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Replies of Armenia to the list of issues in relation to its combined fifth and sixth reports**, ***

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*** The annexes to the present document may be accessed from the web page of the Committee.



Part I

Reply to paragraph 2 (a) of the list of issues (CRC/C/ARM/Q/5-6)

1. In line with its international obligations, including those under the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Council of Europe Convention on the Protection of Children against Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse, and considering the unique aspects of its domestic legislation, Armenia has developed a draft Law "On the Rights of the Child and the System of Protection of the Child," along with a package of related laws ("the legislative package"). The later has undergone extensive discussions with relevant stakeholders and has been submitted to the Office of the Prime Minister of Armenia for revision. The legislative package is set for enactment in 2024.
2. Armenia continues to implement the current Law on the Rights of the Child. Article 6 ensures every child's right to a name and citizenship from birth, with the Civil Status Acts Registration Agency of the Ministry of Justice responsible for registration. Article 15 guarantees every child the right to maintain personal relationships and direct contact with parents, except in cases outlined by the Family Code. The Compulsory Enforcement Service of the Ministry of Justice upholds this right as stipulated by the Law "On Compulsory Enforcement of Judicial Acts."

Reply to paragraph 2 (b) of the list of issues

3. In 2022, an external expert assessment of the National Strategic Programme on Protection of Child Rights in Armenia for 2017-2021 was conducted. Recognizing the need for an impartial and multifaceted evaluation, the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs of Armenia ("MLSA") requested a comprehensive assessment from United Nations Children's Fund ("UNICEF"). The actions outlined in the 2020-2023 Programme, aimed at ensuring a child's right to live in a family and develop harmoniously, concluded in 2023. To externally evaluate this programme, the Ministry sought assistance from US Agency for International Development ("USAID") through the Data for Impact Project. To establish a new programme following the 2020-2023 Programme, amendments were made to the Law on the Rights of the Child. The findings from the assessments have been taken into account in the development of the new Complex Programme for the Protection of the Rights of the Child ("Complex Programme"), which will be submitted to the Office of the Prime Minister by early August 2024. This new Programme will address key child rights issues for the next five years and will include measures to ensure children's voices are heard in the planning process.

Reply to paragraph 2 (c) of the list of issues

4. The National Commission for the Protection of Child Rights has been actively addressing fundamental sectoral issues over the past three years through its sessions and working groups. In 2023, the Commission's Operational Headquarters held discussions across ten regions of Armenia to identify region-specific risks and resolve or prevent potential inter-agency issues. This effort included representatives from various state institutions and sectoral organizations. To ensure children's voices are heard in the decision-making processes, a government decision established a working group within the Commission, inclusive of child participants, who have actively contributed to working groups, offering opinions and proposals that are considered based on their age and maturity. In January 2024, the MLSA initiated a meeting between Commission members and beneficiaries of round-the-clock and day care institutions, providing a platform for these children to voice their suggestions across various fields. Additionally, Commission members are actively involved in discussions concerning legislative amendments.

Reply to paragraph 2 (d) of the list of issues

5. In the past three years, the MLSA has undertaken various initiatives to support children in challenging situations. These include expanding round-the-clock and day care services to 37 centers, reaching over 4,000 beneficiary children and their families with socio-psychological support measures. Preventive services and in-kind assistance have been provided to mitigate the risk of family separation. Notably, the number of children in foster

care has risen to 152, and crisis support services have been offered to prevent long-term separations. Graduates of round-the-clock institutions now receive living allowances and pocket money equivalent to the minimum wage for 12 months, rather than a lump-sum payment.

6. The 2023-2027 Programme for Social Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities outlines priorities for the coming years, focusing on the rights and social inclusion of individuals with disabilities. It includes measures to combat stereotypes and discriminatory treatment, promoting a more inclusive society.

7. Since 2020, the Ministry has provided comprehensive support to victims of domestic violence, including services through support centers across all regions and Yerevan. These centers offer information on rights, socio-psychological support, legal aid, and employment assistance, accessible via a hotline service. Shelters provide safe accommodation, food, hygiene products, educational supplies for children, socio-psychological support, and legal aid. Victims also receive lump-sum compensation of up to AMD 150,000.

8. Following the approval of the package of legislative drafts by the National Assembly, budget allocations will enhance child protection at the community level, including the introduction of professional capacities. New initiatives include measures to ensure the right to education for children excluded from compulsory education due to socio-economic reasons. This will involve providing school supplies, essentials (such as stationery, school bags, uniforms, sports attire, etc.) and the necessary furniture for a conducive home study environment (such as desks, chairs, lamps, etc).

Reply to paragraph 2 (e) of the list of issues

9. During the reporting period, 23 output indicators have been developed and integrated into the information system for registering children in challenging life situations, which are disaggregated by the type of care, gender, age groups, police referrals, and which cover the distribution of children in different types of alternative care. These include ratios of family-type care to round-the-clock care, the percentage of children transferred to alternative care following needs assessment, and details on those with individual social plans. Additionally, the indicators encompass data on children transitioning to alternative care with reviewed social plans, contact maintenance with family for children in round-the-clock care, relocations from institutions, ratios for those exiting round-the-clock care versus new admissions, interests in registered foster parenting, exits from foster care, adoption interests, children available for adoption, transitions to foster care, evaluations for reunification decisions, reunions with biological families, post-reunion monitoring by social workers, state support during and after reunions, preventive services accessed by children and families, utilization of day care services, counts of day care centers, and the number of children in round-the-clock care institutions and special schools. Each of the mentioned indicators has a detailed definition based on its specific characteristics.

10. Following the adoption of the legislative package, a new system will be implemented, with an initial template already in place, and programming set to commence shortly. This system will enable automatic interoperability with other systems, enhancing efficiency. Currently, the data from the "Manuk" information-analytical system is applied in the policy development process.

Reply to paragraph 2 (f) of the list of issues

11. Using the available technical, human and financial resources, the Human Rights Defender conducts monitoring of compliance with the legislation and provisions of the Convention, including through regular visits to child care institutions and schools, issues public statements on the rights of the child, provides recommendations to the competent bodies for legal improvements, and addresses complaints related to child protection. Adequate technical, human, and financial capacities available for the Children's Rights Protection Department are crucial in enabling the Human Rights Defender to effectively fulfill the entrusted mandate of upholding the rights of the child.

Reply to paragraph 2 (g) of the list of issues

12. The obligations and responsibilities of businesses are governed by the existing legal frameworks, which primarily focus on compliance with mandatory laws and regulations. Unlike legal responsibilities, which are obligatory and enforceable by law, social responsibility encompasses voluntary actions undertaken by businesses to contribute beyond what is legally mandated.

13. Section 7 of the Criminal Code of the Republic of Armenia adopted on 5 May 2021 (enacted on 1 July 2022) introduces the concept of criminal liability for legal entities - a provision, which was not part of the previous Criminal Code. Legal entities may be held criminally responsible for any offense outlined in the Criminal Code under the following conditions:

- If the offense is committed by an individual authorized to influence the entity's activities or decisions, or by a representative acting on behalf of the entity with their permission or instigation, and for the entity's benefit.
- If the entity fails to ensure compliance with legal obligations or regulations, resulting in an offense committed by an authorized individual, representative, or employee.
- If the offense is committed by an individual authorized to influence the entity's activities, a representative acting on behalf of the entity, or through the entity itself. Moreover, Article 126 of the Code outlines the punitive measures applicable to legal entities, which include fines, temporary suspension of specific activities, compulsory liquidation, or a ban on operating within Armenian territory.

Reply to paragraph 3 of the list of issues

14. According to Article 10 of the Family Code of the Republic of Armenia, the legal marriage age for men and women is set at 18 years. However, the same Article allows for marriage registration for individuals aged 17 and 16 with parental (legal representative) consent. In the case of 16-year-olds, consent from both parents and the requirement that the other spouse be at least 18 years old are necessary conditions. This legislative approach aligns with the age at which individuals attain active legal capacity. Notably, marriage for children under 16 years old is prohibited by law.

15. To address concerns regarding the marriage age limit and uphold human rights, the Standing Committee on Protection of Human Rights and Public Affairs of the National Assembly has conducted public hearings on legislative amendments aimed at raising the marriage age limit, resulting in draft legislative amendments prepared by the Committee, which are expected to be adopted by the end of June 2024.

Reply to paragraph 4 (a) of the list of issues

16. The 2023-2025 Action Plan stemming from Armenia's National Strategy on Human Rights Protection (ratified by Government Decision No. 1674-L on September 28, 2023) contains Chapter 4 titled "Legal Equality, Prohibition of Discrimination." This chapter outlines various measures, notably the adoption of the draft Law "On Ensuring Legal Equality," aimed at promoting equal treatment and opportunities for all individuals and citizens without discrimination.

