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Country Review on the Social Dimension in higher education in Armenia

Background Report

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Contents

1	General country information	4
1.1	Population.....	4
1.2	Economic situation	5
1.3	Youth unemployment.....	7
1.4	Educational attainment	9
2	Legal Framework of higher education.....	11
2.1	Development of the legal framework of higher education	11
2.2	By-laws and steering documents	12
2.3	Higher education financing.....	16
2.4	Underrepresented Groups.....	17
3	Organisation of Armenian (higher) education	19
3.1	General description of the education system in Armenia	19
3.1.1	Higher education entrance qualification	20
3.2	Study framework	22
3.2.1	Study costs	22
3.2.2	The student allowance system.....	23
3.2.3	Student support	25
3.3	Student body	26
3.3.1	Higher education enrolment.....	26
3.3.2	Socio-economic background	31
3.3.3	Gender equality.....	32
3.3.4	Age distribution.....	34
3.3.5	Student mobility.....	35
3.4	Graduation and transition	35
4	Literature.....	37
4.1	Laws and other legal documents	39
4.2	Online sources	40

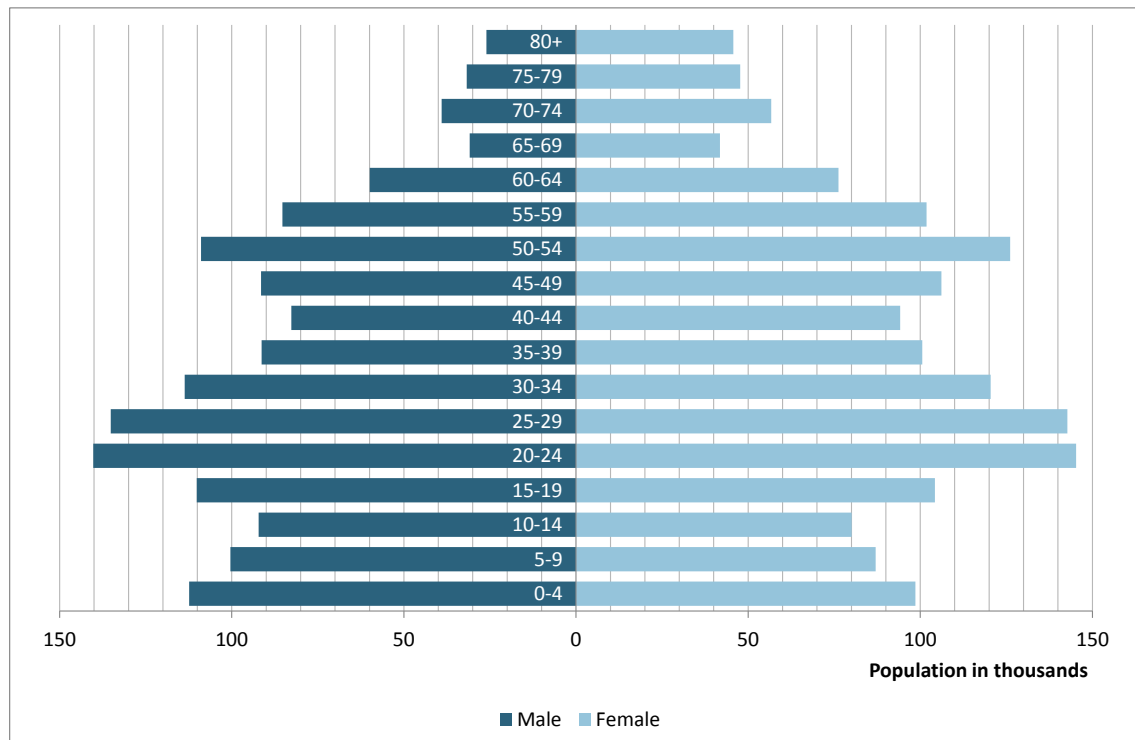
1 General country information

The Republic of Armenia is located in the South Caucasus region, bordering Georgia in the North, Azerbaijan in the East, Iran in the South and Turkey in the West. It covers a mountainous area of 29,743 km². The national currency is Armenian Dram (AMD), where 1 EUR≈545 AMD (www.rate.am, 17/02/2015).

1.1 Population

About 3 Million People live in Armenia, almost two thirds of which live in urban areas. One third of the total population lives in the capital Yerevan. The population number remained constant over the past decade, which accounts equally for urban and rural areas. 48% of the population are males, 52% are females. The average age of the population is 34 years (NSS 2013, based on RA Population Census 2011).

Figure 1: Population pyramid of Armenia.



Source: NSS 2013, based on RA Population Census 2011.

On the whole, Armenia's population is ageing due to decreasing birth rates on the one hand and high emigration rates on the other. In the intra-census period from 2001 until 2011, the net migration balance was -320,000, which accounted for 10% of the population in 2002 (MPC 2013). The majority of emigrants headed for the US and Russia. A significant part of Armenian emigrants is under 24 years old (OECD 2011), nearly 80% are between 15 and 49 years old (MPC 2013). Thus, brain drain and ageing society are among the development challenges Armenia faces (OECD 2011).

98% of Armenian population is considered to be of Armenian ethnicity. Subsequently, 98% of the population speak Armenian (CIA 2014, estimation from 2011). The predominant religion in Armenia is Armenian Apostolic with adherents accounting for 93% of the population.

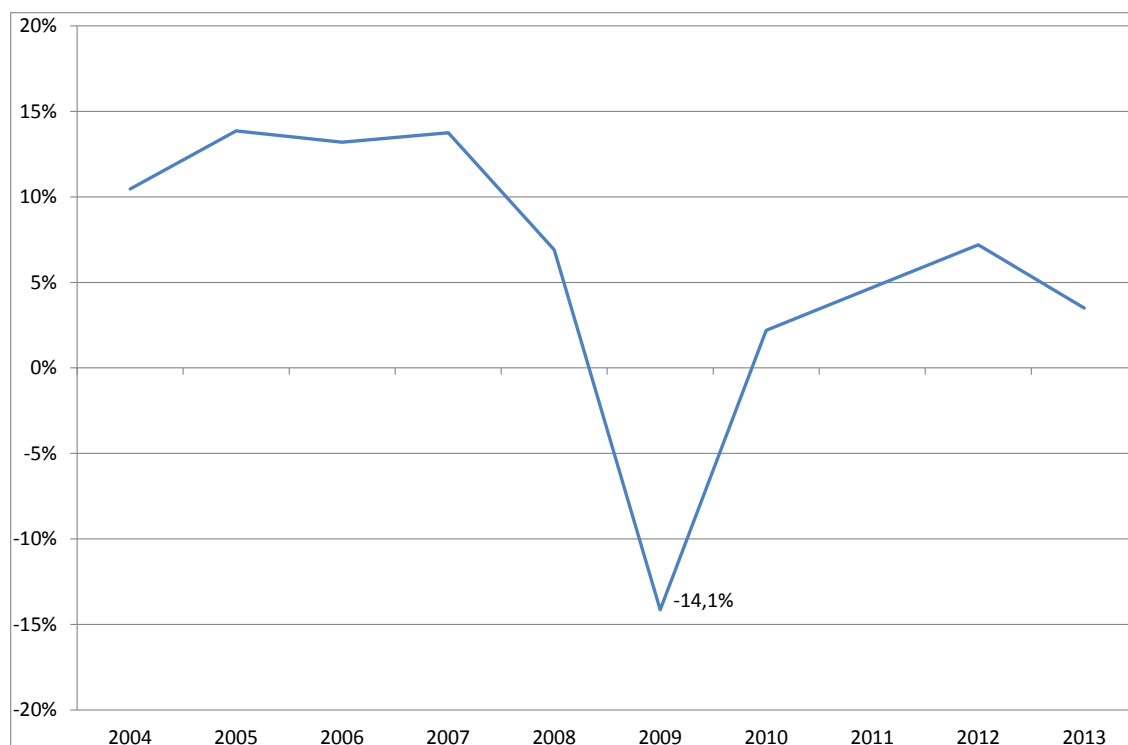
Armenia has a very low share of foreign citizens – only 0,7% of the total population have a foreign citizenship, 7% of the total population in 2011 were born foreigners.¹ Whereas the share of foreigners (according to citizenship) hardly varies with age, the share of persons that were born foreigners is remarkably higher among older age groups (7% among up to 9 year olds, 11% among 50-59 year olds and 16% among those aged 70 or older, UN 2013).

