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Women human rights defenders in a new social and political reality of Armenia: Active in the margins, unprotected in the core



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Women human rights defenders stand up for women's rights and gender equality, they see and believe in the importance of being vocal for those women and girls around the world that are somehow deprived from the opportunity to speak for themselves. This policy paper addresses women's and gender issues in Armenia, and especially the ways women human rights defenders react and respond to gender-based injustices. Recent experiences demonstrated that women human rights defenders and activists are significant actors in the women's movement in Armenia that has tried to establish the climate of equality in the Armenian society for more than a century. With this policy brief we highlight the importance of the work of women human rights defenders in Armenia especially in the new political and social realities in the country which, despite the fact of the revolution, are still to be transformed from complex gender perspectives. We argue that although Armenia is undergoing major political, social and economic changes and, hopefully, developments, there is evidently a need to point out some field-specific important aspects that the state and other stakeholders should consider in their works and co-operations. This policy brief also addresses the issue of safety of women human rights defenders and gives recommendations to different stakeholders/parties in decision-making.

INTRODUCTION AND PROBLEM DESCRIPTION

Gender inequalities and women's lower representation in Armenia

Women in Armenia consist more than half of the country's population (52.6%).¹ Yet the violence against women and gender inequality persist in the Armenian society and culture. Violence against women is one of the harshest ways of discrimination against women. The practice itself is a violation of all sorts of fundamental human rights and freedoms. And it is not a surprise that violence against women is manifested also in the family (domestic violence).

Domestic violence is one of the persistent issues of the Armenian society.² The latest femicide report by the Coalition to Stop Violence Against Women in Armenia states that only in 2016 there were three cases, and in 2017, four cases of femicide.³ According to a study conducted in Armenia in 2016, 22.4% of women were subjected to physical violence and 45.9% of women were subjected to psychological violence by their regular partners and spouses.⁴

Another major gender issue in the country is the low economic participation of women and the urgent need of concentrating governmental forces on development of effective mechanisms of gender budgeting and gender sensitive projects on state level. According to the Armenian

Statistical Service's latest report, in 2017 the economic activity rates are higher among men than women: 70.7% of men and 52.8% of women (of age 15 to 75) are employed or actively seeking a job.⁵ Similarly, the gender gap in Armenia in 2017 was 25.3%.⁶ Moreover, the gap has the highest rate in the age group of 25 to 34 (40%). According to the same statistical report the latter rate is due to 'family circumstances', namely women's engagement in 'family responsibilities', such as pregnancy, childbirth, child care, etc.⁷

Women's sexual and reproductive health is another major topic to discuss in terms of inequality and discrimination. Even though recently women have gained some independence in terms of exercising agency over their life and body, it is evident that they continue to face discrimination and judgement when dealing with issues related to sexual and reproductive health and rights.⁸ Another major component of this area is the proper use of contraception. Still, in many regions in the country abortion is considered as the main option of contraception. In the vast majority of cases abortion is a mechanism to get rid of a female fetus: unsurprisingly Armenia is one of the leading countries in terms of gender-biased sex-selection or son preference.⁹ In some other cases, the key issue related to secure and accessible abortions in rural areas remains the fact that the state is not creating appropriate conditions for women to exercise their rights to abortion. They are forced to travel to cities to be