17. A key provision of the draft is the establishment of the Legal Equality Council, tasked with supporting the Human Rights Defender in investigating discrimination complaints. Additionally, the draft Law on the System of Protection of the Rights of the Child incorporates fundamental principles safeguarding children's rights, emphasizing the elimination of discrimination based on various factors such as nationality, race, sex, language, belief, and social origin. Following the enactment of this draft, further secondary legislative acts will be developed and implemented by the Ministry of Justice throughout 2024.

Reply to paragraph 4 (b) of the list of issues

18. Since 2015, Armenia's constitutional amendments have enshrined the basic rights of the child, including the principle of "the best interest of the child," as outlined in Article 37 of the Constitution, echoing Article 3 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child. During enforcement actions carried out in the context of visitation rights, compulsory enforcement officers are mandated to prioritize the best interest of the child alongside the strict observance of the writ of execution. To facilitate this, the Compulsory Enforcement Service has adopted the Guide on Conducting Enforcement Proceedings regarding Child Visitation. The Guide specifies procedures such as engaging with the child to understand their refusal of visitation and involving experts when necessary, especially in cases of alleged psychological pressure or influence. In instances where visitation enforcement is deemed not in the child's best interest, officers are obligated to terminate enforcement proceedings accordingly. The draft Law "On making amendments and supplements to the Family Code of the Republic of Armenia" includes provisions on the child's expression of opinion and being heard. Children may express their opinions in writing, verbally, or through audio and video recordings, with the engagement of children's experts or social workers to ensure their voices are appropriately considered. Written opinions are submitted along with corresponding professional assessments, while verbal or recorded opinions are accompanied by expert assessments conducted by relevant authorities.

Reply to paragraph 4 (c) of the list of issues

19. The draft Law "On making amendments and supplements to the Family Code of the Republic of Armenia" includes provisions concerning the expression of opinion by children and their right to be heard. Children's participation in the decision-making process has been prioritized in various government-led discussions, ensuring their right to be heard. For instance, children have been directly involved in discussions on amending the government's decision regarding the minimum state social criteria for children in care institutions. Efforts are underway to adjust these criteria to better reflect children's perspectives and rights. Additionally, children have actively contributed to the working group focused on the educational rights of those in care institutions. Studies conducted within this group aim to improve educational opportunities for children in round-the-clock care. In line with the amendment made on 9 February 2021 to the Law on the Rights of the Child, children aged 16 and above now have the right to provide informed written consent for psychiatric intervention, except in cases specified by law. This provision applies when the child, in the opinion of the psychiatrist, is capable of understanding the consequences of the intervention, and when such information is deemed beneficial and supportive for the child's well-being.

Reply to paragraph 4 (d) of the list of issues

20. Article 61, Part 1 of the Constitution of the Republic of Armenia guarantees the right to effective judicial protection of one's rights and freedoms, while Article 63, Part 1 ensures the right to a fair and public hearing within a reasonable time frame by an independent and impartial court. Additionally, Article 63, Part 2 allows for judicial proceedings to be held behind closed doors in certain circumstances, such as to protect privacy, minors' interests, or state security. The new Criminal Procedure Code, effective from July 2022, reaffirms these rights, emphasizing that individuals have the right to have their cases examined by the appropriate court and judge. Furthermore, it grants victims of crimes the right to seek compensation for damages incurred through the court system.

21. Article 50, Part 4 of the Criminal Procedure Code of the Republic of Armenia specifies that the rights of a minor victim are exercised by their legal representative, who can be a parent, adopter, guardian, trustee, or an employee of the guardianship and trusteeship body. However, Article 69 outlines circumstances where the participation of a legal representative is prohibited. These include situations where the legal representative has a personal relationship with the judge or another participant in the proceedings, their conduct is detrimental to the interests of the represented person, they are ineligible to be a legal representative according to law, or there are indications of their involvement in a crime against the interests of the represented person. Additionally, a minor's guardian, trustee, or an employee of a guardianship and trusteeship body cannot serve as their legal representative

if they have participated in the proceedings as a judge, participant, or supporter, except when acting as a witness. These provisions aim to prevent potential harm to the interests of minors by their legal representatives during proceedings.

22. The new Criminal Procedure Code of the Republic of Armenia has introduced more child-centered approaches. For instance, Article 212 outlines specific procedures for investigative actions involving minors, mandating the involvement of a psychologist to safeguard their best interests. Prior to commencing such actions, investigators must draft questions for minors with the psychologist's consent. The psychologist is entitled to ask questions, provide comments, and offer professional recommendations during the investigative procedure to ensure that it is conducted in a manner that prioritizes the child's best interests to the fullest extent possible.

23. In civil proceedings, minors' rights are protected by their legal representatives, as outlined in Article 3, Part 1 of the Civil Procedure Code. Minors may also independently defend their interests in court under certain circumstances and have the right to be heard during investigations, as specified in Article 2, Parts 7-9. In cases involving minor witnesses under fourteen years of age, the Court of First Instance must involve their legal representative and may also include a child psychologist or an educator during interrogation, as per Article 71, Part 6. When questioning a witness under the age of fourteen, individuals involved in the case will be asked to leave the courtroom if they have a legal representative present or if their presence could impact the witness's testimony. The Code of Administrative Procedure grants individuals and legal entities the right to appeal to administrative courts if they believe their rights or freedoms, as established by the Constitution and laws, are violated. Minors aged fourteen to eighteen may represent themselves in court under specific circumstances, and those recognized as partially capable have the right to be heard during case consideration, as detailed in Article 4. The rights and freedoms of minors under the age of fourteen are represented in court by their legal representatives, which include parents, guardians, and other individuals authorized by law. Minors aged fourteen to eighteen, recognized as partially capable, have the right to be heard during case consideration. Additionally, the court can extend the right to be heard to minors under fourteen or those recognized as incapacitated during case consideration.

24. The "Child Protection" Law further prohibits violence and exploitation against children, holding offenders criminally liable. The state and relevant bodies are tasked with protecting children from various forms of abuse and exploitation, including involvement in criminal activities such as the use, production or trade of drugs, beggary, prostitution, gambling, and other violations of the child's rights and legal interests. Chapter 3 of the law focuses on safeguarding children's rights in adverse conditions and extreme situations.

Reply to paragraph 5 (a) of the list of issues

25. The ongoing efforts towards the formulation of the Complex Programme aim to address the risks associated with internet usage and its harmful impact on the life and health of children. Central to the Programme's objectives are measures that prioritize more balanced and supportive online environments that facilitate access to information while safeguarding online experiences.

Reply to paragraph 5 (b) of the list of issues

26. Chapter 6 of the 2023-2025 Action Plan stemming from the National Strategy on Human Rights Protection outlines initiatives aimed at reviewing the legislation governing police conduct during gatherings and other mass events to ensure alignment with international standards and human rights principles. Additionally, the plan includes provisions to enhance the understanding of freedom of assembly among leaders and personnel of specialized units within the Ministry of Internal Affairs tasked with maintaining public order. The objective is to foster a practice that prioritizes the protection of human rights, addresses emotional dynamics, and effectively manages crowds during such events.

Reply to paragraph 6 (a) of the list of issues

27. The draft Law of the Republic of Armenia titled "On the Rights of the Child and the System of Protection of the Child" solidifies the child's entitlement to protection, affirming the following provisions:

- Every child is entitled to safeguarding against violence.
- Individuals, including parents or legal representatives, are prohibited from subjecting children to violence, physical punishment, or other degrading treatment, and from using coercion for upbringing purposes.
- Corporal punishment, torture, or any other cruel, degrading, or inhuman treatment of children is prohibited across family, educational, alternative care, medical, psychiatric, penitentiary, or any other settings.
- Children who have experienced violence have the right to state protection and support. Entities involved in caring for children are mandated to promptly report incidents of child violence to the Police of the Republic of Armenia.
- The government defines the procedure for referring children subjected to violence to relevant protection bodies, outlines forms of support, and establishes the support provision process.
- The state, its bodies, and organizations undertake measures to enforce the prohibition of child violence, including through legal enactments, parenting support programmes, promoting non-violent child-rearing methods, and training child-focused specialists.
- Individuals infringing upon a child's right to protection from all forms of violence are liable under the law.

28. Additionally, since 2020, as part of the initiative to nationalize the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), data on SDG16 (selected as the initial target) has been systematically gathered across the regions of Armenia and its capital, Yerevan. This data includes information from the care institutions operating under the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs. The gathered output indicators are analyzed, and relevant guidance is offered, as needed.

Reply to paragraph 6 (b) of the list of issues

29. "Safe Corner," established since 2023 at the "Syunik Marz Child and Family Support Centre" SNPO and the "Child Protection Center" Fund in Yerevan, serves as the first safe haven specifically designed to protect children who have experienced or witnessed violence. This facility offers multidisciplinary and inter-agency protection to victims of violence, aiming to prevent re-traumatization and introduce child-focused justice procedures. Services provided include interrogation, forensic medical examinations, comprehensive assessments of the children's conditions, and crisis support from specialized professionals. "Safe Corner" ensures the best interests of children affected by violence are served and facilitates the proper enforcement of the law. It operates in collaboration with UNICEF Armenia and the MLSA, funded by the European Union. Another center with the same objectives was established at the FAR Child Protection Centre during the same period. Additionally, the Government of the Republic of Armenia approved the procedure for referring children subjected to violence to relevant support services on 4 April 2024. See also point 14 for more details.

