

**Alternative
Report**

**prepared by the
PUBLIC COUNCIL ON CHILDRENS
AND YOUTH RIGHTS**

adjunct to the
Human Rights
Defender of
Armenia

Introduction

In 2022, the Public Council on Children's and Youth Rights adjunct to the Human Rights Defender of Armenia, was created by the Human Rights Defender's Office. It consists of 21 members from all the provinces of Armenia, selected on the basis of pre-announced criteria. The goals, knowledge, and further expectations of the applicants have been considered while choosing the participants. UNICEF Armenia assisted the HRDO during the process of the formation of the Council. At all stages of the participation process, the HRDO guarantees confidentiality and privacy for the children. Special rules are developed to which all members of the Council are subjected to, for the purpose of building tolerance and respect towards others' opinions.

On November 20, 2022, the inaugural session of the Public Council on Children's and Youth Rights took place. It was followed by a question-and-answer session and a discussion between the members of the Council and representatives of state bodies. During the question-and-answer session, the members of the Council raised questions about the existing issues in the field of inclusive education and referred to the difficulties faced by students with hearing and vision problems in educational institutions.

This report is the result of various discussions, official and media publications, as well as observations by the children involved in the Public Council, ensuring the involvement of the views of all the members of the Public Council, which also reflects the views of the children of Armenia.

The purpose of this report is to form mechanisms, and a culture of raising the issues related to children based on the principle of autonomy, as well as to contribute to the provision of real and effective participation in the proposals aimed at solving them.

The report covers the articles of the Convention on the rights of the child which, according to us, need the most attention and follow-up in Armenia

The Guaranteeing of the Best Interests of the Child/ Child-Centred Approaches

Article 3

The best interest of the child must always be taken into consideration during the decision making process related to the child. Despite the efforts taken by the competent state bodies to ensure the best interest of the child, some issues have been registered. An issue which has been registered in Armenia is that currently, around 15,000 children are waiting for their turn to be able to be registered in preschool education, which is contradiction to the best interest of the child, even though some of the kindergartens are in the process of being renovated.

Another issue has been registered in public schools: the maximum number of students in classes is 35, and duration of the class is 45 minutes. Children do not have the opportunity to participate equally in the class, since the duration for the class is short, while the number of the students is too high, thus effecting the quality of education.

There is a shortage of experts working with children, since the salary of teachers is very low, and also the number of applicants to the Armenian State Pedagogical University is small.

Another issue registered is that after the separation of the parents, the decision of the custody of the child is very often made without taking into consideration with which parent the child can be safer with.

Specialists working with children do not have sufficient information and knowledge about child rights and working with children in child-centred approaches.

The work of Guardianship and Trusteeship Commissions is protecting children in communities, but there are a number of problems:

- The inefficient and improper work of guardianship and trusteeship bodies, as a result of which cases of child violence are recorded in the family currently (moreover, they are videotaped and widely spread on the Internet; a case has been registered where the parent(s) subject the child to cruel and humiliating treatment, and the videos are disseminated on the Internet document how the child's parent, mainly the mother, beats the child, humiliates him/her, and subjects him/her to psychological violence)
- Non-child-centred settlement of the issue of child custody after separation of parents (giving the custody to one of the parents who poses a danger to the child and does not ensure the emotional connection of the child equally with both parents)
- The inefficient work of guardianship organizations, problems in care centres, violations of children's rights by employees of care centres, violation of the right to personal space are issues registered by the monitoring bodies, including the fact-finding activities of the Human Rights Defender's Office.

However, despite the huge responsibilities, the Commission works on a voluntary basis, without receiving remuneration, which has led to the fact that the work of these structures does not fully ensure the best interests of the child.

Recommendations

- Create new preschools through grants, other support programs,
- reduce the number of students in the class, which will allow children to receive more attention and better quality education,
- increase the salary of teachers and thus stimulate the growth of the number of students in pedagogical universities,
- train specialists who work with children, making them professionals who know how to work with children without the exertion of violence, and violating their rights,
- to only appoint as members of Guardianship and Trusteeship Commissions, professional psychologists, social workers who have the necessary skills, are knowledgeable and have studied international and domestic laws, and are able to improve their work. Moreover, the members should receive remuneration, as their work is of high importance and requires high levels of responsibility.
- include experienced and skilled specialists working with children in the field of justice, train and teach specialists on how to work on juvenile delinquency.



Article 4.

Conditions for the realization of rights must be created for all children, because all children equal, have equal inalienable rights.

Issues registered:

There is a lack of awareness among children about their own rights, as a result of which many children become victims of bullying, discrimination, and violence.

There is a need for skilled specialists in schools and kindergartens, such as teachers, psychologists and social pedagogues, who can apply their skills in creating a child-centred society.

There is the lack of an effective mechanism that would allow to increase the protection of children's rights in schools.

Children have the right to participate in protests, but several issues have been registered that are an obstacle to the realization of this right, for example, the criticisms directed by the society to the children for participating in protests, or the banning of the children in schools and universities from participating in protests after class-hours.

