

Online First

International Organisations Research Journal, 2022, vol. 17, no 4, pp. 193–208

Original article

doi:10.17323/1996-7845-2022-04-08

## Structure and Prospects for the Transformation of Official Development Assistance to Armenia<sup>1</sup>

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### Abstract

This article examines the ratio of the official development assistance (ODA) structure of Armenia to its domestic goals. For this, the author examines the structure of development assistance to Armenia and the motives of its main donors. Considering the country's rather close economic cooperation with Russia and the countries of the European Union (EU), the expected political motivation of the country's donors in providing and distributing ODA is revealed. However, for the most part, ODA-supported projects correspond to the redistribution of the country's domestic needs: poverty reduction and support for socially vulnerable groups of the population, development of agriculture and the service sector, and support for climate initiatives. The main contribution to this is made by international organizations and the United States, which are historically the most reliable and long-standing donors of ODA to the country. The Russian Federation is also a major donor of ODA to Armenia; however, due to the peculiarities of defining development assistance at the legislative level, Russian bilateral ODA is disordered and incorrectly reflected in official statistics. In the medium term, the current structure of ODA by sector and donor can be expected to stay stable: it is based on long-term agreements on cross-country economic cooperation and the activity of a stable political structure in the United States. In the long term, the structure of Armenia's ODA is likely to be most determined by the development of economic relations between the Republic of Armenia and the European Union.

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<sup>1</sup> This article was submitted on 15.09.2022.

**Key words:** bilateral international development assistance, Armenia, EAEU, motivations of ODA donors

**Acknowledgments:** The article is prepared within the project funded by the Russian Foundation for Basic Research, No. 20-310-90017

**For citation:** Oksinenko V. (2022) Structure and Prospects for the Transformation of Official Development Assistance to Armenia. *International Organisations Research Journal*, vol. 17, no 4, pp. 193–208 (in English). doi:10.17323/1996-7845-2022-04-08

## **Introduction**

Official development assistance (ODA) is an important mechanism for solving the problems of developing countries. Despite the significant role of political prerequisites in the distribution of aid, in recent years, according to expert estimates, altruistic motives have been gaining strength [Morozkina, 2019a]. The growing focus on the real needs of recipients allows recipient countries to solve internal problems but this does not happen in all countries, which is why the ODA mechanism may be ineffective.

The Republic of Armenia belongs to the group of countries with a relatively low level of per capita income and a high level of poverty, and since 1992—with its formation as an independent state—has been a recipient of ODA. The structure of Armenia’s ODA and its features are poorly studied in the academic literature: it is partially covered in the few works of Russian authors devoted to the distribution of ODA in the countries of the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU) [Morozkina, 2019b], as well as in studies of the mechanism of the provision of ODA by Russia as a donor [Degterev, 2013; Degterev, Yan, Trusova, 2017; Gevorgyan, Farmanyanyan, 2018], however, there are no works focused on Armenia and all its donors.

The relevance of studying the position of the Republic of Armenia in the ODA distribution system is also due to the divergence of the country’s economic interests. In 2015, Armenia joined the EAEU, which led to the emergence of preferences in trade with other member countries, as well as the formation of a single labour market, primarily with a large “new” donor of ODA, the Russian Federation. At the same time, Armenia supported cooperation with the European Union (EU). Thus, at the beginning of 2021, the Comprehensive and Expanded Partnership Agreement between the republic and the countries of the EU entered into force [Sheiko, Gazazyanyan, 2021]. The country’s interest in cooperation with various organizations of regional economic integration can create political prerequisites for sending ODA to the republic, and therefore lead to its distribution, not focused on the real goals of the country’s development.

The purpose of this work is to identify the motives for the provision and distribution of ODA to Armenia, as well as their possible transformations in the medium and long term. For this purpose, the article considers the structure of the ODA allocated to Armenia by sectors and donors, and the historical and modern prerequisites for its formation. Russia's place in this system will be considered separately.

## The Content of the Research

### The Structure of Armenia's ODA

Armenia has been a recipient of ODA since 1992, when an independent state was formed after the collapse of the USSR. According to the World Bank classification [Hamadeh, van Rompaey, Metreau, 2021], since 2017 Armenia has belonged to the group of countries with an average per capita income above the average, although the gross national product (GDP) per capita in the republic exceeds the lower limit of this category minimally.