Reply to paragraph 6 (c) of the list of issues

30. To enhance the competence of personnel in social protection, trainings are continuously organized for childcare professionals, including those working with and for child victims and witnesses of violence. In 2023, about 2,000 participants from child care and protection institutions received training, often covering topics like violence prevention. Collaborative efforts with other agencies, such as a qualification course with the Ministry of Justice, and partnerships with the National Institute of Health and various organizations have broadened training opportunities.

31. Since 2022, discussions with UNICEF within the Council for Juvenile Justice have focused on piloting the Barnahus model to prioritize child witnesses and victims in criminal proceedings. Safe corners established in Yerevan and Kapan in 2023 streamline justice processes for children affected by violence. Collaborative training sessions have improved interview techniques with child victims, enhanced interdepartmental cooperation, and promoted child-sensitive approaches in criminal proceedings. These efforts emphasize a commitment to safeguarding children's rights and improving child protection measures.

Reply to paragraph 6 (d) of the list of issues

32. The legislative package provides for a number of key concepts in the field of protection of the rights of the child, namely: bullying, physical (corporal) punishment, exploitation, including sexual exploitation, and other concepts. Following the enactment of the package, secondary legislative acts pertaining to the subject matter will also be developed.

33. See also point 14 and sub-point 4 (a).

Reply to paragraph 6 (e) of the list of issues

34. Adoption of the legislative initiative is envisaged at the end of June 2024.

35. See also point 3.

Reply to paragraph 7 (a) of the list of issues

36. The MLSA is implementing the "Organising the Reunification with Their Families" Programme, which focuses on reintegrating children in round-the-clock care institutions with their families and preventing child-family separations. Non-governmental organizations, which are operating the services delegated by the Ministry under the "Day Care Social Support Services to Children in Adversity" project, are actively involved in this initiative. Collaborating with round-the-clock care institutions, these NGOs conduct comprehensive needs assessments for children without parental care and their families to facilitate potential reunification efforts. Additionally, as part of the de-institutionalization process, many children have transitioned from institutional care to foster families, with NGOs aiding in needs assessments to facilitate this transition. Moreover, day care services, aimed at fostering family environments, are implemented by both state and non-governmental organizations. NGOs secure funding through competitive processes and grant agreements with the state, ensuring that services are accessible to children. In 2024 alone, approximately 4,250 children are expected to benefit from these services, supported by a budget allocation of AMD 1.9 billion.

Reply to paragraph 7 (b) of the list of issues

37. The primary objective of the policy regarding children without parental care is to prioritize family-based care options, such as reunification with biological families, placement in guardianship or adoption, fostering, and alternative services. This approach aims to ensure the upbringing and well-being of children within a family environment whenever possible. Additionally, efforts are underway to reduce the institutionalization of children with disabilities as part of the Programme for Social Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities for 2023- 2027, which outlines key priorities focused on upholding the rights of individuals with disabilities and promoting their social inclusion.

Reply to paragraph 7 (c) of the list of issues

38. Public oversight ensures the quality of services and upholds human rights in organizations offering care to children, the elderly, and individuals with disabilities, as outlined in the 2018 Order of the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs. This directive establishes procedures for forming public monitoring groups to oversee state non-commercial entities under the Ministry's jurisdiction. The Order also defines schedules for assessing compliance with legislation within the round-the-clock care centers for children, crisis support facilities, and social care centers monitored by the Ministry. Furthermore, in accordance with governmental decisions and the Ministry's directives, studies on nine non-state charitable institutions providing round-the-clock care for children have been conducted.

Supervision over foster care, a key component of alternative care for children in need, is conducted throughout the foster care contract period by regional authorities, ensuring the well-being of foster children. As part of the Complex Programme, strategies are devised to monitor service quality and protect children's rights within care organizations.

Reply to paragraph 7 (d) of the list of issues

39. Family-based care, particularly foster care, has been significantly expanded. The 2020 Memorandum of Understanding between the MLSA and the "Child Protection Center" established a series of targeted activities and community meetings in various regions to raise public awareness about foster care. The programme also focused on capacity building, providing training for over 2,000 participants in 2023 alone, including Guardianship and Custody Commissions, Unified Social Service centers, community social workers, and other child protection specialists. These training sessions emphasized the importance of a child's right to live in a family environment.

40. Efforts to improve foster care methodologies and tools continued, resulting in an increased number of potential foster parents and participating regions. Ministry representatives engaged with regional and Yerevan municipal staff to offer methodological support and address legislative issues related to foster care. Active cooperation was developed with "SOS Children's Villages" Charity Foundation and "Child Protection Center" Fund. The "Child Protection Center" Fund conducted awareness meetings, training sessions, and individual consultations for current and prospective foster parents. A new model for foster care was introduced in collaboration with "SOS Children's Villages," integrating children into communities through foster care and supporting foster families with necessary resources.

41. In 2024, a new foster care development programme was launched in partnership with UNICEF Armenia, which will be incorporated into the Complex Programme.

Reply to paragraph 7 (e) of the list of issues

42. See 8 (a).

Reply to paragraph 7 (f) of the list of issues

43. Legislative improvements to the adoption process are being addressed in the draft Law of the Republic of Armenia "On making amendments and supplements to the Family Code of the Republic of Armenia," which is currently under development and review. The draft includes provisions related to both domestic and international adoption processes. To further this effort, a working group was established by the decision of the Prime Minister of the Republic of Armenia to discuss issues and recommended regulations stemming from the ongoing reforms and to ensure more effective and streamlined adoption processes.

Reply to paragraph 8 (a) of the list of issues

44. In accordance with the 2021 Law "On Functional Assessment of a Person," a new disability assessment system based on WHO's International Classification of Functioning (ICF) principles was introduced. Since 1 February 2023, this system has been in use for first-time disability applicants and was fully implemented in 2024. The new system includes a comprehensive needs assessment, considering disability within social contexts and specifying tailored social services.

45. The 2021 Law "On the Rights of Persons with Disabilities" aims to create equal opportunities and eliminate discrimination. The 2023-2027 Programme for Social Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities outlines priorities for the social inclusion and rights of persons with disabilities. This programme includes measures to combat stereotypes and discriminatory treatment. Care and social rehabilitation services focus on social inclusion and developing independent life skills. Services such as white cane training for visually impaired individuals are provided in day care centers and small group homes. Approximately 445 persons with disabilities receive services monthly in 11 day care centers, with round-the-clock care available in five small group homes. Grant allocation tenders fund organizations that offer these services, ensuring support, training, and employment for persons with disabilities.

46. To promote social inclusion, supporting means are provided from state budget funds based on state certificates, with qualified organizations supplying these means. Since 2020, the MLSA has expanded day care services to prevent family separation and reunite children with their families. These services, delegated to NGOs across all regions of Armenia, include socio-psychological support for children with disabilities.

Reply to paragraph 8 (b) of the list of issues

47. As part of legislative reforms, specific functions of specialized community subdivisions are being established to enhance the activities of guardianship and custody bodies—community heads—on professional grounds in child protection. Additionally, modernization and efficiency improvements are planned for the relevant sub-divisions of provincial administrations (Marzpetarans) and the Department of Children and Social Protection in Yerevan Municipality. This will facilitate closer community engagement, particularly in complex child protection cases, enabling timely interventions in the child's best interest. Regular training sessions are conducted, with a focus on addressing stigmatization and discrimination against children with disabilities. Efforts are underway to establish an independent life center and introduce independent life services on a designated land plot in Armavir region, supported by the United Nations, as part of initiatives to promote self-sufficiency.

Reply to paragraph 8 (c) of the list of issues

48. During the planning and execution of construction, major repairs, and reconstruction projects in mainstream schools, the Ministry of Education, Science, Culture and Sports ("MESCS") ensures the provision of accessible facilities for children requiring special educational conditions. Since 2023, territorial pedagogical and psychological support centers have been assessing the need for special education conditions in accordance with government regulations, proposing all necessary accommodations to facilitate effective education for students with disabilities. In 2023, the Republican Psychological-Pedagogical Center developed guidelines on "Physical Environment Adaptations," providing information on accessible infrastructure and necessary adaptations for school inclusion. Additionally, guidelines on "Assistive Technologies in Education" were created to support teachers and parents in promoting universal inclusive education effectively.