1.2 Economic situation

In the 1990ies Armenian government fostered privatisation and price liberation policies in order to disengage the national economy from Soviet institutional structures and to stimulate economic growth. This policy has proved successful as it brought about an average of 13% of economic growth between 2002 and 2007.

The global economic crisis struck Armenia in 2008, causing an economic decline of 14% in the following year (World Bank 2014). From 2010, the growth rate amounted 2% and was followed by an again uprising trend in the following years (2.2% in 2010 and 4.7% in 2011). 2012 recorded a rather significant growth of 7.2%. However, this was not sufficient for reaching the level of 2008 (NSS; The World Bank 2013).

¹ As stated in the Armenian Constitution (1995), citizenship is granted according to Jus sanguinis.

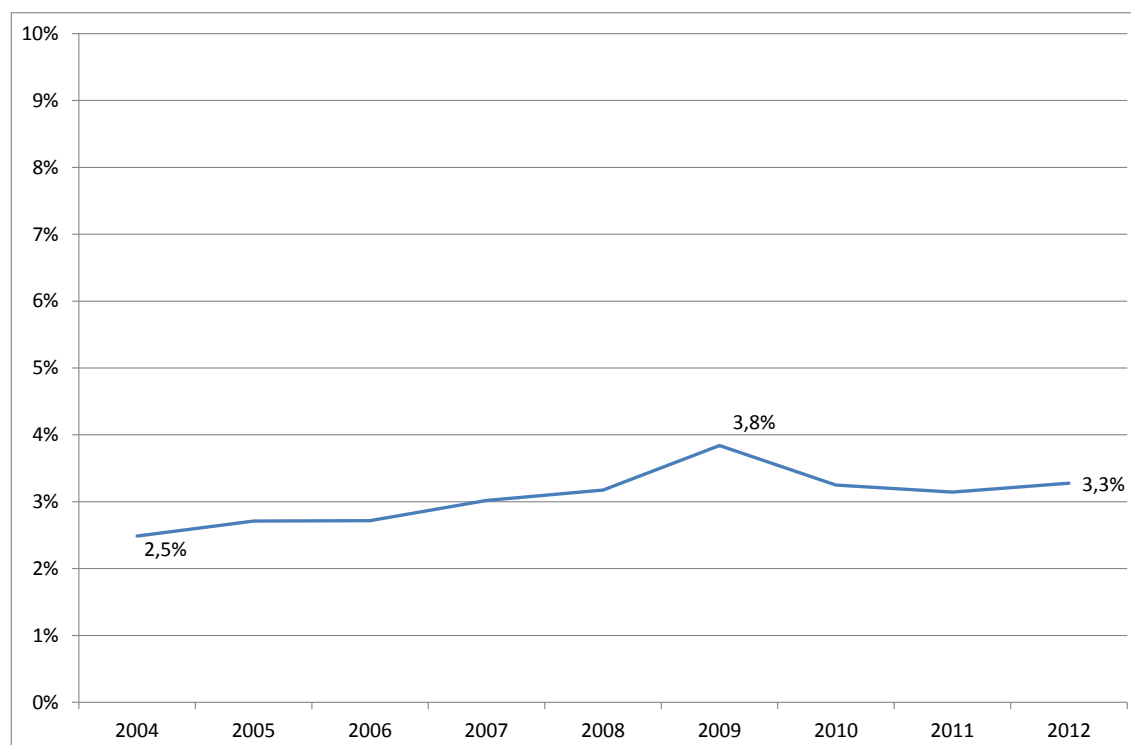
Figure 2: GDP development based on constant 2005 USD

Source: World Bank Data 2014.

In 2009, the poverty rate increased significantly by 17.4% (or by 4.8 percentage points) between 2008 and 2012 and amounted to 32.4% in 2012. Although the poverty rate decreased in 2012 in comparison with 2011 (from 35% to 32.4%), both poverty rate and its severity were still at a higher level than in 2008. In 2012, 2.8% of the population were “extremely poor” and 13.5% were “very poor”. In 2012, poverty indicators did not significantly differ by urban (32.5%) and rural (32.1%) communities (NSS 2013; The World Bank 2014).

In general, remittances both from non-emigrants (e.g. seasonal workers) as well as from emigrants and the Armenian diaspora play an important role for the economic situation in Armenia. The latest data the PL4SD research team could rely on shows that in 2003 the net remittance flow of non-emigrants alone amounted to USD 106,000,000. Additional remittances were noted from emigrants, amounting to USD 9,000,000 and USD 174,000,000 from the Armenian diaspora. Hence, remittances accounted for 10% of the total GDP in 2003 (Roberts et al./ USAID 2004).

In comparison to the development of the overall economy in regard to the global crisis, the expenditure on education as a share of the GDP has remained relatively constant in the past decade. As Figure 3 shows, the share of the GDP dedicated to education rose constantly until 2009. After the crisis struck, the share has been lowered again, but still higher than before 2008.