- 1 National Statistical Service of Armenia, 'Women and Men in Armenia' (ARMSTAT 2018) 14 <www.armstat.am/file/article/gender_2018.pdf> accessed 10 April 2019.
- 2 Coalition to Stop Violence Against Women in Armenia, *Femicide in Armenia: Silent Epidemic* (Coalition to Stop Violence Against Women in Armenia 2016) 16-18; Anna Hovhannisyanyan and Stella Chandiryan, 'Silenced Voices: Femicide in Armenia 2016-2017 Report', 'Coalition to Stop Violence Against Women in Armenia' (2019) 34.
- 3 Hovhannisyanyan and Chandiryan (n 2).
- 4 UNFPA, 'Men and Gender Equality in Armenia, Report on Sociological Survey Findings' (UNFPA 2016) 26 <https://armenia.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/pub-pdf/MEN%20AND%20GENDER%20EQUALITY_Final_0.pdf> accessed 10 April 2019.
- 5 National Statistical Service of Armenia (n 1) 69.
- 6 Ibid.
- 7 Ibid.
- 8 Council of Europe, 'Women's Sexual and Reproductive Rights in Europe, Issue Paper' (Council of Europe 2017) 5 <<https://rm.coe.int/women-s-sexual-and-reproductive-health-and-rights-in-europe-issue-pape/168076dead>> accessed 10 April 2019; Women's Resource Center Armenia, 'The Invisible Rights of Women in the Republic of Armenia: The Overall State of Reproductive Health and Rights Among Various Groups of Women' (Women's Resource Center Armenia 2018) 4 <<http://ysu.am/files/Repro%20report.pdf>> accessed 10 April 2019.
- 9 Women's Resource Center Armenia, 'The Invisible Rights of Women' (n 8) 8.

able to access the services for safe medical abortions.¹⁰ This topic overlaps also with the issues of organisation and delivery of sexual and reproductive education in schools in Armenia.¹¹

Lesbian, bisexual and trans women are under even higher risks of double discrimination and abuse. Their sexual and reproductive rights are not protected, safety is not guaranteed and the climate of intolerance is a usual part of these women's everyday lives.¹² Women with HIV/AIDS have also become a marginalised group with little or no access to health care, education, labour market and so on.¹³ Elderly women and women with disabilities are marginalised because of their age and disability status.¹⁴ Women living in rural areas are even more deprived from many services of and communication with properly working public institutions.¹⁵ The free and public spaces shrink further for women of all groups and backgrounds.

State response and obstacles to gender inequalities in Armenia

The main guarantee of gender equality com-

mitment on a state level is proper legislation and the existence of a complex and multi-directional state gender strategy. This strategy ensures commitment of the state institutions towards achieving gender equality and making efforts in that direction. The latest Gender Equality Strategy in Armenia ended in 2015.¹⁶ Since January 2016, the state, civil society organisations and experts are struggling to establish another one. Up until the 'Velvet Revolution' and post-revolutionary changes in 2018 and 2019, the document was out of any discussion, many organisations did not even know in which departments the document has been and who was working on it. The Gender Theme Group of Armenia – as a responsible body on that matter – was not active in that sense either.

In March 2019, after the final appointment at the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs (which is responsible for the state gender strategy development and implementation), new meetings and discussions have taken place in order to ensure all parties interested in the country's strategy could contribute with their suggestions.¹⁷ Interestingly, the Armenian version of the strategy

10 Ibid.

11 Women's Resource Center Armenia and Center for Gender and Leadership Studies, Yerevan State University, 'The Attitudes of Teachers of "Healthy Lifestyle" about Topics of Sexual Education' (Women's Resource Center Armenia and Center for Gender and Leadership Studies 2018) <http://ysu.am/files/Sex-ed_Teacher2018_WRC_CGLS.pdf> accessed 10 April 2019.

12 PINK Armenia, 'From Prejudice to Equality' (PINK Armenia 2016) 11 <https://issuu.com/pinkarmenia/docs/from_prejudice_to_equality_english> accessed 10 April 2019.

13 Eurasian Women's Network on HIV/AIDS (in Publishing), 'No Justification for Violence, Analytical Report on the Study of Violence Against Women with HIV/AIDS in Eastern Europe and Central Asia' (Eurasian Women's Network on HIV/AIDS (in Publishing) 2018) 5-7, 10.

14 Zaruhi Batoyan, 'Inclusiveness and Accessibility of Reproductive Medical Services for Women and Girls with Disabilities in Armenia' (Center for Gender and Leadership Studies 2014) <[http://ysu.am/files/Research%20report%20_Inclusive%20Medical%20Services%20for%20Women%20with%20Disabilities%20\(English\).pdf](http://ysu.am/files/Research%20report%20_Inclusive%20Medical%20Services%20for%20Women%20with%20Disabilities%20(English).pdf)> accessed 1 April 2019; Yevgine Vardanyan, 'Gender Aspects of Aging in Rural Armenia: Health and Well-Being of Elderly Women in Rural Communities of Armenia' (Center for Gender and Leadership Studies, Yerevan State University 2015) <<http://ysu.am/files/Yevgine%20Vardanyan%20-%20research%20report.pdf>> accessed 10 April 2019.

