PROBLEMS OF EARLY MARRIAGE AND SCHOOL DROPOUTS IN YEZIDI COMMUNITIES IN ARMENIA

Problems of Early Marriage and School Dropout in the Yezidi Community in Armenia

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Summary

"The problem of early marriage and school dropouts in the Yezidi community in Armenia" report was produced within **Empowerment of Yezidi Women and Girls in Armenia** Project implemented by the **Eurasia Partnership Foundation,** supported by the Bulgarian Development Aid.

The report comprises two parts. The first part – Literature Review – was prepared by Expert **Alina Hovhannisyan,** with reliance on academic literature, international practices, and official statistics. The second part of the report builds on analysis of the survey findings, administered by the **Center for Educational Research and Consulting in September–November 2021.** The survey report was prepared by **Marina Galstyan,** expert from the Center for Educational Research and Consulting.

To accomplish the survey, the Center worked closely with "Sinjar" National Yezidi Union NGO.

The report focuses on the **problem of school dropouts among children from Yezidi community,** representing the largest ethnic minority in Armenia.

Qualitative research method was used in correspondence of the purpose of the research. **It included:**

> **Review of secondary sources**

- Academic literature

- Statistical data

- Previous surveys

- Legal acts

- International practice

- Formal written requests for information (sent to the Ministry of ESCS, regional administrations, schools, and municipalities of Armenia)

> **Review of primary sources**

> Interviews: total of 44 interviews, including:

- Interviews with school pupils, including school dropouts

- Interviews with parents, including those of school dropouts

- Interviews with school principals and municipality heads

- Expert interviews with representatives of international, local organizations, and individual researchers

- Group discussions: total of 8 discussions, including:

  - Focus group discussions with school pupils

  - Focus group discussions with parents

The literature review briefly covers the specificities of the lifestyle of the Yezidi population in Armenia, as well as on the relevance and role of compulsory education in their life. Review of official statistics makes such overview more comprehensive from the perspective of school visits and absenteeism. The problem was considered also in the context of international experience with particular focus on the reasons behind school dropouts in various countries and potential causes of early marriage, as well as the ways of their identification and elimination. The problems of compulsory education were analyzed within the framework of new educational challenges posed by COVID-19 pandemic.

The report covers existing perceptions and standpoints regarding education in the Yezidi community, including those of parents, children, and education managers. The report is an attempt to understand the aspects of interdependence and interrelations of early school leaving and early marriage, ethnic and cultural specificities.

Main **findings** of the report are as follows:

- Attitude towards education has significantly improved in the Yezidi community in the past ten years in several regards. Earlier, the issue of school dropouts and negative disposition towards education was implicit, and the community did not consider it a problem. But nowadays, leaving school or failure to attend school is considered a problem in the Yezidi community.
- The community has started to acknowledge the importance of education in terms of profession, as well as career, and attainment of life skills.
- In elementary grades, the children of Yezidi communities are motivated to learn; however, motivation level drops over the years conditioned by the level of parents' literacy needed for completing the assigned homework. The problem suggests a clear

correlation between poverty and academic achievement, typical not only of the Yezidi communities but also other socially vulnerable families.

- Learning continuity is affected by the parents' level of satisfaction with the quality of education, as well as career orientation and awareness. Children are not informed of the vocational/professional education institutions, fields of study, and admission procedures.
- In terms of access to education, Yezidi communities face several issues, such as
    - Lack of kindergartens and preschools;
    - Insufficient professional skills of the teaching staff, including discrimination towards Yezidi pupils;
    - School facilities and equipment;
    - Quality of teaching the Yezidi language;
    - Complexity of the curriculum;
    - Distance between the education institutions – school, high school, vocational education institution – and the communities;
    - Impracticability of passing the threshold of admission examinations; and
    - Lack of absence of extracurricular classes.
- The problem of school dropouts among Yezidi children is driven by national and cultural grounds, as well as socio-economic and organizational aspects.
- Not only girls but also boys in the Yezidi communities drop out of school. Moreover, the issue of school dropouts is more acute in high school – grades 10-11.
- Main reasons behind dropping out of school by children of Yezidi communities are as follows:

    - The community is afraid of assimilation; therefore, the community finds education as a process conducive to assimilation.

    - It is customary for girls to leave school for marriage, or avoidance of it, while for boys – dropping out of school is mostly driven by family roles or intention to migrate.

    - Education, especially high school, is not accessible in all communities.

- General education schools and the education system are not ready to organize online education.
- The Yezidi community also encountered problems during remote learning – most of teachers were not able to deliver the content to the pupils, and the pupils did not have adequate technical resources to join and participate in online lessons.
- Lack or absence of technical resources in families, number of school-age children, and parents' busyness also were a barrier to participation in online classes.
- Distance education posed another risk for the Yezidi pupils, i.e., after remote learning parents may choose not to send their children to school or the culture of learning without

attending school may prevail. This circumstance allows the Yezidi pupils to get access to education without getting out of house. However, it also contains a risk of being deprived access to complete education.

Preface

The largest ethno-religious minority living in Armenia is the Yezidi community – 35,308 people.[1] Yezidis live mainly in Armavir, Aragatsotn, Ararat, Kotayk, Shirak, and Lori regions (Marz).[2]

Twelve-year secondary education (K–12) is compulsory in Armenia: after completing grade 9, children must go to high school, grades 10–12, or pursue studies at primary or middle vocational institutions. In regard to this, the Yezidi community of Armenia faces several problems related to education, influenced by the socio-cultural factors and peculiarities.[3]

Early marriage is one of factors significantly conducive to school dropouts, essentially among girls. In the Yezidi community, it is common for girls to marry at the age of 13–15. As a rule, girls who get married at a tender age are forced to leave school immediately, without any prospect of further education.[4]

Villages that are populated mostly by Yezidis have other educational problems as well. Most children drop out of formal education; their level of education is below the requirements for their age, and candidates to tertiary and vocational institutions are rare. There are dire problems in terms of early marriage, lack of knowledge of the Armenian language, and lack of active participation in social life. Community development is not progressing, and education is not seen as a priority and a guarantee of well-off future.

Therefore, it is important to find out how early marriages and other factors affect the dropout level among Yezidi children.

The study was conducted in July–November 2021.

Goal and Objective of the Study

The goal of the study is to explore the problems of early marriage and school dropouts in Yezidi community.

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[1] Statistical Committee of Armenia, 2011 census figures https://www.armstat.am/file/doc/99478358.pdf [20.10.2021].

[2] Issues related to the rights and opportunities for Yezidi girls residing in Armenia, Isabel Mkhail Broyan, Parandzem Paryan, Hayastan Martirosyan, Eviya Hovhannisyan, https://epfarmenia.am/sites/default/files/Document/Yezidi_Girls_Research_EPF_Arm.pdf [20.10.2021].

[3] Implementation of Yezidi children's rights in Armenia, Alternative report to the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, Eurasia Partnership Foundation, "Human Rights Research Center" Nongovernmental organization, "Sinjar" Yezidi National Union: https://epfarmenia.am/hy/document/Alternative-report-to-the-UN-committee-on-the-rights-of-the-child-with-a-focus-on-Yezidi_children-in-Armenia-arm

[4] ibid.

Objectives of the study are as follows:

In Part 1 (Review of secondary sources)

1. Analyze the attitude of the Yezidi population about compulsory schooling and early marriage, according to references available.

2. Understand the specificities, main causes, and potential consequences of dropping out of school in the socio-economic context.

3. Analyze the international practice of revealing, intervening, and preventing early school dropouts.

4. Analyze the approach of the Republic of Armenia on identifying and guiding the school dropouts.

5. Look into the challenges to education posed by the COVID-19 pandemic.

In Part 2 (Review of primary sources)

1. Explore pupils'/parents' opinion of the quality of and access to school education.

2. Explore the main reasons behind dropping out of school.

3. Explore how early marriages affect the learning continuity of Yezidi girls.

4. Find out the percentage of children in Yezidi community who drop out of school and draw the gender and age profile.

5. Explore how shift to distance education during pandemic has affected the inclusion of Yezidi pupils in education.

Methodology

Following methods of data generation were employed to achieve the goals and objectives of the study:

Desk review

- Scholarly literature

- Statistical data

- Previous surveys

- Laws and regulations

- International practices

- Formal written inquiries (addressed to the RA Ministry of ESCS, Regional administrations, schools, and municipalities)

Interviews

The method of individual in-depth interviews was employed to explore the school pupils', parents', education managers' individual opinions, perceptions, and experiences regarding teaching and learning and school.

- Interviews with school pupils, including school dropouts: 15 interviews

- Interviews with parents, including school dropouts: 15 interviews

- Interviews with principals and municipality heads: 9 interviews

- Expert interviews with representatives of international and local organizations, individual researchers: 5 interviews.

Group discussions

Group discussions were held with school pupils and parents to identify the beliefs and standpoints of the group.

Focus group discussions were held among school pupils and parents: 4 group discussions with parents and 4 group discussions with school students – two-by-two discussions with girls and boys and two-by-two discussions with mothers and fathers.

Given the risks and restrictions posed by COVID-19 pandemic in Armenia, some interviews were held online.

Sampling

The study was conducted in the following communities with account of the number of Yezidi population: Zartonk, Tandzut, Artashat, Ferik, Yeghgnut communities in **Armavir Marz** and Alagyaz community **in Aragatsotn Marz.**

The pupils and parents were selected through targeted sampling method.

Limitations

- Following issues took place in the process of engaging the parents: some of them avoided interviews and discussions and some participated but kept away from talking about deep educational problems and actual causes of removing their children from school.

- It was uneasy for children to freely express their opinion and ideas during group discussions.

- Survey participants avoided indicating the incidence of early marriages, as in some cases the girls were married at the age below the eligibility age – at 14, 15, 16.[5]

The research team introduced the goal of the survey, highlighted that it does not imply any legal consequences, and emphasized the confidentiality and anonymity of the survey.

Part 1. Desk review

Introduction

Throughout history, human migration driven by socio-economic and political security or other reasons has brought changes to the demography in most countries making them multicultural. It generated a new demand for setting an appropriate environment to create equitable and unbiased opportunities for all groups of the society regardless of their religious, ethnic, or other associations. Presence and protection of parity in this new realm is crucial. Monitoring the relevance of existing laws for all groups of the society has become critical.

While Armenia is not a country receiving many refugees and migrants, it is home to several national minorities, such as Yezidis, Greeks, Jews, Assyrians, Russians, and it regularly makes effort to implement efficient integration programs. For instance, cultural centers are established, such as the Yezidi temple in Aknalich, which is particularly remarkable.

According to the Framework Convention on Protection of Rights of National Minorities,[6] in effect since 1998, protection of the rights and freedoms of individuals belonging to minorities is an integral part of international protection of human rights. Within the framework of this convention, Armenia, as well as CoE member/associate states, commits to designing integration

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[5] The RA Family Code sets 18 years of age as minimum marriage age for the males, and 17 – for females.
[6] See https://www.arlis.am/DocumentView.aspx?DocID=81178

policies for national minorities, ensuring the protection of human rights and prohibiting any discrimination.[7]

Following its independence, Armenia embarked on designing policies to protect minorities' rights. The Framework Convention was drafted jointly with the CoE and went into effect in 1998, as said earlier. It incorporated the protection of almost all rights and nondiscrimination of national minorities. Later, in 2000, Armenia launched the monitoring of the Framework Convention. The established advisory committee started a dialogue with all the parties to the Framework Convention, including the Armenian authorities and national minorities. Despite regular efforts by the state to integrate the minorities, there is still some social isolation. Social situation, lack of access to infrastructure, deteriorated or hardly passable roads, weak or no links with centers of governance, cultural nonparticipation, and other factors are conducive to it.[8] In some ethnic minority communities, the language is not a limitation to interacting with the locals; hence, most of Yezidis understand and speak Armenian, while Russian minorities mostly understand but rarely speak Armenian. Isolation is mostly driven by internal beliefs. In this case, for minorities isolation is a means to retain their national identity, which they probably prefer over assimilation (adaptation or acceptance of the customs and rules of the host country).[9]

Yezidis had settled in Armenia from early times. However, they are not open due to absence of their own statehood and risk of assimilation. Due to this fact, lack of full integration may lead to a closed circle of friends, nonparticipation in formal education, and preference for early marriage. As a result, old-fashioned customs and traditions persist, even though nowadays they are incompatible with fundamental human rights.

Resolution No 154-N promulgated by the Armenian Government in 2021 aims to "*regulate the legal relations pertaining to identification and referral of school-age children left out of compulsory education.*"

This new regulation stipulates the child's right to education and may drive the development of a statistical data collection and monitoring instrument, making it possible to better understand the educational problems among vulnerable groups (in this case – Yezidi communities) and within the laws, identify and preclude, through essential measures, cases of leaving the school.

In this regard, it is important to consider the experience of various countries from the perspective of key measures for identification and presentation of school dropouts and early marriages. Moreover, it is essential to take account of the changes brought by COVID-19 pandemic, in

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[7] Advisory Committee on the Framework Convention on Protection of National minorities, 2nd Opinion about Armenia, approved on May 12, 2006, Summary, Pages 4-5,
https://www.gov.am/u_files/file/kron/2d%20Komiteji%20kartsiqy%20hajeren%202006.pdf
[8] Hovhannisyan H., Freedom of Religion and Children and Youth belonging to Minority Groups, 2014, page 20, https://rm.coe.int/16807023b8
[9] See https://www.dw.com/en/opinion-integration-doesnt-mean-assimilation/a-3126467

particular, the challenges and potential opportunities of distance education among children of vulnerable groups (e.g., children who are at risk to drop out of school).

