



**Gender Aspects of the
Republic of Armenia 2018-2020
Action Plan¹ within the
framework of
Open Government Partnership
Initiative**

Assessment Report

¹ http://www.ogp.am/u_files/file/4th_edited_2019.pdf

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The aim of the project is to promote the participation of citizens in the democratic system, increase awareness of transparency and involvement in policy-making processes with emphasis on youth and women as a norm in society and formalize these efforts in the new Open Government Partnership (OGP) Action Plan 2021-2023 of Armenia.

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INTRODUCTION

Having joined the Open Government Partnership (OGP) initiative in 2011, the Republic of Armenia has committed to taking steps towards realization of the goals of the initiative, i.e. promoting improvement of the governance system through active engagement of civil society and enhancing the efficiency and effectiveness of the governance system through raising the transparency, reliability and accountability of state-citizen relations.

In the OGP Declaration², partnership member states, including Armenia, have declared four commitments:

- To increase the availability of information about governmental activities,
- To support civic participation,
- To implement the highest standards of professional integrity throughout administrations,
- To increase access to new technologies for openness and accountability.

Within the framework of these commitments, the members of the initiative have committed to upholding and being guided by the principle of equality, including gender equality, and to ensuring women's full participation in the governmental processes.

The OGP Declaration specifically states, “We value public participation of all people, equally and without discrimination, in decision making and policy formulation. Public engagement, including the full participation of women, increases the effectiveness of governments, which benefit from people's knowledge, ideas and ability to provide oversight.”

The requirement of women and men's equal participation in decision making is part of Armenia's commitments also within the scope of a number of international documents on women's rights and is reflected in the national legislation. Therefore, the requirement of gender sensitivity with respect to action plans adopted within the framework of the *Open Government Partnership* (OGP) initiative is based on the logic and rationale of these very documents and should be assessed within the framework of this very logic.

Within the scope of the *Open Government Partnership* initiative, Armenia has developed and adopted four Action Plans: for 2012-2014, 2014-2016, 2016-2018, and 2018-2020. The first three have already been implemented and assessed, and the fourth is in the assessment stage. Looking at the action plans implemented by the Republic of Armenia up to date, we can state that these actions plans have never been assessed from the perspective of gender sensitivity. Moreover, no

² http://www.ogp.am/u_files/file/OGP%20Declaration%20of%20Prnciples_ARM.pdf

gender mainstreaming was conducted at their development stage, although the OGP principles are consonant with the gender policies adopted by the state and according to these policies, all programs to be adopted in the republic should be subjected to gender mainstreaming.

I. Interconnectedness of International Obligations related to OGP Commitments and Gender Equality

At least three fundamental documents related to women's rights protection and ensuring gender equality, i.e. the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women, the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and Sustainable Development Agenda, view the necessity of women's engagement in the governance system as a precondition for improving the governance system and increasing its effectiveness.

Specifically, the principle of ruling out discrimination enshrined in the OGP Declaration is directly based on **the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women**³, which Armenia ratified in 1993 and which obligates the participating states “*to take all appropriate measures to eliminate discrimination against women in the political and public life of the country*” and to provide for women's political rights, which include the following rights noted in Article 7:

- To vote in all elections and public referenda and to be eligible for election to all publicly elected bodies;
- To participate in the formulation of government policy and the implementation thereof and to hold public office and perform all public functions at all levels of government;
- To participate in non-governmental organizations and associations concerned with the public and political life of the country (Article 7).

In 2016, in its Concluding Observations⁴ on Armenia's combined fifth and sixth periodic reports the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women came up with a number of recommendations on women's participation in the governance system:

a) Adopt measures, including temporary special measures, in accordance with article 4, paragraph 1, of the Convention and the Committee's General Recommendation No. 25 (2004) on temporary special measures and General Recommendation No. 23 (1997) on women in political and public life, in order to accelerate women's full and equal participation in elected and appointed bodies, including in National Assembly, Ministerial positions, regional and local municipalities, the judiciary and the foreign service;

³ UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women, http://www.un.am/res/UN%20Treaties/III_8.pdf

⁴ <https://undocs.org/CEDAW/C/ARM/CO/5-6>

- Women’s engagement increases the effectiveness of governance, facilitates introduction of the principles of accountability and transparency and decreases corruption.⁷

It is noteworthy that the UN Women report on *Gender equality: Women’s rights in review 25 years after Beijing* published in January of 2020 views the critical area of concern of *Women in Power and Decision-Making* within the cluster on *Participation, Accountability, and Gender-Responsive Institutions* in the context of Sustainable Development Goals and in unity with other critical areas of concern of the Beijing Platform for Action, which include *Institutional Mechanisms for the Advancement of Women, Human Rights of Women* and other areas. Thus, the unity of pivotal approaches of the Beijing Platform for Action, the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women and Sustainable Development of Goals is emphasized.

