

# GENDER ANALYSIS OF THE CULTURAL FIELD IN ARMENIA

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NGO

2022

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## **Methodology and Structure of the Analysis**

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**This** report is one of the first attempts to understand and estimate the environment on gender policy in the contemporary cultural field of Armenia. In the analysis, we used the results of a qualitative study while incorporating some elements of a quantitative survey. The gender analysis aims to identify trends and fundamental issues of gender equality, women's role and engagement, the rights and freedom of expression of the LGBTQ+ community in the cultural space of Armenia within the period of 2018-2021. In the analysis, the first part refers to the legal framework of the topic and the public and media perceptions on the changes in state gender policy in the cultural field or the introductions of the new ones. The second part of the analysis presents a desk study of the activities and local phenomena that work towards the actualization and dissemination of the discourse on gender equality in the modern cultural space.

## **Background**

**Over** the past two decades, several non-governmental organizations in Armenia have been actively working towards the democratization of various spheres while advocating for and introducing a discourse on gender equality, women's engagement, and the protection of LGBTQ + community rights. It is worth mentioning the constant and efficient work of Pink Armenia<sup>1</sup>, Women's Resource Center<sup>2</sup>, the Coalition to Stop Violence Against Women<sup>3</sup>, and

**1** See periodic reports on the violation of the rights and freedoms of LGBTQ+ representatives on the website of the organization <https://www.pinkarmenia.org/en/publications/report/>

**2** One of the rare attempts to research and analyze the situation of women engagement, gender discrimination, etc. is carried out by this organization. Reports and studies can be found on the organization's website: <https://womenofarmenia.org/publications-research/>

**3** See "Challenges And Gaps in Armenia's Response to Domestic Violence" report prepared by the Coalition to Stop Violence against Women in 2020 [https://coalitionagainstviolence.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/DOMESTIC-VIOLENCE\\_ENG\\_30\\_06.2020.pdf](https://coalitionagainstviolence.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/DOMESTIC-VIOLENCE_ENG_30_06.2020.pdf)

many other CSOs and public initiatives. The positive impact of these organizations and initiatives towards gender equality and equal representations of women and men in the country is indisputable. In most recent years, positive dynamics can be observed from the rigid rejection of the gender equality discourse and advocacy of LGBTQ+ rights in the early 2000s to moderate neutrality of state authorities and local media after 2018 to the present.

While influencing public discourse, developing a new vocabulary, and regularly working to create alternative educational platforms, civil society organizations were among the lobbyists for the Law on “Providing equal rights and equal opportunities for women and men” (adopted in 2013) and the ratification of the Istanbul Convention (under discussion since 2017 and since 2019 becoming the subject of active public and political polemics). Despite the active work of several organizations, legislative changes and improvements, social attitudes towards gender equality and freedom of expression of the LGBTQ+ community periodically become the subject of high-profile scandals and illustrate that a high level of intolerance continues to persist in the Armenian society, and discriminatory practices are regularly applied towards women and LGBTQ+ community members.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>4</sup> One of the scandalous cases, which was covered widely by the local and international media were the events in 2018, when a group of young LGBTQ activists were attacked by local residents in the village of Shurnukh, Syunik region, Armenia. See the report of Pink Armenia on the case: <https://www.pinkarmenia.org/en/news/details-of-the-incident-that-took-place-in-the-village-of-shurnukh/>. Another case which became a matter of continuous and conflicted discussions was the creation and publication of the book “My body is private” book by the Sexual Assault Crisis Center NGO in 2019, and the debates on the revision of the mandatory reading list in the public school programs in 2020, see: <https://newmedia.am/am/news/16910>. It is worth mentioning, that all these scandals fundamentally had the same reaction mechanism of right and far-right radical parliamentary or non-parliamentary political forces, who represent any attempts at innovation in the cultural and educational sphere related to gender policy as an attempt to “distort national values.”.

Despite the intensive efforts by many CSOs and initiatives towards understanding gender equality issues, there are still no studies of the cultural sector in the context of gender equality, the role, and women's engagement. Almost all research projects are aimed at certain social phenomena, while the professional sphere of cultural figures and cultural policy remains outside the scope of gender analysis implemented till now. For instance, with all the prevailing public interest in the rhetoric and language of the media from a gender perspective, there is practically no research<sup>5</sup> (qualitative or quantitative) on the film production distributed by local TV channels and the image of gender balance and hierarchy they contain. There are also no statistics and analytical materials on the gender balance situation in the field of contemporary art and literature, apart from the rare academic research articles aimed at studying individual cases of women's literature or women's visual culture.