Main Characteristics of the Yezidi Nation

"Persons permanently residing in the Republic of Armenia and holding RA citizenship who differ from the main population of Armenia by their ethnic origin are qualified as national minority in the RA."[10] According to the 2011 census, national minorities in Armenia comprise around 1.8 percent of the population. There are 11 self-organized ethnic communities in Armenia – Assyrian, Yezidi, Kurdish, Russian, Belarusian, Ukrainian, Georgian, Jewish, Polish, Greek, and German.[11] The Yezidi community is the largest ethnic-religious minority in Armenia with a population of around 35,308 Yezidis, according to the 2011 census.[12] Yezidis are quite a closed ethnic-doctrinal group for whom faith is crucial and attributive. According to the Yezidi religion, every Yezidi should be guided by religious commandments aiming to preserve the purity of religion.[13] Religious beliefs often become incompatible with the contemporary human rights – particularly, the customs inherited from ancient times, such as early marriages of Yezidi girls (often against their own will,[14] missing school classes, or nonattendance, etc.). Such occurrences may be explained by tradition, as well as historical reasons. For instance, in the Ottoman Empire, for years it was prohibited for Yezidis to get education (it is unknown whether the ban was on general education or only on schooling) most probably not to be obliged to study Islamic texts and the Qur'an.[15] Most Yezidis preferred home schooling or would get no education at all. According to a Turkish author (Birgül Açikyildiz, 2014), even until recently, writing and reading were prohibited among Yezidis, except for the sheikhs from some casts, as changes in literacy level could have seriously affected the hierarchy of Yezidi society and the functioning of the clan structure.[16]

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[10] Vardanyan H., Organizing the general education for national minorities in the RA; YSU collection of scholarly articles; Yerevan, YSU Publishing, 2018, page 217,
http://ysu.am/files/collection_of_scientific_articles_of_ysu_sss_1.2(25)_pages_217-229.pdf
[11] ibid.
[12] Statistical Committee of Armenia, Table 5.2-1, Population (urban, rural) by nationality, gender and mother tongue, page 275, https://www.armstat.am/file/doc/99478358.pdf
[13] Isabel Broyan Mkhail, Parandzem Paryan, Hajasyan Martirosyan, Eviya Hovhannisyan; Issues related to the Rights and Opportunities for Yezidi Girls Residing in Armenia Eurasia Partnership Foundation 2020, page 6. https://epfarmenia.am/sites/default/files/Document/Yezidi_Girls_Research_EPF_Arm.pdf
[14] See Yezidi Girls, 2021, https://we.fo/1540088588
[15] Isabel Broyan Mkhail, Parandzem Paryan, Hajasyan Martirosyan, Eviya Hovhannisyan; Issues related to the Rights and Opportunities for Yezidi Girls Residing in Armenia Eurasia Partnership Foundation 2020, page 8, https://epfarmenia.am/sites/default/files/Document/Yezidi_Girls_Research_EPF_Arm.pdf
[16] (Literecy among Yazidi IDPs, An investigation into adult literacy rates and attitudes toward literacy among displaced Yazidis in Iraqi Kurdistan, Lena Insulander and Adam Bott, June 2019, page 4. https://www.jointhelpkurdistan.org/wp-content/uploads/Literacy-among-Yazidi-IDPs.pdf

The 2014 genocide in Iraq forced the Yezidi nation into migrating to different countries, including Turkey, Greece, Syria, and others. This fact, certainly, could have intensified the problems among the Yezidi youth driven by the legal, integration, and language barriers.

A 2019 literacy survey conducted among the Yezidi population in one of the camps in Kurdistan revealed high level of illiteracy.[17] Almost half of female Yezidis in the age group of 15 and above and around one-third of male representatives could not read and write. This survey also demonstrates serious gender gaps. Most girls do not receive education, as it is not sufficiently important and as much of a priority as the family and kids. However, nowadays most women with no education would no longer agree to such a viewpoint. The new generation is more inclined to getting education.

According to the data received by the RA Ministry of ESCS in October 2021, in the 2018–2019 school year, 3,681 Yezidi children were enrolled in the schools countrywide and 3,612 – in the next academic year (see Tables 1 and 2).

Table 1. Enrollment of Yezidi pupils by grades, 2018–2019 school year

Region	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	Total
Aragatsotn	82	107	80	82	75	82	76	84	61	22	9	11	771
Ararat	29	52	58	39	56	65	66	48	45	21	10	16	505
Armavir	129	174	182	192	168	165	161	150	141	87	73	57	1,679
Gegharkunik						2		2					4
Yerevan	7	42	34	30	28	27	38	24	25	9	3	5	272
Lori	1	12	17	10	3	4	9	5	6	4	1	0	72
Kotayk	22	40	26	48	33	40	35	21	36	9	9	4	323
Shirak	3	6	8	6	2	8	4	5	4	5	2	1	54
Syunik			1										1
Total	273	433	406	407	365	393	389	339	318	157	107	94	3,681

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[17] See ibid, page 11.

As this data shows, the enrollment of Yezidi pupils is highest in Armavir, Aragatsotn, and Ararat regions and less in Syunik and Gegharkunik regions. It is also apparent that enrollment in grades 10–12 substantially differs from enrollment in other grades. Enrollment in higher grades is significantly lower. The statistic of the next year shows the same trend.

Table 2. Enrollment of Yezidi pupils by grades, 2019–2020 school year

Region	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	Total
Aragatsotn	70	76	104	79	83	73	80	73	84	22	16	9	769
Ararat	28	30	51	57	41	54	60	64	48	23	14	7	477
Armavir	144	129	174	184	190	166	169	155	146	99	71	61	1,688
Gegharkunik						2		2					4
Yerevan	4	9	41	33	30	25	27	39	21	10	6	3	248
Lori	5	1	12	17	10	3	4	9	3	4	4	1	73
Kotayk	20	23	37	27	45	33	38	33	21	11	7	8	303
Shirak	2	3	5	9	5	3	6	4	4	3	4	1	49
Syunik				1									1
Total	273	271	424	407	404	357	386	377	329	172	122	90	3,612

Comparison of data from the two tables proves that school enrollment of Yezidi pupils countrywide has dropped by around 70 percent in one-year period. There are different reasons to it. Main reason is moving abroad. Most have left the education institution after middle school.[18] Approximately 49 pupils left school in the 2018–2019 school year due to the ban on further education.

Table 3. Reasons behind Yezidi pupils dropping out of school, 2018–2019 school year

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[18] Most probably, the Ministry of ESCS means "secondary education" by saying "school" in the below tables.

In 2019–2020 school year school dropouts level essentially decreased. However, the main reasons are still the same.

Table 4. Reasons behind Yezidi pupils dropping out of school, 2019–2020 school year

	Poor academic performance	Completed secondary education	Moved to another school in RA	Moved to another country	Transited to university	Transited to middle VET institution	Transited to primary VET institution	Parents preventing further studies	Total
Aragatsotn	31	5	26		1	2		30	95
Ararat		23	4	53	1	2		3	86
Armavir	1	34	9	142	1	4		9	200
Yerevan		6	4	31			1	3	45
Lori		2	2	6			1	1	12
Kotayk		12	5	39	1	2	6	4	69
Shirak		2	1	8		1	1		13
Total	32	84	51	279	4	12	9	49	520

Aragatsotn		6		7	2			11	26
Ararat		5		15	1			7	28
Armavir		36		27	4	1		8	76
Yerevan		1		6					1
Lori			1						1
Kotayk	1	3		3			1	1	9
Shirak				1					1
Total	1	51	1	59	7	1	1	29	150

The Role and Relevance of Personal Development and Socio-Economic Context

Education is an opportunity for socio-economic mobility, as well as a means of avoiding poverty. According to EU data, efforts were taken in the last decade to improve access to education and school enrollment, especially for girls. As of 2018, around 260 million children (around one-fifth of the world's population in that age group) are left out of schools. Approximately half of the kids and adolescents do not meet the basic literacy and numeracy standards.[19]

Everyone – a child, a young person, a mature individual – should be able to benefit from learning opportunities to meet their basic needs for education. The latter is about main learning tools (such as literacy, speaking, arithmetic comprehension and problem solving), as well as the core content of instruction (such as knowledge, skills, values, attitudes, etc.). All this is essential for people to survive, enhance their overall capabilities, lead a decent life and have a decent job, improve their life quality, and make informed decisions, as well as pursue further studies.[20]

The World Bank has significantly contributed to the improvement of education. Namely, during 2000–2012 the level of school dropouts dropped from around 100 million children to 58 million. It is a significant achievement, but this figure is still a serious challenge. Moreover, most school graduates often have no basic skills needed in future life and work. Educating children, especially girls, may positively influence poverty eradication.

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[19] See https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/education/
[20] See https://www.ohchr.org/en/resources/educators/human-rights-education-training/9-world-declaration-education-all-1990

Studies suggest that an additional year in secondary education for girls may increase their future earnings by 10–20 percent. In addition to financial well-being, education is an important tool to improve health, gender parity, peace, and stability.[21] Education is crucial as a fundamental human right. It boosts individual freedom and promotes child empowerment, well-being, and development while securing their ability to understand and press for their rights throughout life.[22]

Girls Dropping out of Compulsory Education

While opportunities, resources, and technologies have seen an incredible spark in the 21st century, in many parts of the world there are kids who are deprived of schooling. From this perspective, girls are more vulnerable. It is confirmed by the fact that two-thirds of illiterate people in the world are females. Such a gender gap is specific to many countries. The Global Compaign for Education presents it as an indispensable right interconnected with all human rights.[23] According to the sources of the Guardian, about three years ago the ten countries with the worst record of educating girls are in sub-Saharan Africa, except Afghanistan (it ranks the fourth), known for high level of gender disparities in preschool education. The list includes Chad, Mali, Burkina Faso, Liberia, Ethiopia, and other countries.[24] According to such data, approximately more than half of girls in mentioned countries married before turning 18, and on average every forth labored in childhood. According to the World Bank, around 130 million girls are deprived of access to education globally, while they could become professionals in various spheres, contribute to the development of the global economy, public health, and promote sustainability. In this regard, the world has lost trillions of dollars.[25] Even in countries where the government makes substantial investment in education (such as Ethiopia and Nigeria), a lot of factors, such as extreme poverty, child marriage, cultural and economic conditions, prevented a high number of girls from getting education.[26] Such barriers include proximity of the settlements and unfavorable conditions for commuting, indifference or discrimination from parents and school administration, extreme poverty of the family, early labor and marriage of the pupils, existing traditions and beliefs, etc.

Such reasons may differ from country to country. For example, in Bolivia, even though the Constitution safeguards equal rights for women and men, women are less protected and are more

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[21] See https://www5.worldbank.org/mdgs/education.html
[22] Universal Declaration of Human Rights at 70: 30 Articles on 30 Articles - Article 26, Right to Education, 05 December 2018).
https://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=23977&LangID=E
[23] Global Campaign for Education, Gender Discrimination in Education: The violation of rights of women and girls, Global Campaign for Education, February 2012, page 3).
https://docs.campaignforeducation.org/reports/GCE_INTERIM_Gender_Report.pdf?fbclid=IwAR3j9klfeWPu-LEbaA6RP-upD7u_ai9lnsya4nhlO-NnlUs7kmjaG3TtnMs
[24] See https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2017/oct/11/revealed-the-10-worst-countries-for-girls-to-get-an-education-international-day-girl
[25] See https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/press-release/2018/07/11/not-educating-girls-costs-countries-trillions-of-dollars-says-new-world-bank-report
[26] See 23

often abused and victimized. About 13 percent of adult females can't write and read. Most of women in Bolivia are afraid to be physically, psychologically, or sexually abused by boys, and until the schools guarantee the girl's safety, this problem will continue to negatively affect the girls' and women's access to education.[27]

In Pakistan, only four out of ten women and girls above age of 15 can read and write. Girls' enrollment in high schools is lower (however, the boys' enrollment here is also low). In general, more than eight million girls of school age do not attend school. Like in Bolivia, here too, same types of abuse are common. Here female pupils and teachers face different risks of abuse. In some rural areas, female teachers even leave their jobs.[28]

In Tanzania, about four million women can't read and write. Pupils rarely graduate to high school: this figure was around 32 percent in 2008. One of the reasons is early pregnancies. In 2007–2009, according to the government, total of 25,000 girls were left out of school due to pregnancy (the actual figure may be higher). In case of nonattendance in high school, this reason is even more relevant than the financial issues.[29]

In Armenia, literacy among women is 99 percent. However, cases of nonattendance in Armenia are driven by difficult financial situation and children's early entry into the workforce. In rural areas, lack of a school in the community or means of transportation is also a reason for nonattendance. Cases of dropouts from compulsory education prevail especially among the national minorities residing in Armenia, where rigid stereotypes and culture may force many girls into marriage, after which they leave school. As a result, very few go to and finish high school. According to available publications and life stories, Yezidi girls marry even before high school (at the age of 13–14). It is assumed that the girls manage to attain only basic school knowledge but do not manage to develop self-regulation (it's part of the high school curriculum). In addition to these restrictions, the situation can be aggrevated by biased treatment by those close to them. According to the Alternative Report on the Implementation of Yezidi Children's Rights in Armenia,[30] schoolteachers, administrators, as well as parents of other pupils, believe that Yezidi children are not capable of learning. It may cause isolation of Yezidi children from peers and lead to lower academic performance, creating a risk of early dropping out of school. A recent survey on "Issues related to the rights and opportunities for Yezidi girls residing in Armenia," published by EPF and conducted in Ferik and Alagyaz communities, describes the Yezidi girls' educational limitations driven not only by traditional values but also by the impact of lack of infrastructure (in particular, high school or transportation). Despite social conditions, the present school-age Yezidi generation does plan to pursue further education and has

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[27] See 22, page 5
[28] Ibid. page16
[29] Ibid., page 17
[30] Alternative Report to the UN Committee on Child's Rights on Implementation of Yezidi Children's rights in Armenia, Eurasia Partnership Foundation, "Human Rights Research Center" Nongovernmental organization, "Armavir Development Center" Nongovernmental organization, "Sinjar" Yezidi National Association, page 17. https://epfarmenia.am/sites/default/files/Document/Alternative_report_to_the_UN_committee_on_the_rights_of_the_child_with_a_focus_on_Yezidi_children_in_Armenia_arm.pdf

professional preferences. Unfortunately, they do not always come true. According to the EPF survey, during school years the male pupils gain independence and opportunities to study in other cities or countries, etc. However, for girls this period of maturation takes place in the context of isolation. Due to the fear of being kidnapped or falling short of the gender role, most girls will have to spend most of their time at home doing housework.[31]

The president of the Yezidi National Association and pastors, according to their media interviews, are not against K–12 education but find questionable its compulsory nature. They find that girls who have no learning abilities or who wish to marry at an early age should have an opportunity to finish school in grade 9. It is noteworthy that publication titled "Girls in Yezidi Community Face a Dilemma – School or Marriage"[32] does not contain similar judgements about boys. It gives grounds to conclude that such dispositions are mostly about girls, even though boys often drop out too. It is interesting to understand whether the community leaders' attitude towards K–12 is based only on pupils' abilities or wishes to early marriage, or it is an attempt to preclude the girls' potential independence and future career, which, in its turn, may be an assimilation threat. It is true that the objective of the middle school is to equip pupils with knowledge about human being, nature, and society needed in high school or vocational institution or to perform an age-appropriate job, while the objective of high school is to provide pupils with the knowledge, skills, and competences essential for independent life.[33]

Exploring Early School Leaving by Pupils, Intervention and Prevention in the Global Context

Early school dropout rates are alarming not only at individual level but also for the society and economy. Early school dropout rates are most often correlated with socio-economic and family problems that can be closely interlinked. Hence, comprehensive and cross-sectoral research is needed to thoroughly examine it. It is remarkable that failure to complete school education is a problem not only in developing and underdeveloped countries but also in countries with advanced economy and educational system. According to the 2013 Report "Reducing Early School Leaving: Key Messages and Policy Support,"[34] among European countries, number of early school droupouts in 2012 was particulary high in Turkey[35] (39.6 percent), Spain (24.9 percent), Portugal (20.8 percent), Iceland (20.1 percent), Italy (17.6 percent), United Kingdom (13.5 percent) etc., while lowest figures were observed in Croatia (4.2 percent), Czech Republic (5.5 percent), Lithuania (6.5 percent), Austria (7.6 percent), etc.[36] These figures were calculated also based on the pupils' origin (local and foreign). In mentioned countries, the share of

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[31] Isabel Broyan Mkhail, Parandzem Paryan, Hajasyan Martirosyan, Eviya Hovhannisyan; Issues related to the Rights and Opportunities for Yezidi Girls Residing in Armenia Eurasia Partnership Foundation 2020, page 24. https://epfarmenia.am/sites/default/files/Document/Yezidi_Girls_Research_EPF_Arm.pdf

[32] See https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oWn7QDSl7PI

[33] See https://escs.am/am/static/second-education?s=edu

[34] See https://ec.europa.eu/education/sites/default/files/early-school-leaving-group2013-report_en.pdf

[35] While Turkey is not a European country, it is also covered in this EU report (source).

