



Resilient Syunik
Team Europe Initiative



Schweizerische Eidgenossenschaft
Confédération suisse
Confederazione Svizzera
Confederaziun svizra



Polish aid



Fundacja
Court Watch
Polska

**“Empowering Youth through Court Monitoring and
Legal Education: Advancing Human Rights, Fair
Trials, and Anti-Corruption with
Special Focus on the Syunik Region of Armenia”**

REPORT

YEREVAN 2024

1. Executive Summary

This report outlines the activities and findings of the “Court Monitoring and Fostering Legal Awareness for Active Citizenship in Syunik” project, implemented in real from May to November 2024 by the Helsinki Association for Human Rights (HAHR) within the framework of the Resilient Syunik Team Europe initiative, implemented together with the Solidarity Fund PL and supported by the Polish Ministry of Foreign Affairs’ development cooperation.

Founded in 1997, the Helsinki Association for Human Rights (HAHR) has been a steadfast advocate for human rights and fair trials in Armenia, through a variety of activities and projects designed to promote transparency and accountability within the country’s legal and judicial system. Over the years, HAHR has successfully implemented numerous initiatives aimed at strengthening democratic processes and ensuring the protection of fundamental rights.

One of HAHR's key areas of focus in recent years has been youth engagement through court monitoring and legal education. For the past four years, HAHR has been conducting a continuous youth court monitoring program, in partnership with the Solidarity Fund PL (SFPL). While this initiative has been formulated under different project titles in previous years, it remains a long-term and ongoing activity that continues to empower young people to become active participants in the legal processes of their communities.

Each year, this program has expanded its scope, reaching more youth participants, deepening their understanding of human rights, fair trials, and anti-corruption efforts, and providing them with the skills necessary to engage in judicial monitoring. The long-term nature of this initiative has allowed HAHR to build a strong foundation for fostering a culture of monitoring, strengthening legal education, and encouraging youth civic engagement, particularly in regions such as Syunik. Through these sustained efforts, HAHR has contributed to promoting a more transparent, accountable, and rights-respecting judicial system in Armenia.

Among other donors, such as the Public Diplomacy Section of the U.S. Embassy in Armenia, and the US Department of Relief and Labor, both the Polish Aid and Solidarity Fund – the Leading partner, have played critical roles in promoting international development, democratic values, and civil society through partnerships, funding, and on-the-ground initiatives. Their contributions significantly supported activities focused on enhancing social resilience, improving governance, and promoting human rights and a culture of court monitoring in Armenia. Within Polish Aid, this marks the fourth year of youth engagement in court monitoring, during which comparative analyses between previous years were conducted and several recommendations were taken into account.

The Court Watch Poland collaborated with HAHR and Solidarity Fund PL to develop a new software monitoring tool tailored to HAHR’s updated methodologies, considering the specificities and needs in Syunik to maintain a strong focus on the region. This initiative, supported by the Solidarity Fund PL, aimed to streamline and enhance HAHR’s monitoring activities. The Solidarity Fund PL played a key role in organizing and financing the project, ensuring the necessary resources, coordination, and strategic oversight were in place to achieve impactful results. Their comprehensive support helped facilitate the development and

implementation of the software tool, enabling HHR to carry out more effective and efficient court monitoring. The HHR team played an active role throughout the process. It included as follows:

- ✓ Assessing the context and current monitoring tools;
- ✓ Creating individual online tools for observer recruitment (Registration Form)¹ and court monitoring (Court Monitoring Form)²;
- ✓ Advising on the implementation of these tools in HHR's monitoring processes.

2. Introduction

The report focuses on detailing the analysis of data collected via the online Court Monitoring Form, completed by young court monitors after each public case hearing they attended. The project built on proven practices and lessons learned to address critical needs, in particular, in the Syunik region, emphasizing youth empowerment through training and practical application of their new knowledge and skills.

The initiative started with profound capacity development training and engaged a total of 160 young participants, including 93 from Syunik (40 from Goris, 40 from Kapan, and 13 from Meghri, representing the Loft-Meghri youth centre), as well as an additional 67 participants from Yerevan, Shirak, and Lori regions. Of the 40 participants from Goris, 12 were from nearby rural areas: 1 from Khndzoresk, 3 from Akner, 3 from Halidzor, 2 from Hartashen, and 3 from Verishen. Additionally, two displaced persons from Artsakh participated—one from Goris and one from Kapan. These young individuals received comprehensive capacity development training covering topics such as the main concept of human rights, fair trial procedures, anti-corruption practices, and legal transparency. As a result, the participants not only enhanced their understanding but also became active advocates for a transparent and accountable judiciary.³

This report also highlights HHR's continued efforts to promote civic engagement, human rights, court transparency, and anti-corruption measures. Key impacts of the project include also developing the court monitoring mechanism (CMM), and enhancing regional engagement with the judiciary and law enforcement.

Recent project activities in Syunik, Shirak, Lori, and Yerevan played a vital role in nurturing civic engagement and resilience among local youth, as well as the broader public. Special focus was placed on Syunik due to its strategic importance and the unique socio-political challenges faced by the region. This emphasis aimed to bolster community involvement and empower young individuals, enhancing their capacity to contribute to local governance and resilience-building. By concentrating on Syunik, the project sought to address specific local needs, promote stability, and foster a more active and informed civil society.

¹ <https://hahr.am/registration/>

² <https://hahr.am/cmog/>

³ According to the summary of pre- and post-evaluation surveys completed by participants after each training session, the overall average increase in knowledge across all groups exceeded 48%.

Training sessions, court monitoring, and experience-sharing meetings with the judiciary and police provided the participants with practical insights into legal processes. These efforts align with HAHR's mission and objectives.

Youth involvement in observing criminal court proceedings offered valuable, firsthand experience, deepening their understanding of Armenia's legal system and civic responsibilities. The project engaged participants aged 13 to 25. Educators such as Ms. Hasmik Mesropyan from Kapan, Mr. Artavazd Mkrтчhyan from Halidzor community nearby Goris, and Ms. Lala Mirzoyan from Vanadzor, were engaged, too, enhancing the training with diverse perspectives and fostering community leadership. As usual, female involvement was higher.