## **Timeframe**

**There** is a need for defining the historical period we take as a basis for reflections on gender analysis of the cultural industry in Armenia. The importance of determining the timeframe of this research lies in the fact that Armenian culture (in inseparable connection with political, economic, and other processes) developed unevenly and other cultural norms and traditions influenced it too. In many respects, Armenia continues to remain under the impact of the Soviet colonial past, but at the same time strives to revive a process of decolonization and defining its boundaries of identity.

<sup>5</sup> There are only a couple of similar researches created in last 2-3 years. See *Discrimination and Violence on TV Channels and Newspapers: How Gender Sensitive is Armenian Media? Summary of the Monitoring Results (2019)*

[https://oxygen.org.am/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/Media-Monitoring-Report\\_Final.pdf](https://oxygen.org.am/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/Media-Monitoring-Report_Final.pdf);

*Manifestations of sexism in the public sphere and public speech. Guide (2020)* <https://oxygen.org.am/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/.pdf>

In short, the contemporary cultural field in Armenia does not have the tendency of gradual and continuous development and does not portray a single monolithic image. The contemporary culture of the country differs drastically from the situation during the pre-soviet and Soviet periods in Armenia. The latter can become the subject of a separate study where the dynamics of the dissemination of Soviet culture (Sovietization) and the parallel development of dissident culture can be traced. The tendencies of the cultural field changed drastically with the independence of the country and separation from the Soviet Union in 1991. In general, the period of independence highlighted new prospects for cultural development, based on the desire for democratization and the search for new identities. Not only did the local/internal actors influence the period, but also the diasporic culture left an important mark in this process.<sup>6</sup> However, shortly after gaining independence, the country fell into an economic crisis. In addition, a long-lasting military conflict with Azerbaijan (1991-1994) prevented the society from creating a space for reflections on the past and creation of a critical language concerning colonial history. Despite some attempts made by the government and newly formed civil society actors, it remained underdeveloped for many years. The complex political situation, economic crisis, consequences of the 4-year-long war, and devastating

<sup>6</sup> For example, the Armenian Center for Contemporary Experimental Art (ACCEA) was established by the representative of the American diaspora in 1992 (the official opening of the exhibition space in 1995). Today the ACCEA is the only large-scale center for experimental art, supporting the early-career artists and collecting the archive of contemporary Armenian art. Another important example of diaspora influence is the Cafesjian Center for Contemporary Art, opened in 2009. The reinterpretation of the diasporal and at the same time the Soviet dissident past is the opening of the Sergei Parajanov Museum in Yerevan in the early 1990s. As an artist, often working in the context of queer art, Parajanov was perceived as a dissident who was imprisoned by the Soviet authorities for homosexuality, but after the opening of the museum, Parajanov became one of the most important filmmakers and artists of modern Armenia and the narrative about his work changed dramatically.

earthquake in Spitak - all of these events eliminated from the social and political discourse the conversation about the fundamental human rights, gender equality in general, let alone gender equality issues in separate sectors, such as the cultural field.

In this analysis, we will not explore the whole independence period (1991-2021), a period of complex and multipolar processes. We take as an object of analysis only the period of active cultural development, differentiated by changes in the context of gender policy in culture and the introduction of the discourse about gender equality and the rise of issues of the LGBTQ+ community.

In the gender analysis of a contemporary culture in Armenia, we will pay special attention to the period that began during the Velvet Revolution (2018), where women and youth had active participation. We can state that along with the Velvet Revolution, a new cult of politics and politics of culture developed, in which women's role and significance were first articulated not only by the non-governmental sector but also by the official authorities. After the revolution, many actors from the opposition, who had previously taken an active part in civil society activism (including in the activism towards gender politics), joined the new government.<sup>7</sup> Many cultural figures during the revolution days supported the democratic values proposed by the leaders of the revolution, who used to mention the major role of gender equality and the role of women and feminist organizations and collectives in the future of Armenia. Though during the revolution days these

<sup>7</sup> See the article ““Women belong in the Revolution?!” | A study on gender equality in Armenian politics”, prepared by the Caucasus Research Resource Center Armenia: <https://www.crrc.am/en/blog/women-belong-in-the-revolution-a-study-on-gender-equality-in-armenian-politics/>

statements promised a great change, no real articulation of women's engagement happened once the revolutionary party came to power. As it is stated in the USAID Gender Analysis Report of 2019: "After the "velvet revolution" (April - May 2018), for the first time in Armenia's history, a prime minister highlighted the role of women in the country's future success. On May 8, Nikol Pashinyan promised the National Assembly he would ensure proper representation for women, who he acknowledged "played a major role" in unseating Sargsyan and the ruling Republican Party. Pashinyan's public address marked a significant step forward. However, the appointments to the cabinet were disappointing to many female civil society activists. Only two of the new government's 17 ministers were women, and all three deputy prime ministers were men."<sup>8</sup>

