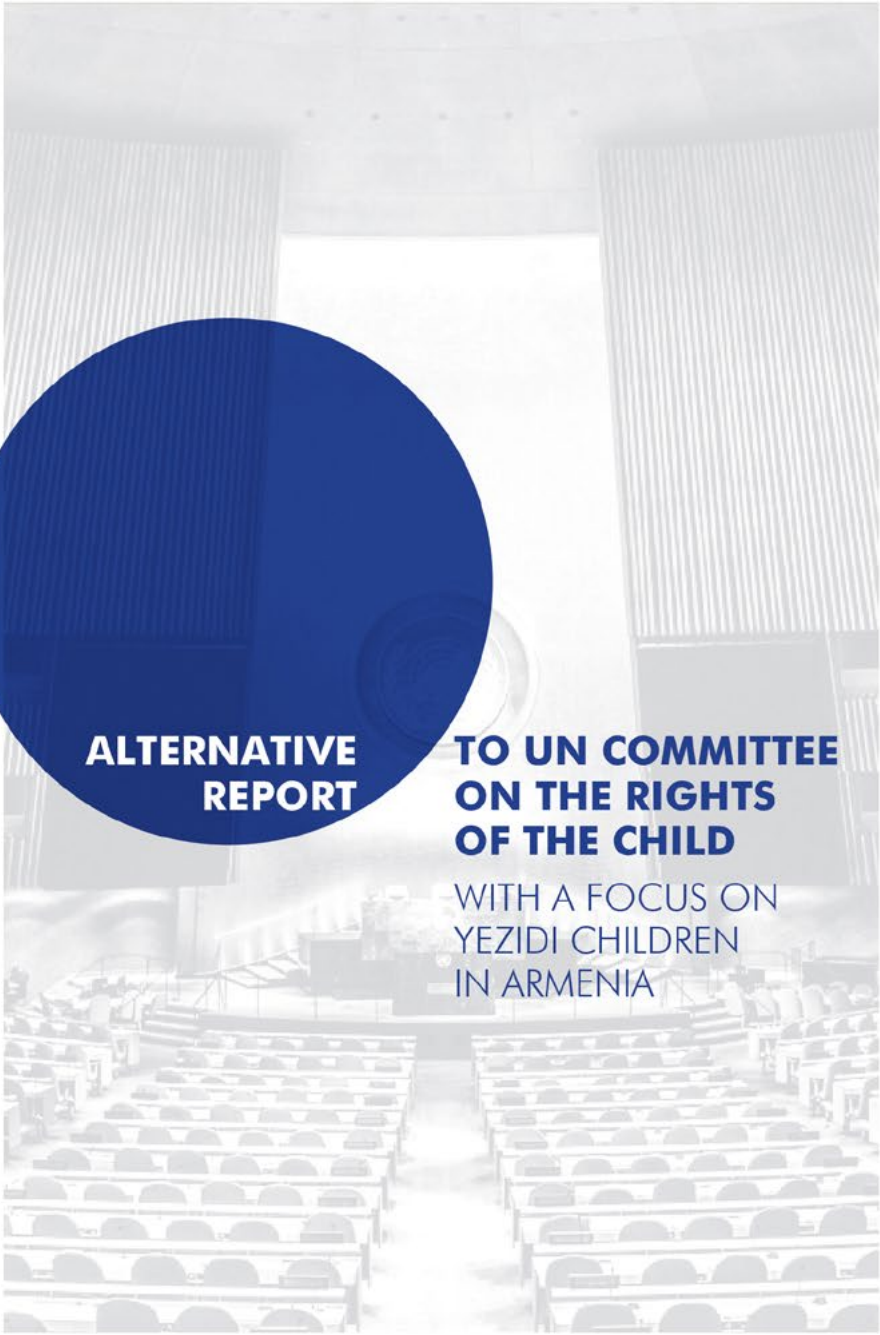




**ALTERNATIVE
REPORT**

**TO UN COMMITTEE
ON THE RIGHTS
OF THE CHILD**

WITH A FOCUS ON
YEZIDI CHILDREN
IN ARMENIA



ALTERNATIVE REPORT TO THE UN COMMITTEE ON THE RIGHTS OF THE CHILD

WITH A FOCUS ON YEZIDI CHILDREN IN ARMENIA

This report has been produced as part of the project “Promoting Human and Labour Rights through GSP+ in Armenia” and is presented now for the purposes of the EU’s ongoing GSP+ monitoring process. It is also to be submitted to the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child. However, that submission will be at an undetermined future date and hence the content of the report may be modified in the interim.