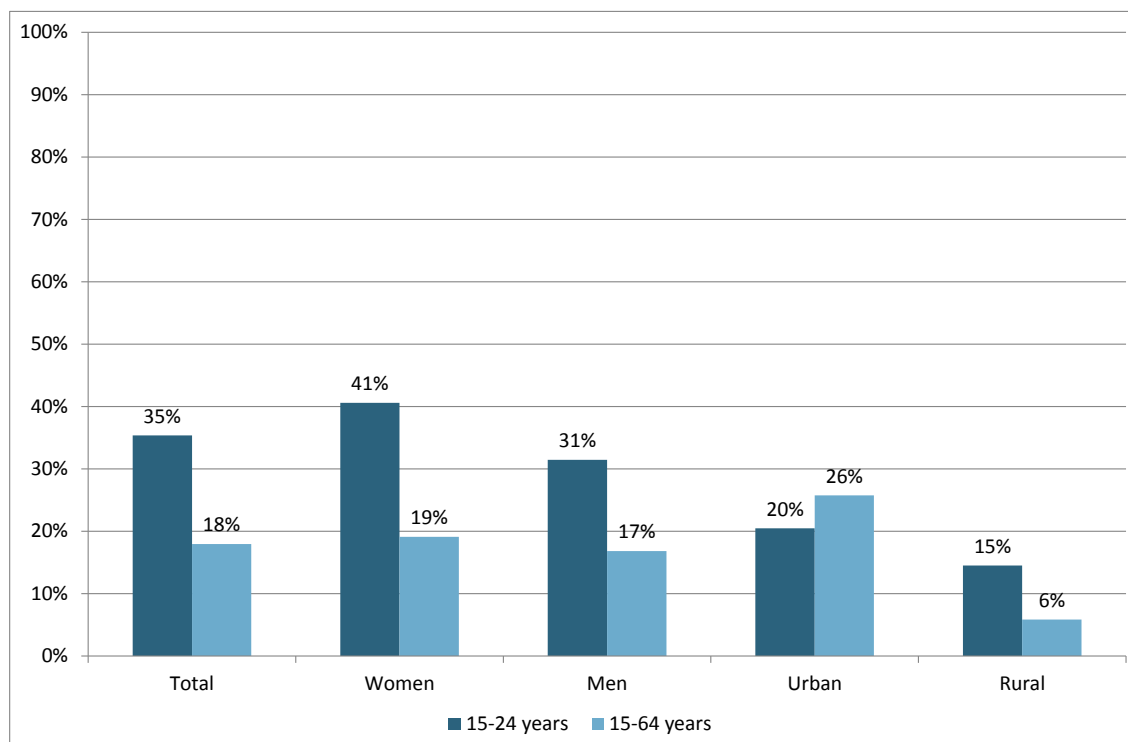
Figure 3: Expenditure on Education as % of GDP

Source: World Bank Data 2014.

1.3 Youth unemployment

The general unemployment rate in Armenia is 17% in 2012, hardly varying by gender (NSS 2013). Among persons of 15-24 years of age, about one third is unemployed.

Young women thereby are more often struck by unemployment than young men (41% vs. 31%). Remarkably, in rural areas the unemployment rate among young people is more than twice as high as among people of 15-64 years. Thus, youth unemployment is almost as frequent as in urban areas, whereas in the total working population unemployment is four times higher in urban areas than in rural areas.

Figure 4: Unemployment rate of youth and total population by gender and regional residence

Source: NSS 2013.

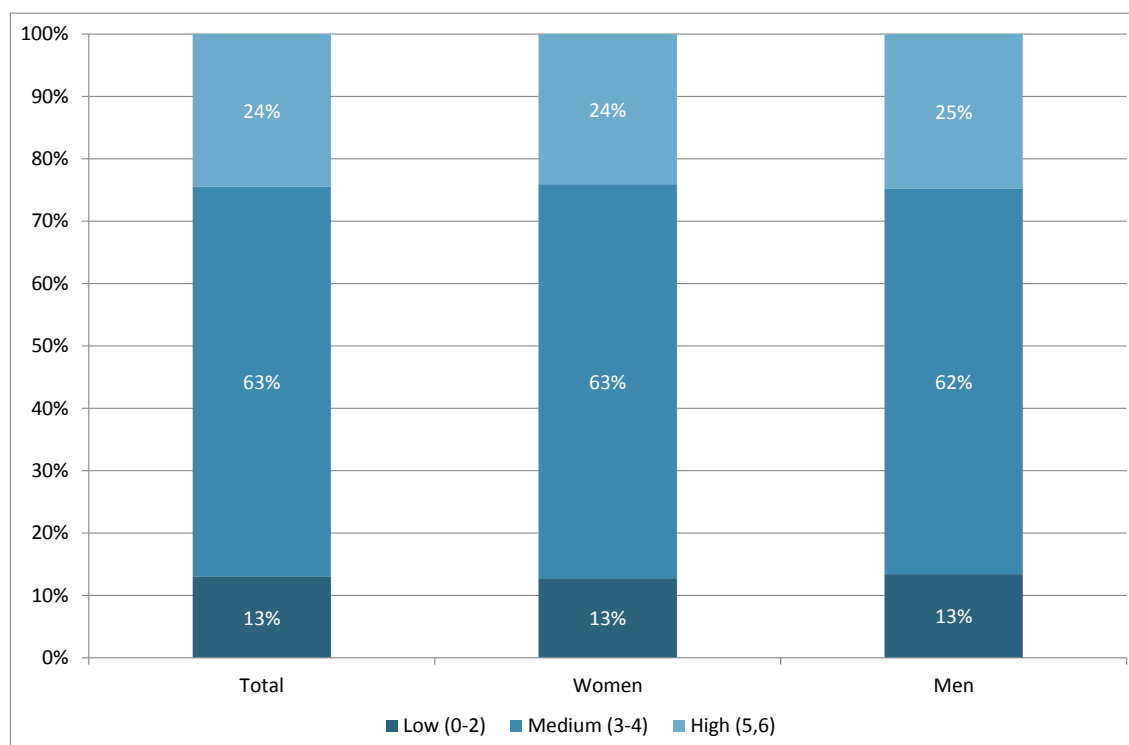
Youth employment has been identified as a Millennium Development Goal (MDG) to be achieved until 2015. Besides general support for jobseekers provided by the State Employment Services Agency (SESA), there are other top-down measures explicitly focussing on youth employment. In 2006, the Ministry of Employment and Social Affairs established the Youth Vocational Orientation Center, providing career leading informative-consulting services for pupils and jobseekers alike. Besides others, the Ministry of Sport and Youth Affairs implements activities related to youth employment and so does the Ministry of Education and Science, fostering tertiary education (UNDP 2012).

Secondary and tertiary education have been identified as crucial regarding the improvement of youth's employment situation. Therefore, the Armenian government seeks to improve the overall quality of the education system and support young professionals (ibid). This includes implementation of reforms in accordance with the Bologna principles, such as the national qualification framework, financing strategy for universities, student mobility and a credit system for research in post-graduate education. Providing youth with opportunities to receive quality education, including activities to strengthen professional education, the development of a vocational orientation system and lifelong learning structures are targeted interventions to foster youth employment. Thereby identified challenges are, among others, lack of public financing for education, especially for highly demanded vocations, vocational curricula not fitting the labour market demands and an insufficient knowledge about vocations of young people (ibid).

1.4 Educational attainment

Armenia's literacy rate among adults as well as youth lies at 99%, according to the National Statistical Service (OECD 2011). Two thirds of the population at the age of 25 years or older have at least attained upper secondary education, one quarter holds a tertiary education degree. On OECD average, nearly one third of the population aged 25-64 years has attained tertiary education (OECD 2013).

Figure 5: Educational attainment of people aged 25+ years in Armenia



Source: NSS Population Census 2011.

Interestingly, there are no gender differences regarding educational attainment. Also the OECD country review (OECD 2011) reports a good education of women, bearing potential for professional development. However, women account for 49% (2009) of the officially employed population, whereas they account for 52% in the whole population, and only 80% of employed women are working full time (ibid.). Female academics are more likely to be unemployed than male academics: Within the economically active population, 14% of male and 20% of female academics are unemployed (NSS Population Census 2011).

30% of the employed population holds a higher education degree. The highest percentage of persons who attained tertiary education occurs in the following areas of economy: “Financial and insurance activities” (82%), “Activities of extraterritorial organizations and bodies” (82%), “Professional, scientific and technical activities” (75%), “Education” (72%) and “Information and Communication” (71%). With less than 7%, the economic area of “Agriculture, forestry and fishing” employs the lowest share of persons with a higher edu-

cation degree while it is the area that holds the highest share of the employed population in total (37%; *ibid*).