## **Scope of the Cultural Space**

**8**

**Speaking** about the cultural space of contemporary Armenia, we refer to the institutional and non-institutional culture and those ideas about culture formed as a result of complex collisions and mutual influences of these two types of cultural actors. At the same time, it is necessary to separate the state policy of culture and the agenda formed by the efforts of public, independent creative formations. The projects supported, financed, and/or managed by the government often have a more national (sometimes even nationalistic) nature, directed to the reproduction and preservation of the cultural traditions of the country (more often it is about the preservation of those forms of the cultural past that are in one way or another connected with national identity). Within this context, gender discourse is eliminated from the

<sup>8</sup> USAID/Armenia Gender Analysis Report, August 2019, p. 31 <https://banyanglobal.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/USAID-Armenia-Gender-Analysis-Report-1.pdf>



culture as such. The so-called independent cultural actors (artistic collectives whose roots go back to dissident art, non-governmental cultural organizations, NGOs, cultural institutions, etc.) are keener to address the gender equality issues, rights, and freedoms of women and the LGBTQ+ community.

In the long-term strategic development plan of the Republic of Armenia for 2014-2025 published on the website of the Armenian Government, the following paragraphs are allocated to culture (in the human resources section):

- \* preservation of tangible and intangible cultural heritage;
- \* development and management of cultural infrastructure;
- \* development of international cultural connections;
- \* public television.

In the meanwhile, in the Governmental Decision of 2019 on “Gender Policy in The Republic of Armenia: Implementation Strategy for 2019-2023 and Approval of the Events Program” the cultural sphere is mentioned in the section of the goals of preventing gender discrimination, which is as follows: overcoming gender stereotypes in the field of culture. The Strategic Plan includes a list of events to be organized within the given period, where two out of 13 measures are referring to the cultural field: support of projects with the participation of women artists in various fields of culture (performance, exhibition, concert); and organizing exhibitions of works by women artists in museums and libraries (tapestry, embroidery, carpet weaving, carpet weaving, puppetry, painting), master classes, meetings.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>9</sup> For more detailed information see the Decision of Armenian Government N1334-L, 19th of September 2019, <http://ori.mtad.am/files/docs/43296.pdf>

Both in these strategic plans and the announcements of governmental financial support to the cultural field, the gender equality issues, women engagement, and issues of LGBTQ+ people are not addressed.

Even though both state cultural policy and strategies of non-governmental institutions never articulate the gender equality issue, the following image can be portrayed based on the available documentation, statements, reports, and other informational resources:

### **State cultural institutions**

- \* **The absence of gender policy in the dissemination of financial resources and creation of new opportunities in the cultural field;**
- \* **The absence of gender equality component monitoring in the cultural sphere;**
- \* **Strategic understanding of culture as national culture** (it is important to note that while maintaining national culture, decisions on the development of the field are also business-oriented and sometimes contradictory and destructive to cultural heritage)

### **Non-Governmental Cultural Institutions**

- \* **Chaotic, uneven, and sometimes without continuous agenda but at the same time sustain discourse on gender equality**, the role, and importance of women engagement in the cultural field;
- \* **Women are not only quantitatively equal but are often decision-makers;<sup>10</sup>**
- \* **Strategic understanding of culture as an**

**10** This statement is based on the quantitative analysis we made based on the survey within the independent cultural institutions in Armenia. During September 1-30, we surveyed cultural organizations that are leaders in a particular area, and their work is indicative for the field. Representatives of 15 organizations joined the survey, including Pen Armenia, Cafesjian Art Center, Golden Apricot Film Festival, HayArt Center, and other organizations from the literature, theater, cinema, contemporary art, and other fields, both the administrative regulations of the institution, the distribution of opportunities and roles, and the content produced by them. Though the organizations do not have clearly stated agenda and development plan for the gender mainstreaming and addressing the gender equality issues, the survey illustrates that within these organizations women are the majority not only as general workers, but also in managerial positions, and they play an important role in decision making processes.

**innovative tool for the development** of the creative potential of society, development of civil society (democratic values at the heart of most projects, an attempt to develop a non-discriminatory language)

We should consider that the feminization of such spheres as culture or education does not lead to a more positive picture of gender equality, but quite the opposite. These are spheres where labor is low-paid and requires a lot of effort in return. Workers of the field do not acquire social or economic significant capital. Sometimes the feminization of industries leads to a devaluation of these industries themselves, which are perceived in society as “not a male occupation,” that is, not profitable enough and not serious enough.

