
A Brief History of Education in Prisons in Armenia

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Abstract: Introduction: The right to education plays a key role in the system of formation, development and continuous activity of a citizen, as well as in the system of fundamental rights and freedoms a man and citizen. At present, in the Republic of Armenia (RA), at the level of laws and strategies, educational guarantees for persons held in penitentiary institutions have been established. Study purpose is to research up to present the historical development / history genesis of education in penitentiary institutions in the RA. Materials and methods: The following methods were used, i.e. the study of documents related to educational programs implemented in penitentiary institutions of the RA, collection, generalization and analysis of primary statistical data. Results and Discussion. The history of education development in penitentiary institutions of the Republic of Armenia made it possible to conclude that 1) along with a decrease in the number of people in penitentiary institutions of the RA since 2000s, there has been an increase in the number of people involved in educational programs; 2) Despite the fact that non-formal education programs implemented by the state were initially initiated for minors and women, based on the dynamics of the last 5 years, it can be stated that they are becoming more common among adult men; 3) The steps taken by the state so far lead to the conclusion that there is a national mechanism for realizing the right to education of persons in penitentiary institutions.

Keywords: prison education, Armenia, penitentiary institutions, the right to education.

INTRODUCTION

The right to education plays a key role in the system of formation, development and continuous activity of a citizen, as well as in the system of fundamental rights and freedoms a man and citizen. At present in the Republic of Armenia, at the level of laws and strategies, educational guarantees are established for persons held in penitentiary institutions.

Study purpose is to research up to present the historical development / history genesis of education in penitentiary institutions in the RA.

METHODS

The following methods were used, i.e. study of documents related to educational programs implemented in penitentiary institutions of the RA, collection, generalization and analysis of primary statistical data.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

General understanding of penitentiary institutions in the RA

In order to get a general idea, we will briefly dwell on the penitentiary institutions of the RA in general. Thus, on January 7th, 1919, by the decision of the government of the First Republic of Armenia, the places of deprivation of liberty were transferred to the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Justice and the 'Prison Inspectorate' was created to organize and control the activities of places of deprivation of liberty.

In April 1921, a correctional and punitive department was created as part of the People's Commissariat of Justice of the Autonomous Republic of Soviet Socialist Republics (ASSR), and the prisons were renamed 'Correctional Houses'; in the period from 1923 to 1926 the corrective labor department, and in 1926 the department of places of detention, which functioned as part of the department of the People's Commissariat of Internal Affairs of the ASSR.

In the period from 1930 to 1934 the prison system was transferred to the subordination of the People's Commissariat of Justice of the ASSR, and in subsequent years to the People's Commissariat of Internal Affairs of the ASSR, and in different years it was called differently:

- 1938 – Prison department;
- 1959 – Administration of correctional labor colonies;
- 1962 – Prison administration;

- 1969 – Department of Corrections;
- 1988 – Corrections office;
- 1991 – Department for the execution of criminal sentences.

In 2001, the Department for the Execution of Criminal Sentences with all subordinate divisions was transferred to the subordination of the RA Ministry of Justice and until now functions as a criminal-executive service of the RA Ministry of Justice with a central body and 12 institutions (Ministry of Justice of the Republic of Armenia, 2021). According to the order of the Minister of Justice of the Republic of Armenia No. 30-N of February 28, 2012, up to 5346 prisoners can be kept in these institutions.

In this article, information about the penitentiary institutions of the Republic of Armenia is presented on the basis of a secondary analysis of the data we collected as a result of field research. It should be noted that in the Republic of Armenia there is no unified system for collecting statistics on the number of persons held in penitentiary institutions, their educational level, programs implemented in penitentiary institutions, program participants. The following data were obtained through official individual inquiries, correspondence and individual fieldwork with each prison. The data has been corrected from several sources to ensure low data errors:

- 1938 – Prison department;
- Ministry of Justice of the RA;
- Ministry of Education, Science, Culture and Sports of the RA;
- Penitentiary Service of the RA Ministry of Justice;
- ‘Center for Legal Education and Implementation of Rehabilitation Programs’ SNCO;
- The "Artik Night School" government non-profit organization;
- Public Observer Groups in Penitentiary Institutions of the Ministry of Justice of the RA.

Thus, below is the total number of persons held in penitentiary institutions as of September 2020 (Figure 1). This was provided on 19-10-2020 by the Central Department of Social, Psychological and Legal Issues of the Central Department of the Penitentiary Service of the Ministry of Justice of the Republic of Armenia in response to the message of the author of the work (citizen M. Tadevosyan) 09/23/2020. 40 / 12-6780, and a sample annex thereto. The statistics presented may contain inaccuracies, given the constant flow of people in prisons and the lack of a unified information / statistical database.