The modern structure of Armenia's ODA has significant historical prerequisites both in the context of aid distribution by sector and in the context of donor participation. The country is not a major recipient of ODA. The total volume of aid to the republic is less than 0.5% of the global total (see Fig. 1); however, within the EAEU it is the second recipient in terms of the amount of assistance received, after Kyrgyzstan [Morozkina, 2019b].

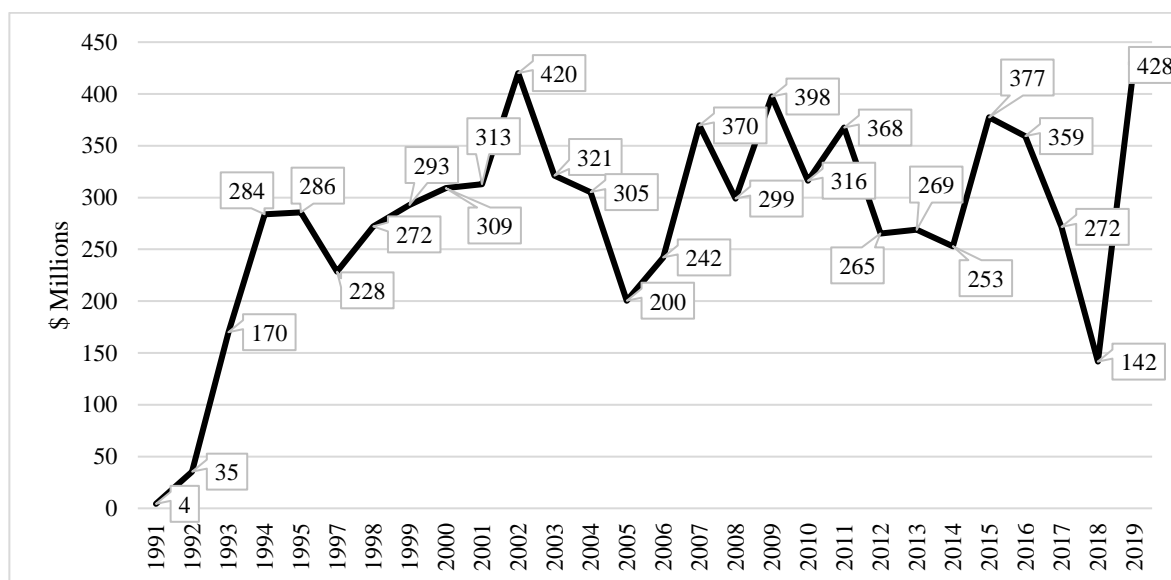


Figure 1. Armenia's ODA volumes, \$ Millions (in 2018 prices), 1991–2019

Source: Compiled by the author on the basis of data from the World Bank [n.d.].

Sharp changes in the volume of aid in some years in the interval under consideration are mainly associated with major projects of multilateral organizations or general economic changes. Thus, the sharp increase in ODA in 2002 was due to the provision of significant

loans to developing countries by the World Bank. The fall in 2005–06 was due to large-scale debt cancellation by donor countries to Iraq and Nigeria and, as a result, the redistribution of ODA between countries. In 2007 there was a return to the previous volumes of aid after the short-term reduction, but the crisis of 2008 led to a new recession. Spikes in 2009 and 2011 (and the next fall that followed each of them) are explained by the provision of large concessional anti-crisis loans to Armenia from the World Bank and the Asian Development Bank (ADB). In 2015, Armenia acceded to the EAEU and increased the assistance from Kazakhstan and Russia, including this through multilateral organizations. The decline in 2018 was caused by the velvet revolution in the country, the subsequent change of government and, as a result, the caution of donors in implementing development programmes. The sharp surge in 2019 is associated with a large loan from the International Monetary Fund (IMF) for financial development. Thus, the total volumes of ODA provided to Armenia correlate with the current situation in the world economy and in the country itself.

Armenia mainly receives ODA in the form of loans [Morozkina, 2019b]. These funds are used to implement projects for the development of economic and social infrastructure, as well as related projects, mainly focused on supporting agriculture and climate conservation (Fig. 2).

