

*“Commitment to Constructive Dialogue” Project is funded by the European Union*



**“COMMITMENT TO CONSTRUCTIVE DIALOGUE” PROJECT  
STRATEGY FOR CSO INCUBATORS**

## **1. INTRODUCTION. INTERNATIONAL EXPERIENCE OF CSOs INCUBATORS’ ACTIVITY**

Civil society organisations’ (CSO) incubators are aimed at promoting the capacity building of CSOs and enhancing their effectiveness. They specifically help CSOs to develop their own management skills and expertise, establish new business contacts and reduce costs by providing them with resources, services, new knowledge and skills. Some CSOs, especially those operating in the marzes (regions), do not have sufficient office facilities, computer equipment, the Internet, the ability to establish or develop external communications. Incubators will provide them with these capacities.

Incubators are a platform for meetings and co-operation, thus, as a result of such contacts, CSOs may develop new ideas, which they can turn into reality in cooperation with other organisations.<sup>1</sup>

CSO incubators operate in different countries, such as Poland, Czech Republic, Hungary, Slovakia, Bulgaria, Serbia, Belarus, US, Indonesia, India, China<sup>2</sup> and other countries. They all have the format, mission and purpose of their activities, which are very diverse.

In Europe, in addition to the incubators for the non-profit organisations’ model, the model of incubators for commercial organisations is operational as well. For example, for start-up businesses or NGOs that are engaged in entrepreneurial activity, the Incubator of Talents in Poland<sup>3</sup> may be singled out. The latter is composed of experts from different spheres who perform various business functions. The incubator enables them to reduce the costs of engaging in entrepreneurial activity and the volume of each entrepreneur’s obligations, as well as to get acquainted with each other.

The Odyssey Organisation<sup>4</sup>, registered in the Czech Republic and operating in a number of other countries, including Slovakia, Hungary, Bulgaria, and Singapore, has also adopted a similar approach. Their mentors are experienced professionals from the business sector, who voluntarily support the development of women’s capacities in business, non-governmental and public sectors. And though Odyssey offers paid services, the rate of these services is quite low (e.g., EUR300 a year). Moreover, rendering paid services is conditioned by the fact to cover the organisation’s minimal expenses.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.quora.com/What-are-the-advantages-of-a-non-profit-incubator>

<sup>2</sup> <https://avpn.asia/organisation/non-profit-incubator/>

<sup>3</sup> <http://fwn.org.pl/en/for-companies.html>

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.myodyssey.eu/>

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Often, mentoring programmes focus on the development of leadership capacities. For example, a civil society leadership project was launched in Belarus<sup>5</sup>, where NGO leaders were provided with support through training, individual mentorship and practical activities.

The model of incubators for the organisations engaged in social entrepreneurship is especially developed in Europe and other countries, e.g.: Oksigen Lab and i-propeller in Belgium, the Non-Profit Incubator in China, the Nonprofit Enterprise and Self-Sustainability Team in Hungary and Romania and the Foundation for Social Entrepreneurs in the United Kingdom.<sup>6</sup>

Serbia should be emphasized as the European Model of Incubators of Non-Profit Institutions, where a number of initiatives that have received ideological, logistical and material support from the European Movement in Serbia, are currently independent structures and are regarded as indispensable actors in the non-profit sector of Serbia. Among them are the Association of Non-Governmental Organisations in the South East Europe (CIVIS), the Alliance for Local Communities’ Sustainable Development, the Young European Federalists, the Association of Business Women, the Victimology Society, Transparency Serbia, the Initiative Group Alpbah, the Women’s Government, the Union for Qualitative Life and others.<sup>7</sup>

The following model of incubators for non-profit organisations exists in Poland: NGOs involved in incubators should have a 1-2 year history of activity and display activity in their field. A maximum of 16 NGOs can be involved in each incubator. They will benefit from the incubator’s capabilities for a year. NGOs participating in the incubator before the start of their work sign an agreement with the company that operates the incubator and undertake obligation to be active and participate in trainings. During the year 10 courses are organised. The courses include the following topics: Team Building, Legislation, Taxes, Social Entrepreneurship, Dialogue with LSG and Business, Communication, Human Resource Management, Strategic Development and Fundraising.

NGOs participating in incubators enjoy opportunity to make use of mentoring; in case of online registration in advance, also from the consultant’s advice, as well as of office facilities, computers and the Internet.