**DEMOCRACY
REPORTING
INTERNATIONAL**



The report was prepared by

Eurasia Partnership Foundation,

“Human Rights Research Center”

Non-governmental organization,

Armavir Development Center

Non-governmental organization,

“Sinjar” Yezidi National Union



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EUROPEAN UNION FOR ARMENIA

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INTRODUCTION

- (1) This alternative report has been developed through the joint efforts of the Eurasia Partnership Foundation (EPF), the Human Rights Research Center, the “Sinjar” Yezidi National Union and the Armavir Development Center as part of the EU-funded Promoting Human and Labor Rights through GSP+ program implemented by the Eurasia Partnership Foundation (EPF) with the support of Democracy Reporting International.
- (2) The report looks generally at Armenia’s legal and policy framework through the lens of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) and focuses on the rights of children in the Yezidi community. With a population of over 35,000 persons, Yezidis are the largest ethnoreligious minority group in a country where over 98% of the population identifies as Armenian.¹ According to the most recent census in 2011, there are 16,480 individuals belonging to national minorities (Yezidi, Russian, Assyrian, Greek, Ukrainian, Kurd, Georgian) under the age of 19; 12,214 of them were from the Yezidi community².
- (3) This is the first alternative report focusing on the rights of children from ethnic and religious minorities in Armenia. While these children face the same challenges and experience the same violations as those from majority communities, they also experience specific issues which have so far been largely excluded from general reports on children’s rights produced by state bodies, international organizations and local CSOs. This alternative report focuses only on issues affecting minority children and does not consider those relevant to all children in Armenia, regardless of their religious and/or ethnic identity (e.g. child poverty).
- (4) The report analyses the legal and regulatory framework relevant

1. See at: <https://www.armstat.am/file/doc/99478378.pdf>

2. See at: <https://armenia.savethechildren.net/sites/armenia.savethechildren.net/files/library/book-eng.pdf>

to children's rights in general and minority rights in particular. It also includes the results of a media monitoring exercise and six focus groups conducted in the Armavir region where many Yezidis live.

- (5) The various violations of the rights of children from religious and ethnic minorities in Armenia are interconnected and thus relevant to several CRC articles simultaneously. For instance, the dropout of girls from schools clearly implicates the right to education under Article 28. However, the cause of this issue is likely rooted in the harmful practice of early marriage, which falls under a number of other articles. In the same manner, a number of issues pertaining to Article 14 on freedom of thought, conscience, and religion are also relevant to Articles 12 and 13 on freedom of expression and the right to be heard. Taking this into account, the report focuses on four key articles: Articles 4 on state obligations; 14 on freedom of thought, conscience and religion; 19 on freedom from mistreatment; and 28 on the right to education. The combination of these reflects a range of interconnected issues, challenges and gaps that contribute to the exclusion and rights violations of children from Armenia's ethnic and religious minorities.
- (6) In addition to the description of the situation as per the 4 articles, the report presents recommendations to the Government of Armenia, as well as recommended questions to be asked to the Government of Armenia by the Committee on the Rights of the Child.

ARTICLE 4: STATE OBLIGATIONS UNDER THE CONVENTION

- (1) The legislative and regulatory framework of the country does not fully ensure the protection of the rights of children from ethnic and religious minorities and their inclusion in the society.
 - 1.1) Armenia has no effective and comprehensive standalone anti-discrimination legislation; provisions addressing discrimination are scattered across different laws. Not only

are there no concrete regulations in place to recognize, prevent or respond to discrimination, but also no official and comprehensive definition of discrimination is available. The lack of such legislation is a barrier to the inclusion of minority groups and further contributes to discrimination, rights violations and exclusion of minority children.

(2) In addition to lack of general anti-discrimination legislation, a number of key documents fail to make reference to the rights of minority children.

2.1) While the Law on the Protection of the Rights of the Child does include provisions guaranteeing children's rights to freedom of thought, conscience and religion, these provisions are not reflected in any documents, programs or efforts aimed at the implementation of the law. According to the law, the protection of the rights of the child is administered in the manner and timeframe foreseen by 5-year Strategic Plans and Annual Programs on the protection of the rights of the child. The 2017-2021 Strategic Plan on the Protection of the Rights of the Child in Armenia, which is the primary document outlining state efforts (including budgetary and other resource allocations) towards the implementation of the CRC as well as national legislation on children's rights, envisions no goals or activities aimed specifically at protecting the rights of children from religious and ethnic minorities, improving their conditions, responding to their needs or ensuring their inclusion in society.