15 Mkhitar Gabrielyan, 'Woman in Rural Livelihood in Armenia: Economic Activities, Social and Family Status' (Center for Gender and Leadership Studies, Yerevan State University 2015) <<http://ysu.am/files/%20-%20%D5%80%D5%B8%D5%B2%D5%AB%20%D5%BE%D6%80%D5%A1%20%D5%A1%D5%B7%D5%AD%D5%A1%D5%BF%D5%B8%D5%B2%20%D5%AF%D5%AB%D5%B6%D5%A8.pdf>> accessed 10 April 2019.

16 Sargisova and others, 'Report on Evaluation of Implementation of Gender Policy 2011-2015 Gender Strategy and National Program Against Gender-Based Violence 2011-2015' (UNFPA, UNDP and UNICEF 2015) <http://un.am/up/library/Assesment_2011-2015_Gender%20Policy_arm.pdf> accessed 10 April 2019

17 RA Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs (MLSA), 'We Want to Have Not Temporary but Tangible Results: Zhanna Andreasyan' (MLSA 2019) <www.mlsa.am/?p=20896&fbclid=IwAR0vpTDuuZCdG9WGtIIKv-mIh_w-LYGRF9-k8Fx-2D9LHMqlgp7nJhVNP4FI> accessed 10 April 2019; Aravot Daily, 'The Solutions Must Be Tangible: Zhanna Andreasyan' (*Aravot Daily*, 15 March 2019) <www.aravot.am/2019/03/15/1029092/?fbclid=IwAR1kR6a1ng-p5ypPHYrIJDIVKw>

and action plan does not have the word ‘gender’ in its title; it is ‘women and men’ in all the official documents after anti-gender backlash and attacks back in 2013. However, state officials used the word ‘gender’ while reporting in English to international committees, such as the United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women.¹⁸

A major component of the gender strategy was the adoption of the Law on Gender Equality in Armenia in 2013. After this event, some nationalist groups started to constantly investigate the activities of non-governmental organisations (NGOs), activists and human rights defenders preoccupied mainly in spheres of women’s and lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex (LGBTI+) rights. These groups also attacked them on social media and online media with direct killing threats, videos, pictures, posts, etc.¹⁹ Eventually, instead of being called the ‘Law on Gender Equality’ that could guarantee the rights and opportunities of all the members of the Armenian society, the law has been renamed ‘Law on Equal Rights and Equal Opportunities of Women and Men’.²⁰

The same happened with the law on domestic violence in Armenia. Before the public hearing of the law in Yerevan, several anti-gender nationalist groups started campaigning against the legislation.²¹ Eventually, the law was adopted by the National Assembly of the Republic of

Armenia (RA) in December 2017 with another change in the title, again because of the hateful debate around it. Now, the law is not just about domestic violence, but it also focuses on restoring the ‘solidarity and harmony in the family’.²² There is also an ongoing debate around the law on anti-discrimination as well that is aimed at ensuring more stability in terms of protecting the rights of every citizen in Armenia regardless any gender identity or sexual preferences, or social, economic status, disability, age, etc. As part of official commitments to international and European conventions and legal documents, in January 2018 the Government of the Republic of Armenia signed the Istanbul Convention on preventing and combating the violence against women and domestic violence.²³

Although we can say that the country takes the route for democratisation, there is still a long way to go. For the moment, only one ministry is led by a woman,²⁴ there are no female heads of regions (marzes), only 24% of MPs are female²⁵ and only eight of the 502 communities have female heads.²⁶ Needless to say, the new programme of the government for 2019-2023²⁷ is lacking gender sensitivity in many priority aspects of the government’s work. The entire programme has no section on women’s rights and gender equality but rather is a neutral document with no deep arguments for achieving equality and democracy.²⁸ In addition, those in

ZauvbyjQCcAuKsChP2EaLs3934LVHO-F8> accessed 10 April 2019.