It is also necessary to mention the Incubator/Partner Program implemented by the New York City Foundation.<sup>8</sup> Participation in the Incubator/Partner Program ensures access to a variety of professionals for commercial organisations (including representatives of relevant state bodies) such

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<sup>5</sup> <http://www.pactworld.org/country/belarus>

<sup>6</sup> [https://static1.squarespace.com/static/56d2e6bb654f9329d9dbd20e/t/5773e624197aea1484daf410/1467213350185/Country\\_Report\\_Belgium.pdf](https://static1.squarespace.com/static/56d2e6bb654f9329d9dbd20e/t/5773e624197aea1484daf410/1467213350185/Country_Report_Belgium.pdf)

<sup>7</sup> <http://www.emins.org/english/emins-as-incubator-of-ngos>

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.fcny.org/fcny/core/ip/>

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as human resource management experts, accountants, lawyers, or coaches specialised in non-profit organisations.

In 1984 the Nonprofit Coordinating Committee of New York<sup>9</sup> was established in the framework of the aforementioned programme. Its mission was to contest a government proposal to remove the charitable property tax exemption from many of NYC’s nonprofit cultural institutions. Succeeding in the above mentioned, they have also been able to secure other provisions for exemption from other types of taxes in the legislation. Further, this structure-incubator of non-profit organisations learned from its beneficiaries that they needed targeted information, guidance, and appropriate knowledge and skills. For these purposes, this institution currently performs the following functions:

- Providing practical tools to non-profit organisations, such as the Information Databank. Within its framework, the organisations receive information on the existing sectoral legislative norms, such as advocacy and lobbying, tax issues, as well as on internal whistleblowing, procedures of conflict of interest and others, and the Non-profit Outsourcing Clearinghouse;
- Providing services to beneficiaries which develop capacities of non-commercial institutions, such as relevant training, education and information provided by experts (the organisation conducts 50-60 seminars annually);
- Providing opportunities for group purchases of some programmes, which saves the resources of non-profit organisations;
- Providing Nonprofit Excellence Awards, which is based on 8 target areas of excellent governance of non-profit organisations.

Summing up the international experience of operation of incubators and localising the above-mentioned experience in the Republic of Armenia and in the framework of the “Commitment to Constructive Dialogue” project (hereinafter referred to as the **Project**), it should be stated that there is a need **to create CSO incubators for non-profit civil society organisations.**

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<sup>9</sup> <https://www.npccny.org/about-us/npccs-history/>

## **2. INCUBATORS OPERATING IN THE FRAMEWORK OF “COMMITMENT TO CONSTRUCTIVE DIALOGUE” PROJECT**

CSO incubators will be operated within the framework of the Project. The Project is implemented with the financial support of the European Union by the “Armenian Lawyers’ Association” NGO in cooperation with its partners: Agora Central Europe o.p.s (an NGO from the Czech Republic), “Armenian Centre for Democratic Education-CIVITAS” NGO, “International Centre for Human Development” Public Organisation, the “SME Cooperation Association” and “Union of Communities of Armenia” Union of Legal Entities.

### **Mission**

The mission is to provide professional and technical assistance to Armenian CSOs to develop their capacity in 9 target areas of the Project and the following 4 thematic capacities:

- Monitoring of public budgets and policies;
- Development of evidence-based policies;
- Coalition building and/or development;
- Constructive participation in the development of public policies / dialogue with the Government and local self-government.

### **Functions**

*The incubators will perform the following functions:*

- Preliminary assessment of capacities of CSOs in 4 thematic areas and 9 sectors.
- Development of individual action plan for CSOs, involving CSOs and mentors.
- Organisation of seminars/webinars and provision of consultations on a regular basis in the scope of the certification training program for CSOs organised by the American University of Armenia on the use of practical tools taught at the training, which shall include the creation and development of coalitions, development of evidence-based policies, public oversight/monitoring, constructive engagement with the government and local self-government bodies in policy development processes.
- Professional discussions in 9 target areas of the Project in accordance with the incubator’s action plan and timetable.
- Thematic and sectorial lectures by invited experts and lecturers.
- Conducting mentoring sessions for CSOs, as well as sectoral mentoring for each CSO member of incubators.

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- Individual visits and practical meetings: with the state and local bodies, non-governmental organisations, business organisations, according to sectoral directions of CSO activities.
- Organisation of quarterly visits of each CSO member of the incubator operating in the marzes to Yerevan aimed at organising meetings and discussions.
- Presentation and discussion of CSO success stories in thematic areas.
- Providing legal advice to CSOs on legal, tax, and 4 thematic and 9 target spheres of CSOs, on sectoral legislation and, in particular, on recent changes of legislation in the NGO sector.
- Provide information on conflict of interests, whistle-blowing and other organisational-legal and CSO internal capacities, including defining procedures for fundraising.
- Implementation of social and cultural activities.
- Ensuring access to office space (facilities), computers and the Internet.
- Providing small grants for CSO members of incubators on competitive basis.
- Final assessment of capacities of CSOs in 4 thematic areas and 9 sectors.
- Annual reward of CSOs for their activities in the following categories: “Coalition Building and Development”, “Evidence-Based Policy Development”, “Public Oversight and Monitoring” and “Constructive Participation/Dialogue with the Government and Local Government in Policy Development Processes.”

