

Violence Against Children in

ARMENIA

Relevant extracts from an NGO alternative report presented to the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child

CRC Session 35, 12 - 30 January 2004

National Center for Democracy and Human Rights – English

www.crin.org/docs/resources/treaties/crc.35/armenia_ngo_report.doc

[...]

Different training courses, round tables, conferences on the protection of the rights of children are being held at different levels on regular basis. They contribute to the proliferation of necessary information, precise understanding of these rights and even to the practical application, for example, through organization of summer camps, student parliaments and other units. It is necessary to mention establishment of the network of students' parliaments (at the initiative of "Project Harmony", sponsored by USAID), where the students of 7-9th grades from 18 schools are included. Thanks to this project the students obtained opportunity to expand their knowledge and understanding on the activities of legislative body and peculiarities of democratic system, and get familiar with the working style of legislative body and the role of information technologies. The project gave also an opportunity for students to address troublesome for youth problems, problems available at schools and local communities and mechanisms for their solution.

[...]

The role of new Family and Labour Codes in protection of the rights of children is of utmost importance since they relate to the rights of children at possible maximum extend, but mentioned Codes are not yet adopted. Thus the Labour Code should define numerous important requirements including prohibition of recruitment of minors to work, minimum age to recruitment of minors to work.

Cases are known, when children are involved in illegal activities, particularly, prostitution, beggary or such activities, which by their content and terms can cause damage to the health of children, their security and moral education.

According to the 1999 Convention of ILO forms of such activities are called "The worst forms of minor's work". To this regard it is very important that the provisions prohibiting such phenomena and defining relevant responsibility for them will be set up in new Codes on Labour and Administrative legal violations. Definition of the minimum age for recruitment of children to work in new labour Code is of utmost importance.

[...]

Children of 1, 2, 3, 4 grades using public transportation try to exercise their right to freely get education but cannot pay for the ticket and on the half way he/she could be made by the controller get out of the vehicle and it would be a serious obstacle for enjoyment of his/her right to freely get education. Such deed is not punished by anybody. This phenomenon can be eliminated by defining responsibility, for example, by depriving the driver of his license and controller of his right to work or by directly fining them.

[...]

The process of closure and privatization of children health institutions continue. The state seems to have forgotten that the child has no independent income and till a certain age cannot have it. And the state instead of taking children under its sponsorship and support, requires payment from children equalizing it at a full scale with adults who have their independent income.

[...]

Taking into account today's situation, particularly the factor of mass unemployment, as well as the size of allowance for unemployment which constitutes 1000 dram (\$1.8) and is paid only for 11 months, according to requirement of the above-mentioned article, the size of alimony constitutes 200-250 dram (\$0.36-0.41). For comparison it should be mentioned that 1kg of bread costs 350-400drams. We think that comments are unnecessary here.

[...]

According to data provided by the Ministry of Education and Science of the Republic of Armenia pre-school education in Armenia is carried out in 3 type of institutions: crèches (for 2-3 years old children), kindergartens (for 3-7 years old) and combined crèches and kindergartens. At present there are 825 community-based and 19 departmental institutions in the field of pre-school education where respectively 51905 and 956 children are enrolled. In comparison with the number of pre-school institutions registered in 1991 (1069 institutions) in 2002 their number decreased.

Children's enrollment in these institutions has considerably dropped. In 1991 143500 children attended pre-school institutions (39% of children of that age). According to statistic data in 2000 53200 children attended kindergartens and other pre-school institutions (21% of children of that age), enrollment dropped by 18%. Also 21 non-state kindergartens operate. These figures demonstrate that kindergartens are becoming gradually less accessible for population, access to them has decreased.

[...]

Today the most important issue in the field of education is availability of non-enrolled children in the process of school education. Most of these children do not attend schools due to extremely poor living conditions.

There is no precise data on children who do not attend schools and therefore it is necessary to make a special statistical survey to appropriately evaluate the situation.

Socio-economic situation of country with economy in transition effects also education system dropping its quality and accessibility. Budget allocations to education are still low. It is necessary to mention that in 2002 allocations from state budget to education constituted 2 % of internal volume of GDP which is for 0.32% less of the same indication of the year 2001. This is the lowest indicator among the countries with transition.