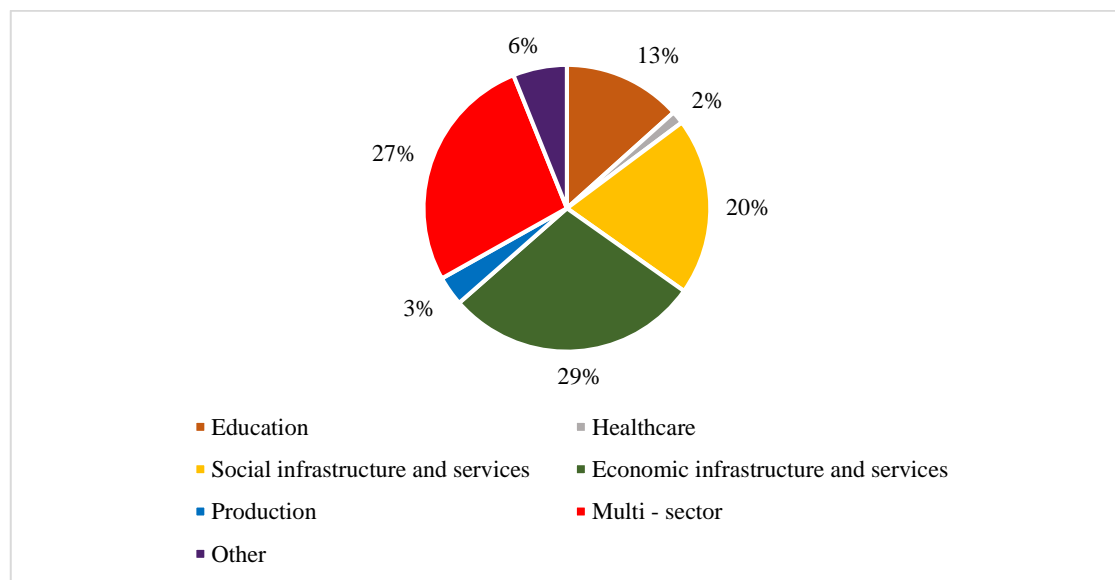


Figure 2. Distribution of Armenia's ODA by sector, 2018–19

Source: Compiled by the author based on data from the OECD [n.d.].

To understand how this distribution satisfies real insurance needs, let us turn to the analysis of priority areas of economic development in the republic. Armenia is an agro-industrial country: the level of employment in agriculture in 2019 was 40% [World Bank,

n.d.]. According to the Strategy of the Main Directions of Economic Development of the Agricultural Sector of the Republic of Armenia for 2020–2030 adopted in 2019, “the vision of the Government of the Republic of Armenia is to have a happy and prosperous rural population in the next 10 years...small and medium-sized economic entities producing high-quality and competitive agricultural products” [Government of the RA, 2019, p. 3]. Thus, the development of agriculture is one of the country’s priorities, although Armenia focuses on the development of other sectors, primarily the service sector, which provided more than 50% of the country’s GDP in 2020 [World Bank, n.d.].

One of the most difficult problems for the republic is poverty and its related social problems. At the beginning of 2022, 30% of the Armenian population lived below the poverty line, and the unemployment rate in the country reached 17%. It is no coincidence that a poverty reduction is one of the priorities in the National Development Strategy of Armenia until 2050, adopted in 2020 [Prime Minister of the RA, 2020]. A significant contribution to the formation of the current situation was made by the consequences of the recent armed conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh, which, against the background of the COVID-19 pandemic and rising world oil prices, led to a slowdown in economic growth in the country, a decrease in investment activity, and exceeding inflation targets [COFACE for Trade, n.d.].

Summarizing, we can say that the key country priorities are support for vulnerable groups of the population (in terms of food and housing), job creation, support for services, and agriculture. The distribution of Armenia’s ODA generally meets these needs, but for a detailed analysis it is necessary to refer to the structure of ODA donors to the country and their projects.

#### Key Donors of Armenia’s ODA

The main donors to the country are multilateral organizations, institutions of the EU, the U.S., Germany, France and Russia (Fig. 3).

