

ASSESSMENT ON ACCESS OF CHILDREN TO PRE-SCHOOL EDUCATION SERVICES IN ARMENIA

ANALYTICAL REPORT

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**ASSESSMENT ON ACCESS
OF CHILDREN TO PRE-SCHOOL
EDUCATION SERVICES IN ARMENIA**

Country Name: ARMENIA

NAME OF ORGANIZATION: MEDIA MODEL LLC.

ADDRESS: Kievyan Str. 12/10, 0028 Yerevan, Republic of Armenia

Tel./fax: +374 10 270873, URL: www.mediamodel.am

Contact Person: Ms. Ada Babloyan,

This report is elaborated by:

Team Leader/Author: Ada Babloyan

Data Manager/Processing: Bagrat Harutyunyan

Field Managers: Tigran Harutyunyan, Gayane Dajunts

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ACRONIMS

AMD	Armenian Dram
ECD	Early Childhood Development
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
F2F	Face to face standardized interview
HH	Household
ILCS	Integrated Living Condition Survey
MoES	Ministry of Education and Science
MoH	Ministry of Health
MoLSA	Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs
MoTAD	Ministry of Territorial Administration and Development
MPPAC	Medical-Psychological-Pedagogical Assessment Center
NGO	Non-governmental Organization
NSS RA	National Statistical Service of Republic of Armenia
OVS	Orphans and Vulnerable Children
RA	Republic of Armenia
UNICEF	United Nations Children’s Fund
WB	World Bank

GLOSSARY

Here are definitions of main concepts as interpreted and used in the report:

Early Childhood is defined as the period from birth to eight years old. A time of remarkable brain growth, these years lay the basis for subsequent development.

Early Childhood Development is a preparatory stage, assisting the child's transition to formal schooling. It places emphasis on child's complete development—according to his or her social, emotional, cognitive and physical needs - to establish a solid and broad foundation for lifelong learning and wellbeing.

A preschool - (also called nursery school, pre-primary school, kindergarten) is an educational establishment or learning space, offering early childhood care, development and education to children between the ages of three and five, prior to the enrollment in compulsory education at primary school.

Vulnerability – a potential to experience negative outcomes, such as the loss of access to education, morbidity, and malnutrition, at higher rates, than do their peers.

Net Enrolment Rate - proportion of total number of children population of the RA aged 0-5 years, enrolled in pre-schools, expressed in percentage, based on NSS RA official data.

Absolute Enrolment Rate - proportion of total number of children population of the RA, aged 0-5 years, enrolled in pre-schools, expressed in percentage, based on data collected from province authorities.

Relative Enrolment Rate - Proportion of children aged 3-5 years in the survey sample, enrolled in any type of pre-school services/classes, expressed in percentage.

Access - the ability, right, or permission to approach, enter and use pre-school education services, having admittance to them.

Entry – the process of inclusion into pre-school education.

Admission – formal and informal procedures for gaining/providing permission to enter/attend pre-school.

Exclusion –not being enrolled in any kind of ECD service, drop-out.

Inclusive education –quality education for all children, including those with special educational needs (due to disability or other cause).

Inclusive education is one dimension of a rights-based quality education, which emphasizes equity in access and participation, responding positively to the individual learning needs and competencies of all children.

Inclusive education is child-centered and places the responsibility of adaptation on the education system, rather than the individual child. Together with other sectors and wider community, it actively works to ensure, that every child, irrespective of gender, language, ability, religion, nationality or other characteristics, is supported to meaningfully participate and learn alongside his/her peers, and develop to his/her full potential.¹

Poor HHs– sample households, which spend more than 62% of their income on food consumption.

¹Save the Children (2014) *Save the children stands for inclusive education*

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

BACKGROUND. Preschool education generally targets the group of population under 6 years old. Pre-school education services in Armenia mostly function under the state-guided programs. Early Childhood Development (ECD) is included in education policy and social policy concepts in the framework of both state and donor programs as one of the significant dimensions. However, the number of centers for pre-school education and ECD is insufficient. The preschool education and ECD services in Armenia are implemented through community, departmental and non-state institutions, most of which are municipal institutions; besides, there is a small number of departmental and private institutions. Compared to other groups of population, the children, having limitations in accessing pre-school education, are the most vulnerable children.

METHODOLOGY. The aim of this study was to conduct a nation-wide assessment on access of children (including most vulnerable children) to preschool education services in Armenia. The scope of the assessment covers all families, having children of 3-5 years old in 10 provinces of the RA and in the capital city Yerevan, who are de-facto or potential beneficiaries of pre-school education and ECD services in 2016-2017. Assessment methodology was based on combined methods approach, which consists of (a) collection of numerical data via quantitative methods, and (b) in-depth information from qualitative methods. The findings, presented in the report, are based on the data, collected by means of 20 semi-structured interviews with representatives of local authorities at the community and regional level, experts from respective ministries, agencies and donor organizations, 599 F2F standardized interviews with families, having children of age 3-5 across Armenia and 9 focus group discussions in 3 regions of Armenia with 3 categories of families, whose children do not attend kindergartens (poor families, where monthly expenses are below poverty line or less than 40.000 AMD per person, well-off families, where monthly expenses are above average monthly salary, or more than 158.000 AMD per person, and families, having children with disabilities of age 3-5). The fieldwork was implemented during the period November 25 - December 28, 2016, in 10 provinces of the RA and capital city Yerevan. Sample size for the quantitative survey was 600 (implemented sample 599) households with confidence level 95% and the sample error around $\pm 4\%$. The sampling design was based on representative randomized multistage sample strategy. For analytical purposes of the survey the households in the sample, whose monthly expenses for food made more than 62% of their overall incomes, have been defined as poor households.

MAIN FINDINGS FROM EXPERT SURVEYS

PRE-SCHOOL EDUCATION DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY. According to experts' assessment, there is a widely shared determination to raise and universalize enrolment of children in pre-school education among Armenian decision-makers; however, the final scenario of pre-school education concept development on operational level is under transition. Main trends of ECD strategy for upcoming years cover:

- a. shift to compulsory pre-school education for 5-6 year-old children by means of alternative, more cost-effective models of pre-schooling;
- b. in rural communities redistribution of budgets for free-of-charge pre-school education from kindergartens to alternative services (particularly, to school-preparedness programs);
- c. localization of pre-schooling into more comprehensive scope of primary and high-school education strategy, adopting the so called "11+1" model;

- d. absence of any targeted policy in pre-schooling, particularly for inclusive early childhood care (children from 0 to 3 years old).
- e. serious gap between rural/urban policy orientations.

DATA REGISTRY. There is a lack of a unified registry or data collection, storage, sharing, analyzing procedures and monitoring tools on the number of children of pre-school age; rates for enrolment in different types of pre-schools, including alternative pre-school education centers; drop-out rates and registries for children from socially vulnerable families, children with disability, children from refugee and displaced families, etc. Data sources, elaborated separately for needs of different agencies (for example, for social support services, territorial administration agencies, outpatient departments, ministry of Diaspora, etc.) are fragmented, not correlated, and cannot be used to target groups of children, having accessibility obstacles or being drop-out from pre-school education.

ALTERNATIVE PRE-SCHOOLS. By now there are several models of alternative pre-school education, piloted in the regions of Armenia:

- a. A preschool class within a school/school-based ECD center (for five year olds, possibly, also for four-year olds in future),
- b. A kindergarten, either localized for special educational needs, or equipped with a mobile professional team, working with specific groups of children in the kindergarten and providing on-demand training for the staff,
- c. An ECD center, providing not only learning activities, but also services, related to children’s health, protection and rehabilitation,
- d. Individual parents support, provided either within a center or at home (“home visiting”) by mobile support teams,
- e. “Home-based provision” of children’s games, care and learning activities, especially in small and remote communities, that are too small for creation of a one full-size ECD group.

Only two of the abovementioned models are equipped with a mechanism for identification and recruitment of children, not enrolled in pre-school education.

EXCLUSION FROM ECD. According to experts, main social groups of, so called, excluded or drop-outs from pre-schooling in Armenia are: (a) small, rarely populated or remote rural and urban communities in the provinces; (b) children with special needs; (c) children of Syrian-Armenians, or Armenian refugees from Iraq; (d) children from extremely poor or high-risk families (deviant behavior, alcoholism, with children placed in institutions, etc.). However, identification and recruitment mechanisms for children, excluded from pre-schools, are missing, there are no mandates, attributed to respective agencies for special efforts to ensure the right of children to education, since pre-school education is non-compulsory in Armenia.

INCLUSIVE PRE-SCHOOL EDUCATION. Estimates for inclusiveness of education on pre-school level, provided by experts, are worse in comparison to primary or higher education. The agencies for identification of children with special educational needs and the institutions of inclusive education do not operate as a holistic system; therefore, there is lack of any accurate data, regarding children drop-out of pre-school because of disabilities. Not only parents are not proactive in integrating their children with special needs in state kindergartens, preferring special centers for rehabilitation or development, but also principals of kindergartens are not eager to enroll children with special needs, mostly reasoning by lack of relevant supplies, professional specialists and conditions for special care.

THE CHALLENGES. The efforts in ECD are rather sporadic, there is lack of systematic collaboration among organizations, working in the field, regional authorities and other agencies in charge. In cross-agency collaboration there are spheres, that gain duplicate attention and issues, that gain no attention at all. There is lack of alternative pre-school services, especially for children from socially vulnerable families and children under age 5.

THE MAIN FINDINGS FROM SAMPLE SURVEY

AWARENESS AND PERCEPTIONS IN PRE-SCHOOL EDUCATION. Majority of respondents (more than 80% of sample) consider enrolment of children under 6 in preschool educational institutions “very important” and “mainly important”. The most important institutions for respondents traditionally are kindergartens and school-preparedness courses. There is a positive perception of child enrolment in any kind of ECD, and more than 62% of respondents demand for **compulsory** pre-school education. There is an overall comprehension of social functions of pre-schooling for child and family among Armenian society with special emphasis on social functions, related to increasing attainment rate at school (33.4% of responses), developing communication skills (31.4% of responses) and ensuring general education and development of the child (30.5% of responses).

ENROLLMENT RATES. There is a difference between enrollment rates calculation, based on official statistics and other relevant data. The difference is determined by a definition of pre-school age (children from 0 to 6, or children from 3 to 6), as well as discrepancy in reported numbers of pre-school-aged children. **Net Enrolment Rate**, which is calculated as a proportion of child population of pre-school age, officially registered as enrolled in pre-schools, expressed in percentage based on official data from National Statistical Service (NSS) of the RA for 2013-2015, is about 28%. This rate for urban communities is 35.6%, while for rural communities it is extremely low - 15.8%. **Absolute Enrolment Rate** for 2016, which is calculated based on data collected by the team during current survey directly from province authorities as a proportion of children aged from 0-5 enrolled in pre-schools expressed in percentage, is 50.5%. **Relative Enrolment Rate**, calculated by the team based on survey data for the reported sample as a proportion of children aged 3-5 in the survey sample, enrolled in public and private kindergartens (in total 684 children, of which 65.3% are of age 3-5 and 34.7% are of age 5-6) expressed in percentage, is around 60%.

ATTENDANCE AT PRE-SCHOOLS. 59.4% of all surveyed children attend public kindergartens, while private kindergartens are not too popular (the rate is 3% of children). Quite a large number of children (accordingly 5.1%, 3.8% and 12.5% of total number) attend alternative pre-schools. In general, the attendance at pre-school educational institutions is quite intensive, since 89.4% of children enrolled in pre-schooling, attend ECD every day and 84% of the enrolled spend more than 4 hours in pre-schools. Children from urban areas are twice more likely to attend pre-school educational institutions. At the same time children in rural area and children from poor households attend kindergartens more regularly, considering both the time spent there and attendance rate. Children of respondents with higher education level are more likely to attend ECDs and, besides, children of working respondents are twice more likely to attend ECD.

ENTRY OBSTACLES. Approximately every third out of 10, or 36,7% of HH, whose children are attending kindergarten, mentioned, that from their personal experience, it was not easy to arrange/enroll a 3-5 years old child to a public kindergarten in their community. The number of poor house-

holds, not satisfied with the accessibility to ECDs, is higher. It is twice easier to arrange enrolment of children in kindergarten in rural areas, than in urban areas. The largest share of families, having difficulties in accessing ECD, are found in the provinces of Lori (25% of enrolled families), Yerevan (23.5%) and Kotayk (17.6%), while the easiest access is reported for provinces of Gegharkunik and Tavush.

ADMISSION OBSTACLES. Most common reason for non-admission is absence of enrollment spaces in kindergartens. Most common (more than 60% of responses) obstacles for admission refer to bureaucratic hurdles of the process, such as having to spend a lot of time, waiting in a queue for arranging the child's admission, as well as the high volume of documents and references requested at the institution. Corruption related mechanisms, such as request of special permission from community leader or bribe/present request, are still widely practiced (around 16.5% of responses). At the same time, the access to kindergartens is facilitated through a range of informal mechanisms, such as engagement of third parties/intermediaries, etc., which were exercised by around 28,4% of families, enrolled in kindergarten. There is a trend for certain preliminary selection and limited access of children from individual families to enter kindergarten, especially in kindergartens, having high demand or overcrowded public kindergartens on the part of community leaders or pre-school service managers.

QUALITY OF SERVICES. One of the most serious problems regarding the quality of kindergartens in Armenia is irregularity of operation: 12.1% of families, whose children attend kindergartens, mentioned that the operations were seasonal and on irregular basis. This indicator is especially high for rural communities. Irrelevant of average estimates for quality of services being satisfactory, the task of providing knowledge and school readiness was estimated lower (4,4 points), than other aspects of ECD, such as working hours, developing creativity or providing life skills and logical thinking (4,6; 4,56; 4,53 accordingly). Private kindergartens perform slightly better in terms of providing school knowledge and readiness (4.5 versus 4.4), but their services are estimated lower for the rest of the tasks under assessment.

PERCEPTIONS OF INCLUSIVE PRE-SCHOOL EDUCATION. 92.6% of respondents from rural communities state, that there are no children with special needs/disabilities at their child's kindergarten in comparison to 83.7% for urban settlements. 14.5% of respondents stated that they would react negatively, if children with special needs or disabilities attend their child's group or kindergarten. Rural population is more tolerant to inclusive pre-school education, than urban population. Those, who have jobs, are more positively oriented towards inclusive education; women respondents are less tolerant than male respondents. The lowest indicator of positive perception and highest indicator of neutrality towards enrollment of children with disabilities to kindergartens are reported for Yerevan. The respondents, whose children attend kindergartens with the enrolled disabled children, are more positively oriented towards inclusiveness of children with special needs.

ECD EXPENSES. ECD related total expenses for urban area are higher, than for rural: families spend a total of 4700 AMD per an average month for kindergarten expenses across Armenia. For informal payments, supplies and other purposes several times less money is spent in rural areas, than in urban areas.

EXCLUSION RATE. Exclusion Rate for children of age from 3 to 6 across Armenia is 32.7%. Children from rural areas are more likely to be excluded, than those from urban areas. Caregivers for

excluded children in majority of cases are their parents (mother/father), and not their grandparents. Excluded children more often are children from well-off families. Provinces with the largest number of children with nonattendance of pre-schooling, are Tavush (61.7% of sample children in province), Kotayk (59.1%) and Lori (53.2%), while the best indicators are found in Yerevan (drop-out rate is 17.3% of sample children in province), Aragatsotn (22.9%) and Armavir (24.5%).

ATTEMPTS FOR ENROLLMENT. More than 1/3 of excluded families made some attempts to enroll their children in pre-school. Top three reasons for exclusion of children are: unavailability of kindergartens in the area, cases, when kindergartens do not meet parents' expectations, and refusal to admit the child to kindergarten. 95% of excluded families said, that no one from community authorities, social or healthcare services, alternative educational services have ever contacted them with an offer or appeal to help them with the enrolment.

THE FINDINGS FROM FOCUS GROUPS

REASONS FOR EXCLUSION. FGs, conducted with members of families, whose children do not attend kindergartens, revealed, that they have a positive perception of pre-school education significance for child development and family in general. Majority of Focus Group (FG) participants have made some efforts to arrange their children to attend kindergartens. In most of the cases children have been excluded either due to lack/absence of public kindergartens in their community and neighborhood, or due to admission obstacles. Among main advantages of home-based care in addition to better nutrition and hygiene, participants mentioned child's stronger relationships with other members of the family, more intensive communication with parents and grandparents, better immunity and less cases of contracting infections. There is a lack of special skills and guidelines for professional staff, working with newcomers (often children drop out, because they cry and the staff do not manage to deal with them). Another problem is the lack of staff and overlapping duties for assistants, which lead to drop of attention towards children and poor quality of care activities. Among admission obstacles participants first of all define overload of public kindergartens and long queues, which result in corruption-related mechanisms, such as bribes, involvement of third parties and intermediaries, intolerant or unfriendly attitude of the staff and principalstoward applicants. According to the results, poor families more often experience demands for bribe or presents requests, than well-off families. Most probably this is determined by a latent intention of principals for non-admission of socially vulnerable children; therefore, they are creating certain obstacles for parents, forcing them leave the institution on their own free will.

CHILDREN WITH DISABILITIES. The most vulnerable group among excluded from pre-school is the group of children with disabilities. Their families experience a lot of difficulties for enrolling the children at public inclusive institutions. Most often, the parents of children with disabilities are told at public kindergartens, that there are no conditions for special education at their institution. The entry is especially hard for children with physical impairments. In addition, parents of children with disabilities have conflicts/disputes with grandparents in terms of child's admission to the kindergarten. The older generation is more prone to hiding family issues from community and keeping children with disabilities at home, isolating them from society. The FG participants mentioned, that they often prefer private services and special rehabilitation or assistance centers, where the attitude towards children is much better. The study revealed a lot of cases of corruption, improper treatment and poor accessibility at outpatient departments and other medical care institutions, which are responsible for disability assessment and free medical procedures.

CHAPTER I

THE RESEARCH DESIGN, METHODOLOGY AND SAMPLE

THE TARGET AND THE SCOPE OF ASSESSMENT

The target of the study was to conduct a nation-wide assessment on access of children (including most vulnerable children) to preschool education services in Armenia. It is known, that the term and concept of vulnerability is used in several fields in order to refer to the potential for poor results, risk or danger. There are various definitions of child vulnerability. For example, the World Bank’s “Orphans and Vulnerable Children (OVC)” toolkit defines vulnerability as “the group of children that experience negative outcomes, such as the loss of their education, morbidity, and malnutrition, at higher rates than do their peers”². The main categories of vulnerable children, outlined in this toolkit, are:

1. Street children,
2. Children in the worst forms of child labor,
3. Children, affected by armed conflict,
4. Children, affected by HIV/AIDS,
5. Children, living with disability, and
6. Local OVC groups.

As per the World Vision’s summary of OVC programming approaches, this definition includes “the children, who live in a household, in which one person or more is ill, dying or deceased; orphans; children, whose caregivers are too ill to continue to look after them; and children living with very old and frail caregivers”³.

A comprehensive work to generate the definition of ‘vulnerability’ has been carried out by Skinner et al, who defined vulnerable children as “the ones not having certain of their basic rights fulfilled”. Thus apart of orphanhood being a major determinant of vulnerability, the definition is centered around the three fundamental aspects of dependence:

- Material aspects — money, food, clothing, shelter, healthcare and education;
- Emotional aspects — care, love, support, space to grieve and containment of emotions;
- Social aspects — absence of a supportive peer group, of role models to follow, or of guidance in difficult situations, and risks in the immediate environment⁴.

According to Save the Children’s definition, the most deprived and marginalized children are those least likely to survive, learn and be protected. There are many factors, that lead to child’s deprivation and marginalization, including income, poverty, gender, geography, ethnicity or caste, and disability. Often, it’s a combination of these factors, which deprive children’s rights to survive, learn or be protected.

Within the frames of the current survey, poor children, children with disabilities, displaced or refugee children and children from minority groups were defined as the most vulnerable group.

² World Bank. OVC Core Definitions. [Last accessed on 2015 Apr 15]. Available from: <http://info.worldbank.org/etools/docs/library/164047/howknow/definitions.htm>

³ Geneva: World Vision International/HIV/AIDS Hope Initiative; 2002. World Vision. Summary of OVC Programming Approaches.

⁴ Skinner D, Tsheko N, Mtero-Munyati S, Segwabe M, Chibatamoto P, Mfecane S, Chandiwana B, Nkomo N, Tlou S, Chitiyo G. Towards a definition of orphaned and vulnerable children, AIDS Behav. 2006 Nov; 10(6): 619-26.

The scope of the assessment covers all families, having 3-5 years-old children in 10 provinces of the RA and in the capital city Yerevan, who are de-facto or potential beneficiaries of pre-school education and ECD services in 2016-2017. Hence, the main object/target of the assessment were the potential beneficiaries of ECD services with special focus on socially vulnerable families and families with disabled children, as well as other stakeholder groups, including respective ministries, local, regional, national authorities, partner organizations and service providers.

Main questions of the assessment addressed the following:

- what is the general rate of enrolment/access to pre-school services across Armenian regions, in particular across rural and urban settlements;
- which social groups of potential beneficiaries have limited or no access to pre-school services and why;
- what are the main reasons for exclusion from the services;
- what are the recent efforts of the state in the field;
- how far the changes in policy and practice are continuously addressing the needs of target group;
- what are the main needs and expectations of the target group, and how they can be achieved within the broader context of the Integrated Social Services (ISS) and other reforms.