Problems related to access to health care have also been registered. It should be noted that in Armenia, medical services are free for children under the age of 18, but there are various rehabilitation courses, as well as examinations, surgeries, which are not free, and the fees are very high. This has resulted in many cases where children have been denied access, as a result of which the right to health, or in extreme cases, the right to life, have been violated.

Children are often forced to live in dangerous conditions in the border settlements and villages, since civilian objects are regularly targeted by Azerbaijani forces.

About 1,000 children in Armenia have been left out of education, and as a result of the forced displacement of Armenians from Nagorno-Karabakh (Artsakh), this number has increased because there are still families who do not have a primary residence and are constantly on the move.

Recommendations

- Implement awareness raising campaigns and raise the knowledge of rights among children.
- Train teachers, and provide them with better skills to work with children.
- Develop a mechanism to protect the rights of the child in schools, which will be used primarily by children themselves.
- Create an environment where a child can express his/her right to participate in protests in a free and unhindered manner.
- Implement an assessment of the social situation of children, and, based on the results, partially or fully finance their needed treatment.
- Develop a strategy and specific actions for the safety of people, including children living in border areas during conflicts.
- Organize events in which children from Armenia and children forcibly displaced from Nagorno-Karabakh will participate equally, thus demonstrating the society that children are equal regardless of their place of residence, and discrimination in this regard is unacceptable.
- Support the integration of children in a new environment, and be consistent in the process of the protection of their rights.
- The state should undertake all appropriate measures to ensure the full realization of the rights of the child in the Convention.



Article 2.

Children face the issue of discrimination since birth throughout the world; It is necessary to say "no" to discrimination in kindergartens, schools, various institutions, and society. Despite the efforts taken by the state to eliminate all forms of discrimination, certain issues still persist:

- Discriminatory approach based on the child's nationality or religion and social status.
- Access to preschool education is an important issue. State kindergartens in Yerevan are free, while in the provinces they are paid. As a result, due to insufficient funds, many children in the provinces do not have access to pre-school education.
- Armenian children receive extremely discriminatory treatment due to their religion and nationality. This is evidenced by the fact that the servicemen of the Azerbaijani armed forces rip cross necklaces from the necks of Armenians, including young children, and throw them on the ground, and they do not allow the forcibly displaced Armenians to transport personal objects of spiritual significance (books, pictures, crosses) with them to Armenia.
- Most public entertainment venues in Armenia, and some educational institutions do not provide accessibility for the full inclusion of persons with disabilities. Children with disabilities do not have access to information related to children (legal, educational, cultural).

- Many schools do not have facilities (ramps or special elevators) that allow children with disabilities who have mobility problems and use wheelchairs to enter the school building; sometimes the facilities have a formal character, meaning, they exist at the entrance, but the rest of the building is not accessible to children with mobility issues,
- Appropriate books with Braille translation and adequate specialists who can work with visually impaired children are needed; there are no schools in the provinces where they can receive their education, and the children are forced to go to Yerevan (the Capital City),
- The situation is more complicated for children with hearing issues. Few people in society know how to communicate in sign language, thus creating a communication problem. There are very few specialists in schools who can work with them; their right to education and non-discrimination are violated,
- Many television channels do not have sign language translation, creating problems for children with hearing issues.
- The numbers of cases bullying in society are of concern and require appropriate attention. Moreover, the word bullying is a strange term for the majority of the public, and they do not possess any information on it. Bullying is most common in schools and occurs between peers, and even between teachers and students, which is a very concerning. A worrying lack of awareness about bullying has been registered, as a result of which many children are severely affected, both physically and psychologically.
- Gender discrimination - discriminatory treatment by society, sometimes also by parents, towards their own children due to the latter's gender, which is evidenced by the increasing number of sex-selective abortions. This issue is more widespread in rural and remote provincial communities.



Recommendations

- Train tutors and teachers, and provide them with the necessary skills to work with children.
- Increase the number of internships for people who have not yet graduated, but are studying at the university.

- Adopt decisions that will oblige specialists working with children to go through a trial period before starting work.
- Support the construction of preschools next to schools.
- Conducting seminars and awareness raising campaigns about bullying by state bodies.
- Provide appropriate conditions for persons with disabilities in schools.
- Provide Braille books for visually impaired children in the schools of the provinces, and necessarily conduct special trainings with the teachers working with them.
- Hold sign language courses every year, even for a short time, in schools; from elementary to high school.
- Oblige the television channels to have at least several programs with sign language translation during the day.
- Provide informal sex education sexuality and family planning
- Bullying-discrimination: develop and ensure a safe and secure environment free from bullying in in schools in Armenia,
- Strong oversight over all public and private structures that are concerned with children, as well as implement informal trainings (kindergartens, schools, centres, clubs, private schools, etc.).
- Raise awareness on gender equality.