In urban areas, a higher share of the economically active population holds a higher education degree (39%) than in rural areas (13%). In urban areas, it is significantly less likely to be unemployed for academics: 24% of the unemployed are academics (in comparison to 39% academics in the economically active population). In contrast, holding a higher education degree in rural areas has remarkably less impact on unemployment: 10% of the unemployed population in rural areas have a higher education degree, while this share is 13% in the total economically active population in rural areas (*ibid*).

2 Legal Framework of higher education

2.1 Development of the legal framework of higher education

Education is constitutionally considered a right for “everyone” and thus not restricted to Armenian citizens (NA RA 1995, Article 39). One of the basic tasks of the state is to support the development of free of charge higher and vocational education (Article 48). The constitution defines basic education as compulsory, allowing the law to define a higher level of compulsory education. Furthermore, the right for free higher and other professional education institutions is guaranteed to all citizens on the basis of competition. The constitution also states the right for state support to institutions offering higher and professional education programmes as well as their students (Article 39). Generally, it is the parents’ right and duty to take care of their children’s education (Article 36). Beyond this, in Article 16 of the constitution, which states the right to liberty and security, it is written that a person may be deprived of or restricted his/her liberty amongst others “to establish educational control over a minor or to present him/her to the competent body”.

Within a decade after adoption of the Declaration of Independence in 1991, the Law on Education was developed and adopted in 1999 (NA RA 2011). It regulates all stages of education from pre-school to tertiary education. Parts of this law have then been repealed by the Law on General Education, adopted in 2009, and several other subsequent legislations on education such as the Law on Higher and Postgraduate Professional Education (adopted in 2004) or the Law on Preschool Education (adopted in 2005; UNESCO-IBE 2010/11).

Apparently, higher education is predominantly framed by the Law on Education (1999) and the Law on Higher and post-Graduate Professional Education (2004). Regarding the social dimension of higher education, the Law on Education (1999) determines (among others) that a certain number of students are provided with state-funded study places. Additionally, it prescribes that HEIs are obligated to provide additional free study places of an extent of at least 10% of non-state funded study places. The Law on Higher and post-Graduate Professional Education (2004) determines that the state provides student financial support such as full or partial refund of tuition fees, scholarships or loans. According to the Law, tuition fee refunds shall be provided to students who demonstrate high academic performance, are “socially insecure”, as well as to students from borderline or highland settlements. When looking at the latest amendments of the Law on Higher and post-Graduate Professional Education in 2014, it becomes apparent that the regulations regarding the social dimension are still in progress. Thus, the amendment dated May 19, 2014 (Law No.23) specifies socioeconomic groups of students who receive partial or full tuition fee reimbursement. The amendment regulates that HEIs have to provide at least 7% of the budget gained from tuition fees in form of full or partial tuition fee refunds to at least 10% of the students studying within non-state funded higher education. As a result, the share of students receiving full or partial tuition fee reimbursements could be raised to about 20%

of the total student population. The reimbursements are granted on the basis of academic performance and the socioeconomic status of the students. Amongst others, following groups may receive tuition fee reimbursement: Students who are socially disadvantaged, students without parental care, students with disabilities, students with children under one year of age, students within compulsory military service, and students with two or more siblings (under age or within education). Another amendment of the Law (Law No.82, June 21, 2014) extends the definition of foreign students who can't be charged higher tuition fees than students with Armenian citizenship. Amongst others, it now includes recognised refugees and ethnic Armenian citizens seeking asylum. The amendments from 2014 and their focus on socioeconomic criteria clearly show that Armenian policy efforts aim at strengthening the social dimension in higher education.

Armenia has adopted the Bologna Architecture of study curricula and implemented the two-cycle structure with approval of the Law on Higher and Postgraduate Professional Education in 2004. The new system actually started from the academic year of 2007/08. The growing attempt of adapting to European structures motivated international and national organisations to further reforms in higher education. Another example besides the implementation of the Bologna study structure is Armenia's effort towards implementing a comprehensive quality assurance system. Institutional quality assurance systems are considered the key to a change in higher education, which was also adopted by national policy makers. In 2008, an independent foundation for promoting quality in tertiary education was established, the Armenian National Quality Assurance Agency (ANQA). Moreover, also at institutional level, projects on quality assurance were conducted (Matei et al. 2013).

According to Estermann (2014) from the European University Association, institutional autonomy and freedom are one area that requires further attention and action. He states that in a European comparative perspective the level of autonomy is relatively low in Armenian higher education. As an example for this conclusion he points out that board structures are strongly regulated by public authorities and that rectors are formally employees of the state which indicates a strong reliance on election results. However, it has to be noted that this analysis is made from an external, central European perspective, and should be envisaged in the long run. In addition, it has to be noted that recent by-laws show strong attempts within Armenian higher education policy to introduce more standardised procedures to reduce arbitrariness and increase transparency (see chapter 2.2).

2.2 By-laws and steering documents

As stated above, the Law on Education (1999) and the Law on Higher and post-Graduate Professional Education (2004) determine the legal framework of higher education in Armenia. However, most of the recent changes have been implemented through several by-laws and steering documents in addition to existing laws with higher education relevance. These regulations are crucial in promoting change and reflect Armenia's strong effort towards improving quality of higher education and strengthening the social dimension in the higher education system. The comprehensive webpage of the Center for Education Pro-

jects PIU of the Armenian Ministry for Education and Science also shows strong efforts towards improving higher education and that a lively discourse about higher education takes place in Armenia. In order to give an insight into the legal framework, this chapter outlines the most important by-laws selected by the Ministry of Education and Science.² The following overview aims at elaborating in what regard these documents refer to the social dimension.³

Regulation of the student allowance and state scholarships, Government Decision-No.1183, July 27, 2006 and its amendment through Government Decision No.1323, October 10, 2012

This regulation from 2006 determines the distribution of student allowance and state scholarships. Three groups of students can obtain student allowance, i.e. a full refund of tuition fees: (a) Students who achieve good exam results (free study places are allocated through a rotation system which restarts the competition for free places each year), (b) students who meet specific socioeconomic criteria, and (c) students within fields of study that are defined as national priority. While the first (a) and the third (c) category of student allowance recipients do not take the social dimension into account, the social dimension is focused within the second (b) category. The following groups of students are eligible for receiving a full tuition fee refund: Students without parental care, students with disabilities, and students who are children of deceased or wounded soldiers. A partial refund of tuition fees can be granted to students whose parents are classified as financially vulnerable according to administrative statistics. In addition, higher education institutions are required to provide partial tuition fee refund to at least 10% of the students based on their academic performance and social need. The regulation defines groups of students, who are eligible to this partial refund based on social need. Among them are: Students from financially vulnerable families, students with one parent, two or more siblings, one or more siblings within paid education, students with parents with impairments, a child less than one year of age, and students from families of teachers in remote mountainous and border villages. Alongside the definition of student allowance recipients, the regulation determines the allocation of state scholarships as well. These scholarships are merit based and are granted to students who show excellent academic performance (e.g. through publishing) or social activity.