[36] See 33, page 32.

foreigners is significant in the total number of early school dropouts and is relatively low in the United Kingdom.

United Kingdom: Despite the above-mentioned situation, in the UK regulations on early detection of children leaving school or at risk of leaving and its prevention are adequately framed. "*All schools must also notify the local authority within 5 days of removing a pupil's name from the admission register under any of the grounds mentioned in the regulation.*"[37] It is the responsibility of local authorities to identify school-age children residing in the territory they are responsible for, who are not registered at any school and are not receiving proper education. Such responsibility implies cooperation with parents as a result of which dropouts are returned to school or an alternative form of education. The activities of local authorities are essentially connected with other institutions (such as health or police) that may be needed depending on the reasons behind school leaving. In such cases, parents should oversee the process of their children's education. Pupils may leave school based on the letter from their parents, but it is the school that should notify local authorities about it. The latter checks the content of the parent's application and whether it matches the children's basic needs.

According to the Guidance for Keeping Children Safe in Education adopted in England, children may drop out of school for different reasons, and information about them is important to properly respond to the situation. Forced marriages are also classified to that series of reasons.[38] Such a phenomenon is considered as a form of abuse "for the sake of honor", when girls marry to save the face of the family or community. However, in England forced marriages, as well as child abuse and violation of human rights, are considered a crime and may lead to up to seven years of imprisonment.[39] Schools and colleges may play an important role in it.

Girls, who are forced to marry and often abandon education and personal development, find it impossible to resist their parents' will and end up in oppressed and depressed state of mind. All this may lead to disruptions in social development, limitation of professional and study opportunities, financial dependence, and other limitations of life.

Most girls may find their education meaningless, as there are no prospects because of the upcoming marriage. It may lead to loss of motivation to study, dreams, and study goals. Therefore, low achievement in learning, low scores, incomplete or no homework at all are characteristic of this social group. The school administration, for instance teachers, may notice

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[37] UK Gov. Service, Department for Education, Children missing education, Statutory guidance for local authorities, September 2016, p. 4.
https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/550416/Children_Missing_Education_-_statutory_guidance.pdf

[38] UK Gov. Service, Department for Education, Keeping children safe in education 2021, Statutory guidance for schools and colleges, September 2021 , p. 132).
https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1021914/KCSIE_2021_September_guidance.pdf

[39] See gov.uk, 2013, https://www.gov.uk/guidance/forced-marriage

and essentially react as soon as possible to the situation trying to offer appropriate social services or explaining the pupils their opportunities and informing about their rights. The pupils, in their turn, should be sure that they are heard and their concerns are taken seriously.

It happens that children are not back to school from holidays. In such cases, the school personnel in England are instructed to

- Liaise with the local police domestic abuse unit;

- Contact the forced marriage unit;

- Try to obtain as much information as possible about the absent pupil;

- Establish if there is a history of siblings being forced to marry; and

- Consider speaking to the pupil's friends.

There may be occasions in England when an Education Welfare Officer or the teacher visits the child's family to find out why the pupil is not attending school.[40]

The local police, whenever there is a risk of forced marriage of young people under 18, may take the child away from the family and keep for 72 hours in a safe environment, after which the social service shall come in offering proper accommodation.[41]

In England, local authorities may intervene also in the initial phase, when there is a predicted risk of forced marriage, as well as in case of already consummated marriages.

Turkey: In terms of number of dropouts, Turkey is in leading positions compared to EU Member States. In 2015, around 36.4 percent of pupils left the school early.[42] According to Murcia University (Spain), the reason behind boys and girls leaving school early is essentially the same – poverty. However, the consequences may vary. Forced marriages are still typical for girls in Turkey, which, in its turn, may be the cause and effect of early school leaving.

According to UNICEF, children who start primary school late (often rural children, the poorest children, and refugee children) may struggle to make up for missed content and are at high risk of dropping out. Working children are also more likely than others to drop out of secondary

[40] UK HM Government, Multi-agency practice guidelines: Handling cases of Forced Marriage, June 2014, p. 35 https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/322307/HMG_MULTI_AGENCY_PRACTICE_GUIDELINES_v1_180614_FINAL.pdf
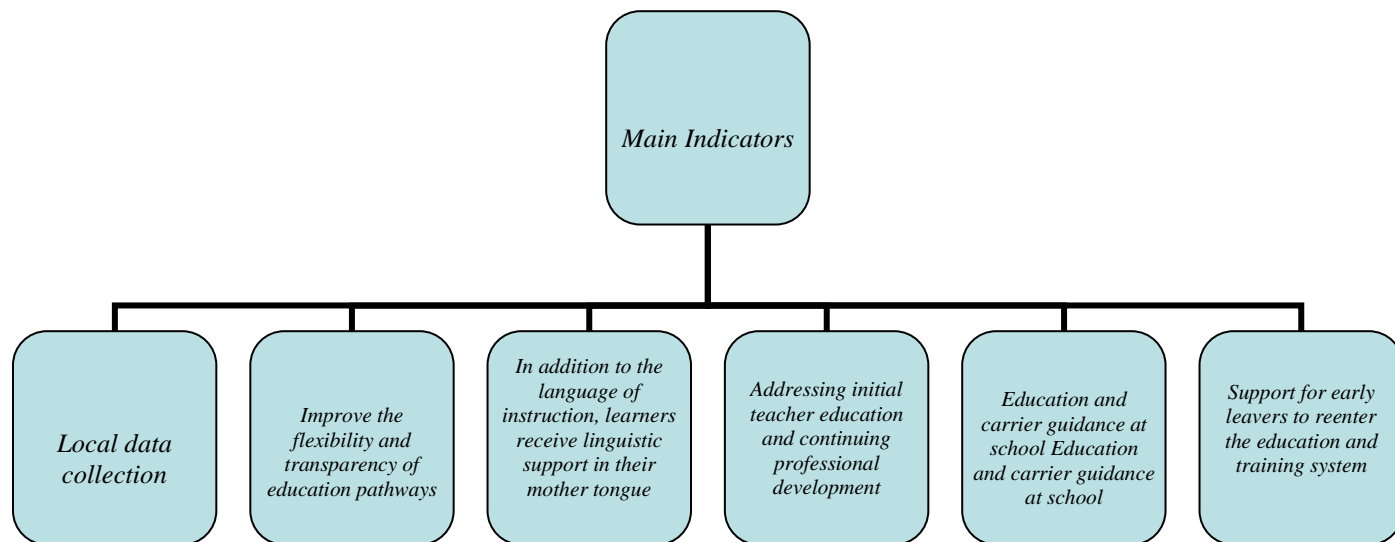
[41] Ibid., page 85

[42] CARMA, Early School Leaving – Statistics, Policies and Good Practices in Collaborative Learning, Paz Prendes-Espinosa, Linda Castañeda, Isabel Gutiérrez, M.Mar Sánchez-Vera, p. 30), https://carma-project.eu/wp-content/uploads/2017/02/WP2-1-Country-specific-report-mapping-data-across-all-7-partner-countries.pdf

school.[43] This group includes especially boys living in rural areas who often leave school for undertaking farming jobs. In addition to the issues of the locals, learning of refugee children is specifically underlined in the context of education reform in Turkey, as they may have multiple challenges on the way of integration in the teaching and learning process, such as language issues or discrimination. The administrative regulation states that ensuring a child's attendance is the responsibility of the parent or a legal guardian, the school administration, national education directorates, education inspectors, elected representatives of the neighborhood, and civilian local authorities.[44] The absence of a pupil is to be constantly monitored by the school administration via the e-School system, and parents are to be immediately informed about it. It also falls under the legal responsibilities of school administration and basic education auditors to identify the causes of child's absenteeism and to work towards resolving financial and nonfinancial causes.[45]

EU Member States: Early leaving from school has multiple forms in Europe. While statistics and causes differ country by country, there are common elements, which are universal. Such issues include, for example, learning difficulties, socio-economic problems, lack of motivation or support, etc. One of headline targets for education in Europe was to reduce the rates of early leaving to below 10 percent by 2020.[46] European countries that have joined together around this goal plan to design, enhance, and implement encompassing strategies and policies. They should include appropriate evidence-based measures of prevention, intervention, and compensation, as shown in Diagram 1.

Diagram 1. Main indicators of early school leaving

Main Indicators

Local data collection

Improve the flexibility and transparency of education pathways

In addition to the language of instruction, learners receive linguistic support in their mother tongue

Addressing initial teacher education and continuing professional development

Education and carrier guidance at school Education and carrier guidance at school

Support for early leavers to reenter the education and training system

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[43] See unicef.org, https://www.unicef.org/turkey/en/education
[44] See UNICEF, 2012, pp. 50-52, https://www.allinschool.org/media/1631/file/Turkey-OOSCI-Country-Study-2012-en.pdf
[45] See ibid, page 53.
[46] European Commission Education and Training, Structural Indicators on Early Leaving from Education and Training In Europe – 2016, p. 6 https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/ffea0a0e-f995-11e6-8a35-01aa75ed71a1/language-en

Local data collection: To elaborate and implement a policy targeted to out-of-school pupils, it is essential to understand the extent and underlying causes of the phenomenon. In this regard, three main modes of data collection are used in the European countries:[47]

- *Student register,* where data is collected automatically through the school administration system.
- *EU Labor Force Survey and separate quantitative and qualitative surveys,* which may be an important instrument for developing a more comprehensive understanding of the causes behind the phenomenon.

Improve the flexibility and transparency of education pathways implies interventions especially during transition from one level to another, giving a chance to change the curriculum that does not meet the pupil's interests. For example, difficulties at elementary school or lack of motivation may challenge the process of continuing studies at secondary or high school. This phase implies specific highlights for those transitioning to VET (vocational education and training).[48] Most of European countries, except for Luxemburg, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Turkey, have adopted this policy.

In addition to the language of instruction, learners receive linguistic support in their mother tongue: This point targets mostly children from ethnic minorities or migrant families, which have learning difficulties because of lack or absence of knowledge of the language instructed. In such cases, some European countries offer additional language courses, while there are countries, such as Hungary, Scotland, Turkey, and others, with no such opportunity.[49]

Addressing teachers' primary education and continuing professional development: Teachers' professional skills have quite a significant role in the problem of early school dropouts. It is assumed that teachers can find out those worrisome issues that may lead to early school leaving in the aftermath. Therefore, developing competencies, such as diversity management, relationship building, and conflict settlement, is crucial. Teachers' pre-service and in-service training should focus on those aspects. In this sense, the teachers should have the chance to actively collaborate and exchange with their peers, as well as work in delicate situations. As a result, teachers should be able to understand the pupils' problems that lead to early dropping out of school or signs of it and be able to reduce or eliminate them. At least in five European countries – Germany, France, Ireland, Austria and Slovenia – such policy is actively implemented.[50]

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[47] Ibid., page 7
[48] Ibid., page 10
[49] Ibid., page 12
[50] Ibid., page 14

Education and carrier guidance at school: Education and carrier guidance is a service that provides pupils and pupils with information, as well as support for developing their decision-making skills. Guidance may also include psycho-social work, in particular for those at risk of leaving early. Education and carrier guidance may be part of the curriculum and/or provided through an external guidance service.[51]

Providing support for early leavers to reenter the education and training system: It implies policy and measures that support early leavers to reenter the education and training system. Such measures include initiatives that aim at detecting such pupils and liaising with them, providing necessary education, and training programs, offering guidance and consulting services, as result of which they may complete the education or receive qualification.[52] Almost all European countries (except for Bosnia and Herzegovina, Iceland, Macedonia, and Serbia) have policies and measures. In most cases, they are second-chance schemes that provide early leavers with alternative education and training pathways, leading to a formal qualification and/or preparing them for employment.[53]

Russian Federation: In terms of continuing school education, it would be appropriate to consider the experience of the Russian Federation as a post-Soviet country, with multiple years of similarities with our country in terms of approaches to teaching and learning. In contrast to Europe, the general situation here slightly differs. Recently, the Russians seem to opt for home schooling, driven by various reasons, including inefficiency of the curricula, lack of trust in teachers' performance, large number of pupils in schools, and child safety, etc. As suggested by local sources (for example, Алина Мусина, 2021),[54] in 2021–2022 school year, the number of children who shifted to home schooling increased by around 20 percent compared to the previous year – an increase to 13,000 from 10,000. However, this number is still within the bounds of 1 percent of total number of pupils, while survey data predicts a forthcoming aggravation of the problem. According to the survey conducted by the High School of Economics in 2017, 58 percent of the parents surveyed, who have organized home schooling for their children, have done so as they were not happy with the quality of education.[55] The situation with the pandemic may also promote preferences for alternative education. However, it is also full of multiple risks from the perspective of protecting the child's right to education.

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[51] Ibid., page 18

[52] Ibid., page 20

[53] Ibid.

[54] Russia: Pupils frequently shift to home schooling. Alina Mussina, Sep 13, 2021 (Россия: школьники все чаще переходят на семейное обучение, Алина Мусина). https://russian.eurasianet.org/%D1%80%D0%BE%D1%81%D1%81%D0%B8%D1%8F-%D1%88%D0%BA%D0%BE%D0%BB%D1%8C%D0%BD%D0%B8%D0%BA%D0%B8-%D0%B2%D1%81%D0%B5-%D1%87%D0%B0%D1%89%D0%B5-%D0%BF%D0%B5%D1%80%D0%B5%D1%85%D0%BE%D0%B4%D1%8F%D1%82-%D0%BD%D0%B0-%D1%81%D0%B5%D0%BC%D0%B5%D0%B9%D0%BD%D0%BE%D0%B5-%D0%BE%D0%B1%D1%83%D1%87%D0%B5%D0%BD%D0%B8%D0%B5?fbclid=IwAR3GRPoA1Ca1f0dXgu62TmBL5baK9ZMBp2Q3pX0rfX-ucYwTfxLWP1abRhk

[55] Ibid.

Protection of the child's rights in the RF, according to the Family Code, is assigned to parents (or the guardians), guardianship authorities, prosecutor's office, and courts.[56] Parents are entitled to choose the education institution or the preferred mode of study for their child – school or home-based – but such choice should derive only from the best interests and needs of the child. Whenever the parents breach the child's right to education and, for example, prevent the child from attending school, the school plays no role in bringing the child back to school (in contrast to the European case), as it has no leverage over the parents.

This function is mostly performed by guardianship authorities that may settle the relations with parents by restricting or depriving them of their parental rights.[57]

Local self-government authorities also play an important role in ensuring children's education. Their responsibilities include registration of children who should be in the education system (preschool, elementary, basic, and secondary schools).[58] If the parents opt for alternative education for their child, they have to inform about it the local self-government authorities.[59]

Policy of the Republic of Armenia in Identifying and Guiding the Out-of-School Children

The right to education, as a fundamental element of human rights, is also very important, and the Government should provide access to proper education for all members of the public, including the minorities.