Article 5

An important issue is the exclusion of Yazidi children from school education and early marriage, and an approach has emerged in society which mainly refers to the state's inaction in this regard and actively targets the Yazidi children's parents and guardians. Hate speech on social media networks, targeting the parents of the children have been registered. The parent is responsible for violations of the right to education, but in many cases children do not realize their right to education, as a result of national traditions. In this regard, it is important for the state to develop and implement such a policy, which on the one hand will respect the right and duty of the parents of Yazidi children to guide their children according to their evolving capacities, while on the other hand will exclude violations of children's rights.

Article 6

The right to life is a fundamental right. The right to life is guaranteed and protected in Armenia, although the Public Council has proposals that will make the realization of this right more complete. The problems registered regarding this right are: Access to health services is an important issue to which special attention should be paid. Medical services in Armenia for persons under 18 are free, but it is relative. There are a number of operations, examinations and rehabilitation therapies, for which are not free, and very expensive.

- Parents and teachers often consider some forms of violence (slap, bad words, disrespect) as the "best" way of upbringing and education, and thus hit and injure their children.
- While arguing with each other, children injure each other with sharp-cutting-piercing tools, and also by stabbing. The sale of knives and pneumatic weapons (which are also very dangerous) in Armenia is not regulated, and these items are also used by children, including during arguments with each other.
- The law on the sale of cigarettes, according to which it is forbidden to sell cigarettes to persons under 18 years old, is not respected in the stores in the provinces; children are able to purchase cigarettes, smoke, thus harming their health.
- A serious threat to children's right to life is the aggressive acts regularly conducted by Azerbaijan, during which the civilian population is also targeted. 5 children were killed as a result of the latest aggression.

Recommendations

- Increasing access to health services, provide support for poor families for the payment of medical services for children.
- Combat against the cultural perception of hitting children as an educational method.
- Implement severe sanctions for physical violence or abuse of children, regardless of whether the victim submits a complaint or not.



- Ban on the sale of pneumatic (air) guns or knives to children.
- Ensure compliance with the law on the sale of cigarettes, fine the shops that sell cigarettes to children, and increase the oversight of the sale of cigarettes.
- Raise the awareness of the international community about the aggressive acts of Azerbaijan.

Article 14

Children are free to choose their religion, have their own opinions and thoughts, but this should not prevent others from exercising their rights. Parents can guide children in exercising their rights.

Children in Armenia can very often be subjected to psychological violence, which in many cases can be caused by traditional way of thinking. For example, if a child wants to follow a different religion or be an atheist, he/she may be subjected to such psychological violence by the society, by his/her classmates, by his/her friends, which may lead to negative results. It should be noted that this problem is not faced only in Armenia, but also by the countries that were part of the USSR, and the mentality and standards of that time period, though limited, continue to remain in Armenian families.



Recommendations

- Develop new educational methods that will contribute to protecting the child's right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion. For example, replace the subject "History of the Armenian Church" with the subject "Religious Studies", and within that subject study not only the history of the Armenian Apostolic Church, but also the history of other religions, traditions and religious cultures of other countries.

- Train educators, teach new skills to regulate relationships between children, inform them about their rights, and provide new opportunities.
- Grave violations of the child's freedom of thought, conscience and religion have not been observed or officially recorded in recent years. At the same time, individual cases have been registered where a child is targeted because of his/her ethnicity or religion. Yezidi children are not Christians, therefore, especially in schools and kindergartens, when a Yezidi child or parent refuses to pray, or participate in classes/events related to religion, children are targeted by their teachers and classmates. Cases have been registered where children simply do not want to participate in these activities, because they are certain that this will contribute to the creation of a negative attitude towards them.
- The state can include such information in the educational programs that will enable the school-aged children and teachers to have a broader understanding of the people living around them, including their religion and culture. This will contribute to the increase in the levels of tolerance and mutual respect.

Article 15

Children have the right to create, and join groups or organizations, and they can join other groups and become members of different organizations. They can meet different people or organize meetings, if it does not harm them.

There are a number of organizations in Armenia whose founders are children and young people. Of course, these organizations are supervised by adults to protect the best interests and rights of children. There are many non-governmental organizations and youth centres in Armenia, where children can attend, develop skills, study various fields, etc. They can also join these organizations and extracurricular groups. The state often does not have the capacity or the will to conduct a policy that provides equal opportunities and attention for the realization of this right in all regions of the country. In this regard, activities of children are concentrated in the capital, and the main children and youth programs are implemented in Yerevan.

Recommendations

- To provide cultural and physical accessibility so that children with disabilities, or those from national minorities, such as the Yezidi or other communities, are actively involved in the formation of groups or organizations.
- Provide accessible programs for children throughout the territory of Armenia



Article 16

All persons, including children, have the right to protect their lives from unwanted attention by others, and not to disclose details related to their health, personal relationships, personal correspondence, use of private photos, etc.

Violation of the right to privacy has always been a challenge for people, and in today's technological age, the issue of exercising that right is even more acute. Striking a balance between publicizing private life details in the public interest and maintaining privacy is one of the greatest challenges in the modern world.

For example, the directorate and teachers of schools and educational institutions in Armenia often possess the personal information of students and their parents. To protect the privacy of students and their parents, the school is legally and morally responsible for maintaining and using this information. Children at school do not have the opportunity to receive competent and useful information in a systematic way for the full realization of the right to the protection of private life. In many cases, children are not aware of the available mechanisms or procedures by which they can independently ensure the protection of their private life.