Although the project faced challenges in including a significant number of former Artsakh residents,⁴ the participation of two individuals demonstrated its commitment to inclusivity and support for those affected by regional conflicts, thereby contributing to social cohesion and a stronger civic framework.

The enthusiasm of 154 participants who expressed interest in continuing court monitoring highlights the project's success in inspiring long-term civic involvement and youth empowerment. This interest follows a series of targeted trainings and activities conducted in the previous year, with part of the monitors (a total of 31 young people) continuing their involvement, demonstrating the project's lasting impact and the sustained commitment of youth from earlier groups.

The project also helped identify shortcomings within the judiciary and provided an overview of public perceptions regarding access to justice. It shed light on how individuals feel in the courtroom and emphasized the importance of understanding legal standards to some extent before attending court for monitoring purposes.

These contributions significantly advance the goals of the Resilient Syunik Team Europe Initiative by enhancing civic participation and building an informed citizenry that supports regional stability and development.

3. Acknowledgements

We extend our special gratitude to the **Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Poland**, represented **Solidarity Fund PL**, for their long-term and generous support of this particular and previous projects within the **Polish Aid program**.

We extend our sincere gratitude to the **Court Watch Poland** for their invaluable partnership and support, especially for their assistance in developing online tools. Their expertise has been instrumental in enhancing our court monitoring initiatives.

⁴ Armenia – *Events of 2023*; *Aftermath of the Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict*; Human Rights Watch; Country Report 2024; <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2024/country-chapters/armenia>

Our sincere thanks go to the **Judicial Department of Armenia** for granting HHR permission for participants, particularly those under 16, to freely access the local courts of general jurisdiction and observe public trials. This was very essential for the success of the project.

We are also thankful to the **RA Syunik Regional Governor's Office** and the Department of Education, Culture, and Sports, headed by Ms. Meri Gandalyan, for their close collaboration in recruitment of the school students in Goris and Kapan, and involvement in the implementation of the activities in the cities.

We appreciate the **Human Rights Defender Office**, represented by Ani Mnatsakanyan, Syunik region's representative, for attending the exchange meetings and encouraging youth to remain active and engaged in civic matters.

The experience exchange meetings with judges from local courts played a crucial role, with judges sharing valuable insights and engaging with the youth. We are grateful to the Chairman of the Court of First Instance of the Syunik region, Judge Napoleon Ohanyan, Chief of Staff of the Court of General Jurisdiction of the Syunik region, Garik Hovhannisyanyan, and judges Anahit Tumanyan, Romen Aharonyan (Kapan), and Rima Arakelyan (Goris) for their support and involvement in various phases of the project. Their valuable input greatly contributed to the development of the young court monitors' legal knowledge and skills.

Ms. Gandalyan, Ms. Tumanyan and Ms. Mnatsakanyan expressed their willingness to cooperate in future initiatives and remain actively involved in creating new formats.

Our gratitude extends to the **Ministry of Internal Affairs of Armenia**, including the police and patrol departments in Kapan, Goris, Meghri, and Vanadzor, for their valuable interactions with the youth, educating them on their rights and responsibilities when encountering law enforcement.

We also appreciate the **Ministry of Education, Science, Culture, and Sports** for their support, as well as the positive expert opinion from the **National Center for Education Development and Innovations (KZNAK)**. This opinion underscores the project's goal to cultivate interest in human rights among high school and university students through training, while encouraging active civic engagement. The Armenian version of the "Compass"- manual for human rights education with young people was highlighted as a key resource for interactive training and as a long-term guide for trainers.

Finally, our heartfelt thanks to the **youth - court monitors** for their dedication and hard work, which made this project possible. For future projects, we recommend involving more regional monitors, utilizing online platforms for case tracking and collaboration, and strengthening engagement with state bodies and court administrations to facilitate volunteer access to courts.

4. Methodology

a. Human Rights and Rule of Law background

In 2024, Armenia's human rights and rule of law landscape remained complex, marked by both challenges and some progress. Although the law formally provided for an independent judiciary, it continued

to struggle with a perception of bias and partiality due to a longstanding history of corruption, political influence, and resistance to meaningful reform. High-profile scandals and unconfirmed reports of government and former regime influence over judges further eroded public trust in the judicial system. The high volume of cases, coupled with public skepticism and allegations of governmental pressure, dissuaded qualified legal professionals from pursuing positions as judges.

The aftermath of anti-government protests in October 2023 highlighted serious issues related to law enforcement conduct, with reports of officers using unlawful force and incidents of harassment and violence directed at journalists by government supporters. Despite the pressing need for justice, there was no reported progress in investigating alleged war crimes and other violations of international law from the 2020 armed conflict with Azerbaijan. Some lawyers reported instances of ill-treatment when visiting clients in detention facilities. Environmental activists also continued to face harassment, indicating persistent challenges to civic activism and expression.

However, there were positive developments as well. Armenia ratified Protocol No. 13 of the European Convention on Human Rights, fully abolishing the death penalty under all circumstances, including wartime. This step was significant for aligning Armenia's legal framework with international human rights standards and demonstrating a commitment to fundamental human rights principles, even amidst broader systemic issues.⁵

Given the complex human rights and rule of law situation in Armenia in 2024, characterized by perceived judicial bias, political influence, and public mistrust, the need for the project becomes clear. This project aimed to empower young people with legal knowledge, and foster a culture of court monitoring, which is essential for reinforcing trust in the judicial system and supporting human rights. Especially in Syunik, where local governance and the judiciary face unique challenges, the project sought to address gaps in public awareness and promote a stronger understanding of legal rights. Syunik's strategic location and its complex socio-political dynamics make it a critical area for enhancing civic engagement. The inclusion of meetings with local police forces was a crucial part of this initiative, as it allowed young participants to better understand the role of law enforcement in the legal system, foster open dialogue, and build stronger ties between the youth and law enforcement. These engagements were intended to create a more informed and active youth population, equipped to advocate for justice and transparency, as well as more motivated to self-develop in their living community.

b. Selection criteria for young participants

The methodology for selecting young participants for the “Court Monitoring and Fostering Legal Awareness for Active Citizenship in Syunik” project was designed to ensure diversity, inclusivity, and engagement from various communities. The following criteria were applied to identify and recruit suitable candidates:

➤ **Age range:** Participants were primarily high school students aged 13 to 18, and university students aged 18 to 25. This age group was chosen to foster early civic awareness and to equip young people with

⁵ See Armenia 2023 Human Rights Report; <https://am.usembassy.gov/2023-human-rights-report-on-armenia/>

legal knowledge at an influential stage in their development.

