



2024 ANNUAL REPORT



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OUR WORK

Vulnerable Women's Empowerment in Armenia



+100

Income-generating activities created since 2022

Education



+8000

Educational project beneficiaries

Migration - Return to Sources



+400

Small businesses created since 2005

Vulnerable people



+1500

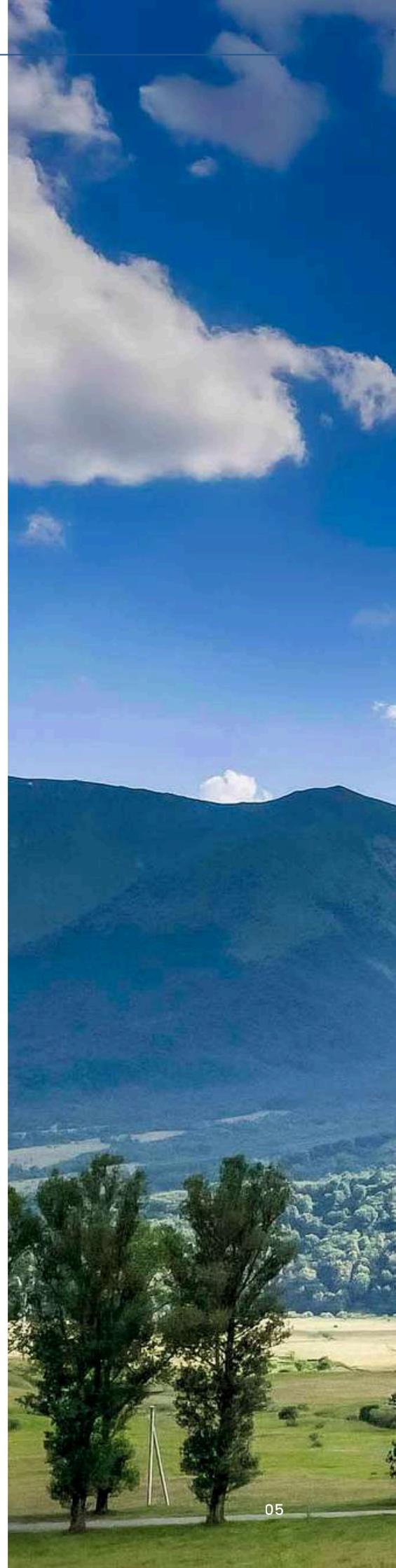
Supported refugees

OUR PROJECTS

The year 2024 marked a new milestone in our commitment to development and support for vulnerable populations. Through our projects, we continued our work in key areas, including migration, education, assistance to those in need, and the promotion of the French-speaking community.

Among these initiatives, particular attention was once again focused on empowering vulnerable women, especially refugee women, wives of military personnel affected by the 2020 war, and subsequent military conflicts. Through concrete and targeted programs, we supported their resilience and opened new prospects for the future.

This 2024 annual report reflects the progress made, challenges overcome, and successes achieved. It testifies to our constant commitment to supporting women and displaced persons from Artsakh toward sustainable autonomy. Through these pages, we invite you to discover the impact of our actions and the promising perspectives for the future.



DIRECT AID **FROM AUSTRALIA**

REFUGEE WOMEN EMPOWERMENT IN ARMENIA

In 2024, we continued our tireless efforts to advance the self-sufficiency of women affected by war. Thanks to the support of the Australian Government through its Direct Aid program and a partnership with AAAS, we implemented this project to support refugee women from Artsakh (Nagorno-Karabakh).

The project established 18 income-generating activities and funded 15 professional training programs, providing vulnerable women with pathways to economic independence. Participants gained expertise across diverse fields, including agriculture and artisan production, as well as sewing, hairdressing, and accounting, allowing them to choose careers aligned with their interests and market opportunities.

It's worth noting that, for two consecutive years the Armenian Foundation for Sustainable Development, has received invaluable support from the Australian government for our "Vulnerable Women Empowerment in Armenia" program. Through this cooperation, the program has successfully established 29 micro-enterprises and organized 30 professional training programs.



These projects were rolled out using a systematic approach: through detailed screening and field evaluations, the project distributed grants via in-kind contributions to the most viable ventures. The supported women received personalized, hands-on assistance tailored to their unique situations, enabling them to tackle and resolve the economic and social barriers they encountered.

A CONTINUING COMMITMENT

Our partnership reached a pivotal moment in April 2024 when the Australian Government delegation, led by the Ambassador, visited Armenia. This visit enabled Australian officials to witness firsthand the impact of their investment, as they met directly with beneficiaries, toured flourishing micro-enterprises, and observed tangible results in action.