The connection between the OGP commitments and **Sustainable Development Goals** is affirmed by the fact that within the OGP framework, the third (2016) and fourth (2018) action plans adopted by Armenia prioritized those suggestions, which were aimed at implementation of Sustainable Development Goals, specifically within the framework of Goal # 5 *Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls* of Sustainable Development Agenda and Sustainable Development Goals (SDG). The issue of women’s representation in decision-making and leadership positions is specified by the indicators of target 5.5 of goal 5, which characterize women’s representation in leadership positions of legislative, local self-government and executive bodies.

Goal 5.
Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls⁸

Target 5.5.

Ensure women’s full and effective participation and equal opportunities for leadership at all levels of decision-making in political, economic and public life

Indicators:

- 5.5.1. Proportion of seats held by women in national parliaments and local governments
- 5.5.2. Proportion of women in managerial positions

⁷ A number of research works substantiate the direct link between a high level of women’s representation and low level of corruption. Corruption, Accountability and Gender: Understanding the Connection <https://www.undp.org/content/undp/en/home/librarypage/womens-empowerment/corruption-accountability-and-gender-understanding-the-connection.html>

⁸ The targets and indicators of the goal in their entirety <http://un.am/hy/p/sustainable-development-goal-5>

II. OGP Commitments within the context of the RA Gender Policies

Obligations on ensuring gender equality taken up under international documents are also reflected in the national legislation and first of all in **the RA Constitution**, which secures general equality before law (Article 28), prohibition of discrimination (Article 29), legal equality of women and men (Article 30), as well as a state policy goal on promoting de facto equality between women and men (Article 86).

Provision of women and men's equal rights and opportunities within the framework of the **National Security Strategy**⁹ adopted in July of 2020 is listed among Armenia's national goals:

“Equality of all before law, legal equality of women and men, provision of equal opportunities for engagement of women and men in public, state, and economic life, and establishment of national unity based on rights protection and performance of responsibilities.”

Approaches enshrined in the documents on the fundamentals of the state gender policies, such as the RA Law on Ensuring Equal Rights and Equal Opportunities for Women and Men, the RA Gender Policy Conceptual Framework, and the 2019-2023 Strategy and Action Plan on Implementation of the RA Gender Policy are not only consonant with the principles of the Open Government Partnership, but also contain requirements that should be reflected in all programs adopted and implemented in Armenia.

In particular, **the RA Gender Policy Conceptual Framework**¹⁰ adopted in 2010 views the ensuring of gender equality in the area of governance as a requirement for development of a democratic, social, and rule-of-law state and as an important prerequisite for increasing the effectiveness of the governance system.

The conceptual framework envisions introduction of gender approaches in the public administration area and at the decision-making level and outlines the following requirements for this purpose:

- **Gender mainstreaming** of policies and political practices in long-term, medium-term and special-purpose programs and in all areas of public, political, social, economic, and cultural life at the national and regional levels;

⁹ <https://bit.ly/2WBd2YB>

¹⁰ https://www.gov.am/u_files/file/kananc-xorh/Gender-hayecakarg.pdf

- Creation of **the national machinery** for gender equality;
- Conduct of **gender expertise** of legislation.

In the areas of governance and decision-making, the following main goals of the gender policy have been declared:

- Ensuring a balanced representation of women and men at all levels of decision-making in representative and executive power bodies as a prerequisite for improving the quality of adopted decisions and strengthening social solidarity.
- Increasing the number of women in the RA National Assembly and at the decision-making level of power structures through the adoption of temporary legislative measures.
- Using women's intellectual and creative potential to boost the effectiveness of the public administration and local self-government.
- Engaging women's social and political resources in the processes of democratization of society through overcoming sex-based discrimination and gender stereotypes and supporting women's active participation in the country's socio-political life.

