



2025

Center for Legal Initiatives NGO

Annual Report

2025

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Snapshot of the Organization - Key Numbers

In 2025 (hereinafter referred to as the reporting year), the Center for Legal Initiatives NGO (hereinafter referred to as the Organization) implemented four grant-funded projects. These projects aimed to support the social integration of incarcerated persons and beneficiaries of the probation service, enhance their economic empowerment, foster creative potential, and strengthen professional and employment-related skills. Particular emphasis was placed on the application of gender-sensitive approaches and principles by diverse groups of specialists working with incarcerated women.

Within the framework of these projects, the Organization also carried out activities to assess the penitentiary system from a gender-sensitivity perspective and actively advocated for the development and implementation of gender-sensitive policies within the penitentiary system.

During the reporting year, the Organization engaged with a total of 103 beneficiaries, comprising 77 men and 26 women.

Among the male beneficiaries, 37 were sentenced to imprisonment, 2 were serving life sentences, and 1 was a pre-trial detainee, all held in the Armavir and Sevan Penitentiary Institutions.

Of the remaining 37 male beneficiaries, 35 were beneficiaries of the probation service, while 2 were family members of probation service beneficiaries.

Among the female beneficiaries, 1 was a beneficiary of the probation service and 2 were family members of probation service beneficiaries. Of the remaining 23 women, 2 were sentenced to imprisonment and 21 were pre-trial detainees held at the Abovyan Penitentiary Institution.

Within the framework of both project-related and non-project-related initiatives, the Organization conducted more than 100 visits during the reporting year to the Abovyan, Armavir, Nubarashen, and Sevan Penitentiary Institutions.

In addition, the Organization received six complaints from incarcerated persons held at the Nubarashen and Vanadzor Penitentiary Institutions, all of which concerned the health conditions of the complainants.

To obtain official clarifications on the issues identified through complaints and visits to penitentiary institutions, and in the context of its ongoing operations, the Organization submitted approximately 90 official letters to the relevant state bodies.



Snapshot of the Organization - Key Numbers

These letters included inquiries, reports on inmates, and other related documentation.

During the reporting year, the Organization took part in more than 30 events, including conferences, workshops, meetings, training sessions, and other professional activities.

The President of the Organization, Nare Hovhannisyan, was appointed as a member of the second-phase attestation commission for penitentiary service officers by Order No. 507-A of the Minister of Justice, dated August 20, 2024.

Furthermore, upon official invitations from the Embassies of the Kingdom of the Netherlands, the Kingdom of Norway, and the Czech Republic in Armenia, as well as from the UN Office in Armenia, Ms. Hovhannisyan participated in the corresponding official events, including the King's Day celebration, Norway's Constitution Day, the Czech Republic's National Day, and the 80th anniversary of the United Nations.

During the reporting year, the Organization officially joined the Global Alliance on Prison Reform and the Women's Labor Rights Platform, as well as became a member of both the Public Council under the Ministry of Justice and the Advisory Council on the Prevention of Torture under the Human Rights Defender.

The year was also marked by the signing of a memorandum of cooperation between the Organization and the Legal Education and Rehabilitation Programs' Implementation Center, aimed at combining efforts to raise legal awareness among incarcerated persons and beneficiaries of the probation service, promote law-abiding behavior, facilitate social reintegration, and prevent recidivism.



Brief Overview of the Most Important Meetings

During the reporting period, the Organization actively participated in a number of high-level and thematic meetings addressing key issues in criminal justice, human rights, and public policy. These included an interagency meeting on the rehabilitation program for perpetrators of domestic violence, as well as a seminar-discussion dedicated to the introduction and implementation of this program in Armenia.

The Organization also took part in the presentation of guidelines concerning personal searches in penitentiary institutions and the prevention of suicides and self-harm. In addition, discussions were held on improving penitentiary healthcare through effective information exchange and cooperation, alongside policy-level consultations on the Draft Strategy on Combating Crime and the revised Draft Law on Comprehensive Health Insurance.