## **The Legal Framework of Gender and Cultural Field Regulations in Armenia**

**Armenia** adopted the law “On the Fundamentals of Cultural Legislation” in 2002 (ՀՕ-465-Ն). It is the only law defining goals, principles, concepts of the cultural field, establishing the aims of state cultural policy, etc. The law had three minor adaptations and changes till now, which do not change the main content of the law and any definitions one can find here. The law stresses that the goals of state cultural policy are the public’s awareness of culture as a means of development; the search of new values and new ideas; creation of conditions for the reproduction and development of the creative potential of the society; and the formation of the civil society. According to the law, the principles of state cultural policy include freedom of cultural and creative sphere, preference of cultural values of international importance, independence of cultural organizations.

The law grants equal rights for everyone regardless of their nationality, race, sex, language, religion, beliefs, social origin, property, and another status, as

an inalienable right of every person in participation in the cultural life of the society and carrying out cultural activities in the territory of the Republic of Armenia, In addition, everyone has a right to creativity, both professionally and as an amateur, as well as everyone, has a right to communicate cultural values, to use any available state cultural resources in accordance with the legislation of RA.

Other laws regulating the cultural field one can find at the website of the Ministry of the Education, Science, Culture, and Sports of the RA, are RA Law on Language, RA Law on State Awards, and Honorary Titles of the Republic of Armenia, RA Law on State Non-Commercial Organizations', RA Law on the Preservation and Use of Immovable Monuments and Historical History and Cultural Monuments and Historic Environment, RA Law on Immovable History and Cultural Monuments of the Republic of Armenia, RA Law on Export and Import of Cultural Property, RA Law on Libraries and Library Affairs, RA Law on Intangible Cultural Heritage. All these laws are regulating the overall procedures of the cultural field, stressing the importance of traditional and national culture preservation, while the creation and development of the new tendencies, issues of cultural diversity, and equality are still undermined.

Armenia has several memorandums with different countries (Russian Federation, Israel, Romania, Kyrgyzstan, Argentina, Cyprus, the Oriental Republic of Uruguay, China, Belarus, and many others) towards cooperation in the fields of education, sport, science, and culture. These memorandums highlight the cultural exchange, but only within the traditional national (ethnic) culture (e.g. preservation of cultural heritage).

An addition to the legal framework of the cultural field was the adoption of the RA Law on Cinematography. The public discussions for the adoption

of this law started in 2017, and after many debates, suggestions, and revisions, the law was adopted by the RA National Assembly on the 30th of June 2021, which is the first law regulating a single cultural field. One of the notions brought to the attention of the Armenian Government by all the activists, cultural actors, and people related to the field was the absence of any policy or regulations on how the State's financial support is disseminated. This law establishes the principles of State policy regarding cinematography, clearly stating the ways the Government should support the field. While the law has undergone long discussions, revisions, and developments till its adoption, and the public sector was actively involved in its development, it still does not refer to any gender equality issue in the field.

On the other hand, the Law on "Providing equal rights and equal opportunities for women and men" adopted in 2013, states that the Government of the RA within its powers ensures the implementation of the state policy on gender equality. According to this law, one of the ways to ensure the development of gender equality is the establishment of effective legal and organizational mechanisms to implement the state policy on gender equality. Yet, there are still no specific regulations and organizational mechanisms represented in any law of the cultural field allowing to foster the cultural programs and initiatives by/for women funded by the government.

This law defines the guarantees of equal rights and equal opportunities for women and men in political, social, economic, cultural, social life, and other spheres and regulates the relations arising in connection with them. It states that direct and indirect gender discrimination is prohibited in all spheres of public life and determines ways of direct discrimination, highlighting the prohibition of different remuneration for the same or equivalent work, any

change (increase or decrease) in remuneration, or deterioration of working conditions by gender.

Gender equality is fundamental to ensuring a diversity of cultural expressions and equal opportunities in cultural and artistic work. According to the recent publication of UNESCO “Gender & Creativity: Progress on the Precipice,”<sup>11</sup> “women and gender diverse artists and creators continue to face numerous barriers, including unequal access to decent work, fair remuneration, and leadership positions, as well as barriers to seniority.”

Though unequal remuneration based on gender is prohibited by the RA law “Providing equal rights and equal opportunities for women and men,” the recent research on the gender pay gap in Armenia made by UN Women shows that the issue continues to be vital in the country.<sup>12</sup> While the research does not highlight the issue of the gender pay gap in the cultural field specifically, the general study of the overall labor market showcases that there is a 23% pay gap in all spheres and occupations in Armenia.

