

## Factsheet

**The Gender Gap Index 2017 rating shows that Armenia ranks the 97th having improved its position with five points**



The World Economic Forum published the 2017 global Gender Gap Index where Armenia ranks the 97th among 144 countries of the world having improved its last year's position with five points (the 102nd in the last year's Index).

The Gender Gap Index is defined through consideration of a state's performance in four key sectors: economic participation and professional growth opportunities, education, healthcare and political participation.

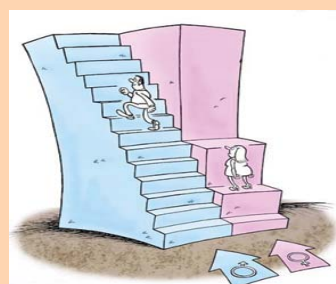
**Seventy-seven percent of women in the world are eager to work**



The report published in 2017 by the International Labour Organization and the Gallup Institute evidences that 77% of women prefer to have a paid job, and 66% of men support them on this matter. Only 27% of women stated that they would like to stay at home and be a housewife.

The "Towards a better future for women in the employment" report is based on the results of a survey conducted in 142 countries. The results show that gaining the opportunity to combine the job with household care is one of the major problems faced by working women.

**Annually the world economy loses 17 trillion US dollars**



There is no country in the world where women earn more than men or where women boast that they have equal labour rights with men. Gender inequality is displayed in various forms and extents. Around the world women are facing challenges in climbing the career ladder and in combining job with household care. This results in women not even trying to maintain a work-household balance and choosing the role of a housewife.

As calculated by the experts at the International Monetary Fund, the world economy loses 17 trillion US dollars annually because of gender inequality in the labour market. In the meantime, women are urged to do housework, which is sometimes very hard and completely free of charge. It may be profitable for men, but it is not so for women and for the global economy.

# Woman & politics

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"A nanny at the expense of the state": there are more questions than answers



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"See how tasty and appetizing are the jams prepared by fruits grown in our community. That is because fruits are collected right from the woods. The fruits are processed right away: we do not let the fruits stay overnight", say Emma Hovhannisyan and Arevik Hovsepyan who are employed at fruit processing plant in Sevkar village, Tavush marz. The plant was established with the support of OxyGen Foundation. See page 4

## The Labour Code

As known, Karen Karapetyan, the RA Prime Minister recommended making radical amendments to the RA Labour Code. The draft was published in November 2017 and underwent a round of public discussions. It will soon be presented to the National Assembly. Tadevos Avetisyan, the deputy Minister of Labour and Social Affairs (MLSA) talked about the amendments to the Labour Code in one of his press conferences. He made a noteworthy remark that it was not necessary to assign more rights to employees and more obligations

to employers in the Labour Code. "Employees should be able to come to certain arrangements with the employers. The culture of negotiations is one of the economy attributes", he said.

Note that the 'culture of negotiations' in the international practices was formed due to the existence of strong labour unions, whereas in Armenia many people do not even know about labour unions. Besides, after the labour agency was shut down (because of inefficient operations) there was no any state authorized body currently in Armenia that could oversee the

labour legislation sector. This makes the lives of employees difficult in cases when they seek protection of their labour rights. The only resort to seek in case of contract breach, is filing a suit in the court which is inaccessible to many, due to various reasons. The high level of unemployment comes to worsen the situation and it becomes easy to understand how and for whom the 'attribute of negotiating with employers' works in Armenia, and why many people agree to work without employment contracts ...

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## Let the Numbers Talk

### Ten facts about economic inequality

**1.** Women's share in the labour resources of Armenia is 55%, however only 52,5% of women have economic participation. Men in economic activity constitute 71,2%. The gender gap in economic participation of 25-34 age group is 40%, which is mainly conditioned by family obligations undertaken by women (pregnancy, childbirth, childcare and so on).

**2.** Armenia has the highest level of unemployment among CIS countries. Women's unemployment constitutes 17,8%, the unemployed men are 18,1%. At the same time, there are significant gender differences between the unemployment duration and the reasons for unemployment. Women constitute the 67,8% among the officially registered unemployed.