To achieve these goals, the conceptual framework envisions:

- Integration of a gender component in the country's political and economic development strategy and programs and in the regional development plans: introduction of gender expertise into the assessment of socio-economic programs and projects and political practices at all levels of governance.
- Balanced engagement of women and men's intellectual resources in the processes of democratization of the public administration and local self-government system, introduction of gender approaches in the personnel policies through impartial and unbiased consideration of women and men's capacities and resources.
- Overcoming women's underrepresentation at the decision-making level of legislative and executive power and local self-government bodies to expand opportunities for women's participation in political life and the country's future democratic development processes, as well as to achieve social justice and tolerance in society.
- Introduction of a gender dimension in the public administration system to democratize administrative practices, to increase the effectiveness of work by governing structures, and to perfect the process of development and adoption of decisions.
- Improvement of legal, governmental and organizational measures aimed at achieving women and men's equal opportunities and ensuring gender equality and gender equity in all areas of public life.
- Development of national and structural mechanisms for effective implementation of gender equality policies.
- Creation of conditions for balanced and full participation of women and men in the decision-making processes of all levels of power structures.

The action plans following the adoption of the conceptual framework, i.e. **the 2011-2015 Strategic Program on the RA Gender Policies** and **the 2019-2023 Strategy and Action Plan for Implementation of the RA Gender Policies** adopted with an interval of four years have incorporated the above noted principles and approaches to the possible extent. The issue is to what extent they have been implemented. For example, according to the report on the assessment of the implementation of the 2011-2015 Strategic Program on the RA Gender Policies, measures to expand women's representation at the decision-making level of legislative and executive bodies have not been sufficiently envisioned.¹¹

The RA Law on Ensuring Equal Rights and Equal Opportunities for Women and Men (2013) has created legal bases for implementation of the requirements of the conceptual framework and regulates the issue of ensuring women and men's equal rights and equal opportunities in the areas of politics, public administration, work and employment, entrepreneurship, healthcare, education, etc. The law also envisions quota mechanisms aimed at supporting candidates of less represented sex in elected bodies, which is a direct reflection of the provisions of the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) in the national legislation.

One of the strategic priorities of **the 2019-2013 Strategy and Action Plan for Implementation of the RA Gender Policies**¹² is "Perfection of the national machinery for the advancement of women and women and men's equal participation in governance and decision-making."

Important goals include:

- The availability of an effective national machinery for the advancement of women,
- A unified system comprising national and institutional mechanisms for development and implementation of gender policies,
- Improved participation of women in different areas of public life, including in politics,
- Introduction of quotas for ensuring gender equality in the public administration system and expanded participation of women in decision-making of legislative, executive and other powers.

The indicators of the strategy implementation include:

- Women's representation in the representative bodies, including local self-government, is higher after each subsequent election as compared to the preceding elections (%),
- Proportion of women in high-ranking public offices is increasing each year (%),

¹¹ https://www.un.am/up/library/Assesment_2011-2015_Gender%20Policy_arm.pdf

¹² <http://www.irtek.am/views/act.aspx?aid=151906>

It is understandable that the approaches and indicators of the 2019-2023 Strategy and Action Plan on Implementation of the RA Gender Policies adopted in 2019 are not incorporated into the OGP Action Plan adopted in 2018. Nevertheless, taking into consideration that the obligations for ensuring gender equality taken up by Armenia within the scope of international documents and the provisions secured in the national documents on the state gender policies are consonant with the Open Government Partnership commitments, one should expect that the principles and approaches related to women's participation should have been reflected also in the action plans developed and adopted by the Republic of Armenia within the OGP framework.

III. Gender Equality Principles in the OGP Action Plan: Assessment

Since the Republic of Armenia joined the Open Government Partnership initiative, three of the four Action Plans: 2012-2014, 2014-2016, 2016-2018, adopted by it have already been implemented and assessed, the fourth one is entering the assessment stage.

According to the assessments of the preceding three action plans, thanks to their implementation, significant improvement has been recorded in provision of public services, effective administration of public resources, promotion of public trust, development of local self-government, freedom of information, public procurement reforms, information accessibility, and accessibility of social services. The commitments made by the previous OGP action plans, but not completed by the defined deadlines were continued and brought to completion even after the end-date of the plans. The progress with the initiative was assessed and evaluated by both local and international partners.

Looking at all the programs implemented within the OGP framework by the Republic of Armenia up to date and their evaluations, one can state that these programs and their implementation have never been assessed from the perspective of gender sensitivity.