DATA COLLECTION METHODOLOGY

Assessment methodology is based on mixed methods approach, which combines (a) collection of numerical data via quantitative methods with (b) in-depth information from qualitative methods. This approach entails the study for broader understanding of the project, providing both reliable statistically strong estimates of assessment indicators, hands-on experience of groups and communities under focus, as well as the environmental context of the project. Combined methods design is comprised of sequential and consecutive approach elements. The idea was to start the study by collecting mainly qualitative data (using methods of document analysis, round-table discussions and informal interviews with implementing and partner entities, desk-reviews). Then the study proceeded with quantitative methods (face-to-face (F2F) standardized interviews with actual/potential beneficiary families, having children of age 3-5 across Armenia), combined with simultaneously proceeding expert/key-informant semi-structured interviews with representatives of social services, educational departments, other ECD implementing agencies at local level. On the last stage, cases for follow-up Focus Group Discussions (FGD) were selected and conducted with representatives of families, excluded from pre-school education. Follow-up FGDs provided additional in-depth, case-related data to generalize the results and to verify main recommendations. **Hence, the findings, presented in the report, are based on the data, collected by means of expert-interviews, F2F standardized interviews⁵ and focus group discussions.**

FIELDWORK APPROACH, QUALITY CONTROL AND SAMPLING

The fieldwork was implemented during the period November 25 -December 28, 2016 in 10 RA provinces and capital city Yerevan. The main instruments for the study included: (1) standardized F2F questionnaire with the following topical domains: the awareness and perception of pre-school education, the enrollment in pre-school educational institutions, the access and quality of pre-school education, the consumption and monetary income of the family, socio-economic description of the respondent; (2) semi-structured F2F protocols for local authorities at the community and regional levels, representatives of respective ministries, agencies and donor organizations with such topical domains, as number of families, having access to ECD services, number of exclusions and their

⁵ See Attachment 1. Survey Instrument

reasons, problems and mechanisms of action for the institutions, etc.; (3) FGD guideline with visual techniques for excluded families. All tools were pre-tested prior to the main fieldwork and reviewed based on pilot results. A total of 18 pilot interviews in Yerevan and 2 neighboring communities in province of Kotayk (Katnaghbyur (the kindergarten working seasonally) and Igdir (a small kindergarten in the area) were conducted to pretest the standardized questionnaire. The other set of instruments was pretested on small samples. Two main training sessions were organized for the interviewers. A total of 9 F2F interviewers, 2 FGD moderators and 2 qualitative interviewers worked in the field.

Sample size for the quantitative survey was 600 (implemented sample is 599) households with confidence level 95% and the sample error around ±4%. The calculation of samples and its distribution across RA provinces was based on the number of families with 3-5 year old children, according to the official data of the National Statistical Service of the RA for 2016⁶.

The sample design was based on representative randomized multistage sample strategy. The coverage area is the entire country, including rural areas. Sampling procedures include the following stages:

STEP 1 - Selection of Types of Primary Sampling Units (PSUs), based on the number of children under 6 in rural and urban areas of Armenia. The distribution was the following:

- in Yerevan – 30% or 180 interviews
- urban settlements in province – 33% or 198 interviews
- rural settlements in province – 36% or 216 interviews.

Table 1. Distribution of sample HH across types of settlements

Type of settlement	Frequency	Percent
Urban	381	63.6
Rural	218	36.4
Total	599	100

STEP 2 - Selection of Primary Sampling Units (PSUs). In provinces, based on availability of state kindergartens in the settlements, 2 rural and 2 urban (with and without kindergartens in each) were selected⁷. Official list of the available pre-school educational institutions was cross-checked by the field team in order to meet the selection criteria.

Table 2. Distribution of sample across provinces and availability of state kindergartens

PROVINCE		Frequency	Percent
Armavir	Without Kindergarten	10	24,4
	With Kindergarten	31	75,6
	Total	41	100,0

⁶ Statistical Yearbook of Armenia, National Statistical Service of RA, 2016 <http://www.armstat.am/file/doc/99499383.pdf>

⁷ Official data from the Ministry of Education and Science from 2016 has been used, The List of Pre-School Educational Institutions can be found here <http://edu.am/index.php/am/about/view/105>.

ASSESSMENT ON ACCESS OF CHILDREN TO PRE-SCHOOL EDUCATION IN ARMENIA

Aragatsotn	Without Kindergarten	10	23,8
	With Kindergarten	32	76,2
	Total	42	100,0
Ararat	Without Kindergarten	10	26,3
	With Kindergarten	28	73,7
	Total	38	100,0
Gegharkunik	Without Kindergarten	10	25,0
	With Kindergarten	30	75,0
	Total	40	100,0
Kotayk	Without Kindergarten	11	25,6
	With Kindergarten	32	74,4
	Total	43	100,0
Lori	Without Kindergarten	10	23,8
	With Kindergarten	32	76,2
	Total	42	100,0
Shirak	Without Kindergarten	10	23,8
	With Kindergarten	32	76,2
	Total	42	100,0
Syunik	Without Kindergarten	10	23,8
	With Kindergarten	32	76,2
	Total	42	100,0
Tavush	Without Kindergarten	10	24,4
	With Kindergarten	31	75,6
	Total	41	100,0
Vayots Dzor	Without Kindergarten	10	23,8
	With Kindergarten	32	76,2
	Total	42	100,0
Yerevan	With Kindergarten	180	100,0

STEP 3 – Selection of households. A randomized sample was conducted to select the starting point for random route procedures from the address registries of the RA. Among pre-selected households, families with 3-5 year old children were selected for actual interview. If the interviewer was unable to conduct an interview at the initial sampled household, he/she used a simple substitution method. As a result, the average size of target households was 6, the average number of children under 18 was 2.

STEP 4 - Selection of respondents. Members of households who were mainly involved in child care and were aware of pre-school education and ECD services, were selected as respondents for the face-

to-face interview. Distribution of respondents by age, gender, occupation, relationship to 3-5 years old child, etc. is shown in Annex 2, Tables 3-9.

All data from F2F was entered into SPSS database with proper User's Guides for the Data. Most popular verbatim quotations for "other" option in semi-open-ended questions are presented in Annex 4. A multi-level quality control scheme was utilized, ensured by follow-up visits and back-checks of around 20% of interviews. All 100% of questionnaires were edited and logically checked by quality control team before data entry. Double-key entry procedures and computer scripting of the data in SPSS format have been used. To ensure the quality of qualitative data, regular debriefings of interviewers and within team discussions were organized. **Synthesis of sequential and consecutive approaches of the combined methodology strengthened the assessment design, allowing triangulation of quality not only comparing data from various sources, but also from the use of various methods and from different researcher groups.**

For the qualitative component, the following sample strategy was used:

1. A list of 20 key informants/experts was compiled by the team in strong collaboration with Save the Children, mainly covering the following areas:
 - a. local and regional authorities,
 - b. representatives of implementing agencies,
 - c. experts of ECD in Armenia.
 10 experts from national and 10 experts from regional level (1 expert per province) have been selected. Total of 20 semi-structured interviews were conducted and audio recorded.
2. Total of 9 follow-up FGDs with target families, that were excluded from the ECD for various reasons, were conducted. For conducting FGD sample, the following regions of Armenia were selected: province of Tavush, province of Vayots Dzor and capital city Yerevan. The idea was, on the one hand, to represent North, South and Center of the country (see Table 3), and on the other hand, to select regions, where socially vulnerable groups of the population were prevailing. Therefore, Tavush was selected as a region, situated on Armenian-Azerbaijani border with a number of communities, being periodically under intensive gunfire, with large number of families being displaced, with high poverty rate and the highest rate of children deprived in 2 and more dimensions of care (around 76% of children in the region)⁸. Vayots Dzor is a region with high poverty rate, scattered population, small and distantly situated settlements and high level of child deprivation. Yerevan is the capital city, which is the most urbanized and populated city of the country, where not only poor urban families, families with disabled children can be recruited for FGDs, but also well-off families, excluded from pre-schools. Due to lack of any official registry or organization, working with disabled children in Vayots Dzor, a decision was made to replace FGD with families, having disabled child, and recruit other families from communities of Ararat province, situated close to Vayots Dzor region.

Main 3 categories of participants were recruited for FGDs: poor families (where monthly expenses were below poverty line or less than 40.000 AMD per person), well-off families (where monthly expenses are above average monthly salary or more than 158.000 AMD per person), and families with disabled children of age 3-5.

⁸ According to Child Poverty in Armenia, National Multiple Overlapping Deprivation Analysis, 2016, UNICEF

Table 3. Sample Distribution for Focus Group Discussions

Target Area	FGD with members of poor households	FGD with members of well-off households	FGD with members of families with disabled children	Total No of FGD
North/Tavush province	1	1	1	3
South/Vayots Dzor and Ararat province	1	1	1	3
Center/Yerevan	1	1	1	3
Total	3	3	3	9

The FGDs covered both rural/urban populations with 5-8 participants in each. The participants were recruited, using lists of organizations and agencies, working with poor and disabled population of the target areas. Full transcripts of FGDs were compiled in Armenian, audio-recordings stored and archived.

ESTABLISHING COOPERATION, DURATION OF INTERVIEWS AND MAIN LIMITATIONS

The fieldwork team, supported by an official letter from Save the Children, contacted local authorities in selected communities to support the study and to organize the sessions in any appropriate community building (such as local mayor’s office, medical center, cultural center, “Bridge of Hope” NGO local offices, etc.).

In general, establishing cooperation with rural population went on smoother, than with urban. Most of the families with children were interested in the study topic; they were willing to participate and to tell about their problems and experiences with pre-school education. Average duration of standardized interview was 12 minutes. The expert interviews lasted 40-90 minutes. The average duration of focus-groups was 65 minutes.

Among the study limitations and challenges, it is worth mentioning difficulties in recruitment of families, having children with disabilities. Particularly, in the province of Vayots Dzor it was impossible to find any official registry of such families or any functional organizations, working with disabled children and their parents. Due to the absence of any official data or relevant organization, working with disabled children in Vayots Dzor, a decision was made to recruit families from communities of Ararat province, situated close to Vayots Dzor. Sample implementation of F2F standardized interviews was rather problematic in Yerevan, where it was very difficult to target families with children under 6 and to get access to buildings, situated in the central communities of the capital city.

As it is shown in Table 3-4 of Annex 2, 78.1% of the sample are women and 63.2% of them are 18-35 years old, which is determined by the requirement to interview a member of HH, who is mostly engaged in child care and education. In 82% of cases selected respondents were parents of the child (see Annex 2 Table 5). However, for some sections of the questionnaire (such as expenditures and income) it was allowed to clarify the information with other members of HH.

Among other limitations it is worth to note, that experts from state governing bodies were not eager to give much information, particularly Yerevan city administration representatives refused to provide any statistical data (the data was collected from other sources), while representatives of local authorities in most of the provinces were more collaborative and assisted the team in collection of the requested statistics.

APPROACH TO POVERTY DEFINITION AND MEASUREMENT

The definition of poverty and its measurement within the study are based not upon an absolute poverty assessment methodology, but on relative poverty and comparison approach. This approach provides the researcher an opportunity to use collected data in comparator surveys, irrelevant from the financial currency fluctuations, the official national definitions of poverty line and the value of basic consumption basket. The living conditions and the social status of the household is assessed, based on proportion of expenses, made for food during an average month, to the total amount of other expenses. Due to this methodology, the intention of respondents to hide or veil real sizes of income or income sources, do not impact the overall measurement. The estimation value is calculated in [0:1] range, where 1 refers to those households, which spend their whole budget on food consumption, while 0 refers to HHs, whose food costs, in proportion to overall budget, are close to zero (see Table 4). Actually, it is impossible to find out absolute values for relatively small families, but this approach allows the measurement of poverty, irrelevant of current prices and exchange rate fluctuations, geographical peculiarities and other factors, required for comparison.

Therefore, for analytical purposes of the study, poor households are defined as those households, whose monthly expenses for food make more than 62% of their overall incomes. The calculation is based on 2 main variables: monthly expenses for food and other consumption; monthly total income generated from different sources⁹ (see Table 4). For analytical purposes the whole sample is divided into two main categories: poor (food expenses more than 62% of total) and not poor (food expenses less than 62% of total) (for sample distribution see Table 5).

Table 4. Sample Distribution by Proportion of Monthly Expenses for Food to Family Total Income

Proportion (Binned) from 0 to 1	Total
<= ,35	9.4%
,36 - ,42	9.4%
,43 - ,45	9.7%
,46 - ,48	9.7%
,49 - ,52	10.9%
,53 - ,56	14.7%
,57 - ,61	6.9%
,62 - ,67	10.6%
,68 - ,74	8.4%
,75+	10.3%
Total	100.0%

⁹For more detail see Annex 1. Survey Instrument

Table 5. Poor and Not Poor Across the Sample

Types of HHs	Percent from Sample
Poor	60.8%
Not Poor	39.2%
Total	100.0%

CHAPTER II

CONTEXT OVERVIEW OF PRE-SCHOOL EDUCATION IN ARMENIA: EXPERTE VALUATION

Context

According to contemporary theories of ECD, there is a positive impact of pre-schooling on child development. Enrolment in pre-school education can enhance children's cognitive skills, literacy and social skills, necessary for success, as well as promoting school achievements in elementary grades, which ultimately reduce the need for special education and grade retention, and increase levels of school attainment. There is also a strong logic behind promotion of pre-school access among the children of disadvantaged groups. Such programs for the high-risk families become a priority for most of active actors of the field in Armenia, because the environment of homes does not prepare young children for school. It is suggested that if quality pre-schooling can be provided to children with disabilities or socially vulnerable families, they will be well prepared to complete the compulsory education along with the children from other families. All those ideas were very well perceived and defined by study experts as basics for Armenian pre-school education concept. **As mentioned above, the list of 20 key-informants/experts covered the following areas: local and regional authorities, respective ministries, representatives of implementing agencies, representatives of donor organizations and NGOs, working in the field of ECD in Armenia. 10 of them were selected on national level and 10 experts on regional level (1 expert per each RA province).**

During the Soviet period Armenia had been offering great opportunities in providing pre-school education with core emphasis on state kindergartens, where children under 6 could receive care and school preparatory studies. Independent Armenia faced serious socio-economic and political crises since 1991, and the state management of pre-schooling became problematic. In 1996 the Law on Local Self-Governance was adopted, respective to which Early Childhood Development fell under the jurisdiction of communities, obtaining funding from local budgets and fees, paid by parents. However, to ensure the smooth operation of kindergartens, local self-governance bodies are not always equipped in all necessary areas, including managerial, professional and financial. Due to that, the enrolment of children in kindergartens sharply dropped.

Pre-School Education Concept: Development and Trends

During the study, 20 experts of the field were interviewed on various aspects of pre-school education accessibility, issues and perspectives for further development. **Based on study results, it should be stated, that experts, selected from various fields on both state and regional levels, emphasized a widely shared determination to raise and universalize enrolment of children in pre-school educational institutions among Armenian decision-makers. However, a clear vision of pre-school education concept on operational level is not created yet:** the recent reform of the system (based on development strategy for 2008-2015) is under in the process. Most of government-independent experts mentioned about a **lack of any targeted policy on pre-schooling, particularly for early childhood care (children from 0 to 3 years old) and a serious gap between rural and urban policy orientations.**

Study results revealed, that the final scenario of policy in the field is unclear both for the donor organizations, working in Armenia and for representatives of respective ministries and local authorities. Main contradiction arises from the shortage of state and community budgets and a well understood need for universal access to pre-school education for Armenian children. **New Government of the RA is trying to fit the pre-schooling into more complex scope of primary and high-school educa-**

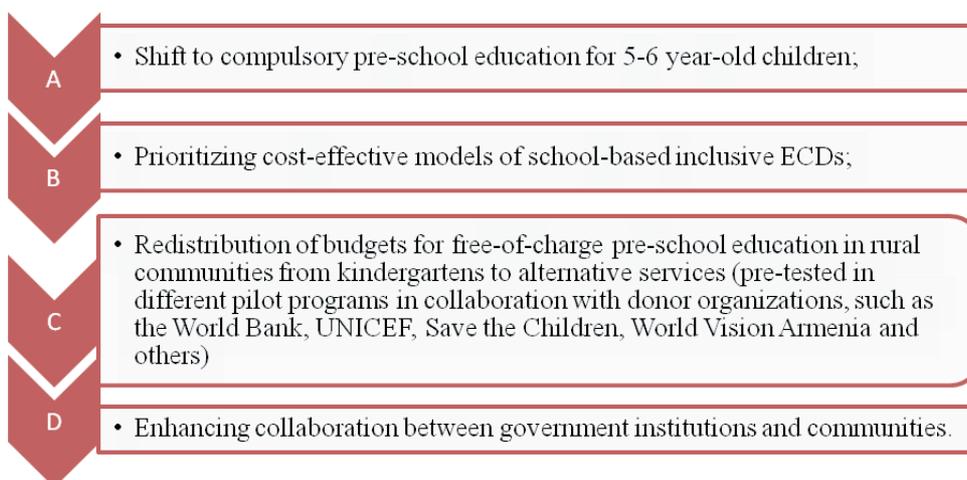
tion strategy, adopting a so called “11+1” model. The model is defined in the Draft of Education Development National Program for 2016-2025, which is presented to public debate. The full text of official document is not widely available for public on official websites of respective ministries and agencies yet. Therefore, the information, presented below is based on estimates of study experts from state and civil society levels, who were involved in discussions of the program.

According to experts, aware of the document, the essence of the model is based on the following assumptions: primary education, starting from age six, is compulsory in Armenia, but it does not include pre-schooling. The Ministry of Education and Science (MoES) is in charge of state schools and their curricula, while the pre-school services are run under the community budgets and community decision-makers. Though, it is worth mentioning, that the curriculum of ECD services is developed by the RA MoES and ECD staff (teachers, teachers’ assistants), who are being trained by the National Institute of Education (NIE), which operates under the auspices of RA MoES. However, numerous international documents, ratified by Armenia, reflect commitment to provision of pre-primary education for children before they start their primary education. By means of the so called “school preparedness educational programs before the first grade”, the draft of National Education Strategy for 2016-2025 suggests provision of pre-schooling of 5 year-old children in some selected schools and gradually expand that to all other schools. **That approach enables basic education system to cover 11 years of basic education plus 1 year of pre-primary or pre-school education (11+1 formula) under the scope of 12-years compulsory education.**

The Government of Armenia has made various legislative efforts to expand forms of ECD, initially with a focus on kindergartens, which traditionally have been the key modality of pre-schooling in Soviet Armenia, and then expressing interest towards alternative, more cost-effective models of pre-schooling. Most of the state level experts highly appreciated this approach and evaluated it as cost-effective and more realistic. On the other hand, representatives of civil society and international organizations, mentioned a narrow focus of the strategy, which prioritizes pre-school education, and not early childhood care. As a matter of fact, the strategy does not offer any measures for children under 4 years old. It is still unclear, how the needs of children under 5 will be met.

Hence, most realistic scenario for pre-school development in upcoming years, according to expert estimates, includes the following trends (see Figure 1):

Figure 1. Trends For Ecd Strategy For Upcoming Years



Management of Pre-School Education

All experts agreed upon the idea, that there is a huge demand for pre-school education and ECD among Armenian population, while the offer of services and their quality is insufficient. According to all study experts, the stereotype, that Armenian families consider home-based care better than institutional services and prefer not to send their children to pre-school institutions, is not true both for capital city, urban and rural areas, for well-off families, as well as the poor. In experts' opinion, especially vulnerable families are interested in receiving well organized ECD and pre-schooling for their children. Very often, either the services are not available, or they are on a paid basis, which is not affordable for poor families. **Therefore, access to pre-school education is limited not because of parents' negative perceptions or lack of awareness, but due to insufficient or lack of resources of the state and regional budgets for offering services.**

Low enrolment rate across the country¹⁰ is reflecting the poor state of pre-school service management, existence just a few pre-school educational institutions, especially in rural areas, and lack of desire on the part of local authorities to use community budgets for ECD. According to regional experts, heads of villages often refuse to plan expenses for kindergartens, as they are confident, that while there are other, "more serious" directions for community development, it can be organized by community households on their own anyway. Local authority leaders do not consider ECD as a proper field for social investments or creation of social capital. It is viewed as a costly and unnecessary challenge for community budget. In fact, the kindergartens in provinces are not free-of-charge, though even minimal fees are not affordable for young families.

In this regard, Yerevan municipality's experience is outstanding, as it covers all expenses of kindergartens from municipal budget and provides day care, feeding and pre-school education at kindergartens for free. At the same time, as the kindergartens are overcrowded and the demand is extremely high, Yerevan authorities are more concerned of quality of services and transparency of entry and admission conditions, than of enrolment rates among target groups of 3-5 year-olds in general.

Hence, during interviews with representatives of Yerevan municipality and MoES, it became clear that the experts were unaware about official enrolment rates and standards/requirements. Municipality representatives were even surprised on hearing, that according to NSS of the RA, enrolment in Yerevan pre-schools for 2015 is lower than 50%. It allows to conclude, that state agencies are more concerned over preserving what they have, rather than elaborating new possibilities for those, who are excluded from the scope of their services.

Data Registries

In general, all experts talked about lack of statistics and accurate data on the number of children under 6 years old, enrolment rates¹¹ for specific social groups. Official number of child population is calculated by NSS of RA, based on Census Data from 2011 and annual sample surveys, such as Integrated Living Condition Survey (ILCS) and other sources. To ensure the comparability with the indicators of subsequent years to the RA Population

¹⁰ For more detail on Enrolment Rates see Chapter 2.

¹¹ For more detail on this see page 30-32.