**14**

## **Public Perceptions of the Laws on the Gender Equality**

**Despite** the efforts to reduce gender inequalities by the RA government in national legislation, a gap between legislation and implementation continues to exist, and gender inequalities are still socially accepted or tolerated. This is one of the main conclusions made in the USAID/Armenia Gender Analysis Report (August, 2019)<sup>13</sup>. The report states that social

<sup>11</sup> Bridget C. 2021. Gender & creativity: progress on the precipice, special edition <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000375706/PDF/375706eng.pdf.multi>

<sup>12</sup> Analysis of The Gender Pay Gap and Gender Inequality in The Labour Market in Armenia, 2020, UN Women

<sup>13</sup> USAID/Armenia Gender Analysis Report, August 2019, p. 31 <https://banyanglobal.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/USAID-Armenia-Gender-Analysis-Report-1.pdf>

norms play a vital role in limiting women’s participation in all spheres. This conclusion is illustrated in all the demonstrations against adoption of laws for gender equality, preventing and combating violence against women, etc.

In 2013, while the discussions on adoption of “Providing equal rights and equal opportunities for women and men” law were in process, the public protests were organized against it, claiming that it is a direct threat to the traditional Armenian family and cultural norms. An important role in these protests had also clergymen of the Armenian Apostolic Church, who were even threatened by the use of the term “gender”.<sup>14</sup> All the news reports on the protests illustrate that the society felt threatened by the law due to the misunderstanding of basic principles of gender equality. The slogans protesters use during these demonstrations are implying to the law as a source of distortion of traditional Armenian culture and cultural norms.

Another subject for such misperceptions was the ratification process of the Istanbul Convention<sup>15</sup> in Armenia. The process started in 2017<sup>16</sup>, when the Government of Armenia approved the signing of the Convention on December 28 with the initiative of the Council of Europe. The better preparation of

**14** The articles on the protests against the “Providing equal rights and equal opportunities for women and men” law can be found by the following link: <https://tinyurl.com/5y53nvd>

**15** Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence <https://www.coe.int/en/web/istanbul-convention/text-of-the-convention>

**16** In 2017 another law was adopted by the Armenian government on “Prevention of Domestic Violence, Protection of People Suffered from Domestic Violence and Restoration of Solidarity in Families.” The law was adopted under the strong public and political pressure, which resulted in many serious legislative gaps.

the country continued in 2019<sup>17</sup>, which arose a new wave of public and far-right non-parliamentary political parties' unrest, who stated that the eradication of prejudices, traditions, customs and all other phenomena based on the stereotypical division of men and women is a major threat to Armenian society and destroying the national value system.<sup>18</sup>

## **The Gender Discourse** **in the Non-Governmental** **Cultural Sphere** **in Armenia** (results of the desk-study)

**16**

**While** in the official cultural space the discourse on the gender equality and LGBTQ+ rights are never on the agenda, and some rare references to this topic can be traces only during some TV shows in a sarcastic and comic way, which directly or indirectly are discriminating women and LGBTQ+ community; many non-governmental organizations and independent cultural actors are actively working towards raising the gender equality issues, which served as one of the prerequisites for the preparation and organization of the Velvet Revolution in 2018.

Below we will present the main organizations, collectives and initiatives influencing the cultural field of Armenia while advocating for gender equality.

**17** The Path towards Armenia's Ratification of the Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence  
<https://www.coe.int/en/web/genderequality/preventing-and-combating-violence-against-women-and-domestic-violence-in-armenia-continuing-the-path-towards-ratification-of-the-istanbul-convention-2019-2021->

**18** Many public and political organizations protested against Istanbul Convention, such as Kamq and Veto public initiatives <https://tinyurl.com/f4ee975c> or <https://veto.am/hy/page/istanbul-convention>





### **Revolutionary Sensorium**

58th International Art Exhibition,

La Biennale di Venezia 2019

Curator: Susanna Gyulamiryan

Participants: feminist scholars and activists

One of the most important attempts of reflections on the Velvet Revolution of 2018 and the women's role and importance within these events became the Armenian exposition in the 2019 Viennese Biennale. The curator of Armenian pavilion was Susanna Gyulamiryan, an experienced art historian, who's main area of interest and research is Armenian feminist art. She is the director of the Art and Cultural Studies Laboratory. For the first time in the history of Armenian contemporary art, the country was represented by the predominantly feminist theme.

