

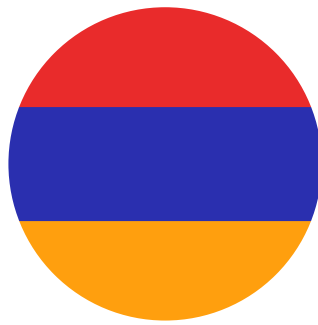


Co-funded by  
the European Union

# WOMEN SOCIAL ENTREPRENEURSHIP

## COUNTRY REPORT

### ARMENIA





FFunded by the European Union. Views and opinions expressed are however those of the author(s) only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union or the European Education and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA). Neither the European Union nor EACEA can be held responsible for them.

2022-1-IE01-KA220-ADU-000089829



[u.power](#)



[u.powerproject](#)



[www.upowererasmus.com](http://www.upowererasmus.com)



Co-funded by  
the European Union



**2.78 mil**

Population

**61.00%**

Females' with tertiary education level

**55.00%**

Share of females

**15.20%**

Females' unemployment rate

**46.71%**

Females' with low education level

**N/A**

Females' long-term unemployment rate

### Development of social enterprises

Social entrepreneurship in Armenia is an emerging concept. Although the legal framework is generally conducive to entrepreneurship, there are no specific regulations related to social enterprises or for empowering women in this field. An attempt has been made to provide a clear definition of social entrepreneurship within a Concept Paper on Social Entrepreneurship, which was initially developed by the EBRD Business Support Office in 2017 and is now led by Impact Hub Yerevan. It also provides recommendations for the social entrepreneurship development in the country. However, it is not expected to be an elaborate legislative initiative at the moment and its main aim is to increase awareness of social entrepreneurship among public officials as well as to provide clarity on the term to the general public. Within the growing interest in female entrepreneurship and social entrepreneurship as well as support programmes, (mainly funded by international donors such as the European Union, USAID, and, in some cases, Armenian organisations) the importance of social entrepreneurship in Armenia is increasing.

### The main social impact areas

Employment and integrating vulnerable groups, such as people with disabilities, empowering women, especially those outside of major urban centres, giving parents of children with disabilities flexible income generation opportunities, community (village) development, and youth empowerment.

### The main economic sectors for social enterprises

The service/hospitality sector (cafes, etc.), Manufacturing of handmade gifts, souvenirs and other small items, Agriculture, including processed items such as jams, honey, etc.

### Ecosystem – women in social entrepreneurship

There is no updated information available in Armenia about the number of social enterprises in the country, especially those social enterprises founded by women.

U.POWER expert interviews suggest that the total number of social enterprises in Armenia is around 150, but this is constantly changing as several incubation programs in the country encourage the establishment of new ones, while older ones close over time. The general view of experts is that most of the social enterprises in the country are founded and run by women, with estimates as high as 75-80%. This has been the situation from the very beginning of the development of this field in the country (around 2016-17) and has not changed since then.

### Key findings on women social entrepreneurship

While women's entrepreneurship is slowly emerging in Armenia thanks to various donor-led programs, commercial entrepreneurship is still perceived as a "profession for men." However, the picture is very different when it comes to social entrepreneurship.

# ARMENIA

In Armenia, women have started and constitute the majority of the managers of social companies, which can be explained by several reasons: (1) many social enterprises start as civil society organisations (usually led by women), and then transform to entrepreneurship with a means of securing financial sustainability or additional impact. (2) availability of financial support programmes of the EU and other international donors, specifically encouraging the establishment of new social enterprises. (3) stereotypical assumption of women as social entrepreneurs because social entrepreneurship is viewed in similarity to charity work, not as a “real business” and that women are naturally more suited to social enterprise than men because they are more “caring” and perhaps even better understand the nuanced social problems in their communities in comparison to their male counterparts.

**WOMEN SOCIAL ENTREPRENEURSHIP IN ARMENIA CAN HELP TO OVERCOME GENDER BARRIERS AND STEREOTYPES BY SHOWCASING WOMEN'S LEADERSHIP AND BUSINESS SKILLS.**

## Key obstacles

- Women (and all social entrepreneurs, in general) need a grounded understanding of business principles in Armenia. For women who transition from the NGO sector, it takes a considerable time for them to adapt to a business mindset.
- Women face limitations on their freedom and time (especially if they have family duties), which means that they have less capacity and time when it comes to engaging with new opportunities.
- Women face issues of self-confidence that have been caused by stereotypical societal attitudes.

- They are seen as having a specific role (caregiver, household manager) and sometimes do not believe in their own ability to grow beyond these roles.
- While there are no obstacles at the policy level and legislation in Armenia is mostly gender-neutral, there is a lack of advocacy for greater engagement of women in all fields, particularly business.