Census of 2011, the indicators for the number of population for current year are being recalculated by the NSS of the RA, using new data, derived from different sources and the RA Population Census of 2011. Hence, RA relative indicators of the NSS of the RA (such as enrolment rate) derived from the number of population are also being recalculated. In their yearbooks and other reporting forms, open for the public, the NSS uses age categories to present the data. Regarding child population, in multidimensional distribution tables ranges from 0 to 4 and from 5 to 9 are used, which make it impossible to extract reports for children of pre-school age (0-5 years old). Special official queries should be sent to NSS to obtain other types of aggregations. However, there is some data available at NSS on enrolment of child population in pre-schools, which is based on a narrow definition of pre-school educational services, covering only kindergartens. There is no statistics on enrolment in other ECD services. Lack of detailed reports on children of pre-school age from NSS is obvious. Another source of statistics is the data, collected by province authorities annually and maintained by the Ministry of Territorial Administration and Development, which is not widely available for the public and is not generated as a complex database. A registry for children, enrolled in state kindergartens, has been elaborated recently, and it seems very useful and important to the experts. According to representatives of respective ministries, NGOs working with disabled children and representatives of Psychological-Pedagogical Assessment Center (PPAC), there is no comprehensive registry for children with special education needs and children from socially vulnerable families. Each of the respective agencies elaborates its own database (e.g. database for children's needs assessment, or database of children, included in «Paros» social support system), which are not processed as a holistic database and do not include data, concerning every child of pre-school age. It is impossible to calculate, what percentage of children under 6 years is excluded from all types of pre-schooling, how many of them are disabled children or children of Syrian-Armenian families and other vulnerable groups. There are some **data sources**, elaborated separately for needs of different agencies (for example, for social support services, territorial administration agencies, outpatient care departments, Ministry of Diaspora, etc.), which **are fragmented, not linked to each other and cannot be used to target groups of drop-out children, or children having accessibility obstacles.**

Lack of centralized databases should be a serious problem for policy-makers, but, unfortunately, study showed a weak interest towards targeted policy management on the part of state and regional governmental bodies. State experts are not aware of exact numbers about access to pre-schooling and actually do not take “the statistics seriously”, they are more aware of those children who are already included/enrolled in the services, rather than of those, who did not access pre-school institutions.

None of government or local agencies is attributed a mandate to contact, recruit or target families excluded from the scope of provided services, explaining this fact by non-compulsory status of pre-school education. Only after parental demand for some assistance, the agencies start to implement measures.

Alternative Pre-School Services

The burden of targeting children, excluded from pre-school, is transferred to international donor organizations, NGOs and special funds. The experts from respective organizations defined main social groups of so called “excluded” or “drop-outs” from pre-schooling in Armenia:

- small, rarely populated or remote rural and urban communities in the provinces,
- children with disabilities,
- Syrian-Armenian, Iraqi refugee children,
- children from extremely poor or high-risk families (deviant behavior, alcoholism, children, placed in institutions, etc.).

Different types of programs and pilot projects are being implemented for each of vulnerable groups, defined above. The largest program is being carried out for communities, where kindergartens are not available. It is supported by the Adaptable Program Loan 1 and 2 from the World Bank as part of the Education Quality and Relevance Project. More than 280 school-based pre-school centers have been founded in 2010-2014 by the MoES Project Implementation Unit (PIU) and covered more than 8.000 5-6-year-old children. The amount of pre-school education centers is planned to increase by 120 in the provinces of Armenia by the end of 2019. Provinces of Shirak, Kotayk, Gegharkunik, Tavush, Lori and Armavir have been already covered.

During 2011-2016 Save the Children established 21 school-based preschool education centers. Concurrently to this, in close collaboration with the World Bank and UNICEF, an important work has been done for preschool educational standards. UNICEF, together with the MoES and local communities, started small scale pilot projects to test a few **alternative models for poor communities**. One of them was **family-based community service model** of ECD for 3-5-year-old children, piloted in the province of Syunik. According to UNICEF and ministry experts, aware of the project, the model is cost-effective, as it allows the use of social capital of the community and provides relevant ECD services on-site. Generally, the model includes training for several parents from the community and establishment of a home-based center for ECD services.

Another scope of programs addresses **children with disabilities**. The right to education for all children, including children with disabilities, is determined by the Law of the RA on Education and the Law of the RA on Persons with Special Educational Needs. However, while the philosophy of inclusive education is already under progress on general education level; and there are more than 139 inclusive schools in all regions of Armenia, the inclusion of children with disabilities at pre-school level is out of reach. **In general, the experts gave lower estimates for inclusiveness of education on pre-school level in comparison to primary or higher education.** The agencies for identification of children with special educational needs and the institutions of inclusive education do not operate as a holistic system; therefore, the experts do not possess any accurate data about cases of children's drop-out from pre-school due to their disabilities.

During interviews with professionals in the field, it became obvious, that on the one hand, **parents are not proactive** in integrating their children with special needs in state kindergartens, preferring special centers for rehabilitation or development. On the other hand, principals/**directors of kindergartens are not eager** to enroll children with special needs, mostly reasoning by a lack of vehicles, professional specialists and conditions for special care. Moreover, according to experts from NGO level, very often it is easier for kindergartens to take care of children with mental disability, than those with physical problems. Furthermore, according to experts from PPAC, **psychological-pedagogical assessment commissions within communities are not authorized to make efforts for ensuring the right of children to education, after they become identified as having special educational needs.**

So far, there are several models of alternative pre-school education pilot projects in Armenian regions:

- a. A preschool class within a school/school-based ECD center (for five year olds, perhaps later also for four year olds¹²),
- b. A kindergarten, either inclusive, or with a mobile professional team, working with specific groups of children in the kindergarten and providing on-demand training for the staff¹³,

¹² Mostly piloted by the MoES PIU in 2010-2014 within the framework of Adaptable Program Loan 1 and 2 from the World Bank, as well as by Save the Children.

¹³ Some funding from UNICEF, World Vision and other donor organizations, particularly in Yerevan.

- c. An ECD-center, providing not only learning activities, but also services, related to health and child protection or rehabilitation¹⁴,
- d. Individual parent support, provided either within a center or at home (“home visiting”) by mobile support teams¹⁵,
- e. “Home-based provision” of games, care and learning activities, e.g. in small and remote communities, which are too small for creation of one full size ECD group¹⁵.

The study revealed, that on state level there is low interest towards all above mentioned modalities, except the first one, which is defined as the most significant and effective setting for ECD management for the government in coming years. During the interviews we have tried to collect expert estimates on advantages and disadvantages of mentioned alternatives, which are presented in Table 6. As it is shown in Table 6 **only two of the models are equipped by a mechanism of identification and recruitment of children, not enrolled in pre-school education. Absence of identification and recruitment mechanisms for children, excluded from pre-schools on all levels of services is rather alarming, as it does not create any preconditions for potential drop-out families to get enrolled.**

Table 6. Modalities of Alternative Pre-school Services

Modalities of alternative pre-school services	Advantage	Disadvantage	Intended to identify and recruit children, potentially excluded from education
School-based preparatory classes	Cost-effectiveness, qualified preparation to primary education, adaptation to school environment and teaching staff	No day care, no feeding, targeting only children from 4 to 5, not intended to detect and recruit children, potentially excluded from education	No
Kindergarten with mobile professional team care	Cost-effectiveness, qualified services for children with disabilities, complete inclusiveness, no requirement for special staff, on-site training and skills for local staff	Kindergarten should have facilities and vehicles for special education	No
Development and Rehabilitation Centers	Cost-effectiveness, highly professional services, good quality conditions for special education	Distance and transportation expenses for the family, contradiction with the philosophy/idea of universal inclusion	Yes
Home-visiting by a mobile team	Cost-effectiveness, extensive coverage, mobility, professional services, provision of skills to parents	Contradiction with the philosophy/idea of universal inclusion	Yes

¹⁴ Mostly implemented by Bridge of Hope NGO within recent years in Tavush.

¹⁵ Mostly implemented by Bridge of Hope NGO within recent years in Tavush.

Home-based provision or Parenting Group	Cost-effectiveness, establishment of social and human capital for parents, investment in social capital of the community	Poor conditions for care and education, lack of professional control, poor quality of school preparatory skills and experience	No
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A success-story for integrated education and care for children with disabilities on both primary and pre-school levels is presented in the province of Tavush. Being close to Armenian-Azeri border, this province became a target for different respective organizations. Many projects are being carried out by Bridge of Hope NGO, Mission East and World Vision Armenia. Tavush is the province where a new model of strong cooperation among state agencies (such as the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs (MoLSA), the Ministry of Territorial Administration and Development (MoTAD), the Ministry of Health (MoH), the Ministry of Education and Science (MoES)) have been successfully utilized-within the framework of UNICEF project. According to experts’ opinion, particularly representatives of UN and implementing agencies, this experience should be analyzed and put forward as a basic strategic orientation for state efforts in pre-schooling.

Rehabilitation centers for children with disabilities operate in the province (according to expert’s estimates, around 600 children have been receiving services during 2016-2017). Bridge of Hope NGO in cooperation with Mission East, a Danish international relief and development organization has established a model of mobile intervention teams (comprised of different specialists), responsible for several geographical locations and providing services to children with special needs at kindergartens, community centers, homes.

Challenges and Problems

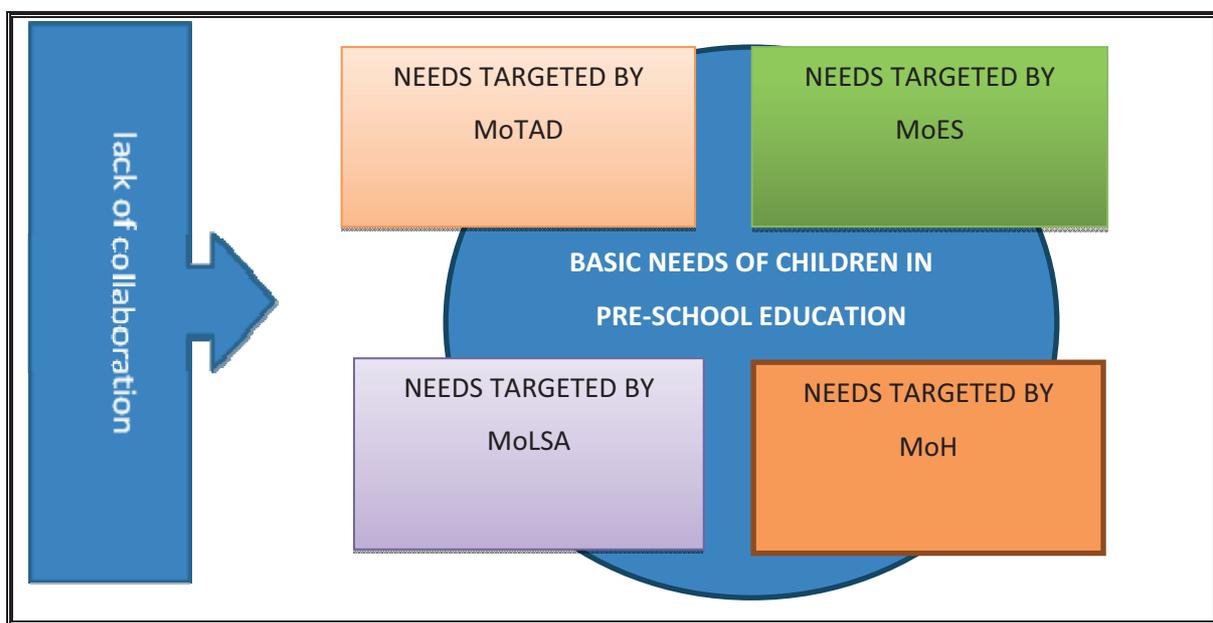
However, the efforts are rather sporadic, **there is a lack of regular cooperation among organizations, working in the field, regional authorities and other agencies in charge.** There is a need to analyze the impacts of the projects and combine the efforts in formulation of more comprehensive policy of pre-school services. According to estimates of private sector experts, there is a gap in legislation, regarding alternative pre-school services, and a need to develop a systematized and coordinated general state approach. For example, according to representative of academic field, there is no direct cooperation among institutions of formal education for professionals in special education from Yerevan State Pedagogical Institute and respective agencies. Neither academicians from the Institute, nor their graduates do not formally cooperate with the Center for Psychological-Medical Assessment, which would become a core actor in targeting children with special needs in coming years.

It becomes clear, that in Armenia ECD is the responsibility of more than one ministry. The MoES has the lead, when it comes to policy development in ECD and education standards. The MoH in its turn has responsibilities, its institutions provide healthcare for children in their early years and assessment of children with special needs or disabilities. The MoLSA plays its role in creating favorable conditions for development of children from poor families. And finally, the MoTAD is responsible for the allocation of state funds to communities for ECD services. In addition, there are some other agencies such as National Institute of Education, Center for Medical-Pedagogical Assessment and other actors. **This means, that the country should create some coordination mechanisms regarding ECD, which will ensure symmetric cooperation among relevant line ministries and agencies.**

However, there is usually a kind of conflict of interests among the stakeholders, as each of them tries to take only mandatory responsibilities, minimizing related costs and does not care for issues/needs

that lie in-between their activity frames. There are areas of extra attention and lack of attention in inter-agency cooperation and coordination sphere (see Figure 2). All 10 national-level experts agreed upon the idea, that **there should be a model of inter-agency cooperation, enforcing all stakeholders to share experience, target efforts and create a unified share-point database for monitoring of the field.** Currently the data is not analyzed, it does not serve for the development of program or actions strategy. There is no procedure for exchange and coordination of the information among interested public bodies.

Figure 2. Interruptive/Inconsistent Inter-Agency Cooperation Network



Summarizing the experts’ opinion, collected during the study, it is possible to define the following problematic issues in the sphere of pre-school education in Armenia:

- Lack of symmetric cooperation among donor organizations, active in the field;
- Lack of inter-agency cooperation, communication and coordination, which results in either overlap of functions, or gaps in addressing specific needs of children;
- Absence of a unified registry or data collection, storage, sharing, analyzing procedures and monitoring tools;
- Need for adoption of compulsory component on pre-school education level;
- Overlooking early childhood development of in children under 4 years old;
- Lack of mechanisms to systematically detect, recruit and enroll children, drop-out from pre-school education for different reasons;
- Underestimation and lack of alternative pre-schooling services;
- Increasing gap between urban and rural sections of pre-schooling.

CHAPTER III

ACCESSING PRE-SCHOOL EDUCATION: QUANTITATIVE ANALYSIS

RESPONDENTS’ AWARENESS AND PERCEPTION OF PRE-SCHOOL EDUCATION AND ECD SERVICES

Majority of respondents were very much interested in ECD issues and were eager to tell about their opinion on different questions, related to the field of study. 76% of respondents mentioned, that they are either fully aware or mostly aware of issues on pre-school education in their community (see Table 7), and another 85.8% of sampled respondents mentioned that they are very/mostly interested in processes/issues of organization of early childhood care and development in Armenia (see Table 8). Hence, we can conclude, that ECD is among priorities of interest areas for targeted households. Families, living in the provinces of Shirak, Ararat and Syunik (70.2%, 66.7% and 40.5% of HH in the province accordingly) are the most interested, while the largest group of families, not interested in the issue at all, is in the province of Kotayk (3.7% of families).

The higher is education of respondents, the larger is extent of their interest towards pre-schooling issues.

Table 7. Awareness of preschool education issues

Table 8. Interest Towards ECD

To what extent do you think you are aware of the issues of preschool education in your community?			To what extent are you interested in processes/issues of organization of early childhood care and development in Armenia?		
	Frequency	Percent		Frequency	Percent
Fully aware	149	24.9	Very interested	220	36.7
Mostly aware	306	51.1	Mostly interested	294	49.1
Mostly unaware	123	20.5	Mostly uninterested	78	13.0
Not at all aware	21	3.5	Not interested at all	7	1.2
Total	599	100.0	Total	599	100.0

As it is shown in Table 1 of ANNEX 3, rather a large group of respondents (around 10% of total) described their connection with education field as a very intensive (they work or study in this field). This fact may express more biased attitude among this group of respondents, on the other hand, their responses are more informative.

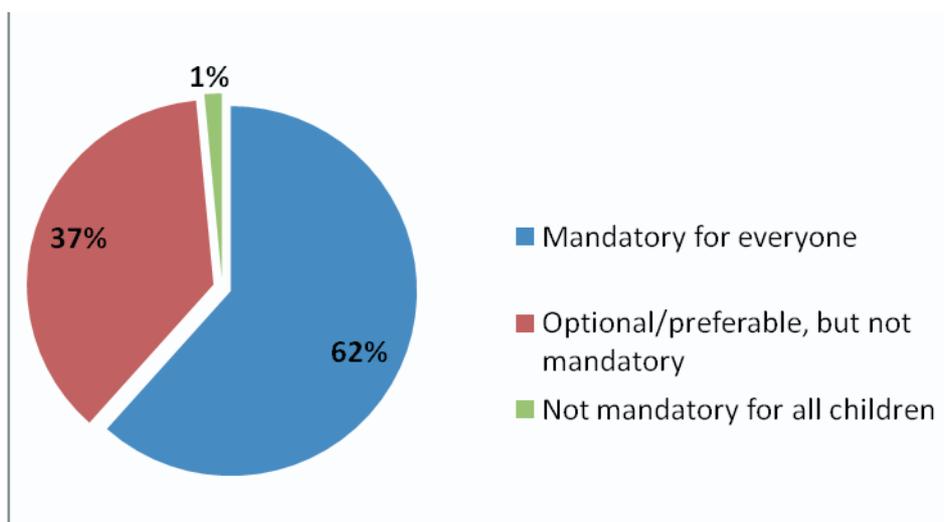
Survey data substantiates expert’s opinion, that among some regional authorities there is a wrong stereotype about so called ”negative attitude” of Armenian population towards enrolment in pre-school education (see Table 9). Majority of respondents consider enrolment of children under 6 in preschool educational institutions very important and mostly important. The most important institutions for respondents traditionally are kindergartens and school-preparedness courses. None of respondents considered enrolment of children “not at all important”. **This positive perception of child enrolment in any kind of ECD should be taken into account by policy makers, because the perception, that the demand for pre-schooling is not high, is in question.**

Table 9. How important do you consider enrollment of 3-6 year old children in preschool education institutions in your community?

	Very important	Mostly important	Mostly unimportant	Not at all important	Total
1. Kindergarten	88.1	10.7	1.2	0	100.0
2. Pre-school educational courses	77.1	20.9	2.0	0	100.0
3. Development circles	76.3	21.4	2.2	.2	100.0

Moreover, there is a positive perception of need for compulsory pre-school education. Only 1 % of respondents think, that pre-school education should not be compulsory for all children in Armenia. Hence, we can define a rate for **Perceptual Willingness for Enrollment** in pre-school institutions as very high - around 99 % for Armenian society. This indicator covers respondents, considering pre-school education enrolment either preferable or mandatory for 3-6 year olds (see Chart 1).

Chart 1. In your opinion, should enrollment of 3-6 years old children into pre-school institutions be...



It is interesting, that among the reasons, justifying their positive opinion on compulsory ECD, the option, related to socio-economic aspects (such as releasing time for the family members to work or reducing additional costs for the family) were not popular (4.7% of responses in total). There is a deeper understanding of social functions of pre-schooling among society with special emphasis on increasing attainment rate at school (33.4% of responses), developing communication skills (31.4% of responses) and ensuring improved general behavior and development of child (30.5% of responses) (see Table 10).

Table 10. Reasons for Compulsory Pre-School Education

If mandatory, then why?		
	Number of responses	Percent
It sets preconditions for high attainment rate at school	222	33.4%
It develops communication skills of children	209	31.4%
It ensures general development and behavior of children	203	30.5%
It allows time for the family members to work	30	4.5%
It releases the family from additional expenses/costs/issues	1	.2%
Total	665	100.0%

While examining the reasons of the respondents, who were against compulsory component of pre-school education (see Table 11), it is worth mentioning, that the most popular options refer to health related issues or special care needs of children, their deviances in mental development or behavior. This fact indirectly shows, that there is a stereotype about impossibility of inclusive education in pre-school for children with special needs¹⁶.

Table 11. Cases for Non-Mandatory Pre-School Education

The cases of non-mandatory pre-school education N		Responses		Percent of Cases
		Percent		
	When the child has a health related issue or special care needs	74	23.1%	32.7%
	When members of the family/parents are not willing	66	20.6%	29.2%
	When the child does not want to stay in the kindergarten	58	18.1%	25.7%
	When the child has deviances in mental development or behavior	58	18.1%	25.7%
	When the care is better organized at home	57	17.8%	25.2%
	Other¹	7	2.2%	3.1%
	Total	320	100.0%	141.6%

Summarizing survey findings on the awareness and perception of pre-school education in general, a conclusion can be made about positive perception of compulsory pre-school education and thorough understanding of significance and social functions of ECD for child and family.

¹⁶ For analysis on inclusive education see page35, 43-44, 55-56.

ABSOLUTE AND RELATIVE ENROLLMENT RATE

For analytical purposes we will use and define 3 main indicators of participation in pre-schooling for current study:

- Net Enrolment Rate - (based on official data from National Statistical Service (NSS) of the RA: proportion of child population of pre-school age officially registered as enrolled in pre-schools, expressed in percentage;
- Absolute Enrolment Rate (based on data, collected by the team directly from province authorities): proportion of children aged 0-5 enrolled in pre-schools expressed in percentage;
- Relative Enrolment Rate (based on survey data): proportion of children aged 3-5 in the survey sample, enrolled in any type of pre-school services/classes, expressed in percentage.