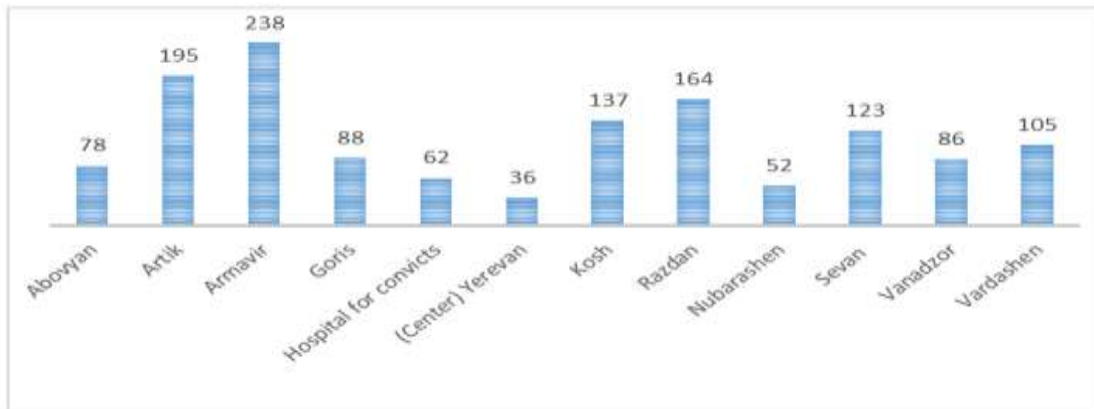


Fig.1: Number of persons detained in penitentiary institutions of the RA, October 2020

Thus, as of October 2020, there are about 1364 people in penitentiary institutions of the Republic of Armenia, which is 25.5% of the established number of penitentiary institutions (5346 people) in 2012. The World Prison Brief (WPB, 2021) is a unique statistics database that provides free access to information about prison systems around the world. Country information is updated monthly, mostly using data from government or other official sources. The organization publishes national indicators for each country, mainly every two years, and also establishes a Prison population rate per 100,000 population. Thus, in the section on Armenia, we can see the total number of prisoners (prison population) in Armenia from 1994 to 2018 and the prison population index (WPB Armenia, 2021) (Figure 2).

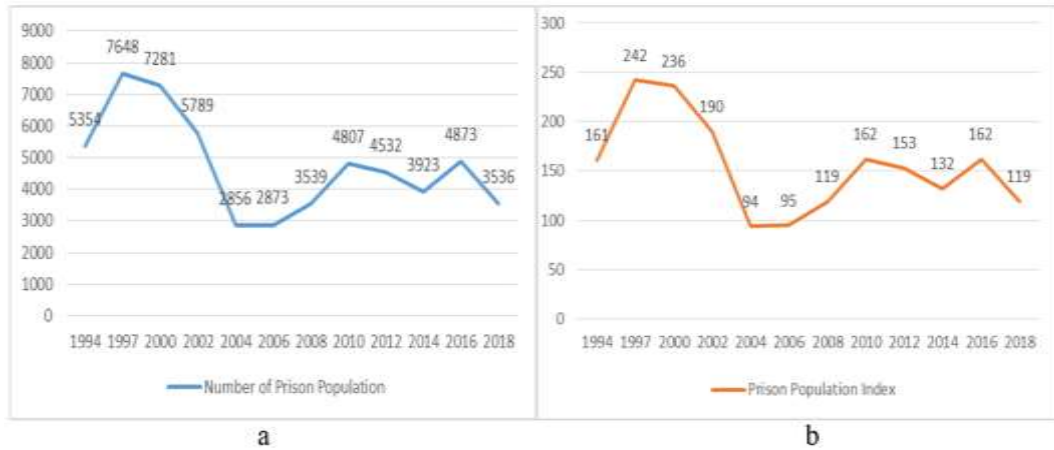


Fig.2: The number of prison population (a) in the Republic of Armenia and the index of prison population (b) according to the World Prison Brief, 1994-2018

As can be seen from Figure 2, since 1994 the number of prisoners in the RA and the index of the number of prisoners have generally tended to decline. By comparing these statistics with the education statistics of persons in penitentiary institutions we obtained from field research, it is possible to see the percentage of people participating in educational programs of the total number of people in penitentiary institutions.