2.2) The needs and rights of minority children are also under-represented in the State Plan on the Development of Education until 2030. This document outlines only two goals related to the rights of minority children: 1) development of literature in minority languages and 2) development of pre-school services in villages, including in minority villages. No other efforts tailored for minority children are foreseen in this key document which shapes the State's education-related efforts for the next decade.

- 2.3) The third key State-level document that excludes children from ethnic and religious minorities is the Plan and Timeline on the Introduction of Universal Inclusive Education in Armenia. Although this document is specifically aimed at ensuring the development of inclusive education, it does not consider minority children and focuses solely on the inclusion of children with disabilities.
- (3) The exclusion of minority children from these documents are not isolated incidents, but rather part of an overall pattern. The rights and needs of ethnic and religious communities are widely underrepresented or entirely excluded from legislative, regulatory and strategic efforts, which, in turn, is part of a larger trend of failure to recognize and include the needs of minorities (including persons with disabilities, members of the LGBTQ community, etc.) in state efforts.
- (4) Among the causes contributing to this situation are non-inclusive decision-making policies and practices that fail to facilitate the participation of minority groups in decision-making processes affecting their lives. This results in legislation, regulations, policies, etc. that not only do not represent the rights and needs of minority communities, but are often discriminatory.³
- (5) While Armenia's new government - which came to power as a result of peaceful transformation - has on several occasions expressed willingness to ensure equal rights and conditions for all individuals and groups, the newly adopted Government Program also does not specifically address the rights of ethnic and religious minorities.

Recommendations

- (6) Adopt effective and comprehensive standalone anti-discrimination legislation.
- 6.1) Ensure that effective mechanisms, including monitoring

3. See at: <https://www.gov.am/files/docs/3133.pdf>

mechanisms, reporting mechanisms and an independent Equality Body, are in place to ensure the implementation of such legislation in practice, and that such mechanisms are provided with adequate resources.

- 6.2) Ensure that minority communities are included in the development of legislation and implementation mechanisms.
 - 6.3) Carry out targeted efforts aimed at raising awareness about anti-discrimination legislation among the general population and minority communities.
- (7) In cooperation with minority communities, revise all existing state-level strategic documents, such as the Strategic Plan on the Protection of the Rights of the Child, State Program for the Development of Education of the Republic of Armenia until 2030 and the Plan and Timeline on the Introduction of Universal Inclusive Education in Armenia, to ensure that the documents effectively address the rights and needs of minority children, as well as provide specific budgetary, human and other resource allocations.
 - (8) Introduce and enforce inclusive decision-making practices to ensure that representatives of minority groups have meaningful participation in all relevant decision-making processes on all levels: state, regional and local.
 - (9) Carry out systematic monitoring of State documents, policies, plans, etc. aimed at the evaluation of their inclusiveness.
 - (10) Ratify the Optional Protocol to the UNCRC on a Communications Procedure adopted in 2011 and entered into force in April 2014.
 - (11) Carry out targeted awareness-raising efforts aimed at a) raising awareness of minority rights among the general population and b) raising the legal awareness of minority representatives.

ARTICLE 14: THE RIGHT OF THE CHILD TO FREEDOM OF THOUGHT, CONSCIENCE AND RELIGION

- (1) The rights of children to freedom of thought, conscience and religion are set out in several legislative acts and are stipulated by the Constitution and the Law on the Protection of the Rights of the Child. However, in practice, minority children are frequently deprived of freedom to practice their religion and face a number of challenges in preserving and expressing their ethnic and religious identities.
- (2) The right of minority children to freedom of religion is frequently violated in school. Although Article 4 of the Law on General Education requires the Government to ensure the secular and democratic nature of education, the doctrine and practices of the Armenian Apostolic Church are part of routine school life.
- (3) The first and foremost issue is the History of the Armenian Apostolic Church class. This class, which includes elements of religious propaganda and - as content analyses of textbooks and field studies show - goes beyond merely educating students on the history, teachings and principles of the Armenian Apostolic Church,⁴ has been a mandatory subject for all students in the country, for several years. In addition to obliging children of religious minorities to learn about and discuss other religious convictions, the class often includes directly religious practices such as group prayer, reading from the Bible, presence of church clergy in the classroom, school trips to religious sites, participation in religious celebrations and ceremonies, etc. Participants in focus groups have also reported instances where every class was started with a mandatory out-loud group prayer. When asked whether their opinions were taken into account during such activities, most Yezidi children responded with statements such as *“It’s not like we’re directly forced to do religious things, they just never ask us anything. It’s school, so teachers decide*

