



According to UN data, globally every hour 700 children die of starvation.

### What To Do?

According to official data, 38.1% of children in Armenia are poor, 4.5% are extremely poor. Poverty level for children under the age of 5 is at 39.6%, for children aged 6-9 at 40.5%. Children with disabilities constitute 70% of the poor children in Armenia.

"What is the government doing to prevent people from sending their children to bed early, because they don't have any food to give to them," Victor Dallakyan, an Armenian parliamentarian, recently raised this rhetorical question in the National Assembly of Armenia.



### Crime Against Childhood

As of June 1 2011, the Armenian State Police departments registered 103 crimes against minors, including 24 cases of physical abuse and 25 cases of sexual abuse. Children were abused at home, by family members as well as in public places.

Last year the police reported about 140 such cases, while in 2009 the number of crimes committed towards children was 110. It is obvious that violence and abuse towards children is increasing.

### Every Child Dreams to Have a Family



According to UNICEF's "Rapid Assessment of Residential Child Care Institutions" 2010 report, there are 237 children registered for adoption in Armenia's residential care institutions.

According to data presented by Ms. Lala Ghazaryan, Head of the Department for Family, Women and Children's Issues of the Armenian Ministry of Labor and Social Issues, 120 children were adopted in 2010, including 59 adoptions by citizens of Armenia. Children with disabilities are mainly adopted by foreigners. In 2008 and 2009 the number of adopted children was 153 and 143 respectively.

# Woman & politics

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## Parliamentarians Agree to Strengthen Efforts to Protect Children

Representatives of Parliaments from 10 countries agreed to intensify efforts to better protect the most vulnerable children during the "Making Child Rights a Reality for the Most Vulnerable Children" regional parliamentary conference organized on June 14-16 in Yerevan by the National Assembly of Armenia, the Inter-Parliamentary Union and UNICEF.

More than 100 delegates participated in the conference, including 40 parliamentarians from 10 Central and Eastern European and CIS countries (CEE&CIS).

At the end of the conference, parliamentarians, including members of the National Assembly of Armenia, adopted an Outcome Document in which they committed to a number of objectives:

- Strengthen or develop specific parliamentary mechanisms to address children's rights and ensure their sustainability, and support the establishment and functioning of an ombudsperson for children;
- Invest in early childhood development as a priority, prevent the institutionalization of children between birth and 3 years and invest in quality alternative care and support;
- Scale up action to put an end to violence against children and violence among children, paying particular attention to violence against young children;
- Enhance parliaments' involvement in the implementation of international child rights instruments and UN treaty reporting processes; and
- Champion children's rights throughout legislative work.

"It is therefore our priority to ensure implementation of child rights and provide necessary opportunities for the development of our younger citizens, independently of their social status and location," said President of the National Assembly of Armenia Mr. Hovik Abrahamyan, addressing the conference participants.

...Over 800 thousand children under 18 live in Armenia, including 162 thousand children, who are below 5 years old. We are yet unable to provide for our children's right to have a happy childhood: almost every second child is growing up in poverty.

We have passed about 40 laws and regulations regarding protection of children's rights, but in many cases we are dealing with the sad phenomenon of laws not being put into practice.

We have created the three-level system for protecting and realizing children's rights (National Commission for Child Protection, similar committees at regional and local level), however it is not efficient, because it is activated only when a child is already in a very difficult situation, thus failing to serve as a preventive or an early intervention mechanism...



## "I Love it When I Call for My Mom and She Answers 'Yes Sweetie!'"

Karlen's mother was a single parent. She now lives in Turkey. It was difficult for relatives to take care of Karlen. He spent two years in an orphanage, but today he is 13 and lives with Mrs. Sveta's loving family.

At first he didn't know what kind of family he would be living with. "I didn't know what I was supposed to do, how I was supposed to behave, but after some time I realized that it was a blessing to end up in this family. Now I have a mom and a sister and I love them very much..."