In February 2021, the Government of Armenia adopted its Decision No 154-N (hereinafter "Decision No 154-N"), which aims "*to regulate the legal relations pertaining to identification and guidance of school-going age children who are left out of compulsory education.*"[60] According to the Decision, the lists of out-of-school children identified are shared with several institutions, such as ministries, health establishments, guardianship authorities, regional administrations, police, territorial administration bodies, etc. Following children are considered to be left out of compulsory education:

- 6-18 years-old children, not registered at any education institution or simply not attending it
- Registered children, who have not attended school for six business day in a row or more than ten days in a month

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[56] Family Code of the Russian Federation, 1995, Article 56, (Семейный кодекс Российской Федерации, 1995). http://xn--273--84d1f.xn--p1ai/zakonodatelstvo/semeynyy-kodeks-rossiyskoy-federacii-ot-29121995-no-223-fz

[57] High School of economics (Высшая школа экономики, б.д.), http://xn--273--84d1f.xn--p1ai/voprosy_i_otvety/kak-shkola-mozhet-vozdeystvovat-na-roditeley-kotorye-ne-vodyat-detey-v-shkolu-ot

[58] High School of Economics, 2012, Article 9.6, (Высшая школа экономики, 2012), http://xn--273--84d1f.xn--p1ai/zakonodatelstvo/federalnyy-zakon-ot-29-dekabrya-2012-g-no-273-fz-ob-obrazovanii-v-rf

[59] Ibid., Article 63,5

[60] Armenian Legal Information system, 2021, RA Government Decision No 154-N of February 11 2021, On approving the procedure for identification and guidance of out-of-school children https://www.arlis.am/documentview.aspx?docid=149923

- Children under 18 who have studied at a vocational education institution and have dropped out of such education institution
- Children, who have attended an education institution, but have left it based on parent's (or legal guardian's) formal request (to leave for abroad)
- Children registered at home schooling system, who, according to the investigation of the Education Inspection Body of Armenia, are not receiving home education

Above mentioned groups, targeted by Decision No 154-N, seem to represent all potential situations and sector specific risks, encountered by the Armenians, as well as the ethnic minorities. Moreover, taking into consideration the fact that even pupils who miss school for a few days are covered in the Regulation, relevant authorities (the school – in the first place) are authorized to detect the problem at an early phase. It is also suggested by paragraph 9 of the said decision, which prescribes one business day for the schools to find out the causes of dropping out of school due to absenteeism. If the cause is not determined, this information is made available to the police; however, if the cause implies problems that the school is not authorized to tackle or has no sufficient capacity to do so, the school is responcible to inform appropriate authorities about it within three days.[61]

If the child has dropped out of school based on the parent's formal request with no indication of the education institution they plan to transfer, such information about the child shall be made available to the guardianship authorities of the settlement and the territorial social security agency, in accordance with the procedure established by the RA Government Decision No 1061-N of September 10, 2015. These institutions are responsible for managing the social case and ensuring that the child attends the education institution (para 18.1).

In 2017 a project to identify out-of-school children was piloted in Lori. It includes awareness raising and implementation of case management in cases when the parent prevents the child from attending school. Case management is completed or closed when the child is returned to school and starts regular attendance.[62]

Having a regulation in place is as much important as opportunities for the institutions involved in the process (such as ministries, health establishments, police, guardianship authorities, family, and others) to perform their duties efficiently. In theory, RA Government Decision No 154-N enables reducing the problems in the Yezidi community re-integrating out-of-school children into education, which, in its turn, may be a deterrent factor for early marriages. However, the reality can be different if, for example, the parents and family of the child do not support the implementation of the decision. The family plays significant role in keeping children in school (such as in the case of England), whereas RA Government Decision No 154-N does not prescribe any involvement or contribution from the family.

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[61] Ibid., para 17.
[62] Karine Saribekyan, How to detect out-of-school children?, 2017, https://blog.168.am/blog/87680.html

The problem of early leavers may manifest itself differently in the modern world, especially in the context of COVID-19 pandemic, when face-to-face learning periodically moves to online mode. This fact drives new risks.

Potential Measures to Preclude Early Marriages

A research company exploring women's problems – International Center for Research on Women (ICRW) – based on the analysis of several cases and data, recommended five main measures to prevent early marriages,[63] such as:

1. *Empower girls with information, skills, and support networks.* By brining girls together to learn basic skills like literacy and numeracy, how to communicate and negotiate with others, how to stay healthy, how to earn and manage money, girls can become more knowledgeable and self-confident. In developing countries, girls with such skills can make money and improve their social status. Taken together, these gains may also have a deterrent effect on early marriages.
2. *Educate and rally parents and community members.* Community elders and parents are traditionally responsible for deciding when and whom a girl marries. Hence, educating them about how child marriage impacts a girl's health and future, may spark powerful change.
3. *Provide economic support and incentives to girls and their families.* Such financial support may enhance the economic security of households and aid in curbing child marriage. Daughters who learn skills that enable them to earn an income in the future may be seen as adding more value to the family and make parents revisit their traditional approaches.
4. *Enhance girl's access to a high-quality education.* Providing opportunities, such as scholarships, can help retain girls in schools. When girls are in school, they are less likely to be seen as ready for marriage by their families or community members.
5. *Encourage supportive laws and policies.* Many countries with high rates of child marriage have worked to prevent them (for example by establishing a legal minimum age for marriage), but such laws should have clear implementation mechanisms, as they may not bring a real change if left in writing only.

Challenges for Education Posed by COVID-19

The global pandemic has led to partial or complete lockdown of schools in around 190 countries in the world. Around 1.7 billion pupils suffered from it. Hundreds of pupils had/have to stay at home. In this situation, education specialists must work to make classroom processes uninterrupted, as well as make education accessible to the most vulnerable groups of pupils.[64]

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[63] International Center for Research on Women (ICRW), Solutions to end child marriage, Summary of the evidence, p.2 https://www.icrw.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/10/19967_ICRW-Solutions001-pdf.pdf
[64] The World Bank, Lessons For Education during the COVID-19 crisis, 2020.

"Distance education is a form of delivery of the curriculum, when the direct and indirect study process between the learner and the teacher takes place essentially via information technologies and telecommunication, and they can be used throughout the delivery of core school curricula in accordance with the procedure and in cases specified by the public administration body responsible for education, for a defined period."[65]

The technologies are the only means to ensure learning beyond the classroom. However, the process that seems easy at first glance, in fact, has many challenges. Of course, they vary from country to country, by settlements (rural, urban), social status of the family, as well as digital skills. Moreover, not only pupils but also teachers may encounter such challenges (especially older teachers with limited use of computers).

Use of digital technologies is the key approach used in different countries of the world during the crisis driven by the pandemic. Some countries developed radio and TV broadcasting services especially for elementary school pupils. While broadcasting has some limitations in terms of communicating the content, it still may have a wider reach, compared to other technologies.

According to UNICEF, around 31 percent of school-age children globally have no access to learning through broadcasting or digital technologies.[66] Pupils in rural schools comprise a prevailing share in this number. Three out of four children left out of distance education reside in rural areas, and the situation in poor countries is even worse. Gender gap in the list of pupils left out of distance education is almost none.[67]

Given the fact that many pupils are left out of the school curriculum, bringing them back to school is, of course, an important and pressing matter, but possible covid-related risks should be considered. Given that the pandemic is not over yet, reopening of schools may be problematic. Therefore, many countries have adopted a so-called "hybrid" teaching strategy. It can be defined as *"an approach integrating distance and face-to-face teaching and learning to improve pupils' experiences, as well as to ensure learning continuity. It is typical especially for newly reopened schools, which need to hold out against new waves of the pandemic."*[68]

https://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/edutech/brief/lessons-for-education-during-covid-19-crisis

[65] Order of the Minister of Education, Science, Culture and Sports, 2020, On approving the procedure of organising remote (distance) teaching and learning at general education insitutions, General Provisions, Para 2, https://www.arlis.am/DocumentView.aspx?docid=142945

[66] UNICEF Data: Monitoring the situation of children and women, COVID-19: Are children able to continue learning during school closures?, A global analysis of the potential reach of distance education policies, August 2020, https://data.unicef.org/resources/remote-learning-reachability-factsheet/

[67] Ibid.

[68] UNESCO, COVID-19 response–hybrid learning, Hybrid learning as a key element in ensuring continued learning, Version 2 as of December, 2020, p. 11 https://en.unesco.org/sites/default/files/unesco-covid-19-response-toolkit-hybrid-learning.pdf

According to UNICEF, as of September 2021, the schools are still partly or fully closed in many countries.[69]

Many European and US experts are considering the chances of school reopening from the perspective of school children's age/grade.[70] They believe that different ages have varying needs, which can be decisive in deciding whether that age group should be returned to school or can still study online.[71]

Table 5. Considering returning to face-to-face mode of learning by different segments of student population

	Preschool and lower elementary (4–8-year-olds)	**Upper elementary (8–12-year-olds)**	**Secondary (12-18-year-olds)**	**Upper Secondary (17-18-year-olds)**
Criticism about social distancing for public safety	Reduced potential risk of infection, social distancing and mask wearing is hard to force	Reduced potential risk of infection, social distancing and mask wearing is hard to force	Higher risk of infecting, easy to force social distancing and mask wearing	Higher risk of infection, easy to force social distancing and mask wearing
School reopening for economic activity is criticized	Highest need for childcare	High need for childcare	Low need for childcare	Lowest need for childcare
Disrupted learning risks in case of school closures	Key threshold for prior literacy and cognitive	Medium risk of disruption of academic achievement	Medium risk of disruption of academic achievement, high risk of interrupting the	Risk of disruption of academic performance at the university,

[69] UNICEF, Education disrupted: The second year of the COVID-19 pandemic and school closures, September 2021, https://data.unicef.org/resources/education-disrupted/

[70] Emma Dorn, Frédéric Panier, Nina Probst, and Jimmy Sarakatsannis, 2020, Exhibit 2 https://www.mckinsey.com/industries/public-and-social-sector/our-insights/back-to-school-a-framework-for-remote-and-hybrid-learning-amid-covid-19

[71] Ibid.

			studies	high risk of interrupting the studies
	development			
Efficiency of distance education	Low efficiency, need for social counselling and guidance	Low efficiency, need for recurrent social counselling and guidance	Medium to high efficiency, depending on the pupil's profile	High efficiency, increased student autonomy
Logistics to plan safe face-to-face learning	It is easy to retain sustainable cohorts		It is difficult to create cohorts (as a result of different combinations of the disciplines)	

Based on evidence available

According to Table 5, bringing back pupils of eight years old and younger to the face-to-face study mode is the most pressing issue, as the children of that age-group need most consistent professional guidance to attain primary knowledge. Discussions about 8-12-year-olds are not as straightforward: here, too, children need some care but not as much as the ones in the first group. Given the fact that children need less care as they grow, pupils in higher grades are more adept at learning online, despite the risks of disrupted academic performance. In addition to educational problems, this age-group is at risk of leaving school or not returning to school. The school and those close to a child are the main driving force (for instance when the peers discuss their future career, teachers provide career guidance and university admission counselling to pupils), and if this mechanism is not in place (for example, in case of distance education), other family problems may resurface, thereby disconnecting the child from school. For example, hefty social conditions (when child's involvement in housework is needed), ethnic norms, especially force girls into child marriage.

According to 2020 Save the Children data, school closures due to pandemic increase the risk of child marriage among girls mainly from poor families.[72] According to this data, child marriage is most common in Nigeria – around 76 percent: 3.8 million children are deprived of the chance to go to school due to pandemic. Remote teaching and learning, as well as hybrid teaching and learning approach, require detailed and comprehensive review of local needs and opportunities to create clear mechanisms to overcome the challenges in education. In interviews with one of female pupils, she says: "*Not going to school exposes girls to child marriage…if dropped out of school today, I wouldn't be able to achieve my goal (become a nurse) and I'm sure I'd be forced into a marriage.*" [Hauyau, 17-year-old, Nigeria][73]

Even if high school pupils are considered as relatively ready and autonomous for distance learning, in some countries the risk of not going back to school should be considered and possible measures should be taken for all vulnerable groups, especially during distance learning to keep them in the loop of corresponding authorities.

Challenges in Education Sector of Armenia in the Context of COVID-19 Pandemic

According to the regulation on distance education adopted by the RA Ministry of ESCS, the curriculum content does not differ from the face-to-face curriculum and is delivered in accordance with the curriculum and syllabus. "*Distance education is a successful form of delivery, if at least 90% of pupils attain 70% of the hours prescribed by the curriculum via ICT (information and communication technologies).*"[74] This regulation implies that out-of-school pupils complement their learning through individual studies in the manner specified by the education institution or distance learning center.

For many developing countries, such as Armenia, educational challenges posed by the pandemic can be grave driven, on the one hand, by lack of corresponding technologies and lack of relevant skills and, on the other hand, by limited resources of the country to mitigate these challenges. Specifically, there was a situation to organize the study process for 391,143 pupils in 1,403 schools in Armenia, with involvement of 38,167 teachers and available resources.[75] As

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[72] Yolande Wright, Vishna Shah, 2020) https://www.savethechildren.net/blog/school-closures-put-girls-risk-early-marriage

[73] Ibid.

[74] Ibid. https://escs.am/am/news/6621

[75] Situation with distance learning in Armenia, and how UNICEF responds to COVID-19, Zhanna Ulikhanyan, https://www.unicef.org/armenia/%D5%BA%D5%A1%D5%BF%D5%B4%D5%B8%D6%82%D5%A9%D5%B5%D5%B8%D6%82%D5%B6%D5%B6%D5%A5%D6%80/%D5%B0%D5%A1%D5%B5%D5%A1%D5%BD%D5%BF%D5%A1%D5%B6%D5%B8%D6%82%D5%B4-%D5%B0%D5%A5%D5%BC%D5%A1%D5%BE%D5%A1%D6%80-%D5%B8%D6%82%D5%BD%D5%B8%D6%82%D6%81%D5%B4%D5%A1%D5%B6-%D5%A1%D5%BC%D5%AF%D5%A1-%D5%AB%D6%80%D5%A1%D5%BE%D5%AB%D5%B3%D5%A1%D5%AF%D5%B6-%D6%87-%D5%AB%D5%B6%D5%B9%D5%BA%D5%A5%D5%BD-%D5%A7-%D5%B5%D5%B8%D6%82%D5%B6%D5%AB%D5%BD%D5%A5%D6%86-%D5%B6-

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confirmed by a distance learning expert from UNICEF, attempts to organize distance learning were made earlier in Armenia, particularly, in two villages that had no teachers.[76] It is anticipated that such experience should serve as an example, in case of need, to mainstream distance education.

In the opinion of the education consultant from UNICEF, the most vulnerable groups of children from the perspective of distance learning are as follows:

- Children with no access to computers/phone, internet

- Children with special needs for education

- Children with disability

Main challenges are as follows:

- Lack of skills to use information technologies among pupils and teachers, as well as the hardware and internet

- Lack of knowledge of cybersecurity

Even though distance education has already been piloted in Armenia, such a drastic and complete shift to distance education in the context of pandemic could not have been predicted, which, in its turn, is the main cause of key challenges and gaps. Despite the country's efforts to refurbish the schools and prepare the teachers for remote instruction, the key challenges still include the child's family situation, lack of computer and access to internet, failure by parents to follow-up (especially in case of elementary pupils), etc.

