

## **. General Information**

1. The Republic of Armenia is a land locked in the Southern Caucasus Region of Eastern Europe. It is the smallest of the republics of the Former Soviet Union. The bordering countries are Georgia in the north, Azerbaijan in the east and southwest, Turkey in the west, and Iran in the south.
2. Total land area is 29,800 square kilometers.
3. Total population is approximately 3.79 million people (1998). The majority of population (about 65%) is living in urban areas. The population is primarily ethnic Armenian. Minorities make up about 3% of population. The main minority groups are Yezidis, Russians Kurds, Assyrians and Greeks.
4. Life expectancy: female – 78, male – 71.
5. Infant mortality rate: 14.7/1000
6. Maternal mortality rate: 25.4/1000
7. Literacy rate: 100%
8. Before 2001, the compulsory education started at the age of 7 years and continued for 8 years. The high schools 9 and 10 grades were not compulsory but the Government provided free high school education for all who wanted to continue. Since the year 2001, the Government of Armenia has provided free of charge secondary education from the age of 6.5.
9. As a result of economical blockade, energetic crisis as well as moving to the market economy and privatization of the industry, many industrial factories were temporarily closed and many people became unemployed. As a result, the unemployment rate is very high at the moment. The official unemployment rate is 10.7%, though there is also hidden unemployment and the rate is approximately 30%. It includes people who are actually unemployed but not registered for unemployment services, and who are “under-employed”.

## **Situation of People with Intellectual Disabilities.**

1. The former Soviet Union system of mental disability and diagnosis has been popular in Armenia. According to that system, there are following three categories differentiated: debility, idiotism and imbecility. Due to the establishment and activation of international relations, we are in a process of changing the former terminology and changing it into international definitions, but there are no corresponding diagnostic methods developed yet. The above-mentioned activities are in a process.

The baby's first a few years from the birth are cared by the medical services and

their staff register the first diagnosis of any intellectual deviations. There are medical labor commissions which identify disabilities of children and elder people in Social Security system.

The number of an early intervention programs is very few. One of the projects of the Ministry of Education and Science- "The program for the pre-school care and education development of disabled children" is within the framework of this program. At the Soviet period, the education and care of disabled children had been implemented at the separate educational institution. There was a Specialized Boarding Institution for the pre-school age children where 22 mentally disabled children were cared until 1998. It was terminated by the order of the Ministry of Education and Science and the children were put into kindergartens. In spite of our expectations, the staff of the kindergartens accepted the disabled children very warmly and the children have adapted well each other. The program has been successfully continued. The logical continuation of this program became the program on pre-school care and education for mentally disabled children, which has already been implemented for 3 years in Armenia. The goal of the program is to create the conditions for the children with special needs by the multi-disciplinary specialists group for inclusive education and upbringing in the community based kindergartens. Now 6 resource kindergartens are being established where the teachers, psychologists, special teachers, social workers and physicians are working. It is supposed that the work experience of these will be extended within the whole republic.

The education of mentally disabled children is being implemented at 16 Special Boarding Schools. The compulsory education as well as the general secondary schools is being started at the age of 6.5 and lasts for 8 years. General academic knowledge, skills and simple professions are provided during the 8 years. Unfortunately, these schools are in severe conditions: there is a shortage of textbooks, teaching materials and curriculums, the education methods and programs do not correspond to the existing conditions and these schools are not affordable for the children from the far regions because of the long distance. The goal of the policy at the field education for mentally disabled children is:

- a) to modernize the education, to establish the child-centered education system,
- b) to develop the possibilities of inclusive education
- c) to develop the Community based initiatives.

The Ministry of Education and Science is implementing a number of programs with the participation of the local and international organizations in this direction.

Jointly with the “Mission East” Danish organization, the program on “Educational reform for the mentally disabled children” in which the goal is to move to the new flexible developing programs in specialized schools for the mentally disabled children, child-centered teaching methodology and training of teachers are being implemented. The program will support not only to increase the quality of education and the productivity, but also lighten the children moving from Special School to the General Secondary.

The next program is the pilot program on Inclusive Education, where the Ministry of Education and Science, UNICEF, Yerevan Secondary School#27 and “Bridge of hope” NOG are involved. The goals of the program are to improve the medical-psychological-pedagogical assessment of the mentally disabled children, to organize the intervention of different specialists into the secondary schools and to develop the corresponding regulations.

The other program which has started by the financing of the World Bank and is being continued by the support of SIDA and Stockholm university, is directed to the development of the community based services and piloting of organizing of these different models. Three different models have been created and the specialists were trained. The financial assessment of the program is supported to be done this year, after which the experience of these services will be spreader to the other regions and cities. The main and the first state of the vocational education for the mentally disabled children is being implemented at the special schools, here they are taught woodworking and sewing.