"Karlen brings flowers home every day for me and his sister. He even tells his friends that they should always get flowers for their moms..." shares Mrs. Sveta.

We asked Karlen what has changed in his life after he started to live in a family. "...When I come home from school, open the door and call for my mom, she answers 'Yes, Sweetie.' That is what I love!" the boy says.

There are about 4,000 children living in Armenian orphanages and other residential care institutions who would give anything to hear "Yes, Sweetie" - these simple words that signify being in a caring family. Over 80% of these children have at least one parent and were placed under institutional care because their families were facing social and economic hardships. Most of these children are not visited by their parents and they never go home. Children with disabilities are even more vulnerable. 35% of children living in Armenia's residential care institutions have a mental, physical or a combined disability. Almost all of these children have parents, but have been placed in various institutions due to their disability.

This is more than a shameful statistic for a nation that prides itself on cherishing children

and family values.

It's doubtful that anyone needs further proof of family being the best place for a child to grow and develop. A right of a child to grow up in a family is also embedded in the Convention on the Rights of the Child (Armenia signed and ratified the Convention in 1992) as well as in Armenian Laws.

"Placing a child in a foster family will not only fulfill child's right to live in a family, but can introduce savings for the national budget," points out Ms. Laylee Moshiri, UNICEF Representative in Armenia. UNICEF studies demonstrate that the annual cost of care for a child in an orphanage or other residential care institution averages \$3,600USD, while cost of care in a foster family does not exceed \$2,600USD (foster family receives 80,000

AMD/\$218 USD a month for one child).

Today there are only 20 foster families in Armenia with 22 children under their care, while hundreds of children are still spending their childhood in institutions deprived of affection that only a family can provide. It has now been several years since the Armenian government has embarked on the child protection system reform, specifically in the area of decreasing the number of children in institutional care. Despite this fact all the resources, including financial, are continuously spent to support the orphanages, while it is obvious that diverting those resources towards supporting socially vulnerable families or expansion of foster care would be more efficient.

This does not at all mean giving up the wealth of professional expertise present in current orphanages and other residential care institutions. Family support or other alternative community centres can be created where qualified social workers and educators can provide services to children and their families. These are the key messages and the main idea of UNICEF's "Every Child Needs a Family" Campaign.

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All stories included in this publication are true. Names and places of residence have been changed to protect children's identity.

### ONE in FIVE Campaign

Available data suggests that about 1 in 5 children in Europe are victims of some form of sexual violence. It is estimated that in 70% - 85% of the cases, the abuser is somebody the child knows and trusts. Sexual violence against children can take many forms: sexual abuse within the family, child pornography and prostitution, corruption, solicitation via Internet and sexual assault by peers.

Last November the Council of Europe launched the "ONE in FIVE" campaign. One of the goals of the campaign is to achieve further ratification and implementation of the Council of Europe Convention on the Protection of Children against Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse that was passed in Lanzarote, Spain.

Armenia signed this Convention on September 29, 2010, but has not yet ratified it.



**Position**

**“Perhaps Resources Allocated to Orphanages Should Be Directed to the Families?”**



“The fact that in our country a child who has both parents can be admitted into an orphanage is a primary evidence of existing extreme poverty. According to UNICEF data, this is true for 43% of children in institutional care,” Ms. Anahit Bakhshyan, member of the National Assembly of Armenia, member of the Standing Committee on Healthcare, Maternity and Childhood, points out.

- In other words, due to difficult economic conditions a child is deprived of a chance to have a normal childhood. If even a part of the resources provided to the orphanages is given to socially vulnerable families, it would be possible for a child to stay with the family. However, we have an opposite process, where the government provides financial support to children in orphanages, thus putting at risk their well-being and future. One would argue that many people would want to foster children for selfish reasons, to benefit from having an additional income, but even that does not justify the government’s position of supporting orphanages.