The women shared powerful stories of transformation, describing how they had overcome significant challenges and the profound impact this support had had on their lives and families. These personal accounts demonstrated not just individual success but the broader community impact of our collaborative efforts.

The stories of our beneficiaries are ones of resilience and determination. Each training session completed, each business established represents a step toward regained independence and a more stable future for them and their families.

We remain convinced that economic empowerment is an essential key to enabling them to rebuild their lives with dignity and confidence. Thanks to the commitment of our partners and the courage of these women, these projects are not just one-off interventions, but sustainable levers for social and economic transformation.



We will continue to work with determination to provide our beneficiaries with the tools and opportunities they need to build a more promising future for themselves and their families.

TESTIMONIALS

The day of our departure will be forever etched in my memory. Our big family, composed of children, a pregnant woman, elderly people, and I, with my six-month-old daughter and my two sons, went through extreme hardships.

We fought to stay alive, following twisted trails through suffocating wilderness. For years, I buried these memories deep, unwilling to relive that nightmare. But my husband is convinced that we must preserve and share with the world all that we endured. To him, these scars weren't just personal wounds; they were the threads that wove together our past and would shape our future.



Shamam, 3 children

Refugee from Martakert, Artsakh



Although I lost my husband, the news of my son was like a glimmer of hope through the darkness. It reminded me that even in the most challenging moments, there is always something to hold onto, a reason to keep going. It is this connection, this hope, that allowed me to stay strong.



Ninel, 2 children

Refugee from Artsakh



Find more testimonials by scanning the QR code

SUPPORT FROM AAAS AND SAINT SARKIS CHARITY TRUST

For several years, the Saint Sarkis Charity Trust Foundation, Association Arménienne d'Aide Sociale (AAAS) and the Armenian Fund for Sustainable Development have collaborated to enhance the social protection of vulnerable women in Armenia. This collaboration continued in 2024 with reinforced commitment in favor of refugee women and war widows, offering them material support to rebuild their future through training and economic opportunities.

Building on the actions carried out in 2023, when 17 economic projects and 16 professional training programs were funded, our program enabled us once again this year to support women affected by conflicts. Following a call for applications in February 2024, 44 funding requests were received. After a rigorous selection process, five agricultural projects and five professional training programs were selected and funded for this session.

The beneficiaries are women aged 21 to 55 who were forcibly displaced from Artsakh in September 2023. They aspire to develop small businesses, particularly in the agricultural sector, a key area for their integration and economic autonomy.



AN EXPANDED PROGRAM AND STRONG ENTHUSIASM



This program is not limited to simple financial support: it is a true lever of emancipation, promoting women's economic autonomy and their reintegration into society.

Thanks to our partners and the determination of the beneficiaries, we continued to work to offer these women the means to transform their resilience into sustainable success.

The commitment of the Saint Sarkis Charity Trust Foundation was also materialized by the launch, in September 2024, of a new project.

Interest in this project exceeded all expectations, with 175 refugee women expressing their desire to participate. Among them, women aged 18 to 65, from displaced families, as well as widows and mothers who lost a loved one during the 2020 war or recent hostilities.

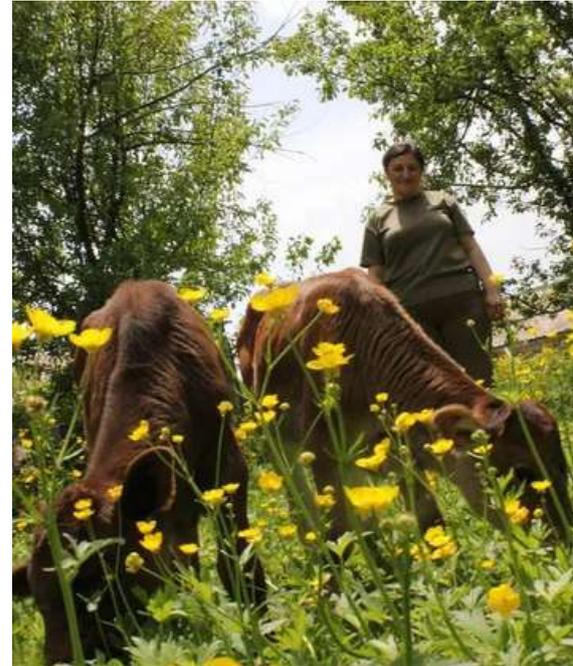
In October 2024, 95 candidates participated in an intensive workshop covering business plan creation, accounting basics, and entrepreneurial coaching. These women acquired essential skills to structure their projects and gain a better understanding of business management. However, beyond practical teachings, this workshop provided a genuine space for sharing and mutual aid, thereby strengthening solidarity among participants.