The regulation was amended in October 2012 through the Government Decision No.1323 that defines more specifically, who is granted state-funded study places based on the family vulnerability score (see chapter 3.2.3 for more detailed information).

² At this point the review team owes a depth of gratitude to the substantial support Zhanna Andreasyan, head of the higher education subcomponent of the Center for Education, has provided.

³ The documents presented in this chapter are only available in Armenian. Due to a lack of resources of personnel and time, the translation of the document has provisionally been conducted with google translator. In order to avoid translation or interpretation errors, only a short and general overview can be provided in this chapter. The author cannot be held responsible for any mistranslations.

Regulation of MA programme enrolment, Ministerial Decree (MoES) No.1193, December 6, 2007

This document regulates the procedure of distributing graduate study places to HEIs, as well as the process of student admission to graduate programmes. Master admission is built on a competitive basis and prioritises students who have demonstrated good academic performances, have published their work, etc. Through this regulation, Master admission is standardised to some extent and thus, arbitrariness in admission is avoided. As a result, students are provided with improved conditions and transparency, and uncertainties regarding admission procedures are reduced.

Regulation of part-time education enrolment, Ministerial Decree (MoES) No.1194, December 6, 2007⁴

This document determines the enrolment regulations for and the organisation of part-time education. The objectives of part-time education are to widen access and provide education opportunities to students who are employed or live in rural regions or abroad, and to improve educational technology. The admission procedure regarding part-time study places prioritises students without parental care, students with disabilities, and students who are children of deceased or wounded soldiers. Within part-time enrolment, each student is given an individual schedule each semester. In addition, the regulation determines technical support the HEIs have to provide to their part-time students (e.g. audio-visual and electronic learning material). Through this regulation, students belonging to underrepresented groups are supported and provided with flexible learning paths.

Ratification of the National Qualifications Framework, Government Decision No.332, March 31, 2011

The Armenian National Qualifications Framework was ratified in 2011. It determines eight levels of education and describes the required knowledge, skills and abilities of students at different levels. The Framework covers the levels of elementary (1), basic (2), primary vocational (3), secondary (4) and secondary vocational education (5), as well as first- (6), second- (7) and third-cycle higher education (8). This regulation reflects Armenia's efforts towards standardisation and improvement of a comprehensive education system. In addition, ratifying the framework shows a strong attempt towards further convergence with the European Higher Education Area.

Regulation of BA programme enrolment, Government Decision No.686, April 28, 2011

This regulation from 2011 defines the admission process for undergraduate programmes at public and private HEIs. The admission system is administered by the “National Assess-

⁴ This document has been provided only in Armenian. In the translation used for this report, the term “Հեռակաուսուցման” is translated synonymously as „part-time education“ or „distance learning“.

ment and Testing Centre” (NATC) and is based on external examinations that are controlled centrally and serve both as secondary school leaving exams and as higher education entrance qualification. The Government of the Republic of Armenia annually determines the number of study places for each HEI and each field of study. Admission to these study places is administered through the central examination on a competitive basis. Students are admitted to state-funded or to fee paying study places based on the test results and on the availability of their preferred study places. Several students are exempted from paying exam fees based on social criteria (Article 37). In addition, certain groups of students do not have to take the examination in order to be admitted to a higher education institution (Article 38). The regulation defines certain groups of students who are given an advantage in case of an equal score (e.g. graduates from vocational schools; Article 102). In addition, admission privileges (e.g. the privilege of being admitted to a state funded study place) are given to certain social groups such as students with disabilities, students without parental care, or students within compulsory military service (Articles 104-107)⁵. This clearly refers to the social dimension in higher education. The regulation helps to ensure a fair and transparent admission procedure and takes the social dimension into account. More detailed information about the admission procedure to Armenian HEIs is given in section 3.1.1.

Regulation of State Accreditation of the Educational Institutions providing professional educational programmes, Government Decision No.978, June 30, 2011
and

Approval of the Accreditation Criteria for Professional Education, Government Decision No.959, June 30, 2011

These regulations determine the accreditation process of higher education institutions and of programmes of study provided by them. The documents define the required criteria for both institutional and programme accreditation. Some of these criteria are of relevance in regard to the social dimension in higher education, such as a required “Focus on students”. Thus, institutions have to provide (amongst others) student advising and support services (e.g. special student career support services), mechanisms for promoting equitable recruitment, selection and admission procedures, and students’ involvement in university governance structures. An additional institutional requirement is “Societal Responsibility”, which includes higher education institutions’ accountability to the public. Regarding infrastructure, the institutions have to ensure a safe and secure environment, also considering special needs of students. With these requirements that have to be met in order to obtain accreditation, the social dimension in higher education is gaining importance.

⁵ Since the present translation of the regulation is of poor quality (translate.google.com), the admission advantages given to certain social groups can’t be described more detailed.

Regulation of the academic mobility of students, Government Decision No.1240, August 25, 2011

This document regulates international student mobility as well as mobility within Armenia (which includes changing degree programmes as well as transferring from one HEI to another). Candidates for international mobility programmes are selected based on their academic performance and language skills. International mobility programmes in Armenia include (among others) joint degree programmes, double degree programmes, inter-university cooperation, and one-year research internships. This regulation reflects Armenia's efforts towards fostering international student mobility and implementing Bologna principles within the higher education system.

Regulation of final certification of the graduates from Higher Educational Institutions, Ministerial Decree (MoES) No.1197, October 31, 2011

This regulation contains a standardisation of final exam procedures for higher education graduates. In order to graduate from an Armenian higher education institution, every contestant has to take both a final exam and complete a thesis or project that has to be defended as well. The document defines detailed regulations concerning the organisation of final testing. Through this standardisation, final exam procedures become more transparent and uncertainties for students are reduced.

Regulation of student's dismissal and readmission in the Higher Educational Institutions, Ministerial Decree (MoES) No.1242, November 17, 2011

The document defines criteria under which students may be expelled or may interrupt their studies, and conditions for a potential readmission. A student is expelled for inadequate academic progress (accumulating less than half of the required credits), violation of internal regulations of the HEI, or for not paying the tuition fees within the prescribed period of time. Students may interrupt their studies due to military service, their state of health, pregnancy and childbirth as well as childcare (for up to three years). This legal regulation that allows students to interrupt their studies in case of life events such as pregnancy is crucial regarding the social dimension in higher education. In such cases, the right for readmission is important to ensure retention and success of students who experience major life events or health issues.

2.3 Higher education financing

From mid-2000 until 2009 the expenditure on education in Armenia steadily increased. As a result of the economic crisis, the state expenditure had to be cut off in most sectors. Compared to the original budget for the education sector, the decrease in expenditure for education was 15%. Kataoka outlines that despite the economic recovery the total spending on education will continue declining (Kataoka 2013: 20). With 3.3% of GDP in 2012 the public expenditure of the education sector is low compared to international standards

(World Bank Data). About 9% of total government expenditure on education is allocated for higher education (UNESCO Institute for Statistics).

Thus, the share of state financing in HEI's budget is rather low and the main part of approximately 80-95% is derived from non-state revenues, primarily student tuition fees (Tempus 2012: 6; see chapter 3.2.1).