➤ **Geographical representation:** To ensure broad regional participation, the selection included youth from different parts of the Syunik region—specifically, Goris, Kapan, and Meghri, including representation from local centers such as Loft Meghri. Additionally, participants from nearby rural areas, were involved. This approach extended beyond Syunik, bringing in participants from Yerevan, Shirak, and Lori regions to promote cross-regional exchange and collaboration.

➤ **Interest in civic engagement:** Candidates were selected based on their demonstrated interest in civic activities, human rights advocacy, or participation in community projects. Those with a prior history of volunteering or engagement in school or community programs were given preference to build on their existing commitment to civic participation.

➤ **Inclusivity and gender balance:** The selection process prioritized gender balance, resulting in higher female involvement, aligning with HAHR’s commitment to promoting equal opportunities for young women. Efforts were also made to include participants from different socioeconomic backgrounds to reflect the diversity of the region and ensure equal access to educational and participatory opportunities.

➤ **Commitment to continued engagement:** Potential participants were evaluated on their willingness to commit to the full duration of the project, including training sessions, court monitoring activities, and post-training follow-up. This ensured that participants would be actively involved and would contribute to achieving the long-term goals of the project.

c. Training techniques

The training methodology was designed to be interactive, engaging, and adaptable to the participants' varying levels of knowledge and experience.

The youth involved in the project underwent **Human Rights, Police Proceedings, Fair Trials, and Anticorruption training program in Syunik region**, including also court monitoring technology. These trainings were crafted to equip participants with a well-rounded understanding of legal principles, ethical standards, and the tools necessary for effective court monitoring. By combining these diverse topics, the program aimed to foster a deeper sense of civic responsibility and legal literacy among young people, empowering them to actively contribute to promoting justice and accountability in their communities

Training sessions were organized into two primary groups: beginners (a total 88 participants, of who 49 participants or 55.68 % in Syunik region) and advanced participants (a total 66 participants, of who 44

participants or 66.67% in Syunik). The following interactive techniques were used to ensure the effectiveness of the learning process for both groups:

- Participants were introduced to real-life case studies and hypothetical legal scenarios relevant to their region. Through this method, participants were able to assume the roles of the government, judges, lawyers, prosecutors and court monitors, which allowed them to gain a hands-on understanding of the legal processes. This method was particularly effective in helping beginner participants grasp complex concepts in human rights and transparency, while advanced participants could engage in more nuanced discussions and analyses of fair trials and anti-corruption issues in Armenia.
- Workshops focused on developing practical skills such as how to observe court proceedings, note-taking techniques, and the ethical considerations of court monitoring. Beginner participants learned the basics of court observation, while advanced participants worked on more sophisticated tasks, such as analyzing judicial transparency and evaluating the fairness of trials. These activities were designed to build confidence in young people by providing them with a valuable online tool—the Court Monitoring Form—that they could use during court monitoring sessions.
- Throughout the training, the HAHR legal experts, as well as the judges and the representatives of the police and patrol services shared with youth their knowledge and experiences. These experts facilitated interactive Q&A sessions and discussions, allowing participants to ask questions and engage directly with professionals in the field. This provided both beginner and advanced groups with valuable insights into the practical application of legal concepts.
- An essential component of the project was peer-to-peer learning, where more experienced participants mentored beginners during court monitoring following the training. This approach not only strengthened bonds among participants but also reinforced the learning process, as teaching others is a proven method for deepening one's understanding. Advanced participants, with prior exposure to legal concepts and practices, guided beginners through the complexities of court monitoring.

These interactive training techniques were crucial in building the participants' confidence and understanding of the key topics, ensuring that both beginner and advanced groups were well-prepared for the court monitoring activities and the broader goals of the project. By combining theory with practical experience, the training fostered not only legal knowledge but also a strong sense of civic responsibility and engagement.

d. Overview of court monitoring processes and exchange experiences with the judiciary

The court monitoring component of the project aimed to empower youth participants with the knowledge and skills necessary to observe and assess court proceedings in a critical and informed manner. The process was designed to provide both theoretical and practical training on how to effectively monitor court hearings, evaluate judicial transparency, and assess the fairness of trials.

The participants were trained on the steps involved in court monitoring, starting from understanding the structure and functions of the judiciary to the specific procedures involved in observing a trial. They

learned how to record key information, such as the impartiality of the judge, the behavior of court officials, the presentation of evidence, and the treatment of defendants and plaintiffs.

The primary tool used in the court monitoring process was the Court Monitoring Form (hereinafter CMF), an online tool designed to facilitate accurate and efficient data collection. This form guided participants in recording essential information during the court sessions and helped ensure consistency and reliability in their observations. The tool was user-friendly, allowing participants to focus on the content of the proceedings without being distracted by technical difficulties. From July 1 to November 7, 603 CMFs were completed by 154 court monitors, indicating that 603 court hearings across 591 criminal cases were observed by the young monitors in the courts of general jurisdictions located in the above-mentioned cities.

A key feature of the project was fostering direct interaction between the youth participants and key stakeholders in the judicial system. Participants had the opportunity to meet with judges. This exchange provided the participants with valuable insights into the practical workings of the judiciary, allowed them to share their observations and concerns, and facilitated an open dialogue where the young monitors could discuss their findings from court observations, ask questions, and receive feedback.