People can publish a picture of a stranger's child on social media networks, and write about the child, and not bear any responsibility for it. People can help vulnerable children, then take photos/videos and share them on the Internet, without thinking about the situation these children will find themselves in later, because of that information, and whether they would be stigmatized in educational institutions, etc.

In the case of Yezidi children, the situation is more complicated. Dozens of publications can be seen on the Internet, in which children's faces and personal data are clearly visible. Journalists talk with children about the topics of education, and early marriage.

Although the aim might be to raise awareness about the issue, more importance should be given to the direct impact of the publication on the child. After the publication, the child's family and relatives may have a negative attitude, especially to the discussions about marriage, and the issue of girls being left out of schools. Cases have been registered where journalists go to schools and takes picture/videos of children without the prior agreement of their parents.

In parallel, a journalist without profound knowledge of the community, can make false or wrong claims about the community. Cases have been registered where reportages on national minorities which do not represent the real, facts-based situation, leading to the further of false stigmas, the dissemination of false information, thus creating further grounds for discrimination against the communities.

It is important that the state ensures the protection of personal data, as well as protection from discrimination based on nationality.

Often, journalists can interview children, film them, and post them on social media networks without their parents' permission. According to the UN Convention, and the Constitution of Armenia, to film children, the permission of the parent or guardian with written or verbal consent is unnecessary. For example, in schools, kindergartens or other educational institutions, children, pupils, students can be filmed without their permission, and then those footages can be published on social media platforms.



Yezidis have their national characteristics and this can have an impact on the education of a Yezidi child. Not all Yezidi-inhabited villages have preschool educational institutions. In certain villages Yezidi children face issues related to the realization of the right to education, such as transportation problems, which may lead to the exclusion of Yezidi children from education. against their will. Children of the Yezidi community often mention the complexity of educational programs, which is the reason for the formation of negative attitudes towards education.

Despite the efforts taken by the state, issues related to professional orientation and continuity of education still persist. The Yezidi community in Armenia is free to maintain its national identity, religion, and language. There are Yezidi language classes in Armenia, and radio programs broadcast in Yezidi language on the Public Radio.

Recommendations

- Conduct trainings for staff in educational institutions, where they will be introduced to children's rights and, above all, to ensure the safety of their private life and personal space.
- The state should introduce new laws that would criminalize filming children without written permission. Journalists will then be more responsible for filming, and citizens will become more aware and demand appropriate permissions, for the purpose of the protection of their rights

Article 17

Children have the right to receive information from the Internet, radio, television, press, books and other sources. Adults must ensure that this information is not dangerous for the child's mental health. The state should encourage the media to disseminate information through various sources and in languages that all children can understand. According to the laws and the Constitution of Armenia, every person in Armenia, regardless of whether they are citizens of the country or not, has the right to receive information.

In all actions concerning children in the digital and information environment, the best interests of the child must be paramount. In assessing the best interests of the child, the state should make every effort to balance the right to protection of the child with other rights, in particular the right to freedom of expression and information, as well as the right to participation.

For example, a number of public television channels in Armenia are able to provide sign language translation or subtitles for persons with disabilities and children; however, at the same time, several television channels do not provide this, leading to the violation of children's rights. Moreover, no prohibitions that would limit the child's right to obtain information exist in Armenia.

Recommendations

- The state must provide access to the dissemination and provision of information for each of its citizens. For example, various applications can be created to help children, and persons with disabilities to easily access information on their own. Moreover, the information in the application can be arranged by age.
- The drafts of the law on children's rights or on education, which are presented for discussion in E-draft, should be presented in a simplified manner, in addition to the legal language, and should also be posted on school websites, so that children can also access them and express their position.
- An hour of fairy tales or children's programs on the radio should be broadcasted in the mother tongue for children of ethnic minorities.



Article 18

In Armenia, fathers are almost not involved as participants in the process of ensuring the child's participation in public events, as well as in the educational process.

Suggestions for solving the problems related to this right, are partially implemented, because fathers hardly take part in the process of ensuring the child's participation in public events, as well as their involvement in the educational process. Stereotypes exist regarding the fact that the implementation of the child's development process is the "mother's job".



Recommendations

- Despite the fact that the state provides for the obligation of both parents have common responsibilities for the upbringing and development of the child, certain issues have been registered in this regard; for example, in the form of effective parenting courses, or through family sports events, or campaigns organized in schools to integrate both parents in the process of raising the child, as well as participating in public events.
- The state should take additional steps to reform the system, so that the option of taking the child from the parent or legal guardian is only used as a last resort, and help parents, through group measures, to be informed about the care of the child.
- Fathers should be informed that they have the opportunity and obligation to take leave from work immediately after the birth of the child to fully participate in the implementation of child care.

