



COMMUNIQUE

on

Expanded Meeting of the National Assembly-Civil Society Cooperation Platform



On May 18 of this year, an expanded meeting of the National Assembly-Civil Society (NA-CSO) Cooperation Platform took place.

Meeting Objectives:

- To present the main achievements and challenges of the NA-CSO Cooperation Platform activities in 2019-2021;
- To discuss suggestions on promotion of women’s employment and protection of their labor rights in the Republic of Armenia presented by civil society organizations.

The meeting was organized within the framework of the project “Modern Parliament for a Modern Armenia.” The project is implemented by the United Nations Development Fund in cooperation with the RA National Assembly with the financial support of the United Kingdom’s “Good Governance Fund” and the Government of Sweden.



Participating in the meeting were Chairperson of the RA National Assembly Standing Committee on Labor and Social Issues Heriknaz Tigranyan, Deputy Minister of Labor and Social Issues Ruben Sargsyan, Chief Technical Specialist of the UNDP-Armenia project “Modern Parliament for a Modern Armenia” Bilyanna Ledenika, Executive Director of OxYGen Foundation Margarita Hakobyan, representatives of civil society organizations and experts in the field.

Highlights of Opening Remarks:

When presenting the pre-history of the NA-CSO Cooperation Platform, **Margarita Hakobyan**, Head of OxYGen Foundation emphasized the importance of ensuring the continuity of the Platform’s activities in terms of jointly discussing issues of concern to the public and coming up with legislative solutions to these issues.



Bilyanna Ledenika, a representative of UNDP-Armenia, thanked OxYGen Foundation for coordination of the Platform's activities and organization of the meeting and noted that the NA-CSO Cooperation Platform is a step forward for Armenia taking into account the visible trend of civil society involvement in the Inter-parliamentary Union. From the perspective of effectiveness of the Platform's activities, the speaker attached importance to maintaining the established contacts with other branches of the authorities, especially with representatives of executive power, with respect to discussed issues. The speaker also emphasized the importance of the statistics on the adopted and improved legislative initiatives thanks to the Platform's work as an indicator of the effectiveness of the Platform's activities.



Heriknaz Tigranyan, Chairperson of the RA NA Standing Committee on Labor and Social Issues, stressed the importance of reactivating the Platform during this period when changes to the Labor Code are in planning. Emphasized was the fact that the agenda of the Platform’s meeting includes issues on promotion of women’s employment and protection of their labor rights.

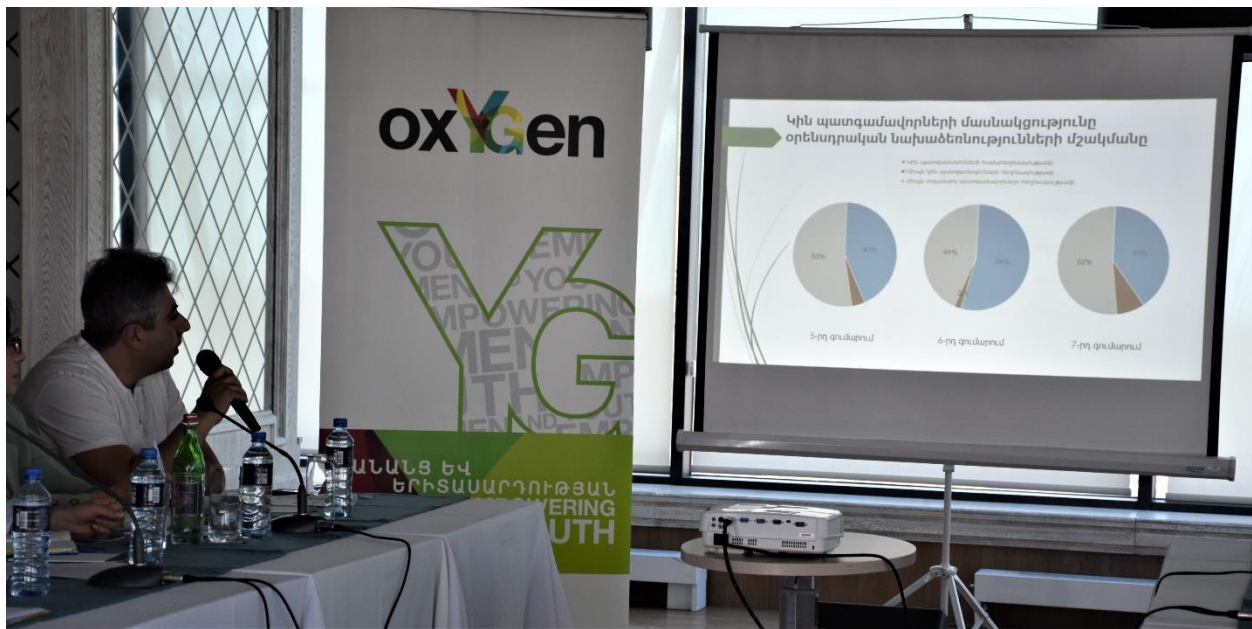
Ruben Sargsyan, Deputy Minister of Labor and Social Issues, assured that the gender equality principle is on the list of priorities of the RA Government. According to him, when drafting the Labor Code, which will be put in circulation by the end of this month and will be presented to the National Assembly, they took into consideration a number of suggestions made by civil society organizations and these suggestions will be reflected in the final draft of the code.



