

Armenia: Children and the military

Pre-session

Submission to the Committee on the Rights of the Child on the
combined fifth and sixth periodic reports of Armenia
(October 2023)

Summary

- **Child recruitment.** Adolescent children aged 17 are, or could be, enrolled into Military Education Institutes as full members of the armed forces, contrary to Armenia's OPAC declaration.
- **Civilian schools: military training.** All civilian schools include one hour per week of 'preliminary military training', which appears to include the use of weapons.
- **Military schools: use of weapons and military discipline.** Military schools provide weapons training. Whether students are subject to military discipline is unclear.
- **Prohibition.** While conscription below the age of 18 is not practised by the State party, the recruitment of children and their participation in hostilities is not prohibited in law.
- **Conscientious objection.** It remains unclear whether citizens who register for compulsory military service at age 16 must register a conscientious objection immediately.
- **Suggested questions.** The submission closes with suggested questions for the List of Issues.

Introduction

The Child Rights International Network (CRIN) and Conscience and Peace Tax International (CPTI) present these comments as part of their project to monitor progress made by states parties in implementing the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) on the involvement of children in armed conflict (OPAC).

Country situation

History: The former Soviet Republic of Armenia declared independence in 1991 and was admitted as a member state of the United Nations in 1993. Its history since has been dominated by hostilities with neighbouring Azerbaijan, following attempts at secession by the latter's

Armenian-majority enclave of Nagorno-Karabakh. A state of open warfare existed between 1988 and 1994, and again in 2020. In September 2023, a surprise assault by Azerbaijani troops deposed the enclave's secessionist administration and reoccupied the territory in full, apparently without directly engaging Armenian forces. Most of the enclave's population has now fled to Armenia and the situation at the time of writing remains tense.

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| Population (2022): | c. 3 million. ¹ |
| Armed forces personnel (2022): | c. 42,000. ² |
| Military service: | Compulsory for men aged 18-27 years: 24 months. |
| Conscientious objection: | Civilian alternative service (36 months) available since 2013. |
| OPAC ratified: | 2005. |
| OPAC report: | CRC/C/OPAC/ARM/1 , 2012 (with reply to List of Issues CRC/C/OPAC/ARM/Q/1.Add1 , 2013); Concluding Observations CRC/C/OPAC/ARM/CO/1 , 2013. |
| CRC reviews since OPAC report: | None. |

Issues arising

Military education and military schools

The principal outstanding items from the examination of Armenia's report relate to military involvement in education. This arises with regard to the general secondary education curriculum, to a number of military schools of at least two educational levels, and to Military Education Institutes.

Children in military service at Military Educational Institutes

The State party report makes clear (paragraph 270) that Military Educational Institutes are post-secondary institutions covered by the Law On Higher and Postgraduate Professional Education. Paragraph 16 clarifies that all students are considered to be performing compulsory military service as members of the armed forces.

It appears that adolescent children aged 17 are, or can be, enrolled into the institutes. If so, this amounts to military recruitment, contrary to Armenia's OPAC declaration which sets 18 as the legal minimum age.³ While admission into the institutes is possible only after obligatory education has been completed (paragraph 268), which normally means after age 18, entry below that age is not explicitly prohibited. Paragraph 19 of Armenia's OPAC report, which states that 'cadets not having

¹ Institute for Strategic Studies, *The military balance 2023*.

² Ibid.

³ '...the citizens of the Republic of Armenia, who have attained the age of 18, are required to serve in the armed forces of the Republic of Armenia; the Republic of Armenia guarantees that those citizens who have not yet attained the age of 18 cannot be called upon for either obligatory or contractual (voluntary) military service.' UN Treaty Collection, [Chapter IV: Human Rights \(11b\)](#), 2023.

attained the age of eighteen do not take part in military operations' suggests that some cadets are adolescent children (similar wording appears at paragraph 270 of the State party report).