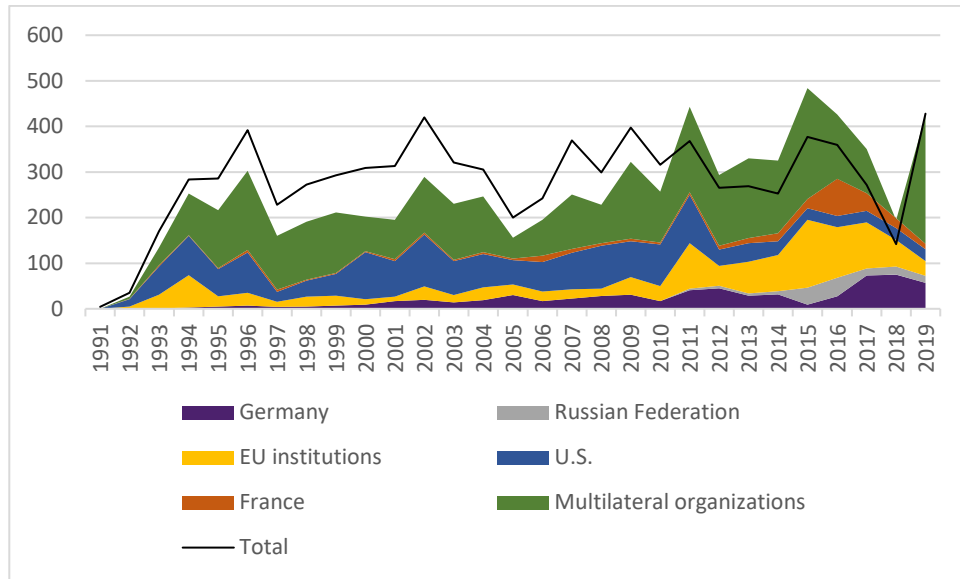


Figure 3. Share of Donors in Armenia's Aid, 1991–2019

Source: Compiled by the author based on data from the OECD [n.d.].

Among the multilateral organizations, the largest creditor of Armenia is the World Bank. Thus, at the expense of the funds provided to them, the Territorial Development Fund of the republic operates in the country and implements infrastructure and territorial projects in regions and cities: in 2020, the fund allocated 717 million Armenian drams for the purchase of new agricultural machinery [Arminfo, 2020]. In addition to the World Bank, Armenia receives assistance within the framework of development programmes from the IMF, United Nations (UN) organizations, the ADB, and other multilateral organizations.

Among the bilateral donors, the United States has historically been the largest for Armenia: it was the first to allocate ODA to the republic after its emergence as an independent state. The main reason lies in the formation of an influential Armenian lobby in the U.S. at that time, which successfully implemented many significant political and economic decisions regarding Armenia through the U.S. Congress, including the recognition of the Armenian genocide [Gregg, 2002]. A large Armenian diaspora, which subsequently formed its political structure, grew in the United States at the beginning of the twentieth century from among the refugees [Minority Rights Group International, n.d.]. The experience of a number of countries proves that migrants who have already moved to the host country have a significant influence on local legislators in terms of preferences for their home country, also in terms of providing ODA [Bermeo, Leblang, 2015].

More current motives for the U.S.' interest in official assistance to Armenia lie in the expanding economic and political cooperation between the two countries. Armenia is a participant in the Partnership for Peace programme and an observer in the Organization of

American States, in which the United States holds key positions. The United States is also interested in resolving the conflict in the Nagorno-Karabakh region and eliminating the hotbed of tension there. In terms of trade, Armenia is a major supplier of carpet products and precious stones and metals to the United States [U.S. Department of State, 2020].

Being the largest bilateral donor of ODA in the world in absolute terms, in 2020, the United States provided Armenia with bilateral ODA in the amount of almost \$26 million (in 2018 and 2019, the amounts were less—\$19 and \$20 million, respectively) [USAID, n.d.], and taking into account ODA, distributed through multilateral organizations, the U.S.’ contribution in 2020 exceeded \$66 million [ForeignAssistance.gov, n.d.].