This direct exchange helped participants understand the challenges faced by the judiciary, the importance of transparency and accountability in the legal system, and provided them with a deeper understanding of how the judiciary operates in Armenia, the role of judges in upholding the law, and the measures taken to ensure fair trials. Participants learned about the complexities of legal decision-making and how court monitoring contributes to improving the justice system.

Additionally, these interactions helped dispel misconceptions about the judicial process, encouraged greater confidence in the courts, and respect for the rule of law, as well as allowed young participants to develop critical thinking, analytical skills, and a deeper understanding of the legal processes in Armenia.

The training and court monitoring initiatives mainly benefited the volunteers, but they may also have had indirect positive effects on the judges with whom the monitors interacted. Volunteers monitoring court proceedings likely encouraged judges to adhere more strictly to protocols, knowing their actions were being observed. Engaging local volunteers, particularly in regions like Syunik, helped foster public trust in the judiciary by promoting transparency and openness. The judges gained insights into new perspectives on judicial monitoring and digital tools, which can contribute to improved case management and greater judicial efficiency. Volunteer observations could help judges identify areas for improvement, such as procedural delays. Finally, independent monitoring by volunteers reinforced the idea that the judiciary should operate transparently and free from external influence.

e. Impact of interaction with the Police on Youth understanding of the Rule of Law

As part of the project's effort to provide a well-rounded understanding of Armenia's law enforcement system, participants had the opportunity to visit local police departments in Goris, Kapan, and Meghri, as well as additionally in Vanadzor, at the request of the local group. These visits were a critical component of the training, offering young people a direct look at law enforcement operations and the opportunity to engage with police officers about their roles and responsibilities.

During these visits, the participants gained insights into the daily operations of police departments. They were exposed to the real-world challenges faced by police officers, such as managing public order, responding to emergencies, and ensuring community safety. They also learned about the tools and methods used by law enforcement to uphold the law and protect citizens, which deepened their understanding of the complex role police play in society.

The participants were introduced with their own rights and responsibilities within the legal system. They learned about the procedures that law enforcement follows in various situations, such as arrests and searches, and were informed about the legal protections available to individuals.

The meetings also provided valuable insight into ongoing efforts to improve transparency and accountability within law enforcement. The youth were introduced to police reform initiatives aimed at building public trust, reducing corruption, and improving interactions between law enforcement and the communities they serve. By learning about the challenges and duties of police officers, participants were encouraged to think critically about their role in society and how they can engage in promoting justice, security, and respect for human rights.

A total of 120 young people were involved in the activity in the Syunik and Lori regions.

f. Expansion of implemented activities to Meghri and its impact on engagement

Over the years of successful partnership with SFPL, the expansion of our activities to the Syunik region, and this year's inclusion of Meghri, played a significant role in broadening the reach and impact of the initiative, particularly in fostering greater civic engagement among youth in this remote area of Syunik. Meghri, being more geographically isolated compared to other regions like Goris and Kapan, presented unique challenges and opportunities for engagement.

The project ensured that youth from all parts of Syunik were represented, helping to strengthen regional connections and promoting a sense of unity. This increased representation also allowed for a more comprehensive understanding of the local challenges and opportunities that youth face in relation to civic engagement, legal awareness, and the justice system. Given the distinct socio-cultural and geographical characteristics of Meghri, the project team tailored its approach to better meet the needs of young participants in this area.

Unfortunately, we encountered a significant issue: the court in Meghri was closed, and the only judge there was reassigned to Kapan. As a result, the young participants in Meghri, participated in the Human Rights trainings, but due to the distance required for travel, lost the opportunity to engage in court monitoring. The nearest available location, Kapan, is about a two-hour drive from Meghri, which created a major challenge for the youth to participate in the monitoring activities as originally planned.

g. New tools for data collection and participant feedback

The implementation of new tools and methods for data collection and participant feedback aimed to enhance the accuracy and efficiency of monitoring activities. They facilitated real-time tracking of

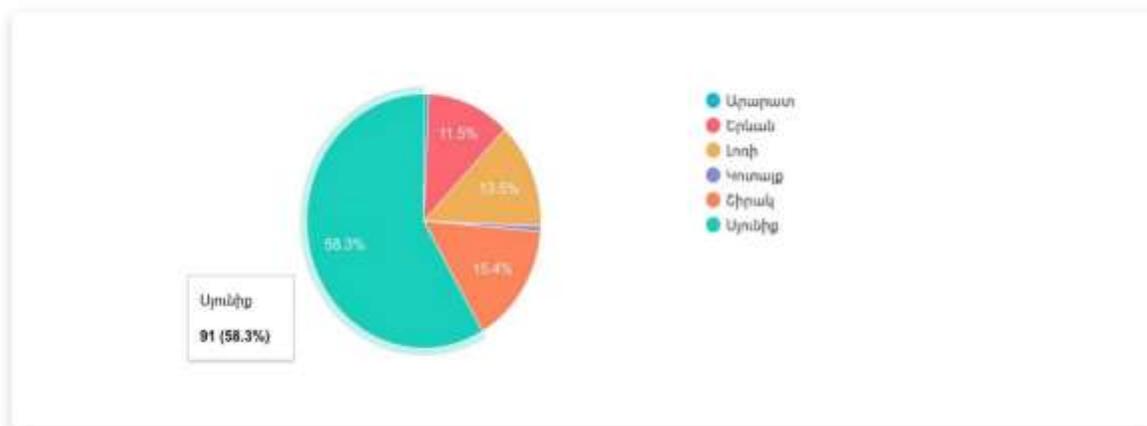
participants' experiences, allowing for immediate adjustments to the project activities based on their input. Feedback mechanisms were integrated into the monitoring form and regular survey, which enabled the project team to assess the effectiveness of the training, identify areas for improvement, and measure the overall impact of the initiative on youth understanding of the legal system.

