



ARMENIA

Inclusive Education: The way of the future

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INCLUSIVE EDUCATION IN THE REPUBLIC OF ARMENIA

World community is on the way to integration, based on education. European Council is not only one of the best examples of such integration but its activity in the field of education provides developing regions with an opportunity to join the civilized community.

Armenia, with its 1600 years' educational history, has always focused on education as a priority issue. The school has always been the stronghold of political and national existence of Armenians, a guarantee of progress and preservation of national identity, the Armenian language and culture.

Till 1920 all Armenian schools functioned under the patronage of Armenian Christian church. And then the foundations of the modern national school were laid down.

During the Soviet period (1920-1991) the foundations of the present system of education were established.

By the time the disintegration process in the former USSR began Armenia had been considered the country with high educational and scientific rates. Economic grievances affected the system of education deeply.

In spite of anything in 1995 the 35th article to the **Constitution of the Republic of Armenia** was adopted and it stated: "Every citizen of the Republic has the right to education. Secondary education in state educational establishments is free of charge. Every citizen has the right to free higher and other professional education in state educational foundations on a competitive basis. Establishment and operation of private educational foundations must be statutory."

On April 14, 1999 the National Assembly adopted the **Act "On Education"**. This Act, based on constitutional provisions, shaped main goals and courses of action while reforming the national system of education. The Provisions of the Act on Education are focused on democratization of education and its integration into the international system. After the adoption of the Act "On Education" it was revised so that to solve arising problems.

In May, 2000 the Government of the Republic of Armenia approved the **State Standards on Secondary Education**, which help controlling the quality of education in the national school.

In June, 2001 the "**National Core Curriculum 2001-2005**" was approved by the National Assembly and became a law. The main goal of the Curriculum was to accelerate changes in the field of education as the consolidation factor of statehood as well as social and economic development.

A lot of acts, regulating legislation in the field of education, have been adopted recently.

The **New National Core Curriculum** has become a comprehensive guidance for the system of education which is aimed to:

- Develop national education system.
- Develop basic skills and capacities of students: logical and creative thinking, decision-making and other practical skills necessary in modern life.
- Create and integrate a unified complex of standards on secondary education, curriculum, subject standards and syllabus.
- Ensure conversion to 12-year secondary education.
- Use ICT in the educational process, as a cutting-edge technology in teaching and learning.

Major problems dealing with accessibility and quality of education are solved in the framework of the **National Education Project**. Thanks to the Armenian Government education has become more accessible and quality, its forms are more varied, perspective educational and information technologies are being assimilated, and the process of upbringing is paid much attention to.

Armenian system of education is a well-arranged collection of educational establishments and institutions which basic components are: pre-school education for children from 3 to 6 years; secondary education, which comprises primary education (1-4 grades), basic school (5-9 grades) and upper secondary school (10-12 grades); institutes of professional and higher education; postgraduate education; and institutions for in-service training and retraining. Basic and upper secondary school graduates have the right to continue their education in professional and higher educational foundations.

Private educational establishments (schools, colleges, institutes of higher education, etc.) not only render services in the field of education, but also contribute to its development.

Inclusive education as a guarantee of equal access to quality education for all children has never been a problem in the Republic of Armenia. Armenian system of education possesses vast cultural and intellectual potential, long-term educational traditions which can ensure the transition to education for sustainable development.

A wide network of educational foundations of different levels and types guarantee **inclusive education as compulsory and accessible secondary education, as well as professional one.**

Until recently the concept of “inclusive education” in Armenia was viewed as education of children with physical disabilities, and then, little by little, it involved alternative education (schools with all types of advanced study). Nowadays the concept “inclusive” is being reviewed shifting to “inclusion” of various forms of education. Moreover, the system of education is reconsidering its attitude to education of children with physical disabilities.

One of such programmes is teaching together healthy children and those physically challenged. Such form of equal access to education is implemented in some Armenian schools.

The ratification of the UN Convention on the Right of the Child by Armenia stimulated a systematic process focused on the protection of the right of the child, which is reflected in the following legal acts: :

- Act On the Right of the Child, 1996
- Act On Education, 1999
- The National Core Curriculum in the Republic of Armenia 2001-2005 was adopted in 2001
- Act On Education of People with Special Needs, 2005

The Act On Education, adopted in 1999, laid the foundations for the development of Special Needs Education. The Act vests rights in parents to choose a regular or special school which will provide adequate education for their child with disabilities.