According to the Report on Evaluating the Efficiency of the State Policy on Education in the Context of Pandemic,[77] distance learning has also brought improvements in the existing situation. Namely, in the context of legal regulations, educational resources were developed, disseminated, and enhanced, and infrastructure was formed, personnel was trained (professional development), and etc. Collaboration between teachers and parents, as well as close public-private-donor-community partnership, was formed.

To assess the needs and demands, as well as risks driven by various situations, periodic data collection practice should be in place regarding the online mode of instruction, as well as the

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[76] Ibid.

[77] Civic Youth Center NGO, Center for Educational Research and Consulting, 2021, page 43, http://www.cyc.org.am/files/file/_(4).pdf

risks that could occur in Yezidi communities, as well as in many Armenian families, where children, being left out of distance learning, do not go back to school for various reasons.

Conclusion

The Yezidi community in Armenia have a contradictory perception of the K–12 education. Informally, they consider secondary education as more or less mandatory. However, the statistics provided by the RA Ministry of ESCS suggests that enrollment in grades 10–12 is quite low. This evidence also proved that in many families parents often prevent their children from pursuing their education at school. It is apparent that though with a lesser extent but early marriage is still a reality in Yezidi communities.

Decision No 154-N, in effect since 2021, possibly covers all the players and situations through which it is possible to identify, explore, and prevent incidence of early school leaving. And with effective efforts (when every institution or agency involved in the process fully performs their tasks), it is possible not only to bring the children back to school or retain the risk group in school but also, as a secondary outcome, to prevent early marriages. However, to properly evaluate the impact of Decision No 154-N, monitoring projects should be regularly implemented to mitigate the existing problems, as well as maximize the outcome.

Recommendations

Summarizing the experience of different countries in addressing the problems of early leavers of compulsory education, a so-called "tripartite model" can be drawn including the child's family (or legal guardian), the school, and the local self-government authorities (often other authorities too, as needed).

Family: the family is a prevailing force affecting the child. In case of this problem, the negative impact of such force deprives the child of their right to education and future. Therefore, appropriate engagement with the parents of children in vulnerable group may bring significant change to the situation. It is particularly recommended to:

- organize and implement awareness raising sessions on the role and relevance of education, as well as laws for the parents of children at risk,

- provide financial assistance to the families of children in the risk group or provide special privileges for the child not to have to leave the school under the pretext of work,

- implement career guidance activities for children and their parents.

School: schools are another important link in addressing the problem. Schools with pupils from different ethnic affiliation should be clearly aware of the differences and needs of nonlocal pupils and be able to appropriately respond to the existing situation.

- Organizing additional courses of Armenian language for the children who need them may improve the pupil's performance and motivation to pursue further education. If possible, parents can also participate in such courses, as lack of linguistic knowledge also negatively affects the child's learning.
- Delivering career orientation and guidance may also be crucial especially for children whose families do not give importance to education or successive professional training.
- Jointly with local government representatives deliver training to pupils on women's rights, empowerment, and how to avoid abuse.

Talking about the role of schools as an essential link in addressing the problem in question, the role of administrative staff, as well as the importance of relevant teacher skills should be mentioned. Teachers, who have pupils from different ethnic groups in the same class, must be even more attentive and tactful towards all children to preclude potential conflicts and ensure equal opportunities for learning. It means:

- regular teacher training on how to manage multicultural classrooms, opportunity to engage with experts and exchange with peers

- in some European countries teachers manage to identify the risks at earlier stages based on pupil performance. It is a recommended and needed skill in Armenia too, not only to identify the problems of Yezidi children but also of those in other vulnerable groups.

Relevant institutions and local self-government bodies: The roles and responsibilities of such entities in addressing the problems of early school dropouts are specified in Decision No 154-N.

- In addition to these responsibilities, it is important to note the relevance of establishing a mechanism for data collection and monitoring by such bodies. Comprehensive and detailed statistics (including gender and age composition, social status, and other key descriptors of pupils) will enable to deeply examine causes and effects, reveal the incidence of the phenomenon, as well as evaluate the impact and effectiveness of interventions.

Part 2. Analysis of Findings of the Survey

Introduction

Research and scholarly articles about the education of ethnic minorities focus on low academic achievement of the minorities, rather than the variability of learning performance

among various groups.[78] Failure in learning is easily attributed to cultural differences or cultural incompatibilities even though some minorities whose culture and language are different from those of the majority do achieve high results in education.[79] Not all representatives of a minority have poor learning outcomes – failure at school is driven by primary differences in culture and language, elements of social class, or institutional barriers in the learning environment. Studies suggest that group **beliefs** about the advantages, value and meaning of schooling **affect** the learning strategies of its members.[80] Analysis of the survey findings focuses on group **beliefs and perceptions** as an important factor of dropping out of compulsory education.

The quality of mainstream schools in Yezidi communities: perceptions and assessments

- Community's attitude towards education
- Access to education

"School dropout rate among Yezidi children has been a common issue in Armenia for decades."[81] However, attitude towards schooling has changed in the Yezidi communities – and even more so – in several regards.

Previously, the school dropout rate, denial of education was more latent, implicit: the community did not consider it as a problem, whereas nowadays, school dropout level and nonattendance are considered a problem in the Yezidi community. Such a tendency is driven also by the fact that the community has become more open, with enhanced interaction, thanks to access to internet, labor migration, enhanced communication with the Yezidi communities abroad.

In the last decade, the community **has started to prioritize education** for future carrier and job, as well as for attainment of life skills.

> *It [education] is very important nowadays. If you are ignorant, it is very difficult. When going out, for everything. For calculations, for paperwork. Now everything is by phone, by cards. If you are illiterate, ignorant, how would you carry on, especially nowadays?*

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[78] Luciak M., (2004) Minority status and schooling, John U. Ogbu's theory and the schooling of ethnic minorities in Europe, Intercultural Education Vol. 15, No. 4

[79] Ogbu, J. U. (1995) Cultural problems in minority education: their interpretations and consequencesηpart two: case studies, The Urban Review, 27(4), 190

[80] Ogbu, J. U. (1995) Cultural problems in minority education: their interpretations and consequencesηpart two: case studies, The Urban Review, 27(4), 271-297.

[81] Alternative Report to the UN Committee on Child's Rights on Implementation of Yezidi Children's rights in Armenia, 2017, Eurasia Partnership Foundation, "Human Rights Research Center" Nongovernmental organization, "Armavir Development Center" Nongovernmental organization, "Sinjar" Yezidi National Association, https://epfarmenia.am/hy/document/Alternative-report-to-the-UN-committee-on-the-rights-of-the-child-with-a-focus-on-Yezidi_children-in-Armenia-arm

Now they want to learn. My father-in-law always says, he says, "if you are illiterate, you can't set up even a small business. If you are illiterate, have not attended school, you don't now numeracy. Even with animal husbandry. You should have an idea what to buy, at what price, shouldn't you? Then you won't lose money.

Quote from mothers' group discussion, Tandzut

Acknowledgment of the role of education and school has been consistent following several cases when a child of a Yezidi family started to attend school till grade 12 or attended extracurricular classes, others started to replicate. Here the principle of **community identity, solidarity, and non-isolation from the community** also came into play.

Education in Yezidi community is mainly seen and perceived **not as a children's right** but rather as a means to achieve some short- or long-term goals. Moreover, parents correlate leaving school with the **child's academic performance –** if the child does not demonstrate good, high academic performance, the parents do not see the worth and relevance of learning, attending the school, and, therefore, do not send their child to school. It is interesting that the roots of the problem are hidden in the quality of education provided by the school – parents, being unhappy with the quality of education, do not want their child to continue studies at that school, and since they do not consider another community school as an option, the child is left out of education.

If the child doesn't study at all, why send to school – to do what, frustrate the teacher? If they go to school for eight years and learn nothing, would they be learning in the next four years?

Quote from an interview with a mother, Yeghegnut

Interestingly, such an approach was reproduced by the children as well, which is closely related to the **gender roles and role expectations present** in the community.

For example, if the girl doesn't like learning, its better if she leaves, but if she has aspiration, let her study. For example, in our school two years ago [pronouncing the name of the girl] left, went to study, she is in Tbilisi now, studying at medical university.

> *There is no problem for learning, if she is a pure girl, she can go and study, as she can behave among thousand boys so that nobody approaches her.*
>
> *Quote, group discussion with pupils, Zartonk*

Education is not **acknowledged by some people in the community** and is secondary to marriage, housework, and farming. Survey participants mentioned that education does not provide well-off life in Armenia, and only education cannot provide a job that would generate sufficient financial resources.

> *We crave for education, but unfortunately, we live in times when learning is pushed to the back burner – meaning more business - work has become a business. It is a bit difficult. Materiality has become a priority, while education seems to be pushed to the back – I am sorry to say that.*
>
> *Quote, respondent, Alagyaz*

> *Well, education has a big role in the community. Maybe not previously, but now – yes. They are now giving more significance to education. Well, for their children, for them to move forward. It wasn't so active in the past, but now it is, like, one must. Now its importance is recognized – to be educated, to earn their living.*
>
> *Quote, group discussion with mothers, Alagyaz*

Mothers underline that education is important for children, especially for future career and job. Moreover, **mothers recognize the importance of education,** highlighting that now they have no job, are deprived of well-being, as without a job and financial resources, they can't support themselves and their families.

Continuity of education is also conditional upon **availability of financial resources,** as to get professional education, children should go to a professional education institution either in one of the regional cities or in Yerevan, which for some families means financing the pupil's living in that place. Hence, pursuing professional education created financial burden for the family. Because of the financial burden, even if they pursue professional education, they prefer distance learning.

> *It is very difficult. No matter how capable (he/she) is, we can't do anything because of finance. If, of course, they don't have an acquaintance or relative in the city. Now they don't*

Continuity of education is affected also by **career orientation and awareness.** Children are not informed about vocational/professional education institutions, fields of study, admission procedure. The respondents were not aware that they can be admitted to a university without competition if they pass the minimum threshold of the admission exams.

In terms of access to education, there are several problems in the Yezidi communities:

- No kindergartens and preschools

- Inadequate professional qualities of the teaching staff, including discrimination against Yezidi pupils

- Inadequate physical facilities and equipment

- Low quality of teaching the Yezidi language

- Complexity of the curriculum

- Distance of education institutions – school, high school, vocational institution – from the communities

- Impossibility to pass the admission exams

- Lack or absence of extracurricular programs

Attending a kindergarten or a preschool **prepares the child** for school, while in Yezidi communities lack of such facilities/institutions puts the children at a disadvantage – they start attending school with poor knowledge of the Armenian language and inadequate self-regulation. Whereas children who have attended a preschool or a kindergarten are more prepared for school as they are equipped with essential knowledge and skills, including knowledge of the Armenian language.

Teachers' **qualifications** also need improvement in the schools in Yezidi communities. Moreover, essential qualifications include knowledge about the Yezidi community, culture, and nondiscrimination against children.

teachers who are discriminating and treating Yezidi children differently from Armenian kids. Such cases are observed, but I repeat again, not all of them; there are also those who are very dedicated and doing a great job. Here, it is most probably very important that the teachers are Yezidis, but we used to have only one Yezidi teacher in our school, the teacher of the Yezidi language. Well, naturally, because they don't complete undergraduate studies and so forth, that's where the problem originates.

Quote, Expert interview

The issue of instruction in the Yezidi language is also connected with school leaving and access to education. There are no qualified teachers to deliver instruction in the Yezidi language, and the problem is recurring. Since enrollment in vocational and tertiary education institutions from the Yezidi community is low, there are few specialists of the Yezidi language, and there is room for improvement of the professional qualifications of active teachers. Lack of professional development of the Yezidi language teachers is also a problem.

The next group of problems includes access, quality, and content of education; **the curricula are complex, and** in addition, in the Yezidi communities neither the parents nor the older generation can help the children with studies. In this sense, the parents mentioned the importance of after-school classes and homework preparation. Although nowadays Yezidi families have started the practice of sending their children to private tutors, as mentioned by the respondents, not all families can afford additional studies for their children.

Not all communities have secondary schools, and some parents in particular do not send their daughters to high schools in nearby villages "in fear of them being kidnapped".

There are communities with no access to transportation facilities, and the kids from such communities do not attend kindergarten, high school, or VET institution in adjacent community, and it may also be attributed to tuition fees.

Vocational education is not accessible to the children of Yezidi community, as learners are not sure whether they can participate in the admission examinations with the knowledge attained at school.

Motivation to learn is low among school children because of the lack or absence of extracurricular studies or because the parents do not let their children attend such groups. There is great interest in sports, arts, software development, but the study groups in these areas are either not offered in communities or the children are not able to attend.

Main reasons why Yezidi children leave compulsory education include:

- The gender and age profile of out-of-school Yezidi children

- The impact of child marriages on learning continuity of Yezidi girls.

The issue of Yezidi children leaving school is conditional upon national and cultural customs, as well as socio-economic and organizational matters. The attitude towards education, as well as the problem of dropout rates, has **significantly evolved** in the past decade. Of course, you can still find out-of-school children in Yezidi communities, but the study suggests that the situation has fairly improved recently.

In Yezidi communities not only girls but also boys leave school. Moreover, the issue of dropout rate escalates in high school – grades 10–11.

Yezidi children, as suggested by the parents, children, and experts, leave school for following reasons:

- The community fears of assimilation.

- There is a tradition in the community that children should drop out before turning 16 to prevent kidnapping – the case for girls – and to take a role in the family or migrate – the case for boys.

- Education, especially high school, is not available in all communities.

- The role of education is not adequately prioritized either by the learner or their family.

Attitude towards education in Yezidi community and incomplete education of the children is driven by the **concern for preserving their culture and fear of assimilation.**

It seems to me that irrespective of everything we – the Yezidis – should go hand in hand with evolution, reach an adequate level of development, and it seems to me that our new generation should fight to show it to the older generation. They should prove that we can synchronize with time and progress. It essentially seems to me that there is a fear of assimilation. I think, from the perspective of preserving the family, from the patriarchal perspective, a species may segregate.

Quote, interview with a female pupil, Yeghegnut

It is interesting that girls in Yezidi families are often prevented from going to school justifying that the girl might be kidnapped, but when asked, for instance, how many cases of kidnapping they have heard about in the past three years, the respondents could not recollect any. The police also have not shared any statistical data about such cases. Of course, it should be considered that parents of a female child in such cases do not file with the police for cultural reasons. First, they think that one should not file a complaint against anyone from their community, and there is almost no practice of "bringing the girl back". It was indicated by the respondents, that "it is a shame to bring a kidnapped girl back". If a girl is kidnapped in the Yezidi community, one of the reasons of not reporting to the police is that people don't want to disrupt solidarity, aggravate hostility, which makes it difficult to generate accurate data about such cases. We may assume that such occurrences are significantly low nowadays, as the fear that the girl will be "kidnapped" is not a reason but rather an excuse of not attending school. Yezidi families may drop out a girl from school for marriage. Many parents note that it is not appropriate to send "an engaged girl" to school, even though general education in the Republic of Armenia is compulsory. Such a practice is often conditional upon the fact of marriage, as well as the intention to marry – in some cases a 16–17-year-old girl is married after leaving school. Such a phenomenon has cultural and traditional foundations, as after a certain age, when a girl is prepared for marriage, their active social life, in such a case – attending school – is considered incompatible in Yezidi communities.