## Key knowledge and skills need

- Key skills include creativity, innovation, problem-solving, and risk-taking.
- Knowledge and skills related to social impact and sustainability. For example, they may need to develop a deep understanding of the social issues they aim to address through their businesses, as well as strategies for measuring and communicating their social impact.
- Skills related to sustainable business practices, such as resource efficiency, waste reduction, and ethical sourcing.
- Soft skills such as communication, leadership, negotiation, and networking.
- Basic knowledge of founding and running a business including product development, marketing, sales, and basic finance.

## Drivers and opportunities

- Some of the key drivers of women's entrepreneurship include the desire for independence, the need for income generation, and the desire to address social issues.
- Initiatives by the government and international organisations to promote the development of women entrepreneurs and favourable values towards entrepreneurship in the country.
- Armenia's favourable value system towards entrepreneurship. The Government of Armenia recognizes entrepreneurship as a main pillar for job creation and sustainable economic growth.



**Policy recommendation to empower women:**

To empower women in Armenia, policymakers could advocate for a more gender-balanced policy, prioritise providing better access to finance for women entrepreneurs - the government may work with financial institutions to create special programs and incentives for women.

Also, the government may work with educational institutions and industry associations to provide training and courses to help women entrepreneurs develop their business skills.

<p><b>POLICY MAKERS AND PUBLIC INSTITUTIONS</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <a href="#">National Assembly of the Republic of Armenia</a></li> <li>• <a href="#">Ministry of Economy of the Republic of Armenia</a></li> <li>• <a href="#">Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs</a></li> </ul>	<p><b>ORGANISATIONS AND NETWORKS REPRESENTING SE SECTOR</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <a href="#">Association of Social Enterprises of Armenia</a></li> <li>• <a href="#">School of Social Entrepreneurs LLC</a></li> </ul>
<p><b>KEY FINANCIAL SUPPORT PROGRAMMES</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <a href="#">Impact Hub Yerevan</a></li> <li>• <a href="#">Armenian General Benevolent Union (AGBU)</a></li> <li>• <a href="#">VIA Fund</a></li> <li>• <a href="#">AYWA</a></li> <li>• <a href="#">EU Delegation in Armenia (EU4Business)</a></li> </ul>	<p><b>FISCAL ARRANGEMENTS</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <a href="#">School of Social Entrepreneurs</a> - offers limited funding for a few participants at the end</li> </ul>
<p><b>DEVELOPMENT OF SKILLS, PRACTICAL EXPERIENCE</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <a href="#">Zartir Fellowship</a> (provided by Impact Hub Yerevan)</li> <li>• <a href="#">Khtan Social Entrepreneurship Incubator (KASA Foundation)</a> - social entrepreneurship incubator</li> <li>• <a href="#">AXEL'23</a> (provided by Impact Hub Yerevan)</li> </ul>	<p><b>MENTORING, incl. LEGAL ADVICE/CONSULTATIONS</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <a href="#">Association of Social Enterprises of Armenia</a> - can facilitate, but does not provide legal consultation directly</li> <li>• <a href="#">Impact Hub Yerevan</a> - membership provides access to mentors</li> </ul>

**Used sources:**

- International Finance Corporation (2021), [Women Entrepreneurship Study in Armenia](#)
- SocialEntrepreneurship Concept Paper, [E-draft platform. Unified Website for Publication of Legal Acts' Drafts](#) (Armenian only)
- U.POWER Country Report of Ireland (analysis of data and expert interviews) by Jinishian Memorial Foundation (JMF)
- Worldbank (2021)

**Statistical data sources:**

- DataReportal, Popularion of Armenia (2023)
- Trading Economics, Level of education, (2021, 2018)
- [Statistical Committee of the Republic of Armenia \(ARMSTAT\) \(2022\)](#).



# SUCCESS STORIES





# ARMENIA

BeeLife Success Story



**BeeLife**

**GAYANE SIMONYAN  
(CEO)**

Sector: Agriculture and agritourist

[facebook.com/beelifecandles](https://facebook.com/beelifecandles)

## LESSONS LEARNED AND TIPS

*“The social problem should be embedded in the enterprise from the very beginning. The solution should be a part of the business operations.”*

## EVIDENCE OF SUCCESS (RESULTS ACHIEVED)

In 2 years, 250 people have participated in trainings – 85% of them are women. 75-80 women have gone through practical training, many of them became amateur producers. 8 of them are part of BeeLife’s honey producers’ network, collaborating closely with the social enterprise. Beekeeping was considered a dying profession, many old beekeepers. Now, a younger generation is doing it, and more women are involved.



## INTRODUCTION TO THE CEO

Gayane felt these problems personally as a resident of Spitak. No belief in women as active members of the economy. She wanted to overcome those stereotypes and demonstrate that women can be successful. She wanted to support women to overcome their own doubts as well. Originally, she had studied languages and started working in tourism, then she learned about beekeeping and combined it with her initial experience in tourism.