The 2008-2015 Education Development State Program targeted to achieve a rate of 90% of children, covered under preschool education in Armenia. However, according to the data of the National Statistical Service, the number of operational community, departmental and non-state ECD institutions in 2015 was 717, of which 431 were in urban areas and 286 in rural¹⁷ (see Table 12). This calculation most probably does not include alternative preschool education centers, established with the support of international organizations, such as school-based preparatory classes. Otherwise, the increase from 2014 to 2015 by only 4 preschools could be rather contradicting, taking into account a large number (more than 200) of centers, opened under World Bank Adaptable Program Loans 1 and 2 during recent years.

The Net Enrolment Rate of children in ECDs (all children between the ages of 0-5) for 2013-2015 is, in average, 28%. The rate for urban communities is 35.6%, while for rural communities it is extremely low - 15.8%. From official indicators it becomes clear, that children at preschool age in rural communities are the most vulnerable, since around 85% of them are, essentially, not covered by preschool education.

Table 12, Net Enrolment Rate, based on the NSS of the RA official data¹⁸.

	2013		2014		2015	
	Urban	Rural	Urban	Rural	Urban	Rural
Number of pre-school institutions	422	275	428	285	431	286
	Total 697		Total 713		Total 717	
Number of children enrolled, 1 000 children	55.2	13.7	57	15.7	56.8	15.6
	Total 68.9		Total 72.7		Total 72.4	
Enrolment rate	35.2%	14.3%	36%	16.6%	35.7%	16.6%
	Total 27.3%		Total 28.7%		Total 28.6%	

As it is shown in Table above, there is no significant increase in enrolment rates in 2013-2015. However, the experts and implementers of the field very much doubted the accuracy of the official data, explaining it by its biased nature particularly concerning the total number of children of pre-school age. According to the opinion of municipality and local self-governmental level experts, probably, the number of child-population is defined more than it is de-facto, which shifts down the rate sharply.

¹⁷ Armenia in Figures 2016: Living Standards and Social Sphere, National Statistical Service of RA, Yerevan, 2016, pp. 37-38

¹⁸ Statistical Yearbook of Armenia 2016, National Statistical Service of RA, Yerevan, 2016, pp.116-118

During the study, the team tried to collect numerical statistical data about the number of children of pre-school age and the number of children at pre-school institutions on province level from local self-government bodies to make some cross-check calculations (see Table 13). Unfortunately, despite the Law about transparency of public data, in 6 provinces out of 10 and in Yerevan the authorities did not possess or refused to present exact numbers of children population aged 3-5 or under 6 (for details see Annex 3 Table 2). However, based on available data for 4 provinces, a calculation of Absolute Enrolment Rate was performed. **In average, the Absolute Enrolment Rate for 2016 is 50.5%** (for example, in Vayots Dzor province it is around 60%, while in Aragatsotn it is less than 43%). Although this data does not represent the total or complete information for Armenia, it is close to experts' estimates. Hence, the difference between NSS rate and rate, calculated during the study is determined by a difference between NSS official number of 0-5 age child population and numbers from province centers.

The data from quantitative survey, conducted in 2016 among 599 HHs was used as another source of enrolment rate estimation. Based on survey data **the Relative Enrolment Rate for children from 3 to 6 (younger than 6) (in total 684 children, of which 65.3% are of age 3-5 and 34.7% are of age 5-6) in public and private kindergartens is around 60%**. The difference between Absolute and Relative Rates is determined by the fact, that Absolute Rate is calculated from total number of children under 6, while Relative Rate is calculated only for children from 3 to 6, who are more likely to attend pre-school institutions, than children younger 3.

Table 13. Cross-checks for Enrolment Rates.

Net Enrolment Rate for children 0-6 in 2015 (based on NSS data)	Absolute Enrolment Rate for children 0-6 in 2016 (based on the data, collected from regional self-government agencies)	Relative Enrolment Rate 2016 for children 3- 6 (6 incomplete), (based on survey data)
28.6%	50.5%	60%

The results **from the survey**, referring to enrolment peculiarities, are presented below.

As it is shown in Table, 14,59.4% of all surveyed children attend public kindergartens, while private kindergartens are not too popular (the attendance rate is 3%). Quite large number of children (5.1%, 3.8% and 12.5% of total accordingly) attend some alternative pre-school services, such as pre-school education courses and circles or private classes (sports, arts, languages, etc.). In general, the attendance to pre-school educational institutions is quite intensive, since 89.4% of children, enrolled in pre-schooling, attend ECD every day and 84% of enrolled spend more than 4 hours in pre-schools. These indicators are rather high and demonstrate intensity of enrolment in pre-schools (see Annex 3 Table 5, 6).

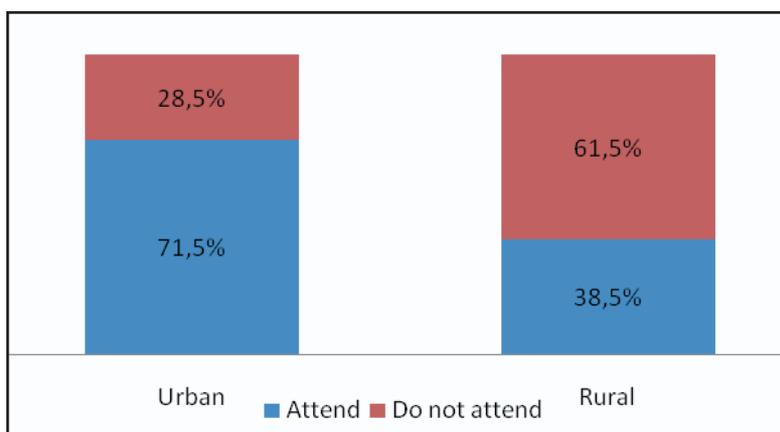
Table 14. Types of pre-school educational institutions, attended by children.

Public kindergartens	Private kindergartens	Free-of-charge pre-school educational courses	Paid pre-school educational courses, colleges	Circles or private classes /sports, arts, languages, etc./
59.4%	2.9%	5.1%	3.8%	12.5%

Children from urban areas are twice more likely to attend pre-school educational institutions.

The enrolment in public kindergartens of children from rural areas is 38.5%, while in children from urban areas it is 71.5% (see Chart 2). At the same time, **children in rural areas attend kindergartens more regularly**: 95% of children in rural areas attend ECD every day, in comparison to 87% for urban areas; at the same time only 1.7% of children in rural areas spend less than 2 hours at pre-school institution in comparison to 5.4% in urban areas (see Annex 3 Tables 7 and 8). This fact once again proves that children from rural areas are more vulnerable in terms of access to ECD, as, compared to urban areas, most of the children in rural areas more regularly attend regularly operated ECD-s.

Chart 2. Public Kindergarten Attendance Rate in Urban and Rural Settlements



The same tendency of more regular attendance is found in poor households in comparison with not poor ones. More children from poor households attend kindergartens every day and spend there more than 4 hours daily in comparison with those from not poor households (see Table 15). It means, that if **children from poor households** enter pre-schools, they **attend the services more regularly, than children from not poor HHs**.

Table 15. Regularity of Attendance Among Poor and Not Poor HH

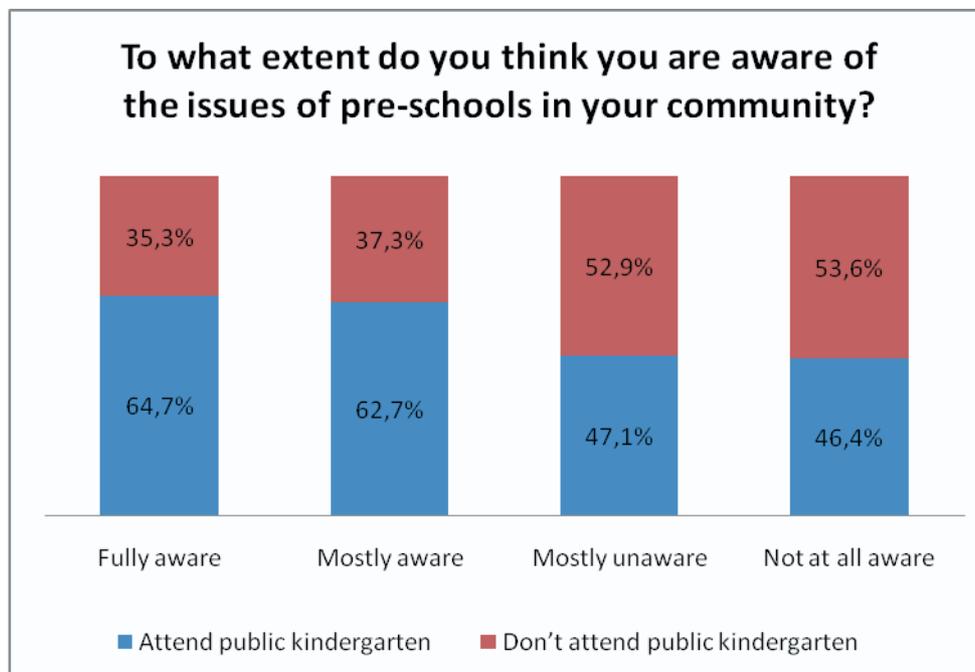
How often does the child attend any pre-school education service during a week?				
not poor		Poverty Status		Total
		poor (spent at least 62% of income on food)		
How often does the child attends any pre-school education service during a week?	Every day	86.4%	91.7%	88.0%
	3-4 days per week	13.6%	8.3%	12.0%
Total		100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

ASSESSMENT ON ACCESS OF CHILDREN TO PRE-SCHOOL EDUCATION IN ARMENIA

How many hours in average does the child stay in preschool during the day?				
not poor		Poverty Status		Total
		poor (spent at least 62% of income on food)		
How many hours in average does the child stay in preschool during the day?	Less than 2 hours	4.3%	2.8%	3.8%
	From 2 to 4	14.3%	8.3%	12.6%
	More than 4 hours	81.4%	88.9%	83.6%
Total		100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

The largest number of parents, whose children attend public kindergartens and who consider enrollment of 3-5 year olds in ECD important and mandatory for all children, are those, who have very close contact with the field (have jobs or study in the field). Therefore, we can conclude that **the level of awareness on importance of pre-school education and positive perception of compulsory education determine willingness to enroll children in pre-schooling** (see Chart 3).

Chart 3. Awareness of Pre-School Issues by Kindergarten Attendance



In total, only 31.6% of targeted HHs do not send any of their children to any type of pre-school institution. 62.6% of HHs are using at least 1 pre-school service. The number of families, whose children are using 2 and more types of pre-school services, is not big - around 6% of the sample (see Table 16).

Table 16. Number of pre-school services, used by children in HHs.

Number of types of services, used by children in HH	Frequency	Percent
0 services used	189	31.6
1 service used	375	62.6
More than 2 services used	35	5.9
Total	599	100.0

Provinces with largest number of children, who do not attend any type of pre-schooling, are Tavush (61.7% of sample children in province), Kotayk (59.1%) and Lori (53.2%), while the best indicators are revealed in Yerevan (drop-out rate is 17.3% of sample children in province), Aragatsotn (22.9%) and Armavir (24.5%), (see Table 17).

Table 17. Enrolment among targeted children (% from children in the province).

Province	no one is attending any type of pre-schooling	at least one child is attending some type of pre-schooling	Total
Armavir	24,5%	75,5%	100,0%
Aragatsotn	22,9%	77,1%	100,0%
Ararat	28,0%	72,0%	100,0%
Gegharkunik	48,1%	51,9%	100,0%
Kotayk	59,1%	40,9%	100,0%
Lori	53,2%	46,8%	100,0%
Shirak	34,7%	65,3%	100,0%
Syunik	31,8%	68,2%	100,0%
Tavush	61,7%	38,3%	100,0%
Vayots Dzor	31,1%	68,9%	100,0%
Yerevan	17,3%	82,7%	100,0%

There is a strong link between HH usage of pre-school services, and education and occupation of respondents. **More respondents with higher education level send their children to ECD, at the same time those, who have jobs, are twice more likely to send their children to ECD.** At the same time our hypothesis, that poor families have lower enrolment rate in public pre-schools, than other HHs, is not confirmed. Approximately, same shares among poor (60% of poor HH in sample) and not poor (61,2% of not poor HH in sample) households are enrolled in public kindergartens (see Table 18).

Table 18. Enrolment in Public kindergartens Among Poor and Not Poor HH.

not poor		Poverty Status		Total
		poor (spend at least 62% of income on food)		
Do they attend - Public kindergarten?	Yes	61.2%	60.0%	60.8%
	No	38.8%	40.0%	39.2%
Total		100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Among sampled HH, there were 11 children with disabilities (1,6% of children in the sample). More detailed analysis of data, referring to children with disability, shows that only 3 of them (around 27% of children with disability in the sample) attend public kindergartens. The other 73% of children with disabilities do not attend any pre-school educational institution, including private kindergartens, preparatory courses, etc. **Enrolment Rate among this group is rather low, but the attendance is regular, as children use the services every day or more than 3 days a week, and stay there for more than 4 hours daily.** In the meantime, families with disabled children prefer sending their children to rehabilitation centers (6 out of 11 children are attending them). It is remarkable, that all families with a disabled child, excluding one, mentioned, that they were aware of rehabilitation centers, operating in their region. The most notable fact about composition of families, having a child with disability, is that all of them are families with single child.

ENTRY OBSTACLES AND FACILITY

More detailed examination of accessibility of pre-school services reveals a number of notable tendencies. First of all, **the access is not estimated as absolutely open and easy by respondents.** Approximately each third of 10, or 36,7% of HH, whose children attend kindergartens, mentioned, that based on their personal experience, it was not easy to arrange/enroll a 3-5-year-old child to a public kindergarten in their community. It is remarkable, that the number of dissatisfied families by accessibility is higher among poor households (see Table 19).

Table 19. Estimate of Easiness of Access to Pre-Schools Among Poor and Not Poor HHs

not poor		Poverty Status		Total
		poor (spend at least 62% of income on food)		
Based on your personal experience, please, estimate how easy is to arrange/enroll a 3-6 year old child in a public kindergarten in your community?	Very easy	30.7%	25.3%	29.1%
	Mostly easy	32.0%	30.5%	31.6%
	Mostly not easy	29.3%	40.0%	32.5%
	Not easy at all	8.0%	4.2%	6.9%
Total		100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

14,6% of the kindergarten consumers stated, that they had faced certain obstacles while arranging the child to kindergarten (see Table 20). The distribution of responses by rural/urban population demonstrates, that **it is twice easier to arrange a child to kindergarten in rural areas, than in urban areas** (see Annex 3 Table 9). 6.3% of respondents, whose children are enrolled in kindergartens in rural areas, mentioned, that they faced obstacles in comparison to 17.2% in urban areas. It is remarkable, that there is no serious difference between private and public kindergartens in the sense of easy access. 10.5% of families, enrolled in private kindergartens, mentioned, that they had faced obstacles while arranging the child, compared to 14.8% among those, enrolled in public kindergartens (see Annex 3 Table 10).

In general, the largest number of families, facing obstacles while accessing ECD, are found in the provinces of Lori (25% of enrolled families), Yerevan (23.5%) and Kotayk (17.6%) (see Table 20), while the easiest access is reported in provinces of Gegharkunik and Tavush (none of the families experienced obstacles).

Table 20. Access Obstacles Across Regions.

Yes		Did you face any obstacles while arranging the child to kindergarten?		Total
		No		
PROV- INCE	Armavir	10,7%	89,3%	100,0%
	Aragatsotn	3,7%	96,3%	100,0%
	Ararat	9,1%	90,9%	100,0%
	Gegharkunik	0%	100,0%	100,0%
	Kotayk	17,6%	82,4%	100,0%
	Lori	25,0%	75,0%	100,0%
	Shirak	3,7%	96,3%	100,0%
	Syunik	10,7%	89,3%	100,0%
	Tavush	0%	100,0%	100,0%
	Vayots Dzor	14,3%	85,7%	100,0%
	Yerevan	23,5%	76,5%	100,0%
Total		14,6%	85,4%	100,0%

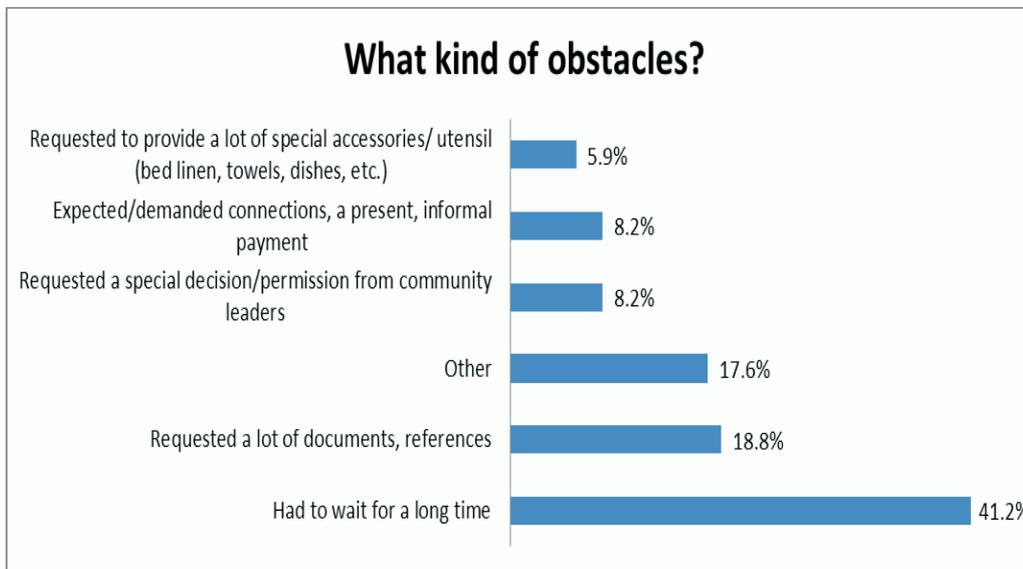
Analysis of reasons, why some of the children were not admitted to kindergartens, revealed, that the most popular explanation, given to families by kindergarten headmasters, was the overload of the institution. 77.3% of respondents, whose children were not admitted to kindergarten, noted, that main reason for that was absence of space in the kindergarten (see Table 21).

Table 21. Reasons for Non-Admission to Kindergarten

Why the child was not admitted to the kindergarten/other preschool educational institution, that you preferred?	
	Valid Percent
No space	77.3
Said, that the child was not a citizen of the RA/was not registered in the community	9.1
Other (it is early for our child to go to kindergarten; the child is younger than 4 years old and will go to kindergarten after 4)	9.1
Expected an informal payment, connections or a present	4.5
Total	100.0

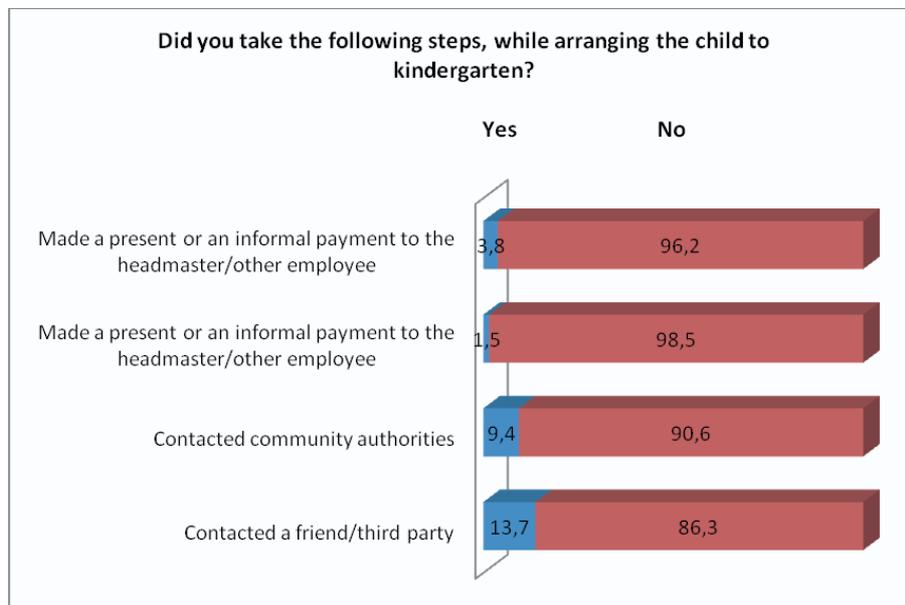
The rating of access obstacles is shown in Chart 4. More than 60% of responses refer to bureaucratic nature of access procedures, such as waiting in the queue for arranging the child, numerous documents and references, required by the institution. Corruption-related mechanisms still exist, thus in 8.2% of cases people were requested special permission from the community leader, and in another 8.2% of cases they were requested to buy a present or make a payment.

Chart 4. Rating of Access Obstacles



At the same time, the access to kindergartens is facilitated through a range of informal mechanisms, which are accepted by around 28,4% of families enrolled in kindergartens. Among those mechanisms the most popular ones are social networks(friends, relatives, etc.) (see Chart 5).

Chart 5. Steps, Taken to Arrange the Child to Kindergarten



Thus, 13,7% of respondents, whose children were enrolled in kindergartens, gained access to kindergarten through friends/relatives/third parties; and 9,4% of the enrolled families had contacted local authorities or community leaders. It is remarkable, that though regarding to the issue of obstacles-faced, more than 8% of responses pointed out the request for informal payments/presents, only 6 out of 395 respondents (or 1,5% of enrolled in kindergartens) reported the fact of giving a present or making an informal payment to the headmaster/other employee of the kindergarten. Of course, this indicator might be biased to some extent, since respondents would try to veil or hide the evidence of their personal engagement in informal payments. Nevertheless, it is possible that request/demand for a present/payment was satisfied in the form of intervention of third parties/social networks, or by some kind of charity or work performed. The group of respondents, who were forced to give money for charity, perform work or give a present to kindergarten, makes around 4% from total number of families, enrolled in kindergartens.