In 2002 under the Government Resolution all boarding schools were transformed into State Non-profit institutions – special comprehensive foundations. That was one of the steps of a whole programme aimed at boarding school improvement. In the Republic much attention is paid to education, upbringing and social integration of disabled children.

On September 8, 2005 Armenian Government adopted Resolution №1646-N on transformation of 23 out of 52 special educational foundations (about 10500 children), dealing with orphans and unparented children, and on creation of an improvement plan providing child care and protection of children’s rights. As well as mainstream curriculum special education is based on two principles: accessibility and quality. And this gives children equal chances irrespective of their physical condition.

Implementation of instruction for physically challenged children is based on the following principles:

- the right to choose an educational establishment with adequate curriculum;
- the right to benefit from pedagogical, medical, psychological and other services, irrespective of the type of the educational establishment chosen.

Under this Resolution a new schedule, defining liability of Ministers of Labor, Social Security, Education and Science, and Territorial Management, was adopted.

Implementing educational policy the Republic tends to preserve its educational heritage, develop it under modern conditions and adjust it in accordance with international criteria.

Modern schools can be defined by the following characteristics:

- patterns of ownership (state or private);
- educational establishments (boarding schools, schools for gifted children, schools for children with special needs);
- forms of organization of education (day schools, externship);
- types of comprehensive schools (gymnasia, lyceum, secondary school).

The results of the reformation of the curriculum are considerable: new differentiated syllabuses were worked out; basic and alternative course books were published. In the framework of the Education credit programme, carried out by the World Bank, Armenia continues to apply the programme “Textbook”. A system of book renting was created, which helped solve the problem of provision students with course books at moderate price. These funds give every school a chance to buy all the necessary textbooks.

As for the quality of education, an important part is played by comprehensive education, which has recently been subject to reformations in curriculum and administration.

Inclusive education is a priority issue for public policy and plays the leading part in educational development in Armenia, as everyone understands that quality and accessibility of education lead to a democratic and flexible system of education.

Recently the Armenian Government and Ministry of Education and Science have done much to implement various programmes aimed at “protection of rights” of ethnic minorities: Russians, Greeks, Assyrians, Ezids, Kurds, etc. Ethnic groups living on the territory of the Republic (those that have their one national alphabet) have an opportunity to study in national schools of the areas they inhabit. They also have a chance to study their native language and culture, using extra hours of the schools their children attend. Every year Armenian Ministry of Education and Science arranges work of such schools and works out an individual curriculum. Ethnic minorities also have a chance to choose the comprehensive school they like, as well as the language of teaching – either Armenian or Russian.

In 2005-2007 in Armenia special syllabuses and textbooks were elaborated for those Ezid and Assyrian students who want to learn their mother tongue. In-service training was arranged for those language teachers from communities who teach these languages. Course book presentations were gladly accepted and held as national celebrations.

It should be noted that mainstream schools not only take advantage of extra hours built into the curriculum, but also seek an opportunity to include extra subjects into the curriculum (e.g. the Polish, Greek, Persian and other languages). All educational staff realize the necessity of such forms of activation of cognitive activities.

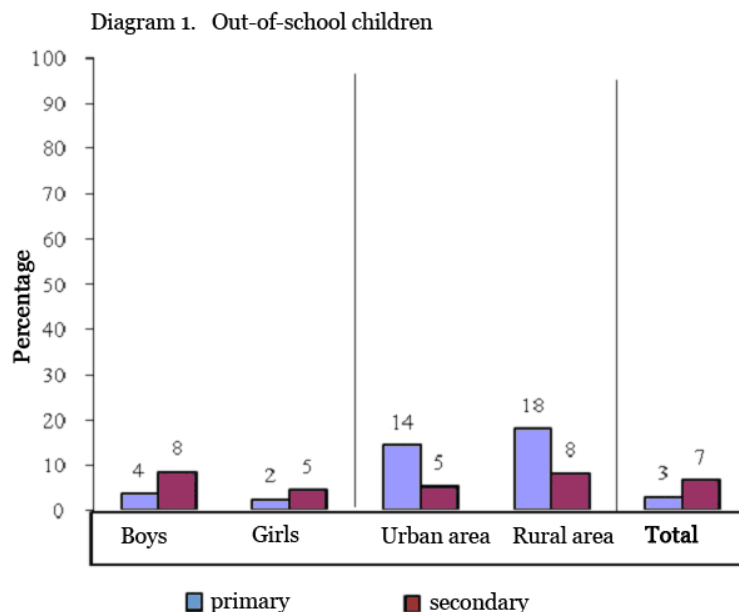
Quite a lot of legal amends have recently been made In Armenia. These amends focus on interests of gifted and talented children, parents’ social problems. Only for the last five years Armenian system of education has faced a lot of problems of “ex-émigrés”, whose children not only fail to have any education certificates, but also do not know their native language.