We encourage the Committee to clarify whether any cadets at these institutions are aged under 18. Paragraph 272 of the State party reveals that these statistics are available already, and therefore could be provided.

Use of weapons in civilian schools

In the present review cycle, the State party states initially (paragraph 263) that military training is not conducted in civilian schools, then proceeds to reveal that schoolchildren are routinely put through 'preliminary military training' at one hour per week, which includes teaching on the 'military art... as well as practical knowledge on the fundamentals of safe living and first medical aid'. Other evidence of weapons training includes the following:

- In eighth grade (14 years of age), two hours are spent learning about military rifles (State party report);
- 'Educational weapons and ammunition' are provided to civilian schools and colleges (State party report);
- Firearms training is included in the 'civil defence' curriculum of civilian schools from the 8th grade (age 14 years) (Concluding Observations on OPAC report, paragraph 10).

Use of weapons at military schools

The Concluding Observations further record that firearms training is also included in the curriculum of the Poqr Mher military school, which was accepting students from age 14 (now merged into the Nubarashen Specialised Military Training School), and the Monte Melkonyan military school, which accepted boys from age 16 years, particularly from economically deprived backgrounds. It remains unclear whether the State party operates any further military schools.

Computer-simulated firing practice is carried out at at least one military school (Monte Melkonyan), where students also practise with dummy weapons (paragraph 262). Otherwise, it remains mostly unclear how much and what kind of military training is included at military schools in addition to that provided in civilian schools.

Observations and recommendations of the Committee

The Committee's Concluding Observations on the State party's OPAC report recommended (paragraph 11):

'that the State party exclude military training from the curriculum of general schools and take measures to ban military training with the use of firearms and combat training for children under the age of 18 in military schools. It also recommends that the State party establish regular monitoring of military schools to ensure that the school curriculum and the teaching personnel comply with the Optional Protocol'.

Paragraph 10(d) records the Committee concern that '... children in military institutes can also be subjected to military discipline and punishment.' We have no evidence to offer on this and we encourage the Committee to ask the State party whether it is still the case.

Prohibition

Paragraph 13 of the Concluding Observations on the OPAC report recommended that Armenia

‘amend its Criminal Code to add a provision that explicitly prohibits the recruitment of children under the age of 18 into the armed forces and their use in hostilities by the State armed forces and non-State armed groups’.

In the present review, paragraph 169 of the State party report refers only to explicit legal prohibition of ‘participation of a child under the age of 15 in armed conflict’. The State party will claim that this provision is redundant because of other protections, but it is not appropriate that a standard should be incorporated into law which is lower than that stipulated in OPAC.

Conscientious objection

This issue has not previously been raised by the Committee with Armenia. While conscription takes place from the age of eighteen, registration is compulsory for males from the age of sixteen, such that children are expected to know in advance of adulthood whether they hold a conscientious objection to military service. We encourage the Committee to ask the State party whether the procedures for applying for alternative service are, or can be, engaged before the age of eighteen.

Suggested questions for the List of Issues

- 1. Please name all the Military Educational Institutes and provide data on admissions for recent years disaggregated by age and gender. Please detail any steps taken to ensure that no persons under the age of 18 may be enrolled.**
- 2. Please list all other military schools, together with, as the Committee requested in paragraph 9 of its Concluding Observations under OPAC, data on the number of students ‘disaggregated by sex, age, nationality, ethnic origin and socioeconomic background’. Please detail any weapons training, if applicable, and state whether students are subject to military discipline.**
- 3. Please give details on the content of ‘preliminary military training’ in civilian schools, with particular regard to the age at which it begins and the use of weapons.**
- 4. What action has been taken to implement the Committee’s recommendation that the State party amend its Criminal Code to criminalise the recruitment of children under the age of 18 into the armed forces and their use in hostilities by the armed forces or non-state armed groups?**
- 5. At what age can a citizen of Armenia lodge an application to perform alternative service on the grounds of conscientious objection? What is the process for considering such an application?**