Article 19

In the Republic of Armenia, violence against children is an important issue with serious consequences. Here, cases of being subjected to violence are recorded both in the educational institutions and at home, cases of sexual violence against children have been registered. The frequency of cases of violence against children in Armenia is determined by cultural perception and the response of relevant bodies to the issue. It's common for parents to resort to violence as a method of child discipline, frequently employing actions like slapping, shouting, or engaging in other forms of physical and psychological aggression. Acts of violence against a child should be grounds for holding parents or their substitutes accountable under civil and legal responsibilities.

To prevent child abuse

- regular visits by community medical and social services workers to both the child and parent are necessary
- groups organized for parents are also effective, where they will be taught child-rearing skills, expand knowledge about child development, as well as develop positive communication tactics with children.
- it is important to teach children ways to protect themselves from violence in schools



Article 20

The state provides education and care for children left without parental care in round-the-clock or day care centres. Here the challenges are multifaceted. Resource allocation poses a significant issue, encompassing aspects such as securing qualified personnel, ensuring fair compensation, and improving infrastructure, including personal space and the arrangement of group rooms. Additionally, there's a need for effective mechanisms to identify instances of violence within these institutions. Equally important is empowering children with mechanisms to prevent and protect themselves from violence. Addressing these concerns calls for a professional and proactive response to safeguard the well-being and full socialization of children under institutional care.

A case of pregnancy of one of the girls, who received discriminatory treatment, was also recorded in the institutions.

Recommendations

- To reduce reliance on institutions, it's more effective to support families by improving social conditions, enhancing parenting skills, and upholding the child's right to live within a family.
- To ensure the resources of institutions according to the needs and goals of the institution's activity (specialists with relevant professions, with proper remuneration).
- regularly train employees and provide them with manuals.
- ensure the institution-school connection and develop common goals for the child's development.

Article 21

When faced with challenges concerning children within a family, the state's foremost consideration should be focused on fortifying the parent-child bond. In this regard, the state is continuously taking steps to improve the mechanisms to achieve the mentioned aim. Furthermore, it is imperative to explore avenues such as organizing parenting courses, implementing supportive measures, and fostering an environment that facilitates positive parenting.



Therefore:

- round-the-clock care centres are obliged to create an environment where a living child who needs family warmth and care can find it again
- the existence of consistent steps of the state is also important. The state should improve the mechanisms through which adoptive families should be subjected to regular visits by local government agencies, ensuring they are informed about the child's mental condition. Furthermore, it is imperative to foster a comprehensive understanding of the child-adoptive parent relationship. Moreover, workshops designed for adoptive parents should be organized with the aim of consistently strengthening and nurturing this crucial bond.
- care facilities should have such a policy that the child can develop knowledge and skills to lead an independent life
- if a child has a family, albeit facing challenging social conditions, the state should strategically develop tactics to support the parents or legal guardians. This could involve providing opportunities for them to acquire a profession, ensuring access to job opportunities, and essentially doing everything within its means to empower and uplift the family.

Article 22

In December 2022, the Azerbaijanis, under the guise of environmental activism blocked the Lachin Corridor, not only disrupting the fundamental rights of children in Nagorno-Karabakh but also severed the vital child-parent bond. Many children found themselves unable to return to their families, enduring months without the comfort of family and the warmth of home. This prolonged separation not only infringed upon the children's right to live in peaceful conditions but also hindered their access to education, healthcare, and the basic dignity every child deserves.

In 2023, faced with the ongoing threat of a dangerous and unfavourable environment, the residents of Nagorno-Karabakh, particularly women, elderly individuals, and children, found themselves compelled to abandon their homes. After enduring months of blockade and grappling with challenging psychological conditions: they spent days and nights on the roads and moved to Armenia. The Republic of Armenia, in turn, despite having few and limited necessary social and economic services for the reception of refugees, very quickly managed to do the impossible and ensured the participation of the displaced compatriots in vital areas, such as the provision of health services, the availability of shelters, etc.

But it is necessary

- to establish programs for the reception of refugees, which will help the displaced child to integrate more quickly into a new environment, as well as support children entering schools to organize education more quickly
- all services for children considered refugees must be provided by the state



Articles 23-24

In Yerevan, for children living in the cities, the issues regarding these articles are not as complicated as in the villages. It is not always possible to get medical assistance in the own place of residence of the person:.. There are certain remote regions where the lack of, or inadequate medical centres have been registered.

And getting a disability certificate is more complicated, there is no simplified mechanism and procedure, which complicates the life of a child with a disability and his/her parent, especially when they live in a village and have issues regarding transportation and finance. In this matter, there are no manifestations of discrimination against Yezidi children, but based on language issues, paperwork problems often become difficult and intractable for Yezidi people.

