



Schweizerische Eidgenossenschaft
Confédération suisse
Confederazione Svizzera
Confederaziun svizra

Embassy of Switzerland in Armenia



Schweizerische Eidgenossenschaft
Confédération suisse
Confederazione Svizzera
Confederaziun svizra

Swiss Agency for Development
and Cooperation SDC

February 2024

YEREVAN

SDC NEWSLETTER 2023



CONTENT

Forward Message (p. 2)

Portfolio Developments (p. 3)

Swiss Assistance to the Refugee Crisis (p. 4)

Official Meetings, Visits & Field Trips (p. 6)

Arts and Culture (p. 8)

FORWARD MESSAGE



Dear readers
Dear partners and friends

Probably the most important topic of Armenian policy and public attention in 2023 was the crisis in Nagorno-Karabakh (N-K). It began with the blockade in December 2022 and culminated in the Azerbaijani intervention and takeover of the remaining N-K territories in September 2023. As a result, Armenia had to take in around 100,000 refugees in less than a week, in addition to the approximately 27,000 refugees from the 2020 war.

These developments have had and continue to have a fundamental impact on politics and the economy of Armenia. The political stability and state of governance, public resources and institutional capacities at all levels, the political agenda – that is the need for a comprehensive policy response to the refugee crisis and the pace of implementation of already planned reforms -, and the economic growth path, all these key areas were and are directly affected. While related challenges are exceptional, the fundamental issues for a stable peace remain unresolved.

Against this challenging backdrop, the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC) continued to implement the Armenian part of its 2022-2025 Program for the South Caucasus Region in 2023. Total expenditure for bilateral and multilateral aid in Armenia in 2023 amounted to around CHF 5.35 million (equivalent to around USD 6 million).

By the end of 2023 and halfway through the 2022-2025 strategic framework, the Armenian SDC team achieved to fully update and modernize its country portfolio for addressing the challenges in Armenia in an innovative way. At the same time the developments at regional and at country level once more documented the need for flexibility and swift responsiveness.

The year 2023 notably brought new long-term SDC engagements to strengthen the Armenian democracy, as well as to restore Armenian forests vis-à-vis the foreseeable impact of climate change. Moreover, immediate humanitarian aid to arriving refugees was increased, while efforts were launched to prepare their longer-term socio-economic integration. With the aim of promoting cross-border connections, interactions and cooperation in order to help defuse conflicts in the long term, considerations were also made as to how cooperation in the region could be strengthened, e.g. through overarching cooperation in environmental and climate policies.

To conclude, with this forward message I would like to say goodbye to our partners and friends of the Swiss Development Cooperation in Armenia after almost four years. My team and I feel that the portfolio is very relevant, working relations with partners are very good, and results are tangible. Switzerland's development cooperation effectively contributes to Armenia's reform agenda and to excellent bilateral relations between the two countries. I would like to express my sincere thanks for the good cooperation and interest in our work in 2023 and over the past four years, and I wish my successor, Ms. Ursula Läubli, who will take office in April 2024, the same great support and trust that I have always enjoyed.

Stay in touch with the Embassy and the SDC in Armenia by visiting our [website](#), as well as by following us on the following social media platforms: [Facebook](#), [Instagram](#), [LinkedIn](#).

Sincerely,

Werner THUT, PhD
Deputy Regional Director Swiss Cooperation Office South Caucasus
Deputy Head of Mission

PORTFOLIO DEVELOPMENTS

"Democratic Institutions and Participatory Policies in Armenia" (DIPPA) project launch



On December 28, 2024, the SDC launched its new project "Democratic Institutions and Participatory Policies in Armenia" (DIPPA). An amount of CHF 9 million (around 10.5 Mio. US\$) is envisaged for the period 2023-2033. The project budget is subject to a recurring review by the SDC of the feasibility of the project from an overall budgetary perspective. The project is currently in its preparatory stage of one year with a budget of CHF 400'000.