The Deputy Minister emphasized the importance of the NA-CSO Platform and of similar formats in general from the perspective of public policy development and informed that at present the Ministry is taking steps to resolve the problems related to women’s employment. Ruben Sargsyan also noted that a new institution for out-of-court settlement of labor disputes would be introduced soon. It is expected that it will be a model based on international experience and it will be discussed with all interested parties.

During the meeting, presented were:

- [Final Report on the NA-CSO Cooperation Platform activities in 2019-2021](#) (Speaker: gender expert Tamara Hovnatanyan)
- [Research on Female MPs in the National Assembly of the 5th, 6th, and 7th Convocations](#) (Speaker: an expert of the “Argument” Center for Studies Arman Melkonyan)



Discussed Issues

During the meeting, participants discussed a number of issues, which were directly related to the items on the agenda, i.e. promotion of women’s employment and protection of their labor and social rights.

CSO representatives raised the following issues:

- The necessity of legislatively regulating the issue of sexual harassment at workplace;

- The issue of clarifying the procedure for collecting state dues in the case of victims of domestic violence in order to ensure judicial access;
- Mechanisms for protecting the rights of pregnant women and breastfeeding mothers and provision of safeguards prescribed by law in their legal relations with their employers;
- Discriminatory manifestations towards representatives of the LGBT community at workplace and the issue of mechanisms for protection of their labor rights;
- The issue of securing the right of trade unions to apply to the court and their accountability and transparency issues.



Suggestions

The following suggestions were made in connection with the raised issues:

1. **To closely cooperate not only with the NA Standing Committees, but also with the NA Expertise Center**, thus ensuring more consistent review of draft legislation from the perspective of gender sensitivity.
2. **To exert consistent efforts to ensure that the new draft of the Labor Code include CSO suggestions on addressing sexual harassment in the workplace.** Moreover, it is important that these suggestions be adopted as formulated by CSOs and with mechanisms that correspond to the state's obligations undertaken within the framework of international documents.
3. **To organize awareness-raising activities in cooperation with state structures** with a view to raising awareness of the public about cases of discrimination by employers at

workplace, mechanisms for sounding them and the evidence base, and to include employers among the beneficiaries of these awareness-raising processes. For the same purpose, to cooperate with the RA Healthcare and Labor Inspectorate within the scope of the latter's functions as defined by law, including its functions of overseeing the adherence to the requirements of the RA laws and other legal normative acts, as well as implementing preventive measures in the noted areas.

4. **To take steps to keep sex-disaggregated statistics on labor rights violations** using the potential of structures responsible for such issues.
5. **To expand the bases for exemption of domestic violence victims from payment of state dues in courts**, which, according to the Law on State Dues in effect, cover only cases of collecting alimony, whereas no privileges are envisaged for domestic violence victims in judicial disputes for child's permanent place of residence and visitation issues. To define similar privileges and secure them in the Law on State Dues based on international practice.
6. **To engage in the next discussion of changes to the Labor Code representatives of judicial power**, in particular, representatives from the Judicial Department's Division for Judicial Practice Analysis and Monitoring, to have them present judicial practice on cases of labor rights violations.
7. **To take steps to improve digitized databases on social and economic support programs** with a view to ensuring access to them for all departments and making activities addressed to beneficiaries of social support programs clearer, better targeted and properly referred.
8. **To carry out mandatory evaluation and monitoring of the effectiveness of state support programs** envisioning clear-cut standards for all measures undertaken for that purpose.
9. **To carry out activities jointly with state structures** aimed at protecting labor rights and raising public awareness about labor contracts.
10. **To assist in protection of interests of the LGBT community** by putting the burden of proof on the employer in cases of manifestations of discrimination towards representatives of the community in the workplace.
11. **To keep in the spotlight** cases of employer dismissal of pregnant women from work by envisaging additional legislative regulations to ensure the implementation of the guarantees for maternity protection as prescribed by law.
12. **To secure the right of trade unions to apply to the court**, to facilitate the development of social partnership by establishing clear-cut mechanisms within the scope of relations with employers in order to ensure the upholding of employee labor rights by the employer.

13. **To include solutions to the problems related to women’s workforce and women’s unpaid work** in the new strategy on labor and social protection, which is being developed by the Ministry of Labor and Social Issues.



Wrapping up the meeting, the OxYGen Foundation’s Head Margarita Hakobyan thanked the Platform participants for their participation and effective discussion. The next meeting of the Platform will be held in a month.

The goal of the National-Assembly-Civil Society Cooperation Platform is to ensure participation of civil society in legislative initiatives aimed at legal empowerment of women in political, economic, and social areas, as well as promotion of equal rights and equal opportunities of women and men.

The activity proceedings of the Platform or conclusions reached at its meetings do not necessarily reflect the viewpoints of UNDP or other project partners.