TESTIMONIALS

For more than 15 years, I taught history in Martakert, Artsakh. I never would have imagined becoming, in turn, the involuntary actor of such cruel and unjust historical events.

The real turning point came when I understood how much my dark thoughts weighed on my children. The pain in their eyes revealed to me how deeply my suffering had affected them. I then knew that I had to change, not only for myself, but especially for them.

“ Shushanik, 4 children
displaced from Martakert, Artsakh



I spent countless nights crying and praying for my husband to come back to me safe and sound. But that never happened. Depression slowly invaded me, and to tell the truth, I will never fully recover from the loss.

I'm not really able to put my feelings into words after launching this activity, but I think it constantly keeps me busy and helps me stay focused on the present moment. I also felt a sense of accomplishment and connection with the land that my husband loved so much.

“ Zhanna, 2 children
war widow

Find more testimonials by scanning the QR code



AREV SOCIETY SUPPORTS WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT

Since 2020, our partnership with the Arev Society has played a crucial role in supporting vulnerable women in Armenia, particularly through their support for our "Vulnerable Women Empowerment" program and funding of micro-enterprises. This cooperation has also enabled us to identify a crucial need: the need for digital literacy.

In an increasingly digitized world, mastery of computer tools has become an indispensable lever for professional insertion and entrepreneurship.



This is why, in 2024, a digital training program was designed and implemented. Starting in June, the Arev Society launched courses designed to strengthen the basic computer skills of beneficiaries, focusing on the use of Microsoft Office, online job searching, and awareness of cyber risks. This project is part of our commitment to promoting the autonomy of refugee women from Artsakh and war widows, thereby providing them with the means to better integrate into the job market and develop their economic initiatives.



Furthermore, upon the request of the AF4SD, the Arev Society initiated an in-depth analysis report on the empowerment program for vulnerable women. This document will evaluate the effectiveness of our economic empowerment program for refugee and vulnerable women. The study involved more than 100 women entrepreneurs, analyzing the financial, psychological, social, and personal aspects of their experiences.

 **AREV
SOCIETY**

DIGITAL LITERACY FOR VULNERABLE WOMEN

In June 2024, the Arev Society Foundation partnered with the Armenian Fund for Sustainable Development to launch the “Digital Literacy Course” initiative. The project aimed to support the most vulnerable social groups, particularly women, by providing them with digital skills and basic computer knowledge—essential tools for professional integration and for effectively managing income-generating activities.

More than 80 women, beneficiaries of the “Vulnerable Women Empowerment” program, expressed the need for additional support to strengthen their digital skills. The program had already supported them in financing vocational training or launching small businesses. Among these women were individuals aged 20 to 50, some of whom had lost their husbands or whose spouses were injured during the 2020 war in Artsakh, as well as refugee women from Artsakh.



HIGHLIGHTS FROM INTERVIEWS

“Before, I didn’t realize the importance of digital literacy; it seemed like something only my children could talk about. But after the first lessons, I understood everything I had been missing—not only in my daily life but also in the workplace. Learning and quickly grasping all these new concepts was a real challenge for me. Yet, I am so glad I made the decision to enroll. Today, I am already using some of the skills I gained in my everyday life.”



Refugee woman, 35 years old, 3 children

“I wish I had a computer at home so I could follow the digital literacy classes remotely and practice my skills after the sessions. But our only laptop is reserved for my daughter, who needs it for her university studies.”



War widow, 37 years old, 2 children

“I work all week at the local supermarket, except on Sundays, and despite my deep desire to take these courses, it’s simply impossible. I have four children at home who constantly need me, for everything. If I had a computer at home, I could join the classes remotely. Unfortunately, I don’t have one, and I cannot afford to buy one.”



Refugee woman, 34 years old, 4 children

“When I’m at home, I try to practice everything I’ve learned during the course. But when I get stuck on something, I look for solutions on YouTube. Unfortunately, the best videos are in English, and I’m not comfortable with foreign languages. So, I take it patiently and wait for the next class to ask for help.”



Refugee woman, 35 years old, 3 children

SUPPORT OUR PROJECTS

We need you!

Make your donations by following the link below or by scanning the QR code

www.af4sd.org




VOLUNTARY RETURN

For more than 20 years, the Armenian Foundation for Sustainable Development and the Association Arménienne d'Aide Sociale have been committed to supporting Armenian migrants in irregular situations in France, offering them a new chance to rebuild their future in Armenia in partnership with the French Office of Immigration and Integration (OFII).

These individuals benefit from comprehensive support, which combines voluntary return assistance with economic and social reintegration programs.