It is also necessary to add that CSO incubators formed within the framework of the Project are unique and can be qualified as "a step forward". The CSO incubators will also involve sectoral mentors, invited professionals and lecturers in their work. They will deepen the knowledge, skills and capacities of the sectoral CSOs on target areas of the Project.

Thus, the latter can be a model for creating and operating similar CSO incubators in other countries.

### **3. THE PROJECT TEAM IN CSO INCUBATORS**

CSO Heads and CSO Coalition Managers, local, and international experts, as well as experts from Agora Central Europe o.p.s (an NGO from the Czech Republic) and other invited experts will be involved in the CSO incubators' activities provided by this Strategy. They will introduce their practical experience and success stories in Coalition Building and Development, Evidence-Based Policy Development, Public Oversight and Monitoring and building Constructive Participatory/Dialogue with the Government and Local Self Government in Policy Development Processes.

### **4. CSO SELECTION CRITERIA**

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**CSOs will be selected based on the following criteria to participate in incubators:**

- Attendance to Certification Training for Capacity Building of CSOs conducted by the American University of Armenia.
- Assessment of the knowledge test of the Certification Training for Capacity Building of CSOs conducted by the American University of Armenia.
- Compliance of its activity areas with the target areas of the Project.
- Location (territorial) of activity.

## **5. TERRITORIAL ACTIVITY OF INCUBATORS AND THEIR LOCATION**

The incubators will be launched for regional civil society organisations in the offices of the Armenian Lawyers’ Association in Yerevan, Gyumri, Vanadzor, Gavar and Kapan.

CSOs of Tavush Marz will have the opportunity to benefit from the incubator operating in Vanadzor; Aragatsotn CSOs, will attend the incubators operating in Yerevan, Gyumri and Vanadzor; according to their territorial location CSOs from Vayots Dzor marz will attend the incubators operating in Kapan or Yerevan.

Taking into account the fact that CSOs are located in different regions of the marzes, the training will be mostly conducted with the use of a remote method.

The mentioned offices are equipped with the necessary technical equipment and are suitable for organisation of meetings, workshops and webinars. They will cooperate with CSOs on a rotational basis to include as many CSOs as possible.

## **6. EXPECTED RESULTS**

It is expected that after the completion of incubators, CSOs will possess skills in:

- Monitoring of Public Budgets and Policies
- Evidence-Based Policy Development,
- Coalition Building and/or Development,
- Constructive Participatory/Dialogue with the Government and Local Self Government in Public Policy Development Processes,
- Other CSO capacities,

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In addition, within the 9 target areas of the Project, they are expected to be aware of the issues and challenges that exist in the area(s), practical tools, local and international practices, as well as gain valuable links, develop and have their own strategies and action plans for realisation of the aforementioned issues.



## **7. ADDRESSES OF INCUBATORS**

*Incubators operate at the following addresses:*

**7 Nalbandyan str., suite 2, Yerevan, Republic of Armenia**

Telephone: (374 10) 540199

Fax: (374 10) 580299

E-mail: [info@armla.am](mailto:info@armla.am)

Coordinator of the Incubator: Marat Atovmyan

**82 Vardanants Str., apt. 1, Vanadzor, Lori Marz of the RA**

Telephone/Fax: (374 322) 22317

E-mail: [vanadzor@armla.am](mailto:vanadzor@armla.am)

Coordinator of the Incubator: Artur Sukiasyan

**1 Tigran Mets Avenue, apt. 2, Gyumri, Shirak Marz of the RA**

Telephone/Fax: (+374 312) 58236

E-mail: [gyumri@armla.am](mailto:gyumri@armla.am)

Coordinator of the Incubator: Viktoria Yeghoyan

**56 Boshnaghyan Str., apt. 7, Gavar, Gegharkunik Marz of the RA**

Telephone/Fax: (+374 264) 2 55 03 Fax: (+374 264) 2 55 03

E-mail: [gavar@armla.am](mailto:gavar@armla.am)

Coordinator of the Incubator: Liana Makvetsyan

**1 A. Manukyan Str., apt. 72, Kapan, Syunik Marz of the RA**

Telephone/Fax: (374 285) 52511

E-mail: [kapan@armla.am](mailto:kapan@armla.am)

Coordinator of the Incubator: Hrayr Khachatryan