In the context of these issues, the government confirmed a higher education financing strategy in June 2011. The strategy targets a reform of students' financial assistance, a reform of higher education management, to integrate research and education and to encourage private investment in higher education (Tempus 2012: 6). Kataoka (2013) outlines the strategy's main target, which is making higher education financing more equitable, competitive and sustainable. Thus, the strategy proposes "to introduce a competitive innovation fund to support national development priorities and demand-driven projects, needs-based scholarships, and scholarships for national priority fields" (Kataoka 2013: 23). However, Kataoka points out that a substantial increase of the total public expenditure is necessary to improve education quality sustainably. One measure that aims at making higher education more equitable is the amendment of the Law on Higher and post-Graduate Professional Education dated May 19, 2014 (Law No.23). As elaborated in chapter 2.1, the amendment regulates that students belonging to specific socioeconomic groups receive partial or full tuition fee reimbursement. Thus, the share of students receiving full or partial tuition fee reimbursements based on socioeconomic need could be raised.

2.4 Underrepresented Groups

In an OECD country review of Armenia from 2011 (52), it is outlined that regional and income-based inequalities regarding the education system are still an issue in Armenia. The report stresses equality concerns regarding low-income families who can't effort to fund necessary private lessons for their children in order to enable them to pass university exams. Residents from rural areas are half as likely to attend tertiary education as urban residents, as the number of people with incomplete elementary education is higher in rural areas. Taking also the relatively high youth employment rate in rural areas into account, regional development is crucial for countering inequalities related to residence. However, regional development is already one focus within the MDG framework (UNDP 2012).

According to the Bologna implementation report 2009-2012, the Armenian higher education policy has identified several underrepresented groups: Children without parental care, individuals with disabilities, children of killed or deceased military servants, rural population from high mountainous regions⁶, and ethnic minorities. In order to foster their participation, the government provides some support measures, including "partially covering tuition fees, paying lodging for the students coming from rural regions, healthcare, organizing lei-

⁶ In the Law on Higher and post-Graduate Professional Education (2004) students from „borderline and highland settlements“ are identified as underrepresented group. It is assumed that “rural population from high mountainous regions“ are different descriptions for the same group.

sure, providing counselling and information” (Bologna implementation report 2009-2012). In addition, low participation of socio-economically disadvantaged students in higher education is generally described as a major issue in the Armenian higher education policy (e.g. Kataoka 2013: 22).

Recent legal regulations clearly focus on the social dimension and aim at increasing participation of underrepresented groups in higher education. For instance, the amendment to the Law on Higher and post-Graduate Professional Education (2004) from May 19, 2014 (Law No.23; see chapter 2.1) regulates financial support to certain groups of students, such as students who are socially disadvantaged, students without parental care, students with disabilities, students with children under one year of age, students within compulsory military service, and students with two or more siblings (under age or within education). Through this new regulation, the share of students obtaining state-funded study places might increase significantly (see chapter 2.1).

3 Organisation of Armenian (higher) education

In Armenia, several types of HEIs coexist (according to National Tempus Office in Armenia www.tempus.am). The institutional framework of higher education is regulated by the Law on Education from 1999 as follows:

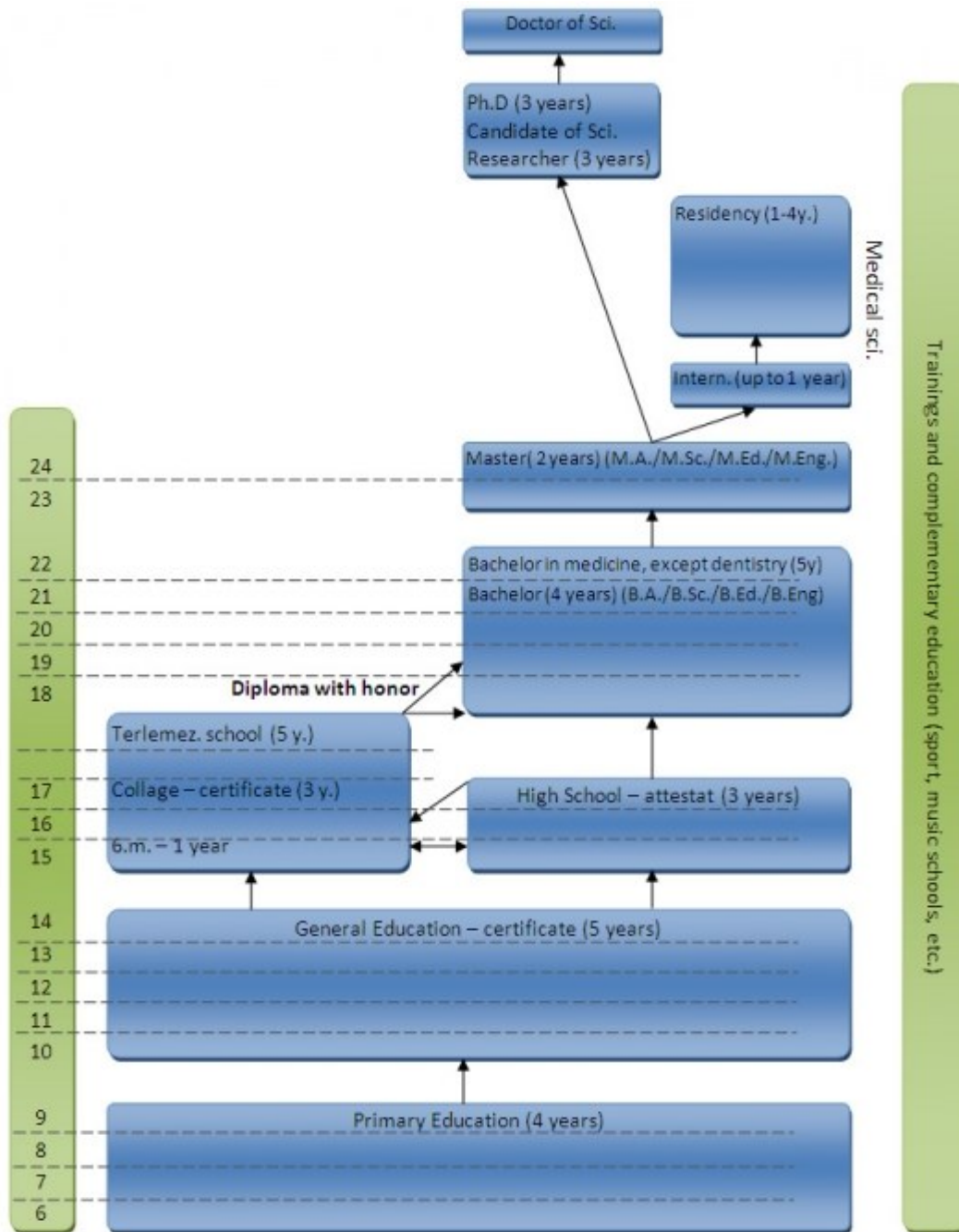
- Universities** a higher education institution, the activities of which are aimed at organising higher, post-graduate and supplementary education, fundamental scientific research and studies in different directions of natural science, sociology, science and technology, and culture;
- Institutes** a higher education institution implementing professional and post-graduate education programmes and scientific studies in a number of directions of science, economy and culture;
- Academies** a higher education institutions the activities of which are aimed at developing education, science, technology and culture in a particular field; which carries out the preparation and re-qualification of highly qualified specialists in a certain branch (sector) and implementation of postgraduate education programmes;
- Conservatories** a higher education institution, the activities of which are aimed at preparation, upgrading of specialists and implementation of post-graduate education programmes in the field of music.