The reporting period further featured participation in the 2nd Armenian Conference on Gender Studies and Sexuality, as well as the regular extended meeting of the Advisory Council on the Prevention of Torture under the Human Rights Defender, reinforcing the Organization's engagement in advancing human rights protections and evidence-based reforms.



Meaningful Influence on State Strategies Developed by the Government

On April 23, 2025, the Government adopted the Strategy and Action Plan for the Implementation of Gender Policy in the Republic of Armenia for 2025–2028, marking a significant advancement in the promotion of gender equality and the protection of women’s rights nationwide. The Strategy defines six priority areas for the implementation of gender equality policy, aimed at fostering an enabling and equitable environment for the effective realization of the rights and opportunities of women and men across relevant sectors, in accordance with Armenia’s international obligations. Within the framework of ensuring equal access to healthcare, the Strategy explicitly addresses the specific needs of women deprived of liberty. In particular, it envisages:

- Ensuring access to reproductive health services for incarcerated women, including the free provision of contraceptive methods, such as condoms and intrauterine devices;
- Implementing preventive healthcare measures on an equal basis for incarcerated women, including access to screening services.

By Decision No. 736-L of June 5, 2025, the Government adopted the Strategy to Combat the Non-Medical Use and Illicit Trafficking of Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic (Psychoactive) Substances, together with the Action Plan for 2025–2027. The draft Strategy was published on the Unified Website for the Publication of Draft Legal Acts in 2024 and was subjected to an extensive and inclusive public discussion process. It was subsequently revised and finalized through cooperation with civil society organizations and relevant state authorities. In collaboration with civil society organizations active in the field of human rights and healthcare experts, the Organization submitted written comments and policy recommendations on the draft Strategy. A number of the recommendations put forward by the Organization were reflected in and incorporated into the final adopted Strategy.



Addressing the Issues Affecting Women Deprived of Liberty Constitutes One of the Organization’s Key Priorities

The second issue of “Armenian (Contemporary) Working Woman”, published by the Women’s Fund Armenia, includes an article authored by the Organization’s President, Nare Hovhannisyan, which addresses the sexual and reproductive health challenges faced by women deprived of liberty.

Members of the Reproductive Health and Rights Network, established at the initiative of the Women’s Resource Center NGO, prepared in 2025 a report entitled “Access to Reproductive Health and Rights in the Republic of Armenia: The Experience of Different Groups of Women in Exercising Their Reproductive Rights.” As a member of the Network, the Organization’s President, Nare Hovhannisyan, an expert and researcher in the penitentiary sector, contributed a section examining the obstacles to the exercise of reproductive rights faced by women deprived of liberty and sentenced women in Armenia (pp. 53–64).



On February 13, 2025, at the Penitentiary Service, a discussion entitled “The Need to Apply Gender-Sensitive Approaches to Women’s Imprisonment” was convened at the initiative of the Organization. The meeting, unprecedented in its format, aimed to examine the issues identified by the Organization at Abovyan Penitentiary, as well as to present and discuss the Organization’s recommendations and potential solutions for improving the overall situation of female inmates.



On 19 November 2025, the Organization’s President, Nare Hovhannisyan, delivered a lecture at the Faculty of Law of the European University of Armenia. She addressed the most critical challenges faced by female inmates within the penitentiary system, emphasizing gaps in legislation and policy frameworks as well as systemic deficiencies. At the conclusion of the lecture, Ms. Hovhannisyan presented the Organization’s position on the necessary reforms to address these issues.



“Unlocking Potential: Empowerment as a Pathway to Reintegration and Sustainable Futures for Prisoners” - Grant Project

In 2025, the Organization, with the financial support of the Finnish Development Cooperation funds, implemented the project entitled “Unlocking Potential: Empowerment as a Pathway to the Reintegration and Sustainable Future of Prisoners.” The primary objective of the project was to facilitate the reintegration of prisoners and create new opportunities for their social and professional development.