**“Orphanage Creates an Association of Fear and Estrangement” ...**

“Unfortunately, I have to say that independently of how much money the government spends to support orphanages, it is a lost investment. Around 80% of these children do not reach their full potential and do not integrate into the society as full citizens,” states Ms. Lilit GALSTYAN, Member of the Armenian National Assembly, Member of the Standing Committee on Science, Education, Culture, Youth Affairs and Sport.



- I believe that political agenda should be focused on providing assistance to a parent who is unemployed, unable to provide for a daily bread and is forced to take his/her child to an orphanage. In other words, the government should stop this vicious practice of spending financial resources to offset the consequences of placement children in institutions and invest in support to families. I am convinced that we should revisit our current system and adopt different forms of care, ones that would allow these children to be brought up in families; otherwise we are losing citizens, whereas people are our most valuable asset.

**Mission is possible**

**UNICEF: End Sending Children Under Three to Institutions!**

Speaking on behalf of UNICEF Regional Director for CEE and CIS Mr. Steven Allen, Ms. Laylee Moshiri, UNICEF Representative in Armenia, urged parliamentarians from Central and Eastern Europe and the Commonwealth of Independent States who came to Yerevan to attend the regional parliamentary conference to join the campaign of preventing children under three from being placed in institutions. “The CEE and CIS region has the highest number of children in residential care in the world - more than 600,000. And despite many reforms this figure has remained static.” – emphasized Ms. Moshiri.

Our interview with Ms. Moshiri was about the outcome of the CEE&CIS Regional Parliamentary Conference “Making Child Rights a Reality for the Most Vulnerable Children” that took place in Yerevan this June.



-The discussions at the conference were predominantly focused around two main themes – Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) and Child Protection. I think the conference presented an excellent opportunity for the parliamentarians from different countries to share best practices, as well as to unite their efforts in fighting against violence towards children. I have to point out that research shows violent discipline of children to be highly prevalent in our region: on average six out of ten children experience violent discipline at home in all surveyed countries.

When talking about early childhood development the essential idea is that the earlier we start investing into the child’s development and well-being, particularly in the younger years, the greater are the future benefits for the society. Meanwhile 90% or more of the region’s young children continue to have no access to organized early learning opportunities until they go to primary school at the age of 6 or 7.

I would consider the conference to be a success if the delegates continue fighting for children’s rights with renewed efforts upon returning to their countries.

The conference also addressed the issue of children being placed in state run residential care and other institutions at the earlier stages of their lives. That is just about the worst start in life. UNICEF calls on Governments in the region to stop the practice of placing children in institutional care especially under the age of three.

We are joining together with partners to campaign against this practice and suggest placing children in alternative care and family based forms of care instead. I believe the parliamentarians have a great role to play by using their functions, including oversight of the work of Governments and budget allocation, to support legislative work that puts families first and reforms that strengthen social services and protective mechanisms to monitor outcomes for children, so that children from low

income families do not end up in institutional care. Sadly child poverty is a reality in all the countries of the region, and therefore improving children’s quality of life continues to be the main concern.

I have to mention that our partnership with the Armenian National Assembly has always been productive. Memorandum of Understanding was signed in 2009 and co-organizing this conference brought us even closer. UNICEF is committed to ensuring that all children are born and raised in an environment that promotes and protects their rights, and many laws have already been passed in Armenia. The issue we face is putting these laws into practice. There is also a need to align the legislation with the principles of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. Further there are at times inconsistencies present within the laws that need to be clarified. We hope to be successful in our collaboration with the Armenian National Assembly when it comes to addressing these issues.

**Stop violence against children**

**“Most People Don’t Realize That Slapping Children is a Type of Physical Abuse”**

In 2009 the Armenian office of Save the Children launched a three year project “Unite for Children, Save Futures.” While reporting on the progress of the project Ms. Irina Saghoyan, head of office, mentioned that the assessment of the child protection situation in Armenia revealed that children are subjected to almost all forms of abuse (physical, emotional, etc.) at home as well as at various institutions.