The project seeks to support public institutions to be more inclusive in their tasks of policymaking and budgeting. The project empowers individuals and citizen groups to engage constructively and innovatively with these institutions

towards balanced, broader-based policy solutions. And finally, it strengthens the role of independent media in promoting public awareness and constructive dialogue. These goals collectively envision a future where democracy and relevant state institutions are robustly supported by an informed and engaged citizenry.

Key partners include state institutions such as the Prime Minister's Office, the National Assembly, the Ministry of Finance, line ministries, and select pilot municipalities. Non-governmental stakeholders, including civil society organizations and impartial media outlets, will also play a big role in project implementation.

DIPPA is Switzerland's response to Armenia's government initiatives for increased public participation, aiming to support the country in comprehensively enhancing its democratic processes. The project builds upon successful local-level participation efforts from the Swiss-funded "Improvement of the Local Self-Governance System in Armenia" project, extending them to the national level. Thus, DIPPA further strengthens Armenia's position as a leader in democratic governance among post-Soviet countries.

Read more [here](#).

"Forest Restoration and Climate Change in Armenia" (FORACCA) project launch

On December 19, 2023, the SDC launched a new 10-year project called "Forest Restoration and Climate Change in Armenia" (FORACCA) with a budget of CHF 10 million around (11.5 million USD) for the period 2023-2033, subject to a recurring review by the SDC of the feasibility of the project from an overall budgetary perspective. The project is currently in its preparatory stage of one year with a budget of CHF 400'000.

Armenia, characterized by diverse ecosystems spanning altitudes from 375 to 4090 meters, faces challenges of deforestation, forest degradation, and the impacts of climate change, ranking among the least forested countries in the region with only 11% forest cover.



FORACCA aims to address these issues by bringing advanced knowledge on climate change to Armenia, facilitating evidence-based policymaking, promoting climate-smart practices in rural areas, and contributing to sustainable forest management.

Working closely with the Swiss Federal Institute for Forest, Snow, and Landscape Research (ETH-WSL) and local partners such as the Armenian National Agrarian University and the Ministry of Environment, FORACCA plans to identify and implement projects in up to 7 communal and privately owned sites.

Read more [here](#).

“Sustainable and Inclusive Growth in Mountainous Armenia” SIGMA project enters implementation



Following the preparatory phase of the SIGMA project launched back in 2022, the SDC and its implementing partner DAI Global UK (DAI) launch the SIGMA implementation to reduce poverty in mountainous areas of Armenia in an inclusive, innovative and climate-aware manner.

With a duration of 10 years, SIGMA’s geographic focus will be on the poorest regions in Northern Armenia, reaching areas at an altitude of more than 1500m.

Read more [here](#).

Photo © Austrian Development Agency. All rights reserved. Licensed to the European Union under conditions. Produced within the scope of the Organic Agriculture Support Initiative project.

ONGOING IMPLEMENTATION AND PLANNING ACTIVITIES

The “Improvement of the Local Self-Governance System in Armenia” LSG project, which is to assist the advancement of the Territorial and Administrative Reform in Armenia, as well as support local municipalities to be more transparent in operations and to carry out functions more effectively, has been extended for implementation until September 2024. The two other flagship projects funded by the SDC in Armenia [“Living Landscapes for Market Development in Armenia” LILA](#) and [“Modernizing Vocational Education and Training in Agriculture in Armenia MAVETA](#) are in their third and second years of successful implementation respectively.

In program preparation research, the SDC has conducted a number of studies, including an assessment for advancing Tech-enabled Private Sector Engagement in the Swiss Cooperation Programme in Armenia, as well as a study to assess the feasibility of a concept for a proposed hospitality educational institution that is being developed by a group of Armenian stakeholders that include Swiss and international diaspora organizations.