In particular, the second part of the exposition "Dialogues about Revolution and Power" featured video

interviews with queer and feminist activists, among which one could see interviews with Gayane Ayvazyan, Anna Nikoghosyan and Anna Zhamkochyan. These are the activist women who have worked for many years to protect the rights and freedoms of women and LGBTQ+ people in Armenia. It's worth mentioning, that one of them changed the role of an activist and social researcher to a political actor: Anna Zhamakochyan became the Deputy Minister of the Work and Social Affairs.

18



### **Queering Yerevan Collective**

For several years from now the Queering Yerevan Collective is functioning as one of the main artistic collective advocating for queer rights and freedoms in Armenian cultural and art field. This is an open collective with permanent and temporary members. The members of this collective are mainly women artists, philosophers, translators, researchers and writers. The artistic group organizes regular performances, exhibitions, prepares publications of feminist manifests, etc. During 2017-2019 the Queering Yerevan Collective organized a range of different events under the "Queering Yerevan Happenings" title, which were mainly different exhibitions of

Armenian contemporary art (installations, photography, graphic art, videoart, etc.), screenings and discussions of queer films and panel discussions of queer-activists, feminist philosophers, etc. The three-year-long project had an important influence not only on local, in-country level, but also its importance was highlighted in regional and international level. The project served as a platform for international exchange of artists and queer activists from Armenia, Georgia, Belarus, Ukraine, Greece, Germany, USA, France, etc. The activities took place in Yerevan, Armenia and Tbilisi, Georgia. Apart from a wide involvement of feminist artists, the project had also an educational and illuminative role, as all the feminist and queer films were presented to Armenian society with Armenian translation, and the expositions included some fundamental feminist texts, which were translated into Armenian from English and French.



### **FemLibrary Armenia**

In recent years, one of the important spaces and initiatives supporting feminist art and thinking has been the FemLibrary. The initiative was launched by the renowned expert on the history of gender politics and activist Anna Nikoghosyan, who says the following in her announcement: “FemLibrary Armenia is a feminist initiative that aims at creating a safe

space for feminist education, knowledge building and sharing, organizing and resistance.” The main collection of books on feminism was donated to the library by private donors and philanthropists, and the library collected a large amount of literature through crowdfunding in a fairly short time. The library has indeed become one of the rare places in the city where feminist discussions, film screenings, book presentations, educational lectures, etc. were held regularly. The public did not always positively perceive the creation of this space, and the Fem-Library owners were forced to change the venue several times.

**20**



#### **4PLUS**

4Plus organization was created by a group of women photographers in 2012, who work in the sphere of documentary and artistic photography. The leader of this organization is Nazik Armenakyan, one of the rare artists in Armenia who regularly addresses taboo topics of Armenian society and tries to visualize them. In 2016 Nazik published a book named “The stamp of loneliness”, where for the first time the

photographs and narratives tell the story of everyday life of sex workers from LGBTQ+ community. The publication of this book had quite a scandalous reaction in Armenian media and in a short time became a matter of active discussions in the society. Nazik and other members of this photographic collective regularly address very sensitive themes in the country, striving to actualize the issue of gender politics in Armenian culture both with their photographs and by sharing their experience as women photographers. One of the most sensitive and taboo topics Nazik Armenakian worked with and published a series of visual storytelling, are the stories of HIV-infected women. The series addresses how these women became victims of stereotypes and discriminatory attitudes. Another topic that the collective's photographers regularly work with is the role of women in wartime.



### **Gender in Literature and Translation**

Over the past years, one of the most active spheres of culture in Armenia, where gender discourse is being transformed and issues of gender equality and the role of women in the historical perspective are regularly raised, is literature. A number of authors create and publish feminist and queer literature in Armenian, which serves as a platform for addressing

the important issues of women and LGBTQ+ community, while creating prerequisites for the Armenian language development. Among these authors an indisputably important role play Shushan Avagyan, Armen of Armenia, Hovhannes Tekgyozyan, and others. These writers and the dissemination of their works are essential since, in Armenian school textbooks, the mention of women writers is reduced to 2-5 percent. And in the publications and public speeches of these authors, the names of Armenian writers such as Zabel Yesayan, Srбуhi Tusap, Shushanik Kurghiyana are constantly re-actualized.