**3.** In 2016, almost the 47% of female youth and the 23% of male youth aged 15-29 did not study and work.



**4.** The average monthly net salary (earning) of women constituted the 66,4% of men's salary, or in other words, the gender pay gap constitutes 33,6%. The world pay gap constitutes 23% on average.

**5.** 33% of economically active population are men; women constitute 67%. 40% of women with no economic

participation have either higher or vocational education.

**6.** In 2016, 47% of women aged 15-75 did not have a job and did not look for one, being mainly engaged in their households. Women perform the major part of unpaid work in households, which does not get the form of any financial

reward and is not reflected in the national system of accounts.

**7.** The state support resources are insufficient to address the issue of combining family care and career. This is evidenced by the fact that 98% of people unemployed because of family circumstances are women. Women constitute a significant group (70%) among those with no hope to find a job and not at all seeking a job.

**9.** The poverty rate in Armenia in 2016 constituted 29,4%, of which 1,8% is extremely poor and 8,0% are very poor. 56,6% of the poor are women; 43,4% are men. 39,8% of women-headed households with children are poor, 4,1% of them are extremely poor. This figure is almost twice higher than the average rate.

**10.** The share of women in small and medium enterprises does not exceed 10%. Women's representation in microbusiness is larger - 20-25%.

RA National Statistical Service 2017

62% of men and 56% of women fully agree with the statement that in case of few job opportunities available, men should be entitled to more enhanced rights to get those job opportunities, than women should.

CGLS" Gender Barometer of Armenia, Yerevan, 2015



## Job Fair

Women even agree to work with a very small salary; men, however, will not do the same



We met Gayane Hovhannisyanyan (43 years old) in the Hayk square in Vanadzor city. She came to take part in the job fair held annually in Vanadzor. Gayane has six children. She lives in one of the suburbs of Vanadzor with her husband and children. Gayane has been looking for a job for a long time. She is ready to do any kind of work, though she is a typist by profession. Gayane says her profession does not exist now. She tried to find a job in the shops and markets in Vanadzor, but the shop owners told her she was already old - her age is not appropriate for that kind of job. "I am not old, but they consider me old. They say they need young people", Gayane says in an offended tone. Gayane visited the fair with her husband. Both of them have been unemployed for a long time. Gayane is even ready to work for a daily payment of 1500-2000 AMD, but her husband, a welder by profession, does not agree to work by such payment terms.

Gohar Hayrapetyan (48 years old) was at the fair accompanied by her husband too. Gohar is tailor; her husband is a construction specialist. Gohar has already made a round in the booths of employers and left her CV. "The range of salaries employers offer is 30-60 thousand AMD. Currently I have no choice but agree to it because my family is really in a desperate situation", Gohar says. Gohar's husband could not find a vacancy of a construction specialist among the offers in the fair.

Sona Sargsyan (18 years old) is one of the youngest participants at the fair. She is a second year student at the State University of Vanadzor. Sona will get the specialization of a financial manager and economist. She would like to combine work with her studies and she is confident in her success. "I do not think there are no jobs. People simply have stereotypes as to what kind of jobs they will do and which they will not. That is why they claim there are no jobs, whereas in reality there are", she says. Sona considers the salary size an important factor, but also mentions that one should start at the very bottom and go up the career ladder gradually. At present, she is ready to earn 30,000 AMD for a part-time job. She is confident that after graduation she can earn an incomparably higher salary. In her words, her parents welcome her initiative to work but they agree to it only if her work does not create any obstacles for her studies.

Alongside with young and middle-aged women at the fair, 68-year old Tsoghik Gevorgyan was one of the job seekers. She approached the booths and asked every single employer about any opportunity of hiring her. Then, after getting a refusal, she continued to walk around. "My pension constitutes 28,000 AMD. Now what kind of job can they offer to me, so that I return my 28,000 and start a job?" says Tsoghik angrily. She is ready to do any type of job. "I can work as a packer or as a caregiver. If they give me a job with 60,000 AMD salary, I can make both ends meet," she says. "You are getting a pension, granny. Go home and let young people find a job"; jokes one of the women standing by us. Tsoghik gets angry: how can she live on 28,000?

Around thirty employers participating at the fair offered about 300 vacancies. The majority of those vacancies were anticipated for women. Vacancies specifically for men were less. Men perceived this fact with humor and proposed one another to apply for the position of women workers.