Behind every application submitted to the granting committee lies a deeply personal ambition, a dream waiting to unfold. Whether it's opening a neighborhood business, launching an artisan workshop, or cultivating a small farm, each proposal represents hope transformed into action. The committee's decisions are based on a thorough analysis of each venture's potential, guided by one unwavering goal: ensuring sustainable success that unlocks lasting opportunities.

But the assistance doesn't stop there. Beyond financial support, beneficiaries are accompanied at every step of their journey. AF4SD and AAAS teams conduct regular visits to monitor project evolution, provide guidance, and adjust support as needed. This hands-on approach not only ensures the viability of emerging businesses but also instills renewed hope and positive momentum in entrepreneurs who have chosen to rebuild their lives from the ground up.

LE COQ FRANÇAIS

"Le Coq Français" has become the premier event for young French speakers in Armenia, inspiring students to pursue excellence in the language of Molière.

Each year during Francophone Month, schoolchildren from across Armenia showcase their linguistic prowess while celebrating their passion for French culture.



The 2024 edition achieved remarkable success, drawing over 2,500 students from every region of Armenia. Their enthusiasm and linguistic mastery highlighted the growing significance of French within Armenia's educational landscape.

This year's competition flourished thanks to the invaluable partnership of the French Embassy in Armenia, the French University in Armenia (UFAR), and the French Institute of Armenia. Their collaborative support transformed the event into an enriching experience that exceeded all expectations.



Building on this momentum, "Le Coq Français" continues to expand its reach, providing young Armenians with an exceptional platform to showcase their linguistic abilities while strengthening the cultural ties between Armenia and the global Francophone community.



FRENCH CLASSROOMS

Since 2018, the Armenian Fund for Sustainable Development (AF4SD) has partnered with the Stepan Gishyan Charitable Foundation to champion French language education by establishing dedicated French classrooms in Armenia's remote regions.



This transformative initiative has already created nine state-of-the-art classrooms, each designed to provide students with an engaging and immersive learning experience. Far beyond traditional teaching spaces, these classrooms serve as vibrant cultural hubs where students explore and embrace both the French language and Francophone culture.

The project exemplifies AAAS's steadfast dedication to educational excellence and cultural exchange in Armenia. By investing in these learning environments, we empower young generations to expand their horizons and build futures enriched by multilingual competency and global cultural awareness.



OUR PERSPECTIVES FOR 2025

- ✓ Social and economic reintegration program for migrants in the context of voluntary return, in partnership with OFII and the AF4SD (since 2005 to date)
- ✓ Socio-economic empowerment program for vulnerable women, war victims, forcibly displaced and refugees, in cooperation with the Arev Society (since 2020 to date)
- ✓ Training and education programs (creation of French classes in schools in Armenia's regions since 2017 to date)
- ✓ Sports initiatives (Generation Sport Project, UEFA Project since 2020 to date)
- ✓ Promotion of French-speaking culture (Francophone Month with a national competition "French Rooster" bringing together more than 2,500 French-speaking students since 2017 to date)
- ✓ Scholarships for students at the French University in Armenia (UFAR) since 2004 to date
- ✓ Capacity building program in digital literacy and AI tools for women war victims and refugees in cooperation with the Arev Society (since 2024 to date)
- ✓ Improvement of the AI-based prototype to predict the success and failure rates of businesses created by returning migrants. This diagnostic tool, as a human-controlled decision-making assistant (ADM), after validation, could be adapted for other target audiences and in different contexts to facilitate decision-making with non-subjective criteria.
- ✓ Various social projects adapted to local needs

JOURNEYS OF RESILIENCE AND HOPE

Behind every initiative led by our organization, there are faces, stories, and destinies being written day by day. Our women's empowerment projects in Armenia are not measured solely in numbers or indicators, but above all through the voices of those who, despite hardship, have found the strength to rise again, to learn, to create, and to build a better future for themselves and their families.

These testimonials reflect their courage and determination. They were collected by our team, which, month after month, regularly visits the field to monitor progress, engage with beneficiaries, and assess the tangible impact of our actions. Each encounter is a lesson in humility and perseverance, a powerful reminder that change is possible when opportunities are offered—and embraced.

Through these stories, we wish to share with you not only individual journeys but also the broader narrative of a collective struggle for greater justice, equality, and hope.

FROM ARTSAKH TO SHGARSHIK

We arrived directly from Artsakh (Nagorno-Karabakh) in late September 2023 without anything because we didn't have enough time to prepare. With four children, we stayed a couple of days in Goris, which was awash with refugees and a total mess.