This approach also highlighted shortcomings and challenges within the court system, viewed through the eyes of the young participants who, in many cases, were not deeply familiar with the system or legal intricacies. The HAHR expert gathered, analyzed, and presented quantitative data along with qualitative insights verified by experienced regional coordinators who are experienced court monitors. This ensured that the feedback was accurate and representative of the observations made during the project.

5. Summary of Findings from Court Monitoring Forms

According to the data obtained through digital tools, as of November 7, 2024, 603 case hearings in 591 criminal cases were monitored by 154 young people across the courts in Kapan, Goris, Gyumri, and Vanadzor, as well as in two courts of the same instance in Yerevan, under the Court of General Jurisdiction of First Instance. Specifically,

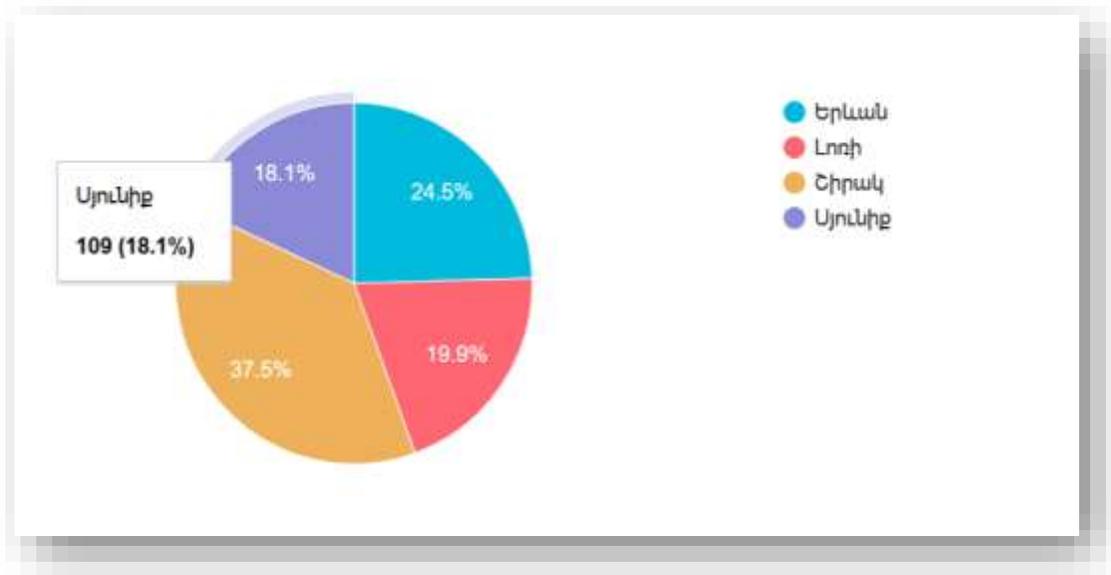
Chart 1: The number of registered users and their corresponding percentages by region (● Syunik, ● Yerevan, ● Lori, ● Shirak)⁶



N	REGION	NUMBER OF REGISTERED	PERCENTAGE
1	Syunik	91	58.3%
2	Yerevan	18	11.5%
3	Shirak	24	15.4%
4	Lori	21	13.5%
Total		154	

⁶ The data presented in Chart 1 reflect entries as of November 7, 2024. The chart also includes data from other regions of Armenia that were not originally part of the project, as volunteers from these regions have also registered. For updated data, please refer to the following link: <https://hahr.am/region/>.

Chart 2: The number of completed CMFs and their corresponding percentages by region
 (● Syunik, ● Yerevan, ● Lori, ● Shirak)



N	REGION	NUMBER OF COMPLETED CMFs	PERCENTAGE
1	Syunik	109	18.1%
2	Yerevan	148	24.5%
3	Shirak	226	37.5%
4	Lori	120	19.9%
Total		603	

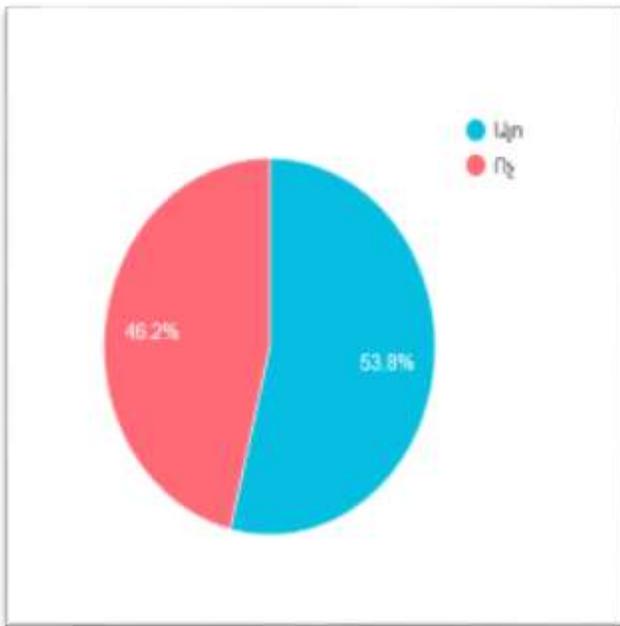
Users of the CMF, along with essential data such as their name, region, and city of residence, were asked to select the name of the court where the monitoring was carried out, the name of the presiding judge, the defendant(s) name(s), the case number, the date and time of the scheduled hearing, etc. They are also asked to record their findings on the following aspects, as described below or presented in the series of tables and charts with the necessary quantitative data.

Although Syunik had the highest number of volunteers, the total number of submitted court monitoring forms was notably lower. On average, each volunteer in Syunik monitored only one hearing. This gap points to potential challenges that may hinder consistent participation. Possible contributing factors include logistical difficulties, such as long travel distances to court facilities, especially for those from rural areas, and Meghri, where the court had closed, limited transportation options for volunteers who faced additional travel requirements to reach the nearest functioning court, and personal barriers like the lack of access to a PC or smartphone for inputting data into the digital CMF. Additional obstacles include the lack of

a criminal court in Meghri, low number of judges handling criminal cases, frequent turnover of judges, the judges' vacation period in August, and insufficient support from court bailiffs to ensure young monitors have unrestricted court access and receive timely information about scheduled hearings.