Arsen Hayrapetyan (42 years old) is seeking a driver's job. So far, in his words, he received job offers with salaries lower than 80,000 AMD. He agrees to jobs only with salaries of minimum 100,000 AMD.

## "If I talk about my rights, and he tells me you are fired, what's then?"

"I hardly found this job that is why I agree to everything. Jobs are not offered at every corner so I do not think I'll benefit if I claim my rights", says 33-year-old Marine Hovakimyan. She was forced to move to Yerevan from Syunik Marz two years ago together with her two small children and mother.

Her husband migrated to Russia for work many years ago. He used to send money to her once every several months but shortly he stopped that as well. Marine was forced to look for a job. She did not tell us which village in Syunik she was from. Her village is small and all people know each other. If they read her name, the will immediately recognize her. "Everyone knows that there are no jobs in the village that is why I moved to Kapan city. I found a job in the bread bakery and my children stayed with my mother in the village. I rented a house in Kapan. I was working in tow shifts to pay for the rent and money home. This was a good deal both for my boss and for me because he had to pay a higher salary if he hired someone else. I got half of the money anticipated for the second shift. This meant that I did two people's job but got paid for 1.5 of the work", Marine says. She had a hard time and soon sleepless nights worsened her health condition. She was exhausted and

yet, she continued to work. "One day I gathered all my courage and asked my boss to increase my salary. I told him my health condition was bad because of this work schedule. I needed money to see a doctor. He however refused by saying that things at the bakery were not going well and suggested that should leave if I was unhappy with the working conditions. I had no one to complain to as I did not even have a job contract. I continued for two more months until I was totally exhausted and left. After that, I found a job in a shop with no job contract again. I worked there for a year doing all kinds of work from cleaning to carrying heavy boxes. Then the cashier was on maternity leave and I replaced her. I was both accepting and selling goods. This shop closed down and I decided to take my children and mother and move to Yerevan. I have no news from my husband for 4 years now", Marine says. After the shop closed down in Kapan, the shop owner did not give her a



final payment explaining that "I went bankrupt: I'll pay you once I have money". Marine now works in Yerevan without a job contract again. The employer justifies this fact with the statement that "I pitied you that was why I hired you. I could hire someone else". Marine got used to the work without any legal basis. She does all type of work in Yerevan's shop too and does not complain. Young girls from Yerevan sometimes complain off the boss, but Marine prefers to work obediently. "I have children of

school age. If I argue or claim my rights the shop owner will fire me, and what's then? I put up with it. I also master hairdressing. I do haircuts for my neighbors and earn extra money. My mother works as cleaner. Her working hours are so that she manages to look after my children. No, I do not want to complain. I do not care about that job contract and the extra money they will give me. Having a job now is the most important thing for me. People are searching for jobs, so should I lose what I have?"

## What risks does the liberalization of relations between employees and employers imply?



As Heriknaz Tigranyan, the legal advisor at the "Transparency International" Anti-corruption Center mentions, the absence of an employment contract is the most widespread problem in labour rights sector in Armenia. The employee understands clearly that his/her rights were violated, but silently allows that to happen in order not to lose his/her job. "Employers do not sign a contract so that in case of breach of rights, the employees do not reserve the right to prove anything. As long as the labour market in Armenia provides potential employees with few opportunities, the employers will take advantage of that fact by signing employment contracts with employees, but still including in job descriptions tasks which are irrelevant to the employment contract or to the specific task". Ms. Tigranyan thinks that the current amendments to the RA Labour Code do not address these concerns. Instead, some of them carry a discriminatory character, observations on which were presented to the Government by the "Transparency International" Center.

Experts of the OxYGen Foundation also shared their observations on the draft amendments to the Labour Code. They highlighted that the idea of liberalization of relations between employers and employees lying at the basis of amendments, can be effective only in

case real equality and mutually beneficial principles are maintained between all parties. Whereas in Armenia we face obviously unequal relations, when the threat of losing a job makes employees work under the most humiliating conditions, and hence involves certain risks of laying the basis for overexploitation of employees with regard to exertion of extra pressure by employers on them.