An expert document on “Environment & Security in the South Caucasus: Assessing Possibilities of Regional Collaboration” explores options for regional cooperation in the intersection of environment and security. By focusing on shared responsibilities across borders, it aims to pinpoint potential areas for collaborative efforts. This could involve cooperation at the government level, among non-governmental entities like academia, civil society, and media, or in combined formats. Working together across borders could enhance the effective use of natural resources, improve environmental protection, and foster confidence between governments and non-governmental actors in different countries.

SWISS ASSISTANCE TO THE REFUGEE CRISIS

In less than a week, more than 100,000 people have fled Nagorno-Karabakh to Armenia in search of security, food, shelter, and a future livelihood. The international community, the Armenian authorities and the civil society are working hard to create best possible conditions to receive and support these people. In response to this urgent situation, in early November 2023, Switzerland defined specific actions for extending humanitarian assistance in Armenia with 1.5 million Swiss francs.

Distributed equally among three key actors WFP, UNHCR and the ICRC, the funds were directed towards addressing the immediate needs of refugees. With their specificities, all three interventions work on hosting, increasing food security, and ensuring economic opportunities of the refugees.





REBCA Project extended

The World Food Programme WFP of the UN utilized a grant of 500'000 Swiss francs to extend the ongoing Swiss-funded **Resilience and Economic Recovery of Border Communities in Armenia REBCA** project launched back in November 2022. With the additional funds, it prioritized the most vulnerable refugees settled in rural areas of Syunik and Gegharkunik regions, as well as their host families, providing them with immediate humanitarian, psycho-social, and long-term economic support.

Funds provided to UNHCR and ICRC

A contribution of 500'000 Swiss francs to the UN Refugee Response Plan (RRP) was approved in October, with the UNHCR UNHCR's emergency response to support the RA Government's efforts to host the refugees and enhance resilience. As an additional effort, a Swiss expert has been made available for UN organizations for communication and data analysis.

The last portion of 500'000 Swiss francs cover the efforts by the International Committee of the Red Cross ICRC, jointly with the Armenian Red Cross Society, providing emergency psycho-social and economic aid. The ICRC will also continue to support the Armenian authorities in their endeavor to clarify the fate of missing persons. A specific attention will be put on the families of the missing. This funding is in addition to the one million Swiss francs already granted to the ICRC for its operations in the region in 2023.

PILOT PROJECTS

To strengthen the civil society, to widen the civic space, as well as to deepen and expand knowledge in priority areas of media, environment and migration. The SCO Armenia funded the following pilot projects in 2023:

“Challenges and Opportunities in Refugee Integration in Armenia”

This pilot project implemented by KASA Foundation aims to support efforts of various stakeholders to develop and implement efficient refugee inclusion strategies, policies, programmes, and measures. It will provide analysis and a deeper understanding of the challenges faced by refugees in their inclusion journey and provide insights on opportunities to be seized. The project will provide space for bringing in existing practices, approaches, and importantly build a dialogue for hearing the voices of refugees and engaging them in reflections on the relevant programmes and measures supporting inclusion.

“Empowering Civil Society Organizations in Armenia”

Implemented by reArmenia, the project aims to empower Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) in Armenia with a specific focus on CSOs engaged in Media, Migration, Diaspora, and Environmental topical activities. This will be achieved by providing comprehensive training courses focusing on the specific needs of the engaged CSOs such as engaging experts, recurring fundraisers, and one-time fundraisers. To provide the Armenian CSOs with an innovative platform with donation management tools the project also involves developing a task-based collaboration tool, enhancing user experience, and implementing new features on the reArmenia portal.

OFFICIAL MEETINGS, VISITS & FIELD TRIPS

Development Cooperation Advisory Commission of Swiss Government and SDC Director General visit Armenia



On 20-22 April 2023, the Advisory Commission for Swiss International Cooperation paid a working visit to the three countries in the South Caucasus region accompanied by Ambassador Patricia Danzi, Director General of the SDC. The members of the delegation deepened their understanding on Switzerland's cooperation efforts in Armenia and on the current geopolitical situation of the country. The mission reaffirmed Switzerland's readiness to support Armenia in its reform agenda as well as to support efforts of all players to promote peace at a regional level through international cooperation.