All sorts of corrective multilevel programmes help solve these problems. At school and class levels they are solved with the help of differentiated instruction (when planning and teaching depend on student’s individual abilities).

Implementation of Collective Group Work methodology (CGW) in some schools gave high positive results and became basis for in-service training under National Institute of Education of the Republic of Armenia.

Armenian normative framework is rather flexible; it guarantees free secondary education for all children of the Republic.

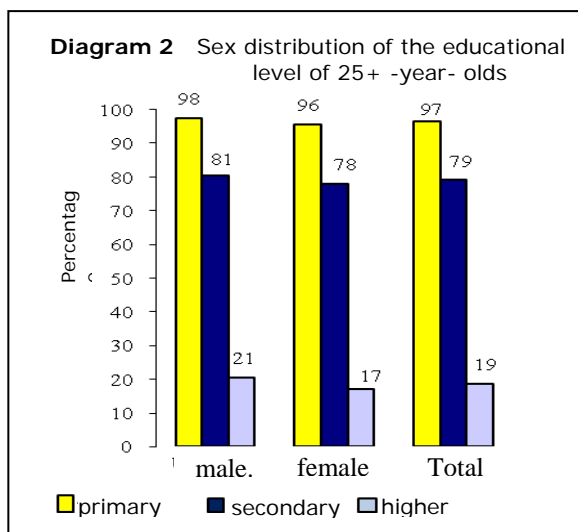
According to the statistics the number of out-of-school children and dropout rates are very low (see diagram 1).



It is difficult to distinguish a certain social group where children do not get primary education, as there is a variety of reasons. As for those who do not get secondary education, they are children of Russian-Malakans, Ezids, etc., who are engaged in farm work and girls are married off early under their cultural and ethnic peculiarities.

One of the reasons for not attending school is the fact, that education in upper secondary school is extra financial expenditure for the families from the lowest 20%-quintile group.

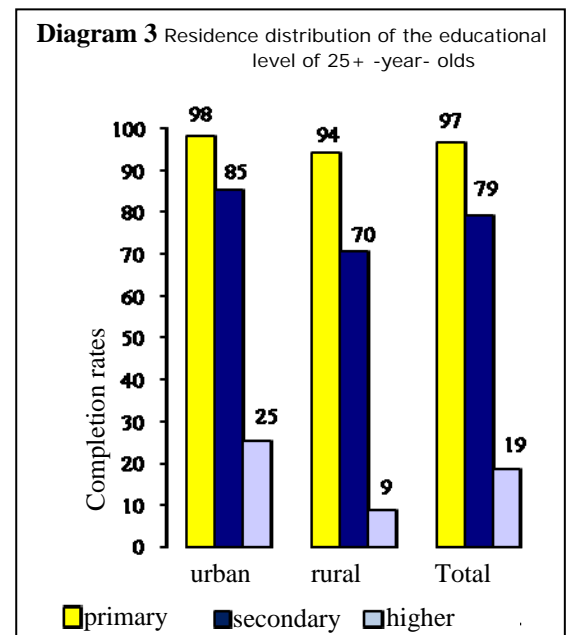
A survey was carried out among 25-year-olds to define accessibility of secondary and higher education. The results show that 79% have secondary education and 19% - higher one (see diagram 2).



Analysis of the results showed that a lot depends on the citizen's area of residence, ethnic group and financial position (see diagram 3).

Implementation of UNESCO programme Education for All in Armenia is being carried out through improving quality of education. In Armenia, as in lots of other countries, there is a gap between those who finished school and those who acquired minimum skills and competences.

Sustainable development of any country as well as Armenia demands unity of education systems with international tendencies in this field. The necessity of creating efficient mechanisms for guaranteeing accessibility and quality of education and meeting national and cultural demands is becoming a burning issue.



It is impossible to overestimate the necessity and importance to correlate national policy with UN and UNESCO legal framework (instruments and recommendations) in the field of education for sustainable development. Positive feedback was received on principles and approaches to perspective development, built into the National Education Project of Armenia, which takes into account UNESCO's views on problems of quality education for all and other relevant international documents.

Literature:

1. Act on Education of the Republic of Armenia, 1999r.
2. National Programme on Protection of the Rights of the Child of the Republic of Armenia (2005-2015r.r.)
3. National Report to UNESCO 1999r.
4. "Education in Armenia" (2003-2004 r.r.)