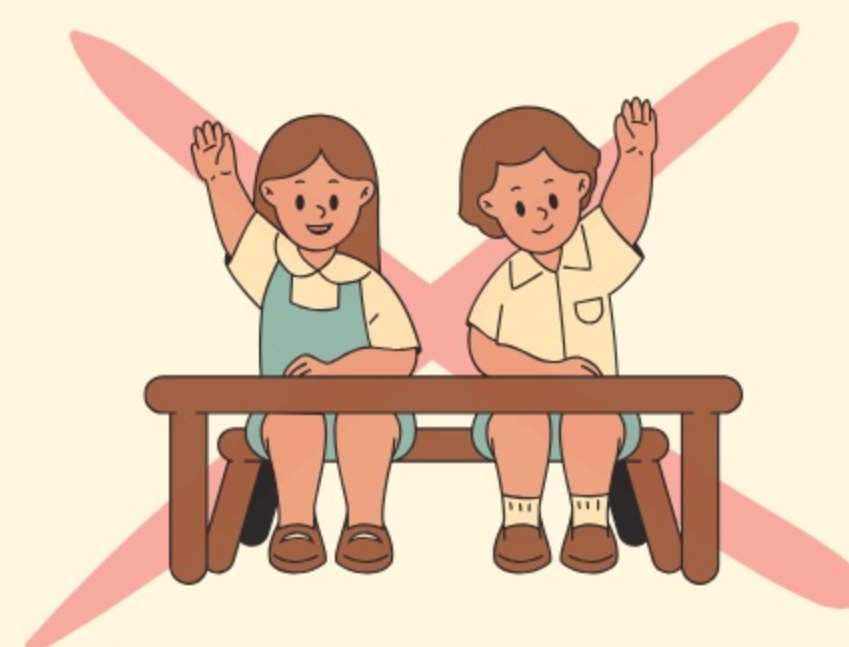
- provide health services, accessible for all.

Article 23

In the realm of child development and education, the pivotal role played by the state non-profit organization known as the "Territorial Pedagogical-Psychological Support Centre" under the jurisdiction of the Ministry cannot be overstated. Through collaborative efforts with local educational institutions, this organization adeptly identifies children necessitating specialized attention, meticulously assesses their unique needs, and orchestrates home schooling initiatives as deemed essential. The state, in turn, cooperates with private organizations that are connected with the health services needed by children with disabilities and can provide these children with means of support. In particular, the role of the Ministry in this case is great, the latter, cooperating with the above-mentioned organizations, provides support devices to the beneficiaries based on the certificates issued by it. In addition to locomotor issues, there are children who have visual or hearing problems, to solve these problems it is necessary to teach both sign language and braille in schools.

On September 19, 2023, after the aggression by Azerbaijan, children with disabilities, found themselves in areas controlled by the Azerbaijani armed forces, and hence, faced transportation problems to Armenia.

In addition to the problems in the lives of children with disabilities, it is also very important to eliminate the difficulties in the lives of their caregivers. Discussion with the guardian of a child with a disability, a number of issues were mentioned that still need to be clarified, for example, there are no development and entertainment centres for these children, the child with disabilities should be fully integrated into entertainment programs, through which the child will be surprised to communicate with society and that most importantly, he will not have to be locked in the house all day and will not be a participant in the discussion of social problems taking place in the family. The absence of a monthly health check-up package for both the child and guardian adds to the complexity. Despite these challenges, the state is striving to enhance the quality of life for children with disabilities. Following Azerbaijan's aggression on September 19, 2023, children with disabilities faced additional problems, since the organization of their transportation to Armenia was specifically complicated.



Article 28

The state has taken serious measures to improve the realization of the right to education, however, certain issues persist. The state should ensure that periodic and long-term work can be carried out on increasing the role of education in the community, on parenting, thus helping to solve the problems related to children's right to education. With the support of various donors, various non-governmental organizations take certain actions in working with parents, but in this matter, the state can play a greater role. Education in Armenia is mandatory and therefore the state does everything possible to make the realization of the right to education possible. Speaking from the viewpoint of children, we have a problem with the implementation of education in villages, often in border areas. Due to a scarcity of specialists in rural areas, the educational infrastructure faces challenges in optimal organization. Consequently, schools are often relegated to a non-priority status, with early marriages and household responsibilities taking precedence in the community's preferences.

The issue of children being left out of education is an important issue when parents do not want to send their children to school. The state uses the "method of punishing by law" - to fine the parent, home visits by the municipal administration, regional administration and the police. In addition to these steps, long-term work must be done with the child and the parent.

Article 29

The educational program in Armenia is quite complicated, as a result of which the child's opportunities for self-expression and the desire to be individual can be problematic, and difficult, under the burden of the standards formed by the system itself. As a result of the focus on grades, at a young age, getting a high score is more of a priority for children than completing the lesson.

The educational program is passive from the viewpoint of physical education as well. Physical education is a subject that is generally not taken seriously and conducted in an inappropriate manner, as a result of which the child does not have the opportunity to realize the importance of physical fitness and an active life.



Sex education is not given adequate attention in Armenia: small topics are presented in the biology textbook, but rarely are they really studied. Sex education is accepted as something shameful, as a result of which the young person remains ignorant of a very important topic. However, it is crucial to note that recently we have also registered positive changes in making the educational system more child-friendly.

Article 30

In the Republic of Armenia, children in schools also have the History of the Armenian Church subject, which presents the adoption of Christianity and the complete history of the church. From this viewpoint, Yezidi children express dissatisfaction about the compulsory principle of the subject, because the Yezidi community belong to another religion.