	QUESTION	ANS WER "YES"	INCLUDED IN SYUNIK	ANS WER "NO"	INCLUD ED IN SYUNIK
1	When entering the court, is a person examined by the bailiffs?	356 / 59%	77 / 70,6%	247 / 41%	32 / 29.4%
2	Did the session start at the scheduled time?	328 / 54.4%	82 / 75.2%	275 / 45.6%	27 / 24,8%
	Have the parties of the trial been informed of their rights?	446 / 97%	105 / 97.2%	14 / 3%	3 / 2.8%
	Has the right to a public trial been preserved?	593 / 98.3%	103 / 94.5%	247 / 1.7%	6 / 5.5%
	Has the right to use the services of an interpreter been preserved?	43 / 96%	99 / 90.8%	24 / 4%	10 / 9.2%
	Were other witnesses present in the courtroom during the witness's questioning?	85 / 14.1%	23 / 21.1%	518 / 85.9%	86 / 78.9%
	Has the right to equality of the parties been preserved?	587 / 97.3%	103 / 94.5%	10 / 1.7%	6 / 5.5%
	Has the principle of the presumption of innocence been upheld?	199 / 87.7%	77 / 82.8%	28 / 12.3%	16 / 17.2%
9	Has the court applied any pressure on the accused?	3 / 0.8%	0 / 0%	598 / 99.2%	109 / 100%
10	Was any pressure applied by the court on the witness or expert?	48 / 10%	7 / 6.5%	433 / 90%	100 / 93.5%

Chart 3: Were the defense and/or prosecution given adequate time to familiarize themselves with the case file?



– According to the defense.

- Yes – 212 or 53.8%, included in Syunik – 104 or 95.4%
- No – 182 or 46.2%¹, included in Syunik – 5 or 4.6%

Chart 4: Were the defense and/or prosecution given adequate time to familiarize themselves with the case file?

- According to the prosecution.**
- Yes – 205 or 53.9%, included in Syunik – 99 or 90.8%
 - No – 175 or 46.1%¹, included in Syunik – 10 or 9.2%

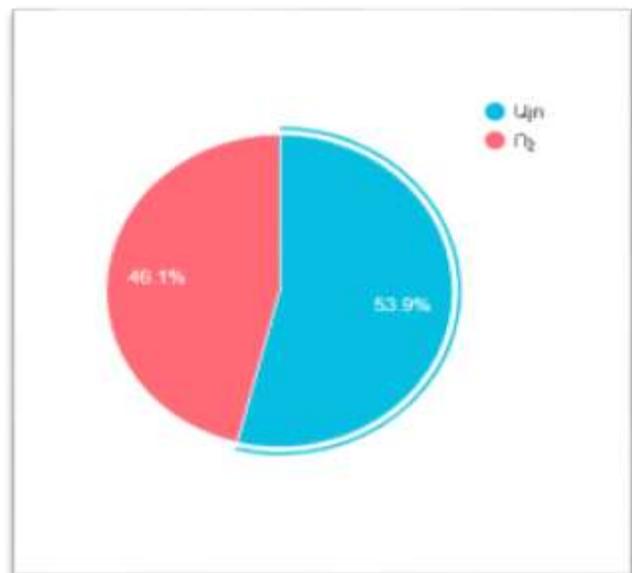
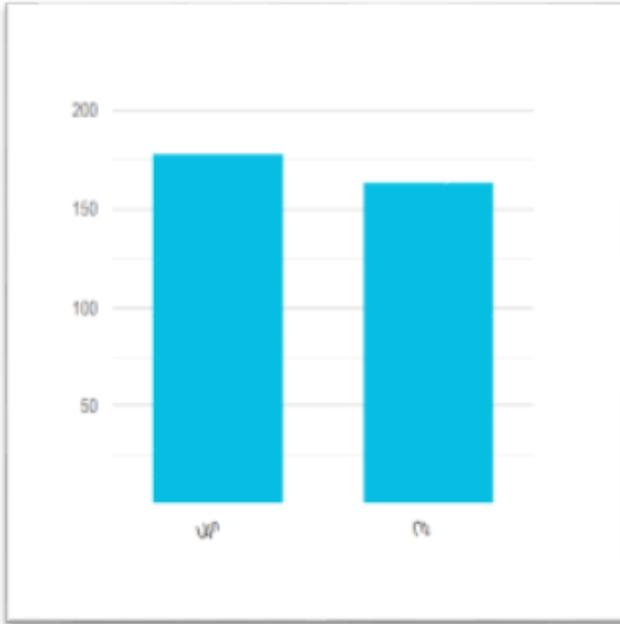


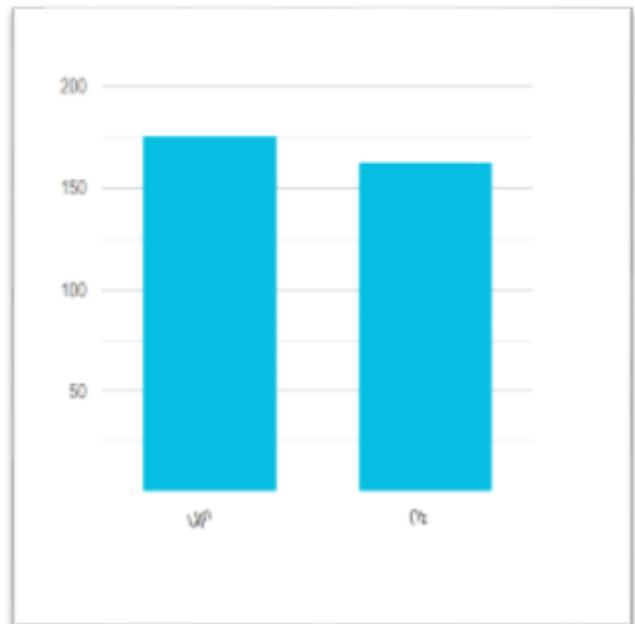
Chart 5: Have the litigants been given sufficient time to file motions?
– According to the defense.



