

## COLLECTIVE CARE: SUMMARY OF NEEDS ASSESSMENT DATA

Although collective care as a concept is a relatively new approach for civil society, the elements of collective care have always been used, especially among women's organizations and grassroots initiatives.

The Women's Fund Armenia pays special attention to collective care, puts it on the agenda and brings it into the field of social justice. One of the collective care policy practices is the allocation of financial resources to organizations and initiatives for self-care and collective care. The need for self-care and collective care became even more pertinent in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic and especially after the 44-day war.

For us, collective care is not only a manifestation of feminist support and solidarity, but also a political act aimed at redefining and highlighting self-care and care. This research conducted by the Women's Fund Armenia is an attempt to bring to the fore the topic of collective care. We are currently planning to expand our programs that will support the women and feminist movements in Armenia to become more resilient and stronger, while being guided by the principles of care and love for each other.

**The Goal of this Research** is to study the perceptions of the partners of the Women's Fund Armenia (Fund) regarding forgiveness, collective care and care, as well as the existing practices and development opportunities within these approaches.

**Forty-one** interviews were conducted with representatives of **twenty** organizations or collectives that perform various functions within their teams.

The main observation of many of the participants is that it is quite difficult to find the Armenian equivalent of healing and collective care, because "... *our culture does not have it, and it is necessary for linguists to suggest a word under which to put the idea as it is, but not something artificial.*"

In this sense, the approaches of collectives created and operating on the basis of feminist values were divided into 2 main directions:

1. Collectives where, there is a formalized director, however, in practice there is no one who manages (*the position of president/director has a purely bureaucratic purpose*), there are no positions, instead, everyone is equally a member of the team, and everyone stands on the same level.

*In such teams, the arrangements for discussions or meetings are flexible, the routine is adapted to the needs of individuals, different scopes of employment or preferences.*

*They try not to work on non-working days as much as possible. In case non-working agreement is not possible to keep for any reason, they take a day off on another day. The works are organized in teams, and then they share it with each other. There are no secrets about finances, funds or anything else. All decisions are made collectively: technical or operational issues are decided by a small group, while broader issues (strategic, political) are also decided as a result of joint discussion with supportive, like-minded members.*

**2.** In organizations, where there is a drive to reach horizontal management, decisions are made as a team, but there are employees with different roles, whose functions differ from each other. There are coordinators to coordinate the activities of the working groups. In those cases, on the basis of teamwork, they try to ensure horizontal, branched, chain management as much as possible.

*In such organizations, the working routine is mostly fixed, but it is flexible to the extent that it is possible to give notice and not come to work, to take days off, to be late, to settle personal matters, to make an appointment in advance and to implement time changes. They try not to work on non-working days and hours, if they work, the organizational culture allows to take a day off to compensate for the work done on the non-working day. In this regard, the issue of flexibility is particularly important for those professionals that work with beneficiaries, responding to hotlines, and working in the field of violence.*

In many of the collectives created based on feminist values and working within those frames, the concepts of "leader", "worker", "employee" are generally avoided, offering instead the options of "teammate", "ideological friends".

While discussing and sharing their own approaches and points of view, the people who participated in the needs assessment highlighted the existence of practices of reconciliation, collective care and care, as well as the impact of those on the environment, describing it as follows:

- people in such an environment understand better how to solve problems, easily go through various difficulties,
- the risk of occupational burnout decreases,
- relationship quality improves,
- the goal of reaching common ideas becomes more visible,
- a sensitive, inclusive environment is created.

The physical comfort of that environment for the people in it is also an important component of the presence of comfort, collective care, and care. In this sense, the participants highlight the importance of

### A space that

- is *"an encircling cozy environment full of poufs"* with peaceful colors and lighting, flowers, comfortable, and inviting,
- has suitable furniture that does not harm a person's health to the maximum possible extent,
- does not have technical problems related to the bathroom, water, hygiene items, other similar issues,
- is quiet, either with a balcony, or a garden, or any other open space to regularly breathe fresh air, to have natural light,
- has an area that is pleasant, convenient for everyone, and everyone feels good there, which can also be considered as a recreation room,
- is filled with things and arranged in such a way that has taken into consideration all the opinions.

Along with the importance of the comfort of the physical environment, the atmosphere in which people are is key.

- open, safe, honest, non-governmental environment where situations, problems, issues are discussed,
- an environment where there is constant reflection on work, environment, interaction,
- a sensitive environment, where issues related to collective self-care, the state of mental health of each person are highlighted,
- an environment where they understand, they don't look for culprits, they create an opportunity to be honest with their emotions,
- an environment that is not oppressive, formalized, aggressive, competitive, ruled with authoritarian procedures and practices;
- an open and positive energy environment where opinions are not suppressed.