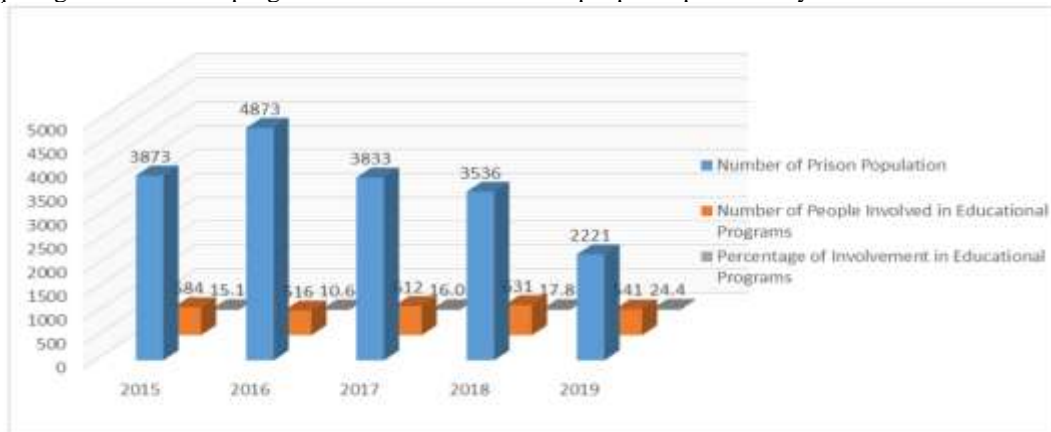


Fig.3: The number of RA prisoners participating in educational programs from 2015 to 2019

These data show that along with a decrease in the number of people in penitentiary institutions of the Republic of Armenia over the past 5 years, there has been a tendency to an increase in the number of people involved in educational programs (1.1% in 2015, 24.4% in 2019). At the same time, despite the upward trend, the number of people involved in educational programs among the main staff of penitentiary institutions remains low.

History and statistics of the education in penitentiary institutions of the RA

Below is the general involvement of persons held in penitentiary institutions of the Republic of Armenia, over the past 5 years (from 2015 to 2019) in educational activities, in which formal (general education, secondary vocational education, higher, postgraduate) and non-formal (Aesthetic education and education, self-employed associations) participation in educational programs based on and comparing the information provided by each penitentiary institution and the available reports of the Penitentiary Service of the RA Ministry of Justice (Figure 4).

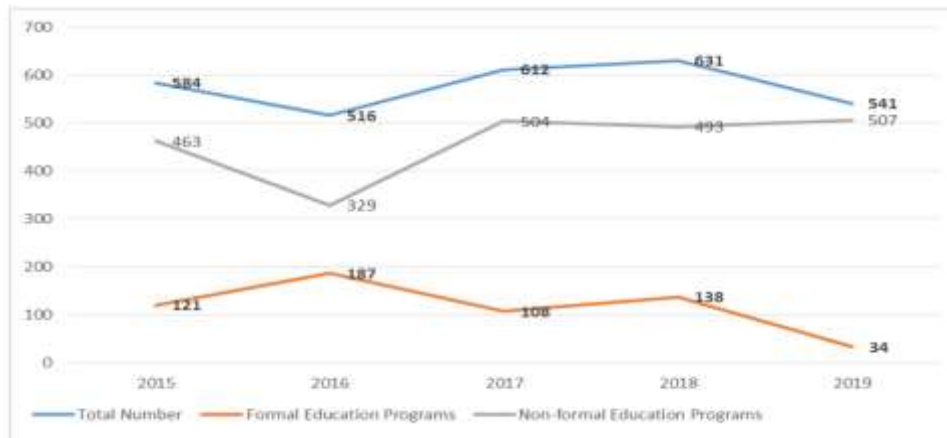


Fig.4: Involvement of persons held in penitentiary institutions of the Republic of Armenia in formal, non formal educational programs, according to data for the last 5 years from 2015 to 2019

As shown in Figure 4, over the past 5 years:

- About 2884 people are involved in educational initiatives / programs, of which 2296 are non formal, 588 are formal educational initiatives;
- The number of those receiving formal education has decreased and the number of those engaged in non-formal education has increased.