While summarizing the results on access obstacles and admission, a conclusion can be made, that on the one hand, all mentioned mechanisms are used by parents to gain easier access to pre-schools, but on the other hand, they are created by community or pre-school service managers to limit the access to overcrowded pre-schooling institutions. The system gives an opportunity to certain officials (community leaders, headmasters, etc.) to make a kind of preliminary selection among families, trying to enter kindergartens, and to take an advantage of high demand under the conditions of the insufficient number of pre-school institutions.

QUALITY OF SERVICES AND EXPENSES

Quality of Services

One of the most serious problems, regarding the quality of kindergartens in Armenia, is irregularity of operations: 12.1% of families, whose children attend kindergartens, mentioned that kindergartens were seasonal and did not operate on regular basis (see Table 22). This indicator is especially high for rural communities (around 15% of kindergartens do not operate on regular basis in rural areas).

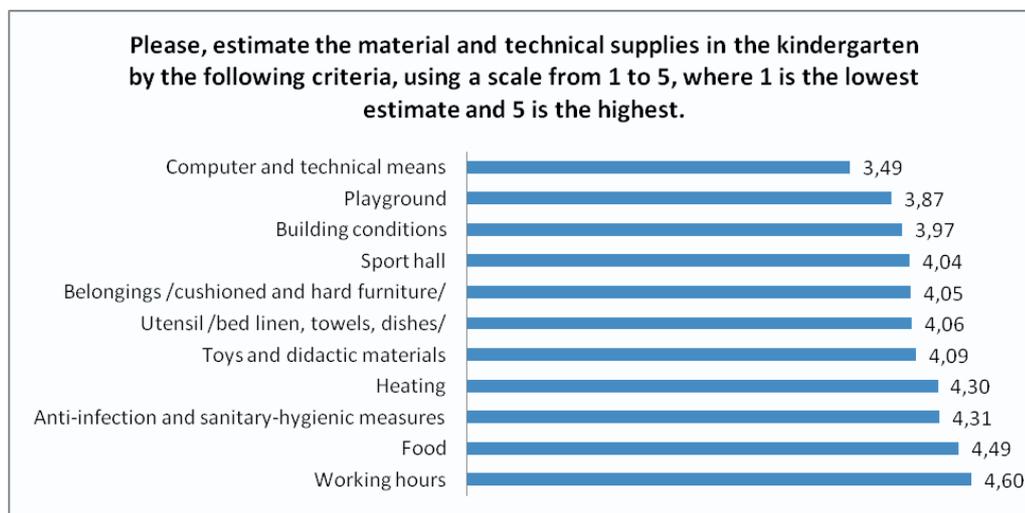
Table 22. Regularity of Kindergarten Operations in Urban and Rural Communities

Does the kindergarten operate on regular basis during the whole year?				
Yes	Does the kindergarten operate on regular basis during the whole year?			Total
	No			
Urban	88.8%	11.2%		100.0%
Rural	85.3%	14.7%		100.0%
Total	87.9%	12.1%		100.0%

More than half of kindergartens are seasonal in the province of Armavir (53.6%), around quarter - in the province of Ararat (24.2%). Best indicators for regularity of services (more than 90%) are reported for Kotayk, Syunik, Vayots Dzor, Lori, Tavush and Yerevan (see Annex 3 Table 11).

There were several questions about estimating different aspects of quality of kindergartens, attended by the targeted HHs using a scale from 1 to 5 points. The assessment was conducted for material and technical supplies in the kindergarten and for services as a whole (see Chart 6 and Chart 7). In general, the average estimates supplies are lower, than estimates for quality of services (4,05 points versus 4,51 points). The results are rather encouraging, since they show, that irrespective of insufficient technical and material supplies, the kindergartens manage to provide good-quality services.

Chart 6. Estimates of Material and Technical Supplies in Kindergartens (if available)

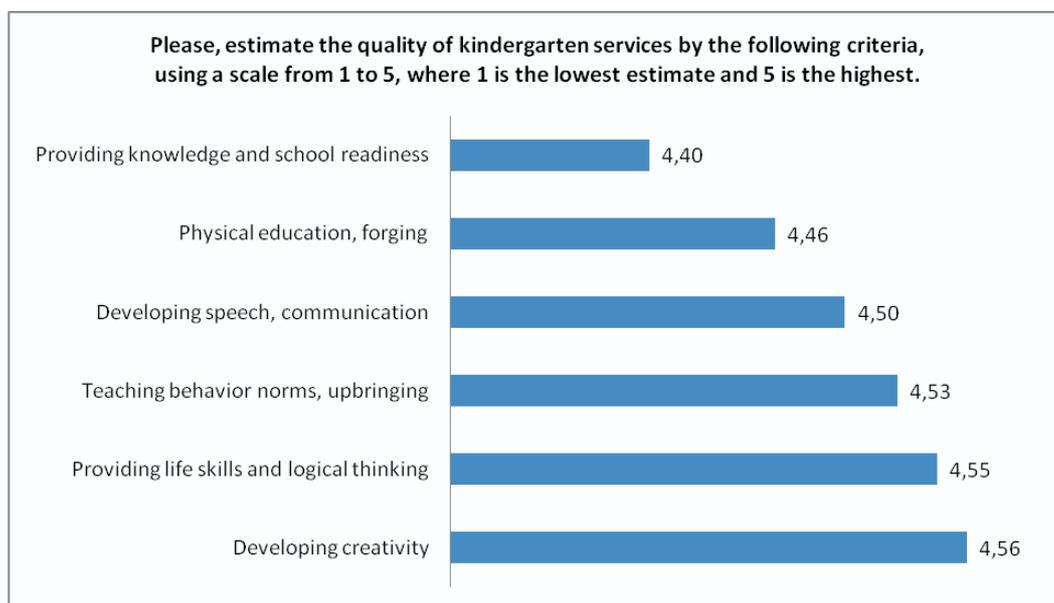


Estimates, lower than 4 points in average, were given for computer and technical means, playgrounds available and building conditions of the kindergartens (3,49; 3,87; 3,97 points accordingly). At the same time, playgrounds, gyms and computer supplies were among the least available at the attended kindergartens. Thus, 77,8% of respondents, enrolled in kindergartens, mentioned, that computer and technical means were not available in their kindergarten at all (though, availability of computers is not mandatory for kindergartens in Armenia), gyms were not available at around 50% of attended kindergartens, while playgrounds were not available at around 8% of kindergartens.

In the meantime, the highest estimates were given for quality of food (4,34), anti-infection and sanitary-hygienic measures, such as cleaning and anti-infection activities, carried out in the kindergarten (4,31) and heating (where available) (4,30).

Kindergartens received relatively high scores for social and educational aspects of their services as well: the average score across the sample is 4,51(see Chart 7) (with 4,48 for urban and 4,63 for rural areas). It is very important, that, despite average estimates for quality of services were satisfactory, a significant task of pre-schooling, which provides knowledge and school readiness, was on the lowest level (4,4 points) in comparison to other aspects of ECD, such as working hours, developing creativity or providing life skills and logical thinking (4,6; 4,56; 4,53 accordingly). This fact should be taken into account especially in the context of contemporary ECD policy orientation towards model 11+1 .

Chart 7. Estimates of Kindergarten ServicesQuality



While comparing the estimates for rural and urban kindergartens, we found, that rural population is more satisfied by both supplies and quality of kindergarten services, than urban population (in average, accordingly 4,29 versus 3,99 for supplies; 4,63 versus 4,28 for quality). Most likely, this fact is determined by lower expectations of rural population in comparison to urban. According to data analysis, people from communities use more positive estimation scale, than respondents from cities.

It is worth mentioning, that there is no significant difference between the estimates for technical/material supplies of public and private kindergartens: the average scores are 4.11 and 4.18 accordingly. In the meantime, there is some difference between the estimates of quality of services, related to main socio-educational tasks of institutions: public kindergartens receive higher estimates, than private ones(4.50 versus 4.38 accordingly). The more detailed examination of estimates reveals, that private kindergartens perform better in terms of building conditions (4.26 versus 3.95), heating (4.47 versus 4.29), property (4.21 and 4.03), while the public kindergartens receive better estimates for quality of food (3.8 versus 4.4) (see Annex 3 Table 12). **Private kindergartens perform slightly better in terms of providing school knowledge and readiness (4.5 versus 4.4), but their services receive lower estimates for the rest of the functions under assessment (especially for physical education and tempering (4.1 versus 4.5), teaching behavior norms and manners (4.3 versus 4.5) (see Table 23).**

Table 23. Estimate of quality of services in public and private kindergartens

Please, estimate the quality of kindergarten services	What type of kindergarten does the child attend?					
	Private			Public		
	Average	Minimum	Maximum	Average	Minimum	Maximum
Providing knowledge and school readiness	4.47	3	5	4.40	1	5
Developing speech, communication	4.42	3	5	4.50	1	5
Teaching behavioral norms, manners	4.32	2	5	4.54	1	5
Providing life skills and logical thinking	4.47	2	5	4.55	2	5
Developing creativity	4.42	2	5	4.57	1	5
Physical education, tempering	4.16	2	5	4.48	1	5

Another positive result on services, provided by kindergartens, was obtained from indirect questions, regarding attitude and tolerance, expressed the staff towards children. The respondents were asked to agree/disagree with certain statements (see Table 24).

Table 24. While talking about your child’s kindergarten, to what extent do you agree with the following statements (in percents)?

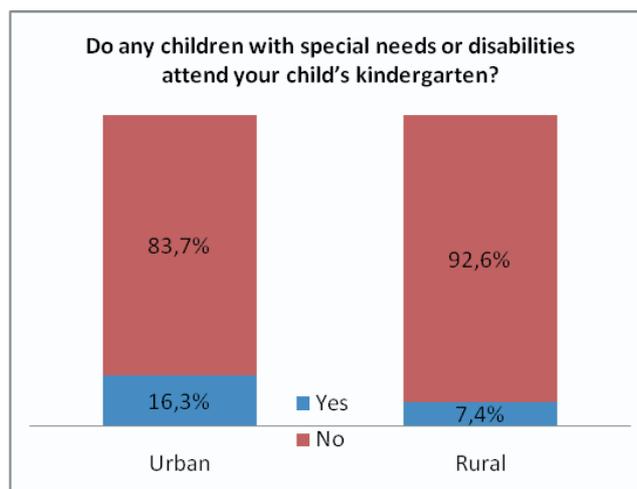
Statement	Absolutely agree	Mostly Agree	Mostly disagree	Absolutely disagree	Total of attending kindergartens
1. The children are permanently treated with care and kindness.	66.4	30.8	2.5	.3	100.0
2. The parents are informed about their children’s progress on regular basis.	68.4	27.3	3.8	.5	100.0
3. The teachers/staff pay attention to parents’ requirements and suggestions.	67.8	25.6	5.8	.8	100.0
4. Children from families with different social status receive similar care and services.	66.3	26.8	5.3	1.5	100.0

The responses show, that in majority of cases children are permanently treated with care and kindness; the parents are informed about their children’s progress on regular basis. However, there are around 7% of respondents, whose children attend kindergarten, who do not agree, that teachers/staff pay attention to parents’ requirements and suggestions. Another 7% of respondents, whose children attend kindergarten, disagree with the opinion, that children from families with different social status receive similar care and services in the kindergarten.

Perceptions of Inclusive Pre-School Education

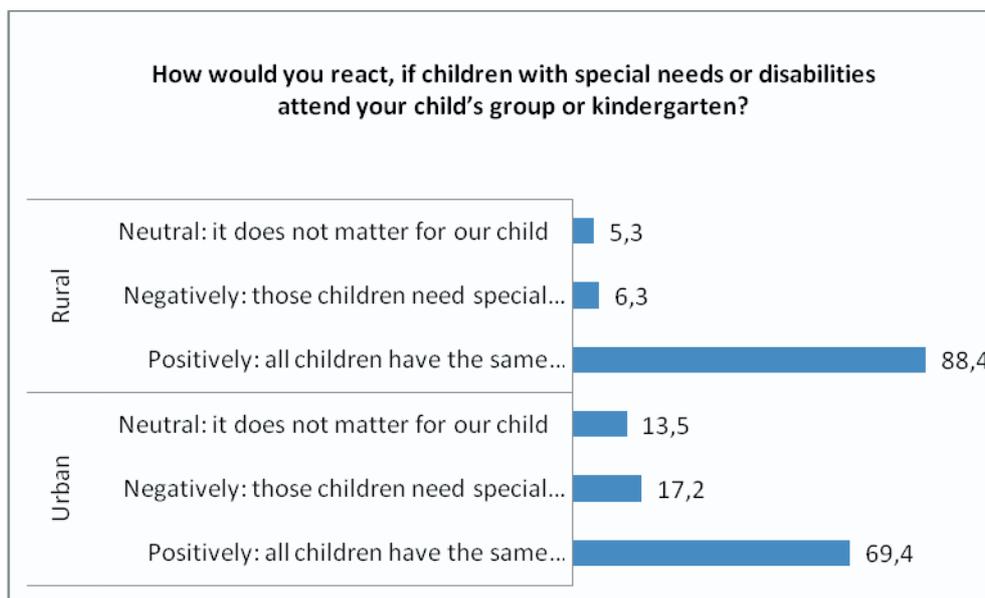
Most disappointing results are received for perceptions of inclusive pre-school education. Based on respondents’ responses, the rate of kindergartens, where children with disabilities are enrolled, is around 14%. **92.6% of respondents from rural communities stated, that there were no children with special needs/disabilities at their child’s kindergarten**, compared to 83.7% for urban settlements (see Chart 8).

Chart 8. Children with Disabilities, Attending Rural and Urban Kindergartens



14.5% of respondents stated, that they would react negatively, if children with special needs or disabilities attend their child’s group or kindergarten. Shares of respondents with negative perception of inclusive education are particularly big in the provinces of Kotayk, Shirak and Gegharkunik (23.5%, 22.2% and 20% accordingly). **It is worth mentioning, that rural population is more tolerant to inclusive pre-school education, than urban population** (see Chart 9).

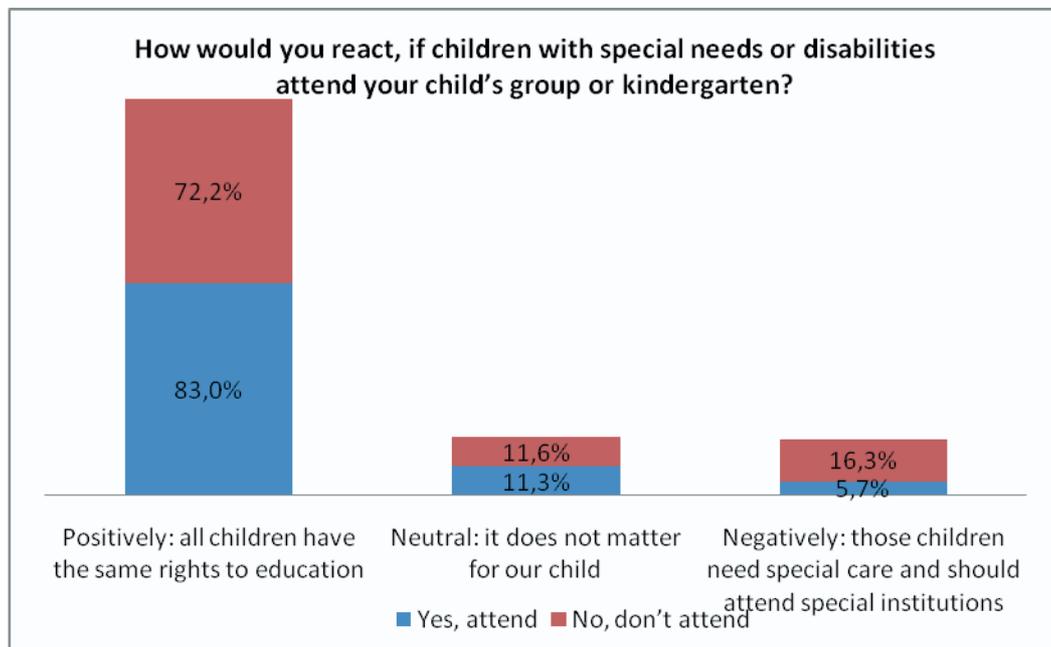
Chart 9. Attitude Towards Children with Disabilities, Attending Kindergarten



As a matter of fact, the lowest indicator of positive perception and highest indicator of neutrality towards enrollment of children with disabilities to kindergartens are reported for Yerevan (only 58.6% of Yerevan respondents, enrolled in kindergartens, said they would have reacted positively and 22.1% said it did not matter for them). Those who have jobs are more positively oriented; women respondents are less tolerant, than male respondents (see Annex 3 Tables 14, 15).

There is a relationship between perception of inclusive pre-school education and real-life experiences of respondents. **Respondents, whose children attend kindergartens, where there are children with disabilities, are more positively oriented towards inclusiveness of children with special needs** (see Chart 10). **This is an important tendency, which shows that the more kindergartens adopt inclusive education programs, the more people shift to positive perceptions on inclusiveness.**

Chart 10. Attitudes Towards Children with Disabilities, Attending Kindergarten, Depending on the Fact of Actual Attendance



Payments for kindergartens

Families spend a total of 4700 AMD per an average month for kindergarten across Armenia. It is worth noticing, that in addition to formal payment (which is around 4000 AMD across the database), the parents pay around 220 AMD per month for informal presents to teachers/assistants and 150 AMD for special accessories, supplies. Another extra amount of about 290 AMD is collected monthly. Generally, the presents/payments to teachers are made several times during the year, which means, that for informal payments to teachers more than 2000 AMD is collected yearly. In fact, rather a large share of households' budget is spent for the needs of children: particularly during a typical month in average more than 32% is spent for costs, related to 3-6 year-old members of households in the sample.

ECD related total expenses are higher for urban areas, than for the rural ones, even though the difference is around 1000 AMD monthly (see Annex 3 Table 16). However, maximum costs for pre-school services in urban areas are around 80.000 AMD, which is several times higher than those for rural

(the maximum costs are 18.000AMD). The most expensive ECD services are reported in provinces of Aragatsotn, Ararat, Shirak and Yerevan (more than 5000 AMD per month).

Close examination of composition of total expenses shows, that in rural areas for informal payments, supplies, etc., it is spent several times less money, than in urban areas (see Table 25). Families from rural settlements spend less, than 3% of total expenses, for informal payments to pre-school institution, while informal payments are more “popular/common” in urban population: more than 17% of total ECD related expenses are informal payments.

Table 25. Monthly Expenses for Kindergarten Services

Types of settlements Formal payment		During an average month how much money do you spend for the kindergarten services in AMD?			
		Informal payment/present to teacher/assistants	Other money collected	Special accessories, supplies	
Urban	Average	4137.25	283.56	362.54	191.95
	Minimum	0	0	0	0
	Maximum	80000	20000	10000	10000
Rural	Average	4112.77	34.74	73.23	37.89
	Minimum	0	0	0	0
	Maximum	18000	1000	1000	2000

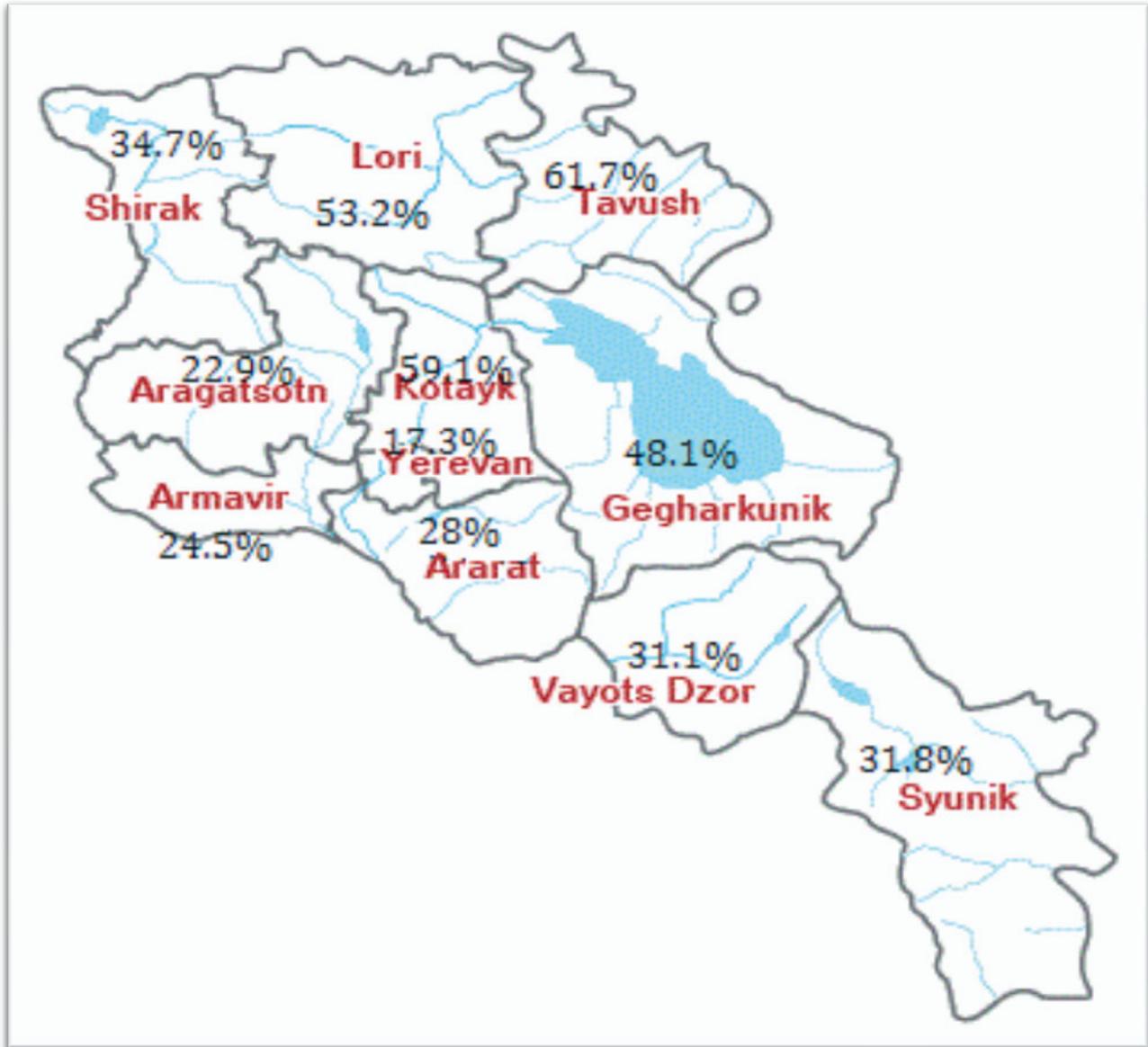
Aggregation data was used to find the shares of those HHs, which do not spend any money for informal payments across provinces, which will allow to define provinces with the lowest corruption indicators for ECD services. **Provinces, where more than 90% of HHs, enrolled in kindergartens, do not spend money for informal payments monthly, are Lori, Aragatsotn, Shirak and Ararat. While Gegharkunik, Yerevan and Syunik are the most corrupt, with relatively high indicators for informal payments.** Only 71.4% of HHs, enrolled in kindergartens in Syunik, do not spend any money for informal payments, accordingly shares for Yerevan and Gegharkunik are 72.6% and 78.3% (see Annex 3 Table 17).

