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**USAID ARMENIA, SOCIAL PROTECTION  
SYSTEMS STRENGTHENING PROJECT**

# FACT SHEET

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## **SOCIAL PROTECTION SYSTEMS STRENGTHENING (SPSS) PROJECT**

The USAID Armenia, Social Protection Systems Strengthening project is a multifaceted initiative designed to help improve social-insurance delivery, introduce job-market reforms and occupational safety standards, and reduce vulnerable citizens' dependence on public support.

Implemented by The Services Group, Inc. (TSG), from 2006 until 2011, SPSS focuses on strengthening existing social protection systems, enhancing the Armenian Government's institutional and human capacities, steering public-private collaboration, and boosting the capacities of social-service NGOs. By supporting core social sector reforms in Armenia the project aims to facilitate transition to self-reliance and sustainability and to reduce citizens' dependence on public support for their basic needs.

### **Social Insurance**

In addition to providing retirement planning options to its citizens, Armenia is working to build a dependable pension system that provides adequate living standards to current and future pensioners, properly tracks individual contributions and benefits. To help Armenia reach this goal, SPSS is:

- developing reform options for the benefit of all social-insurance recipients in the country and promoting informed decision-making,
- providing advice on the reform of the pension system,
- supporting counterparts to establish effective and integrated management systems,
- working to harmonize social-sector databases to improve information integrity and security.

2006-2007 accomplishments include:

- 8 seminars provided on pension system reforms in international practice for the RA Ministry of Labor and Social Issues and the GOAM Pension Reform Working Group,
- 3 study tours organized on pension reform,
- Demographic and economic analysis of the current pension system in Armenia and of proposed administrative changes and required institutional changes provided to Government counterparts,
- Business process and information technology analysis of the State Social Insurance Fund conducted, as well as of
- Integrated social service centers in Masis and Vanadzor cities to determine the status and prospects, and
- Assessment of effectiveness of the current Individualized Reporting System for Social Security conducted.

### **Employment Services**

Armenian employers need support to reduce staff turnover and find the workers with the right skills, while job seekers need to be able to find the right employers and continue acquiring new skills. The current economic growth must be supported by professional labor-market research and the development of a competitive workforce. Employment services should better match labor force supply to match business demand. SPSS is dedicated to facilitating this by:

- working to modernize employment services that promote employer and job seeker needs,
- providing labor market research capacity support,
- developing enhanced State Employment Centers working conditions, re-aligning staff functions and processes, and

- working with Government counterparts to develop the National Employment Strategic Plan, consistent with the International Labor Organization Strategy and European Union standards.

Employment Services Component 2006-2007 accomplishments include:

- Assessed employment service delivery resulting in a partnership with USAID Bridge project to renovate 7 centers,
- Selected pilot offices to demonstrate modern employment services,
- Revised State Employment Service Agency Employer Survey for 2007 and provided recommendations and training on results reporting,
- Training and toolkit provided to 12 partners, including government, on successful Job Fair planning and implementation, including employer and job seeker outreach,
- Researched best practices in strategic plans for the RA Ministry of Labor and Social Issues.

## Occupational Safety and Labor Code

Armenia recently revised its Labor Code to improve employee safeguards, creating a Labor Inspectorate in 2005 to enforce these regulations. However, public knowledge of worker safety issues is low and institutional capacity needs to be developed in effective and risk-based regulation enforcement.

Armenian workers deserve a safe and healthy working environment, which starts with worker-employer collaboration. In order to help foster workplace safety, the SPSS project is:

- helping to develop occupational health and safety norms for Armenia and to refine labor legislation in accordance with international standards,
- raising awareness on these issues, especially among the private sector,
- developing capacity for and support to “risk-based” enforcement on the part of the Labor Inspectorate.

2006-2007 accomplishments include:

- A Labor Inspection Manual drafted introducing best international standards into Armenian labor inspection practices and laying the groundwork for risk-based enforcement.
- Amendment recommendations made, including six policy level changes and 43 specific proposals, based on which the Ministry of Labor and Social Issues made several changes into its draft law for amending the Labor Code.
- A survey of experts in the sphere of labor and labor regulation conducted to gauge public perceptions of the Labor Inspectorate and identify key weaknesses in the Labor Code and its enforcement.
- Mining and Explosive Environment Regulations created through a collaborative process. This included hosting a tripartite round table where representatives of the private sector, trade unions, and Government agencies for the first time discussed safety norms, inter-governmental, and stakeholder cooperation.

## Social Assistance Programs for Vulnerable Populations

Meeting basic needs is a universal challenge. Armenia struggles to provide care, effectively target assistance for its socially vulnerable populations, and promote social and economic inclusion. Under this Component, the Project is:

- working to improve social services that reduce dependency on the state by promoting efficient use of scarce resources to help the most in need,
- supporting the Government and NGOs to collaboratively provide community-based social services through social contracting,
- promoting professional social work and high quality social service provision.

2006-2007 accomplishments include:

- Governmental, local and international public organizations brought together to identify and tackle social contracting challenges in Armenia, in a roundtable on social contracting.
- Grants competition held, in joint collaboration with Government colleagues, to enable four NGOs provide community day care services for the people with disabilities.
- Training for social workers on a country-wide scale on improved accessibility and delivery of services to the vulnerable populations.