We moved to the Kotayk region with my sister and her husband, who also has four children, plus my mother. They found an apartment in the ex-Soviet bloc, and we settled in the nearest village.

The house was severely damaged before we arrived, but it was late autumn, and we decided to stay because there was nowhere else to go. It was the best choice at that time.

My husband and I did our best to find jobs, but we soon realized that our earnings would never be enough to cover the basic living expenses. Winter was harsh, but I had a premonition that something would change.

In early February 2024, I stumbled upon the "Vulnerable Women Empowerment in Armenia" project on the Armenian Fund for Sustainable Development Facebook page. Their call for proposals was intended for refugee women, and they were funding projects in the agricultural sector. Our family perfectly matched the criteria, and I applied to participate in the project.



I submitted my proposal on pig farming and kept waiting. Finally, my project was approved, and they bought me four sows. It was a great relief, and, more importantly, it was hope to continue, a beginning of something new in our new life. We decided to move to another region of Armenia where winters could be milder, but we wanted to find a place similar to Artsakh.

Of course, we didn't find exactly the Artsakhian landscape, but there were green mountains. But above all, there were warm-hearted people who accepted us as their relatives. It was a very unusual but strong feeling of closeness with the inhabitants of Shgharshik village, Aragatsotn region of Armenia. They were very helpful and did their best to ensure our reintegration.

I thought a lot about this, and several days after we moved, I understood that their hospitality was rooted in a shared history—their ancestors, like our family, were also refugees but survivors of the 1915 Armenian genocide from Samsun.

We share a big house with our wonderful neighbors, and we plan to expand our small farm to include more sows and piglets, sheep, and chickens.

Now, as we settle into our new life, I've also decided to find a house for my sister and her family. Should I manage this feat, it would be the second Artsakhian family in this beautiful village.

“The “Vulnerable Women Empowerment in Armenia” project is co-funded by the Saint Sarkis Charity Trust and [Association Arménienne d'Aide Sociale](#) and implemented by the Armenian Fund for Sustainable Development .

The [Arev Society](#) provides management support to the AF4SD's “Vulnerable Women Economic Empowerment in Armenia” program.



Narine, 32 years old, 4 children
refugee from Artsakh



Find more testimonials by scanning the QR code

I HAD TO BECOME SOMEONE WHO WOULD PULL US TOGETHER

I used to be fearless and proud. When my family and I fled from Artsakh to Armenia, I had lost all hope of a stable, happy life. Losing my homeland made me shrink and become vulnerable. With my husband having a 2nd group disability and my four children heartbroken and scared, I was ready to give up.

Having more than 15 years of experience working as a history teacher in Martakert, Artsakh, I never imagined that, at some point, I would also become part of such ruthless and unfair historical events.

The turning point for me was when I realized just how much my depressive thoughts were affecting my family, especially my four children, who were weighed down by my sorrows. I clearly understood that our lives could not go on like this anymore, and I had to become someone who would pull us together.

My sister Narine, who was also displaced from Artsakh, found a call for applications on the Armenian Fund for Sustainable Development Facebook page, applied herself, and prompted me as well.



She is my biggest role model, as her optimistic and determined attitude has always motivated me to move forward. I wrote my business plan with a lot of enthusiasm but without a slight hope of success.

After receiving funding for our farm, a happy future started seeming a little bit closer. We decided to maintain our farm the way we did it in our motherland; we even named the cows purchased in the framework of the “Vulnerable Women in Armenia” project after the animals we kept in Artsakh.

Now, I am working hard to develop a sustainable business and expand my farm. In the future, we plan to keep sheep. Currently, we can sell our produce, specifically our cheeses, which are in high demand in neighboring towns.

Our strength is defined by our bonds with other people and by our communities. I am incredibly thankful to all the people who have helped us settle in Geghamavan, Armenia, and most importantly, that they never made us feel out of place or unwelcome here.

I do not think I will ever get through the loss of my homeland. However, I know that I am capable of providing my family and my beloved children with everything to make them happy. My eldest daughter wants to become a psychologist once she graduates, and my eldest son is working hard to help us provide a stable income. Thanks to their unconditional love and support, I have faith in myself.



Shushanik, 35 years old, 4 children
refugee from Artsakh



Find more testimonials by scanning the QR code

MY LIFE ROCKED IN ONE DAY....

Life has a way of unfolding in unexpected, sometimes heart-wrenching ways. It was October 16, 2020, a day when joy and tragedy collided in my life with devastating force. It was a day of intense emotional complexity, during which a dramatic contrast of profound life events—one representing new life and joy, the other representing loss and grief—occurred within 24 hours.