18 UN CEDAW 65th Session, State Party’s Report, CEDAW/C/ARM/5-6.

19 Siran Hovhannisyan, ‘Gender as Danger: The Discourses Around the Notion of Gender in Iravunk Newspaper’, ‘Central European University’ (2018) 1.

20 Parliament of Republic of Armenia, Yerevan, The Law of Republic of Armenia on Equal Rights and Equal Opportunities for Men and Women (2013), <www.parliament.am/drafts.php?sel=showdraft&DraftID=28173> accessed 10 April 2019.

21 Aravot Daily, ‘Fighters Against the Law on Domestic Violence Demand a Right to Speak’ (*Aravot Daily*, 9 October 2017) <www.youtube.com/watch?v=Sv_s_ENUK-I> accessed 10 April 2019.

22 Parliament of Republic of Armenia, Yerevan, The Law on Prevention and Protection of Victims of Domestic Violence and Restoration of Solidarity in Family of RA (2017).

23 Council of Europe Newsroom, ‘Armenia Signs the Istanbul Convention’ (Council of Europe 18 January 2018) <www.coe.int/en/web/istanbul-convention/-/armenia-signs-the-istanbul-convention> accessed 10 April 2019.

24 MLSA (n 17).

25 WomenNet.am, ‘The Number of Women in the New Parliament is Higher’ (*WomenNet.am*, 5 January 2019) <http://womennet.am/parliament-7-rd/> accessed 10 April 2019.

26 WomenNet.am, ‘The Lowest Numbers of Women in Local Self-Governance’ (*WomenNet.am*, 26 February 2019) <http://womennet.am/tim-women/> accessed 10 April 2019.

27 ‘The Program of the Government of Republic of Armenia 2019-2023’ (2019) <http://www.gov.am/files/docs/3133.pdf> accessed 10 April 2019

28 Women’s Resource Center Armenia, ‘The Statement of the Women’s Resource Center Armenia NGO on the RA Gov-

decision-making positions are still neglecting the voices of important actors on women's and gender issues, mainly NGOs and their members and women human rights defenders who have been active and advocated for women's rights.

One of the main reasons for this situation is a constant backlash from a so-called anti-gender movement that is very vivid in Armenia. The main actors of this anti-gender movement in Armenia are nationalist or rather far-right groups, initiatives, church representatives, MPs, and so on. The (anti-gender) attacks, such as stalking on social media, public shaming, hate speech, actual physical attacks and calls to burn and execute homosexuals and human rights defenders, are ongoing against women activists, NGOs and those MPs that could be champions for effective gender policies and mechanisms to be developed, promoted and implemented in the country.

Although legislation and international conventions have been passed with a significant effort of civil society organisations and vocal women human rights defenders there are still challenges for the implementation of these laws. One important area in this regard is legislation on protection of human rights defenders themselves as well as ensuring proper mechanisms and means for their protection on state level.

Women human rights defenders: What do they have to do with gender inequalities in Armenia?

Talking about gender inequality and women's situation in Armenia is not an end in itself in this particular analysis. Women human rights defenders challenge gender inequalities and stereotypes. Along with many other things they promote women's fundamental rights. Moreover, they also promote the importance of women's active participation in public and political life.²⁹

Women human rights defenders (and, in general, human rights defenders) in Armenia are some of the most active and prominent actors of promotion of human rights of women in the country. Women human rights defenders are at the frontline fighting as part of women's movement in Armenia. They are vocal for variety of issues (including the ones mentioned above) that affect others' lives in direct or indirect ways. Women human rights defenders fight for sexual and reproductive rights of women (including a proper education in this field). They are vocal for the cases of domestic violence, they actively participate in trials for those cases and initiate meetings with state parties, developing and proposing mechanisms for up to date laws and jurisdictions. One of the many examples of that is the law on domestic violence in Armenia that has been promoted and lobbied among MPs and other state representatives since around 2010 by field NGOs in Armenia and women human rights defenders that were active in these NGOs as well. Women human rights defenders are also vocal for lesbian, bisexual and trans women's rights in Armenia. The persistent injustices in the Armenian society that women human rights defenders raise turn out to be the main weapon for others to attack, bully and spread hate around the concepts these women are raising.