EXCLUSION: RATE, REASONS, SOCIAL CHARACTERISTICS

For purposes of the study we will use the term “exclusion” for the children or HHs, who were not enrolled in any kind of pre-school institution at survey period. As stated before, in total, 31.6% of targeted HHs do not send any of their children to any type of pre-school institution. Based on survey results, **Exclusion Rate for children of age 3 to 6 across Armenia is 32.7%.**

More than half of targeted children are not enrolled in ECD in the provinces of Tavush, Kotayk and Lori (Exclusion Rates are 61.7%, 59.1% and 53.2% accordingly). The lowest Exclusion Rates are reported in Yerevan, Aragatsotn and Armavir, where less than quarter of targeted children of suitable age do not attend any type of ECD (see Picture 1).

Picture 1. Exclusion Rates of Children aged 3-5 Across the RA Provinces



Children from rural areas are more likely to be excluded, than those from urban areas. Aggregation data of excluded children by gender shows, that there are more male children among excluded ones, than female (see Table 26).

Table 26. Distribution of Excluded Children by Types of Settlements and Gender

Types of Settlements	Excluded Children of 3-5 years old		Gender Valid Percent		Excluded Children of 3-5 years old
	Valid Percent				
Urban	41.3	Female Total	Male	57.0	
Rural	58.7		43.0		
Total	100.0		100.0		

Caregivers for excluded children in majority of cases are their parents (mother/father) (86.4% of excluded HHs), and not their grandparents (12.6% of excluded HHs) (see Annex 3 Table 18). The study of other social-demographic characteristics of excluded children shows, that excluded children are more often children from not poor families. Excluded children from poor families make 32% of all sampled children (see Table 27).

Table 27. Distribution of Excluded Children by Poverty Status

Poverty Status		Frequency	Valid Percent
Valid	not poor	115	68,0
	poor (spent at least 62% of income on food)	54	32,0
	Total	169	100,0

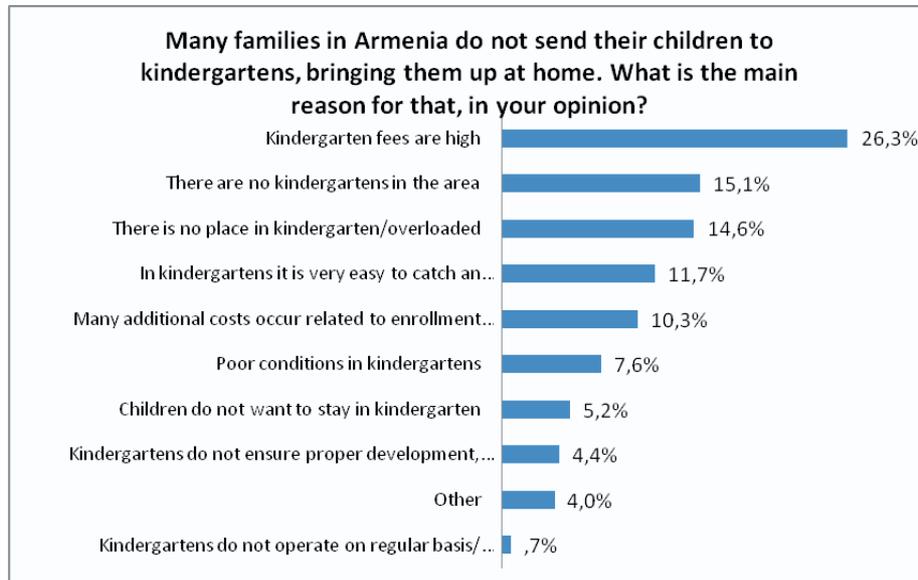
There is another interesting finding, related to exclusion rate in Armenia. Survey data shows, that **more than 1/3 of excluded families made some attempts to enroll their children to pre-school** (see Table 28). Therefore, exclusion is not a case of personal choice, but most probably a case of socio-economic and structural consequences for the people. This indicator once again shows, that there are obstacles in accessing ECD, which increase the number of children, excluded from pre-schooling.

Table 28. Attempts to Enroll Excluded Children in Pre-School

Table 22. If the child/children does/do not attend, have you ever tried to enroll them in pre-school educational institution?			
		Frequency	Percent from Excluded HHs
Valid	Yes	82	39.4
	No	126	60.6
	Total	208	100.0

A range of questions referred to reasons for exclusion of children from ECD in Armenia. One of the questions was about perceptions of possible reasons for non-attendance of kindergartens, asked to all targeted respondents, regardless actual enrolment of their children in pre-school institutions. As Chart 11 illustrates, in respondents' opinion, many families in Armenia do not send their children to kindergartens, bringing them up at home, mainly because of some objective reasons, such as the high fees, the lack of kindergartens in the area, the overcrowded institutions. A rather large group of respondents (11.7% of total) consider, that a common reason for drop-out is the fact, that there is a danger of easily catching infectious diseases in kindergartens.

Chart 11. Perceptions on Possible Reasons for Drop-out



At the same time, the survey data reflects actual reasons for exclusion among those HHs, who do not send their children to kindergartens, which somehow differ from the reasons, based on subjective perceptions of population. **Top three reasons for exclusion of children are the lack of kindergartens in the area, the fact of not meeting parents’ requirements and non-admission of the child to kindergarten** (see Table 29).

Table 29. General Reasons for Exclusion

Why your child/children does/do not attend any preschool educational institution?	Percent from responses
There are no kindergartens or other preschool services, operating in the community/in the area	42.3%
Community kindergartens or other preschool educational services, do not meet our requirements	11.2%
The child was not admitted to the kindergarten/other preschool educational institution, that we preferred	10.2%
Our child does not have any need for preschool education/care	5.1%
The child has a health related issue and needs special care (disability)	2.3%
Do not have financial resources	7.4%
The child does not want to stay in the kindergarten	7.9%

If we try to combine main reasons for exclusion from ECD into subcategories, we can define the following sets of problematic issues:

1. Problems, related to effectiveness of the system in general (lack of kindergartens, overcrowded institutions, hard access) – around 55%
2. Problems, related to quality of services at a particular kindergarten (poor conditions, inability to gain child’s cooperation, sanitation and hygiene, etc.) – around 19%
3. Problems, related to socio-economic conditions of the family – around 7.5%
4. Poor awareness of ECD importance and negative perceptions towards pre-school education - around 5%.

The above-mentioned data can become a basis for elaboration of a matrix for comprehensive measures to be carried out for mitigation of exclusion rate among children of pre-school age in Armenia. If, due to shortage of funding, the first set of problems is rather difficult to deal with directly, the second set can be managed on the ground through better control, training of the staff, other measures, that do not require allocation of additional funds. For example, the detailed analysis of parents' unmet requirements (see Table 30) reveals, that the second top reason is the inability to ensure anti-infectious, sanitary-hygienic measures at kindergarten (40% of responses in this regard). Hence, the improvement and control of sanitary-hygienic measures can somehow change the attitude of the excluded families toward kindergartens. Alternative services and programs, developed for kindergartens, can also improve the situation.

Table 30. Unmet Requirements of Excluded Parents to Community Kindergartens or other preschool educational services (percent from responses)

Specify the requirements, that community kindergartens or other preschool educational services did not meet	Percent from responses
Poor housing/building conditions	35.0
The required level of knowledge is not provided	5.0
Proper care/food are not provided	15.0
Anti-infectious and sanitary-hygienic measures are not ensured	40.0
Other	5.0
Total	100.0

Even though the number of families, excluded from ECD mainly because of the lack of financial resources is not high (around 7.4%), none of the families received any kind of proposal for assistance from the community authorities, social services or any other programs for enrolling the child into preschool educational institution. This data allows to conclude, that if there were cases of assisting poor families in reduction of their ECD related expenses, the number of enrolled among this group might have been increased. There is a need for a targeted mechanism for assisting the poor access ECD.

On the other hand, as was found during expert interviews, there were not any functional mechanisms to target excluded families neither on community level, nor at social service or social policy program level. Survey data comes to prove this assumption, since approximately **95% of excluded families said, that none of the representatives of community authorities, social or healthcare services, alternative educational services, had ever contacted them with an offer/persuasion to enroll their child to ECD** (see Table 31).

Table 31 Offers/Persuasions to Enroll Children on the part of Community Authorities, Social, Healthcare Services, Alternative Educational Services

Did any representative of your community authorities, social or healthcare services, alternative educational services, ever contact you with an offer/persuasion to enroll your child into preschool educational institution?	
Percent from Excluded HH	
Yes	5.3
No	94.7
Total	100.0

CHAPTER IV
EXCLUSION FROM PRE-SCHOOL EDUCATION:
QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS

PERCEPTIONS AND NEEDS FOR PRE-SCHOOL EDUCATION

During FG interviews participants were involved in several topical discussions, regarding their understanding of pre-school education and ECD in general. As has already been mentioned, all participants were parents of children of pre-school age, who did not attend kindergartens. Despite of the fact, that their children did not attend kindergartens, only a few people from the total of 64 participants agreed, that home-based care is better for their children, than institutionalized care.

One of the major topics of discussions related the advantages of institutionalized pre-schooling in comparison to home-based care. The table, summarizing results of discussions by means of some visual techniques, illustrating participants’ general understanding of main functions of ECD, and the chances to perform better at home or at pre-schools, is presented below (see Table 32). Main finding of all types of FGDs is the fact, that the child’s basic care, such as food, sleep, hygiene, is better organized at home than at pre-schools. All parents, involved in discussions, including the poor and members of families from remote and small villages, were convinced, that they could ensure better care conditions for their children at home, than at pre-school institutions, particularly public kindergartens. While comparing the other functions, related to ECD, all groups agreed, that kindergartens performed better than the family. Home-based teaching of behavioral norms/upbringing and physical education/tempering were assessed as equally effective, compared with institutionalized pre-schooling. This once again proves an assumption, that mostly there is a positive attitude towards institutionalized ECD among Armenian parents; in general, the perception of pre-school significance for child development is quite positive.

Table 32. Comparison of quality of home-based ECD tasks versus institutionalized.

	At home	At kindergarten, other pre-schools
1. Care /food, sleep, etc./	+*	
2. Obtaining school preparedness knowledge and skills		+*
3. Developing speech, native language, communication		+*
4. Teaching behavioral norms, manners	+**	+*
5. Providing life skills and logical thinking		+*
6. Developing creativity /arts, singing, dancing/		+*
7. Physical education, tempering	+**	+*

*result, obtained in 9 FGDs

**results, obtained in 1 FG

***results, obtained in 2 FG

Among main advantages of home-based care in addition to provision of better food and hygiene, participants named stronger links to other members of families, more intensive communication with parents and grandparents, better immunity and rare cases of catching infections (Table 33). It is important, that the problem of infectious diseases and illnesses is especially significant for poor families.

During FGs with the poor, the participants were very much concerned about health of their children. Many participants of those FGs were telling about illnesses of their children. Several parents from poor families in provinces did not take their children to kindergartens because of bad health and immunity problems of their children.

Table 33. Advantages and disadvantages of home-based care.

	Advantage	Disadvantage
Related to child	Rare cases of illnesses, better immunity, better food, sleep, expression of more love and attention	Upbringing as an egoist, lack of communication, lack of knowledge, being shy, lack of behavioral norms, lack of occupation, addition to computer, TV soap operas, etc.
Related to care implementer	Better contact with the child, confidence	Dependence from mother, lack of spare time, impossibility to have a job, dull routine
Related to family	Better communication, more links to grandparents	Getting tired, occurrence of conflicts situations

Another finding, obtained from FGs, is that care for excluded children is organized by grandparents more frequently in Yerevan, than in provinces. It is noteworthy, that grandmothers in Yerevan are assisting their daughters or daughters-in-law in child care, while in communities the participants more often talked about lack of help from mothers-in-law, conflicts, arising around child care and methods of upbringing. Traditionally, in rural communities the young couples live with their parents. But results of discussions revealed strains in relations among generations, related to child care. In rural areas, if the mother does not work, it is more likely, that grandparents would not assist her in child care related duties. They prefer playing or going out with children for several hours, while food, hygiene, sleep etc. are more often organized by mothers. In this regard, another, more warring tendency was discovered during FGs with parents, having children with disabilities: elder members of families often do not understand the importance of required medical care and inclusion of children in various pre-schools and rehabilitation centers. Mothers complained, that they often were blamed by their parents-in-law for having a child with special needs, for making expenses, related to medical and rehabilitation assistance they were trying to provide for their children. The parents of children with disabilities often have conflicts/disputes with children’s grandparents, concerning child inclusion. **Old generation is more oriented to hide problems of the family from community and to keep children with disabilities isolated at home.**

Citations from FGDS, related to child care conflicts
FGD Tavush, having children with disabilities:
 “-As Kristina told, “We’re always left alone with our problems, even when we have a husband and parents-in-law, only we understand our needs. For example, I very much want to take my child everywhere – to kindergarten, to Bridge of Hope, to Arabkir center, but there is no assistance... Why should the relatives help? They love the child, but they don’t understand what is going on and they don’t think, that it is important for the child...
 -It is already 4 years that I’m explaining to my parents-in-law that this is important, but they always have the same question, saying “The situation will be the same, even if you don’t take the child anywhere”. But I do it, because I want to do everything possible to help my child... The family doesn’t want to help me neither financially, nor physically; they are only talking...
 -It is right; they often even say, that it is my fault, that we have such a child.
 -For example, when we brought my son home from the hospital with a breathing-machine, and I started doing procedures, prescribed by the doctor; my mother-in-law used to say: «Why are you doing all these? It will be your fault, if the child gets used to that machine». I can’t explain to her, that it is important and that this is what doctors are advising. She says: “No, this is your idea, and you’re doing what you want to...”
FG Vayots Dzor, well-offs:
 “- Negative thing about home upbringing is, that often mother or father says “Don’t do that”, and then grandparents say “oh, that’s ok, do it”. For example, I say: “Don’t eat tangerines anymore”, then grandmother says “Never mind, let her eat, that’s ok...”
 -It is right, or sometimes you get angry with the child and they start protecting the child...”

FG participants were involved in another discussion to elaborate a group estimate for importance and accessibility of pre-schools in their communities, trying to name main obstacles to pre-school access. Table 34 summarizes the average scores for all nine FGs regarding kindergartens, school preparedness courses/school-based centers and other development circles (such as sports, arts, etc.). Significance of all mentioned institutions is estimated very high by parents (maximum around 5 points). It is interesting, that the score for sports, arts, etc. is the highest. Kindergartens and school-based centers are estimated as equally important for children, though the access score was 3 and lower.

Table 34. Significance and accessibility scores for pre-schools, main disadvantages

Types of pre-schools	Significance /1-5 points/	Accessibility /1-5 points/	Obstacles, disadvantages
Kindergarten	4.8	3	Insufficiency/lack at rural and small urban communities, transportation difficulties, queue/overcrowding, involvement of third parties or intermediaries, fees, discriminating treatment, informal payments, poor building conditions, lack of nurses
School preparedness courses, school-based centers	4.7	2.3	Insufficiency/lack at rural and small urban communities, transportation difficulties, fees, short days and short months of operations
Development circles (sports, arts, etc.)	5	2	Insufficiency/lack at rural and small urban communities, transportation difficulties, fees

As a matter of fact, the accessibility of children’s circles is very low (the average score is 2). In small rural communities there is actually no facility for any kinds of sports, especially swimming, which was mentioned as a desirable service to be attended by children. The need for sports, swimming-pools and sport grounds is especially essential for families with disabled children, who need special phys-

ical training. In rural communities of Tavush, Vayots Dzor and Ararat there is no possibility to organize the services in rural or small urban communities. Parents have to take their children to province centers or larger cities for sports, which is very expensive and hard in terms of transportation. At the same time, most of the communities’ children’s circles of traditional dance or singing operate, but children of younger age cannot attend them. In most of the cases all mentioned services (sports, dance, drawing) are not free-of-charge, therefore they are not affordable for kids from poor families.

Hence, based on qualitative data, we can conclude, that the most vulnerable group of children in terms of access to ECD services is again the group younger 4-5 years old. The most part of existing services is oriented towards children of elder pre-school age, while younger children are staying at home or playing in the yard, where there are no playgrounds or facilities. Another problem of home-based care, emphasized particularly by well-off participants, is the computer-dependency and addiction of children to computer games and TV shows and soap operas. Participants told, that often they could not manage to occupy children with other development games or activities; computer becomes the “closest friend” of the child (see Table 35).

Table 35. Perception of advantages/disadvantages of alternative pre-school services

Pre-school education services	Advantage	Disadvantage
School preparedness courses, school-based centers	Children become active, more sociable, they are not shy anymore, ready for school, learning foreign languages	Short hours, no food, remoteness, lack of pre-school institutions in communities, overloading the child with knowledge, lack of games
Development circles (sports, arts, etc.)	Developing skills and talents, small groups and individual approach	Short duration, no food, remoteness, absence in rural communities

The participants had a discussion on priorities of ECD services, that need more attention from the state and local authorities in their regions. The top 8 challenges are presented in the Table 36. The issue of buildings’ heating is especially essential for regions: often kindergartens operate seasonally, since there is no centralized heating system. The parents from Tavush are not comfortable with the safety of children in regional kindergartens, where electric heaters or wood stoves are being used. Parents from Vayots Dzor are concerned about quality of food, they mentioned, that in public kindergartens sometimes children are even allowed to take some food from home or to bring bottle of water with them.

Table 36. Group perceptions of top challenges for pre-schools.

Challenge	Priority
1. Heating	1
2. Food	2
3. Property /cushioned and hard furniture/	3
4. Houseware /bed linen, towels, dishes/	4
5. Building conditions	5
6. Toys and didactic materials	6
7. Gym	7
8. Anti-infectious and sanitary-hygienic measures	8

Nevertheless, the majority of participants in all FG-s agreed, that they would send their child to public kindergarten regardless the quality of services, if they had a job, if there were kindergartens in the area and if the fee was affordable. This means, that quality of services is the last thing, that prevents families from enrolment of their children in pre-schools.

ADMISSION EFFORTS AND ENTRY OBSTACLES

Majority of FG participants made some efforts to arrange their children to kindergartens. There are 2-3 cases, when exclusion from pre-schools is a subjective decision, made by the family, based on prioritizing home-based care versus institutionalized. In most of the cases children are excluded either due to lack of public kindergartens in their community and near-by area, or due to admission obstacles.

It is noteworthy, that a lot of cases of unsuccessful efforts to get involved into public kindergarten services are somehow related to the attitude to children. As has already been known from the survey, many parents had arranged their children to kindergarten, and later they were forced to withdraw the child from the service, because their children were crying and the day-care attendants could not cope with the situation. During FGs, several stories about crying babies and day-care attendants, not being able to cope with the situation, were told by participants. The problem seems to be a widely-spread challenge for Armenian pre-schools; therefore, most probably **there is a lack of special "cooperation-gaining" skills and guidelines for professional staff, working with newcomers. There is a need to develop some methods for this issue, as well as provide consultations for newcomers' parents.**

Citations from FGDs on Crying Babies

FGD Tavush, well-off families:

"My baby was 3. We had been sending him to kindergarten for a week, but he was constantly crying and we quitted... He couldn't get used to them... Then one day they called me on the phone from kindergarten and said: "Come and take your child, he can not stay here..."

Our younger child was crying for our elder son, and they did not admit him..."