- Yes – 178 or 52%, including in Syunik – 101 or 92.7%
- No – 164 or 48%,¹ including in Syunik – 8 or 7.3%

Chart 6: Have the litigants been given sufficient time to file motions?
– According to the prosecution.

- Yes – 176 or 51.9%, including in Syunik – 102 or 93.6%
- No – 163 or 48.1%,¹ including in Syunik – 7 or 6.4%



Below are some exemplary responses gathered from the CMFs, highlighting key aspects of the observed court procedures and practices, with a focus on both positive and areas needing improvement.

➤ **Positive aspects**

1. High adherence to rights:

- 98.3% of cases respected the right to a public trial.
- 97% of parties were informed of their rights.
- 97.3% of cases upheld the equality of all parties.
- 87.7% of cases upheld the principle of the presumption of innocence.

2. Court procedures:

- 59% of individuals entering court were properly examined by bailiffs, indicating some level of security procedures were in place.
- 99.2% of cases showed no pressure was applied to the accused, suggesting fair treatment.
- 90% of witnesses and experts reported no pressure being applied.
- 96% of individuals who required an interpreter had access to one, supporting access to justice for non-native speakers.
- 85.9% of trials did not allow other witnesses to be present during questioning.

➤ **Negative aspects**

- Only 54.4% of sessions started on time, with 45.6% of sessions starting late. This suggests that punctuality in court proceedings needs improvement.
- 12.3% of cases did not fully respect the presumption of innocence.
- The relatively high percentage of individuals not examined by bailiffs upon entering suggests there could be lapses in security or procedural consistency.

6. Recommendations

The analysis of the data collected through CMFs provided valuable insights into the judicial processes and highlighted several key findings. These findings are instrumental in understanding both the strengths, as well as areas for improvement within the judicial system as observed by the youth participants.

The data received from monitoring forms, revealed patterns in court proceedings, the consistency of judicial practices, and the level of transparency maintained throughout trials. Notably, the youth participants were able to identify both

• **positive aspects**, such as fairness in legal procedures and the professionalism of certain judges, as well as

• areas where **improvements are necessary**, such as the clarity of legal communications, the accessibility of court proceedings for the public, and the overall efficiency of case management. These observations serve as a critical foundation for recommending targeted reforms aimed at enhancing the effectiveness and public trust in the judicial system.

While some respondents highlighted positive experiences, such as the professionalism of certain judges and fairness in specific proceedings, others noted areas for improvement. Key aspirations included a desire for greater transparency, improved communication within the court system, and more consistent application of legal standards. The participants' collective desire for a judicial system that fosters *trust and accountability* underpins the need for *continuous reform and public engagement*.

It was revealed that some of the shortcomings identified in previous years still persist. For instance:

1. A majority of case hearings commenced later than the scheduled time.
2. In certain instances, the case parties were present in the courtroom, but the judge arrived significantly late.
3. In most cases, presiding judges did not provide explanations for the delays.
4. Despite closed trials, conversations within courtrooms were audible from outside.
5. Inside courtrooms with glass walls, the audibility of party presentations during trials was challenging.
6. Delays in transporting defendants by the Escort squad's vehicles resulted in hearing postponements or defendants not being brought to court at all, causing further disruptions.
7. Instances of infrequent updates regarding court cases, and in certain cases, the complete absence of information, were documented within the "DataLex" information system.
8. The need to repeatedly input the access code for the "DataLex" information system whenever prompted posed specific inconveniences and challenges, demanding additional time and effort.

There was also a comparison done from 2023 to 2024. Comparing data from 2023 to 2024, as gathered from the Court Monitoring Forms (CMFs), reveals that while there has been some progress in making court information more accessible, significant challenges still remain. For instance, **the time allocated for defense and prosecution to familiarize themselves with case files continues to be insufficient**, which impacts their ability to adequately prepare for hearings. Based on the monitoring results, it is recommended that **the system standardize and enforce a minimum time frame for accessing case files to ensure fair preparation for all involved parties**.

It is recommended that courts **increase the availability of information about trial procedures, verdicts, and court decisions to the public**. This could include making judgments and case outcomes publicly accessible through court websites or other platforms, thereby ensuring transparency and promoting trust in the judicial system.

In addition to ensuring timely access to case files, it is important to **standardize timeframes for all aspects of legal preparation**. This includes deadlines for submitting motions, filings, and other legal documents, as well as sufficient time for both the defense and prosecution to prepare their arguments. Enforcing these standardized timeframes would help ensure fair treatment of all parties involved.

Strengthening human rights protections and fair trial standards requires a **multi-faceted approach**. Key strategies include reinforcing the presumption of innocence, ensuring equal rights for defense and prosecution, and safeguarding the right to a public trial. Additionally, it is critical to address any

inconsistencies in applying these principles across different courts, and to ensure that judges are regularly trained on human rights law and best practices in delivering fair trials.

The project noted **several positive findings related to advancements in court infrastructure** that enhance the judicial process. These included the presence of large TV monitors for examining evidence, which improve clarity and understanding during hearings. The use of remote interrogation facilities in some courts (e.g. Shirak region) was also highlighted as a beneficial feature, allowing for more flexible and secure witness participation.

The analysis of the CMFs revealed the existence of new computers on the desks of judges in some courts. The development of the computer availability represented a significant step toward modernizing courtrooms and streamlining case management. These technological improvements contribute to more efficient proceedings and underscore efforts to align the judicial system with contemporary standards of operation and transparency.

The report does not aim to address every single shortcoming in detail; however, comprehensive information is available at HAHR. We remain ready to share this data with relevant state bodies and facilitate discussions or workshops to collaboratively find solutions for improvement and drive positive change.