There are only 2 vocational schools which have special groups for the mentally disabled children. Here, mentally disabled children are improving their skills which they have acquainted at special schools.

Mentally disabled people are the most unprotected at the labor market. Practically, they almost have no chance to get a job in labor market perspective. After the receiving secondary education, mentally disabled children are mainly involved in household.

2. The main law is the “Law on Disabled” accepted in 1994. It defines the rights of disabled people and privileges to be benefited by the Social, Health and Education

programs. There are separate laws: “Law on Child Right”, “Law on Education”, “Law on Medical Insurance”, and are connected to the disabled problems. There is no special law on mentally disabled children but the draft law is being developed for the “Psychological Health”, where is mainly talked about the mentally disabled children, then at the existing laws.

3. The community based initiatives are at the development stage. The Ministry of Education and Science is the most active in this field. After the earthquake in 1998, the network of Psychological Services has been established in order to support the earthquake victims, which are functioning for the social-psychological rehabilitation of children with special needs.

The Ministry of Education and Science started the “Children Initiative” program in 1998, one of the main goals of developing the community services.

Local NGO has recently become very active, mainly “Bridge of Hope” and “Astghik”. The community centers have been established by the initiative of these organizations, and they are also implementing the rehabilitation programs.

4. Government agencies concerned with Intellectual Disabilities

- Ministry of Education and Science
- Ministry of Social Security
- Ministry of Health

5. Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) dealing with the activities and issues concerning Intellectual Disabilities.

1. “Mental Health 2001” non-governmental organization

- Address Yerevan, Heratsi St.7
- Tel.No. (3741)351 586
- Description Organizing actions aimed at support to mental health

2. Mental Health Foundation

- Address Yerevan, Arshakunyats St.5
- Tel. No. (3741)563 099
- Description Psychological assistance to the population of RA, organizing actions aimed at support to mental health.

**3. “Astghik” union of disabled children’s parents**

- Address Yerevan, Charents St.1
- Tel.No. (3471)575 185
- Description Choirs for the disabled children was created as well as drawing and sewing groups. The organization also has a speech therapist.

**4. “Arbes” Healt Center**

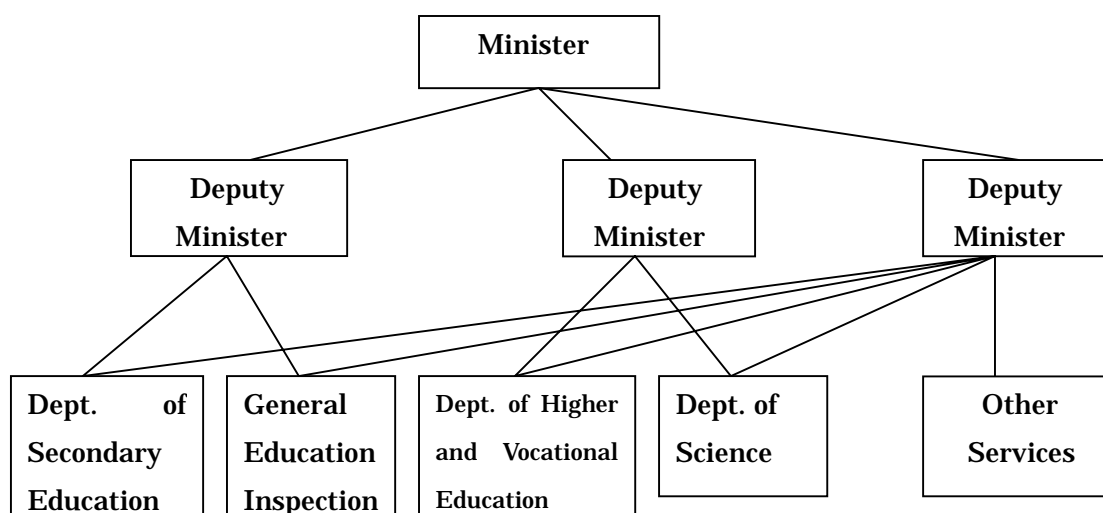
- Address Yerevan, Papazyan St.32
- Tel.No (3471)262 100
- Description Health assistance to the population of RA

**5. “Bridge of Hope” non-governmental organization**

- Address Yerevan, Koriun St.19 A
- Tel.No. (3471)589 186

**The Ministry of Education and Science of the Republic of Armenia**

The reductive structure of the Ministry of Education and Science:



I am leading the General Education Inspection, which is responsible for the implementation of Secondary Education programs and child rights protection monitoring. I am also the responsible person for the community services development for the children with special needs, as well as a member of the working group, developing the “Child Rights Protection” National Program.