Once young Eric witnessed a mother punishing two of her little children by pushing them outside of their house during wintertime without any warm clothes and closing the door so that they couldn’t go inside. The screaming and helplessness of the little ones made such an impression on Eric that when completing an assignment ‘What does abuse mean to you?’ sometime later he painted this very incident.

Head of the project, Ms. Anna Harutyunyan, says that according to the results of the mentioned assessment 70% of mothers use violent discipline towards children. “Most people don’t realize that slapping children is a type of physical abuse. It is widely accepted as a method of discipline, while there are alternative solutions,” notes Ms. Harutyunyan, emphasizing the lack of positive parenting skills. “While most parents realize that punishment may not be the best way to discipline a child, they don’t have the necessary training to address the situation.”

Ms. Anna Harutyunyan discussed that children under the age of 13 who are in orphanages and special institutions are most vulnerable to sexual abuse. In most cases children don’t even realize that they are victims of sexual abuse.

Violence in orphanages and residential care institutions worldwide has been measured at six times higher than violence in foster care. Children living in these institutions are nearly 4 times more likely to be victims of sexual abuse than children in family-based care. Children growing up in an orphanage may be at increased risk of abuse by both staff and other children in an orphanage.

**Fighting Against Child Molesters With Tough Rules**

“Recently the National Assembly of Armenia passed in the first reading a new law introducing more strenuous punishments for sexual crimes against children in the Criminal Code. I proposed this amendment and the parliament unanimously passed it,” member of the National Assembly of Armenia Viktor Dallakyan said.

When presenting the amendment I brought statistics. According to the judicial department’s data there were more than 100 cases of sexual abuse against children during 2000-2010 period. In 2009, 18 cases were brought to the court out of which only 3 resulted in imprisonment of the perpetrators. Unfortunately, child molesters were able to pay legally recognized penalties, for example 100 thousand Armenian drams (\$274), and walk away.

In fact, the National Assembly showed its support for tough methods when it comes to fighting sexual crimes. Therefore, we decided on very stringent punishments like 8 years or 15 years of imprisonment for sexual abuse against a child. In other words, we are taking a very strict approach, and I believe that this will have a substantial impact in reinforcing the campaign against these unacceptable crimes.

I would like to mention that in certain countries the fight against child molesters is accompanied by other means of enforcing accountability. More specifically Poland, Czech Republic, Germany and 9 states of USA practice, among other forms of punishment, mandatory or voluntary castration using surgical or chemical technique. In my opinion the Armenian parliament should use similar methods in its fight against child molesters.

**How To Help Child Victims**

“When the events at the Nubarashen’s school for children with special needs were uncovered, only the court proceedings were at the center of everyone’s attention – how many years did the pedophile get? - everything for the press. No matter whether the sentence is 6 or 16 years, it does not change the life of the child that was abused. What about other ques-

tions: who is working with the victim? a psychiatrist? a social worker? is the child being removed from the place where the crime took place? will the caregiver change? We are not at all concerned when it comes to the child’s rehabilitation.”

Mira Antonyan  
Head of the Children’ Support Centre of Fund for Armenian Relief (FAR)

Parliamentary tribune

# "No Opposition or Ruling Party When it Comes to Child Rights,"

the participants of the conference insist, while presenting mechanisms to promote child rights applied in their countries

**"Children are the most vulnerable, they rely on us, adults"**

Serbian National Assembly established a full Standing Committee responsible for protection of child rights in all areas. The composition for this type of a Committee is of an utmost importance. It is a cross-partisan body, where all political parties of the parliament are represented (MPs from each caucus), and it offers a high level membership as Speaker and Deputy Speakers are members of this Committee and UNICEF is our strategic partner. This composition allows us to create a "critical mass" of members in the parliament who specifically focus on protecting the rights of children.