To promote transparency and public trust, it is important to **educate citizens about their legal rights** and how they can access case information. Public awareness campaigns could include informational materials, workshops, and online resources to ensure that individuals know how to obtain information about their cases and the legal procedures involved.

Promoting awareness of citizens' legal rights and the court system through **educational campaigns** can empower the public to engage more effectively with the judicial process. These campaigns could cover topics such as the right to a fair trial, access to legal resources, and how to participate in the justice process.

Participants expressed strong intentions to continue contributing to the justice system, with many from Syunik highlighting that their experiences in Syunik have left a lasting impact on their views and engagement. While Syunik has historically seen limited participation in justice-related activities, the project has sparked a noticeable shift in awareness and involvement. Many participants from Syunik noted that, despite challenges such as the region's geographical and logistical constraints, they now recognize the importance of their role in promoting transparency and accountability within the judicial system. Many voiced a commitment to ongoing monitoring and further legal education, with an emphasis on advocating for better practices. This eagerness suggests a valuable opportunity to harness their energy in strengthening public oversight and ensuring the justice system becomes more inclusive and transparent.

As Syunik is a central focus of our project, the continued involvement of young people from this region is crucial for fostering long-term civic engagement and empowering them to become advocates for change. While initial levels of activity were lower compared to other regions, the growing commitment to contributing to justice reform indicates a positive shift, one that underscores the need for sustained support and continued investment in this region. Syunik's strategic importance, coupled with its unique challenges,

makes it a critical area for ongoing efforts to enhance judicial transparency and strengthen rule of law practices.

To enhance civil oversight, it is recommended that civil society organizations play a more active role in monitoring judicial processes. Establishing stronger partnerships with law enforcement agencies through joint training, public outreach programs, and collaborative initiatives can ensure that both the legal system and law enforcement operate within the framework of human rights protections.

Engaging youth in the ongoing monitoring of the judicial system and advocacy for reforms is crucial. Youth can play a significant role in promoting accountability and public engagement. It is recommended that structured programs be developed to support their involvement in legal education, court monitoring, and advocacy initiatives. These programs should provide resources, training, and opportunities for young people to contribute meaningfully to discussions about judicial reform and human rights protections, ensuring the next generation is equipped to lead future reforms in the justice system.

7. Innovative Approaches

The project provided valuable insights into the effectiveness of court monitoring by youth and the broader impacts of such initiatives on both the judicial system and society. Key lessons include the importance of continuous training for monitors, and, comparing the previous three years of the youth court monitoring in cooperation with Solidarity Fund PL within Polish Aid program, ensuring better access to digital tools, and enhancing the integration of court monitoring efforts with public awareness campaigns. These initiatives not only help build legal literacy among young people but also improve their engagement in the justice system.

In collaboration with Solidarity Fund PL and Court Watch Poland, the development of modernized monitoring tools was identified as an essential step in improving the efficiency and accuracy of court observations. These tools can facilitate real-time data collection, allow for better analysis of court proceedings, and increase the accessibility of reports to the public. The overall success of the activities in integrating digital monitoring tools with the legal process sets a precedent for future efforts to digitize court monitoring in Armenia and beyond.

8. Conclusion

The participants expressed a high level of satisfaction with their involvement in the project. Many reported that the experience of monitoring court proceedings not only enhanced their understanding of the judicial process but also **deepened their sense of civic responsibility**. The opportunity to engage with real-world legal cases allowed them to gain practical insights into the workings of the justice system, which many found both empowering and educational. Participants appreciated the training and support they received, which helped build their confidence in carrying out the monitoring tasks effectively.

The court monitoring initiative revealed several key findings regarding the functioning of the judicial system in Armenia, particularly in Syunik's courts. In addition to the points mentioned above, other issues identified include the low number of judges specifically examining criminal cases, the frequent turnover of

judges, the vacation period for judges in August, low enthusiasm and commitment among court bailiffs to support young monitors' unrestricted access to the court, as well as the provision of relevant information on the scheduled hearing times, and other challenges affecting the activities in Syunik.

Many participants noted a lack of timely communication, both for the defense and prosecution, which hindered their ability to prepare adequately for hearings. These findings are critical for understanding the gaps in the current judicial processes and highlight the need for legal and judicial reforms that prioritize transparency, fairness, and access to information for all parties involved. These issues also point to the need for standardizing procedures, improving digital access, and enhancing the capacity of court staff to handle procedural matters efficiently.

Civil oversight plays a pivotal role in fostering transparency, accountability, and fairness within the judicial system. Through initiatives such as court monitoring, civil society actors, particularly young people, are empowered to observe and report on court proceedings, ensuring that legal processes are followed and rights are upheld. The involvement of young people in monitoring court activities fosters a more informed and engaged citizenry, helping to bridge the gap between the judiciary and the public. By identifying irregularities and making recommendations for reform, civil society organizations can pressure the system for change, ensuring that justice is not only done but seen to be done.

The project engaged some young boys and girls under the age of 16 who expressed a strong interest in participating in court monitoring. As part of their involvement, many participants recommended that the law be amended to allow young people as young as 14 to have free access to court proceedings. This suggestion reflects the desire of the youth to be more actively engaged in the judicial process, promoting transparency, and fostering a deeper understanding of the legal system from an early age. Such a change could help encourage civic participation and enhance the development of informed, active citizens committed to justice and rule of law.

The long-term impact of this project on the judicial system in Armenia could be profound. By increasing the capacity of young people to monitor and report on court activities, the project contributes to a culture of accountability and openness in the legal system. Continued engagement with civil society will likely lead to more robust reforms in the judiciary, ensuring greater fairness and consistency in trials. Furthermore, the project's focus on empowering youth could foster long-term civic engagement, with participants becoming advocates for justice and rule of law in their communities. This initiative can also set the foundation for greater public involvement in reform processes and contribute to broader societal efforts aimed at ensuring human rights protections and strengthening democratic governance in Armenia.