In particular,

- Both previous plans and the 2018-2020 action plan have not been subjected to gender mainstreaming during their development stage despite the fact the RA Gender Policy Conceptual Framework envisions a gender mainstreaming requirement for all national programs.
- In line with the criteria and principles developed within the OGP framework, the Government has been open to suggestions from individuals and civil society organizations, a competition of ideas has been announced and for the purpose of collection of suggestions, a crowdsourcing tool has been used. Overall, six of the eleven commitments of the Action Plan are suggestions made by individuals and non-governmental organizations. However,

none of them views the OGP principles and values from the perspective of engaging women’s potential in the area of governance.

- Within the framework of the activities included in the plan, only the seventh cluster (Open and social: accessibility of the integrated social services and awareness raising) mentions women and only as beneficiaries, who, together with the poor and vulnerable groups, disproportionately benefit from the RA state budget current and capital expenditures. In reality, women are beneficiaries with the framework of other activities of the plan as well, in particular, with respect to commitments related to the areas of education and healthcare, the greater part of the employees of which and hence of beneficiaries are women.
- The guide on the criteria serving as a basis for development of the Open Government Partnership-Armenia Action Plan notes that preference was given to those suggestions, which, in addition to being in line with the OGP values and principles, were aimed at implementation of Sustainable Development Goals. However, none of the commitments listed in the action plan makes a reference to the SDG goal 5, i.e. provision of gender equality. Respectively, none of the indicators related to this goal was included among the verifiable and measurable criteria for the performance of the obligations. No consideration was given to the fact that the SDG fifth goal is viewed as pivotal and, therefore, a gender component should be integrated in the processes of the implementation of all SDG goals, which, however, is not the case in the OGP Action Plan.

Correspondence of the fourth RA Action Plan (2018-2020) related to the OGP initiative to Sustainable Development Goals

Commitment	Correspondence to Sustainable Development Goals
I. ENSURING TRANSPARENCY AND ACCOUNTABILITY	
1. “Open data” in official declarations: improvement of the electronic system of statements of property and income of high-ranking officials and related persons	<i>16.6 Develop effective, accountable and transparent institutions at all levels</i>
2. Ensuring transparency and accountability of grant allocation from the RA state budget	<i>10.3 Ensure equal opportunity and reduce inequalities of outcome, including by eliminating discriminatory laws, policies and practices and promoting appropriate legislation, policies and action in this regard</i>
3. Introduction of an open public registry of actual owners	<i>16.5 Substantially reduce corruption and bribery in all their forms</i>

	<i>17.17 Encourage and promote effective public, public-private and civil society partnerships, building on the experience and resourcing strategies of partnerships</i>
II. PROMOTION OF ACCESSIBILITY OF INFORMATION	
4. Modernization of community websites: strengthening publicity, transparency and participation at the local level	<i>11.3 By 2030, enhance inclusive and sustainable urbanization and capacity for participatory, integrated and sustainable human settlement planning and management in all countries</i>
5. Accessibility of a unified information system of water resources	<i>6. Ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all</i>
6. Modernization of public accessibility of the land cadaster	<i>11.3.1 Ratio of land consumption rate to population growth rate</i>
7. Open & Social: availability of integrated social services and awareness raising	<i>1.3 Implement nationally appropriate social protection systems and measures for all, including floors, and by 2030 achieve substantial coverage of the poor and the vulnerable 1.b.1 The share of those current and capital expenditures from the RA state budget, from which women, the poor and vulnerable groups benefit disproportionately</i>
III. PROMOTION OF PUBLIC PARTICIPATION	
8. A unified information system of education management	<i>4. Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all</i>
9. Open healthcare: online queuing for treatment and diagnosis within the framework of the state-subsidized medical care	<i>3.8 Achieve universal health coverage, including financial risk protection, access to quality essential health-care services and access to safe, effective, quality and affordable essential medicines and vaccines for all</i>
10. Creation of a unified electronic platform for presenting petitions	<i>16.7 Ensure responsive, inclusive, participatory and representative decision-making at all levels</i>
11. Provision of feedback to public services	<i>16.6.2 Proportion of the population satisfied with their last experience of public services 16.7 Ensure responsive, inclusive, participatory and representative decision-making at all levels</i>

- Overall, the issue of women’s participation in the area of governance and decision-making has never been included in the OGP Action Plans although engagement of

women's potential is an important prerequisite for increasing the effectiveness of the governance system. The assessment of the situation demonstrates that the problem of women's underrepresentation in the area of governance has not been resolved even against the background of women's active participation in the 2018 velvet revolution. The disregard of this problem in the OGP Action Plan adopted by the new government in 2018 cannot be justified.