49. Since January 2023, assessments of students' needs for special educational conditions have resulted in the prescription of necessary accommodations, including adapted textbooks and copybooks. The Republican Psychological-Pedagogical Center has developed and distributed eight workbooks and methodological guidelines to educational institutions based on the analysis of this data:

- Workbooks "Native language 1" (alphabetical phase) for the first grade;
- Workbooks "Mathematics 1" (numerical phase);
- Workbook for the subject "Technology" for the first grade;
- Workbook for the subject "Fine Arts" for the first grade;
- Methodological guideline for teachers supplementary to the workbook "Native language 1, alphabetical phase";
- Methodological guideline for teachers supplementary to the workbook "Mathematics 1, numerical phase";
- Methodological guideline for teachers supplementary to the workbook "Fine Arts 1";
- Methodological guideline for teachers supplementary to the workbook "Technology 1".

Reply to paragraph 9 (a) of the list of issues

50. Women of reproductive age, including those during pregnancy, delivery, and post-partum (up to 42 days), are recognized as special category groups under Decision No. 318-N of March 4, 2004, enabling them to access prescribed privileges for medical care.

51. Decision No. 258-L of March 5, 2020, introduced several examinations for pregnant women at risk, including biochemical screening and tests for various conditions, aimed at reducing perinatal losses.

52. A draft decision for the 2024-2026 Programme and Action Plan on Reproductive Health and Birthrate Improvement is under review, which, if approved, will expand state-funded prenatal care and mandatory check-ups for pregnant women.

53. To facilitate early diagnosis, management, and prevention of intrauterine fetal development anomalies, the Ministry of Health of the Republic of Armenia approved Order No. 3257-L of 6 November 2019, establishing professional groups and a central commission for diagnosing and managing these anomalies, outlining their composition and operational procedures.

54. In efforts to enhance prenatal diagnosis services across the regions of Armenia, a prenatal screening pilot project was launched at the "Gyumri Medical Center" CJSC in the Shirak region. This initiative provides comprehensive prenatal diagnosis, including screening, laboratory tests, and expert sonography for all pregnant women in the region. Identified cases are referred to tertiary-level maternity hospitals, where decisions regarding the continuation of pregnancy are made by a prenatal concilium. Additionally, a theory and practice course by the "Fetal Medicine Foundation" was conducted in May 2023, under the Memorandum of Understanding "On Fetal Medicine Programme 2022-2025" between the Ministries of Health of Armenia and Greece. Representatives from Yerevan and all regions of Armenia attended the theory part of the course.

55. Following the Minister of Health's directive in 2023, scheduled visits to regional medical facilities aim to provide methodological support to obstetric care providers and enhance the quality of services offered by tertiary-level medical organizations in Yerevan.

56. Annually, scientific and practical courses are organized in leading clinics of the Russian Federation, focusing on obstetric care, with an emphasis on regional areas.

57. Urgent outpatient medical services for pregnant, postpartum, and parturient women in Armenia's regions are provided according to the Minister of Health's 2021 directive. When necessary, these services are transferred to tertiary-level medical facilities in Yerevan.

58. To improve the quality and accessibility of medical services for newborns, the Minister of Health approved an order in 2019, outlining procedures for organizing medical care for newborns within the state's guaranteed free healthcare services.

59. Armenia implements six ongoing newborn screening programmes aimed at early detection of various congenital conditions (hypothyroidism, phenylketonuria, congenital hearing disorders, retinopathy of prematurity, congenital heart defects screening and congenital hip dysplasia). In 2024, a screening programme for Adrenogenital Syndrome will be introduced.

Reply to paragraph 9 (b) of the list of issues

60. The Ministry of Health of the Republic of Armenia is preparing for the phased introduction of Comprehensive Health Insurance (CHI) in 2024 - 2027. In 2023, several key documents were developed, including the draft Law on Comprehensive Health Insurance, amendments to related laws, basic and minimum service packages, and lists of health screening examinations. These documents were reviewed and discussed with relevant stakeholders, including the Ministry of Finance, the Central Bank, the World Bank, and the WHO. Currently, the package of documents is under review by the Prime Minister of Armenia to prioritize cost-effective preventive, primary, and ambulatory medical services, and to formulate potential scenarios for the phased introduction of CHI. The implementation of these reforms is planned to be supported through the "Programme-for-Results" financing instrument of the World Bank, which is currently in negotiation between the World Bank and the Government of Armenia.

Reply to paragraph 9 (c) of the list of issues

61. In 2021, the Ministry of Health of the Republic of Armenia collaborated with the UNICEF to implement programmes supporting children's health, including those forcibly displaced from Nagorno-Karabakh and residing in Armenia, as well as programmes focusing on nutrition, growth, and development of young children in various regions of the country.

62. A series of measures, including initiatives promoting healthy nutrition, were endorsed by the Government of the Republic of Armenia in 2021 through the approval of an Action Plan aimed at fostering a healthy lifestyle.

63. Updated food organization requirements for students in general education institutions were introduced in 2024 under the Minister of Health of the Republic of Armenia's directive, which amended previous guidelines from 2014.

64. The Ministry of Health of the Republic of Armenia conducts annual awareness-raising campaigns on healthy lifestyles, encompassing aspects such as nutritious eating habits, physical activity promotion, and the adverse effects of tobacco and alcohol consumption. These campaigns utilize various channels, including electronic communication, educational programs, and distribution of printed materials.

65. With the backing of the UNICEF, mobile pediatric teams, comprised of two pediatricians, a nurse, and a psychologist, conducted comprehensive health and nutrition assessments for approximately 5,000 children across five regions of Armenia. These teams provided psychological support to adolescents and parents, offered consultations on childcare, and facilitated the registration of around 1,300 children into primary healthcare facilities.

66. To address the nutritional needs of young children, the UNICEF distributed 4,500 food packages to families, each containing 14 different types of food tailored to meet children's dietary requirements for a month.

Reply to paragraph 9 (d) of the list of issues

67. Ensuring the protection of the rights of children forcibly displaced from Nagorno-Karabakh stands as a paramount priority demanding comprehensive, multisectoral efforts. The findings from the UNHCR office in Armenia underscore a pressing need for psychological support within the refugee population. The data reveals stark challenges, with respondents reporting significant impacts on their well-being, including heightened levels of anxiety (84%) and emotional distress (76%). Moreover, the enduring effects of armed conflict (76%), loss of property (65%), and haunting memories of past traumatic experiences (63%) further compound the psychological strain faced by the refugees.

68. Children forcibly displaced from Nagorno-Karabakh, who are now without parental care, have been provided with care since their arrival, including necessary support for their educational and healthcare needs. Steps have been taken to assess the possibility of reunification with their families, prioritizing the best interests of the child. In cases where reunification is not feasible, efforts are made to ensure the children are raised in a family environment.

69. Due to the state-funded foster care institution's awareness campaign, over three dozen foster families have volunteered to provide crisis care as needed. From the outset, children and their parents have received tailored psychological and social support services from child protection organizations, acknowledging the adversity they've faced. To streamline services and prevent duplication, a child protection sub-group was established in collaboration with the MLSA and UNICEF, presenting reports in MLSA's format for transparency. Partner organizations, funded by the Ministry, have expanded service coverage, including socio-psychological measures for displaced children. Additionally, within the Operational Headquarters for Child Issues, under the National Commission for Protection of Child Rights, cases involving displaced children from Nagorno-Karabakh necessitating interagency cooperation have been addressed in meetings across all regions.

70. During 2023, 713 refugee children from Nagorno-Karabakh received primary or ongoing psychological support. The educational needs of 27 school-aged children forcibly

displaced from Nagorno-Karabakh were identified, with 9 of them having disabilities and receiving appropriate pedagogical and psychological assistance tailored to their needs.

71. Commencing December 2023, the Republican Psychological-Pedagogical Center initiated the project "Inclusion of forcibly displaced children from Nagorno-Karabakh in the educational process by enhancing their psychosocial resilience," funded by UNESCO. The project aims to train 632 psychologists and 1,896 teachers from 632 schools with the "Increasing Psychosocial Resilience of Children" module, developed following an assessment of the needs of approximately 8,118 displaced children from Nagorno-Karabakh and their teachers. Additionally, around 1,500 teachers from various regions of Armenia will implement the "Increasing Psychosocial Resilience of Children" guideline, benefiting approximately 37,500 pupils, including those displaced from Nagorno-Karabakh.

72. In 2023, the Republican Psychological-Pedagogical Center, in collaboration with UNICEF, implemented the "Building the Capacities of Psychosocial Services in Schools" initiative. This comprehensive effort aimed to establish a coordinated approach to mental health and psychological support services in schools. Through mapping, organizations and institutions involved in mental health and well-being programs in schools were identified, with a focus on summarizing current and planned measures and enhancing collaboration. Subsequently, training modules are being developed for school psychologists and teachers, with plans to train 300 teachers and 50 psychologists. Additionally, with the support of UNICEF, the Armenian Psychiatric Association undertook several significant endeavors:

- (a) Mapping the availability and quality of mental health services for children and adolescents in Syunik Marz, leading to the development of improvement instructions and mechanisms;
- (b) Crafting a guideline for Primary Health Care (PHC) workers, which includes early identification and management of common psychological issues among children within the primary care setting. Over 100 PHC medical workers in Syunik underwent training;
- (c) Currently, activities are expanding to four more marzes—Ararat, Kotayk, Gegharkunik, and Tavush—with plans for further expansion into other regions;
- (d) To prevent drug and alcohol abuse by children.