4. See at: https://epfarmania.am/sites/default/files/Document/2014_Field_Study_Rights_of_Children_en.pdf

everything for us." (Yezidi boy, 7th grade). This issue of opting out the school subject from the mandatory school program has been raised by representatives of the Yezidi community, as well as local and international CSOs during the past years.⁵

- (4) Another obstacle to the realization of freedom of religion for minority children is widespread discriminatory attitudes. In and out of school, Yezidi children frequently confront the harmful stereotype of Yezidis as lazy, unhygienic, poorly educated, etc. *"The worst thing is when they use Yezidi as an insult. Like, 'you look like a Yezidi' means you look cheap and dirty"* (Yezidi girl, 6th grade). To avoid such perceptions, there is a tendency among Yezidi children to conceal their identity from teachers and classmates, limiting their freedom of religion and isolating themselves from their peers.
- (5) An important challenge contributing to the continued deepening of these issues is that, due to low awareness of their rights, Yezidi children do not recognize that their freedoms are being violated and accept such treatment as a norm that cannot and should not be challenged. During focus group discussions, a common response to questions relating to religious freedom in schools sounded like *"Sometimes we read from the Bible, and sometimes we pray and we often go to Churches for school trips, but that's totally normal, because we live in a Christian country. There is nothing you can do about it"*. (Yezidi girl, 8th grade)

Recommendations

- (6) Revise the mandatory school program (including curricula and literature) to ensure that it is in line with the rights and needs of children from religious and ethnic minorities and does not violate their freedom of religion.
- (7) Allow any student to opt-out of the History of the Church class.
- (8) Eliminate the practices (formal or informal) when children pray,

5. Ibid.

read from the Bible, visit religious sites, engage with clergy, etc., through teacher training, revision of curricula and policies, and introduction of reporting mechanisms empowering children and parents to inform authorities of such instances, as well as systematic monitoring.

- (9) Undertake extensive awareness-raising and public education efforts, including through incorporation of such efforts in school curricula, aimed at addressing discriminatory attitudes, perceptions and stereotypes against religious and ethnic minority groups.
- (10) Undertake extensive awareness-raising and public education efforts among religious and ethnic minority groups to increase awareness of their rights and freedoms.
- (11) Carry out regular teacher training aimed at ensuring inclusive and non-discriminatory approaches to education and, specifically, inclusive methods of working with Yezidi children.

ARTICLE 19: PROTECTION FROM VIOLENCE, NEGLECT, AND MALTREATMENT

- (1) In Armenia, children regularly face corporal punishment at home and school, bullying, domestic violence and child labor.⁶ Yezidi children face additional challenges.
- (2) Foremost is early marriage, including forced early marriage. It is an accepted practice for girls to get married as early as 12 or 13 years old. In all focus group discussions, nearly every participant has reported that they personally know girls married at an early age. While anecdotal evidence suggests that this trend is slowly diminishing, it remains a customary part of Yezidi life, especially in remote, rural communities.⁷

6. See at: https://epfarmeria.am/sites/default/files/Document/2014_Field_Study_Rights_of_Children_en.pdf

7. Ibid.

- (3) During the focus group discussions, it appeared that this was the first time the participants were asked for their thoughts on early marriage. Opinions varied significantly between girls and boys. Most boys refrained from expressing their own thoughts about the practice and simply stated that this is a Yezidi tradition that should be respected even if it is against the law. *“It’s just a tradition. Yezidis have many traditions that others don’t understand. We do things our way and you [Armenians] do things your way.”* (Yezidi boy, 8th grade).
- (4) In the focus groups with girls, most girls cautiously admitted the problem of early marriage and its unfairness for girls. However, similar to the boys’ group, girls were attached to the idea that, as a tradition, the practice of early marriage cannot be changed. *“I cannot imagine getting married now. But my mother got married when she was only a year older than I am now. And she doesn’t complain...”* (Yezidi girl, 6th grade).
- (5) Early marriage not only limits the opportunities of Yezidi girls for education and career, but also leads to sexual assault against minors.⁸ Most underage girls marry men over 18, and frequently, men over 30. And most of these girls give birth to a child within the first year of marriage.
- (6) One reason contributing to the prevalence of early marriage is the practice of bride kidnapping. According to focus-group discussion participants, the fear of having their daughters abducted by strangers is a key reasons why parents choose to marry them young.
- (7) The practice of abducting girls and forcing them into marriage is a form of violence. Though largely considered harmful and outdated by the community, according to focus group participants, it remains a more or less tolerated cultural practice, with abduction cases largely unreported to the police and abducted girls forced to stay in the “marriage”. *“...it’s not right, but abducting girls has been a part of our culture for generations, and we don’t see how this can be changed”* (Yezidi father).

