# **A new preschool service opens in the border village of Dovegh with the support of UNICEF and the European Union**

*By the end of 2023, UNICEF will set up 8 more preschool services in rural communities with the support of the European Union.*

**Yerevan, 22 July 2023** - In coordination with the RA Ministry of Education, Science, Culture and Sports (MoESCS), and the Ministry of Territorial Administration and Infrastructure, Tavush regional authorities and other partners, and with the financial support of the European Union, UNICEF opened a new preschool center in Dovegh settlement of Noyemberian consolidated community. Located near the border between Armenian and Azerbaijan, Dovegh is home to 502 residents and 145 children, where 3-5-year-olds have never had a preschool to go to.

“The early years of life are critical for child’s development. When children benefit from early learning, as an immediate result, it boosts their social, emotional, and cognitive skills, boosting their readiness for school and reducing the gap between socially advantaged and disadvantaged children. It also has long-term benefits for the society, enabling children to reach their full developmental potential later as adults and to participate effectively in social, civic and economic life of their communities. The most important skills in life we first learn at preschool,” noted Mrs Christine Weigand, UNICEF Representative in Armenia.

Starting today, 18 young children will benefit from early learning services in Dovegh, and more will enroll by the end of the year. Located on the second floor of the community administrative building, the preschool service has a fully renovated and furnished entrance hall, two playrooms and two separate WASH facilities for children and adults, and a kitchenette. The center has a solar photovoltaic system, a broad range of didactic materials and toys, as well as a first aid kit. Together with Step by Step Benevolent Foundation, UNICEF has also provided three women in the community with pre-service training. The preschool also has a newly built small outdoor playground near the building.

“Early childhood education is a pre-requisite for ensuring that all children can exercise their right to learn and to develop. The roots of learning poverty and why nowadays children struggle in foundational learning skills start in the lack of early learning services to make children ready for school. This is also why we need to invest in early childhood educators, quality standards, training and development, their working conditions and career progression,” said Mrs. Ashkhen Gyurjyan, Step by Step Benevolent Foundation.

Together with partners, in the past three years UNICEF has set up 17 preschool services in Lori, Tavush, Syunik, Shirak and Gegharkunik regions, in line with the alternative model developed previously by Ministry of Education and UNICEF specifically for rural areas. By the end of 2023 works for establishment of 8 more alternative preschool services will be completed ensuring that children in remote rural areas are also given a fair start in education. The model has proven not only cost-effective but also sustainable, as communities commit to covering related salary and operational costs, while the preschool educators continue to receive professional development support from the lead kindergarten of the consolidated community. This model also contributes to Armenia’s objective of increasing the coverage of early learning services across the country.