3.1 General description of the education system in Armenia

The current National Curriculum for General Education was introduced in 2006/07 and fully operates since 2007/08 (UNESCO-IBE 2010/11). It introduced a 12 year general education curriculum. Compulsory education thus starts at the age of six and is completed after 9 years of schooling (primary education, grades 1-4 and lower secondary education, grades 5-9). After general compulsory education, grades 10-12 can be attended in high school. One may choose vocational or general upper secondary education which may be general or vocational (specialised professional) schools (ibid, RA Ministry for Education and Science 2010).

Higher education is organised along the Bologna principles. Bachelor Programmes usually last four years, except for BA of medicine, which takes five years to complete. A Masters' degree lasts two years (4 years in case of medicine). After completion of five years of study in a given field, the degree of 'specialist with diploma' is awarded. Three more years of study after completion of a masters' programme normally lead to the degree of 'candidate of science' (aspirantura), after completion of which 2-3 year doctoral studies can be attained in a research institution of the Academy of Science.

Figure 6: Education System of Armenia



Source: www.armenic.am; National Information Center for Academic Recognition and Mobility.

3.1.1 Higher education entrance qualification

The Law on Higher and post-Graduate Professional Education (2004) establishes the required qualification of at least secondary general education for admission to first-cycle programmes at state and private higher education institutions. According to the Bologna implementation report 2009-2012, access to higher education is possible with a vocational certificate as well. 76% of all students enter higher education with a secondary school leaving certificate, 23% with a vocational certificate and 0.2% with an International Baccalaure-

ate diploma (Bologna implementation report 2009-2012). In the academic year 2012/13, about 21,000 students entered the higher education system (NSS 2013).

The design and approval of admission procedures legally is within the area of the government's competence. Since 2008 the admission procedure is based on external examinations that serve both as secondary school leaving exams (Matura exams) and as higher education entrance qualification. Today, the admission system and its procedures are regulated by the Government Decision No.686 (April 2011). The admission system is administered by the "National Assessment and Testing Centre" (NATC) and covers all state HEIs and most private institutions. The external examinations are controlled and scored centrally - beyond the influence of secondary or higher education institutions. According to Zabulionis (2012), the implementation of a centralised admission system was a necessary policy measure to reduce arbitrariness in the area of higher education and to obtain reliable and universal information about students' achievements.

The main idea behind the centralised admission system is to have one single "entrance door" to all higher education institutions and programmes. As part of the admission procedure, all applicants fill out a list of study programmes they want to apply to - ranked by their individual preferences. The application has to contain information about preferred study programmes and HEIs as well as the preferential mode of tuition-fee coverage (self- or state-funded, see chapter 3.2.1 for more information about tuition fees and state-funded study places). Everyone who participates in the admission procedure has the right to apply to one or more HEIs for a maximum of 8 self-paid and 2 state-funded study places. The admission is based on the examination results on the one hand and on the availability of the preferred study places on the other hand. On the basis of merit, the applicants are admitted to the study place available that is ranked highest by the applicant (Zabulionis 2012: 5).

Zabulionis (2012) raises two issues about the common admission system: First, Zabulionis is worried that in the long run the format of testing may have a negative impact on education quality in secondary schools. The admission exams and hence the educational preparation for it is focused on multiple choice tests, which has a minor educational value than other testing formats according to Zabulionis.

The second concern stressed by the author is the existence of additional specific admission exams at several HEIs and study programmes besides the centralised examinations. Applicants to HEIs in the area of Art, Music, Sports, etc. (e.g. Yerevan State Academy of Fine Arts) have to undergo additional testing as well as applicants to particular study programmes at other HEIs such as Journalism, Architecture, Computer Art Design, etc. These examinations are administered by the HEIs in question - separated from the common admission system. This practice undermines the idea of "one single entrance door" to all HEIs and study programmes. According to Zabulionis (2012), applicants at the moment have to decide at the beginning of the admission procedure whether they want to apply to a

programme that requires additional testing or to programmes within the common admission system. Especially for students who apply to a study programme that requires additional exams but don't get admitted, problematic situations may arise because they lose their chance of getting admitted at all. According to Zabulionis, these problems should be addressed by a slight revision of the current system.

Despite the fact that the common admission system does not cover several study programmes, Zabulionis (2012) underlines the quality of the current system. According to the report, the admission process is “fair and transparent, leaving almost no room for corruption”.

Concerning the social dimension, the law also addresses the issue of underrepresented groups in the regulation of admission. Hence, there are special admission regulations for the group of students from borderline and highland settlements. According to The Law on Higher and post-Graduate Professional Education (2004), the state shall provide free education to this underrepresented group (see chapter 3.2.3) and an admission procedure separated from general admission.

Admission to Master programmes is regulated through a ministerial decree (No.1193) from 2007 (see chapter 2.2). Through this regulation, Master admission is standardised to some extent and thus, students are provided with transparency, and uncertainties regarding admission procedures are reduced. Admission to graduate programmes is built on a competitive basis and prioritises students who have demonstrated good academic performance, such as scientific publications, etc.

3.2 Study framework

3.2.1 Study costs

Public HEIs' budgets are allocated by private funding on the one hand - mainly based on student tuition fees - and public funding in terms of a student allowance system (i.e. state-funded study places) on the other hand (Kataoka 2013: 19f). However, the major component of HEI's budgets is allocated by fee-paying students: According to Zabulionis (2012), estimations show that about 10% of total study places are state-funded.

Tuition fees

The tuition fee level for fee-paying students is set freely by each HEI without any legal upper limit. Correspondingly, the tuition fee level is rather high compared to international standards. According to Zabulionis (2012), the annual tuition fees amount to AMD 200,000 to 700,000 (EUR 360-1,250). In order to relate these numbers to indicators of the national economy: GDP per capita, PPP amounted to 7,400 international Dollar in 2012. Unlike in other European countries the tuition fees at public HEIs are substantially higher than at private institutes (Avetisyan/ Kyurumyan 2012: 7).

Considering Yerevan State University for a more recent example, the current tuition fees for a first year Bachelor programme in the academic year 2013/14 range from AMD 400,000 (AMD 320,000 for part-time studies) up to AMD 800,000 (AMD 640,000 for part-time studies). In some professions, the fees decrease from the second year of study. In most of the fields the fees for Bachelor studies in the first year are AMD 400,000. Higher fees can be found in professions like international relationships, economics, Roman and German philology or eastern studies, and the highest fees of AMD 800,000 are set at the faculty of law.⁷

The level of tuition fees does not reflect the real education costs of a particular study programme but is described as “marked based” – as example, the fees are considerably higher for popular study programmes like Law or Economics than for programmes in the area of technology (Zabulionis 2012: 7).

3.2.2 The student allowance system

By means of the concept of student allowance, the government defines the number of study places for each public higher education institution and field to be state-funded every year (Center for Education Projects PIU). A Government Decision (No.1183) from 2006 regulates the distribution of student allowance. Three groups of students can obtain student allowance, i.e. a full refund of tuition fees: (a) Students who achieve good exam results, (b) students who meet specific socioeconomic criteria, and (c) students within fields of study that are defined as national priority. Despite the efforts to support socioeconomically disadvantaged students, only 6.9% of students receiving government allowance in 2009 were from the lowest income quintile, whereas about 32% were from the highest quintile (Hovhannisian/Gharagozyan 2012: 18f). The total number of students receiving student allowance is rather low and in addition, the main part of student allowance is merit based, hence only a very limited number of students profit by financial support based on social need. However, the situation has improved thanks to efforts that have been made in recent years towards strengthening the social dimension within the student allowance system.

