.
- To strengthen the role of the Parliament in the struggle against the pandemic and its consequences.