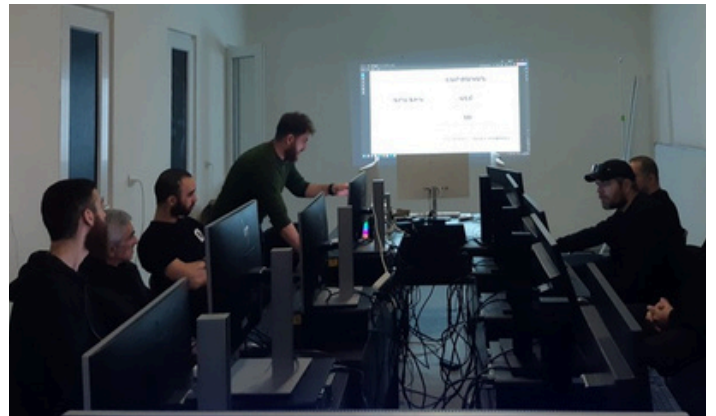
The project was implemented in 3 penitentiary institutions: Abovyan, Armavir, and Sevan, where structured courses were delivered to participating inmates to enhance their social competencies and employment readiness. In the context of social skills development, the courses focused on effective communication, conflict management, decision-making, and team building, while employment readiness was addressed through training in legal skills, marketing and pricing, resume preparation, and job interview techniques. Professional skills development was further supported through vocational courses tailored to each facility, including knitting and felting at Abovyan, graphic design at Armavir, and pottery at Sevan.

A total of 56 individuals participated across the three institutions, with 16 in Abovyan, 22 in Armavir, and 18 in Sevan. Participants demonstrating the highest levels of diligence, engagement, and performance were formally recognized through the issuance of certificates by the Organization. The project contributed to the advancement of participants’ social, professional, and vocational capacities, thereby supporting their reintegration prospects and promoting sustainable development following release.

As part of her visit to Armenia, on 15 September 2025, Anna Azcuí Sánchez, Attaché to the Ambassador of Finland in the South Caucasus, visited Abovyan Penitentiary. She met with the Organization’s President, Nare Hovhannisyan, and engaged with female participants in the project, learning about their achievements and hearing their personal experiences. The meeting addressed the project’s progress and the positive changes it had brought about, as well as the participants’ recommendations concerning resocialization measures and the design and implementation of future initiatives.

The visit further highlighted the significance of women’s empowerment and reintegration within the international agenda, reinforcing the development and application of innovative approaches to ensure the social inclusion and sustainable future of women deprived of liberty.





“Voices of Resistance: Chronicles of Women Behind Bars” - Grant Project

In 2025, with the financial support of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Czech Republic under the Transition Promotion Program, the Organization implemented the project entitled “Voices of Resistance: Chronicles of Women Behind Bars.” The project aimed to transform public perceptions of incarcerated women, ensure their voices are heard by both society and the criminal justice system, and foster an environment of empathy, sensitivity, and mutual understanding.

Within the framework of the project, the Organization engaged 16 women, of whom 3 were convicted prisoners and 13 were pretrial detainees. During the implementation period, 3 pretrial detainees were released following judicial decisions to modify their preventive measures from detention to home arrest. A total of 13 participants completed the project by presenting their personal narratives and were awarded certificates of participation and honoraria in recognition of their contribution.

The process of collecting narratives was preceded by a structured series of individual and group sessions, facilitated by psychologists, journalists, media specialists, and poets. These sessions focused on enhancing participants’ self-development and psychosocial capacities, including emotional awareness, emotional well-being, personal growth, positive self-perception, and the development of written and oral communication skills. The sessions were conducted using interactive methodologies, including facilitated discussions, role-playing exercises, and practical tasks. In addition to its educational and capacity-building components, the process had a therapeutic character, contributing to participants’ ability to process the experience of deprivation of liberty and strengthening their confidence to articulate, document, and publicly share their personal stories in a safe and supported environment.