Information Brief

Women's Representation in Armenia's Governance System

Although women's participation and unprecedented activism was specially valued during the velvet revolution in Armenia in 2018, no changes took place in the gender composition of the government formed right after the revolution.

In 2018, **the Government** headed by Nikol Pashinyan included two women ministers among 18 ministers forming the Cabinet. Although Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan voiced the imperative of expanding women's participation in the country's development and governance system in a number of his statements, only one woman was included in the Cabinet of twelve ministers after the snap parliamentary elections of 2019. As of December 2020, there is no female minister in the composition of the Government.

The number of men in leadership positions of political and public associations of the local self-government, **judiciary, and legislative and executive** power exceeds that of women by 2.8 times. At the same time, women make up 57% and men 43% of highly qualified specialists. That is to say, women's potential is not fully utilized in decision-making and the country's governance.

As for the positions of Deputy Ministers, as of December 2020, eleven (26%) of 42 deputy ministers of the twelve ministries are women, which, though it excels the indicators recorded for all previous Cabinets, does not resolve the problem of gender imbalance among the heads of a number of key areas. There are no women deputy ministers in the Ministry of Emergency Situations, Defense Ministry, Foreign Affairs Ministry, and Ministries of Finance and Economy.

Within the system of territorial administration, governors of all ten marzes of Armenia are men, and there are only two female deputy governors.

Within the system of local self-government, women head only nine (1.8) out of 502 communities of Armenia, there is only one female mayor in Armenia (Vagharshapat), only one out of 52 consolidated communities is headed by a woman (Amasia), only 22 of 420 administrative heads of settlements in consolidated communities are women (5.2%). Three hundred seventy-one of the total number of 3 784 municipal councilors are women (9.8%). At the same time, there are no women in municipal councils of 282 communities out of 502 communities of Armenia. Thanks to the applied gender quota, women's representation is comparatively higher in the City Councils of Yerevan (32%), Gyumri and Vanadzor (24%).

- The requirement of ensuring gender equality in the governance system is consonant with the principles declared within the OGP framework and has two components. On the one hand, a balanced representation of the two sexes in decision-making is a guarantee of an effective use of the human capital and of an effective governance, and hence, a guarantee of realization of the OGP principles. On the other hand, women's representation in governance is a guarantee for ensuring gender sensitivity of adopted decisions and for consideration of the interests of the two sexes, which too is an indicator of an effective governance.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Taking into consideration the above noted gender sensitivity shortcomings of the 2018-2020 Action Plan adopted by the Republic of Armenia within the framework the Open Government Partnership initiative, we propose the following approaches as guidelines for development of subsequent action plans:

- To provide for gender mainstreaming of the upcoming OGP Action Plan in its development, implementation, and assessment stages, based on the requirements of the RA Gender Policy Conceptual Framework and goals and indicators of the 2019-2023 Strategy and Action Plan for Implementation of the RA Gender Policies.
- To incorporate the principle of gender sensitivity among those criteria, which should guide development of commitments with the framework of Action Plans.
- To envision gender sensitive, verifiable and measurable criteria for all commitments to be included in the upcoming OGP Action Plan.
- To incorporate commitments aimed at expanding women's representation in the governance system in the upcoming OGP Action Plan, taking into consideration the internationally proven fact that women's engagement increases the effectiveness of governance helps introduction of the principles of accountability and transparency and reduces corruption.
- To include, in the OGP Action Plan, those approaches, which derive from the obligations taken up by Armenia within the scope of international documents and are enshrined in the national documents serving as the basis of the state's gender policies and which are consonant with the values and principles of Open Government Partnership.
- To apply gender analysis, gender audit, and gender-responsive budgeting tools to carry out gender mainstreaming of the commitments of the OGP Action Plan.
- To envision such commitments in the OGP Action Plan, which contribute to the transparency and gender sensitivity of the personnel policies.

- To envision incorporation of such commitments in the OGP Action Plan, which will promote creation of an effective national machinery for the advancement of women and perfection of the institutional mechanisms for ensuring gender equality.