The inequality between parties becomes even more acute when the employee is a woman, more often when it is a woman with children, who should combine professional obligations with family care. And there comes a big question on how willing the employer is to include in her employment contract all the legal guarantees she is entitled to in the current RA Labour Code.

Boris Kharatyan, the deputy president of the Confederation of Labour Unions of Armenia is sure that leaving it to parties' consent as to how regulate their relations, can lead to abuse. The Confederation also presented its observations on the amendments where they especially highlight that the suggestion to repeal the Article 182 of the Code referring to indexation of salaries is not advisable. This is because the inflation rate is high, the national currency is devaluated, the purchasing power of the official

minimum wage is low and the poverty rate among Armenia's population is around 30%. "By ratifying the Minimum Wage Fixing ILO Convention in 2004, Armenia committed to introduce a system of defining a minimum wage and review it from time to time. However, the provisions of the Convention have not been used in Armenia so far," he mentioned.

Liana Badalyan, the project coordinator at the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung Foundation says that by introducing amendments to the RA Labour Code, the state is attempting to leave the regulation of a number of issues to the will of parties involved. Considering the current high unemployment rate in Armenia the aforementioned provision can be seen as an advantage for employers. "This fact is rather worrisome. The tendency to liberalize labour relations is obvious; certain thresholds and risks defined by the Government in the past are being removed now and all other regulations are left to the discretion of parties which leaves employees in a bleak situation", she says.

"The violation of labour rights are not fully controlled by the state", mentions Lusine Sargsyan, the head of the Research and Education Department of the RA Human Rights Defender's Office. She adds that the labour rights protection system currently operating in Armenia does not allow for full protection of employee rights through extra-judicial means. The authority and functions of the Human Rights Defender's Office are limited in this regard as well, although the Office receives many complaints on discriminatory and other violation practices at the workplace. "There existed a state employment agency in Armenia, which was merged in 2014 with one of the agencies operating under the RA Ministry of Health and lost its authority. This means we do not have an employment agency, and the current agency it was merged with, only controls health issues arising at the workplace".

The participants of the public hearings on the draft unanimously stated that there was a problematic and uncontrollable situation in the state-implemented control and supervision area with regard to fulfilling the requirements of the labour law. A number of experts mentioned that the best solution to this problem would be the re-opening of the employment agency in line with the 81st ILO Convention requirements with regard to agency functions, which will exclude the previous drawbacks of the employment agency. However, only time and the upcoming discussions in the National Assembly will show to what extent this and other recommendations will be taken into account in the final, to-be-adopted version.



## Family and Career

# “A nanny at the expense of the state”: there are more questions than answers



Young mothers were very enthusiastic to learn the news that the RA Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs was lending a helping hand to them by launching two new projects in 2018 to ensure women's return to labour market.

The first project relates to organization of up to six-month professional courses at the employers' premises for non-competitive young mothers without professions. They will receive a scholarship equal to the amount of minimum wages so that young mothers can pay for transportation and childcare in their absence. The second project which became known as "a nanny at the expense of the state", aims at reimbursing childcare expenses to mothers who are in maternity leaves for children aged up to three years, and who intend to return to work before the child's two years. The young mother can hire a nanny for her child by signing a contract with the nanny, and the state will reimburse the 50 percent of her wages (but with the amount, that is no more than the minimum wages). The state will also reimburse those cases when a pre-school institution fulfills the childcare.

## "Restrictions and requirements narrow down the framework of beneficiaries"

When presenting relevant amendments to the RA Law on Employment, Artem Asatryan, the RA Minister of Labour and Social Affairs noted that, "a nanny at the expense of the state" project would contribute to addressing demographic problems in the country. The generation of opportunities to combine family and career for young mothers is a successful tool in demographic policy in the modern world." In his opinion, the international practices show that the birthrate is high in those countries where the percentage of working mothers is high. For instance, 75 -85% of women are employed in Iceland, France, Sweden, Finland and Denmark where the birthrate is 1.9 - 2.2. The draft law will also promote the increase of pre-school institutions, the development of the nanny institute and the decrease in the unemployment rate of the elderly. The law mentions that close relatives can also act as nannies.