FGD Tavush, poor families:

"I arranged my elder to kindergarten, and he was crying, wanted to come back home. One day his father went to kindergarten and saw him crying. He said: "That's enough, take him out." Later, when we took him to kindergarten again, they (kindergarten staff) said: "He is constantly crying, we can't deal with him." So we quitted, and now we are waiting for school..."

"My child always cried... If only there was another day-care attendant...when on the first day I went out from the room and was standing outside, I heard her shouting at the crying children... She shouted "Shut up, anyone who cries after her/his mother, will see what I do to them..." My child got scared and refused to go there again."

FGD Vayots Dzor, poor families:

"My youngest son is very attached to me. He can't stay alone, and he always cries when I leave...We've tried to take him to kindergarten, but as he cries a lot, we decided to wait."

Among reasons for exclusion, there were some concerns about quality of services in kindergartens, particularly determined by a large number of children in pre-school groups and a small number of staff, responsible to take care for the children. **Lack of the staff and overlapping duties for assistants lead to decrease of attention towards children and worsening quality of care activities.** This perception often makes parents to take their children out of pre-schools or prefer more individualized services, such as circles or so called "kids colleges" (school preparedness courses).

Citations from FGDS on poor quality of care

FGD Tavush, well-offs:

“-We have experienced a problem of our child getting ill all the time, because children sleep, perspire and nobody changes their clothes in the kindergarten...The reason is, that there are too many children in a group, and it is impossible to change everyone simultaneously. Day-care attendants start with some of the children, and the others are catching cold...”

-Another problem is, when they don't organize sleeping for children...My child attended kindergarten for 2 months and didn't sleep there, I had to go pick him and put him to bed at home.”

FGD Yerevan, well-off families:

“-There are too many children in a group. They can't pay equal attention to everyone. I've heard, that often children perspire, and they (assistants) have no time to change their clothes. It is impossible for one nurse/nanny to change clothes for 37 or 40 children ...

-There is one more problem: when I came into bedroom, children were sleeping, and there was a very bad smell over there. I asked, whether they were going to air the room after children woke up, but the day-care attendant explained, that it was impossible, because they will have meal in that same room and it might get cold...So often they use the same room for sleeping, feeding and playing.”

According to FG participants in all types of FGDS, the most frequent reason for exclusion from pre-schools are admission obstacles. **Among admission obstacles participants first of all define overload of public kindergartens and long registration lists for those, who want to attend.** Lack of public institutions is an obvious evidence, and it is hard to increase enrolment rate without adding the number and coverage of institutions, but still the most disappointing thing about the entry is, that there are some corruption-related mechanisms, such as bribes, involvement of third parties and intermediaries, intolerance or rough attitude of the staff and headmasters towards the applicants (children's parents).

Citations from FGDS on Overload and Long Waiting Lists

FGD Tavush, poor families:

“-...there is no place...there are no beds, the room is small...there are 4 year old children, whose turn will come in 2 years and there are 2 year old children, who are already attending kindergarten...I don't think, that it is fair...”

-...I did everything to arrange my child, but there is no vacancy...There are even children, who don't have chairs to sit...I was told: “If we admit one more child, he should have to eat standing... (Tavush poor)”

FGD Vayots Dzor, well-offs:

“-...one has to register baby in advance, I'll apply in August to attend from next September...”

FGD Vayots Dzor, poor:

“-...I know the day-care attendants personally, but there is no place... They told me: “Wait, we'll let you know”

-...we've been waiting for our turn for several monthsnow...”

FGD Yerevan, poor:

“-...we're waiting for our turn, but it never comes...when I went to complain, they said: “It is impossible, everything is transparent: here is the registry.” Then they explained, that something went wrong, as the child's photo was missing. I said: “I've been to another kindergarten yesterday, and the photo was in the registry.” Then she (the headmaster) understood, that I could go to municipality to complain, and she said: “Ok, we'll call you in November.” It is almost December, but they did not call yet.”

A lot of stories were told about attempts to engage some relatives, friends of friends and acquaintances to gain entry admission or to pass further in waiting lists. **Community authorities, high-ranking officials, municipality officers are perceived as main agents to assist with admission. Some participants told about bribes or informal payments (so called “magharich”), demanded or presented by them/their friends to headmasters to arrange the child or to get registered in the waiting list.** During FGs in Vayots Dzor, participants said, that there were no bribes in their province at pre-schools, but all services and kindergartens require official payments. It is noteworthy, that qual-

itative data comes to substantiate the data, collected during the survey, regarding extra obstacles, created particularly for poor families. Results from FGs with the poor make it clear, that headmasters very often are impolite or rude to them; there is a kind of selective treatment towards parents, based on their status. According to results, poor families more often experienced requests for informal payments or presents, than well-offs. This is, more probably, determined by a latent intention of headmasters not to admit socially vulnerable children; therefore, they are creating additional obstacles for parents, forcing them to leave the institution on their own. Sometimes it happens, as the requested payments are not affordable for poor families, sometimes it happens, because parents feel insulted or disregarded by the staff. This pattern is especially common in Yerevan, where public kindergartens are overcrowded. Of course, electronic registration system, elaborated recently by Yerevan municipality, somehow has improved the transparency of the entry procedures; nevertheless, there is no baseline data to make some comparison, regarding the scope of improvements in this field. The study results show, that the problem of bribes and corruption is still essential, and it has not been resolved yet.

Citations from FGDS on corruption, bribes

FGD Tavush, poor:

“-More often, they register their acquaintances or relatives. For example, I went to register my child in Ijevan, I was told: “We have no place,” but, when we told our friend, he said, that there was one vacancy...”

FGD Yerevan, poor:

“-I went to kindergarten, and the headmaster said: “I’m busy,” next time she said: “There is no place.” I went with the same problem for 2-3 times. The headmaster was sitting behind her computer and did not even want to respond to me, she did not want to say anything... I got disappointed and said to myself: “Ok, the children will stay at home...”

-I had registered my child, but they (kindergarten staff) phoned and said, that the place will be available only at the time he goes to school. I’ve applied to several other places, but they requested a “magharich” or an acquaintance...

-...I came to the headmaster and said: “I know, that you admit children for payment, I’m ready to pay...” “She said: “Oh no, never.” But I heard from a friend of mine, that she admits children for 80-100,000 AMD...”

-I’ve registered the child, but the headmaster was very aggressive and rude. Usually, they are looking for a “magharich” or a payment. Without that they treat you badly...

-At state kindergarten they requested 8000 AMD, the headmaster told me about it, and I said I’d pay even 10.000, just admit the child. Now we are waiting...

-...When I approached the headmaster, she was standing in the corridor and didn’t even pay attention to me. She seemed busy and hurried somewhere...I offered her a payment, but she said: “There is no way... I can’t admit your child...”

-I’ve contacted the headmaster; she said: “Go to the head of division...The head of division did not help. Then people advised me to find a third-party, but I did not manage...I have to register and wait for our turn, but our turn will come only when the child turns 7 years old...”

-I took all necessary documents, photo, etc. Then the headmaster told my son to tell me, that I have to pay 8000 AMD. I paid 10.000 and she registered us. But our turn will come only in 7 months.

-The only thing I’d like to see, is a polite attitude regardless who you are – a young man, a teenager or an old woman...I’d like them (the staff) to treat you irrespective of your position...They are paying attention, when one arrives in an expensive car, and his/her child wears expensive clothes, then apologize and smile, but if you arrive in an old Soviet car without a chewing gum in your mouth, proper make-up and clothes, they wouldn’t even pay attention to you...”

FGD Yerevan, well-offs:

-Some people say: “You should give them a “magharich”, the others say: “Find someone from municipality to get ahead...”

-One day I went there to see, when our turn comes. She looked in the papers and said “You’re 1000th” or something, but I remember, that I was leaving, we were already on 500th place. Then I started yelling. Later we found a man from community authorities, he made one call, and next day they phoned me back and said, that soon we’d be in, now I’m waiting (Yerevan well-off).

The most vulnerable group among excluded from pre-school is the group of children with disabilities. 3 FGs were organized with parents of children with special needs in different regions of Armenia. It is worth mentioning, that the participants were recruited through different NGO-s and public agen-

cies, working with them, therefore, all participants were “active” mothers: mothers who are willing to engage their children in various programs and are totally encouraged with an idea of integrated and inclusive pre-school education. However, all of them experienced many obstacles, trying to enroll their children to public integrated institutions. Most often, at public kindergartens parents of children with disabilities are told, that there are no conditions for special education at their institution. They do not reject the applications, but they explain, that they cannot take an obligation or a responsibility for quality of care, trying to convince parents, that home-based care is the only best solution for them. The main manifested reason for limited admission is the lack of special facilities and specialists at public pre-schools. However, a more indepth analysis reveals, that another hidden reason is headmasters’ lack of desire to get involved in inclusive services locally. They try to do everything possible to skip an obligation for enrolment of children with disabilities. The entry is especially hard for children with physical disabilities. According to FG participants, it is easier for the staff to take care for children with mental disease, than for those, having physical impairments, not only because they need more facilities for mobility and more care, but also because kids can tell their parents about the way they are being treated at kindergarten.

Citations from FGDS on Entry Obstacles for Children with Disabilities

FGD Ararat:

“-I have a job, and I have to take the child to kindergarten... It is very hard, because he can't go to the toilet and often wets himself...this makes other children feel disgusted... The nurses/nannies do not manage to take enough care, besides that he can't speak and can't let them know, what he wants...

-In many kindergartens there is a rule not to admit such children, since kindergartens are not inclusive...For example, I contacted the headmaster and he/she directly told me “Arevik jan, we don't have inclusive education here, we don't have a specialist...In your opinion, will your son be safe here? We can admit him, but don't require anything more...” ...For example, when my child with Down syndrome is pulling girls' hair, one should be a specialist to react correctly. The headmaster says “If we don't have a specialist to understand this kind of things, how can we take care of your child?”

-I know that in our community kindergarten there is no inclusive education; therefore, I did not approach them anyone...

-I've contacted, but they refused to enroll my child... They said he can hit other children, etc., but he does not have any mental problems...

- I tried to talk to several headmasters...I even suggested to stay there with the child for one hour, but they refused, explaining, that they do not provide inclusive education.”

FGD Yerevan:

“-I contacted an inclusive kindergarten, but they said that they can admit only children with mental issues, if the child has physical disability, they can't admit him/her...

- We were told the same...

-Roughly saying, if the child has a mental problem, they can do anything and he will not be able to tell at home... While my daughter will come and tell me every single word and the way she was treated... It means, that our children, who have more chances to become normal citizens, have more obstacles, and the staff of kindergartens do everything, so that our children lose all chances...

-They say you should have a connection from municipality to assist, if you don't have, then you'll have nothing...

-We've talked to a friend from municipality, he said that they had sent an official vacancy for a specialist, but the kindergarten did not want to take it...

-I also talked to the headmaster, she said that she couldn't refuse, but later she added “Look, there are 30 children and one nurse/nanny, if she takes care of your child, what the others will do ?...”

-This means, that everything depends on the headmaster...

-If there is a will, then everything is possible...

-They just don't want to have another headache; they think: if something happens to the child, they would be blamed... So they think: it is only one child, nothing will happen, if he stays at home...

-I went to a kindergarten and explained, that my child was eating, drinking, and taking care of himself on his own. My child is totally ready for kindergarten, but they didn't even let me meet with the headmaster...Every time I go there, the secretary says she is out, I talked to her by phone and she said “ok, I've registered you” ...that's all. No one phoned me since then...

According to FG results, children with disability and their families are permanently experiencing discrimination not only at public institutions, but also within the communities. There is intolerant attitude on the part of parents of other children, neighbors, community leaders. People do not harm them, but they are not willing to get into close contact or get friends. FG participants mentioned, that often they prefer private services and special rehabilitation or assistance centers, where the attitude is much better. In their opinion, even the parents of other children behave themselves more friendly in private environment. Therefore, it is better for them to pay and be sure, that there is no discrimination towards their child. This option is not affordable for poor families, who have to stay at free-of-charge institutions. The study also reveals, that there is a lack of assistance from local authorities in enrolling the children with special needs in pre-schools, in assistance with funding, transportation and facility. Some mothers were ready to collaborate and help each other to organize transportation, but even on that kind of issues village mayors did not provide any assistance. ECD and rehabilitation is very expensive for families. They have to spend a lot of time and money for services, as well as transportation. The costs are very high, especially for families from regions, where centers are rare, and families have to cover additional expenses for transportation to remote centers or services.

Based on the results, we can conclude, that there is a need to establish some programs for collaboration among parents, having children with special needs, creating registries or portals for sharing common interests and combining efforts and vehicles, as well as create a more cost-efficient planning of their budgets. For example, several families with disabled children could combine their efforts for transportation, sharing the costs and responsibilities for using one vehicle. It could also be useful for those families to create a schedule of responsibilities to share, organize and plan their logistics and time through mutual cooperation networks.

<p><u>Citations from FGDs on tolerant attitude towards children with disabilities, and lack of assistance</u></p> <p>FGD Tavush: <i>“-Many parents look at us, as if we are aliens. I know children, who like my son and when we go out, they are happily greeting him with a” hello”, but their parents are pulling their hand to take them away...There is no bad attitude from children, there are bad mothers, who don’t have any idea of illness and diagnosis...”</i></p> <p>FGD Ararat: <i>“-There is always a kind of discrimination. But to tell you the truth, I never pay attention to that. Sometimes people stare at us in the street, etc., but I taught Arsen not to pay attention or not to answer them, nevertheless, it is hard... -Once when he was putting on his prosthesis, an old woman looked upward and hand-crossed herself, I felt very bad...”</i></p> <p>FGD Tavush: <i>-There are serious financial problems. My child goes to kindergarten three days a week for several hours, for the rest of the time we attend Bridge of Hope. The community is paying for those three days, that’s all. -We’ve applied for assistance to the community administration, but they didn’t pay anything. - I’ve also applied. The accountant saw me several times and said,that the amount was not paid. I reminded them many times, but still there is no response... -What can the headmaster do, if the community leader does not assist him? They do not provide any financial assistance to us. I asked them to provide a vehicle to us, there are 2 of us with special needs, if they could provide a vehicle each of us could take the children in turns, but they didn’t do it.</i></p>	<p><u>Citations from FGDs on tolerant attitude towards children with disability at private institutions and special centers</u></p> <p>FGD Yerevan: <i>“-It is better in private institutions. Nobody is staring at you, nobody talks after you...We attend a private college, and I feel very comfortable there. On the first day, I assumed that something bad could reach my ears, but nothing did... I pay 7000 AMD-monthly...and I’m very happy with their attitude. Firstly parents, and then their children, know that my child can fall down, and they always help... -We were attending inclusive kindergarten in Noragyugh, and all children were very careful...they even asked to sit closer for helping her, if she falls.”</i></p>
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The study revealed a lot of cases of corruption, improper treatment and poor accessibility at outpatient care departments and other medical care institutions, responsible for disability assessment and free medical procedures. The staff frequently demands informal payments; the waiting time and schedules for treatment are inconvenient for families. The two free-of-charge procedures per year, envisaged for each disabled child, are not provided on time, are not properly organized or monitored. Often, financial measures for treatment and transportation of children are being taken by families, while those allocations could be re-directed to ECD and inclusive educational institutions. Instead of bringing the child to a development center, parents arrange formal appointments at outpatient care departments, make informal payments and wait in long queues. In addition to financial problems, the abovementioned increases psychological frustration and stress both for parents and their children. Participants became very nervous and desperate, while telling about their contacts with child disability assessment commissions and specialists at outpatient care departments. It is noteworthy, that main specialists, providing the treatment, such as physiotherapists, are more tolerant, than employees, working as receptionists and at assessment departments.

Citations from FGDs on quality of public medical care

FGD Ararat:

- The most terrible are the doctors. There are some doctors, who respond in such a way, that one can't stand it... There is one Clara in our outpatient care department, I'd like to tell about her. She always makes an appointment for December, knowing that it is very hard to get there in winter. And she does it deliberately for the purpose of preventing some people of coming... We are allowed for 2 free of charge visits per year, but doctors do everything to prevent our visits... -It is right, that we have 2 free of charge courses of medical treatment, but they don't want to provide them... -They say: "We don't have time; you're not alone here..."
- When I was pregnant with my second child, I couldn't take Arsen there. They didn't even call me to see, why we didn't come... Later I asked her (the doctor): "Why didn't you call me and arrange the course for Arsen?" she replied roughly: "You know what, your Arsen is a big boy and I don't have to call you".
- ...Even that treatment, which should be free of charge, actually is not ...
- Yes, there is a "magharich" (informal payment or present)
- Yes, you have to "thank" them.
- Yes, I've given them "magharich" in order to take the child next time.
- Right, you can go there twice a year, but if you don't phone and bother them, you will miss even that...
- The last time they've phoned me, but only after I used a connection...

FGD Yerevan:

- I'm telling a story, that happened just 2-3 days ago. We've been to one of commissions for assessment and the head of department made us wait for 4 hours to receive a piece of paper, which had been ready many days before and was stored at her employee's office. Then she said: "Come tomorrow," I said: "There is no commission tomorrow, if I come tomorrow, nobody will be here."
- Well, the same story happened with me. They made me go back and forth for a whole week, until they gave me the paper...
- Yes, the documentation goes very hard... As they said, children have to stay for hours in the car or in the hallways, go from one room to another, our children can't stand that...

CONCLUSIONS

The report assessed the access of children to pre-school education in Armenia, according to measures/ data, collected during a nationwide survey, a desk-review and a qualitative study. Main conclusions and findings from the research are presented as follows:

1. Though there is a widely shared determination to raise and universalize enrolment of children in pre-school education among Armenian decision-makers, final version of pre-school education concept development on operational level is in transition. Main directions of ECD strategy for upcoming years cover shift to compulsory pre-school education for 5-6 year-old children with an interest towards alternative, more cost-effective models for pre-schooling, efforts to localize pre-schooling into more complex scope of primary and high-school education strategy, adopting a so called “11+1” model. However, the policy in the field has a number of serious challenges, such as the lack of any targeted policy on pre-schooling particularly for early child care (children from 0 to 3 years old), serious gap between rural/urban policy developments, lack of a unified registry or data collection, storage, sharing, analyzing procedures and monitoring tools, particularly on the number of children of pre-school age, rates for enrolment in different types of pre-schools, including alternative pre-school education centers, drop-out rates and registries for children from socially vulnerable families, children with disabilities, children of refugee-displaced families, etc.
2. Main models of alternative pre-school education, piloted in Armenian regions, as well as all implementing agencies in the field, are not equipped by a mechanism of identification and recruitment of children, not enrolled in pre-school education, since pre-school education is non-compulsory in Armenia. The efforts in ECD are rather sporadic, there is a lack of regular cooperation among organizations, working in the field, regional authorities and other agencies in charge. Within cross-agency cooperation there are areas of excessive attention and no attention at all. There is lack of alternative pre-school services, especially for children under 5 years old and children from socially vulnerable families.
3. Estimates for inclusiveness of education on pre-school level are the lowest, compared to primary or higher education. The agencies for identification of children with special educational needs and the institutions of inclusive education do not operate as a unified institutionalized system; therefore, there is a lack of accurate data of children drop-outs from pre-school due to of disability.
4. Perception of child enrolment in any kind of ECD and demand in **compulsory** pre-school education among Armenian society is quite positive. There is a deep understanding of social functions of pre-schooling for child and family along with special emphasis on social functions, related to ensuring the attainment rate at school, developing communication skills and ensuring general development and proper behavior of a child.
5. There is some difference between enrollment rates, based on official statistics and other relevant data from other sources. The difference is determined, first of all, by definition of pre-school age (children from 0 to 6/ children from 3 to 6), as well as different data on number of children of pre-school age. Net Enrolment Rate for 2013-2015 in average is 28%. Absolute Enrolment Rate for 2016, is 50.5%. Relative Enrolment Rate for children aged 3-5 is around 60%. Hence, even best estimates illustrate, that more than 40% of children of pre-school age are not attending any ECD.

6. Public kindergartens are much more popular, than private kindergartens; rather a large number of children attend some type of alternative pre-school. In general, the attendance of pre-school educational institutions is quite intensive in terms of hours, spent there, and regularity of attendance. Children from urban areas are twice more likely to attend pre-school educational institutions. At the same time, children in rural areas and children from poor households attend kindergartens more regularly. More respondents with higher education send their children to ECD, at the same time those, who have jobs, twice as much send their children to ECD.
7. There is lack of open and easy access to pre-school both in terms of entry and admission obstacles. Share of dissatisfied with kindergartens accessibility is bigger among poor households. It is twice easier to arrange a child to kindergarten in rural areas, than in urban ones. The most common reason for non-admission is absence of places in kindergartens. The most common obstacles for admission refer to bureaucratic nature of the process, such as having to spend a lot of time for arranging the child's admission, as well as the large amount of documents and references, requested by the institution.
8. Corruption-related mechanisms, such as a request of special permission from community leader or a request for presents/payments, are still widely spread. At the same time, the access to kindergartens is facilitated through a range of informal mechanisms, such as the engagement of third parties/intermediaries, etc. There is a kind of pre-conditioned selection and limited access of certain families to enter kindergarten.
9. One of the most serious problems, regarding the quality of kindergartens in Armenia, is irregularity of operations. This indicator is especially high in rural communities. Though in average, estimates for quality of services are satisfactory, services of providing knowledge and school readiness is estimated lower, than other aspects of ECD.
10. Total expenses, related to ECD, are higher for urban areas, than for rural ones. Within total expenses, costs, related to still existing informal payments and presents, are not too big. Though, in rural areas several times less money is spent for informal payments, utensils and other purposes, than in urban areas.
11. Exclusion Rate for children of age from 3 to 6 across Armenia is 32.7%. Children from rural areas are more likely to be excluded, than those from urban areas. More than 1/3 of excluded families made some attempts to enroll their children in pre-school institution. Hence exclusion is not a subjective choice of the family, but an outcome of the situation and consequences, such as unavailability of kindergartens in the area, not meeting parents' requirements and non-admission to kindergarten. Access to pre-school education is limited not because of parents' negative perceptions or lack of awareness, but because of insufficient resources, possessed by the state and regional budgets for offering services.
12. Among admission obstacles, the most significant are overload of public kindergartens and long registration lists, which result in corruption-related mechanisms, such as bribes, involvement of third parties and intermediaries, non-tolerant or rude attitude of the staff and headmasters towards the applicants. Additional obstacles for parents from poor families are being created by kindergarten headmasters, which result in withdrawing the children from the institution on parent's own free will.
13. The most vulnerable group, among excluded from pre-school, is the group of children with disabilities. Around 1/5 of respondents have negative attitude towards possibility for children with special needs or disabilities to attend their child's group or kindergarten. There is an

important tendency showing that the more kindergartens adopt inclusive education programs, the more people shift to positive perceptions on inclusiveness. Families, having children with disability, experience a lot of entry and admission obstacles. The older generation is more oriented to hide problems of the family from community and to keep the child with disabilities isolated at home. Among other challenges, families of children with disabilities face a lot of additional expenses and obstacles, not referring to pre-schools directly, but indirectly related to ECD in terms of access to medical treatment and rehabilitation services. The study revealed a lot of cases of corruption, improper treatment and poor accessibility at outpatient care departments and other medical care institutions, responsible for disability assessment and free medical procedures.

