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|  | **NEWS RELEASE**  |

**World Bank Supports Improvements in Education in Armenia**

***Sustaining the Efforts from Early Childhood to University***

**WASHINGTON, March 13, 2014** – The World Bank Board of Executive Directors today approved a US$30 million financing for the **Education Improvement Project in Armenia.** The project will support the improvement of school readiness for children entering primary education and the physical conditions in upper-secondary schools. It will also promote greater links between higher education institutions and labor market in Armenia.

For over a decade the Government of Armenia has been pursuing reforms in the education sector targeted at strengthening the quality of education services delivered. These reforms include but are not limited to the development of the new national curriculum framework, standards, and syllabi for general education, extension of the general education system from grade 11 to 12, establishment of the Assessment and Testing Center (ATC) for enhanced capacity to assess student performance, and provision of universal access to internet to all schools in Armenia. The latter has considerably improved access and the quality of general education.

The new project will support improving the school readiness among those entering first grade by expanding preschool coverage in impoverished rural areas benefiting approximately 2,400 children per year. 17 high schools will be rehabilitated with enhanced construction and safety standards to benefit approximately 10,200 high school students in all regions. The rehabilitated high schools, would provide more appropriate teaching and learning environments to the students, including safer infrastructure, adequate ICT equipment and digital teaching and learning materials. The project activities will specifically cover vulnerable population including ethnic groups and disabled children.

*“Establishing equitable and high-quality education system has been a corner stone of Armenia’s education reforms in the past decade,”* says **Jean-Michel Happi,** **World Bank Country Manager for Armenia**. “*This project will continue improving the relevance of educational services through accessible quality education at all levels, including for higher education, thus contributing to building country’s human capital necessary to enhance the competitiveness of the economy.”*

The project will also support strengthening of the National Center of Education Technology for monitoring the school network and providing adequate ICT coverage and publicly available relevant and timely data to all educational institutions and to the society. The quality of general education would be also increased through the revisions and improvements in curriculum. This would indirectly benefit almost 370,000 students per year. The support for Tertiary Education through the envisioned mainstreaming of the Competitive Innovation Fund (CIF) would impact about 3,000 students annually, whose academic programs would be modernized and made more responsive to the needs of employers.

*“The project will address the readiness to school of over 12,000 five year old children living in rural impoverished areas that lack preschool services,”* says **Cristian Aedo, World Bank Task Team Leader of the project.** *“This will positively impact the poor population as it will improve the opportunities for children to be comparably successful at later stages of their education. The project will actively engage in activities that will boost the learning environment from full rehabilitation of 15 percent of high schools across the country to development of electronic content.”*

Over these years the Government has successfully increased the enrollment at preschool level along with pursuing reforms of higher education after joining the Bologna Process in 2005. To successfully complete the process, this project would be specifically focused on community-based pre-schools and enhancing enrollment rates in participating kindergartens and schools; the improvement in teaching and learning conditions in high schools; and curriculum revisions. The project will support the development of an integrated information system that will provide necessary data and analysis for policy making and recurrent improvement of general secondary and tertiary education. The proposed activities will also enhance partnerships between universities and the private sector for modernizing the higher education sector in Armenia.

Total financing of the project is US$37.5 million, of which US$7.5 million will be the Government’s contribution. The World Bank will provide a US$15 million credit on standard blend IDA terms at a fixed interest rate of 1.25% per annum with a maturity of 25 years and a 5 year grace period, as well as a US$15 million IBRD loan of variable spread, with a 10 year grace period and the total repayment term of 25 years.

Since joining the World Bank in 1992 and IDA in 1993, the commitments to Armenia total approximately US$ 1,818.04 million.

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2014/377/ECA