However, once the mechanisms of project implementation and the beneficiary groups were fixed and implementation procedures were presented for public discussions and feedback in the e-draft.am website, it became clear that the aforementioned objectives would be difficult to achieve. The reasons behind this assumption are the intended restrictions and requirements that highly narrow down the framework of beneficiaries and thus question the effectiveness of the project. This is also evidenced by the summary of responses of the Government to the recommendations of a number of organizations.

## Mothers seeking jobs or returning to work?

After thorough study of the project, first it was revealed that at the initial stage the state is ready to cover only a part of the wages of nannies hired by 200 women. This year's budget anticipated allocation of 121 million AMD for this purpose. As claimed by the RA Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, to address project objectives, the priority in beneficiary selection was given to representatives of groups uncompetitive in the labour market, including recipients of state poverty benefits, families with three and more children or with children with disabilities and single mothers. In addition, there was a mandatory pre-condition for potential beneficiaries to be registered in the employment agencies

for a long time to be eligible for the project. Whereas the research of OxyGen Foundation for the protection of women and youth rights brings arguments that those women stand rather low chances to benefit from that project, since the reasons for their unemployment, often long-term, are deeper and more diverse than just being engaged in childcare. To increase the potential participation of these women in the project, it is actually necessary to enhance their competitiveness in the labour market by training them and offer sustainable jobs to them with salaries of higher than 100,000 AMD.

All these efforts will require both additional funding and time. Even then, these women will obviously be more interested in using the services of free of charge nurseries, than hiring nannies or services of pre-school institutions.

The requirement of registration in the employment agency contradicts to the goal of the project, which states that the project supports women returning to work, i.e. women who actually are employed. The Ministry, however, does not see any contradiction and states that employed persons can also be registered in the employment agencies. It is interesting to know how many women are registered in the employment agency presently ...

## What salary must get a woman who hires a nanny?

The project poses a requirement, according to which the average monthly salary of project beneficiaries cannot exceed the amount of the average monthly salary fixed for the past year and published by the RA National Statistical Service. The latter is 194, 259 AMD gross, around 140,000 AMD net. A very simple calculation is enough to show that women with lower than average salaries are not interested to get involved in the project. One hour of a nanny's service costs at least 500 AMD in the market. The duration of a working day is 8 hours. This means that a working mother has to pay most of her salary to a nanny and be reimbursed only 20,000 AMD, because the payment of income tax for the nanny is also the obligation of the parent, in accordance with the RA Tax Code.

Some of the recommendations proposed by the OxyGen Foundation outline that the restriction relating to salary size is unjustified and women must get "net" salaries of 200-250 AMD on average to be eligible for the project and hence to be able to use private pre-school

services or hire a nanny and pay her income tax. The response of the MLSA to the recommendation on increasing the salary threshold of project beneficiaries was noteworthy. The response particularly included the following: "women receiving salaries higher than the average monthly salary amount, are more solvent and can take care of their expenses without any support". So, these mothers do not need any state support to organize their children's care, whereas the return of these mothers is more beneficial for the state as they pay higher income taxes.

## "A good granny will look after her grandchild without any financial return"

Another project eligibility criterion is that the nanny should not be a person registered at the residence address of the beneficiary. This criterion limits the opportunity for grandpas and grandmas (or another close relative) to engage as a nanny. This, in its turn, contradicts to provisions of the project publicly presented by project implementers. However, the response of the Government to this comment shows that this criterion will not be removed. The response states that, "we think that the person acting as a nanny, registered at the same residence address as the beneficiary, especially if that is a close relative, will not need any financial reimbursement". In short, "A good granny will look after her grandchild without any financial return" ...

## Project procedures are time-consuming

One of the concerns raised by the OxyGen Foundation is the procedures for involvement in the project look like "bureaucratic pro-tractions", and are time-consuming. These factors are additional obstacles for young mothers, who already face time scarcity due to childcare. In the summary of recommendations on the project procedures, OxyGen Foundation outlines that the procedures, requirements and limitations of the project question its effectiveness and the targeted spending of state funding. The Ministry does not agree with this concern and deems the project procedures as clear and simple, not in need of any changes...

Young mothers willing to return to work as soon as possible, have thoroughly reviewed the project eligibility criteria and understood that they cannot benefit from it. They rely on their own efforts and resources to organize the care of their children ...