In addition to literary works written in Armenian, it is necessary to emphasize the importance of translations of feminist literature, which also become the subject of new discussions and critical thinking. In recent years, the works of such authors as Judith Butler, Gayatri Spivak, Hannah Arendt, Julia Kristeva have been translated into Armenian. Shushan Avagyan with collaboration of a group of young translators had an important role in the translation of feminist literature. A great contribution in this sphere has been the publications and translations by the Socioscope non-governmental organization, which publish not only reports on the gender situation in Armenia, but also research papers that intersect with the cultural sphere. A recent publication by Socioscope, called "Sexuality in Armenian [Con]texts" addresses the issues of sexuality and their cultural and political meanings in literature, press, legal and religious documents (authors: Zhanna Andriasyan, Eduard Danielyan, Anna Zhamakochyan, Mariam Khalatyan, Hrachya Hakobyan, Arpy Manusyan, Irina Shakhanazaryan and Lusine Chergeshtyan).



### **The Role of CSOs and Civic Activism**

Civil society organizations and actors of civic activism play an important role towards raising gender equality issues in Armenia. These are mainly organizations working with the issues of violence against women and domestic violence, women discrimination, LGBTQ+ community rights. Despite many efforts to reduce gender inequalities at a national level, these inequalities are still socially accepted and/or tolerated.

To address the gender inequality issues, CSOs and civic activists organize public protests, demonstrations, but in recent years they use the means of cultural and art expressions as well. In this context, art interventions organized by the Coalition to Stop Violence Against Women (for example, “Love is not Violence” 2021) and public dance performances by houZANK u ZANQ (“Excitement and Call”) are of great importance and became a matter of broad social response. Coalition to Stop Violence Against Women had an impressive intervention in urban space in the fall of 2021, when activists pasted red ribbons on trees in the city center with the names of women killed in domestic violence.

**Conclusion** **The carried** out analysis allows us to give answers to some essential questions regarding gender equality in the cultural sphere of Armenia.

**1. The analysis shows** that according to the Armenian legislation women and men have equal access to resources and funds distributed by the state, local non-governmental organizations, and foreign donors. However, in reality, despite the absence of restrictions and special conditions for women and men, women in Armenia do not use the resources of the cultural sector to the same extent, since the social hierarchy often does not allow them to receive a proper education (including in the sphere of culture), to be represented in the media and the social burden does not allow women to be involved in many cultural spheres. As stated in the USAID Gender Analysis report of 2019, socio-economic factors, women's household responsibilities, as well as women's lack of leadership skills, also play a significant role in limiting women's participation. At the same time, non-governmental cultural institutions, as shown by quantitative analysis, have a balanced distribution of resources between men and women. In the meantime, there is no monitoring system regarding the gender distribution of roles in the management of the cultural sphere, which will allow us to have a more accurate image of this issue.

**2. State cultural policy** aims to preserve and reproduce national cultural traditions and heritage, the study and reflections of these traditions and heritage. In traditional national culture, a more passive role is assigned to women, sometimes limited only by their reproductive abilities and



subordination to the will of the men. It leads to the fact that with the help of various media, such a passive and discriminated norm of women's role in a patriarchal society is regularly broadcasted. In the meanwhile, the representatives of the LGBTQ+ community have never been represented in the 'official' culture. At the same time, cultural institutions and individual actors in Armenia regularly develop and implement projects aimed at deconstructing the image of a patriarchal society. In general, it should be noted that despite the tremendous work done by NGOs and contemporary art actors, and despite the positive dynamics, general norms and ideas about gender roles in Armenia remain patriarchal.

**3. Even though** women are sometimes the majority in the cultural sphere, the decision-makers in governmental cultural institutions are men. While in the non-governmental institutions the decisions are made either in a balanced way (by men and women equally) or in some spheres (cinematography, literature), women are more likely to be the decision-makers. However, the cultural sphere is not a priority in the strategic plans of the state and is undermined in terms of financing and support, therefore the presence of a large number of women in this sector is not so much a positive phenomenon as an indicator of the general situation of discrimination against women in society.

**4. All human beings** are equal before the law of RA: this statement is stipulated in the Constitution. The law on "Providing equal rights and equal opportunities for women and men" states that in all spheres the country should strive for gender

equality, and there are no legislative means to support discriminatory policies. However, cultural perceptions, stereotypes, and the general socio-cultural position of women remain within the patriarchal system. The issue of gender equality and attempts to improve the legislative field (for example the ratification of the Istanbul Convention) are exploited by parliamentary and non-parliamentary oppositions and presented as an attempt to distort the traditional/national cultural values by the liberal governmental actors.

**5. The state institutes** of culture in Armenia rarely take on the role of creator or promoter of gender discourse. Therefore, the public and non-governmental organizations (and mostly not cultural ones) are the main actors in the development of the discourse. During the last 3-5 years, various social organizations often cover the issue of discrimination against women and the LGBTQ+ community, conduct various actions of civil disobedience and protest actions against domestic violence, etc. The analysis shows that such organizations often use the name language of modern experience, proposing their own needs in the form of preferences, art installation, various theatrical representations, photography, and presentation. The analysis shows that these organizations often use the language of contemporary art, addressing their concerns and demands in the form of performances, art installations, different theatrical performances, photo exhibitions, etc.

