

DeaLoG Project in Armenia

NEWSLETTER

January – June 2023

SALAR Project in Armenia 2022-2026: Support to Decentralisation and Local Self-Government Reforms (DeaLoG) is a project of the [Swedish Association of Local Authorities and Regions \(SALAR\)](#), implemented by [SALAR International](#) and funded by the [Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency \(Sida\)](#).

The Project aims at support the government of the Republic of Armenia with forms and strengthening local democracy, community engagement, grassroots development potential, service provision, building on a longstanding history of local self-governments in Sweden and on the global cooperation experience, expertise and networks of SALAR International. The Project is also part of the [Resilient Syunik Team Europe initiative](#), which has been launched in January 2023 to promote sustainable socioeconomic development in Syunik region. It is the joint undertaking of the European Union, the European Investment Bank and EU Member States Austria, France, Germany, Poland and Sweden, with Switzerland also joining as an external partner.



Advocacy and Policy Dialogue



In **January-March**, the DeaLoG project ran series of meetings and discussions with key Project stakeholders and partners. The

Project team met with representatives of [Children of Armenia Fund \(COAF\)](#) and [Teach for Armenia NGO \(TFA\)](#) to discuss their activities in the field of education in different regions of Armenia, as well as their plans in Syunik. Team was especially interested in learning their vision on possible transformation of Armenian school system and how they would see the role of communities in school life. Both COAF and TFA presented the results of their work over the past years. In February, the representatives of SALAR International and the Project team also had an opportunity to visit the COAF SMART Center in Debed, which supports learning processes for children of Debed and surrounding villages. During the visit, a separate meeting was held with Anush Sargsyan, Head of Debed settlement of the Pambak municipality. Main purpose of the meeting was to understand the modes of communication and interrelations between COAF, population and administration of the community.

In February, DeaLoG team visited several communities in the north of Armenia. The team met with the Head of

Alagyaz Yezidi community and the Head of the Tumanyan community. Main topics of discussion were the current situation in the communities, their awareness and engagement in policy dialogues around further developments of local governance and decentralisation in Armenia.

On February 15, DeaLoG project met with the leadership of the [Ministry of Territorial Administration and Infrastructure \(MTAI\)](#), the Project's main partner in Armenia. The purpose of the meeting was to present and finally agree the proposed Project interventions for Phase 1, and discuss further cooperation.



In mid-March the Project team visited Syunik marz and held meetings in municipalities of Sisian, Tatev, Tegh and Kapan to discuss the work and challenges in these local governments, the community vision and expectations from the decentralization, local democracy and citizen participation. In the framework of the visit, the team had a meeting also with the Syunik marz governor's office and discussed issues related to school network management and its possible further decentralization.



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On **April 12**, SALAR International publicly presented its first Armenian DeaLoG Project during the official launching event. Among participants of the launching events were key Project partners and stakeholders of local self-governance and decentralisation reforms in Armenia - the Ministry of Territorial Administration and Infrastructure, the [Ministry of Finance](#),

sector ministries, the National Assembly, all enlarged communities, as well as international development agencies, think-tanks and SCOs active in the area of local governance.

The launching event aimed at bringing together all potential stakeholders and beneficiaries of the DeaLoG project and presenting them the key directions and expected results of the Project. The event also opened up a stage for dialogue and exchange between key reform stakeholders.



During the event opening speeches and presentations were delivered by H.E. Mr. Patrik Svensson, the Ambassador of Sweden to Armenia, Mr. Vache Terteryan, Deputy Minister of Territorial Administration and Infrastructure, Mr. Ryan Knox, Executive Director of SALAR International and Mr. Magnus Liljeström, Senior Adviser at SALAR International. All speakers stressed the

importance of having strong, resilient and self-sustained local authorities. Having in mind the recent achievements in territorial reforms in Armenia, the momentum should not be lost and the importance of introduction of further decentralisation reforms should be acknowledged by all stakeholders of the processes.



Project presentation was followed by active exchange on Swedish experiences in the field of local governance and panel discussion among the representatives of the

key target groups of DeaLoG project.

A workshop with representatives from around 40 communities was held in the afternoon of the launch event. The representatives of the communities were

invited to express their opinions on possibilities for decentralisation in the following areas:

- Fiscal decentralization
- General education management
- Provision of health care
- Provision of social services
- Road maintenance
- Cooperation and coordination between LSGs and central level authorities, collective voice, role of local government associations.

As a result community representatives formulated key challenges and potential decentralisation benefits on behalf of their communities.