Reply to paragraph 9 (e) of the list of issues

73. In 2020 and 2021, specialists from the "National Center for Addiction Treatment" of the Ministry of Health collaborated with the "We Can Together" NGO and the Department of General Education of Yerevan Municipality to conduct awareness-raising campaigns on the dangers of drug abuse in over 20 schools in Yerevan. Additionally, in 2023, prompted and financially supported by the Ministry of Health, "Gevorgian Concern" extended awareness-raising efforts on the perils of drug abuse to 50 schools in Yerevan.

74. See also 4 (a).

Reply to paragraph 9 (f) of the list of issues

75. Social assistance reforms continue, centered on assessing social needs and delivering commensurate services. Plans include implementing a new indigence assessment system, aiming for more precise social assistance, particularly for children. This system emphasizes preventing poverty recurrence by offering diverse social services, notably employment initiatives, alongside family benefits. In 2023, 2227 social workers engaged in professional training and courses, enhancing their capacity to deliver effective assistance.

Reply to paragraph 10 (a) of the list of issues

76. Efforts have been made in ensuring the availability and accessibility of preschool education, with 24 new kindergartens and 8 preschools built by the end of 2023 under the "300 schools and 500 kindergartens to be built, renovated or repaired by 2026" programme. Additionally, construction is underway for 14 preschools and 21 kindergartens, slated for completion in 2024.

77. In 2023, the municipalities of Spitak (Lori region) and Baghramyan (Armavir region) successfully secured grants to implement alternative cost-effective preschool models as part of the "Introduction of alternative cost-effective preschool models" initiative. Activities were carried out in Nor Khachakap settlement of Spitak Community and Baghramyan settlement of Baghramyan Community.

78. Public schools across urban areas of Armenia are equipped with heating, water supply, and sanitation facilities. As of May 2024, out of 1,395 schools nationwide, 1,387 have heating systems, 1,351 have water supply (mostly centralized round-the-clock systems), and 1,387 have toilets.

79. According to the "Education" sub-section of the "Development of human capital" section of the Government of the Republic of Armenia Decree No. 1363-A dated August 18, 2021 "On the Programme of the Government of the Republic of Armenia, " it is planned to construct, overhaul, or rebuild at least 300 schools by 2026. In 2023, construction concluded in 28 educational institutions, with an additional 24 scheduled for completion in 2024 under this initiative.

Reply to paragraph 10 (b) of the list of issues

80. As part of its commitments at the Global Refugee Forum, the Republic of Armenia pledged to uphold the rights to education and integrate refugee children into the Armenian education system. The government has committed to ensuring that all refugee children have access to a quality and inclusive education, thus facilitating their social inclusion and protection.

81. Armenia is steadfast in its commitment to uphold the rights of the children forcibly displaced from Nagorno-Karabakh, ensuring their access to education in accordance with existing legislation, even when relevant documentation is unavailable. By prioritizing education, Armenia seeks to provide the children from Nagorno-Karabakh with the necessary tools for their holistic development and well-being, regardless of their circumstances.

82. Efforts to enhance school enrollment are regulated by the government's decision of 11 February 2021 "On establishing the procedure for identification and referral of children dropped out of compulsory education". The National Center of Educational Technologies (NCET) conducts biannual data comparisons between the State Register of Population and the Education Management Information System, identifying individuals aged 6-19 not enrolled in any educational institution within Armenia. Presently, efforts are underway to cross-reference dropout statistics from the 2022 Census, available on the Statistical Committee's official website, with NCET's analysis.

83. The procedure for addressing absences of students is outlined in the Order No. 388-N of 2012 of the Minister of Education and Science of the Republic of Armenia, whereby a student with more than 60 hours of absence in any semester completes additional written assignments, without needing to retake exams or repeat the course. If a student accumulates over 200 hours of absence in grades 2-11, or in the 12th grade, they must repeat the academic year. In institutions adhering to the new state standard of general education, such as those in the Tavush region, any student with over 200 hours of absence in a year is required to take additional written exams across all subjects in the curriculum.

Reply to paragraph 10 (c) of the list of issues

84. The proposed amendments to the Decision of the Government of the Republic of Armenia No. 1667-N of 27 December 2012 aim to refine the mechanisms for implementing teacher training, whereby teacher professional development needs will be assessed jointly by the teacher and the principal, facilitated through the School Management Information System (SMIS). Teachers will conduct self-assessments, while principals will evaluate professional development needs by observing open lessons and utilizing intraschool monitoring tools. The director's assessment will determine participation in training programmes of suitable complexity levels. Teacher's professional development needs will align with module specifications, with each module indicating the appropriate level. An electronic platform will generate a professional needs statement, guiding teachers to suitable training modules. Principal assessments will inform their attestation process, considering alignment with

diagnostic testing results from training organizations and the number of teachers completing training. External monitoring, such as open lesson attendance by institutions like NCEDI or mentor schools, may also influence professional development assessments.

85. A teacher can fulfill the required credits for attestation during the relevant round, aligning with their identified professional development needs. Duration of teachers' professional development cycles is as follows:

- One year for teachers with up to 5 years of work experience, conducted within their first year.
- One year for courses at the initial training level; if teachers undertake programmes of varying complexities, this training occurs in the period outlined in point 1. Training for other levels is in line with points 3 and 4.
- Three years for second-level training courses of increased complexity, completed within the initial 3 years, with participation in a minimum of 4 courses annually.
- Five years for third and fourth-level training, with a requirement of at least 2 courses annually during each year.

86. Based on the training standards and programme, three levels of courses are developed for each section, offered in on-site, remote, or hybrid formats. The most suitable training method is determined by teacher experience and training organization location, with on-site for beginners and remote or hybrid for experienced educators. The project distinguishes between:

- "Training courses" developed by the training organization.
- "Courses" conducted by local or international entities, endorsed by the MESCS.

87. Teachers participate in training modules based on their professional development needs:

- (a) Basic level proficiency aligns with subject knowledge requirements.
- (b) Teachers proficient at the second level attend third-level training.
- (c) Those at the third and fourth levels participate in expert-level courses.
- (d) Fourth-level teachers are exempt from further training, with professional development supported through state-funded activities like international conferences or publication.
- (e) Teachers identifying subject knowledge gaps undergo training at specific institutions, followed by mandatory certification. Success in voluntary certification qualifies them for regular certification.
- (f) Subsequent training rounds assess additional professional needs.

Reply to paragraph 10 (d) of the list of issues

88. The draft Law of the Republic of Armenia "On the system of protection of the rights of the child and the child" defines key concepts related to child rights protection, including bullying, physical punishment, and exploitation, such as sexual exploitation. Bullying is described as intentional negative behavior towards a child, exploiting their vulnerability or power imbalance. This includes verbal or written statements, physical or psychological violence, and cyberbullying via electronic devices. The Government of the Republic of Armenia establishes the procedure and the responsible bodies for protecting children who have experienced bullying.

89. In 2023, significant efforts were made to address various aspects of child protection and well-being through training initiatives. The Republican Psychological-Pedagogical Center organized courses on "Manifestations of Bullying in Educational Institutions and Prevention Strategies" as part of the Programme "Development of Teaching Skills for Teachers and Teacher's Aides," benefitting 2,266 educators from 132 general educational institutions. Additionally, the territorial pedagogical and psychological support centers conducted training sessions on topics such as "Detection of Bullying," "Violence

Prevention," and "Combatting Trafficking," involving 796 pedagogical workers from 38 educational institutions. Moreover, the Republican Psychological-Pedagogical Center developed a Guidebook on "Prevention and Response to Violence Against Children," which served as the basis for two training courses held in February 2024, attended by 37 teachers and 25 specialists.

90. In 2023, 25 specialists from the Republican Psychological-Pedagogical Center and territorial pedagogical psychological support centers underwent training on "Mechanisms and Features of Responding to and Addressing Cases of Domestic Violence." This training was jointly organized by the United Nations Population Fund, the Ministry of Education, Science, Culture and Sports of the Republic of Armenia, and the Impact Innovations Institute's Initiatives Foundation (Safe YOU).

91. Additionally, in January 2024, a module of training courses titled "Change of Perception: Expanding Teachers' Rights and Opportunities" was developed in collaboration with the Republican Psychological-Pedagogical Center and UNICEF Armenia. Since February 2024, 12 training courses based on this module have been conducted for 244 specialists (242 women, 2 men) from the territorial pedagogical and psychological support centers.

92. See also 4 (a).

Reply to paragraph 11 (a) of the list of issues

93. According to Article 8 of the Law "On refugees and asylum," unaccompanied or separated children are recognized as asylum seekers or refugees with special needs. Within the asylum procedure, services are provided to support them in placement and care. This support considers factors such as age, gender, presence of relatives, and other circumstances relevant to the child's well-being and rights. Trained representatives are engaged in working with asylum-seeking children during the asylum process, in compliance with relevant legislation.