## Opinions

### "The size and procedure of reimbursement do not incentivize parents to return to work"

"In my opinion, the size and the procedure of reimbursing a nanny's salary do not incentivize parents to return to work. My impression is that by launching this project and by sending young mothers to work, the state first attempts to increase



tax collection. That is a very simple calculation - the state does not pay 18,000 AMD to mothers returning to work, receives back part of the reimbursement through nanny's income tax and adds to it the taxes the young mother pays from her gross wages. This means the state benefits most from this project. The project cannot achieve its objectives if the amount of reimbursement does not increase now or through time".

*Lena Nazaryan,  
Member of RA National Assembly,  
"Yelk" faction*

### "Do the fixed procedures really correspond to objectives set in the project?"

"The primary goal of the project is to enhance support to parents returning to work before the child is two years old. This formulation received a very positive reaction. However, the procedures and mechanisms set in the project outline certain selection criteria of beneficiaries, which can prevent the implementers from achieving the goal and objectives of the project. In other words, do the fixed procedures really correspond to objectives set in the project? The project implementation mechanisms do not provide the answer to this question".



*Shake Isayan,  
Member of RA National Assembly,  
"Tsarukyan" faction*

### "The idea is welcomed but the project in this formulation cannot be effective"

"The idea of supporting mothers to return to and combine family and career is welcomed, and there can be no alternate opinion on this matter. My concern relates more to launch of processes and initiatives in



recent years, which have no strategic connection with one another, seemingly for the improvement of demographic situation in the country. And yet, it does not improve at all. The project in its current wording and formulation cannot be effective first because the maximum amount of 17,595 AMD (the net amount after all taxes are paid from 55,000 AMD gross reimbursement by the state) will hardly motivate a significant number of women to return to work. It may be a pleasant bonus for women who earn 300 thousand and more without affecting their motivation, as they anyway return to work much earlier. However, it will hardly incentivize women who earn minimum wages or less than 100 thousand AMD and do not have someone to help in childcare, because their main income will not anyway suffice to hire a nanny, even after getting a 17-18 thousand AMD reimbursement from the state".

*Tatevik Davtyan,  
civic activist*

## Survey

According to the survey results conducted by the RA National Institute of Labour and Social Studies in 2015, 41% of women with children up to three years old receive wages of 66 thousand AMD; the wages of 45% are 120 thousand AMD; 12% of those women earn 200 thousand AMD and only 2% of them have wages

amounting to 400 thousand AMD. Besides, almost every fourth woman (around 22%) with a child aged up to three, is engaged in a non-registered employment. This means that women with shadow employment cannot participate in this project and use its opportunities since the involvement in the project requires a written noti-

fication on the amount of the monthly wages the beneficiary earns. This requirement is probably an incentive for women to have registered employment, but it may be unacceptable for their employers who hire shadow employees to avoid taxes and will just reduce the wages of these women in case of registering their employment.



## Rural women

# “You care for land only when you love it...”



Agricultural sector provides for the largest share of employment in Armenia, where employment constitutes around 34% of the total of employed population. 52% of those are women thus making women important contributors to agricultural development. As a matter of fact, the largest share of agricultural produce is made by women and they provide the main guarantees in food supply and survival of households in rural areas. At the same time, women's employment in agriculture has mainly a non-formal character. This becomes a reason for naming women as representatives of the socially unprotected and low-paid segment of the labour market. Very small percentage of women employed in this sector have a legal employment, which is just seasonal. Those working on their land plots are considered to be self-employed and do not pay income tax, which is not regarded as official work experience. On the whole, social guarantees for those employed in the agricultural sector do not exist are not legally defined.

**D**iligence and love towards land and human life are the keys to success earned by Marine Brutyan who lives in Sevqar village in Tavush marz. Today she is respected and loved by everyone in her village and her family - husband, three daughters and nine grandchildren. "You should put your soul into your work to have good results and tasty products. You care for land only when you love it". She grew up with these principles and taught them to her daughters and grandchildren.

Marine was mainly specialized in land cultivation. She learnt the secrets of good land cultivation when she was a child and used to help her parents in their family orchard. After graduating from the agricultural college Marine got married and seriously engaged in agricultural activities together with her husband.