8. See at: <https://www.rferl.org/a/armenia-yazidi-girls-school/29912653.html>

- (8) The Family Code sets the minimum age for marriage as 18 for men and 17 for women. The Government has committed to eliminate child, early and forced marriage by 2030 in line with the Sustainable Development Goals. However, no tangible practical efforts have been undertaken by the Government to end the practice, including by ensuring justice for victims.
- (9) The problem of early marriage among Yezidi girls has been recognized by a number of local and international organizations, including the CEDAW committee. In Armenia's 2016 review, the Committee communicated concerns about early marriage in Yezidi and Molokan communities, school dropout of girls from these communities and difficulties in access to health and other state services.⁹

Recommendations

- (10) Take targeted measures to end the practice of early marriage in a reasonable timeframe, including through legal action, police training, parent education, etc.
- (11) Set up monitoring and reporting mechanisms aimed at identifying cases of early marriage and responding accordingly.
- (12) In cooperation with CSOs representing the Yezidi community, develop and undertake extensive awareness-raising efforts aimed at ending the practice of early marriage.
- (13) Take targeted measures to end the practice of bride abductions in a reasonable timeframe, including through legal action, police training, parent education, etc.
- (14) Set up monitoring and reporting mechanisms aimed at identifying cases of girl abductions and responding accordingly.
- (15) In cooperation with CSOs representing the Yezidi community, develop and undertake extensive awareness-raising efforts aimed at ending the practice of girl abductions.

9. See at: <https://www.refworld.org/pdfid/583863b34.pdf>

ARTICLE 28: RIGHT TO EDUCATION

- (1) Yezidi children face a number of education-related issues, ranging from infrastructure (poor condition of school buildings, lack of medical clinics and cafeterias, lack of school transportation) to issues related to the quality of education (curriculum, effective evaluation, quality textbooks, teacher training). The following discussion focuses on issues specific to the Yezidi community identified as priorities by focus-group participants.

Drop-outs

- 1.1) In Armenia, basic education, which includes elementary school (grades 1-4) and middle school (grades 5-9), is mandatory, while secondary education (high school: grades 10-12) is not compulsory but provided free by the State. This system was introduced during the 2006-2007 academic year and replaced the 10-year education system.
- 1.2) According to the UNESCO Institute of Statistics, the school dropout rate in Armenia in 2016 (the most recent data available) was 6.42%.¹⁰ However, according to anecdotal evidence, including the results of focus group discussions and media reports, the rate is much higher in the Yezidi community.
- 1.3) While no reliable state statistics are available on the number of Yezidi children who do not graduate from high school, early dropout has been a problem in the community for decades. The causes are complex and not fully identified. A 2015 Save the Children report on the “Child Rights Situation in Armenia” states that more than 50%¹¹ of dropouts in Armenia are due to social conditions. While this statistic is

10. See at: http://data.uis.unesco.org/Index.aspx?queryid=156&fbclid=IwAR1b-KOWQL2VQleb_rMo-BYXMrmA49bfj-D250idu40iHylphjhfv15wNZQ

11. See at: <https://armenia.savethechildren.net/sites/armenia.savethechildren.net/files/library/book-eng.pdf>

certainly relevant to Yezidi children, there are causes more specific to the Yezidis.