Reply to paragraph 11 (b) of the list of issues

94. See 8 (c) and 9 (d).

Reply to paragraph 12 (a) of the list of issues

95. In several general education schools across Shirak, Aragatsotn, Armavir, and Ararat regions, preschools have been established, offering classes for children aged 4-5 from national minorities during the first half of the day.

96. Construction is underway for a nursery-kindergarten in Alagyaz settlement of Alagyaz Community, accommodating 144 children from 11 settlements. It is scheduled to be operational by 2024. In Arzni Community of Kotayk Marz, the "Alyonushka Kindergarten" provides mixed-aged groups with Russian language education for Assyrian children. Teaching is conducted in Russian, with Armenian also being taught.

97. Ararat, Kotayk, Armavir, and Aragatsotn regions are among the regions with largest presence of national minorities in Armenia. Here, primary education in ethnic languages is accessible and affordable to minority communities under the protection of the Republic of Armenia. In settlements with fewer ethnic minorities, optional language instruction is also available.

98. The curriculum for general education schools catering to national minorities includes weekly class hours allocated for teaching the subject "Native language and literature." The distribution is as follows:

- Primary school: 4 class hours.
- Middle school: 3 class hours.
- High school: 3 class hours.

99. In smaller communities, the option for language instruction in elective format is also available.

100. As of 2023, the subjects "Yezidi," "Kurdish," and "Assyrian" are integrated into the curriculum of schools across the regions of Armenia, catering to pupils from national minorities. As of November 2023, the schools host 3,027 Yezidi, 80 Kurdish, 277 Assyrian, 1,387 Russian, and 38 Greek students.

101. Textbooks specifically designed for primary, secondary, and high school students from national minorities are funded and published by the MSECS. These textbooks, along with subject programmes, are accessible electronically through the "Resource Library" subsection of the "Armenian Educational Portal." In 2023 alone, a total of 941 textbooks were printed, covering various subjects and grade levels.

102. In Armavir region, 986 Yezidi and 11 Assyrian students attend general education institutions under the jurisdiction of the Provincial Administration. Ten general education institutions offer Yezidi language courses, while one institution provides Assyrian language courses.

103. In Ararat region, 569 pupils, including 198 Assyrians and 340 Yezidis, study in 69 general education institutions. Specific secondary schools in Assyrian communities offer education in Russian with mandatory Assyrian language instruction. Yezidi students receive native language education through extracurricular groups, supported by appropriate textbooks.

104. In Kotayk region, non-governmental organizations like "Artur" and "Gabbara" advocate for Assyrian cultural and educational rights. Some schools offer advanced Russian language classes, while others provide instruction in Yezidi and Assyrian languages through specialized curricula and circles.

105. In Aragatsotn Marz, the Government has established four communities with Yezidi and Kurdish settlements, three of which are consolidated. Across these settlements, 18 schools cater to 603 pupils, ensuring access to textbooks in their native languages provided by the MSECS. State funds guarantee language instruction regardless of student numbers.

106. Students actively engage in various events promoting their culture and traditions, including subject olympiads, cultural festivals ("Golden Seeds" 4th award, "We are in our home" cultural event), republican events, marz ("Alda Tawûsî Melek", "Qyosal Galdi", "Ayda Ezdid"), community and school events dedicated to national holidays, as well as sports events. In Shamiram Settlement Basic School, the "Traditional Song and Dance" subject is introduced, enriching cultural education. Schools are equipped with Internet and integrated into the Education Management Information System, facilitating communication and resource access.

107. Efforts to address societal challenges, such as early marriage and incomplete education among Yezidi girls, are ongoing. The Standing Commission for Gender Issues of Aragatsotn region frequently discusses these issues, involving community leaders and school principals. Awareness campaigns and seminars aim to empower minorities and promote rights awareness.

108. The inclusion of minority children in education aligns with Armenia's universal inclusive education system. Government Decision No. 1265-N of 11 August 2022 introduced a funding model to ensure accessible environments and reasonable adaptations for students with special needs. In 2023, 164 national minority students in need of special educational conditions were involved in the general education system of Armenia, having received relevant pedagogical and psychological support.

Reply to paragraph 12 (b) of the list of issues

109. According to Article 15(2) of the Labour Code, citizens gain full labour passive legal capacity, enabling them to obtain and exercise employment rights, create employment duties, and fulfill them (labour active legal capacity) upon reaching the age of 16, unless exceptions are provided for by the Labour Code or other laws. Additionally, Article 17.1 specifies the following regarding minors:

- Individuals under 18 have the right to engage in labor activities permitted by the Labour Code and other laws of Armenia, considering their age, developmental characteristics, and abilities.
- Those under 14 may participate in creative work or performances in areas such as cinematography, sports, theater, circus, television, or radio.
- Temporary employment contracts are permissible for those under 16, with permanent employment prohibited. Written consent from a parent, foster parent, adoptive parent, guardian, or curator is required for temporary employment of minors under 16, or approval from the guardianship and curatorship body if the aforementioned individuals are absent, unless it interferes with compulsory education.
- Individuals under the age of sixteen may engage in temporary work as outlined in specific articles of the Labour Code, including Article 85(1) and (1.2), Article 89(1.4) and (1.5), Article 91(3.1), Article 101, Article 140(1-4), Article 143(1.1), Article 148(3), Article 149(4), Article 152(1.1), Article 153(2), Article 154(2), Article 155(7), Article 164(4.1), Article 209(3), Article 240(2), Article 249(1), and Article 257.
- Those under eighteen may only participate in work that does not jeopardize their health, including physical and mental development, moral integrity, safety, or interfere with compulsory education. They are not permitted to work on weekends, holidays, or memorial days, except for involvement in sports and cultural events.
- Minors under eighteen are entitled to favorable working conditions, including shorter working hours, as stipulated in Article 140(1-5) of the Labour Code:
- Children under seven: up to two hours per day, not exceeding four hours per week beyond compulsory education hours.
- Children aged seven to twelve: up to three hours per day, not exceeding six hours per week beyond compulsory education hours.
- Children aged twelve to fifteen: up to four hours per day, not exceeding twelve hours per week beyond compulsory education hours.
- Children aged fifteen to sixteen: up to 24 hours per week beyond compulsory education hours.
- Individuals aged sixteen to eighteen: up to 36 hours per week beyond compulsory education hours.

110. Article 257 prohibits the engagement of individuals under eighteen in various activities, including the production, promotion, or sale of alcohol, drugs, tobacco, or pornography. It also restricts their involvement in heavy or harmful work, with the specific list defined by the Government of Armenia.

111. State supervision over employer compliance with labour legislation, collective agreements, and employment contracts is conducted by the Health and Labor Inspection Body of the Republic of Armenia, which can impose sanctions for violations in accordance with Article 33 of the Labour Code.

Reply to paragraph 12 (c) of the list of issues

112. There is no presence of the Armed Forces of the Republic of Armenia in schools situated in border regions, contrary to what the recommendation suggests.

Reply to paragraph 13 of the list of issues

113. The Academy of Justice has incorporated several courses into its 2022-2024 training programmes, focusing on criminal procedure, violence against children, and investigations into crimes against vulnerable groups. These courses address the mental impact of violence on children and strategies for addressing it.

114. Similarly, the Investigative Committee includes a course on violence against children in its training programs for personnel in autonomous positions. These courses emphasize

understanding the nuances of violence cases and ensuring children's rights during criminal proceedings.

115. Additionally, the "Centre for the Implementation of Legal Education and Rehabilitation Programmes" SNPO, under the Ministry of Justice, has been licensed to conduct general education programmes since 2018 (e.g. "General Education Programme for Persons Serving Punishment in the Form of Imprisonment and Detained Persons" under the age of 19, ongoing since 2019).

116. In line with Article 212 of the Criminal Procedure Code, qualified psychologists are required to participate in investigative actions involving minors, individuals lacking legal capacity, or those with mental health issues. Training courses have been conducted for psychologists in these areas, with 25 psychologists trained in 2021 and 28 in 2023. These courses, established by Decision No. 847-N of June 9, 2022, include theoretical and practical modules, and successful candidates receive certificates upon passing the exam.

Reply to paragraph 14 (a) of the list of issues

117. Since 2020, in accordance with the Law of the Republic of Armenia "On Prevention of Violence within the Family, Protection of Persons Subjected to Violence within the Family, and Restoration of Family Solidarity," the following services have been available to individuals experiencing family violence:

(a) Support Centers are operated in all regions of Armenia and in Yerevan under MLSA. These centers inform victims about their rights, available services, and provide socio-psychological and legal assistance, as well as support in job placement. Additionally, these services are accessible through a dedicated hotline;

(b) Shelter Services are available for victims who are provided with safe accommodation, food, hygiene items, supplies for children's homework, and socio-psychological and legal aid;

(c) Lump-Sum Compensation of up to AMD 150,000, provided in accordance with Government Decision No. 333-N of March 29. financial assistance is offered to individuals experiencing violence for the following purposes:

- Meeting basic life support needs.
- Providing compensation or partial compensation to facilitate treatment or rehabilitation.
- Covering the lease fee for temporary accommodation needs.