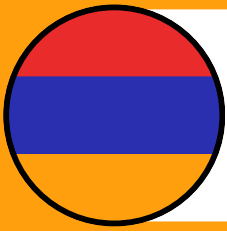
## THE MAIN AIM

Empowerment of women through beekeeping, “BeeLife” provides them with continuous training and masterclasses, good quality equipment and material with its cost price to help women start their own beehives.

They also buy the raw honey from the women and process it, developing products including processed edible honey products, candles made of honey, etc. which they resell on the market. Profits go to tree planting to conserve the environment.

## QUOTATION FROM THE CEO

**“A SOCIAL BUSINESS IS A WAY OF LIFE, IT’S LIKE PART OF THE ENTREPRENEUR’S PERSONALITY. SOCIAL ENTREPRENEURS PUT THEIR SOUL INTO IT AND GAIN A DIFFERENT LEVEL OF SATISFACTION.”**



# ARMENIA

Bohem Studio-Teahouse LLC Success Story



## GOHAR MNATSAKANYAN (CEO)

Sector: Tourism/Hospitality/Culture

[facebook.com/bohemsevan](https://www.facebook.com/bohemsevan)

[www.bohem.am](http://www.bohem.am)

### LESSONS LEARNED AND TIPS

*“When you have a dream, be quick to take that first step, so that you can put it into motion, it will be easier after that.”*

### EVIDENCE OF SUCCESS (RESULTS ACHIEVED)

Since its founding, Bohem has hosted 20,000 people in its premises and organised around 500 events. – more people are participating in those events. The real impact is, of course, at the individual level, with young people who have chosen to stay in the town and pursue their career in arts there, instead of moving away.



### INTRODUCTION TO THE CEO

Gohar has a background in fine arts and education. She teaches at the Sevan branch of the National Institute of Aesthetics. She founded Sevan Youth Club NGO in 2008 with two other girls and saw youth issues as their main mission in addition to the environmental protection of Lake Sevan, near their town. The NGO was involved in various projects, one of which took them through a Social Entrepreneurship incubation program, where the idea of Bohem was born.

### THE MAIN AIM

This is a platform for the development of young people with a cultural career in mind in Sevan and the community. Bohem “produces” some success stories every year in terms of young people that have developed a career in art and music and chosen to stay

in Sevan, instead of migrating to the capital or leaving Armenia. There is qualitative data of how Bohem has helped bring changes to the lives of many young people. All profits go to the Sevan Music Festival, which is held annually.

### QUOTATION FROM THE CEO

***“IF YOU BELIEVE IN AN IDEA THEN YOU SHOULD GO FOR IT, EVEN IF YOUR WHOLE COMMUNITY TELLS YOU THAT YOU’LL NEVER SUCCEED.”***





# ARMENIA

Source Foundation Success Story



**MARINA PARAZYAN  
(CEO)**

Sector: Manufacturing / furniture

[facebook.com/SourceFoundation.am](https://www.facebook.com/SourceFoundation.am)

[www.sourcefoundation.am](http://www.sourcefoundation.am)

## LESSONS LEARNED AND TIPS

*“You should keep learning. My knowledge was as a designer/ architect but I had to learn a lot as a manager, running my own business. I have been studying this over the past 6 years.”*

## EVIDENCE OF SUCCESS (RESULTS ACHIEVED)

Children – up to 30 centres have been furnished in Armenia for children with special needs, serving more than 1500 children in total. Source Production has also established a “furniture library” that serves more than 1000 kids per year with the necessary furniture at home. 120 children have received furniture as gifts over the years. The social enterprise employs 9 parents of children with special needs.



## INTRODUCTION TO THE CEO

Marina is an architect and designer by background, and was present at various European conferences and centres focusing on design for those with special needs. She has a daughter with a disability that was diagnosed at the age of 2 (13 years ago) and had trouble finding necessary furniture. She then decided that people in Armenia should be able to produce this locally, rather than import them from abroad.

## THE MAIN AIM

Integrate people with disabilities and their families in production processes to manufacture specialised furniture for children with disabilities. The impact of this social enterprise is at two levels.

The first group of direct beneficiaries are children with disabilities. The social enterprise manufactures specialised furniture for children with special needs. The second group of direct beneficiaries consists of those parents of children with disabilities that are employed by the social enterprise in the manufacturing process.

## QUOTATION FROM THE CEO

***“OUR PARENTS HAVE CHILDREN WITH DISABILITIES AND LOVE TO WORK WITH US NOT JUST BECAUSE THEY HAVE A STABLE JOB, BUT BECAUSE THEY ARE CREATING VALUE FOR OTHER PARENTS FACING THE SAME CHALLENGES.”***

# UPower

2022-1-IE01-KA220-ADU-000089829



[u.power](#)



[u.powerproject](#)



[www.upowererasmus.com](http://www.upowererasmus.com)



Co-funded by  
the European Union