**Ms. Judita POPOVIC**  
Deputy Speaker of the Parliament of the Republic of Serbia, Member of the Child Rights Committee

**"Every child is entitled to a good start in life"**

...Every child is entitled to a good start in life. Figures and studies show, however, that early childhood tends to receive the least attention and lowest investment from governments. This needs to be changed and I hope that this conference will allow us all to debate strategies to prioritize early childhood development.

Making child rights a reality for the most vulnerable children is an ambitious and challenging objective. It is very close to our hearts as individuals and, I will also argue, it goes to the core of parliament's functions and responsibilities. Although if you want to help and provide protection for children then

you have to start by listening to their opinions and suggestions and only then start developing policies to protect their rights.

**Mr. Anders B. JOHANSSON**  
Secretary General of the Inter-Parliamentary Union

**"I have been fighting for child rights all my life"**

Respect for child rights cannot be perceived as an option, as a question of favour or kindness to children, or as an expression of charity. Child rights generate obligations and responsibilities that must be honoured...

Parliaments have the power to create real and lasting change for children. They can debate, shape and enforce legislation that protects children. They can allocate resources from national budgets. They can establish strong policy directions. UN Study on Violence against Children and UN Secretary General's Special Rapporteur Marta Santos Pais recommend the establishment of an Ombudsperson or Commissioner for Child Rights with a clear mandate to monitor the rights of the child and with competence to receive and investigate complaints of violations of children's rights. Many parliaments around the world are following this recommendation.

**Mr. Trond WAAGE**  
Former Ombudsman for Children, Norway

**"We have undertaken a vigorous campaign to raise awareness of child rights"**

We are closely following the Lanzarote Convention with an intention to ratify it in Verkhovna Rada (Ukraine's Parliament) in the near future. Even though several thousand cases of child abuse are reported annually, we realize that



this is not a true situation for a country with a 40 million population.

The difficulty in this situation is that, according to experts, 97% of child abuse cases are not being reported and therefore not reflected in any statistics. There are various organizations trying to address the problem and prevent violence, however often such cases are being concealed by parents, children and even witnesses, hence we have currently undertaken a vigorous campaign in schools and universities to raise awareness of child rights. One of the goals of this campaign is to warn the parents that resort to violent actions against their children of the legal accountability that they can be brought to.

I also have to mention the mass media role in imposing stereotypes and aggressive, immoral and offensive behaviors in today's world. In this regard, I think that television serves as a means of turning children into zombies. Literally, we are introducing aggression to children starting from early ages and afterwards trying to deal with its consequences.

**Mr. Mykola TOMENKO**  
Deputy Speaker of the Verkhovna Rada of the Republic of Ukraine

**"We have challenges and accomplishments"**

I am a pediatrician and have worked with children for 40 years. Like all other countries in the region we have challenges as well as accomplishments when it comes to child rights. Introduction of an inclusive education was certainly an accomplishment for us as we

demonstrated that we didn't want to deprive children with special needs from their right to receive education together with others. Free medical care for children under 7 is another notable achievement. Undoubtedly, we still have a long way to go...

**Prof. Ara BABLOYAN**  
Member of the National Assembly of Armenia, Chairman of the Standing Committee on Health Care, Maternity and Childhood

**"Thanks to foster families we were able to reduce the number of children in our orphanages"**

In Georgia the government provides monthly payment to foster families – 200 lari for each child (approximately \$140-150USD) or 300 lari for a child with special needs. Foster families are screened in advance to ensure that children are being placed in a safe environment. Thanks to these families we were able to reduce the number of children in our orphanages from 5,000 to 1,000 children. Out of 46 orphanages, there are now 17 that mainly serve as crisis centres for street children. I believe that by the end of the year we will have 2 orphanages remaining for children with special needs who have little chances of being adopted. Other children will be placed in the so called family homes with 6-7 children in each. We have already started the process of purchasing property and 34 small houses are ready for children to move in. At the end of the year we will have 70 family homes.