## **General** **Recommendations**

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**The analysis** shows that there are many gaps in cultural policy in Armenia to address gender equality. Thus there is a need for some essential transformations. Such democratic values as equal rights of men and women, active involvement of women in all spheres, representation of women and the LGBTQ+ community in the cultural space will be ensured as a result of several changes:

- \* **Some examples** of self-organized associations for the protection of workers' rights in state cultural institutions (such as The Guild of the Matenadaran) show that similar practice in cultural institutions is necessary in general to protect the rights of workers and to suppress harassment, discriminatory attitudes towards women and LGBTQ+ people in the sphere. To ensure such self-organization initiatives, educational and awareness-raising work needs to be done, and in addition non-governmental, external resources can be allocated towards sustaining these initiatives to ensure their sustainability.
- \* **Cultural workers** (both administrators/managers, and artists/creators) are not aware of their rights and responsibilities. As a result, they become victims of the discriminatory policies of certain institutions. One of the most effective ways to understand and address this problem is to share experiences of both local and regional/international best practices.
- \* **The analysis shows** that both governmental and non-governmental cultural institutions do not have any specific internal regulation, agenda, or policy to regulate their work towards gender equality within their organizational structure and

in their work. We believe that every organization should have such internal regulations to ensure gender equality and eliminate discrimination against women and LGBTQ+ people.

- \* **Despite the law** on gender equality in Armenia, there is a lack of understanding of the implementation policy of this law. There are no mechanisms developed by the government and among cultural organizations. An essential step towards resolving this issue can be the public discussions about possible amendments and additions in the legal framework.
- \* **It also seems urgently** necessary to create a system for monitoring the gender component of all cultural organizations. Our analysis shows that even those organizations which achieve a positive experience in the context of the absence of gender discrimination, do not have a system for tracking this situation, they are guided by an approximate knowledge of the gender image of the administrative resource and the created content.
- \* **The Armenian government** has many memorandums with other countries on cultural cooperation and cultural exchange. However, in practice, these agreements lead to the fact that the traditional national (ethnic) culture of Armenia is represented in the partner countries and vice versa, often very far from contemporary social and political processes and always narrativizing the patriarchal system of values. When concluding such agreements, it seems to us that it is necessary to clearly state that not only traditional forms of culture should be illustrated in the exchange, but also contemporary art, and the gender com-

ponent of the exchange should also be included in such agreements.

- \* **Since the state-owned media** (mainly public TV and radio) continue to disseminate exclusively traditional Armenian culture with the established norms of women representation in a discriminated way, it is advisable to intervene and change this tradition regularly. Such interventions can be implemented with the help of a wide variety of cultural practices (literature and translation activities of feminist discourse, enhancement of cinema and photography, supporting gender discourse, etc.).

**The Report was prepared by Sona Kalantaryan  
and Tigran Amiryan within the framework  
of the New Democracy Fund Program  
of the Danish Cultural Institute**

**Special thanks to Stella Chandirian for the final  
review and valuable advice and consultation;  
Rafik Santrosyan and Anahit Simonyan  
for helping our team  
to find available resources.**

# **USEFUL LINKS**

**Sexual Assault Crisis Center, Armenia**  
**<http://saccarmenia.org/en/>**

**Women's Resource Center, Armenia**  
**<https://womenofarmenia.org>**

**Coalition to Stop Violence against Women**  
**<https://coalitionagainstviolence.org/en/>**

**Resource Center for Women's Empowerment NGO**  
**<https://www.facebook.com/RCWEHrazdanNGO>**

**Human Rights House Yerevan**  
**<https://hrhyerevan.org/>**

**Pink Armenia**  
**<https://www.pinkarmenia.org/>**

**Real World, Real People NGO**  
**<http://www.realwrp.com/english>**

**Socioscope NGO**  
**<https://socioscope.am/en/>**

**Human Rights Research Center**  
**<https://www.rightsresearch.net/>**

**PEN Armenia**  
**<https://penarmenia.org/>**

**Helsinki Association for Human Rights**  
**<https://hahr.am/?lang=en>**

**4Plus**  
**<https://www.4plus.org/>**

**Queering Yerevan Collective**  
**<http://queeringyerevan.blogspot.com/>**

**Kooyrigs • Զոյրիկս • Sisters**  
**<https://kooyrigs.org/>**