The main directions of the U.S.’ bilateral ODA to Armenia are shown in Figure 4. The main sector over the past seven years has been government and civil society support (on average 30% of the total), operating expenses, and business support (17% each).

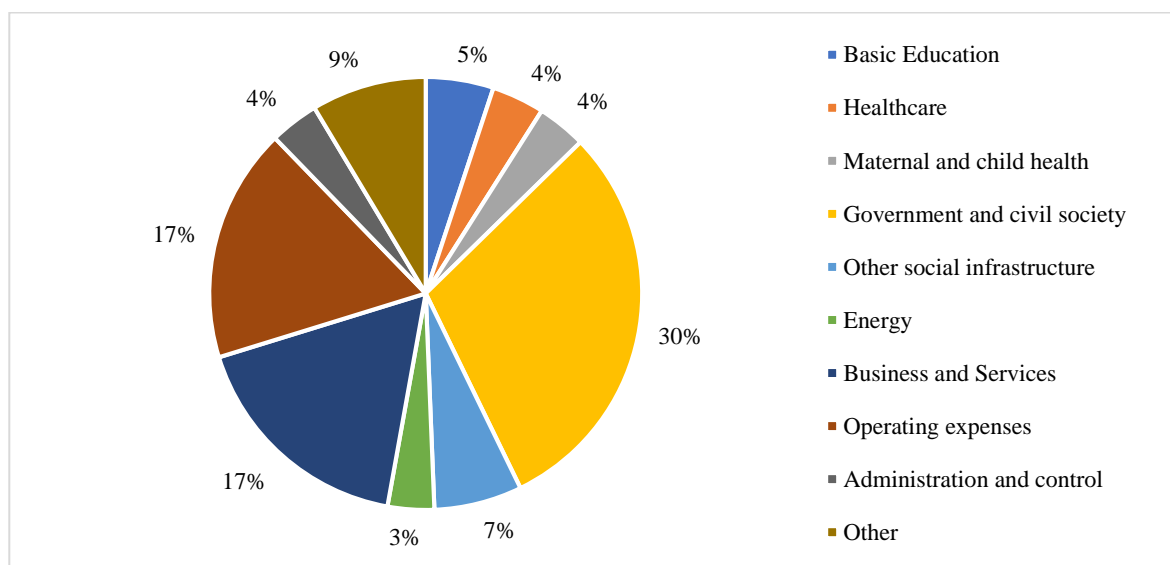


Figure 4. Distribution of the main volumes of U.S. ODA to Armenia, average values, 2014–20

Source: Compiled by the author based on data from USAID [n.d.].

About 80 projects are implemented annually at the expense of U.S. bilateral ODA within the framework of the presented sectors. In addition, there are non-profit organizations in the country that also support development initiatives in Armenia. The largest of such organizations, the Armenian Relief Fund, has implemented about 300 projects with a total value of more than \$350 million in the territory of the republic over the 30 years of its existence [FAR, n.d.].

However, it should be noted that in recent years the absolute volume of U.S. aid to Armenia has decreased (see Fig. 3). Most likely, this is primarily due to Donald Trump’s

policy of reducing the total volume of U.S. ODA, as well as the greater involvement of other donors in Armenia's ODA. Recently, EU institutions and countries have begun to play an increasingly significant role in providing bilateral ODA to the republic, primarily Germany, which was the largest bilateral donor to the republic in 2019. On average for 2018–19, the volume of German ODA has reached almost \$93 million [OECD, n.d.]. Germany regards Armenia as an important recipient of ODA and an ally mainly in the sphere of trade relations, being the third largest exporter of goods from Armenia (after Russia and China) and the fifth importer, mainly receiving metals and textiles from the republic. Within the framework of ODA, Germany provides assistance to Armenia in the settlement of conflicts in Nagorno-Karabakh and the formation of a democratic government, and also actively promotes the study of the German language in schools [Government of the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG), n.d.]. Since 2012, France has also begun to strengthen its interest in Armenia as a recipient of ODA. Historically, the country was one of the first European states to recognize the Armenian genocide by the Ottoman Empire (in 1998), and now it is one of the world's largest (after Russia) investors of projects in the country through the activities of French public and private companies [Government of the French Republic, n.d.]. Through sovereign and non-sovereign loans, France finances initiatives in agriculture, territorial development, energy efficiency, and infrastructure, helps to implement public policy reforms, and has the authority to propose urban development projects [AFD, n.d.].