**Dr. Otar TOIDZE**  
Member of the Parliament of Georgia, Chairman of the Committee on Health Care and Social Affairs

Expert's opinion

## Why Invest in Early Childhood?

"Every one dollar invested in this area will generate at least \$7 dollars in future benefits," experts say when advocating for the importance of investing in early childhood development.

There are at least five key arguments supporting the effectiveness of investing in early childhood development.

The first one is the so called neuroscience argument that has to do with the development of the brain. 80% of the brain mass is developed during the first 3 years of life and therefore interventions in early years of life yield better results than those that were initiated in later periods.

The point of the second argument is that making public investments in early childhood development today will result in great savings in government spending. Investments when children are young have bigger payoffs than at any other time – benefit of up to 17 to 1.

Investing in early childhood contributes to poverty reduction and reduction of disparities as it guarantees the best start in life for every child.

The next argument is for labour force development as child care facilitates women's ability to work outside the home.

And finally the need for investments in early childhood development is required by the Convention on the Rights of the Child. Children have the right to develop to their full potential.

**Prof. Patrice ENGLE**  
Professor, Department of Psychology and Child Development, Cal Poly State University, San Luis Obispo, CA, USA

## Earlier is Better!

The institutionalization of young children under the age of three is a serious concern because its negative impact on physical and cognitive development, emotional security and attachment, cultural and personal identity and developing competencies can be irreversible.

Institutionalization affects the brains of very young children by reducing and/or altering brain activity, altering key hormones, changing size of brain in select areas and altering connection of brain areas.

It is therefore necessary to make every effort to:

- > Identify crises early and provide support to parents for children to remain in families;
- > Develop family-based alternative care for children who cannot remain with parents;
- > Strengthen "gatekeeping" to divert children from institutions.

**Gary GAMER**  
Executive Consultant/Researcher, Families for Children Foundation, Oregon USA

Gender Equality

# More Women in the Parliament – More Protection For Children

**Ms. Kareen JABRE,**  
Manager, Gender Partnership Programme, the Inter Parliamentary Union

Our research indicates that greater number of women representation in the parliament leads to greater emphasis on child rights issues. Likewise, the systems created to support women's rights have a positive impact on child rights protection.

Currently, throughout the world, women's representation in parliaments is 19%, which cannot be considered sufficient. We believe that democracy is impossible without equal representation of men and women in the parliament. Women are not just driven by their priorities. Historically they have changed the quality of political debates in parliaments.

**Ms. Maria AISINA,**  
Member of the Majillis, Member of the Committee for Social and Cultural Development, Kazakhstan

Today women make up 18% of our parliament. Incidentally there is an absolute gender equality in our social development committee as 7 out of 14 parliamentarians are women. Although the objective is not about ensuring the majority representation for women in the parliament, the situation demands otherwise: women represent the majority in the education system, most health workers are also women, therefore who but women would be better informed about the needs in these areas. Not to mention the women being pregnant and the problems they face during the nine months.

I do, however, agree with the viewpoint expressed earlier about men being involved in childcare. It is still hard to overcome stereotypes, yet today in Kazakhstan many men take paternal leaves and this no longer arouses negative attitude. People's mentality is changing...

**Ms. Valentina STRATAN,**  
Member of the Parliament, Member of the Committee on Social Protection, Healthcare and Family, Republic of Moldova

My belief is that greater number of women in the parliament leads to a more peaceful resolution of social issues. This is my credo.

Usually when it comes to debating economic issues, men are ready to get comfortable in



their chairs and keep up these discussions all night. However, as soon as the discussion concerns healthcare or education, all I hear is: "That's enough Valentina, let's stop, let's get to the next question." Only by being persis-

tent are we able to accomplish something. When it comes to children's issues we, women-parliamentarians, can come together, even set aside political differences and effectively work towards solutions.