118. In 2023, a total of 265 beneficiaries, including 169 children, utilized the shelter service. If the victim is accompanied by children under their custody, they may also be accommodated in the shelter. However, if the victim is under 18 years old, they are placed in child care centers supervised by the MLSA.

119. To enhance case management, control, and streamline data collection and processing for family violence cases, Decision No. 70-N of the Government of the Republic of Armenia, effective from 18 January 2024, introduced amendments to Decision No. 1381-N dated 10 October 2019. This amendment mandates the launch of an electronic database for centralized registration of family violence cases. The database aims to improve response mechanisms by relevant authorities while ensuring the protection of personal data.

120. In accordance with the Law of the Republic of Armenia "On identification of and support to persons subjected to trafficking in human beings and exploitation," the following services are provided to assist potential victims and victims of trafficking:

- (a) Emergency medical assistance;
- (b) Provision of temporary shelter during the pre-identification phase, including for their legal representative and children under their care;
- (c) Access to general education;
- (d) Provision of essential items;

- (e) Initial psychological support;
- (f) General counseling;
- (g) Care services.

121. In 2023, the Commission for Identification of Victims Subjected to Trafficking in Human Beings and Exploitation recognized 6 children as victims, with 3 being male and 3 female. These children have received necessary support as mandated by the Law.

122. The oversight of the support outlined by the Law is conducted by MSLA, through coordinating activities among institutions and organizations offering social services, including education and medical care, aimed at the physical, psychological, and social rehabilitation and integration of victims.

123. Support for victims and victims of special categories focuses on addressing the repercussions of trafficking and exploitation and facilitating their complete social reintegration, which includes:

- Provision of accommodation.
- Basic necessities.
- Document provision or restoration.
- Medical and psychological assistance.
- Legal counsel.
- Educational opportunities.
- Employment assistance.
- Safe return organization.
- Lump-sum monetary compensation.

124. A victim of special category, as per the Law, is either a trafficked individual who was a child at the time of identification or an individual with mental disability rendering them incapable of fully understanding their actions.

125. Government Decision No 31-L, effective from January 5, 2023, approves the 2023-2025 National Programme for Organization of the Fight against Trafficking in and Exploitation of Human Beings in the Republic of Armenia. This comprehensive plan comprises seven main sections, with Section 3 dedicated entirely to reducing trafficking and exploitation of children while enhancing response effectiveness. The measures outlined in Section 3 for 2023-2025 include:

- Implementing human rights education in all general education schools and vocational institutions to address trafficking, exploitation, forced labor, and cyber-trafficking.
- Taking proactive steps to identify vulnerable children who are excluded from compulsory education, lack stable housing, or are at risk of trafficking, exploitation, or labor exploitation.
- Organizing seminars and discussions to ensure compliance with Armenian legislation regarding child labor and prevent children from being involved in hazardous work.
- Providing recommendations to enhance interrogation procedures for child witnesses or victims of human trafficking during legal proceedings and ensure their effective implementation.
- Fostering effective cooperation between child care institutions, psychologists, social workers, and law enforcement agencies to address cases of child trafficking and exploring opportunities for structural integration.

126. Additionally, the MSLA, in collaboration with the "UMCOR Armenia" Charitable Foundation, conducted awareness-raising and training courses for employees of childcare centers, round-the-clock care institutions for children, the elderly, or persons with disabilities. This initiative aimed to increase awareness of human trafficking among sector employees.

Furthermore, MLSA, in partnership with the National Institute of Labour and Social Research, organized a distance training course covering the recognition of human trafficking, referral mechanisms for potential victims, the role of social workers, and the types of services provided to victims of trafficking. Forty-eight employees from 16 MLSA-affiliated SNPOs attended the training, including childcare institutions, round-the-clock care centers, and mental health care centers.

Reply to paragraph 14 (b) of the list of issues

127. While Article 1791 of the Administrative Offences Code of the Republic of Armenia outlines administrative penalties for involvement in prostitution, Article 21.1 of the same Code stipulates that individuals subjected to human trafficking or exploitation shall be exempt from administrative liability for any offenses they committed under duress during instances of trafficking or exploitation perpetrated against them.

Reply to paragraph 15 (a) of the list of issues

128. It is essential to recognize the comprehensive context stemming from the security challenges, especially those faced by the people living in areas bordering Azerbaijan. Besides, paramilitary training can offer several benefits when conducted in a safe and age-appropriate manner, with a focus on education, skill-building, and respect for human rights and international law. Such training can provide young people with valuable knowledge about personal safety, first aid, resilience and disaster preparedness, empowering them to protect themselves and others in challenging circumstances. Therefore, any decision regarding such training should be made after thorough consideration of all factors, including the safety and security needs of the population.

Reply to paragraph 15 (b) of the list of issues

129. According to Article 19, part 1 of the Law of the Republic of Armenia "On military service and the status of military serviceman," individuals who have reached the age of 18 are eligible for compulsory military service. Additionally, citizens under the age of eighteen are prohibited from participating in military operations as members of the Armed Forces of the Republic of Armenia. Point 7 of part 2 of Article 137 of the new Criminal Code of the Republic of Armenia, which came into effect on 1 July 2022, establishes legal consequences for the conscription or recruitment of children into military service or their involvement in active military operations.

Reply to paragraph 15 (c) of the list of issues

130. Under consideration.

Part II

Reply to paragraph 16 (a) of the list of issues

131. Annex 6.

Reply to paragraph 16 (b) of the list of issues

132. The following SNPOs were dissolved according to Decision No 1507-N issued by the Government of the Republic of Armenia on October 31, 2019: "Dilijan Children's Care and Protection Boarding School," "Byureghavan Children's Care and Protection Boarding School," "Gyumri Children's Care and Protection Boarding School No 1," and "Vanadzor Children's Home." On November 26, 2020, Decision No 1878 of the Government led to the restructuring of the "Gyumri Social Childcare Centre" and "Fridtjof Nansen Child Care and Protection Boarding School No 2" SNPOs through a merger into the "Shirak Marz Child and Family Support Centre." This newly formed organization commenced operations on June 1, 2021, providing daycare services for 100 children aged 2-18 and short-term round-the-clock care for 60 children aged 0-18 facing difficult life circumstances. Simultaneously, Decision No 37-N, issued on January 14, 2021, established the "Syunik Marz Child and Family

Support Centre," which began operating on May 1, 2021. As per its statute, this center offers care to 100 children aged 2-18 in difficult life situations with a daycare component and provides short-term round-the-clock care for 40 children aged 0-18. Additionally, a crisis center modeled institution operates in Yerevan, known as the "Zatik" Yerevan Child Assistance Centre" SNPO, accommodating up to 50 children for short-term round-the-clock care.

Reply to paragraph 16 (c) of the list of issues

133. To strengthen mechanisms for protecting children's rights and interests, ensuring their social protection and creating favorable conditions for exercising all their rights, various measures have been implemented. These include the approval and implementation of programmes such as the "2020-2023 Programme Aimed at the Exercise of the Right of the Child to Live in a Family and the Harmonious Development Thereof" (Decision No 432-L, 2 April 2020), the "2022 Annual Programme for Protection of the Rights of the Child and the List of Measures" (Decision No 1622-L, 30 September 2021), and the "List of Measures Ensuring the Enforcement of the Law of the Republic of Armenia 'On making amendments to the Law 'On the rights of the child'" (Decision No 1056-A, 23 October 2023), approved by the Prime Minister. These measures are aimed at providing tailored services to children and families in difficult life situations, promoting equal rights and opportunities for all children regardless of various factors, and ensuring their right to live in a family environment and develop harmoniously.

Reply to paragraph 16 (d) of the list of issues

134. On 12 September 2023, the National Assembly of the Republic of Armenia adopted the Law "On ratifying Protocol No 13 to the Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms, concerning the abolition of the death penalty in all circumstances".

Part III

Data, statistics and other information

Reply to paragraph 17 of the list of issues

135. Annex 1, 2, 3.

Reply to paragraph 18 (a) of the list of issues

136. See point 14.

Reply to paragraph 18 (b) of the list of issues

137. In 2021, 17065 marriages were registered, 54 of which were of persons under the age of 18, in 2022 — a total of 16 386 marriages, 30 of which of persons under the age of 18, in 2023 — 15 913 marriages, 27 of which of persons under the age of 18. No separate statistics is kept according to nationality, place of residence, sex and 16 or 17 age groups or other types of divisions.