How the SDC Contributes to Armenia's Tourism Sector Development

A notable example emphasizing the SDC's contribution to Armenia's tourism sector development was the opening ceremony of the Arevi Gosh Hotel, inaugurated on September 18, 2023, an outcome of the SDC-funded Living Landscapes in Armenia (LILA) project. Located in Gosh village within the Tavush Province, the hotel, consisting of 12 rooms, is strategically positioned to cater to eco-tourists, hikers, and trekkers, capitalizing on the region's natural attractions, including the Goshavank Monastery.



The project aims to generate employment, particularly for women, and boost the local economy by sourcing agricultural products and providing guided tours. The hotel received comprehensive support, including technical assistance, waste management training, and digital marketing expertise, aligning with the broader goal of promoting environmentally friendly practices. Werner Thut lauded the Arevi Gosh Hotel as a model for achieving inclusive and sustainable tourism, contributing to positive changes in the Gosh Settlement.

Tourism is a key focus within the Swiss Development Cooperation Program in Armenia, emphasizing inclusive and sustainable development in rural areas. The SDC's approach complements the country's larger tourism policy by targeting small farmers and enterprises. The contributions also prioritize climate change policies and sustainable use of natural resources.

New Regional Director of Swiss Cooperation South Caucasus visits Armenia

In the end of November 2023, Barbara Böni, the newly appointed Tbilisi-based Regional Director of Swiss Cooperation for the South Caucasus, embarked on her inaugural visit to Armenia. Introduced by Werner Thut, her Deputy Regional Director responsible for Armenia, and his team, Ms. Böni is diving headfirst into her role, exploring the diverse but coherent portfolio the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation SDC has in store for Armenia.

Priorities of her 5-day stay were economic, environmental, and governance-related project visits and discussions with public institutions and non-governmental organizations. An omnipresent topic was the current refugee crisis and the Swiss contribution to mitigating it.



The SCO team visits the Swiss Red Cross in Armenia



On December 14, 2023, the team of the Swiss Cooperation Office in Armenia conducted a visit to the premises of the Swiss and Armenian Red Cross societies in Yerevan, receiving an extensive introduction to the mission of the Swiss Red Cross in Armenia and its collaborative initiatives with the Armenian Red Cross Society. The team was warmly received by Jina Sargizova, Head of the Armenia Office of the Swiss Red Cross Society.

Active on a permanent basis in Armenia since 2016, the Armenia Office of the Swiss Red Cross Society has been pivotal in offering various forms of assistance to its Armenian counterparts, encompassing technical knowledge transfer, peer-to-peer marketing and fundraising support, financial aid and more.



CULTURAL CAMPAIGN 2023: MY HOME – ARMENIA IN A RAPIDLY CHANGING WORLD

In February 2023, the Swiss Cooperation Office in Armenia SCO called for creative and innovative project proposals, which contribute to the development of contemporary arts in Armenia with the slogan **"My Home – Armenia in a Rapidly Changing World"**. With the call, the SCO invited artists to reflect on life in this difficult geographical place; on being Armenian in a cosmopolitan world; and on living today but with an open, potentially promising future ahead.

More than 80 proposals were received out of which five projects were selected for funding. Exhibitions, concerts, discussions and presentations of the selected projects took place throughout the year in Armenia and its regions.

Learn more about the selected projects [here](#).



CONTACT

Embassy of Switzerland in Armenia
Swiss Cooperation Office South Caucasus

Melik-Adamyanyan Street 2/1, 0010 Yerevan
Phone: +374 10 52 98 60

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/SwissEmbassyYerevan/>
Instagram: <https://www.instagram.com/swissembassyarmenia/>
LinkedIn: <https://www.linkedin.com/company/embassy-of-switzerland-in-armenia/>
Website: <https://www.eda.admin.ch/armenia>