- 1.4) The practice of early marriage is one factor that significantly contributes to dropout among Yezidi girls. As described above, many Yezidi girls marry at the age of 12 or 13. In general, girls who marry at a young age immediately drop out of school and have no prospect of continuing their education.¹²
- 1.5) According to participants of the focus groups, another reason is that in the Yezidi communities, due to a number of issues, children's education, particularly girls' education, is not prioritized. This is a result of the poor quality of education in village schools, the discriminatory attitudes faced by children in school that discourage children and the general belief that for Yezidi boys it is more important to leave school and start working as early as possible and for Yezidi girls it is more important to leave school and get married.
- 1.6) Poor or absent infrastructure also contributes to the situation. In at least 10 villages with a majority Yezidi population, no high-schools are available. (In Armenia, not all schools include high-school classes; some only provide primary and secondary school education). With no local schools available and no public transportation to attend schools in other communities, Yezidi children are unable to continue their education. The issue is especially difficult for girls, who, as a rule, are not allowed to travel long distances alone.
- 1.7) According to the Ministry of Education and Science, (at the time of writing, Ministry of Education, Science, Culture and Sport), 369 Yezidi children were enrolled in high-school education for the 2018-19 academic year. 44 Yezidi children have dropped out of school in 9th grade: 25 girls and 19 boys.

12. See at: <https://www.rferl.org/a/armenia-yazidi-girls-school/29912653.html>

1.8) The 2016 Report on “The Violation of Yezidi Women’s Rights to Education” by the “Sinjar” Yezidi National Union provides the following data on 3 schools for the period of 2004-2015¹³:

- Artashat school: out of 84 Yezidi girls, 37 completed 9th grade, only 3 completed 12th grade.
- Nalbandyan school: out of 55 Yezidi girls, 41 completed 9th grade, 14 completed 12th grade.
- Ferik school: out of 25 Yezidi girls, 22 completed 9th grade (no 10th-12th grades available).

Extensive absence from school due to seasonal work

- 1.9) Most Yezidis live in rural communities where children miss school for weeks at a time because they are needed to support agricultural work. They can be found helping their families with agricultural work, often carrying heavy objects, working under the sun for several hours, and operating heavy machinery. While this is not specific to Yezidi communities and applies to remote villages across Armenia, when combined with other education-related challenges, it creates a particularly difficult situation for Yezidi children.
- 1.10) The issue of children supporting their families through agricultural labour has not been fully explored by the government, and no statistics are available on the frequency and duration of children’s absence from school. However, the issue was raised by nearly all participants in our six focus groups, as well as in several reports by local CSOs and international organizations. In 2008, two different UNICEF-supported studies, “Child Labour in Armenia” and “School Wastage Study Focusing on Student Absenteeism in Armenia” revealed a link between student absenteeism, dropout rates and child labour. According to the findings, an

13. See at: <https://eexpress.am/en/2016/01/29/yazidi-girls-in-armenia-are-denied-their-right-to-education-report.html>

average of 6.1 percent or about 3,500 children aged 7-18 were involved in some kind of work in Armenia and more than 40 percent of children interviewed during the study were not attending school at all.¹⁴

- 1.11) When asked why children miss school, most focus-group participants (both children and parents) said families are unable to do all the necessary work without help and cannot afford to hire outside assistance. *“Agriculture is our only way of making profit. And it’s a very small profit. Most people living in these villages live in poverty. They don’t like making their children work. But they have to, otherwise they won’t survive.” (Yezidi mother).*
- 1.12) A distressing fact is that while child labor arises largely because of poverty, it only serves to prolong and deepen the poverty cycle by keeping children away from school.

Discrimination

- 1.13) Discrimination against Yezidi children takes many forms. Several forms of discrimination on the grounds of religious beliefs are described above. These practices contribute to the perception that being Christian is a fundamental part of living in Armenia and all other religious beliefs, opinions, traditions and identities are “abnormal”.
- 1.14) Another form of discrimination against Yezidi children stems from the biased attitudes of school teachers and administration as well as parents of non-Yezidi children. Such attitudes are rooted in the stereotype of Yezidi children as being incapable of studying, uninterested in education, and consequently not worth the effort of teachers. The 2018 U.S. State Department Human Rights Report¹⁵ describes an unnamed village in which parents complained that the non-Yezidi school principal and teachers repeatedly

14. See at: https://www.unicef.org/media/media_46200.html

15. See at: https://am.usembassy.gov/wp-content/uploads/sites/92/hrr2018_arm.pdf

expressed contempt for Yezidi children and failed to ensure they received a quality education.

- 1.15) School classes sometimes include propaganda against minority religions. Stigmatized as “sects”, nationalist groups such as One Nation regularly describe minority religions as harmful, anti-Armenian phenomena that “destroy the Armenian family and community”, creating an atmosphere of hostility against children of minority groups. Unfortunately, such extremist views also seep into classrooms, especially during classes where patriotic and military-patriotic values are routinely glorified (Armenian History, Armenian Literature, Military Science, etc.).
- 1.16) As described above, wide-spread negative attitudes towards Yezidis are so deeply ingrained, that the word “Yezidi” is used in everyday language, including in schools and on television/radio as an insult. However, due to a number of causes, including lack of anti-discrimination legislation, limited awareness about discrimination and the absence of effective monitoring mechanisms, few actual cases of discrimination are documented.