On April 13-14, SALAR International representatives visited Syunik and met with Kapan mayor and Syunik marz deputy governor. The parties discussed the current



situation in the communities of Syunik marz, and possible support from and cooperation with DeaLoG Project, inter alia also in the scope of Resilient Syunik Team Europe Initiative.

On **May 1-2** the Project team visited Goris and Tatev municipalities discussing the current situation and the main challenges of local governance. Besides, parties exchanged ideas regarding to school management, as well as the role of school in community life. Based on the results of those meetings, an initial package on support to decentralization of school management was submitted and agreed with the Ministry of Education, Science, Culture and Sport.

On May 18, DeaLoG Project, as part of Team Europe Initiative, participated in the Europe Day fair, which was held in Kapan. The Project team presented the Project to the visitors of the fair, who were mainly from Syunik region. In total Europe Day was showcasing more than 20 different Team Europe financed projects and their benefits for the people of Syunik. The visitors had also opportunity to get familiar with the Experience of Nordic and Baltic states and



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Poland presented in details through one of the most famous publications of SALAR International.

From May 29 to **June 1, 2023**, an Armenian Delegation, comprised of High-Level officials from the Ministry of Territorial Administration (Mr. Vache Terteryan, Deputy Minister, Mr. Ashot Giloyan, Head of Department on



Local Self-Governance Policy), Ministry of Finance (Mr. Arman Poghosyan, Deputy Minister), National Assembly (Mr. Vahe Ghalumyan, Chair of

the Standing Committee on Territorial Administration, Local Self-Government, Agriculture and Environment Protection), Ministry of Education, Science, Culture and Sports (Mrs. Susanna Azatyan, Head of the Division of Development and Implementation of General and Extracurricular Programs) and the Deputy Prime-Minister

Mr. M. Grigoryan's Office (Mr. Edgar Mkrtchyan, Head of Office and Mrs Viktorya Aydinyan, adviser) visited Stockholm for a study and working visit. In the framework of the official visit two memorandums of understanding were signed between the Ministry of Territorial Administration and Infrastructure, Swedish Association of Local Authorities and Regions (SALAR) and SALAR International, and between



the Ministry of Finance, SALAR and SALAR International.

On June 18-22, 2023, a second Armenian Delegation, comprised of decision makers from nine Armenian municipalities (Tatev, Vayk, Masis, Artik, Aparan, Ijevan, Pambak, Hrazdan, Vagharshapat) visited Sweden.

During the study and work visits the delegation had an opportunity to get deeper insights on how a decentralised state governance works in practice in Sweden, on the Swedish framework of political, administrative and fiscal decentralization, on division of responsibility within and between different tiers of government, on the role and place of Swedish local governments in the overall public administration framework and service provision, on the application of the principles of the European Charter of Local Self-Governments in practice, on underlying issues of trust and accountability, on municipal oversight, on fiscal

decentralization, including the revenue sharing, financial equalization system, the benefits of municipalities having a strong fiscal base and freely disposable revenues, especially for economic development, on evidence-based policy formulation and planning in key-areas relevant for decentralization, etc.



As part of Youtopic Fest organized by [Rondine Cittadella della Pace](#), our Project Coordinator Artsrun Pivazyan delivered [a speech](#) on the work of SALAR International in Armenia as part of panel discussion "Peace, politically desirable".

Fiscal Decentralization

In February, in the framework of fiscal decentralization component, the DeaLoG project launched a baseline study on tax policy in Armenia focusing on personal income tax (PIT) and local budget tax revenues. The study is conducted in cooperation with the Communities Finance Officers Association (CFOA). Findings of the report will be publicly available.

Since March, the DeaLoG project has been supporting Ministry of Finance in development of regulations for provision of special subventions aimed at further fostering of participatory mechanisms in communities (application of participatory budgeting tools). It is envisaged that communities will be able to apply for this subvention starting from 2024.

Education Sector

In March, DeaLoG team had its first official meeting with the [Ministry of Education, Science, Culture and Sports](#) discussing our possible intervention and support in field of school network organisation and management, and its further decentralization.

Our first achievements since Project launch

- **9 work visits to municipalities** with thorough discussions on decentralisation process and the role of municipalities (Ejmiatsin, Debed, Tumanyan, Alagyaz, Tatev, Sisian, Tegh, Goris, Kapan).
- **43 (out of 71) municipalities** attended the Project launch event and participated in the facilitated discussion on decentralisation issues.
- **40 municipalities** applied for participation in the Study and work visit to Sweden; **10 were selected** (each representing a region in Armenia).
- In a process are **round-table discussions** on local self-governance challenges and knowledge sharing, and **selection of pilot municipalities**.



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