At a Glance

## About 80% of Children Are Not Attending Kindergartens



According to the official data of the Ministry of Education and Science of Armenia, there are 642 state kindergartens in Armenia where 55,711 children are enrolled. There are also 52 private kindergartens with an average of 42 children in each. The majority of them are located in Yerevan.

In 1989 around 1,335 preschools were functioning in Armenia as well as 80 departmental nursery kindergartens. The enrolment of pre-school children was up to 60%. Today only 21,6 %

of preschool age children attend kindergartens. The number of children attending pre-schools in rural areas is even lower - 10,5%, according to the Ministry.

Nearly 80% of pre-school age children do not attend pre-schools due to poverty and/or absence of pre-school facilities. Many pre-schools were closed down after the Government's decision to transfer them under the authority of local communities that were unable to maintain them due to low budgets.

In most communities of Arme-

nia children are deprived of pre-school education. For example, there are no kindergartens in 95 out of 119 communities in Shirak region. There are no kindergarten buildings in almost half of the country's communities (46%). According to information made public at the National Assembly, one third of Armenia's kindergarten buildings were given under other services in the last 10-15 years. Even though in 2005 the sale of educational and pre-school buildings on the territory of Armenia was banned by law "On the Pre-school Education", media is continuously reporting about cases connected with privatization of kindergarten buildings.

Additional 190 communities have kindergarten buildings that, however, do not operate. Community leaders argue that they don't have enough financial resources. "It is interesting that the lack of financial resources does not prevent some heads of communities from buying "Mercedes" cars for the needs of the village administration", observes Lilit Galstyan, member of the National Assembly of Armenia, referring to the recent findings of

the Oversight Chamber.

The Government has great hopes for the 2008-2015 strategic programme for pre-school education reform that prioritizes issues related to early childhood development.

Within the framework of this programme the Ministry of Education and Science of Armenia has signed Memoranda of Understanding with almost all international organizations represented in Armenia as well as local NGOs dealing with child rights issues. While thanks to them there have been certain accomplishments, in many communities of Armenia thousands of pre-school age children are still spending the whole day in the streets.

It is worth mentioning, however, that the Municipality of Yerevan made a decision according to which 162 state kindergartens of the capital became free of charge starting from April 2011.

The fact that after this decision we saw an increase in the number of children enrolled in pre-schools, demonstrates that many socially vulnerable families didn't send their children to kindergartens due to paid services.

Inclusive Education

In Focus: Education for All



The first steps towards implementing inclusive education in Armenia were taken in 2001 based on the agreement between the Ministry of Education and Science of Armenia and "Bridge of Hope" NGO and technical support provided by UNICEF and other international organizations. UNICEF, Mission East, Oxfam Novib, World vision and other international organizations promote and have continuously supported the introduction of inclusive education in Armenia.

It required five years from "Bridge of Hope" NGO to initially implement this approach in five Yerevan schools and present it to the Government as a successful experiment.

"Education for All: this is the fundamental idea of inclusive education", - mentions Susanna Tadevosyan, chairwoman of the "Bridge of Hope" NGO.

According to her, the movement for inclusive education in the world that started back in 70's of the past century was initiated by parents of children with disabilities.

Today Armenia is the only country in the region that already has experience in implementing inclusive education and has incorporated it as an important part of State policy.

According to the data of the Ministry of Education and Science of Armenia, 1,700 children with special needs are enrolled in 62 inclusive schools in Yerevan and different marzes. Moreover, in Tavush marz inclusive education has been introduced in all schools.

The number of special schools has also decreased by more than a half with only 17 remaining compared to 44 in the past.

Inclusive education should eventually be introduced in all schools and special schools should be recognized as institutions whose time has passed - this is the goal for "Education for All".

Time For Change

## "Step by step" towards child-centered education

Training of preschool staff and increasing children's enrolment in pre-school education is part of the ongoing education reforms. The programme is being implemented with the financial support from UNICEF and World Bank loan in cooperation with "Step by step" non-governmental foundation and the Ministry of Education and Science of Armenia. In the past the same format of cooperation proved to be quite successful when developing education and development standards for children under six.