The growing interest of European countries in Armenia correlates with the pace of expansion of the geopolitical and economic inter-country partnership: in 2003, Armenia stated that it wanted to cooperate in every possible way with EU countries and introduce European standards into the lifestyle of citizens and the organization of economic activity in the country [RIA Novosty, 2003], and at the end of 2017 a comprehensive agreement was signed between the EU and Armenia for an expanded partnership. From 1 June 2018, the agreement began to be applied temporarily, and at the beginning of 2021—after ratification by all EU countries—it entered into full force [Sheiko, Gazazyan, 2021]. An analysis of the projects of key donor countries of Armenia's ODA in the country allows us to assert a clear priority of political motives in assistance to the country's development. At the same time, it should be noted that the main bulk of the projects coincides with the long-term domestic needs of the republic, including poverty reduction. EU countries' assistance is based on official agreements; as the details show, the main assistance from Germany and France is directed to long-term projects in the field of education, agriculture, and government support. The same can be said about U.S. assistance: President Joe Biden has declared the promotion



of international development one of the priorities of his activities as head of state, and the Joint Strategic Plan of the State Department and the U.S. Agency for International Development for 2022–2026 confirms this. So, given the immutability of the situation of the Armenian diaspora in the country, there is no reason to expect Armenia to be excluded from the U.S. aid programme.

At the same time, in 2022 we are witnessing a spontaneous redistribution of U.S. and EU ODA in favour of Ukraine: thus, according to the results of 2022, a significant increase in the ratio of total ODA to German GDP is expected, and the United States has already spent \$1.5 billion on humanitarian aid to Ukraine [Donor Tracker, n.d.]. It can be unequivocally stated that in the results of 2022 we will see a significant reduction in the volume of aid to many recipient countries, including Armenia.

Thus, speaking about the assistance to Armenia's development from the EU and the U.S. in the medium and long term, we must state that it is impossible to predict either its distribution by sectors or volumes. In addition to the patterns of the general economic development of the country, external effects play a significant role. The key factors, considering the nature of the motives of donors, will be related to foreign policy: the volume of ODA can be influenced by the relationship between Armenia and donor countries and between Armenia and Russia within the framework of the EAEU, as well as between donor countries and third countries. Separately, it is necessary to consider the nature of the development of the conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh, which significantly affects the domestic needs and the structure of Armenia's ODA. Finally, given the significant role of the agricultural sector in the Armenian economy, climatic factors may also be significant.

#### Features of Russia's ODA and Its Assistance to the Development of Armenia

The Russian Federation has been allocating bilateral ODA to Armenia since 2011. To determine the place of Russia's ODA in promoting Armenia's development, it is necessary to characterize the Russian Federation as a donor of ODA in general. Russia belongs to the group of "new" donors of ODA [Degtyarev, 2013], although the history of the country's participation in the provision of official development assistance goes deep into the times of the USSR [Ermolov, 2015]. Nevertheless, experts still note the insufficient development of the regulatory framework for providing development assistance and the absence of a separate body that can determine the volume of assistance and its distribution, regulatory legal acts introducing key definitions, and so on [Degterev, Yan, Trusova, 2017].

The main recipient of the bilateral ODA of the Russian Federation is the Cuban Democratic Republic (more than \$358 million for 2019, according to the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development [OECD, n.d.], however, the member countries of the EAEU, primarily Kyrgyzstan and Armenia (\$80 and \$17 million per year 2019, respectively [Ibid.] (Table 1)) are the following. The relatively high position of the EAEU countries in this list is quite natural: increasing international competitiveness and improving the quality of life of the population of the EAEU member states is the main goal of the functioning of the union, in which Russia occupies a leading role in terms of economic indicators [Treaty of the EAEU, 2014].

Table 1. Top 10 Recipients of Russian ODA by Country, 2019

Recipient	Amount (\$ Millions)
Cuba	358.10
Kyrgyzstan	80.44
China	65.88
Syria	16.82
Armenia	16.69
Tadjikistan	12.54
Madagascar	9.39
Mozambique	8.87
Serbia	7.40
Uzbekistan	5.96

*Source:* Compiled by the author based on data from the OECD [n.d.].

