

Press Release

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COAF Secures €10 Million Grant to Transform Education in Armenia's Syunik Region

BRUSSELS — The Children of Armenia Fund (COAF) has secured a landmark €10 million grant from the European Commission through European Investment Bank (EIB) Global to establish two SMART Centers in the Syunik region. The grant was formalized at the Global Gateway Forum in Brussels on 25 October by EU Commissioner for Enlargement and Neighbourhood, OlivérVárhelyi, and EIB Vice-President, Thomas Österos. The signing ceremony was witnessed by the Armenian President Vahagn Khachaturyan as well as COAF Global Executive Director Ara Barsam and Managing Director Liana Ghaltaghchyan. This partnership heralds a new era of educational excellence in Armenia's southern Syunik region, bringing world-class after-school education to the children of the region.

This groundbreaking initiative entails the construction of two innovative extracurricular education and teacher training centers in the cities of Kapan and Goris in the Syunik region of Southern Armenia. These cutting-edge facilities will provide high-quality after-school education and comprehensive services to up to 6,000 children and young adults aged 3 to 18. Students can access a wide range of after-school programs, including foreign languages, entrepreneurship, arts, engineering, athletics. Students will also benefit from the support of social workers, education counselors, study trips, and workshops from international experts.

Following the model of COAF's flagship SMART Center in Armenia's northern Lori region, inaugurated in 2018, this initiative marks a significant step towards enhancing education and development in rural areas. Over the course of its 5-year operation, the Lori SMART Center has served more than 4,000 students from 28 communities and stands as an integral part of a growing network of educational and development facilities, fostering new professional training and employment prospects for rural citizens.

The establishment of two SMART Centers in Syunik is closely aligned with the flagship initiative, "Investing in education, notably in the Syunik region," as part of the European Union's Economic and Investment Plan for the Eastern Partnership. This initiative is also a pivotal element of the Team Europe Initiative on Resilient Syunik, aimed at bolstering the socio-economic resilience of the Southern region of Armenia, which has been significantly impacted by the 2020 hostilities and the recent mass displacement of Karabakh Armenians.

EU Commissioner for Enlargement and Neighbourhood, Olivér Várhelyi, emphasized, "Today's announcement is another proof of the EU's commitment to Armenia's reforms in education, to enhance its quality, modernisation and relevance to

economy and society. Education is a priority under the Economic and Investment Plan's flagship for Armenia, and I am pleased to see that the construction of two non-formal education centers in the Syunik region will be a reality. This will ensure the quality of rural education and workforce development and prepare young people of Armenia, including vulnerable groups, to find appropriate jobs in a competitive job market. This is part of the EU's comprehensive approach to education in Armenia, to which we committed recently a €32 million budget support for the implementation of the education strategy."

President of the Republic of Armenia, Vahagn Khachaturyan, expressed his support, stating, "Today an important step was taken towards the realization of the two non-formal education centers to be constructed in the Syunik Region of Armenia and to be operated by the COAF. This can help to further strengthen the links between formal and non-formal education as the latter is an essential auxiliary to the former. Moreover, the construction of these SMART Centers in Syunik will contribute to a bigger goal of developing the southern regions of Armenia."

EIB's President, Werner Hoyer, added, "As the EU Bank, we are committed to support development of human capital, economic resilience and social cohesion in Armenia, in line with the EU priorities in the country. This Team Europe initiative is not only an investment in a better education and future of the Armenian children, but it will also contribute to reducing urban-rural divides and gender gaps in the country."

COAF Global Executive Head, Ara Barsam, emphasized the significance of the initiative, stating, "This is a pivotal investment in Armenia's future. COAF is swiftly working, upholding the highest standards of quality and innovation to ensure that all young Armenians receive the finest education and training possible."

Liana Ghaltaghchyan, COAF Managing Director, stressed the importance of this endeavor for Armenia, emphasizing, "It is especially vital for Armenia to embark on the establishment of our SMART Centers in Syunik during this crucial period."

This initiative reflects the collaborative commitment of the European Commission, the European Investment Bank, and the Children of Armenia Fund to advancing education, economic resilience, and social development in the Syunik region, marking an important milestone in Armenia's progress.



The Children of Armenia Fund (COAF) aims at improving the quality of life in rural Armenia, with a particular focus on the projects and needs of children and youth. COAF's target development areas are education, healthcare, as well as social and economic development. COAF launched its programs in 2004, starting in one village and expanding to more than 82 communities in Armenia and Artsakh with an investment of more than \$70 million, impacting well over 100,000 people across rural Armenia.

EIB Global is the EIB Group's new specialised arm dedicated to increasing the impact of international partnerships and development finance outside of the European Union. EIB Global is designed to foster strong, focused partnership within Team Europe, and as part of the EU's Global Gateway strategy alongside fellow development finance institutions, and civil society. EIB Global brings the Group closer to local people, companies and institutions through our offices across the world.

The Global Gateway Forum brings together for the first time an assembly of government representatives from the European Union and across the globe, alongside key stakeholders from the private sector, civil society, thought leaders, financial institutions, and international organisations to promote global investment in transformative infrastructure – hard and soft-to deliver on SDGs.

Global Gateway is the EU's positive offer to reduce the worldwide investment gap and boost smart, clean and secure connections in digital, energy and transport sectors, and to strengthen health, education and research systems. The Global Gateway strategy embodies a Team Europe approach that brings together the European Union, EU Member States, and European development finance institutions. Together, it aims to mobilize up to €300 billion in public and private investments from 2021 to 2027, creating essential links rather than dependencies, and closing the global investment gap..

Senior Communications Manager at COAF

Nana Mardoyan

E-mail: nana.mardoyan@coaf.org

Phone: +374 55 003 723