The pilot stage of the training programme was implemented in Shirak and Lori marzes. During the first stage that commenced last year pre-school specialists/educators from 41 communities of Ararat and Aragatsotn marzes underwent trainings. This year four more marzes have been added, including Syunik, Vayots Dzor, Armavir and Gekharkunik. In general, about 90 communities are included in the programme.

"Needless to explain that children without pre-school education not only tend to receive lower scores and demonstrate lower motivation in learning, but also

have difficulties in communicating with teachers and interacting with other children", says Ruzanna Tsarukyan, the Head of the "Step by step" Foundation.

She mentions that having considered all these facts the Government is going to ensure the opportunity of receiving at least one year of pre-school education for all children aged 5-6, including those that come from communities that don't have kindergartens. In this case an alternative model will be used, that is - pre-school groups will be set up in schools.

Among various issues related to the establishment of these insti-

tutions, the problem of training qualified pre-school staff is quite crucial. It is not surprising that in many cases there is lack of competent human resources, given the absence of kindergarten in the community.

More than 2,000 caregivers have been trained in child-centered pre-school teaching and care practices. According to Ruzanna Tsarukyan, the staff training includes the following main components: training of pre-school educators and directors, technical support and consultancy, visits and observations, sharing best practices through training vis-

its to 11 model educational centers created by the Foundation.

Special emphasis is made on the cooperation with parents: on issues that concern early learning and education pre-school staff and parents should speak with one voice. "Sometimes parents ask so many questions during the meetings that the conversation involuntary turns into a small seminar", says the Programme Leader.

Sixteen parental resource centers are now operating in 10 marzes and in Yerevan, offering parents information and skills in early childhood development.

"Step by step" Foundation has a great experience in supporting parents. Several years ago, together with UNICEF, the Foundation developed and published a Guide for Parents on Child Rearing and Early Learning "Our so familiar and unfamiliar child". Reading it one realizes that the best ombudsperson for children is not an official commissioner for child rights, but the child's parent who needs appropriate education and training.

Helping hand

## "Sometimes I Eat at Home Too"...

Ninety percent of our beneficiaries are either divorced or single mothers or the father is an alcohol addict, - says Seda Khaltaghchyan, the head of the Achapnyak social day care centre in Yerevan.

Since 2006 the centre is open every day and serves 6-18 year old children from vulnerable families. The institution is financed by the Government and is intended for 100 children out of which only 35 are allocated a transport allowance as they

have to use public transportation to reach the centre. Very often the children walk home and use the transport allowance to buy a pastry or an ice-cream instead.

The centre works not only with children but with parents as well - providing them psychological and legal support.

Many of these children need serious psychological assistance, they are despondent, inhibited, insecure. This is why here no one raises their voice at a child, everything is explained to the children. Offensive words

are forbidden, these children have been insulted enough.

The children are ashamed of not only the social conditions but also for their parents' behavior, - continues Mrs. Seda, sharing that at times she has witnessed cases that otherwise would have never believed.

We had a parent who wanted to prove by all means that his child had a mental disability and demanded placing him in a boarding school. We took the child to a psychiatrist, and at that point it was clear that the child

was healthy.

Sometimes people are in extremely difficult social conditions.

Several days ago I saw Artak anxiously going back and forth in front of the cafeteria door. It was clear that the boy was hungry. After lunch and after some time had passed I saw him again near the cafeteria. We gave him food again and I asked him what he had to eat that day. I am still puzzled with his answer:

Sometimes I eat at home too but today I didn't have anything to eat....

Question



8,045 children with disabilities are registered in Armenia as of January 1, 2011. About 2,800 children are enrolled in special schools, out of whom there are 1,250 children with disabilities, 1,700 are studying in

inclusive schools and 461 are in orphanages. A question arises: what are all other children with disabilities doing? Have they received any kind of education and what does the future hold for them?

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