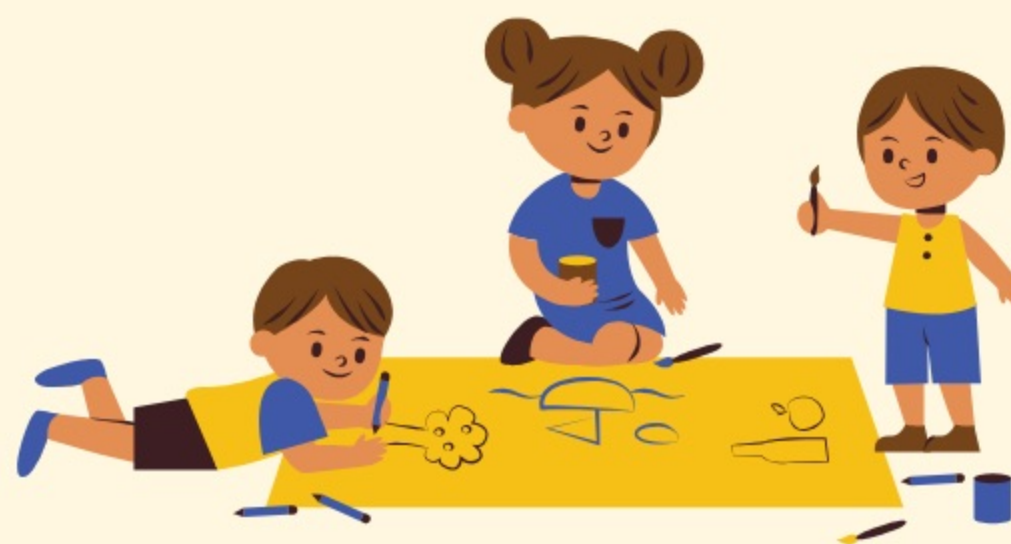
Suggestions for solving the problem

- to give the children belonging to the national minority groups the opportunity to choose whether or not to participate in the courses of the history of the Armenian Church
- start extra classes for forcibly displaced students after school and give displaced people the opportunity to attend them if they wish.

Article 31

The right to participate in entertainment, play, activities and cultural events

Providing entertainment is also very important for a child, because it significantly contributes to his/her healthy development, helps them communicate with other children, make friends, satisfy their interests, etc. It is impossible to say that there are few entertainment centres in Armenia, but it is obvious that they are not accessible to everyone. For instance, there exist well-equipped centres featuring state-of-the-art amenities, albeit with an associated fee. This financial barrier serves as a hindrance for numerous children, depriving them of the opportunity to access and experience these facilities. Of course, there are free playgrounds, but they are sometimes old and unsafe, which can lead to various accidents. And there are cases where people illegally build garages, cars are parked in the areas designated for children's entertainment, and it becomes impossible to organize the children's entertainment. There are many cultural centres in regions and rural areas, which have turned into abandoned buildings due to lack of proper attention.



Recommendations

- create government-affiliated task forces that will deal with issues related to playground areas, regulate them and monitor the construction of playgrounds
- monitor the work of existing entertainment centres, promote the opening of such centres
- Ensure diligent oversight of cultural centres and accord them the requisite attention. Maintain consistency in the development of infrastructure, and institute measures to prevent the sale of areas designated for children and youth activities.

Article 32

In the Republic of Armenia, there are minors who are engaged in manual labour, and this happens without the written consent of one of the parents or the guardian. Sometimes, even during school hours, children do such work at the urging of employers, as a result of which they are deprived of their right to full basic education, it is worth noting that these children are not aware of their rights even when they are employed somewhere, and if they are aware, they are not dare to speak about it, fearing the negative reaction of the society and or possibly losing cooperation with the employer. The lack of awareness about the inherent risks associated with handling the finances of labour contracts without written consent of the parents poses a significant threat. This ignorance may lead to the violation of fundamental rights of children, as they might be compelled to engage in hazardous work conditions. For instance, during harvest seasons, minors are often compelled to toil in fields without adequate protective clothing or gloves, leaving them vulnerable to life-threatening encounters with insects and reptiles.

Since there is a high risk that a minor may be subjected to exploitation, another violation of the fundamental right is the increase of working hours specially defined for the latter in favour of the employer. The right of minors to eat healthy and properly is also violated at the workplace, because in most cases the employer does not provide adequate time for the minor to take a break, as a result the minor begins to eat irregularly, while the employer is not held responsible for the health problems caused by malnutrition in almost all cases. Instances have been documented wherein employers, leveraging the social status of minors, subject them to unequal conditions and low remuneration. Furthermore, beyond employer exploitation, cases of child exploitation by parents or legal guardians have been reported in the Republic of Armenia.