If Russia is the largest donor of ODA in the world for Kyrgyzstan, even ahead of international organizations, then Russia occupies only the fifth position among bilateral donors in terms of the share of participation in Armenia's ODA [OECD, n.d.].

There are several reasons for Russia's relatively insignificant participation in Armenia's ODA. On the one hand, the Russian Federation has been characterized in recent years by the active use of multilateral organizations to provide ODA due to the insufficient level of development of its own channels [Sergeev, Kazantsev, Bartenev, 2013]. In the early 2000s, up to 90% of Russia's total ODA was provided through multilateral organizations; by 2020, this share had decreased to 50% (although according to some estimates, only up to 70% [Ermolov, 2021]). On the other hand, in 2016–20, about 70% of Russia's bilateral ODA fell on debt cancellation to recipient countries (Fig. 5). For the leader in terms of ODA

received from Russia, the Cuban republic, a significant part of the subsidies for debt cancellation, while for Kyrgyzstan, which is in second position, these are mainly loans for development purposes.

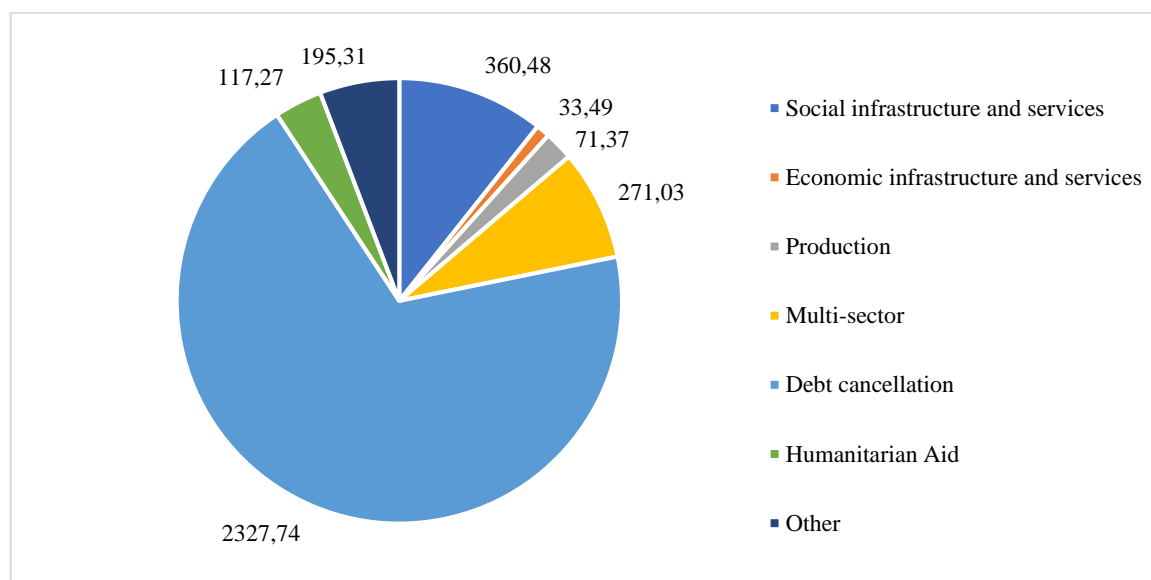


Figure 5. Distribution of Russia’s ODA by sector, \$ Millions 2019, 2016–20 prices

Source: Compiled by the author based on data from the OECD [n.d.].

Finally, in the Russian Federation there is no order in the ways of providing development assistance, including ODA [Ermolov, 2015]. The key current document defining the country’s activities in relation to ODA is the Concept of the State Policy of the Russian Federation in the Field of International Development Assistance From 2014. The concept does not use the term “official development assistance,” instead, the phrase “international development assistance” occurs several times, which, in addition to ODA, includes many forms of interaction, as well as financial flows from private sources. Probably, this can explain the fact that in Russia ODA is provided using means atypical for international aid instruments: through the supply of fuels and lubricants at preferential prices, tariff preferences, support for migrants, including by facilitating the conditions for money transfers and registration, and others. [Sergeev, Kazantsev, Bartenev, 2013]. Thus, bilateral ODA in its classical definition is a rather poorly developed instrument for promoting international development on the part of Russia.