…not as if they force her to leave school to marry her off, but they say "what a shame for our child to attend school at such an age, what if she is kidnapped? A girl of such age should be sitting at home, like, not go here and there, not talk to guys, and so on", maybe this is what they think.

Quote, interview with a parent, Tandzut

In Yezidi communities, girls are also not allowed to attend school due to the **identity and solidarity of the community** approach; this is a common practice, and almost everyone follows it. Interestingly, during interviews and discussions we heard opinions that it is wrong to take a child out of school, and that such a common approach in the community should be changed.

It is wrong to remove a girl from school for marriage. We should try to eliminate this from our nation. I was married at 18, my wife was 16. Well, I married, but it was wrong.
Quote, group discussion with fathers, Artashar

> *Our traditions are great, but there is some backwards mentality. First, they don't let them study long, we don't let girls leave the parents' nest.*
>
> Quote, interview with a father, Yeghegnut

Such a criticism towards own customs, however, is not often leading to an appropriate behavior: most of them follow the old traditions.

> *I think in case of girls it would be proper to marry them off when they are over 18, but according to our customs, they marry them off when they are 16. But that is not ok: they marry them off when they are still kids, and this child doesn't get a chance at life. My daughter married at 17. Candidates would be coming and saying that they won't leave the place, and that they would come and live here until I give them my daughter. They came and went, and I thought, well, they are humans, and have come from far, then they would involve common acquaintances, and I thought, maybe, that's their luck, and married her off.*
>
> Quote, Interview with a father, Zartonk

It should be noted that, in any case, the **age threshold for marriage** has increased recently. While they used to marry their daughters very often before they were 16, now the pattern has changed, and the marriage age is above 16.

> *If the mother is 14-15 years old, she is still a child, and, I am sorry, giving birth to a child, she must educate her children, but has she received full education to educate her own kids? Or will she be able to help her child with learning at school?*
>
> Quote, interview, Alagyaz

Of course, it does not mean that the issue of early marriage is addressed, and there are no cases of kidnapping of girls. It only suggests that **visible changes occurred in the community** in recent years. And, as interviews and discussions held during the survey illustrate, such changes are significantly supported by the government activities, efforts of nongovernment organizations, and active youth recognized in the community, who succeeded thanks to education. Children also speak against **forced child marriage.** A group of parents, mothers mention that in marriage, they take into consideration the opinion of their children. However, we can conclude that the problem is still relevant, as it mostly relates to reproduction of the community culture as well.

> *I have seen it with my own eyes that they make marriage arrangements for a 9-grade female student, and most of our children don't want it. But, for example, I had a girl, who was expecting it, she knew it was her fate, and she was expecting it. And she was very happy that they had her engagement settled, but, well, she was a child, what does she understand?*
>
> *In any case, child marriages are there. And since they also need to match each other – Pirs to Pirs – and sometimes it was difficult to find someone matching, they immediately set up the engagement or marriage or something as soon as they find someone from the same caste, without taking into account the wishes of their child or without even seeing each other.*
>
> Quote, expert interview

The reasons behind leaving school include socio-economic problems – **the child's family roles.** The child does not attend school to help the parents around the house, with farming, and to take care of younger sisters and brothers. Moreover, it is true both about boys and girls.

They leave school because of the financial status of the family too.

> *There are households with no financial means, they don't send their children (to school), but it happens also those other children do attend classes. There are households who can't afford the textbooks or workbook, and remove the children from school.*
>
> Quote, interview with a parent, Ferik

For boys, the **lack of motivation** is also the reason for leaving school; moreover, the parents, in such case, often make their male child go to school, but it is not the case with girls. When the female child has good academic performance and wants to continue learning at high school, college, and then university, the parents prevent her from further studies. Here too, the issue is closely related to the existing gender role expectations in the community.

In primary school, the community children are motivated to learn; however, such motivation decreases in middle school, as they know that their parents will not let them continue school until grade 12 or parents have different plans for their child's future.

> *If you want to know the truth, there is some progress. I feel it now, that the parent seems to acknowledge the role of education and brings (the child) with pleasure, but I don't know, at the end, at the end of basic school, they seem to give preference to their traditions over what they thought earlier.*

Quote, interview with a parent, Tandzut

In elementary school, motivation to learn is driven also by the fact that **parents follow up on their kid's schoolwork/homework.** In middle school parents' involvement decreases due to their literacy level and increase in children's independence. Parents do not dedicate adequate time to their children's homework preparation in middle school. Children do not commit to doing homework: autonomy translates into lack of parental involvement, and children gradually find themselves not keeping up with the content taught. One of the reasons is also the fact that elementary school curriculum is easier and attainable, and children internalize the content with ease, with most parents being able to easily help them at this age with schoolwork/homework. In middle school, however, the curriculum becomes challenging for the children, with most parents being unable to help them due to the lack of knowledge and skills, and learning process becomes unattainable and challenging. And as children start failing at learning, the motivation falls.

The children essentially want to finish school, and they want to learn a profession or handcraft in upper secondary grades. Some children have agreement with their parents about it, while others have put up with the idea of dismissing learning.

Female pupil: *…I will drop out this year, half of the teachers would not let. But my parents say, "you have to leave". But the teachers don't want me to leave. They say, "You have to finish school or leave and go to college, high school."*

Interviewer: *Have you expressed your opinion at home?*

Female pupil: *No, who am I to express!*

Interviewer: *Have you ever tried to say that you want to attend school?*

Female pupil: *Yes, I have, but they would not listen.*

Quote, group discussion with girls, Zartonk

After finishing school, we will go to the army, and I would like to study after the army, but I have not made up my mind yet. I mostly like history and geography. I know that I must take admission exams, but I haven't made up my mind yet. I don't know the ways of how to get admission, but I would ask from others who are admitted. My family told me, if you want to study, go, do it, and I am also motivated to do it.
Quote, group discussion with pupils, Zartonk

The child is able to pursue further education, to attend school or go to a vocational training school, if one of the parents or an older member of the family supports the child's decision.

Interestingly, the parents' or elders' attitude towards school attendance varies from community to community both in Armenia and in other countries.

> *It is interesting that Yezidis do study in Germany, but not in Armenia, isn't it?*
>
> Quote, group discussion with mothers, Tandzut

The problem is about the community being closed: in Armenia, especially in communities populated with Yezidis only, leaving education incomplete, adhering to traditions is more rigidly regulated leading to a situation when some families want to leave for another country, mostly, Russia, where adhering to cultural norms is not strictly regulated. The migration dispositions in the Yezidi community have more socio-economic background.

In Armenia, failure to complete education may be attributed to the **more loyal attitude of the state.** While K–12 education is compulsory in Armenia since 2017, according to the amendments to the RA Law on Education, the state, represented by education managers, is tolerant towards such a custom of the Yezidi community. Of course, the school principals do liaise with the families in case of absenteeism, but if the family decides to remove the child from school before grade 12, no legal actions are taken. Meanwhile, the international practice shows that leaving school for early marriage should be strictly regulated and be under government control. It is not a coincidence that Yezidi parents in European countries are not able to disrupt their children's studies.

However, in Armenia the Ministry of Education, Science, Culture and Sport, as a competent body, is not authorized to call the parents to account. Conditional upon parent's wish, the issue of school dropouts is regulated only within the scope of the **Republic of Armenia Code on Administrative Offenses.**

> *…the government has responsibilities, to equally ensure the right to education for all, and it means that insufficient work was done in that community to address that problem.*
>
> Quote, expert interview

Indeed, the compulsory K–12 education in Armenia has affected the continuity of children's education in the Yezidi communities. In Yezidi communities, where they believe it is a compulsory law, they have started to send their children to high school. Of course, only the law does not prevent early school leaving, but **significant effect has been observed.**

School dropout rates are driven also by the concern in the Yezidi communities that education may develop the kind of qualities and skills that may conflict with **the community norms and traditions and** contribute to assimilation.

> *Among us it is customary that you don't have the right to speak, and if the child studies, they will understand that they have the right to speak, and then they will be able to protect their interests.*
>
> Quote, interview with a parent, Tandzut

Furthermore, the problem of assimilation is prevalent even today, and other sources also speak to it. Within the scope of mandatory school subjects, such as "History of the Armenian Apostolic Church," presence of some religious activities may also force the Yezidi community into removing their children from school.[82]

The attitude towards procedures on identifying the children left out of education is mostly positive; such procedures provide school principals with clear information regarding whereabouts of the child, if they have left the school.

> *….today there are parents who come, submit an application, and say that they want to leave the country. I, personally, record the country, the city of departure, and remove the child based on the parent's application, but in fact the child does not leave the country, nor comes to school. Now, with this measure the children will be identified. Not only the school but other institutions as well should actively participate in it to return the children to school.*
>
> Quote, interview with a principal

A group of parents considers their children's education a matter of family decision, and their attitude towards these measures is negative.

Organizing the remote (distance) learning in communities populated by Yezidis

- The impact of distance education on inclusion of kids from the Yezidi community in education during pandemic.

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[82] Alternative report to the UN Children's Rights Commission about implementation of children's rights in Armenia.

State of emergency driven by the pandemic was declared in Armenia based on the RA Government Decision No 298-N of March 16, 2020, and the education institutions shifted to remote learning.[83]

Since there are schools where classes are still held online due to the pandemic, the efficacy of the remote learning and its impact on the education system in Armenia cannot yet be determined.

The survey gave a chance to reveal the opinions of main parties involved in distance learning – the pupils and parents. The pupils and their parents do not have a comprehensive understanding of the implementation of online education. Most of them complained that they had difficulties in the process and missed out or did not internalize the content from the months of March to May 2020. However, most of the respondents could not clearly elaborate on the advantages and disadvantages of remote learning. Of course, such a situation is typical not only of the schools in Yezidi communities but also of the society in general. Before 2020, distance education was not mainstream: both pupils and teachers had not dealt with distance education. Main elements of remote learning include institution-based factors, which makes it different from self-learning, a separate group of learners, interactive means of communication, and the concept of bringing together the learners, resources, and instruction.[84] In this regard, online teaching provided from March through May of 2020 was difficult to describe as distance education, as several components were missing – a unified platform, the variety of software applications that are used for online classes, such as Viber, Zoom, phone, and etc. Consequently, education research also points to the fact that distance education during that period was not provided in a systemized manner, at least in the initial phase.[85]

Online education required the instructor to have at least basic understanding of technology, whereas a good number of teachers lacked essential skills of presentation, telecommunication, etc.

> *Computer skills are especially difficult for teachers rather than pupils who transitioned to online much easier. The other problem is the fact that most teachers simply considered online class as a 45-minute video call during which both they and the pupils had to sit through the lesson and suffer. They have yet to grasp the concept of what distance education is. I would repeat – not all, but most of them.*
> Quote, expert interview

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[83] RA Government Decision No 298-N of March 16, 2020, on Declaring State of emergency in Armenia.

[84] Keegan, D. (1986). The foundations of distance education. London: Croom Helm.

[85] Evaluation report on the efficiency of education policy in the era of pandemic, 2021 https://erit.am/documents/pdf/98b2f8f11b81657a85af29f6a02f05e0.pdf [18.11.2021]

Distance education implies some level of pupil independence; however, pupils **have difficulty to participate in the lessons on their own** especially at the elementary school levels**.**
General education schools and the education system were not adequately **prepared to organize online education.** Most of the subject textbooks, teaching, and learning materials were accessible only in paper-forms, rather than an electronic format. In these cases, it was technically difficult to deliver such materials to the pupils.
Yezidi communities had similar issues: some teachers were not able to **deliver the content** to pupils, and the pupils **did not have adequate hardware and software to** join and participate in online lessons.

> *Well, there are families in the village with no internet connection, WiFi, or phones. It is a big problem. And it was not good, in general: There were times when we did not have classes because of the lack of electricity; most of children did not understand anything during those lessons.*
>
> Quote, interview with a female pupil, Artashar

Despite the teachers' efforts, pupils were not able to internalize the contents of the lessons. The lessons were delivered only through Viber. The teachers did not have a chance to diversify instruction during remote teaching and learning or provide lesson planning based on the learner's attributes; effective means of assessment and feedback were not used.

> *Well, it is ok: there were good sides, like the homework was checked by sending a screenshot, but the recalling part was poor, as some children would read rather than retell.*
>
> Quote, interview with a pupil, Artashar

> *…most would just connect to the Zoom, turn off the video, and engage in something else, and in reality would neither follow the lesson nor learn anything. It means that we can say it was a lost year for many.*
>
> Quote, expert interview

Lack or absence of technical resources in families, the number of school-age children, as well as employment of parents, have impeded the participation in online classes. Because of the children's physical presence at home, parents have instead involved them more in household work.

> *The reason is that we live in a village. The village work requires that we all try to help the parents and be somehow useful. That is why we are absent.*
>
> Citation from an interview with a school pupil, Yeghegnut

Among the problems of conducting online lessons, school pupils mention **lack of contact** with classmates and teachers.

- According to expert evaluations, remote education gave rise to another risk for Yezidi pupils, i.e., after remote learning, **there is a risk** that Yezidi parents would not send their children to school or would rather have them adapt to the culture of receiving education without leaving the house. This fact both provides the Yezidi pupils with an opportunity not to be deprived of the right to receive education without getting out from home and contains a risk of being deprived of receiving a full-fledged education.

In the meantime, the organization of online classes, indeed, had **a positive impact** in terms of creating an educational system and opportunities for the continuity of education in the Yezidi communities.

"National Center of Educational Technologies" SNCO at the Ministry created an online platform for distance education, https://heravar.armedu.am/, an electronic grade book, and an online educational resources bank that are designed for both pupils and teachers.

The Ministry cooperated with TV companies, providing, on an on-going basis, materials, communications, video materials, and press releases with educational, cultural, and sport content. Responding to the Ministry's suggestion, sports TV companies have also broadcasted video lessons, ensuring their access among pupils from the RA regions (marzes) and communities.

Live public lessons are broadcasted daily from 8:30 a.m. through 12:40 p.m. via Public TV Company (the First Channel).

Rather ample online supplies and resources have been created within the framework of E-school Armenia project. In course of the project, around 2,000 video classes have been developed and shot for pupils in grades 1–12, including classes in the sign language, which are always accessible on the YouTube channel of E-school Armenia. In accordance with general education syllabi, teachers developed syllabi and thematic plans, and in line with the latter, video lessons were shot, materials were prepared, and webinars were held. Teachers' trainings were delivered on the topic of methods and approaches of remote education.