Today Marine is the head of processing unit in Sevqar cannery established in 2014 with the support of OXYGen Foundation. The opening of the cannery was a big and important event in the life of Sevqar border village. After all, the main task faced by any rural community is the opening up of at least a few job opportunities for the population. The "Darpas" agricultural cooperative and its "Anushaham" LLC operate adjacent to the plant. The cannery processes ample forest fruits of Sevqar and produces delicious jams and preserves. Thirteen people, all of them Sevqar residents, are employed at the plant. Marine proudly shows the preserves made from blackberries, raspberries, pumpkin, quince, mulberry and fig stored in stock. They will be exported with the support of the OXYGen Foundation.

Some of the attractive features of their produce is that it is home-made, delicious and useful for health. No food coloring supplements or chemical preserving materials are used during the production period. And although difficulties still exist, they do not in any way discourage the staff to continue

working with love, dedication and in solidarity.

- See how tasty and appetizing are the jams prepared by fruits grown in our community. That is because fruits are collected right from the woods and processed right away, the cannery staff joyfully say.

Marine said that the plant lacks a car for transporting fruits and berries. It is difficult to transport the collected harvest from seven communities to Sevqar.

- How much harvest can people bring in buckets? The harvest is ample. If fruits and berries are brought in for storage, then transportation in this manner spoils the harvest appearance and quality which leads to bad produce. If we have a car, the harvest will arrive at Sevqar earlier, Marine says. She thankfully adds that the OXYGen Foundation has promised to support them on purchasing a car.

Women working at the cooperative are also willing to make dried fruits, set up a drying facility and purchase walnut trees, because the demand for walnuts in the market is high.

Marine also wishes that works at the cooperative become full year activities, shifting from its seasonal schedule. People leave the community due to absence of jobs.

- Why should people who have real working potential be forced to leave their village. A lot of women in the village are able to work, but the number of jobs are limited. The technical opportunities of Sevqar cannery are large: it has all the equipment and facilities to produce quality products. The plant has a manufacturing section, a laboratory, a storage, a cloakroom and a toilet.

- We would not be able to establish this type of facility and could not even dream of it. The existence of the plant has made our daily routine interesting and full of work. As staff, we feel like one family. As the saying goes, we are not from the same family, but have similar life. We get together at work, combine working with interesting conversations, give each other different pieces of advice and help each other to have hope for future. We

go home cheerfully and full of optimism in the evening, Marine says.

It has been two years that Emma Hovhannisyan works at the Sevqar cannery. As Sevqar community has small population, the news on the cannery establishment spread quickly.

- We were very eager to work and I am happy I am part of its staff now. Working in a food industry is such a big responsibility. One should comply with all rules and standards, be attentive. It is also a pleasure to work here. We get relaxed from our daily village routine, communicate with people in the course of work. This is my first employment. I remember getting my first salary. I felt more self-confident because I could take care of my needs on my own and also support the family. There are many problems in our village - road construction issues, lack of water, etc. I hope that our cannery will become more and more powerful through time, new ones will be constructed and all problems will have their solutions.

It has been six months now since Arevik Hovsepian joined our team in the cannery. She is a pharmacist. "I love my profession. I used to think of going to Yerevan, because there would be more job opportunities there. But here I am in my village. I participated in trainings with duration of seven months on food safety and management in food industry. The knowledge and skills I gained help me in my current work", Emma says.

The opening of the cannery was an important event in their life. "We live in a border area. Our village faces many issues related to transportation, water, youth employment. Unfortunately, our work is seasonal - six months a year, but I am sure that we will be able to solve the problem of product sales, will have more raw material in stock and start operating the full year with larger staff and increased produce. Then we will be able to also share our produce with the village school and kindergarten, as well as undertake solutions of certain social issues.