That morning, my daughter-in-law shared great news. She told me that she was expecting my son Arman's child. But fate had other plans.

Before we could fully embrace our happiness, we received the devastating news that our son Arman had fallen in Nagorno-Karabakh, never knowing he would become a father again.

After several months, we named our grandson after him, ensuring his legacy lives on.

Though physically absent, Arman's presence fills our home – his belongings are carefully arranged in a corner, and his photograph is always close to my heart in a pendant I never remove.

The first years after losing him were shrouded in darkness. Grief paralyzed me, stripping away any desire to engage with life.



Little by little, I began to look around, and it was crucial to find an occupation to fill time and calm the terrible pain. When construction work on our new house was completed, I resumed gardening and growing vegetables and fruits.

Like many of my neighbors, I began to dry fruits, mainly peaches.

My first attempt at fruit drying yielded nearly 500kg, a success that encouraged me to continue.

In April 2024, I applied for support from the Armenian Fund for Sustainable Development to develop this activity. My application was approved, and they provided everything needed for a complete production cycle – from drying containers to a greenhouse.

I followed traditional methods, using natural sunlight instead of artificial heaters. Though more time-consuming, this approach yields superior results – fruits that are not just dried but transformed into something pure and wholesome.

Family members, encouraged by my motivation, helped me collect, wash, dry, and sell the fruits. People say work helps heal grief, but they're wrong – at least for me. My son remains in my thoughts every minute, the ache of his loss a constant companion regardless of what I'm doing or where I am.

Yet this program has given me something else: the ability to ease my family's financial burdens, even as we carry the weight of our emotional ones.

Each morning, as I tend to dry fruits under the Armenian sun, I'm reminded that life, like these fruits, can be preserved and transformed into something different yet valuable. What started as a distraction has become a testament to resilience.

In our society, widowed mothers or those who have lost children often retreat into the shadows of their grief, becoming dependent on others not just emotionally but financially.

It is not just a matter of economic independence or a replacement for what I've lost; it's a way to honor Arman's memory by showing the same strength he displayed in serving our country.

When other women in our village see me managing my business, they realize that age and tragedy don't define our capabilities. Some have even sought my advice on starting their own ventures.

This ripple effect of empowerment shows that when one woman stands up and reclaims her life, she lights the way for others to follow.



Zardar, 53 years old, 1 child
refugee from Artsakh

KRO IS A MIX OF COURAGE AND WILL...

Four years have passed since this atrocious war. It is too hard to reminisce. What I had at that time and what I have now can't be compared. I lost my husband during the war; I lost the land where I lived. If I talk to you metaphorically about this, it may be like a situation where you fall into the fathomless abyss.

You are in freefall, plummeting into an endless void with no sense of control or direction. Everything crumbled in a second, and I thought each moment of descent pulled me deeper into darkness, leaving my beautiful world behind.

You are sure that you will be crushed and shattered, but finally, once you have landed, you open your eyes, you begin to feel your members, you start to breathe, and you realize that you are still alive, you survived, and you need to continue for the sake of your children and memory.

After the war, and moving to the Republic of Armenia, I worked as a paralegal, but it did not meet our needs, I just eke out a living and nothing more so I decided to do something else simultaneously. I have always loved baking.

I started taking orders and making pastries at home. Last year, in 2023, I stumbled across the Armenian Fund For Sustainable Development announcement on Facebook about a "Women empowerment program" and applied for support.



In 2024, I finally had the chance to present my pastry shop project beyond agriculture and received support to start. At first, the commission doubted the location and rent costs, but once i found the right place, they visited and delivered the equipment from my business plan.

Although my shop is not on a main street, it is surrounded by schools and cultural centers, and quickly became a favorite spot for children. Every pastry is made with natural, high-quality ingredients – always with love, which i consider my secret recipe.

Clients grow every day, and orders have even reached France, Belgium, and Georgia, especially for my Gathas with walnuts and artsakhian pakhlava. My mother, sister, and two other women from Artsakh help me, sharing both the struggles and the will to move forward. since september, I've been working tirelessly, waking up at 5 a.m., but knowing each morning it is worth the effort.

I also actively take part in expos, masterclasses for children, and even taught 30 students in yerevan, which was deeply rewarding. while the war took much from me, it also gave me a community that feels like family. Our pastries bear the name “KRO,” from our Artsakh dialect meaning “steel,” symbolizing courage and resilience. Looking ahead, I dream of expanding further and opening a training center to pass on the art of pastry-making with dedication and heart.



Zita, 44 years old, 2 children
refugee from Artsakh

A JOURNEY OF RESILIENCE

When we bought our house in Shushi in 2019, we thought we had made our dreams come true. Little did we know how fragile dreams could be. We could never have imagined that we would lose our home one day and that our hopes would crumble.