The project also contributed to enhancing the financial stability of the participants. A number of participants lacked family support, including regular visits or the receipt of parcels, which intensified their social isolation and resulted in daily living difficulties during their deprivation of liberty. In response, symbolic remuneration in the form of honoraria was provided to participants in accordance with the project framework. This support enabled them to meet basic daily needs, cover minor personal and household-related expenses, and experience the dignity and positive psychosocial benefits associated with receiving a lawful and earned income.



“Voices of Resistance: Chronicles of Women Behind Bars” - Grant Project

The project was further marked by a series of visits to Abovyan Penitentiary, which enabled direct and constructive dialogue among the project’s participants, relevant decision-making officials, and representatives of the Embassy of the Czech Republic in Armenia. These visits contributed to the establishment of preconditions for enhancing and diversifying the penitentiary’s cultural and educational activities, while also ensuring that identified challenges and issues requiring intervention received due consideration at the appropriate decision-making level.

On 23 April 2025, the Deputy Ambassador of the Czech Republic to Armenia, Ms. Sabina Nováková, and Mr. Ararat Sahakyan, a representative of the Embassy, visited Abovyan Penitentiary and participated in the training session conducted under the project.

On 4 June 2025, the Ambassador of the Czech Republic to Armenia, Mr. Petr Pirunčík, accompanied by the Deputy Ambassador, Ms. Sabina Nováková, the Consul, Mr. Tomáš Malek, and Ms. Siranush Hakobyan, a representative of the Embassy, conducted an official visit to Abovyan Penitentiary. The delegation was accompanied by the Deputy Minister of Justice of the Republic of Armenia, senior officials of the Penitentiary Service, and other relevant authorities. As part of the visit, the delegation attended a training session organized under the project, engaged with incarcerated women in a structured question-and-answer format, addressed their inquiries, and reviewed the project’s objectives, implementation process, and documented results. Subsequently, the delegation conducted a site inspection of the facility, assessing the living conditions of female inmates and evaluating available opportunities for their social reintegration.

On 15 September 2025, Ms. Sabina Nováková, Deputy Ambassador of the Czech Republic to Armenia, together with Embassy representatives Mr. Ararat Sahakyan and Mr. Adam Pešout, conducted a visit to Abovyan Penitentiary. During the visit, the delegation met with the participants of the project. As part of the visit, a donation of books was made to the penitentiary’s library. The Deputy Ambassador noted that the initiative for the donation was inspired by reading the stories of the women. Participants emphasized that reading constitutes an important aspect of their daily routine and expressed an ongoing need for access to new books.

The stories submitted by the participants were compiled into a collection entitled “So, Mom, how does it feel in Paradise?”, marking the first documented effort in Armenia to present the experiences of female inmates in a standardized and accessible format.



“Voices of Resistance: Chronicles of Women Behind Bars” - Grant Project

The collection includes prefatory remarks by Mr. Petr Pirunčík, Ambassador of the Czech Republic to Armenia, and Ms. Anahit Manasyan, Human Rights Defender of Armenia, thereby reinforcing the credibility, visibility, and significance of the published accounts.

The launch event of the book was held on 4 September 2025, convening over 60 representatives from diplomatic missions, government institutions, local and international organizations, media, and other relevant sectors.

Participants included the Ambassadors of the Czech Republic, Canada, and the Netherlands to Armenia, together with representatives from their respective embassies; representatives from the Delegation of the European Union to Armenia, the Council of Europe Office in Armenia, and the Raoul Wallenberg Institute, Yerevan Office; the Human Rights Defender of Armenia; the Deputy Minister of Justice; senior officials and representatives from the Human Rights Defender’s Office, the Ministry of Justice, and the Penitentiary and Probation Services; as well as representatives from Abovyan Penitentiary, the Legal Education and Rehabilitation Programs Implementation Center, the Investigative Committee, and the Judicial Department. The event further included representatives from civil society organizations, journalists, specialists from the fields of culture and the arts, including writers and cultural scholars.