Language

- 1.17) Yezidi children in Armenia face two language-related challenges. Most Yezidi children grow up speaking their native tongue and have little or no command of Armenian. This creates significant difficulties during the first year of school, where all classes are taught in Armenian. With no pre-school educational services available (most Yezidi villages do not have kindergartens) and no special/additional language classes, children often struggle in school and fall behind their Armenian-speaking classmates. This issue further perpetuates the perception of teachers that Yezidi children are incapable of learning: language difficulties are perceived as limited intellectual incapacity or lack of motivation.

- 1.18) The second language-related challenge is the lack of quality Yezidi language classes. Once Yezidi children overcome the initial challenge of learning the Armenian language, they slowly shift to reading, writing and communicating largely in Armenian. The predominance of Armenian in school, on television, in arts and literature, often leads to Yezidi children forgetting their native language. The issue is exacerbated by the lack of quality Yezidi language classes. Only a few schools offer Yezidi language classes. While the classes are state-sanctioned, they are not a part of the formal academic program, take place at the end of the school day and are not regulated like other school classes. As a result, children and parents complain that the classes are largely ineffective, do not adhere to any standards and do not contribute to improved knowledge of the Yezidi language. With no formal certification for Yezidi language teachers, most teachers in charge of this class are simply representatives of the Yezidi community, with no pedagogical training or experience.

Recommendations

- (2) Regularly compile and publicize data on dropouts disaggregated by age, gender, ethnic/religious identity, location, etc.
- (3) Undertake comprehensive in-depth research on the causes and effects of dropout of Yezidi children.
- (4) Create effective monitoring and reporting mechanisms aimed at identifying cases of dropout and providing appropriate responses (including financial assistance) to ensure the return of children to school.
- (5) Take targeted measures to end the practice of early marriage in a reasonable timeframe, including through legal action, police training, parent education, etc.
- (6) Undertake extensive awareness-raising measures targeted at Yezidi parents and children on the right to education, with a special focus on prioritizing girls' education.

- (7) Take targeted measures to create all necessary infrastructure to ensure that all Yezidi children of high-school age have access to high-school education, including through the construction of schools and the provision of transportation to school.
- (8) Take targeted measures to end the practice of child labor in a reasonable timeframe, including through awareness-raising, parent education, legal action, etc.
- (9) Create effective monitoring and reporting mechanisms aimed at identifying cases of extensive absenteeism and providing appropriate response (including financial assistance) to ensure the return of children to school.
- (10) Carry out extensive awareness-raising and public education efforts aimed at addressing discriminatory attitudes against Yezidi children, including through at-school programs.
- (11) Carry out regular teacher training aimed at ensuring inclusive and non-discriminatory approaches to education and, specifically, inclusive methods of working with Yezidi children.
- (12) Adopt effective and comprehensive anti-discrimination legislation. Ensure that effective mechanisms, including monitoring mechanisms, reporting mechanisms and an Equality Body, are in place to ensure the implementation of such legislation. Ensure that minority representatives, including individuals and groups, are included in the development of legislation and implementation mechanisms. Carry out targeted efforts aimed at raising awareness about anti-discrimination legislation among the general population and minority groups.
- (13) Provide additional, free-of-charge Armenian-language classes for Yezidi children prior to/during the first school year.
- (14) Ensure that quality Yezidi language classes are available to all Yezidi children throughout the whole course of school education.