It is much more difficult when one is a woman and a human rights defender: 'Women human rights defenders are fighting on two levels: first, they fight as human rights defenders, and second, they fight as women. They carry double discrimination, and the violence against them is doubled'.³⁰

The reasons behind the targeting of women defenders are multifaceted and complex and depend on the specific contexts that they act in. Women defenders are often perceived as challenging traditional notions of family and gender roles in society, a perception that can generate

ernment Program 2019-2023' <www.facebook.com/WomenResourceCenter/posts/10161318473805012> accessed 10 April 2019.

29 Human Rights House Yerevan, 'The Rights of Human Rights Defenders' (Human Rights House Yerevan 2018) 31; Human Rights House Yerevan, 'Annual Report 2017' (Human Rights House Yerevan 2018) <https://issuu.com/human-rightshouseyerevan/docs/hrh_yerevan_annual_report_2017> accessed 10 April 2019.

30 Human Rights House Yerevan, 'The Rights of Human Rights Defenders' (n 29) 31.

hostility from State actors and from the public, the media and other non-State actors. They can be stigmatised and ostracised by community leaders, faith-based groups, families, neighbors and communities in the belief that they and their actions are a threat to religion, honor, culture or ways of life.³¹

Women human rights defenders under attack in Armenia: The case of Lara Aharonian

On 8 March 2019, Lara Aharonian, one of the most prominent human rights defenders in Armenia and the co-founder of the Women's Resource Center NGO, gave a short speech at the National Assembly of Republic of Armenia. Her speech was not a planned one, and it was a reaction to the speeches of female parliamentarians during the event on signing a Memorandum of Understanding between Armenia's Parliament and civil society organisations working on women's rights and gender equality. This was a significant step forward initiated by the gender and youth centered OxYGen Foundation in Armenia.³²

Ms Aharonian pointed out that the women that had so far been targeted by the previous state projects had only one image, mostly living in urban areas and having more opportunities in comparison to women from rural areas, elderly women, women with disabilities, lesbian, bisexual, trans women, childfree women, etc. As a matter of fact, in the chase of sensation, most of the media focused on three words: 'lesbian, bisexual, trans'. As expected another wave of hate messages and life threats started to be circulated among different groups of people, mostly on social media, targeting Ms Aharonian. The

hostile attitude and climate around her work and life was accompanied by direct threats of killing, raping and harming her family.³³

On 11 March 2019, after 'collecting' a significant amount of hate messages and threats on her social media account, the 'Museum of Hate', as she named it,³⁴ Ms Aharonian submitted a complain to the police, demanding to find those users and protect her and her family members. Later during a press conference on hate speech and intolerant climate against human rights defenders Ms Aharonian said that the state and the government must have a clear attitude about the campaign against human rights and human rights defenders in Armenia. She also mentioned the importance of clearly developed mechanisms involving women human rights defenders, so these people could feel protected in the society while protecting others' rights.³⁵ During the same press conference another human rights defender, Zaruhi Hovhannisyan, mentioned an important point on state responsibilities on this matter. According to her it does not matter how much and with what effort civil society organisations campaign for the changes amongst the public and the society, they do not have as many tools as the state does to implement those mechanisms.³⁶

Several human rights defenders have agreed that the state fails at protecting human rights defenders and it does not provide them with a safe environment. Thus, apparently, it also fails at implementing many of its international responsibilities on human rights related issues signed and/or ratified during many years. Nowadays, people who are discriminated in Armenia, including human rights defenders, have no legal protection. Moreover, the cases of dis-

31 Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, 'Women Human Rights Defenders' <www.ohchr.org/en/issues/women/wrgrs/pages/hrdefenders.aspx> accessed 10 April 2019

32 WomenNet.am, 'March has been marked with signing an MoU with the National Assembly' (*WomenNet.am*, 9 March 2019) <<http://womennet.am/hushagir-parliament-1/>> accessed 10 April 2019.