Recommendations

- the state should strengthen control over the activities of employers and the latter's employment contracts in cases of minors' involvement in work, the state should regularly receive reports on the family status of minors, their psychological and economic condition through representatives of local community administration.
- The state has the responsibility to prevent children from the premature assumption of financial burdens of the family. It should actively promote the inclusion of minors exclusively in legally defined work areas that safeguard their physical and mental well-being, while concurrently prioritizing their educational pursuits.
- in the case of child exploitation by a parent, the state should apply appropriate laws and regulations to hold the parent or guardian accountable,
- the state should ensure that the child is taught at school and familiarized with his/her own labour rights.

Article 33

In recent times, there has been a significant increase in the volume of drug circulation in the state, however, among the youth, drugs are more common in the insecure areas of the city, among minors who are under adverse influence. The fairly large distribution of drugs is due to several factors:

- drug use has become more accessible on social networks and websites accessible to children/young people. For example: TikTok, Facebook, Instagram, Telegram, etc. Most websites are not controlled by the state or parents.

- In many parts of the country, there are QR codes that direct to specific events, gatherings or websites, the main purpose of which is also the promotion of drugs and their use.
- the resources and methodology of state bodies are not sufficient to prevent the mass spread of drugs. Very weak and insufficient number of courses are held at school about the consequences of bad habits and/or the importance of a healthy lifestyle.
- parents do not have a sufficient level of awareness to talk to their children about this topic, and there is very little content that is appropriate for the child's age, or groups that provide similar information.



Recommendations

- Establish a dedicated monitoring group tasked with ensuring consistency across social media platforms. This group's responsibility will encompass identifying and blocking entities disseminating detrimental content. Furthermore, they will align with the content displayed on external posters and coordinate the removal of any materials that deviate from established standards.
- three-day training of school teachers and psychologists and providing them with modern information and methodology to conduct awareness campaigns starting at the school level.
- create cooperation between government institutions responsible for children and youth as well as organizations and groups that promote a healthy lifestyle or disseminate valuable information. As a result, a universally accessible platform can be created with content targeting different age groups.

Article 34

The state's obligation to shield children from all forms of sexual exploitation and abuse encounters obstacles in identifying residual cases. Additionally, cultural tendencies to assign blame to the victim further complicate the process of addressing such situations. Children in families facing challenging social conditions, devoid of sexual education, emotional connections, and effective parenting, are at risk of becoming potential victims of sexual exploitation in the Republic of Armenia. Unfortunately, there are instances where the necessary mechanisms and specialists for providing an effective and non-harmful response to such incidents may be lacking in the relevant authorities.

In August 2023, the sister of the minor girl who was violently abused by her mother, and was sexually abused by her father. The mother videotaped her child and brutally beat the child naked. The video recording has also become available on the online platform, the children were 8 and 11-year-old girls. it's disheartening to learn about the lack of intervention from neighbours despite hearing distressing noises regularly. Such situations underscore the importance of community awareness and responsibility. Additionally, the discrimination faced by the children at school is deeply troubling. It's essential to promote empathy and support for victims in the community, and educational institutions should actively work to create a safe and nurturing environment for these children. The parents of the abused girl's classmates gathered at the school and demanded her removal, citing concerns about their children's safety. This underscores the need for community education to promote empathy and support for victims, rather than perpetuating stigma. Schools can contribute by organizing awareness programs to address misconceptions and create a more compassionate environment.

Recommendations

- Introduce age-appropriate sexual exploitation literacy and referral courses in schools, either during classroom hours or as informal sessions.
- Conduct specialized training for professionals in relevant bodies to enhance their capacity in effectively responding to sensitive issues, with a specific focus on identifying victims of sexual exploitation.
- create child-friendly social videos about sexual exploitation and protection from it



Article 36

Although the indicators have decreased during the mentioned years, the problem is still relevant in the Republic of Armenia. Children engaged in begging may not be aware of their rights, including those related to decent living conditions, access to health services, and education. To address and prevent this issue, it is essential to establish stable and effective cooperation among all relevant authorities. Upon identifying the child, implement long-term monitoring to secure the realization of their rights. Collaborate with the child's family to prevent institutionalization, recognizing that social insecurity often drives children to begging. Develop child-centred support programs tailored to the specific needs of each child and family, aiming to break the cycle of begging and ensure sustainable well-being. Early detection of children in challenging situations within the community is crucial. The guardianship and trusteeship body plays a pivotal role in effective collaboration, not only with the Police but also with social services. This multi-agency cooperation ensures that children and their families receive the necessary ongoing support.

Article 38

It is very important to note that Armenian children's right to be free from war is violated, and quite often as a result of military operations and various aggressive acts carried out by Azerbaijani armed forces. This violation leads to other rights being compromised, such as education, health, access to information, and most painfully, the right to life. In the border areas of Armenia, children are regularly forced to stop school, leave their homes, and move to shelters due to the risk of significant losses, as civilian infrastructure is also regularly targeted. In these conditions, it is impossible to avoid violations of the right to health. The children who were living in Nagorno-Karabakh faced the same issues before their forced displacement to Armenia.

Recommendations

- have a concretely developed strategy for taking steps during military operations by the government, local self-government bodies of border villages and communities,
- Organize awareness raising campaigns "on how to act and what to do in order to be protected during military operations".
- increasing awareness of the steps taken.