Thus, historically, after the collapse of the Soviet Union (1991), the first attempts to implement educational programs in the penitentiary institutions of the Third Republic of Armenia began about 10 years after independence, in the 2000s. The first such attempts were made in 2001 at the initiative of the NGO (non-governmental organization) ‘Trtu’ with the support of the ‘Open Society Institute’ (Interview with Temik Khalapyan, 2011). According to the founding president of the organization, this idea was based on the historical fact during the Artsakh war in the 1990s, when he (Temik Khalapyan) remarked that ‘some of the boys who fought with him on the battlefield were convicted of crimes in adolescence, but they were no less bold and patriotic. Years later, I read in a newspaper about a grant proposal for cultural programs with vulnerable groups and remembered those boys who had served their sentences in the Abovyan colony. Inspired by this idea, the first educational program with grant support was launched in the Abovyan colony with the participation of juvenile convicts and detainees. This initiative had a cultural orientation, it provided for the conduct of art courses with the participation of minors in correctional facilities. In particular, it included the teaching of the fine arts, pottery, experiments with wood, theatrical art, song and dance. In fact, this initiative served as the basis for initiating pedagogical processes in penitentiary institutions, as well as state programs’.

In 2005, taking into account the potential and innovation of the initiative in the judicial system of the Republic of Armenia, on the basis of the proposal of the Ministry of Culture and Youth of the Republic of Armenia (now the Ministry of Education, Science, Culture and Sports), according to the Decree N2118-N of the Government of the Republic of Armenia on November 3, 2005 ‘Special Creative Center for Juvenile Offenders’ was established (Government of the Republic of Armenia, 2005). Just 2 years after the decision to establish the Center was made, in 2007 the Center began to work under the auspices of the RA Ministry of Culture and Youth. The activities of the newly created center were again aimed at aesthetic education, art courses, exhibitions and performances with the participation of juvenile offenders. These programs were implemented as an ‘Extracurricular upbringing’ initiative.

Taking into account the fact that permits for access to penitentiary institutions were an additional obstacle to the implementation of programs, the Center provided services to the justice system, a close interdepartmental cooperation was required between the RA Ministry of Justice and the RA Ministry of Culture and Youth. As a result, the ‘Special Creative Center for Juvenile Offenders’ operating under the RA Ministry of Culture and Youth since 2007 was transferred in 2012 and continues to operate under the jurisdiction of the RA Ministry of Justice, being renamed ‘Rehabilitation Center for Offenders’ (Charter of the State Non-Profit Organization ‘Rehabilitation Center for Offenders’). In fact, one component was added to the main activities of the Center: the implementation of social programs (Interview with Gayane Hovakimyan, 2013). Thus, the centralized justice system has had a positive impact on the implementation of programs aimed at educating offenders, for the first time at the national level, institutionalized educational programs implemented with the participation of offenders.

Historically, adolescents and women have been considered the main beneficiaries of educational programs in penitentiary institutions in the RA. For this reason, the work of this Center at the initial stage (about 10 years of activity) was focused mainly on women and juveniles. It is noteworthy that since the establishment of the Center, the organization has targeted only one of 12 penitentiary institutions in Armenia, the Abovyan

Penitentiary. The last one, designed for 250 prisoners, built in 1985 and intended only for convicted juveniles, and since 1991 it has housed prisoners and convicted women (Historical overview of the ‘Abovyan’ penitentiary, 2016). Given this circumstance, the ‘Abovyan’ colony received the largest share of educational programs. The government non-profit organization ‘Abovyan State Vocational School No 2’ has been operating since 1997 in the said penitentiary institution, where juvenile convicts undergo vocational training. Until 2004, it operated under the RA Ministry of Justice, after which it became subordinate to the RA Ministry of Education and Science. By the order of the Minister of Education and Science of the Republic of Armenia No. 248-A / Q of April 27, 2004, the organization was issued a license No. 598 for a number of specialties with a preliminary professional educational program. The college organized general education up to grade 11, as well as primary vocational education, including carpentry, agricultural mechanics, electrical engineering (Non-governmental organization Social Justice, 2011). College education is organized in the form of complete classrooms. By the decision of the RA Government of October 25, 2018 N 1185-A, the organization was liquidated (Government of the Republic of Armenia, 2018). Among the main reasons for the liquidation was the acquisition of several specialties by the same convict every year, as a result of which it was decided to replace the existing courses with short-term non-formal professional courses. As a result, the authority to organize general and vocational education was transferred to the government non-profit organization ‘Center for Legal Education and Implementation of Rehabilitation Programs’.

The above facts allow us to conclude that the activities of the Center under the Ministry of Justice of the Republic of Armenia can be considered as an opportunity for development for organization, development of diversity and programs, since there is access to penitentiary institutions. On November 24th, 2016 by the Resolution of the Government of the Republic of Armenia No. 1253-N, the government non-profit organization ‘Rehabilitation center for offenders’ was merged with the ‘Legal Institute of the Ministry of Justice of the Republic of Armenia’, and was renamed into the ‘Center for Legal Education and Implementation of Rehabilitation programs’ (State Non-Profit Organization ‘Center for Legal Education and Implementation of Rehabilitation Programs’, 2018).