33 Media Center, 'The Culture of Hate in Armenia: What do the HRDs Suggest for the Fight Against Discrimination' (Media Center 26 March 2019) <<http://media-center.am/hy/1553673814?fbclid=IwAR0VXks9faTI7Okw5ZcRvzIHiofVEeiY6A5KPfByX7SAtUF7ep8Yy2W2O08>> accessed 10 April 2019.

34 Lara Aharonian, 'Museum of Hate, Set of Screenshots from the Hate Messages and Comments on Social Media Addressed to L Aharonian' (2019) <www.facebook.com/lara.aharonian/media_set?set=a.10156837060815673&type=3> accessed 10 April 2019.

35 Media Center (n 33).

36 Ibid.

crimination are left unpunished. Armenia has no complex and effective legislation on anti-discrimination either. Current laws do not even define the concept of ‘discrimination’.³⁷

Ms Aharonian’s case is not the only one, and it is not unique for Armenia. But in this particular case there are several layers of discrimination that are important to be observed in the context of women human rights defenders. Ms Aharonian 1) is an Armenian from diaspora (not enough Armenian, considered as an ‘other’), 2) she is different in her thinking and her appearance (she speaks up for marginalised groups and has pink hair), 3) she is a human rights defender (every person matters to her despite the differences), 4) she is a woman, etc. These and several other features are a tool especially for supporters of far-right ideology (to which human rights defenders try to resist) to spread anti-gender and hate climate amongst different groups in society. Human rights defenders are negatively targeted in Armenia but in the case of Ms Aharonian it is different because she is fighting for women’s rights, gender equality and justice.³⁸

POLICY OPTIONS/ RECOMMENDATIONS

Human rights defenders in Armenia think that there is an urgent need to reform the situation on discrimination, hate speech and intolerance.³⁹ That is why two very important organisations, the Coalition to Stop Violence against Women in Armenia and the Human Rights House Yerevan, have announced their concerns about the ongoing attacks, especially against women human rights defenders.⁴⁰ These organisations and their allies and partners came up with a statement that condemns the acts of discrimination and violence against human rights

defenders. They also made their own suggestions in order to make the system and the mechanisms of protection of human rights defenders in Armenia feasible and possible.⁴¹ According to these suggestions the government must:

1. ensure the effective work of the police when dealing with the cases of hate speech and threats against human rights defenders and investigate these cases properly;
2. adopt a gender-sensitive policy with an emphasis on gender specifics of human rights defenders;
3. prioritise human rights defenders’ protection and accept the importance and of their activities and cooperation with them;
4. work according to the UN Resolution on Human Rights Defenders,⁴² publicly accept the importance of their work and input in protection of human rights, exclude and eliminate the discrimination and violence against women human rights defenders of all ages, and work on means of protecting them;
5. adopt an informative policy and approach in order to legitimise the activities of human rights defenders; and
6. initiate changes in the Criminal Code in terms of including concrete points on punishment of the hate speech and the hate crime.

Based on this analysis and suggestions, we present our own recommendations below.

Adoption of anti-discriminatory policies and the law on anti-discrimination. Discrimination is a practice basically rooted in the Armenian society, culture and the socio-linguistic practices. A clear identification of ‘discrimination’ both as a concept and a practice is vital for local policies and laws. Such an anti-discrimination policy may be:

37 Ibid.

38 Epress.am, ‘Human Rights Defenders too Need Protection in Armenia’ (*Epress.am*, 18 March 2019) <<https://epress.am/2019/03/18/ՀԱՅԱՍՏԱՆՈՒՄ-ԻՐԱՎԱՊԱՇՏՊԱՆՆԵՐՆԵԼԻ-ՊԱՇ.html>> accessed 10 April 2019.