Reply to paragraph 18 (c) of the list of issues

138. Annex 7.

Reply to paragraph 18 (d) of the list of issues

139. Annex 5.

Reply to paragraph 18 (e) of the list of issues

140. The statistical data of asylum seekers in the Republic of Armenia in 2021, 2022 and 2023, according to citizenship or former country of permanent residence, age, sex, as well as

the statistical data of persons having received the status of refugees in the Republic of Armenia in 2022 and 2023, according to citizenship or former country of permanent residence, age, sex (the data for 2021 is not available since the new system has been in place since 2022), according to the lists attached.

141. 6 children unaccompanied or separated from the family sought asylum in the Republic of Armenia in 2022, and 4 children in 2023.

Reply to paragraph 18 (f) of the list of issues

142. Annex 4.

Reply to paragraph 18 (g) of the list of issues

143. Annex 5.

Reply to paragraph 18 (h) of the list of issues

144. See point g.

Reply to paragraph 18 (i) of the list of issues

145. There are several sports schools with a limited number of students where military science is part of the curriculum. These schools aim to prepare students for careers as professional military personnel and for admission to the Higher Military Academy.

Reply to paragraph 19 (a) of the list of issues

146. Annex 5.

Reply to paragraph 19 (b) of the list of issues

147. See point (a).

Reply to paragraph 19 (c) of the list of issues

148. See point (a).

Reply to paragraph 19 (d) of the list of issues

149. See point (a).

Reply to paragraph 19 (e) of the list of issues

150. Annex 8.

Reply to paragraph 20 of the list of issues

151. Annex 5.

Reply to paragraph 20 (a) of the list of issues

152. Annex 5.

Reply to paragraph 20 (b) of the list of issues

153. Annex 5.

Reply to paragraph 20 (c) of the list of issues

154. Annex 9.

Reply to paragraph 20 (d) of the list of issues

155. See also point 20 (c).

Reply to paragraph 20 (e) of the list of issues

156. See also point 20 (c).

Reply to paragraph 20 (f) of the list of issues

157. Annex 5.

Reply to paragraph 20 (g) of the list of issues

158. Annex 5.

Reply to paragraph 21 of the list of issues

159. https://armstat.am/file/article/soc_sit_2022_30.pdf 308-316 pages.

Reply to paragraph 21 (a) of the list of issues

160. https://armstat.am/file/article/soc_sit_2022_30.pdf.

Reply to paragraph 21 (b) of the list of issues

161. In 2021, the Probation Service of the Ministry of Justice registered 39 minor beneficiaries. Of these, 36 had conditional non-application of punishment with probation imposed, and 3 received educational coercive measures. In 2022, 23 minor beneficiaries were registered, with 22 receiving conditional non-application of punishment and probation, and 1 receiving a fine. In 2023, 28 minor beneficiaries were registered, with 23 receiving conditional non-application of punishment and probation, 2 receiving public works, and 3 receiving educational coercive measures.

162. According to the Law of the Republic of Armenia "On probation," the focus is on ensuring the best interests of minor beneficiaries, including their full-scale rights exercise and development. This involves addressing their intellectual and physical needs, providing relevant care, fostering communication with parents or legal representatives, and considering cultural, language, spiritual, or religious ties and upbringing. Probation officers regularly visit the beneficiaries' residences and places of study, and engage with parents or legal representatives, or the guardianship and curatorship body.

163. Additionally, an electronic tool for evaluating the needs of minor beneficiaries was approved by the Minister of Justice in January 2022. This tool allows specialists to assess and identify the needs of each minor beneficiary, considering their best interests, offense committed, socio-psychological condition, and other relevant factors. Based on this assessment, probation officers develop individual correction and re-socialization plans tailored to each beneficiary's needs, promoting law-abiding behavior through personalized approaches. For example, article 8 of the electronic needs assessment tool focuses on addiction. In 2021, one minor beneficiary identified with addiction issues was referred to the "National Center for Addictions Treatment" CJSC for treatment. At the Probation Service of the Ministry of Justice of the Republic of Armenia, various re-socialization programmes are implemented for minor beneficiaries, including educational, cultural, social, religious, and sports activities. Legal and psychological counseling services are also provided.

164. Legal awareness-raising activities are conducted with minor beneficiaries, such as participation in events like "Participation of Children in the Elaboration and Implementation of Public Policy" in 2021.

165. In cases of psychological problems, minors are either assisted by staff with psychological education or referred to non-governmental organizations providing psychological services, such as the "Armenian Scientific Association of Psychologists" NGO or the "Arevamanuk" Psycho-Social Support Foundation. For instance, in 2021, a minor beneficiary facing intra-family issues was provided with support, including referral to the "Child and Family Support Centre" for six months and regular psychological counseling sessions with the "Arevamanuk" Psycho-Social Support Foundation.

166. Church visits are organized to introduce minor beneficiaries to religious values, facilitating discussions with spiritual leaders and exploring religious traditions. To enrich

cultural experiences, visits to museums and cultural centers are arranged, including trips to various museums across Armenia, offering exposure to regional heritage and artistic expression.

167. Additionally, minor beneficiaries participate in educational programmes provided by the "Centre for the Implementation of Legal Education and Rehabilitation Programmes" SNCO of the Ministry of Justice, such as English language and computer skills training courses.

168. Individual psychological counseling sessions support the educational pursuits and personal growth of minor beneficiaries, enabling their admission to educational institutions like Yerevan State College No. 1.

169. Through a memorandum with the "Federation of Youth Clubs of Armenia" NGO, minor and young beneficiaries of the Probation Service have access to local and international youth programmes, campaigns, and initiatives.

Reply to paragraph 21 (c) of the list of issues

170. Additional information on detention as a preventive measure for minors (up to 18 years old) over the past three years:

- 2021 - 15 petitions, of which 8 were approved, 7 were rejected.
- 2022 - 8 petitions, of which 5 were approved, 3 were rejected.
- 2023 - 17 petitions, of which 14 were approved, 3 were rejected.

Reply to paragraph 21 (d) of the list of issues

171. Between 1 January 2022 and 18 March 2024, "Abovyan" Penitentiary Institution, under the Ministry of Justice of Armenia, housed a total of 27 male minors deprived of liberty, comprising 26 detainees and 1 convict, all of Armenian nationality and citizens of Armenia. Among them, 23 were 17 years old, while 2 were 16 years old, and 2 were 15 years old at admission.

172. These minors faced various charges, including murder, inflicting severe bodily harm, compelling participation in violent sexual acts, threats of harm or property destruction, involvement in pornography-related activities, robbery, hooliganism, extortion, theft, and participation in mass disorders. One individual was sentenced to 4 years in prison for unlawfully taking another person's life, with the sentence starting on 27 April 2019 and ending on 27 April 2023.

Reply to paragraph 22 of the list of issues

173. See 6 (a).

Reply to paragraph 23 of the list of issues

174. As a result of the military attack by Azerbaijan against Nagorno-Karabakh on 19-20 September 2023, Armenia experienced an influx of over 115,000 refugees displaced from Nagorno-Karabakh within a short period, representing almost 4% of Armenia's total population. Notably, around 66% of these refugees are women and children.

175. To address the needs of displaced families and prevent child separation, the MLSA has been expanded day care services, including delegating services to non-governmental organizations across all regions of Armenia. In 2020, approximately 2,800 beneficiaries were served, followed by around 3,277 beneficiaries in 2021 and approximately 1,100 beneficiaries in 2022. Socio-psychological support has also been provided through this initiative, with around 510 beneficiaries in 2020, 327 beneficiaries in 2021, and around 135 beneficiaries in 2022.

176. In 2023, 12 non-governmental organizations extended day care services throughout Armenia, catering to 3,500 children across 24 communities, funded by a state budget of AMD 506 million. In 2024, the state continues to allocate resources for day care services,

earmarking over AMD 650 million from the state budget to serve 4,500 children based on individual social needs.

177. Additionally, efforts have been made to update domestic regulations in line with international standards, including the drafting of amendments to the Family Code to align with the Hague Convention on the Protection of Children and Co-operation in Respect of Intercountry Adoption. The draft is currently under discussion.

178. The Ministry of Justice introduced an electronic birth and death registration system starting 1 February 2024, enabling remote registration without the need for in-person visits to Civil Status Acts Registration Agency service centers, through an electronic platform. Currently, the electronic birth registration process for children born in Armenia to unmarried Armenian citizen mothers is being rolled out. Through this system, parents can input necessary details, including the child's name, to obtain the birth certificate. Data from the state population register and electronic medical records systems are utilized for applicant information and medical birth certificate data. Efforts are underway to extend electronic registration to children born to married parents.

Reply to paragraph 24 of the list of issues

179. In light of the significant influx of refugees from Nagorno-Karabakh, ensuring access to social welfare, healthcare, and education for refugee children is paramount. The current situation underscores the urgency of implementing Article 22 of the Convention, which emphasizes the rights of refugee children to receive necessary support and protection.

180. Additionally, the declaration of a disaster zone in the Lori and Tavush regions due to catastrophic flooding further emphasizes the importance of prioritizing assistance to children in these areas.