Since September 2021, 18 mentor teachers selected within the framework of E-school Armenia project have been teaching, in electronic format, in those general education institutions that are short of specialists in various subjects.[86]

Conclusions

Analysis of the survey resulted in the following main conclusions:

- Over the last decade, the attitude toward education in the Yezidi community has significantly changed, and this has manifested in a variety of ways. Previously, the community would not consider being removed from school or the repulsive attitude toward education as an issue, whereas now, dropping out and not attending school is seen as a problem.
- In the community, they started to prioritize education not only in terms of having a specialty in the future, being engaged in professional work, but also for acquiring life skills.
- In elementary classes, children from the Yezidi communities are interested in education, which declines over years because of the level of parents' literacy required for lesson preparation. The issue is indicative of a clear link between poverty and educational advancement that is typical not only of the Yezidi communities but also for socially vulnerable families.
- The level of parents' satisfaction with the education quality, as well as the issue of professional orientation and awareness, has an impact on the continuity of education. Children are not informed about vocational education institutions, specialties, and admission procedures.
- In terms of access to education, there is a number of issues in the Yezidi communities:

  - No kindergartens and preschools

  - Inadequate professional qualities of the teaching staff, including discrimination against Yezidi pupils

  - Inadequate physical facilities and equipment

  - Low quality of teaching the Yezidi language

  - Complexity of the curricula

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[86] https://e-school.am/view/8 [28.11.2021]

- Distance of education institutions – school, high school, vocational institution – from the communities

- Impossibility to pass the admission exams

- Lack or absence of out-of-class study groups

- The problem of withdrawal of Yezidi children from education is attributable to national and cultural background, as well as socio-economic and organizational issues.
- Not only girls but also boys drop out of school in the Yezidi communities. Note that the issue of dropping out of school is exacerbated in the upper secondary school – in grades 10–11.
- The main reasons behind school dropout among the children from the Yezidi communities are as follows:

  - The community has a fear of being assimilated, and as a result, education is seen as a process contributing to assimilation.

  - There is a custom in the community to leave the school while under the age of 16, which is attributable to marrying at a young age or avoiding that, in the case of a female, and the family roles or disposition to migration, in the case of a male.

  - Education, especially in the upper secondary school, is not accessible in all communities.

- General education schools and the education system were not sufficiently ready to organize online education.
- In the Yezidi community, there have been also problems during online classes: part of the teachers were unable to present the material to pupils, and pupils did not have satisfactory technical equipment to join and participate in online classes.
- Lack or absence of technical equipment, the number of school-age children in families, as well as employment of parents, have also impeded the participation in online classes.
- Among the problems of holding online classes, pupils indicate the lack of contact with classmates and teachers.
- Remote education also gave rise to another risk for Yezidi pupils – after the remote classes a risk occurred for Yezidi children that parents would not send the children back to school or would prefer to have them learn remotely. This fact both provides Yezidi pupils with an opportunity to not be deprived of the right to receive an education without leaving home, and at the same time contains a risk of being deprived of receiving a full education.

Recommendations

Recommendations to prevent the Yezidi children from dropping out of core schooling, addressed to:

Policy makers

- Improvement of legal grounds regulating the role of intervention of the state in the level of dropouts from compulsory education
- Improvement of the methodology of receiving statistical data on children, including the Yezidi children, who withdraw from compulsory education
- Conducting a participatory survey in the Yezidi communities concerning the quality of education, the quality of remote education, and the children's educational accomplishments
- Developing and performing works aimed at elimination of cases of affirmative measures and stereotypes concerning the Yezidi community
- Improving the quality of the teaching staff, including enhancement of the awareness level regarding traditions, norms, and cultural particularities of the Yezidi community
- Elaborating learning materials in Yezidi language and improving the quality of textbooks
- Support to teachers of Yezidi language through trainings, development and introduction of an incentive system, and receiving the necessary professional education
- Active inter-agency cooperation; development and implementation of joint programs
- Establishing preschools with a bilingual system in the communities

Local self-government bodies

- Involvement of social workers in the community life. Regular work on the topic of education, the child's right and problematic topics with the parent and other adult members of the family of the child attending grade 1 until the child graduates from school with the view of preventing the problem of dropping out of school.
- Informal health-related talks on marriages at a young age and their negative consequences with parents, including parents in the Yezidi communities.
- Improvement of school and community collaboration on examination, solution, and prevention of the problems related to dropping out of education.
- Ensuring access to additional courses and study groups in the Yezidi communities.
- Dissemination of platforms to the national minorities, such as for presentation of the Yezidi culture and identity, and the provision of necessary financial resources required for it.

The Yezidi community

- Awareness activities regarding the importance of education and the spread of success stories.

- Conducting intra-community, inter-generation discussions on community traditions and norms, where the school could have a clear role and become a platform.

General education schools

- Creation of an informal education environment – study groups for the Yezidi culture preservation, parent groups, which will contribute to the preservation of the Yezidi culture and the solution of learning motivation issue. Development and implementation of strategies at schools with the view to professional orientation and making recognizable the paths to achieving higher education.
- Change in the community attitude toward education, school, and dissemination of the positive experience. Work with the Yezidi community on the topic of education and children's rights – regular, interconnected courses in various topics, development of parenting skills, and awareness about various problematic topics, as needed.
- Recognition and development of the children's potential through informal education; development of leadership skills and development of critical thinking.
- Elaboration and execution of steps aimed at professional orientation. Raising the pupils' awareness about the RA educational opportunities, the admission procedure, the HEIs, middle vocational educational institutions, and the opportunities to study there, for example, by informing pupils about potential scholarships, transportation costs provided for going to another city to study, and other similar opportunities.
- Development and activation of parents' and pupils' councils at schools.
- Providing platforms at schools to national minorities, inter alia, for presentation of the Yezidi culture and identity.

The civil society, including the scientific community

- Shooting documentaries and performing scientific studies about the Yezidi community, traditions, and norms.

- Dissemination of scientific results among both Armenian and Yezidi broad audience.

Annexes

Annex 1. Tools

Questionnaire for an interview with school pupil

> *Note for interviewer: present the organization and the purpose of interview; submit the participation agreement form for familiarization and signature/verbal consent; request permission to record the interview; <u>emphasize</u> that this is done only not to lose the information and for the efficiency of analytical works and will not be published/disseminated. Note that the interview is conducted anonymously; participant's personal data will not be mentioned in the report. Indicate the total duration of the interview – 45-60 minutes.*

Conduct an interview with:

- ▪ 13-18-year-old girls – married/not married,

- ▪ 16-18-year-old boys.

If you feel that addressing with formal YOU makes participants uncomfortable, use addressing with the informal YOU.

Particularities of the quality of education

- Do you usually go to school with pleasure? What feelings are you mainly having at school?

- Please describe what did you feel when you found out that the lessons will be conducted remotely?

- Have you participated in remote classes? Please indicate the reasons for your absence from remote classes.

- How will you evaluate the quality of organization of remote lessons in general?

- If you were not participating in remote classes, what steps was the school taking to make you a participant in lessons?

- How often were you absent before the state of emergency? What was the main reason for the absence?

- If you were not participating in classes, were absent, what steps was the school taking to make you a participant in lessons?

- According to you, what are the main issues connected with the quality of education at school?

Opportunities/limitations of using the internet

- Do you have computer skills? Can you use it independently?

- Do you have a computer and internet access at home? What technical equipment were you using during remote lessons?

- Please indicate whether you have ever been withdrawn from the education or the learning process due to health problems? Do you presently have health-related concerns that may impede your education?

Programs and plans connected to education

- We are aware that girls and boys from the Yezidi community have a problem of attending school and continuing education. How would you comment on this problem? Have you encountered that problem? Do you have female and male acquaintances who have stopped attending school? What were the reasons? We know that Yezidi girls get married at a young age and do not attend school also for that reason. What is your attitude towards marriages at a young age? Do you think Yezidi girls get married willfully or there are also cases of coercion? What is your attitude towards the phenomenon of coercion? If you are forced to marry, how will you behave?

- Do you want to continue learning after school? If no, then what plans do you have? In which case you would like to continue education. If you want, then where and in what field? What is the attitude of the other members of your family toward that decision?

- How do you evaluate the impact of your education received today on your future? Can you consider it as a guarantee of a prosperous future?

Professional preferences

- How many HEIs do you know in Armenia? Are you aware of the admission procedure? Do you have professional preferences? What accounts for that?

- What occupation would you like to have in the future?

Family status, traditions, contacts

Please briefly introduce your family – the number of family members, the number of children attending school, including yourself, and parents' education and parents' employment. Is/are your sibling/siblings attending school? If no, please present the main reasons.

Besides the family members, with whom are you mainly in contact? Who are your friends? Do you have Armenian friends?

Please characterize the socio-economic condition of your family. *If he/she finds it difficult, ask to choose one of the following options:*

- Money is not sufficient even for buying food.

- Money is sufficient for buying food but not clothes.

- Money is sufficient for buying food and clothes but is not sufficient for buying expensive items, such as a TV set or a washing machine.

- We can afford to buy some expensive items (for example, a TV set or a washing machine).

- We can afford to buy some expensive items, go on a summer vacation, buy a car, but cannot buy an apartment.

- We can even buy an apartment.

Is there an issue that we haven't spoken about, but you consider important to mention?

Thank for the interview.

Questionnaire for an interview with parents

> *Note for interviewer: present the organization and the purpose of interview; submit the participation agreement form for familiarization and signature/verbal consent; request permission to record the interview; <u>emphasize</u> that this is done only not to lose the information and for the efficiency of analytical works and will not be published/disseminated. Note that the interview is conducted anonymously; participant's personal data will not be mentioned in the report. Indicate the total duration of the interview – 45-60 minutes.*

Questions relating to the quality of education

- How many school-age children do you have?

- In what grade level is/are your child/children?

- Did your child/children participate in online classes during the pandemic in 2020, under conditions of the state of emergency? If no, then please indicate the reasons for not being involved in classes. What is the main reason? *If he/she finds it difficult to answer, clarify which of the following options is mostly appropriate for his/her situation:*

    - *Availability of technical resources – computer, smart phone, etc*

    - *Internet access*

    - *Daily life inconveniences*

    - *Child's fatigue factor*

- Have you tried to involve you child in the learning process in another way (finding out from classmates' parents what homework has been assigned, etc.)?

- Has the school tried to somehow support your child's involvement in online classes? If yes, then how?

- Have you received any support for involvement of your child/children in general education? What support? By whom? How would you evaluate the impact of that support?

- If the child/children has/have participated in online classes, how will you evaluate their involvement? Were they actively involved? Were they doing homework assignments or were just present in online classes?

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- How will you evaluate the work of teachers in the process of delivering online lessons?

The role and relevance of education in the Yezidi community

- How much time do you or anyone of your family members usually spend on helping the child/children with the homework during the day? And how much time have you allocated during the state of emergency? If you have not allocated or are not allocating time, what is the reason?

- To what extent are you prioritizing education? To what extent is education prioritized in your community?

- According to you, is it possible to achieve a success in Armenia through receiving education? Please give examples and elaborate on your answer.

Perceptions of the 12-year education

- What is your attitude toward the law according to which the 12-year education in Armenia is compulsory? If positive, why? If negative, why?

Awareness of and attitude toward the new procedure

- A procedure has been adopted in Armenia per which the state has an objective to reduce the number of children withdrawn from compulsory education to solve that problem. Are you aware of that procedure? What is your attitude?

- Should your child fail to attend school, what will your attitude be towards the fact that the school, community, and the regional administration take steps to solve the problem? How will other members of your community feel about it?

Reasons behind school dropouts

- Please briefly introduce your family – the number of family members, the number of children attending school, and your and your spouse's education and employment. Are other children attending school? If no, please present the main reasons.

- Were your children regularly attending school before the state of emergency? If no, then why?

- If your child was not participating in classes or was absent, what steps were taken by the school?

- What do you think are the main problems relating to the quality of education of your children at school?

- Please indicate whether your child has ever been withdrawn from the education and the learning process for health reasons? Does he/she presently have health-related concerns that may impede your child's education?

- We are aware that girls and boys from the Yezidi community have a problem of attending school and continuing their education. How would you comment on this problem? Have you encountered that problem? Do you have female and male acquaintances who have stopped attending school? What were the main reasons? As a parent, how do you feel about that phenomenon? We know that Yezidi girls get married at a young age and do not attend school also for that reason. What is your attitude towards marriages at a young age? According to you, are Yezidi girls getting married willfully or are there also cases of coercion? What is your attitude towards the phenomenon of coercion? Would you like your daughter to marry at a young age? What would you do, if she wouldn't want to? If your daughter marries, will she continue education?

- Do you want your child to continue learning after school? If not, then what are the main reasons? What plans do you have in relation to the child? If yes, then where and in what field? What is the attitude of other members of your family towards that decision?

Family status

- Please characterize the socio-economic condition of your family. *If he/she finds it difficult, ask to choose one of the following options:*

  - Money is not sufficient even for buying food.

  - Money is sufficient for buying food but not clothes.

  - Money is sufficient for buying food and clothes but is not sufficient for buying expensive items, such as a TV set or a washing machine.

  - We can afford to buy some expensive items (for example, a TV set or a washing machine).

  - We can afford buying some expensive items, going on a summer vacation, buying a car but not an apartment.

  - We can even buy an apartment.

- What suggestions do you have regarding the involvement of your child/children in educational processes, including in an online and/or remote format?

Is there an issue that we haven't spoken about, but you consider important to mention?

Thank for the interview.

Questionnaire for an interview with school directors and municipality heads

Note for interviewer: present the organization and the purpose of interview; submit the participation agreement form for familiarization and signature/verbal consent; request permission to record the interview; <u>emphasize</u> that this is done only not to lose the information and for the efficiency of analytical works and will not be published/disseminated. Note that the interview is conducted anonymously; participant's personal data will not be mentioned in the report. Indicate the total duration of the interview – 45-60 minutes.

Quality of education at schools

In case of an interview with head of community, skip questions relating to school, i.e., Questions 1, 2, 3, 6, 8.

- Please briefly introduce the school – the number of school pupils and teachers.

- Please indicate the difficulties/problems that your school has faced in connection with organization of online education under conditions of the state of emergency.

- How many of the children enrolled have not participated in online classes? What is the reason? How will you characterize these children? Have the children from the Yezidi community participated in online classes? If no, then what was the main reason? What steps were taken by the school to involve these children?

- Was the assessment for teachers' and school pupils' needs conducted for the efficient organization of online education?

- What needs have you revealed, and how have you tried to respond to those needs?

- Were all subjects organized online? If no, then what subjects were not organized and why?

- How will you evaluate participation of the children from the Yezidi community in the learning process before the pandemic? What basic needs do they have in the context of exercising the right to education? Do you have school pupils that have not completed the education? If yes, what are the reasons?

- In what manner does the school-parent cooperation take place in tackling the problems?

- Is there an upper secondary school/kindergarten/preschool in the community (if there are such facilities, how is the involvement of Yezidi pupils and what is the efficiency of the work of those structures in the context of learning of Yezidi pupils?)?

Perceptions of the 12-year education

- What is your attitude towards the law according to which the 12-year education in Armenia is compulsory? If positive, then why? If negative, then why?

Awareness of and attitude towards the new procedure as a potential security mechanism

- A procedure has been adopted in Armenia per which the state has an objective to reduce the number of children withdrawn from compulsory education and to solve that problem. Are you aware of that procedure? What is your attitude? To what extent can this procedure contribute to the solution of problems relating to the school dropout rate of children, including those from the Yezidi community?

The role and relevance of education in the Yezidi community

- To what extent is education currently prioritized in the Yezidi community? Please elaborate on and justify your answer. Which factors can influence the enhancement of the role of education in the Yezidi community?