The war broke out in 2020, and constant bombing and massive killings dismantled our world. We fled to Armenia with my two children for several months while my husband, who served in the army, stayed in Artsakh. We returned to Stepanakert once hostilities temporarily ceased.

After returning, nothing was the same; it felt as though a black cloud filled with sorrow was about to rain. This fragile peace didn't last, and in 2022, we found ourselves trapped in a total blockade imposed by Azerbaijan aimed at starving the entire surviving population of Artsakh (Nagorno-Karabakh).

One year later, in September 2023, there was a military incursion, followed by a ruthless war that forced the government to evacuate the entire population.



Exodus...

our grandparents told us horrific stories of the 1915 genocide and the exodus; this time it felt the same, only the horses were replaced by cars. it was unbearably hard for us, our children, and all our brothers and sisters. we realized we were losing a special bond with our motherland.

we left artsakh reluctantly, forced to return to armenia just to save our children. we settled in a small rented house in the ararat region. conditions were tough, no jobs or prospects, and survival was difficult. then we discovered the armenian fund for sustainable development's women's empowerment program. after applying, we were invited to present our chicken breeding proposal. soon, i signed a purchase contract, and today we have almost 400 chickens and an incubator, selling eggs and meat.

the fund also supported my dream of becoming a hairdresser. after two months of intensive training, i received my certificate and now work in a beauty salon. though i hold a master's degree in journalism, i always longed for this profession. at 33, i've gained a new skill and believe things will only improve.

i know my story may reach people who never knew where artsakh was or what it means to lose everything. daily struggles seem small once you've survived war and blockade. what matters is keeping the memory alive and reminding the world how wrong it is to expel peaceful people and turn them into refugees.

we lost something priceless: the land of our ancestors, with its churches and gravestones. it is painful, but i believe we will return one day. until then, we must stay strong, united, and thrive.



Tatevik, 33 years old, 2 children
refugee from Artsakh

HOPE FOR THE FUTURE

I was born and lived my entire life in Artsakh (Nagorno Karabakh), a place that has been my home through every stage of life, from childhood to marriage. But in 2020, everything changed in an instant.

The life I once knew felt like a miracle, and suddenly, the reality became a constant pain that seemed impossible to escape. During the war, I lost the most important person in my life—my husband.



During that devastating war, I was working as a nurse, not just doing my job but fulfilling a deep sense of duty. My husband was at the front, and I knew he needed medicine. I hoped I could help him, but the war kept us apart. Just days later, I received the unbearable news that he had passed away.

Yet, even in that moment of sorrow, I remember the face of a young boy I could help. At least I saved one life. Amid loss, I find peace in that simple fact—it makes my heart feel a little lighter to know I could make a difference for someone else.

Anyway, it's so hard to describe all the emotions we felt during the war. My husband died at the front, and my son was there too.

There were days when i heard nothing from my son, and the uncertainty was unbearable. When his voice finally reached me, it was as if a weight had lifted from my heart. Though I had lost my husband, hearing from him was a ray of hope that kept me going.

I remember vividly the moment we left Artsakh. My children wanted to destroy everything in our apartment so nothing would remain for the Azerbaijanis, but I refused. Instead, we took a set of teacups as a memory, a small act of resilience. Today, when we serve tea in them, we tell the story of our homeland and of a people who, despite losing everything, rise again and never give up.

Now in Mrgavan, Ararat region, life has not been easy, but I am grateful to those who supported us. With the Armenian Fund for Sustainable Development, I found a new path in poultry farming. I've just started selling eggs and already have customers. This small success gives me hope, and I want to be a source of strength for my children. My daughter, an artist, will soon work at the cultural center. She believes that the greatest revenge is creating beauty, and I couldn't be prouder.

We, the Artsakh Armenians, have endured decades of suffering and long only for peace. I remember the blockade, when we had no food, no water, no light, no gas. Yet we gathered with neighbors, shared what little we had, and baked bread so our children would not starve. That spirit of unity, almost magical in its power, gave us strength then—and continues to give us hope for the future.



Ninel, 47 ans, 4 enfants
refugee from Artsakh

A HOME IN THE HEART

We were displaced from Chankatagh, located in the Martakert region of Artsakh. The day we left our homeland will remain etched in my memory forever.

Our big family, with children, a pregnant woman, the elderly, and I, with my 6-month-old daughter and two sons, faced unimaginable hardship.

We fought to stay alive through different paths, across dense woods.