“Pathways to Reintegration: Empowering through Social Inclusion for a Sustainable Future” - Grant Project

Between July and November 2025, the Organization, with the financial support of the UK-based the BEARR Trust Foundation, implemented the project entitled “Pathways to Reintegration: Empowering through Social Inclusion for a Sustainable Future.” The project aimed to support beneficiaries registered with the Shirak Regional Unit of the Probation Service in acquiring the personal, social, legal, and practical skills necessary for independent living, responsible conduct within the community, employment, establishing positive social connections, exercising their rights, and addressing challenges effectively. Within the framework of the project, 16 training courses were conducted covering the following thematic areas: Social Skills Development and Well-Being, Personal Growth and Employment Skills, Awareness and Rights Protection, and Social Reintegration Skills. A total of 40 participants attended the courses, including 36 beneficiaries and 4 family members.

In line with the project’s objective to promote the social integration of probation service beneficiaries, one of the sessions was held at the Shirak Regional Unit of the Human Rights Defender’s Office of Armenia. During this session, participants were provided with detailed information on the functions of the Human Rights Defender, the procedures for submitting complaints, and the mechanisms for intervention and protection. The session also addressed the rights and obligations of beneficiaries in accordance with their criminal-legal status, as defined by court rulings. Participants raised various questions, including those related to the legal consequences of convictions, applicable restrictions, and procedures for the mitigation or annulment of sentences. Comprehensive clarifications were provided regarding the exercise of their rights, as well as the relevant procedures and timelines for submitting applications to appropriate state or other authorized bodies.

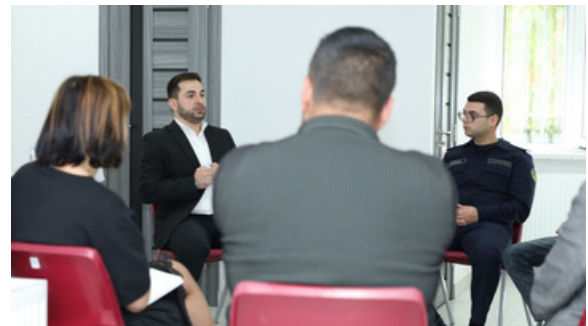
Another training session was conducted at the resource hall of the Gyumri Territorial Center of the Unified Social Service under the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs of the Republic of Armenia. During the session, participants were provided with detailed information on existing state programs, including eligibility criteria and procedures for access. In addition, participants were briefed on upcoming modifications to employment programs and the potential expansion of such programs beginning in 2026. Beneficiaries raised a number of substantive issues, which were addressed through comprehensive explanations and relevant guidance. The discussion highlighted the low level of awareness among participants regarding available social programs and procedural requirements.



“Pathways to Reintegration: Empowering through Social Inclusion for a Sustainable Future” - Grant Project

In response, beneficiaries were encouraged to actively engage with their local communities and to consult regularly with local authorities in order to remain informed of changes in legislation and administrative procedures.

Overall, the session contributed to strengthening the link between probation service beneficiaries and the community, enhancing cooperation among regional institutions, and reinforcing the principle that the effective social integration of this vulnerable group is achievable only through constructive collaboration and open dialogue between relevant authorities.



During the implementation of the project, both interim and concluding meetings were held with the staff of the Shirak Regional Unit of the Probation Service to review the progress of the project and address any issues arising throughout its execution.