## “We must create jobs from the scratch: that is what life dictates us”

**A** hard-working and creative person can overcome challenges, especially when this person has a support, Anahit Veranyan says, the president of the "Mkhitar Gosh" agricultural cooperative operating in Gosh community of Tavush marz. In her words, everything began in 2014 when a greenhouse of 400 sq.m. was constructed in their village within Oxfam Armenia's "Improving Food Security" project. The greenhouse has opened up great opportunities for women members of the cooperative up until today. They have fresh vegetables for use from early spring to late fall. They mainly grow tomatoes, cucumbers both for fresh use and for pickles, chili peppers, eggplants and a variety of greens. Ms. Anahit says their income is not high, so they try to install heating in the greenhouse to be able to operate it full year and receive more harvest.

Tourists visiting Gosh also buy the harvests grown in the greenhouse. Anahit assures us that the demand for organic vegetables is high so the increasing harvest is immediately consumed in the village.

- Our production attracts consumers by its taste. We received 2.5 tons of harvest in the first, and 3 tons in the second year of the greenhouse operation. We mainly grow tomatoes. In summer, tourists visiting the Goshavank monastery, just get crazy from the smell of our tomatoes sold in the

nearby shop, and want to buy it no matter what, Anahit says.

Ms. Anahit is a commodity specialist. Although she has shop in the village center, where she sells the harvest both from the cooperative and her home-adjacent land plot, she prefers spending her day in the cooperative with other women. She acknowledges that she became a business woman due to the cooperative and she continues learning and sharing her knowledge with other fellow women.

Ms. Anahit does not get tired from her work. After finishing it at the cooperative, she hurries, gets a little rest and then spends the rest of her energy by working on their home-adjacent land plot. Though her family members help her, she knows well her tasks. In her rare free time, she makes beautiful paper dolls, dress them with national costumes or weaves colorful nets for wine bottles, together with her beloved daughter-in-law. Anahit is confident that these hand-made accessories will be of big interest to tourists. And she is right: those accessories bring additional income to her family during the tourism high season. She thinks that they should use the opportunities that the tourism development in their region provides.

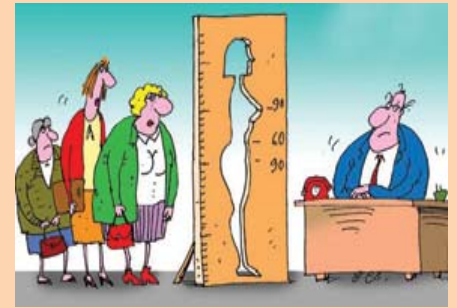
- You can find thousands of flowers in our mountains. We gather and sell them. We should not ignore whatever the nature gives us, but use it wisely. I have more business ideas and I want to



apply to village municipality or Marz Governor's Office for providing me with a venue where gifted women can weave, sew, bake under my guidance. We can sell all products during the high season. We must create jobs from the scratch: that is what life dictates us, Anahit says.

## Stop sexism

"Big lips" indicating highly developed skills for employment



Everyone is well aware of major challenges in Armenia's labour market: shadow employment, inadequate remuneration, unpaid overtime work, working without annual leaves and other forms of employee exploitation. Alongside with these challenges, hidden and obvious forms of discrimination against women at the workplace also persist. This has been voiced for many years, but without any results. While some people question the existence of harmful and unlawful practices in the labour market, employers continue posing such requirements to women under recruitment, that have no connection with the professional aspects of given positions. We see some vivid examples of this in job advertisement websites such as list.am ...

It turns out that the requirement of "good-looking young girls" posed by employers often seen in job advertisements, is not actual any more. Some employers decided to make their understanding on women's appearance more specific by posing the following requirement: "have big lips". One employer seeks an assistant-secretary, who will be free from stereotypes and will not be shy, and perhaps that factor will be decisive in getting bonuses ...

It is sad that requirements with no connections to professional skills exist in every second announcement seeking an assistant. It is obvious that such requirements pave way for further sexual harassment at the workplace since requirements on "having big lips" and certain body shape cannot be logically justified.

By the way, one of the amendments to the draft RA Labour Code under discussion now suggests the following addition to the article on elimination of all discrimination in labour relations: "actions or threats violating physical and (or) psychological and (or) sexual immunity". Although the Labour Code does not make reference to relations before employment, particularly to job announcements where obvious discriminatory requirements are posed, the RA Law on Equal Rights and Equal Opportunities of Men and Women adopted in 2013 prohibits sexual harassment and posing of such requirements or demands that can harm a person with any gender and arouse negative effects".

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