I used to say I didn't want to remember the hell we went through in those desperate moments. But my husband always believed that it's important to remember what happened to us because it's part of our life and fate. He thinks things will eventually get easier and better for us. And even though I see so many challenges ahead, I'm starting to believe in his optimism.

Before we came to Agarak village, we lived in various settlements across Armenia. Just imagine how hard it was for my schoolboys to switch schools and environments repeatedly.

After only a few months in one place, they'd be uprooted and forced to start over. Our elders often said the children became lazy and didn't want to learn anymore. But I understand them. How could they concentrate on school when everything around them was constantly changing?

It's not easy to lose a home, move from place to place, and live in houses that aren't yours, always knowing they are temporary. The hardest part is the loss of inner peace—you feel constantly in motion, waiting for the next change. yet I believe in my children, and I know in my heart that life will change for the better. They deserve peace, stability, and a future full of possibilities, just like every child.

In Agarak village, Armenia, it feels like we've finally found what we've been searching for. My husband loves this place, and so do my children and I. The landscape reminds us of our beloved Chankatagh. Sometimes, as I look at the mountains and the green fields, I feel relief, as if the weight of everything is lifting.

Here we even created a small tradition—inviting neighbors into our home. At first unusual, it grew into real friendship. Now we share time together, and one neighbor even said he would buy the house we rent so we could stay close forever. Moments like this make us feel rooted, as if we finally belong.

Back in Chankatagh, we lived from animal husbandry, raising chickens, pigs, and cows. We lost it all. At first, it seemed impossible to go on. But my husband's optimism gave me courage. Through the Armenian Fund for Sustainable Development, we joined a pig farming program, which became a turning point—allowing us to begin again and rebuild a piece of the life we once had.

We, the people of Artsakh, didn't just work the land—we loved it. The soil, the water, the sun gave us the sweetest fruits and vegetables, but it was our care and devotion that made them thrive. That bond with the earth is now part of our hearts.

Today, we raise pigs and chickens and dream of greenhouses. Challenges remain, but we chose to be stronger—for our children. They deserve safety, encouragement, and happiness. That is all I want for them.



Shamam, 34 years old, 3 children
refugee from Artsakh

MARIAM'S STORY

I am from Khnushinak, a village in the Martuni region of Artsakh (Nagorno Karabakh). It is a peaceful place on top of hills, where homes are built on the slopes. People live in harmony with nature, always connected to the land around them. But the 2020 war in Nagorno Karabakh marked a turning point in our lives, forever changing them.

In Armenia, I am trying to integrate into life after such a tragedy—the untruthful and barbaric war that claimed so many bright lives. Step by step, I am doing my best to rebuild my life and start a business in the field of confectionery.

Although I am a teacher and worked as a computer operator in our village school back in Artsakh, I also used to work as a pastry chef, and people have always ordered cakes from me for their occasions. I loved both jobs and was fortunate to have incredibly educated and talented people around me. Our village school was well known for its talented pupils, and the village was known for its humble and frank inhabitants.

We stayed in Artsakh until the evacuation in 2023. Even in the face of overwhelming loss, we tried to restore what the war had destroyed. Many of us attempted to rebuild—some started new homes, while others repaired the remnants of their old ones. While we faced unimaginable challenges, we were determined not to give up on our dreams.



No one could have imagined that such a tragedy would continue, taking from us everything we had worked so hard for. I still remember the last day in Artsakh—packing what little I could and carefully wrapping my baking tools, unsure if I would ever use them again. That day, I realized how deeply my work defined me and clung to the hope that I would one day continue.

Baking is more than a profession for me—it is meditation, art, and connection. Perhaps that dedication brought me the right people at the right time. Thanks to the Armenian Fund for Sustainable Development, I received new equipment and could rebuild my path as a pastry chef. Their support inspired me to work with even more care and honesty, using only natural ingredients and paying attention to every detail, from the recipe to the packaging. Every cake I make is a reflection of gratitude and love.

After the war, I also lost my parents in a car accident. yet I believe my success carries my mother's blessing. She instilled in me the love of baking, and when I prepare cookies, I feel her presence guiding me, like an angel.

Life in the village has its challenges, especially in sales. But having endured hunger, cold, and war in Nagorno Karabakh, I know resilience. I trust that with patience and hard work, my business will thrive.

As an Artsakhian woman, I also feel the responsibility to preserve our culture and dialect. At home, we speak it with our children, keeping alive the linguistic heritage that ties us to our roots. In a changing world, I find strength in holding onto what truly matters—our traditions, our family, and the craft I love most.



Mariam, 29 years old, 3 children
refugee from Artsakh

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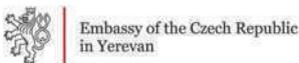
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