This judgment is also true when considering the relations between Armenia and Russia. According to experts, Russia’s ODA in favour of Armenia is disordered and largely does not coincide with the real needs of the country. Thus, within the framework of Armenia’s bilateral ODA, Russia in 2015 provided a grant for the creation of a unified

automated financial management information system in the amount of \$8.2 million. And in 2017, it was agreed to provide a state export loan of \$100 million for the purchase of military equipment [Gevorgyan, Farmanyan, 2018]. However, the more relevant areas in these years, as we saw above, were the creation of new jobs and assistance to the poorest segments of the population.

At the same time, Russia carried out much more structural and country-specific work through multilateral organizations, actively supporting their initiatives in Armenia. So, in June 2020, Russia allocated \$3.2 million for the UN Development Programme project to assist the most affected regions of the Republic of Armenia in post-conflict reconstruction [RIA Novosty, 2021].

As part of the implementation of the provisions of the Law on Food Security in Armenia, a programme to support school nutrition in the country has been operating since 2013 [‘Food Security and the School Feeding System: experience of the Russian Federation’]. The programme focuses on improving the nutrition of schoolchildren, which, according to its developers, can increase the attendance of educational institutions and the educational productivity of schoolchildren, as well as improve the quality of nutrition of students’ family members through the release of additional monetary resources for food. In 2018, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations joined the implementation of the programme, which not only expanded the variety of hot meals in schools, but also began the construction of greenhouses at public schools in Armenia for their self-sufficiency with fresh vegetables and fruits. The programme was fully funded by the Russian Federation, which, among other things, announced that, if successful in Armenia, the project would become a pilot for subsequent implementation in other EAEU countries with similar social problems [FAO, 2018].

Russia also has the largest share in the authorized capital of the Eurasian Development Bank—65.97%—whose main strategic objectives are to finance the EAEU countries and Tajikistan in terms of national development projects and support projects in the field of industrial production [Ermolov, 2021]. As of 1 October 2021, the current volume of the bank’s investment portfolio is \$4.525 billion, 1.7% of which falls on the projects in Armenia [EDB, n.d.]

Some experts attribute to Russia political motives in aiding [Degterev, 2013], especially with regard to the former Soviet republics: there is an opinion in the literature that even the creation of the EAEU and the declaration of assistance to the development of the population and economies of the member states is a political step by Russia to form a space

for opposition to the EU [Duchâtel et al., 2016]. We are not inclined to share such a critical position: an insufficient understanding of the structure of Russia's bilateral ODA to Armenia, due to its non-standard interpretation at the legislative level, does not allow us to create a complete picture of the projects being implemented.

As for the prospects for the transformation of the structure and motives for providing assistance to Armenia from Russia in the medium and long term, in addition to the factors relevant to EU and U.S. donors, the development of legislation on development assistance in the Russian Federation will also play a significant role here: it will not only directly affect the formats and volumes of ODA provided by Russia, but may also create restrictions on the volumes and directions of ODA provided by other donor countries.

## Conclusion

The structure of Armenia's ODA generally corresponds to the structure of its domestic goals, although the country's key donors provide ODA based on clearly political motives. Harmonization in this case is achieved primarily due to the active and long-term participation of the United States with the support of the Armenian diaspora. In the future, the structure of Armenia's ODA will also depend on the political decisions of the leaders of the donor countries, not only in relation to Armenia itself, but also, probably, in relation to third countries. In the short term, and possibly in the medium term, we can expect a reduction in Armenia's total ODA due to its redistribution in favour of other countries.

Russia, being one of the major donors to Armenia, is inferior to others in the systematic nature, volume, and focus of ODA, although it has provided significant assistance to the implementation of major development projects through international organizations.

In the long term, we can expect that the United States will not lose its focus on domestic priorities from bilateral donors. Nevertheless, the share of their participation in the development of Armenia can be largely determined by the level of involvement of other countries, as well as several external factors, the direction and intensity of the impact of which is difficult to predict.

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