“Pathways to Reintegration: Empowering through Social Inclusion for a Sustainable Future” - Grant Project

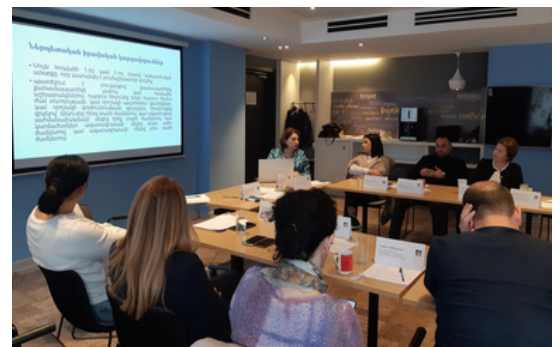
The project concluded with a conference entitled “Reintegration of Probation Service Beneficiaries: Challenges and Prospects.” The conference aimed to summarize the outcomes and achievements of the project, present recommendations for enhancing the social reintegration of probation service beneficiaries, and foster collaboration and constructive dialogue between regional state and cultural institutions and civil society organizations. The conference brought together representatives from regional authorities, local offices of state institutions, and youth, civil society, and academic organizations operating in the region. Each organization presented programs available within the community that could be accessed by probation service beneficiaries. The discussions also addressed barriers to the social integration of beneficiaries. Officials from the Probation Service provided detailed clarifications on the issues raised and expressed a commitment to further examine and address these challenges in follow-up discussions to identify effective solutions.



“Building a Gender-Sensitive Penitentiary System in Armenia” - Grant Project

The 2024–2026 Strategy for the Penitentiary and Probation Systems provides for mandatory training of all personnel working with detained and sentenced women, focusing on gender-specific needs and the protection of their rights. The Strategy also envisages aligning the internal regulations governing the operation and daily life of the “Abovyan” Prison with gender-sensitive approaches, in accordance with the United Nations Bangkok Rules. This alignment requires introducing explicit provisions on gender-sensitive practices, particularly regarding searches of women, including strip and body cavity searches, and establishing safeguards to prevent violations of human dignity. In this context, the “Building a Gender-Sensitive Penitentiary System in Armenia” project, implemented by the Center for Legal Initiatives NGO with the financial support of the Embassy of the Kingdom of Norway in Georgia, represents the first systematic initiative in Armenia aimed at advancing these strategic objectives. It is also the first project to integrate gender-sensitive approaches into work with women visiting imprisoned men, including the organization of visits, the conduct of searches, the acceptance of parcels, and related procedural processes.

The project emphasized overcoming entrenched patterns of interaction among different professional groups working with women deprived of liberty, delivering trainings in an interdisciplinary format to bring all professional groups together. Two three-day training sessions were conducted within the project framework: September 24–26 and October 27–29, 2025. The first session involved 1 staff member from the Security Department of the Central Body of the Penitentiary Service; 8 staff members from the Social, Psychological and Legal, Security, Guard, Logistics and Administrative Support, and Operational Departments of the “Abovyan” Prison; 2 medical specialists from the “Abovyan” Medical Unit of the Penitentiary Medicine Center. The second training session brought together 7 staff members from the Social, Psychological and Legal, Security, Guard, and Operational Departments of the “Abovyan” Prison; 2 medical specialists from the “Abovyan” Prison unit of the Penitentiary Medicine Center. In addition, 16 staff members from Social, Psychological and Legal, as well as Security Departments of the “Armavir,” “Hospital for Convicts” “Nubarashen,” “Sevan,” and “Vardashen” Prisons participated in trainings.



Strengthening Cooperation with the Media

During the reporting year, the Organization organized two discussions in collaboration with the Media Center and three discussions within the framework of the “Dprutyun” program of Public Radio. The Organization’s President, Ms. Nare Hovhannisyan, participated as a guest in two episodes of Public Radio’s “Your Lawyer” program, one episode of Sputnik Armenia Radio, one segment on Ampop Media, and one appearance on Radio Shant’s Evening Program.

The Organization’s activities in the penitentiary and probation sectors received coverage from a range of media outlets, including Radio Azatutyun, Factor TV, Armat Media, Asparez.am, and Shant Gyumri Television.

Eight media reports were produced highlighting the participation of the Organization’s President, Ms. Nare Hovhannisyan.



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