Reasons for frequent withdrawal of girls and boys from schools and chances of bringing them back to school

- Are the children from the Yezidi community attending school? How many pupils have dropped out over the past three years, and what are the main reasons for being withdrawn from education?

- How frequently is the financial situation of family seen as a reason for leaving school?

- What is the rate of marriages at a young age among school pupils? Are married girls withdrawn from school? Why?

- What are the main reasons for dropping out of school in case of boys?

If you would like to add something, or if we haven't mentioned an issue that you consider important to address, please indicate.

Thank for the interview.

Questionnaire for an expert interview

> *Note for interviewer: present the organization and the purpose of interview; submit the participation agreement form for familiarization and signature/verbal consent; request permission to record the interview; emphasize that this is done only not to lose the information and for the efficiency of analytical work, and will not be published/disseminated. Note that the interview is conducted anonymously; participant's personal data will not be mentioned in the report. Indicate the total duration of the interview – 45-60 minutes.*

- Please introduce yourself – specialty, employment, and work experience in the education sector.

- Can you indicate what main problems are available in the general education sector?

- Please evaluate the quality of education before the state of emergency.

- How will you evaluate the quality of online education in general? According to you, what were the main problems connected with the quality of online education?

- What were the main problems related to the access to education?

- What main achievement or positive aspect available in the process of delivering education during the state of emergency would you indicate?

- How would you characterize the children that have dropped out of general education during the state of emergency? Who are they – sex, age, etc.?

- How would you evaluate the delivery of education for the children from national minorities under conditions of the state of emergency? Please present the problems encountered, solutions, and steps taken.

- To what extent are you familiar with preventive measures that are taken by state, international, and nongovernmental organizations in relation to dropping out of education before and after the state of emergency?

- How would you evaluate efficiency and target of these measures? Please justify and give examples. Please refer to the measures taken by different state, international, and nongovernmental organizations.

- Surveys suggest that children from the Yezidi community, particularly the girls, are withdrawn from compulsory general education. How will you comment on this issue, the reasons, and consequences?

- How do you see the solution of the problem connected with withdrawal of children from the Yezidi community at the political level and at the community level?

- Have the problems existent in communities of national minorities, such as the fact of dropping out of school due to marriage at an early age, been considered when developing the procedure. *Ask the question to state education policy makers or informed experts.*

- Is this procedure sufficient for neutralizing the problems relating to the withdrawal of the Yezidi community children from education.

Is there a question that we haven't spoken about but you consider important to mention?

Thank for the interview.

Guide for focus group discussion with pupils

Note for moderator: present the organization and the purpose of discussion; submit the participation agreement form for familiarization and signature/verbal consent; request permission to record the discussion; emphasize that this is done only not to lose *the information and for the efficiency of analytical work, and will not be published/disseminated. Note that the discussion is conducted anonymously; participant's personal data will not be mentioned in the report. Indicate the total duration of the discussion – 45-60 minutes.*

Conduct a discussion with boys and girls in separate groups:

- *with13-18-year-old girls, married/not married*

- *with16-18-year-old boys*

Particularities of the quality of education

- Do you usually go to school with pleasure? What feelings are you mainly having at school?

- Please describe what did you feel when you found out that the lessons will be delivered remotely?

- Have you participated in remote classes? Please indicate the reasons for your absence from remote classes.

- How will you evaluate the quality of organization of remote classes in general?

- If you were not participating in remote classes, what steps was the school taking to make you a participant in classes?

- How often were you absent before the state of emergency? What was the main reason for the absence?

- If you were not participating in classes, were absent, what steps was the school taking to make you a participant in classes?

- What are the main issues relating to the quality of education at school in your opinion?

- Do you have Armenian friends? What is communication like with them?

Opportunities/limitations of using the internet

- Do you have computer skills? Can you use it independently?

- Do you have a computer and internet access at home? What technical equipment were you using during remote lessons?

Programs and plans related to education

- We are aware that girls and boys from the Yezidi community have a problem of attending school and continuing education. How would you comment on this problem? Have you encountered that problem? Do you have female and male acquaintances who have stopped attending school? What were the reasons? We know that Yezidi girls get married at a young age and do not attend school for that reason too. What is your attitude towards marriages at a young age? According to you, are Yezidi girls getting married willfully or are there also cases of coercion? What is your attitude towards the phenomenon of coercion? If you are forced to marry, how would you behave?

- Do you want to continue learning after school? If no, then what plans do you have? In what case you would like to continue education? If yes, then where and in what field? What is the attitude of other members of your family towards that decision?

- How do you evaluate the impact of your education received today on the future? Can you consider it as a guarantee of a prosperous future?

Professional preferences

- How many HEIs do you know in Armenia? Are you aware of the admission procedure? Do you have professional preferences? What is the reason for it?

- What occupation you would like to have in the future?

Family status, traditions, and communications

- Is/are your sibling/siblings attending school? If no, then please present the main reasons.

- Besides the family members, with whom are you mostly in contact? Who are your friends? Do you have Armenian friends?

Is there an issue that we haven't spoken about but you consider important to mention?

Additional questions for group discussion with boys

- What is your attitude towards the girls who are active on the internet (particularaly in social networks) or who have higher education.

Thank for the discussion.

Guide for focus group discussion with parents

Hold the discussion with fathers and mothers in separate groups.

Questions relating to the quality of education

- How many school-age children do you have?

- In what grade is/are studying your child/children?

- Did your child/children participate in online classes during the pandemic in 2020, under conditions of the state of emergency? If no, please indicate the reasons for not being involved in classes. What is the main reason?

- *If he/she finds it difficult to answer, clarify which of the following options are mostly appropriate for his/her situation:*

    - *Availability of technical equipment – computer, smart phone, etc.*

    - *Internet access*

    - *Daily life inconveniences*

    - *Child's fatigue factor*

- Have you tried to involve your child in the learning process in another way (finding out from classmates' parents what homework has been assigned, etc.)?

- Has the school tried to somehow support your child's involvement in online classes? If yes, then how?

- Have you received any support for involvement of your child, children in general education? What support? By whom? How would you evaluate the impact of that support?

- If the child/children has/have participated in online classes, how will you evaluate their involvement? Were they actively involved? Were they doing home assignments or were just present in online classes?

- How will you evaluate the work of teachers in the process of delivering online lessons?

The role and relevance of education in the Yezidi community

- How much time do you or anyone of your family members usually spend on helping the child/children with the homework during the day? And how much time have you allocated during the state of emergency? If you have not allocated or are not allocating time, what is the reason?

- To what extent are you prioritizing education? To what extent is education prioritized in your community?

- According to you, is it possible to achieve a success in Armenia through receiving education? Please give examples and elaborate on your answer.

Perceptions of the 12-year education

- What is your attitude towards the law according to which the 12-year education in Armenia is compulsory? If positive, then why? If negative, then why?

Awareness of and attitude towards the new procedure

- A procedure has been adopted in Armenia per which the state has an objective to reduce the number of children withdrawn from compulsory education and to solve that problem. Are you aware of that procedure? What is your attitude?

- Should your child fail to attend school, what will your attitude be towards the fact that the school, community, and the regional administration take steps to solve the problem? How will other members of your community feel about it?

Reasons behind school dropouts

- Were your children regularly attending school before the state of emergency? If no, then why?

- If your child was not participating in lessons, was absent, what steps were taken by the school?

- What do you think are the main problems relating to the quality of education of your children at school?

- We are aware that girls and boys from the Yezidi community have a problem of attending school and continuing education. How would you comment on this problem? Have you encountered that problem? Do you have female and male acquaintances who have stopped attending school? What were the main reasons? As a parent, how do you feel about that phenomenon? We know that Yezidi girls get married at a young age and do not attend school for that reason too. What is your attitude towards marriages at a young age? According to you, are Yezidi girls getting married willfully or are there cases of coercion too? What is your attitude towards the phenomenon of coercion? Would you like your daughter to marry at a young age? How will you behave if she wouldn't want to? If your daughter marries, will she continue education?

- Do you want your child to continue learning after school? If no, then what are the main reasons? What plans do you have in relation to your child? If yes, then where and in what field? What is the attitude of other members of your family towards that decision?

- Please briefly introduce your family – the number of family members, the number of children attending school, and your and your spouse's education and employment. Are the other children attending school? If no, then please present the main reasons.

Family status

Please characterize the socio-economic condition of your family. *If he/she finds it difficult, ask to choose one of the following options:*

- Money is not sufficient even for buying food.

- Money is sufficient for buying food but not clothes.

- Money is sufficient for buying food and clothes but is not sufficient for buying expensive items, such as a TV set or a washing machine.

- We can afford to buy some expensive items (for example, a TV set or a washing machine).

- We can afford to buy some expensive items, go on a summer vacation, buy a car but not an apartment.

- We can even buy an apartment.

What suggestions do you have regarding the involvement of your child/children in educational processes, including in an online and/or remote format?

Is there an issue that we haven't spoken about but you consider important to mention?

Thank for the discussion.

Annex 2. Participation agreement forms

Participation agreement form for children

What is the survey about?

With the funding from Eurasia Partnership Foundation, the Center for Educational Research and Consulting in Armenia performs a survey relating to the problems of marriages at a young age and dropping out of compulsory education in the Yezidi community. The purpose of the survey is to find out what are the main problems relating to education of the children in the Yezidi community. Your opinion and perceptions regarding these questions are crucial for our survey team.

Who are we?

I am an interviewer from the Center for Educational Research and Consulting

Address: Room 514, 5th floor, 26/3 Vazgen Sargsyan Str., 0010, Yerevan

Telephone: (+374) 10 56 33 74,

Mobile: (+374) 93 75 37 40.

Website: www.e-research.am

How will we conduct the survey?

We will ask you questions prepared in advance. If you don't mind, we will record the conversation so that nothing important is missed.

What questions will we ask?

We will ask about your education and family.

May I end the interview or not answer questions?

Yes, of course. You may end the interview anytime. You may also bypass any question to which you don't want to answer.

Will my name be used anywhere?

No, the data presented by you will be used only in a generalized manner; your name will not be mentioned anywhere.

Yes, all the questions discussed will be kept confidential. However, in case someone causes damage to you, I have to inform about that appropriate bodies.

We will listen to the records of your and other children's responses and will compile a report.

Note that there is no any right or wrong answer; we would like to hear about your life experience.

If you agree to participate in the interview, please give your verbal consent.

I have read and I do understand the above-stated information.

I agree to participate in the interview.

I agree that the interview is recorded.

I agree that the opinion voiced by me is mentioned in the survey report as a citation, without mentioning my name.

Indicate today's date:___/____/2021

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Center for Educational Research and Consulting

Address: Room 514, 5th floor, 26/3 Vazgen Sargsyan Str., 0010, Yerevan

Tel.: (+374) 10 56 33 74; Mobile: (+374) 93 75 37 40.

Website: www.e-research.am

Participation agreement form for parent/guardian

Hello! I am _____ _____. I represent the Center for Educational Research and Consulting. With the funding from Eurasia Partnership Foundation, the Center for Educational Research and Consulting in Armenia performs a survey relating to the problems of marriages at a young age and dropping out of compulsory education in the Yezidi community. The purpose of the survey is to find out what are the main problems relating to education of the children in the Yezidi community. Your opinion and perceptions regarding these questions are crucial for our survey team.

To conduct the study, questionnaires were designed. We would like to obtain your consent for holding an interview with you. The inquiry is anonymous; the data presented by you will be used only in a generalized manner. The interview concerns the education of your child.

We guarantee that the information received during the inquiry, which will last approximately 60 minutes, will not be published and will not be provided to other persons and organizations; they will be used solely in a generalized manner for analytical purposes. The information received will be summarized in the report without individual data regarding you and your child.

To increase the efficiency of analytical works and not to lose any information, we request your permission for recording the interview; the answers to questions will be recorded with an audio recorder.

Your participation in the study is voluntary.

You will not receive any financial payment or bonus for participation in the survey. In the meantime, no risk is imposed on you for participation or nonparticipation in the inquiry.

We would like to stress that there is no right or wrong answer; we are interested in your personal opinion concerning these questions.

Should you have questions regarding this survey, you may call 093 75 37 40 phone number or write to the following e-mail address: marinagalstyan@e-research.am

Thank you in advance for listening to us and answering the questions.

I have read and I do understand the above-stated information:_____

(name, signature/verbal agreement)

I agree to participate in the interview:_____

(name, signature/verbal agreement)

I agree that the opinion voiced by me is mentioned in the survey report as a citation, without mentioning my name: _____

(name, signature/verbal agreement)

Indicate today's date: ___/____/2021

Center for Educational Research and Consulting

Address: Room 514, 5th floor, 26/3 Vazgen Sargsyan Str., 0010, Yerevan

Mobile: (+374) 93 75 37 40.

Website: www.e-research.am

Participation agreement form for information providers

Hello! I am _____ _____. I represent the Center for Educational Research and Consulting. With the funding from Eurasia Partnership Foundation, the Center for Educational Research and Consulting in Armenia performs a survey relating to the problems of marriages at a young age and dropping out of compulsory education in the Yezidi community. The purpose of the survey is to find out what are the main problems relating to education of the children in the Yezidi community. Your opinion and perceptions regarding these questions are crucial for our survey team.

We would like to obtain your consent for holding an interview with you. The inquiry is anonymous; the data presented by you will be used only in a generalized manner.

We guarantee that the information received during the inquiry, which will last approximately 60 minutes, will not be published and provided to other persons and organizations and will be used solely in a generalized manner for analytical purposes.

To increase the efficiency of analytical works and not to lose the information, we request your permission for recording the interview; the answers to questions will be recorded with an audio recorder.

Your participation in the study is voluntary.

Should you have questions regarding this survey, you may call 093 75 37 40 phone number or write to the following e-mail address: marinagalstyan@e-research.am

Thank you in advance for listening to us and answering the questions.

I have read and I do understand the above-stated information: _____

(name, signature/verbal agreement)

I agree to participate in the interview: _____

(name, signature/verbal agreement)

I agree that the opinion voiced by me is mentioned in the survey report as a citation, without mentioning my name: _____

(name, signature/verbal agreement)

I agree that my name/surname is indicated in the list of the inquiry participants:
_____ (name, signature/verbal agreement)

Indicate today's date: ___/____/2021

Center for Educational Research and Consulting

Address: Room 514, 5th floor, 26/3 Vazgen Sargsyan Str., 0010, Yerevan

Mobile: (+374) 93 75 37 40.

Website: www.e-research.am

Annex 3. List of experts participated in the survey

1. Isabella Sargsyan, Programs Director at Eurasia Partnership Foundation

2. Lusine Kharatyan, Anthropologist, Scientific Worker at the Institute of Archaeology & Ethnography, Member of the Committee of Experts of the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages of the Council of Europe

3. Naira Arakelyan, Executive Director at "Armavir Development Center" NGO

4. Venera Abovyan, Biologist-Chemist; Biology, Chemistry Teacher; Director of School; formerly Teacher-Leader of "Teach for Armenia" Program

5. Siranush Sargsyan, Senior Inspector, Police Captain, the RA Police

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ուղղորդման կարգը սահմանելու մասին:
https://www.arlis.am/documentview.aspx?docid=149923-ից

Հայաստանում բնակվող ազգությամբ եզդի աղջիկների իրավունքներին և
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