As a result many schools face serious problems with acquiring buildings, furniture, equipment. Question of heating is again urgent. Today there is a need for teaching staff with professional qualification. There is also a trend of aging among teacher staff.

Since 2001 rationalization and optimalization of the work of educational schools have been taking place.

According to this program which will be completed in 2006 it is envisaged to reduce the number of school teachers with an argumentation that only about 30 000 from 54 000 teachers are fully involved in teaching process and the rest 24 000 teachers, due to reduction of number of students have 2-3 Academic hours a weak. In 2003 it was envisaged that 20 500 teacher's places would be reduced (mainly those who reach age of pension). But taking into account hard socio-economic situation of teachers ministry of Education and Science decided to reduce number of teachers only for 9.000 in 2003.

According to national statistical data salary of the teacher in 1994-2001 was one of the lowest constituting almost the half from average in the country. In 2003 salary of teachers of educational schools raised for 20%. In 2004-2006 it is envisaged to raise salary of teachers for 60-70%. But "blackmailing" is still popular at schools. Image of the teacher is destored and his prestige is undermined.

[...]

Aggravation of general socio-economic situation in Armenia is the main reason of insufficient implementation of socio-economic rights of citizens. Social protection of population has considerably worsened; it particularly affected the most vulnerable groups.

Majority of children in Armenia is brought up in families. There are 874812 families in Armenia according to statistics. Due to hard economic conditions most families prefer having only one child. Within the recent 40 years natural growth has dropped in Armenia. Natural growth (per every 1000 citizen) was respectively in 1960, 33.3%, 1984-86-18.2-18.4%, 2000-2.7%.

Number of divorces increased in recent years.

[...]

Problem of social “orphanhood” is very serious in Armenia, when parents place their children in orphanages, because due to socio-economic conditions, they are not able to take care of them.

Thus, the number of children having parents but deprived of the parents’ care increases in orphanages. In 2002 from 595 children placed in orphanages 215 were children who had parents or were from divorced families.

According to data provided by the Ministry of Social Security there were 8900 disabled children in Armenia in 2000. It is obvious that present institutions for disabled children need renovation and technical review.

There is a necessity for improvement of suitable conditions for children by urban housing means. There is such new phenomenon in Armenia as the use of child labour.

Very often minors involved in trade or service fields could be noticed. At the same time there is no precise survey, which would help to reveal the scale of use child labour in Armenia. Article 200 of the Labour Code of the RoA prohibits to hire young persons who are under the age of 18 to work in hard circumstances, particularly in arduous, dangerous or underground occupations.

Proliferation of beggary particularly among children and street children in recent years is the matter of concern. One of the purposes of the French organization “Medicine sans frontiers”, which commenced its activities in Armenia in 1988 after the earthquake is to provide assistance to beggars and street children. In the Annual Report of the organization presented in 2002 it is noted that: “There are no children sleeping in Yerevan streets. Several dozens children work in the streets, some are beggars, 20 of them on permanent basis”.

[...]

In spite of economic crisis, impoverishment of population and the fact that state services cannot help the population, there is readiness among the people of mutual assistance within society and family solidarity. Parents begging with their children often have no other choice. Hiding sense of guiltiness and obeying their fate they send their children to streets for several hours per week to ensure survival of the family, to pay for food, heating, other housing expenditures and take care of expenditures for education-related problems.

[...]

Though the Ministry of Culture and Youth affairs undertook steps within recent years (the concept on provision of state support to musical, artistic arts and art schools for children was elaborated), in general, the field of culture is in a deep crisis situation which in its turn effects the appropriate organization of the rest, leisure and cultural life of children. In addition to financial aspect of the problem many questions emerged due to a policy pursued in the field. After transfer to the marz (province) and community jurisdiction most of cultural institutions have been closed since they did not have sufficient funding and relevant human resources. At present the problem of equipment is very serious, musical instrument of schools should be replaced. Children libraries face recession, their number decreased. According to statistics there were 99 children libraries in 1990 and only 53 in 2000. Library fund dropped by 2 mln. pieces of books. In rural communities there were 955 libraries in 1990 and respectively 833 in 2000.