The picture, drawn by this report, points towards a number of complementary recommendations:

- concentrate efforts on making **pre-school education maximally inclusive**, which could encourage the enrolment of children with special education needs;
- establish **mechanisms to systematically detect, recruit and enroll** children, drop-out from pre-school education for different reasons by respective ministries and implementing agencies;
- increase the number and types of **alternative pre-school services, especially for children under 4 years old**, through stronger cooperation among implementing agencies, donor organizations and community authorities, combining efforts in assessment and analysis of the undertaken projects;
- create coordination mechanisms to ensure proportional cooperation among the relevant line ministries and cross-agency cooperation, enforcing all actors to share experiences, targeting efforts and creating a **comprehensive share-point database** for monitoring of the field;
- elaborate a matrix for complex measures to be carried out for mitigation of exclusion rate among children of pre-school age through better control of service quality, training of staff, other measures, not requiring allocation of additional funds;
- focus on assistance for poor families in reduction of expenses, related to ECD, in order to increase enrollment of children from poor families;
- increase awareness of advantages of inclusive pre-school education within society, utilize mechanisms of recruitment of children with disabilities by means of ECD alternative services;
- establish parent collaboration hubs/centers for families, having children with disabilities of pre-school age in close geographical areas in order to combine efforts, vehicles and budgets of families through co-assistance schedules and cost-efficient budget planning.

Annex 1. Survey Questionnaire

Available on the website:

www.armenia.savethechildren.net/resources

Annex 2. Sample Implementation List

Table 1. Distribution of Sample Across Settlements

PROVINCE		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Armavir	Armavir	10	24,4	24,4
	Metsamor	10	24,4	24,4
	v. Mrgashat	5	12,2	12,2
	v. Khorunk	5	12,2	12,2
	v. Nalbandyan	6	14,6	14,6
	v.Zartonk	5	12,2	12,2
	Total	41	100,0	100,0
Aragatsotn	Ashtarak	10	23,8	23,8
	Talin	10	23,8	23,8
	v.Karbi	5	11,9	11,9
	v.Agarak	5	11,9	11,9
	v.Voskepat	6	14,3	14,3
	v. Aghtsk	6	14,3	14,3
	Total	42	100,0	100,0
Ararat	Artashat	10	23,8	23,8
	Vedi	10	23,8	23,8
	v.Taperakan	5	11,9	11,9
	v. Goravan	5	11,9	11,9
	v. Aygepat	6	14,3	14,3
	v.Dashtakar	6	14,3	14,3
	Total	42	100,0	100,0
Gegharkunik	Gavar	10	23,8	23,8
	Vardenis	10	23,8	23,8
	v.Lchashen	5	11,9	11,9
	v.Yeranos	5	11,9	11,9
	v.Tsagkar	6	14,3	14,3
	v.Chkalovka	6	14,3	14,3
	Total	42	100,0	100,0

ASSESSMENT ON ACCESS OF CHILDREN TO PRE-SCHOOL EDUCATION IN ARMENIA

Kotayk	Hrazdan	10	23,3	23,3
	Byureghavan	10	23,3	23,3
	v.Meghradzor	5	11,6	11,6
	v.Kotayk	6	14,0	14,0
	v.Artavaz	6	14,0	14,0
	v.Aramus	6	14,0	14,0
	Total	43	100,0	100,0
Lori	Vanadzor	10	23,8	23,8
	Tumanyan	10	23,8	23,8
	v.Lernapat	5	11,9	11,9
	v.Gugark	5	11,9	11,9
	v.Arjut	6	14,3	14,3
	v.Pambak	6	14,3	14,3
	Total	42	100,0	100,0
Shirak	Gyumri	10	23,8	23,8
	Artik	10	23,8	23,8
	v.Tufashen	5	11,9	11,9
	v.Kaps	5	11,9	11,9
	v.Hayrenyants	6	14,3	14,3
	v.Azatan	6	14,3	14,3
	Total	42	100,0	100,0
Syunik	Kapan	10	23,8	23,8
	Sisyan	10	23,8	23,8
	v.Syunik	5	11,9	11,9
	v.Shaki	5	11,9	11,9
	v.Chapni	6	14,3	14,3
	v.Tsghuk	6	14,3	14,3
	Total	42	100,0	100,0
Tavush	Ijevan	10	24,4	24,4
	Ayrum	10	24,4	24,4
	v. Khashtarak	5	12,2	12,2
	v.Haghartsin	5	12,2	12,2
	v.Hovk	6	14,6	14,6
	v.Lusahovit	5	12,2	12,2
	Total	41	100,0	100,0

ASSESSMENT ON ACCESS OF CHILDREN TO PRE-SCHOOL EDUCATION IN ARMENIA

Vayots Dzor	Yeghegnadzor	10	23,8	23,8
	Vayk	10	23,8	23,8
	v.Getap	5	11,9	11,9
	v.Malishka	5	11,9	11,9
	v.Areni	6	14,3	14,3
	v.Zedea	6	14,3	14,3
	Total	42	100,0	100,0
Yerevan	Avan	16	8,9	8,9
	Arabkir	7	3,9	3,9
	Davtashen	16	8,9	8,9
	Erebuni	16	8,9	8,9
	Kentron	22	12,2	12,2
	Malatia-Sebastia	16	8,9	8,9
	Nor-Nork	16	8,9	8,9
	Nork-Marash	32	17,8	17,8
	Shengavit	6	3,3	3,3
	Kanaker-Zeytun	16	8,9	8,9
	Ajapnyank	17	9,4	9,4
	Total	180	100,0	100,0

Table 2. Distribution of Sample by Types of Settlements Across Provinces

PROVINCE		Frequency	Percent
Armavir	Urban	20	48,8
	Rural	21	51,2
	Total	41	100,0
Aragatsotn	Urban	21	50,0
	Rural	21	50,0
	Total	42	100,0
Ararat	Urban	20	47,6
	Rural	22	52,4
	Total	42	100,0
Gegharkunik	Urban	20	47,6
	Rural	22	52,4
	Total	42	100,0

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Kotayk	Urban	20	46,5
	Rural	23	53,5
	Total	43	100,0
Lori	Urban	20	47,6
	Rural	22	52,4
	Total	42	100,0
Shirak	Urban	20	47,6
	Rural	22	52,4
	Total	42	100,0
Syunik	Urban	20	47,6
	Rural	22	52,4
	Total	42	100,0
Tavush	Urban	20	48,8
	Rural	21	51,2
	Total	41	100,0
Vayots Dzor	Urban	20	47,6
	Rural	22	52,4
	Total	42	100,0
Yerevan	Urban	180	100,0

Table 3. Distribution of Respondents by Gender

Gender		Frequency	Valid Percent
	Male	131	21.9
	Female	468	78.1
	Total	599	100.0

Table 4. Distribution of Respondents by Age

Respondent's Age		Frequency	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	18-35	378	63.2	63.2
	36-45	98	16.2	79.4
	46-60	90	15.1	94.5
	61 and more	33	5.5	100.0
	Total	599	100.0	

Table 5. Respondents' Relationship to child

The relationship to the 3-6 years-old child/children /if several, match the closest relationship/.				
		Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Mother/father	491	82.0	82.0
	Sister/brother	6	1.0	83.0
	Grandmother/grandfather	99	16.5	99.5
	Other relative	3	.5	100.0
	Total	599	100.0	

Table 6. Respondents' Education Level

Your education level					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Primary/secondary	265	44.2	44.4	44.4
	Secondary vocational/incomplete higher/student	146	24.4	24.5	68.8
	Higher/post-graduate (Ph.D., other)	186	31.1	31.2	100.0
	Total	597	99.7	100.0	
	Refused to Answer	2	.3		
Total		599	100.0		

Table 7. Respondents' Employment

Do you have a job?					
		Frequen- cy	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Yes	185	30.9	30.9	30.9
	No	414	69.1	69.1	100.0
	Total	599	100.0	100.0	

Table 8. Respondents' Occupation

If yes, then your job is...					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Everyday job with a monthly salary	149	24.9	80.5	80.5
	One-time short-term job	7	1.2	3.8	84.3
	Periodical short-term job	24	4.0	13.0	97.3
	Other	5	.8	2.7	100.0
	Total	185	30.9	100.0	
Missing	Do not have job	414	69.1		
Total		599	100.0		

Table 9. Field of Employment

In which sector are you employed?					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Public administration and defense	26	4.3	14.1	14.1
	Education	53	8.8	28.8	42.9
	Healthcare and social support services	20	3.3	10.9	53.8
	Culture, entertainment and recreation	2	.3	1.1	54.9
	Other services	18	3.0	9.8	64.7
	Crafts	4	.7	2.2	66.8
	Agriculture, forest and fish production	11	1.8	6.0	72.8
	Mining industry	1	.2	.5	73.4
	Electricity, gas, water supply	6	1.0	3.3	76.6
	Construction	11	1.8	6.0	82.6
	Wholesale and retail	11	1.8	6.0	88.6
	Transportation and vehicles	4	.7	2.2	90.8
	Telecommunication and IT	3	.5	1.6	92.4
	Finances and insurance, real estate activity	6	1.0	3.3	95.7
	Other	8	1.3	4.3	100.0
	Total	184	30.7	100.0	
Missing	Refuse to answer	1	.2		
	Do not have job	414	69.1		
	Total	415	69.3		
Total		599	100.0		

Annex 3. Additional Data Aggregation Tables
Table 1. How intensive is your contact with the field of education?

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Not too intensive: as a parent I'm aware of what is going on in kindergarten my child attends	233	38.9	40.8	40.8
Moderately intensive: as a parent I'm actively involved in all events in the kindergarten	278	46.4	48.7	89.5
Very intensive: I work/study in the field of education/science	60	10.0	10.5	100.0
Total	571	95.3	100.0	

Table 2. Absolute Enrolment Rate based on data, collected from regional self-government agencies for 2016

	Province	Total number of children under 6	Number of children under 6 enrolled in pre-school institutions	Enrolment Rate
1	Armavir	*	6226	**
2	Ararat	20017	9371	46.8%
3	Aragatsotn	5838	2486	42.6%
4	Gegharkunik	*	5042	**
5	Lori	11590	6186	53.4%
6	Shirak	*	*	**
7	Vayots Dzor	1988	1176	59.2%
8	Tavush	*	4392	**
9	Syunik	*	4405	**
10	Kotayk	*	7318	**
11	Yerevan		32.628	**
Average Enrolment Rate				50.5%

*Refused to obtain the data. **Calculation impossible.

Table 3. Enrolment among targeted children (% from sample children in the province).

Province	no one is attending any type of pre-schooling	at least one child is attending any type of pre-schooling	Total
Armavir	24,5%	75,5%	100.0%
Aragatsotn	22,9%	77,1%	100.0%
Ararat	28,0%	72,0%	100.0%
Gegharkunik	48,1%	51,9%	100.0%
Kotayk	59,1%	40,9%	100.0%
Lori	53,2%	46,8%	100.0%
Shirak	34,7%	65,3%	100.0%
Syunik	31,8%	68,2%	100.0%
Tavush	61,7%	38,3%	100.0%
Vayots Dzor	31,1%	68,9%	100.0%
Yerevan	17,3%	82,7%	100.0%

Table 4. In your opinion, should enrollment of 3-6 years old children into pre-school institutions be...

	Frequency	Percent
Mandatory for everyone	369	61.6
Optional/preferable, but not mandatory	221	36.9
Not mandatory for all children	9	1.5
Total	599	100.0

Table 5 How often does the child attend any pre-school education service during a week?

	Frequency	Valid Percent from Enrolled	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Every day	412	89.4
	3-4 days per week	49	10.6
	Total	461	100.0

Table 6. Hours spent in pre-schools?

	Frequency	Valid Percent from Enrolled	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Less than 2 hours	20	4.4
	From 2 to 4	53	11.6
	More than 4 hours	383	84.0
	Total	456	100.0

Table 7. Distribution of regularity of attendance across urban/rural settlements

How often does the child attend?			Cluster coder		Total
			Urban	Rural	
Every day	Count	297	115	412	
	% within Cluster	87.4%	95.0%		
3-4 days per week	Count	43	6	49	
	% within Cluster	12.6%	5.0%		
Total		Count	340	121	461
			100%	100%	

Table 8. Distribution of hours spent at pre-schools across urban/rural settlements

Hours spent in PSES?			Cluster coder		Total
			Urban	Rural	
Less than 2 hours	Count	18	2	20	
	% within Cluster	5.4%	1.7%		
From 2 to 4	Count	32	21	53	
	% within Cluster	9.6%	17.4%		
More than 4hours	Count	285	98	383	
	% within Cluster	85.1%	81.0%		
Total		Count	335	121	456
		%	100%	100%	

Table 9. Did you face any obstacles while arranging the child to kindergarten by urban/rural settlements?

	Did you face any obstacles while arranging the child to kindergarten?			Total
	Yes		No	
Cluster coder	Urban	17.2%	82.8%	100.0%
	Rural	6.3%	93.7%	100.0%
Total		14.6%	85.4%	100.0%

Table 10. What kind of kindergarten does the child attend? * Did you face any obstacles while arranging the child to kindergarten? by public/private kindergartens

	Did you face any obstacles while arranging the child to kindergarten?			Total
	Yes		No	
What kind of kindergarten does the child attend?	Private	10.5%	89.5%	100.0%
	Public	14.8%	85.2%	100.0%
Total		14.6%	85.4%	100.0%

Table 11. Does the kindergarten operate on regular basis during the whole year? By RA provinces

Yes		Does the kindergarten operate on regular basis during the whole year?		Total
		No		
PROVINCE CODER	Armavir	46,4%	53,6%	100.0%
	Aragatsotn	85,2%	14,8%	100.0%
	Ararat	75,8%	24,2%	100.0%
	Gegharkunik	78,3%	21,7%	100.0%
	Kotayk	100,0%		100.0%
	Lori	95,0%	5,0%	100.0%
	Shirak	81,5%	18,5%	100.0%
	Syunik	100,0%		100.0%
	Tavush	94,4%	5,6%	100.0%
	Vayots Dzor	96,4%	3,6%	100.0%
	Yerevan	94,6%	5,4%	100.0%
Total		87,9%	12,1%	100,0%

Table 12. Please, estimate the material and technical supplies of the kindergarten by the following criteria – by type of kindergarten

What kind of kindergarten does the child attend?		Building conditions	Heating	Food	Belongings	Utensil	Toys and didactic materials	Anti-infection and sanitary-hygienic measures	Sport hall	Play-ground	Computer and technical means
Private	Mean	4.26	4.47	4.13	4.21	4.26	4.26	4.37	3.80	4.07	3.43
	Minimum	2	3	2	3	1	3	3	1	2	1
	Maximum	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5
Public	Mean	3.95	4.29	4.50	4.03	4.05	4.08	4.31	4.04	3.86	3.48
	Minimum	1	1	2	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
	Maximum	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5

Table 13. Please, estimate the quality of kindergarten services? / by type of kindergarten

Please, estimate the quality of kindergarten services	What kind of kindergarten does the child attend?					
	Private			Public		
	Mean	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Minimum	Maximum
Providing knowledge and school readiness	4.47	3	5	4.40	1	5
Developing speech, communication	4.42	3	5	4.50	1	5
Teaching behavior norms, upbringing	4.32	2	5	4.54	1	5
Providing life skills and logical thinking	4.47	2	5	4.55	2	5
Developing creativity	4.42	2	5	4.57	1	5
Physical education, forging	4.16	2	5	4.48	1	5

Table 14. Inclusive education is being implemented in some kindergartens. How would you react, if children with special needs or disabilities attended your child’s group or kindergarten? /By having job/

Do you have a job?		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Yes	Positively: all children have the same rights to education	108	58.4	76.6	76.6
	Neutral: it does not matter for our child	14	7.6	9.9	86.5
	Negatively: those children need special care and should attend special institutions	19	10.3	13.5	100.0
	Total	141	76.2	100.0	
	Refuse to answer	1	.5		
	Do not attend	43	23.2		
	Total	44	23.8		
		185	100.0		
No	Positively: all children have the same rights to education	182	44.0	72.5	72.5
	Neutral: it does not matter for our child	31	7.5	12.4	84.9
	Negatively: those children need special care and should attend special institutions	38	9.2	15.1	100.0
	Total	251	60.6	100.0	
	Refuse to answer	1	.2		
	Do not attend	158	38.2		
	Total	163	39.4		
	Don’t know, Don’t remember	4	1.0		
	414	100.0			

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Table 15. Inclusive education is being implemented in some kindergartens. How would you react, if children with special needs or disabilities attended your child’s group or kindergarten? /By gender/

Gender		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Male	Positively: all children have the same rights to education	63	48.1	84.0	84.0
	Neutral: it does not matter for our child	6	4.6	8.0	92.0
	Negatively: those children need special care and should attend special institutions	6	4.6	8.0	100.0
	Total	75	57.3	100.0	
	Do not attend	55	42.0		
	Refuse to answer	1	.8		
	Total	56	42.7		
		131	100.0		
Female	Positively: all children have the same rights to education	227	48.6	71.6	71.6
	Neutral: it does not matter for our child	39	8.4	12.3	83.9
	Negatively: those children need special care and should attend special institutions	51	10.9	16.1	100.0
	Total	317	67.9	100.0	
	Do not attend	145	31.0		
	Refuse to answer	1	.2		
	Total	150	32.1		
	Don't know, Don't remember	4	.9		
	467	100.0			

Table 16. Total monthly expenses on pre-schools per child across urban/rural settlements

Urban	N	Valid	290
		Do not attend	91
	Mean		5088.4138
	Minimum		0.00
	Maximum		80000.00
Rural	N	Valid	92
		Do not attend	126
	Mean		4220.7609
	Minimum		0.00
	Maximum		18000.00

Table 17. Distribution of HHs informal payments by provinces

Province	Informal Payments to kindergartens	Percent from HH enrolled in kindergarten
Armavir	Don't pay anything	89.3
	Pay at least 1 dram	10.7
	Total	100.0
Aragatsotn	Don't pay anything	96.3
	Pay at least 1 dram	3.7
	Total	100.0
Ararat	Don't pay anything	93.9
	Pay at least 1 dram	6.1
	Total	100.0
Gegharkunik	Don't pay anything	78.3
	Pay at least 1 dram	21.7
	Total	100.0
Kotayk	Don't pay anything	88.2
	Pay at least 1 dram	11.8
	Total	100.0
Lori	Don't pay anything	100.0
Shirak	Don't pay anything	92.6
	Pay at least 1 dram	7.4
	Total	100.0
Syunik	Don't pay anything	71.4
	Pay at least 1 dram	28.6
	Total	100.0
Tavush	Don't pay anything	83.3
	Pay at least 1 dram	16.7
	Total	100.0
Vayots Dzor	Don't pay anything	82.1
	Pay at least 1 dram	17.9
	Total	100.0
Yerevan	Don't pay anything	72.6
	Pay at least 1 dram	27.4
	Total	100.0

Table 18. If the children do not attend kindergarten, who takes care of them?

		Frequen- cy	Percent	Valid Per- cent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Mother/father	178	29.7	86.4	86.4
	Grandmother/grandfa- ther	26	4.3	12.6	99.0
	Other	2	.3	1.0	100.0
	Total	206	34.4	100.0	

Annex 4. Verbatim Quotations for “Other” Option in Semi-Open-Ended Questions

No of question in questionnaire	Semi-Open-Ended Questions	Most popular responses for «Other» option
7	If not mandatory, in which cases?	if there is lack of financial means, if parents do not have job
8	Many families in Armenia do not send their children to kindergartens, bringing them up at home. What is the main reason for that, in your opinion?	lack of education of parents, limited set of mind of parents, lack of confidence towards teachers, home-based care conditions are better
14	Why the child/children does/do not attend any preschool educational institution?	it is early for our child to go to kindergarten, the child is younger than 4 years old and will go to kindergarten after 4
22	If yes, then what kind of obstacles?	there were no free places, registration address related, community registration related