The "Artik Night School" Government non-profit organization (2017) also plays an important role in the process of organizing education in penitentiary institutions. The educational institution, located in the Shirak region of the Republic of Armenia, has been operating since 1965 on the territory of the ‘Artik’ penitentiary institution of the Ministry of Justice of the Republic of Armenia. According to the Charter of the latter, ‘illiterate and semi-literate convicts without secondary education under the age of 28 can be admitted to an institution on the basis of educational censorship indicated by the court in their personal file on education’. In fact, this educational institution is the only body for organizing general education of adult convicts in penitentiary institutions in the Republic of Armenia. At the same time, it should be noted that according to the annual report of the Human Rights Defender (2019) (Ombudsman) of the Republic of Armenia for 2019, on the support of the activities of the "Artik Night School" Government non-profit organization, the Ministry of Education and Science of the Republic of Armenia reported that the "Artik Night School" Government non-profit organization, carrying out educational activities under the secondary education program, is not yet licensed' (p. 4-10, p. 248). From 2015 to 2019, 57 adults were enrolled in the general education program.

Thus, ‘Center for Legal Education and Implementation of Rehabilitation Programs’ subordinated to the RA Ministry of Justice is the only state structure that provides comprehensive educational services to penitentiary institutions in the RA. As of 2020, the Center is implementing two educational programs for persons held in penitentiary institutions, i.e. ‘Aesthetic education and training for offenders’ (non-formal educational program) and ‘General education of juvenile prisoners’ (formal educational program: During 2020, 11 minors were included in the general education program).

Soft skills	Literacy and language skills	Aesthetic / cultural skills
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Social education and life skills • Psychology • Business literacy • Computer skills • Healthy lifestyle 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Armenian language and literature • Basic literacy / mathematics • Foreign language / English • Foreign language / Russian 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Arts and crafts • Ceramics, pottery painting and baking technology • Woodworking and artistic woodcarving • Pottery, ceramic painting and baking technology. • Ceramics, decor and painting

Fig.5: Non-formal education courses conducted by the state in penitentiary institutions by directions

The dynamics of people involved in non-formal educational programs implemented by the state in penitentiary institutions of the Republic of Armenia over the past 5 years is presented below (Figure 6).

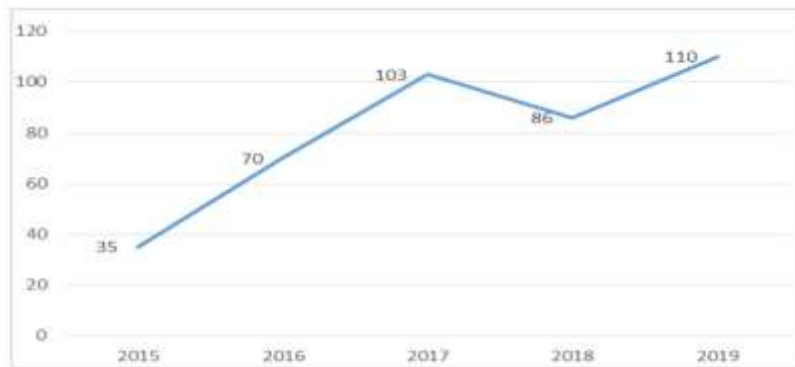


Fig.6: Dynamics of participation of individuals in non-formal education programs implemented by the state in penitentiary institutions, by years

CONCLUSION

Based on this research and the above data, we can state that along with a decrease in the number of people in penitentiary institutions of the RA since the 2000s, there is an increase in the number of people involved in educational programs. Since the beginning of educational programs (2000s), they have been implemented by the state in 2 out of 12 penitentiary institutions, accounting for 16.6% of the total number of penitentiary institutions. Over the past 20 years, the range of educational programs has expanded and now includes 6 penitentiary institutions, which is 33.3% of the total number of penitentiary institutions. In the period from 2000 to 2020, 20 years after the start of the Program, the volume of educational activities was expanded 3 times. From the outset, non-formal education programs have dominated prison programs. Despite the fact that non-formal education programs implemented by the state were initially initiated for underage women, based on the dynamics of the last 5 years, it can be stated that they are becoming more common among adult men. From the 2000s up to 2015, the programs of non-formal education implemented by the state had only a cultural and aesthetic orientation. Since 2016, the programs have been supplemented with a social component (healthy lifestyle, psychology), and since 2018, courses have been initiated aimed at acquiring skills necessary in the labor market, literacy courses, acquiring basic language skills, and the first steps have been taken in the implementation of formal education programs.

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