39 Media Center (n 33).

40 Epress.am (n 38).

41 Ibid.

42 UNGA Res, ‘Declaration on the Right and Responsibility of Individuals, Groups and Organs of Society to Promote and Protect Universally Recognized Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms’ (8 March 1999) A/RES/53/144.

7. part of the governmental programme;
8. part of mandatory policies of all ministries and state institutions; and/or
9. part of local projects implemented in different regions of the country.

Another step forward in this case could be a mindful and dedicated work of the Governmental and the National Assembly of the Republic of Armenia on the law on anti-discrimination which at this point is targeted with negative connotations and related to LGBTI+ issues only. Anti-discrimination, in fact, is a wider and a more complex concept. It targets many other vulnerable and marginalised groups and their representatives in society.

There is an urgent need for *the adoption of the State Gender Strategy* which is missing and makes the works of both grassroots organisations and human rights defenders active in the field of women's issues and gender equality much harder and unproductive. The Gender Strategy and its action plan can be an absolute guarantee for legitimised actions of the activists and women human rights defenders. This document may not only ensure the legitimacy of those actions but also give stronger political grounds to the activities of women human rights defenders in Armenia.

Together with the adoption of the strategy, the government should indirectly focus on the issues that women human rights defenders raise day by day and year by year. *The projects of the government of Armenia should be concentrated on the issues raised* in the beginning of this analysis/policy brief, namely, publicly evident and considerable attention as well as concrete actions in the areas of *prevention of and response to domestic violence, sexual and reproductive health and rights of the citizens, LGBTI+ women's rights, elderly women's situation, the situation of women living in rural areas of the country, mostly deprived from many public services, the rights of women with disabilities, women living with HIV/AIDS, and others*. The women in the mentioned groups and communities are under double discrimination also for their diverse statuses and backgrounds. So, an intersectional approach is going to be needed in this sense. Giving considerable attention to these issues may also indirectly bring

changes in the acceptance of the importance of activities by women human rights defenders, make their work valuable and efficient. In this sense, *public awareness around the UN Resolution on Human Rights Defenders must be raised and continuous campaigns must be organised*.

A set of actions to resist anti-gender, anti-feminist and anti-democratic attacks and campaigns is needed in order to have stronger responding mechanisms to the latter phenomena. Nowadays, Armenian society is highly homophobic and intolerant, and the fact of being excluded and marginalised just by being a human rights defender or a holder of diversity values is a proof for that. The resisting mechanisms can be developed between state and civil society organisations as a part of newly established cooperation between these two actors. At this moment of global extreme anti-democratic attacks there should be more cooperation between all stakeholders of all levels.

An ongoing evaluation of the work of the police is needed, especially related to investigations of the complaints by women human rights defenders (and other human rights defenders in general). Police should be ready for these kinds of cases, and the members of related departments within the police should be hyper-sensitive and responsive to these issues. Still we witness the inappropriate and unprofessional behaviour and attitudes of the police in cases of trans people, domestic violence survivors, LGBTI+ people and others. New political realities in Armenia should be the guarantee that every citizen is protected by the laws and the constitution of the country in their own ways of living.

Media should become gender-sensitive. Unfortunately, nowadays, media materials (online and printed articles, TV shows and news etc.) are concentrated on blame and sensation rather than information and professional analyses. Most of the times, media itself is the main actor of spreading the hate and intolerance in the society (also due to the anti-revolutionary and anti-gender campaigns as well as due to the lack or absence of independence in political terms). *Media campaigns on human rights and related areas of studies should be promoted and financed on the state level*. Democracy is not earned or obtained in one day. It is an ongoing process of

making societies better places to live for each and every member. And, of course, the situation of (women) human rights defenders that are at the frontline of promoting democratic values must not be overlooked.

All these nuances that have been overlooked for many years must be thoroughly considered in the new policies, strategies and projects of all local and international organisations as well. The same kind of recommendations are also directed also to higher education institutions in terms of sensitive teaching and research as well as for staff and faculty recruitment.

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