RECOMMENDED QUESTIONS TO ASK THE GOVERNMENT OF ARMENIA DURING THE CONSTRUCTIVE DIALOGUE

Questions on Legislation

- (1) Please inform the Committee about plans to adopt effective and comprehensive anti-discrimination legislation. In particular, please describe what implementation mechanisms, including reporting and monitoring mechanisms, are planned to be introduced. Please describe any plans to create an effective Equality Body. Please inform the Committee how representatives of ethnic and religious minorities, as well as other minority communities, have been involved in the development of anti-discrimination legislation and implementation mechanisms.
- (2) Please inform the Committee about the reasons why the rights of children from Armenia's ethnic and religious minorities are not adequately represented in the following documents: 1) The Strategic Plan on the Protection of the Rights of the Child, 2) RA State Plan on the Development of Education until 2030 and 3) The Plan and Timeline on the Introduction of Universal Inclusive Education in Armenia. Please inform the Committee about specific plans (including timeframe, budgetary and human resource allocations and responsible bodies) in place to revise the three documents for better inclusion of the rights of ethnic and religious minority children.
- (3) Please inform the Committee about specific plans (including timeframe, budgetary and human resource allocations and responsible bodies) to introduce inclusive decision-making practices to ensure that representatives of minority groups have meaningful participation in all relevant decision-making processes.
- (4) Please inform the Committee about specific awareness-raising efforts undertaken by the State to a) raise awareness of minority rights among the general population and b) raise the legal consciousness of minority representatives. Please also inform

about specific plans (including timeframe, budgetary and human resource allocations and responsible bodies) to carry out such awareness-raising efforts in the near future.

Questions on the Right of the Child to Freedom of Thought, Conscience and Religion

- (5) Please inform the Committee about specific plans to enable students to opt-out of the History of the Church class in the mandatory school program.
- (6) Please inform the Committee about specific efforts undertaken to ensure that children are not required to participate in religious practices such as prayer, reading from the Bible, trips to religious sites, engaging with clergy, etc. Please also inform the Committee about specific plans (including timeframe, budgetary and human resource allocations and responsible bodies) to undertake such efforts in the near future.
- (7) Please inform the Committee about specific awareness-raising and public education efforts undertaken by the State among religious and ethnic minority groups to increase awareness of their rights and freedoms.
- (8) Please inform the Committee about any teacher training efforts carried out by the State to ensure inclusive and non-discriminatory approaches to education and, specifically, inclusive methods of working with Yezidi children.

Questions on Violence and Abuse

- (9) Please inform the Committee on statistics on early marriage in the Yezidi community of Armenia. How many cases of early marriage have taken place during the past decade? Please provide data disaggregated by age, gender and location. Please specifically provide information about the number of underage girls married to men over 18.
- (10) Please inform the Committee about specific efforts carried out by the State to end the practice of early marriage. Please also

inform the Committee about specific plans (including timeframe, budgetary and human resource allocations and responsible bodies) to end this practice.

- (11) Please inform the Committee about monitoring and reporting mechanisms aimed at identifying cases of early marriage. Please also inform the Committee about specific plans (including timeframe, budgetary and human resource allocations and responsible bodies) to establish such mechanisms.
- (12) Please provide the Committee statistical data on bride abductions in the Yezidi community of Armenia. How many cases have taken place during the past decade? Please provide data disaggregated by age, gender and location.
- (13) Please inform the Committee about specific efforts carried out by the State to end the practice of bride abductions. Please also inform the Committee about specific plans (including timeframe, budgetary and human resource allocations and responsible bodies) to end this practice.

Questions on Education

- (14) Please provide to the Committee data and statistics on dropout of Yezidi children from school, disaggregated by age, gender, location, etc. Overall, what percent of Yezidi children has graduated from school during the past decade? How does this number compare to the overall population in Armenia?
- (15) Please inform the Committee about the causes leading to dropout of Yezidi children from school.
- (16) Please inform the Committee about any specific efforts undertaken by the State to address the issue of dropout of Yezidi children. Please also inform about any specific plans (including timeframe, budgetary and human resource allocations and responsible bodies) to address the issue.
- (17) Please inform the Committee about any plans to introduce effective monitoring and reporting mechanisms aimed at

identifying cases of dropout and providing appropriate response (including financial assistance) to ensure the return of children to school.

- (18) Please inform the Committee about specific measures carried out by the State to end the practice of child labor in Armenia, particularly within the Yezidi community. Please also inform about any specific plans (including timeframe, budgetary and human resource allocations and responsible bodies) to address the issue.
- (19) Please inform the Committee about the number of villages, specifically villages with large Yezidi communities, with no high-schools. Please also inform the Committee about specific plans (including timeframe, budgetary and human resource allocations and responsible bodies) to ensure access to high-school education for children from these villages.
- (20) Please inform the Committee about specific measures carried out by the State to ensure that Yezidi children are provided with the necessary support to learn the Armenian language prior to/during their first year of school. Please also inform about any specific plans (including timeframe, budgetary and human resource allocations and responsible bodies) to provide such support.
- (21) Please inform the Committee about measures carried out by the State to ensure that all Yezidi children have access to quality Yezidi language education, including through monitoring, teacher education, development of standards, etc.