Every year, the government makes a decision about the distribution of state-funded study places to institutions and study programmes. For each state-funded study place a fixed amount is transferred to the HEI in question for the purpose of reimbursing tuition fees (Zabulionis 2012: 7).⁸ In the Law on Education (1999) it is established that HEIs have to provide free study places to at least 10% of the students in each field of study.

As stated above, the distribution of state-funded places to HEIs and study programmes aims at supporting specialties that are specified as important for the national economy and

⁷ At <http://www.y-su.am/files/6.2.1%202014-15.pdf> (access on December 2, 2014) the latest tuition fee levels of Yerevan state university can be found in Armenian language.

⁸ Following Zabulionis (2012), the remit was ADM 300,000 (about EUR 540), while the tuition fees ranged from AMD 200,000 to 700,000.

regional development (e.g. Mathematics, Agriculture, IT and Science, Pedagogics). On the other hand, popular programmes for instance in the area of Law and Economics deliberately get less state support because there are constantly more applicants than available study places. Since the study programmes in question are not defined as priority areas of the labour market it is justified to not extensively support students in that field. As an example, only 3 to 8% of newly admitted students at universities of Economics received state-funded places - in comparison to the average of about 10% of state-funded places in 2012 at public HEIs. From the perspective of social equity it has to be emphasised that there are very limited chances for students from low income families to pursue the study programmes in question (Zabulionis 2012: 6ff).

Despite the attempts to support certain fields of study and areas of the economy through the student allowance system, one major issue of the higher education financing system is the rather weak link between the higher education system and the labour market. According to the website of the Center for Education Projects PIU, the distribution of state-funding does not reflect the demand for graduates in prioritised areas of the national economy. In order to support national development priorities, efforts are made to develop profound estimations of the potential demand for graduates in the priority sectors of economy as a basis for purposeful distribution of state-funding (EV Consulting 2012).

As stated above, the level of self-paid tuition often is higher than the fixed amount of a state-funded place. It seems that from an economic perspective it is therefore more profitable for some HEIs to have a large share of fee-paying students. Problematic situations arise especially at HEIs where many planned self-paid places are not filled eventually. Hence, in such situations the HEI in question loses large amounts of financial resources and the impact of public underfunding increases even more (Zabulionis 2012: 6ff).

Another issue that is discussed in many reports is the missing link between the level of state funding and tuition fees per study place on the one hand and the real costs on the other hand. Therefore the Ministry of Education and Science has started a process of estimating the real costs of each study programme. These estimations are planned to serve as foundation for more efficient distribution of state-funding (Zabulionis 2012: 7f). Furthermore, a report presented to the Center for Education Projects PIU (Avetisyan/Kyurumyan 2012) emphasises the necessity of elaborating a sound methodology of calculating the level of student tuition fees. According to the report, the implementation of a consistent method should be mandatory for every HEI that receives state funding.

Student allowance based on social need

As stated above, the student allowance system is not exclusively based on merit but also takes social factors into account. Students belonging to the following socioeconomic groups are eligible for receiving a full tuition fee refund: Students without parental care, students with disabilities, and students who are children of deceased or wounded soldiers. A partial refund of tuition fees can be granted to students whose parents are classified as

financially vulnerable according to administrative statistics (Government Decision No.1183, 2006). This category of student allowance is based on the “Family vulnerability score” that was developed by the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs and is already used in Armenian social policy (Zabulionis 2013: 26). According to Zabulionis (2013: 22), the family vulnerability system is a reliable and trustable national system to evaluate students’ social needs. Full or partial compensation of tuition fees is granted to students who are “socially vulnerable” and reach a certain grade level. Every year the Ministry of Education and Science determines a minimal score of the average of cumulative grade points that has to be achieved to be eligible. The minimum level of the family vulnerability score that is necessary for eligibility is annually determined by the government. As Table 1 shows, the extent of tuition fee reimbursement depends on the respective score points. As an example, students whose vulnerability score is four points higher than the marginal score determined by the government receive a 50% refund, whereas students whose score is 16% higher receive a full refund (Government Decision No.1183, 2006; Hovhannisian/Gharagozyan 2012).

Table 1: Extent of tuition fee reimbursement based on the family vulnerability score

Vulnerability score, points exceeding the marginal score defined by the government	Refund rate
5 or less	50%
5-10	60%
10-15	70%
15-20	80%
Higher than 20	100%

Source: Government Decision No.1183, 2006

It has to be noted that the Government Decision in question is not based solely on the criteria of social need, but on the principle of merit as well. Students who do not achieve the required average of cumulative grade points defined by the government are not eligible and therefore lose the prospects of obtaining financial support. This appears to be relevant not least because not every student who is in need actually obtains the support. According to Zabulionis (2012), a Government Decision (No.1323, 2012) that is an amendment of the Government Decision discussed before (No.1183, 2006) regulates that at least 1,000 students receive a tuition fee refund based on social vulnerability in 2013, increasing to 2,500 recipients in 2015.

3.2.3 Student support

The amendment of the Law on Higher and post-Graduate Professional Education dated May 19, 2014 (Law No.23) is crucial regarding student support. It specifies socioeconomic groups of students who may receive partial or full tuition fee reimbursement. The amendment regulates that HEIs have to provide at least 7% of the budget gained from tuition fees in form of full or partial tuition fee refunds to at least 10% of the students studying within non-state funded higher education. As a result, the share of students receiving full or partial tuition fee reimbursements either by the state or by the HEIs could be raised to

about 20% of the total student population. The reimbursements are granted on the basis of academic performance and the socioeconomic status of the students. Amongst others, following groups may receive tuition fee reimbursement: Students who are socially disadvantaged, students without parental care, students with disabilities, students with children under one year of age, students within compulsory military service, and students with two or more siblings (under age or within education).

In addition to student support in form of tuition fee reimbursement, students with good performances can be granted a stipend. According to the materials⁹ presented on the website of the Center for Education Projects PIU, most stipend recipients are students who obtain student allowance too. The average amount of these merit-based stipends is AMD 5,000 per month (about EUR 9). Due to its relatively small size the stipends have no major impact on accessibility of higher education. However, it constitutes a not inconsiderable share of the public higher education expenditures. Therefore, the Center for Education Projects PIU¹⁰ emphasises the importance of considering social equity in this aspect of financial student support.

The Armenian higher education system does not have a student loan system. Only a few commercial banks provide short-term loans, but the terms are mostly not eligible for low income families. There have been efforts made by the government to develop a student loan scheme throughout the last decade but it has not been established yet (The World Bank 2009/Center for Education Projects). Within the Second Education Quality and Relevance Project (APL2) in Support of the Education Quality and Relevance Program, the establishment of a student loan system that provides students with the opportunity to obtain financing on favourable conditions has been considered one of the main obstacles in the reform of the higher education financing system since 2011 (The World Bank 2009: 39).

3.3 Student body

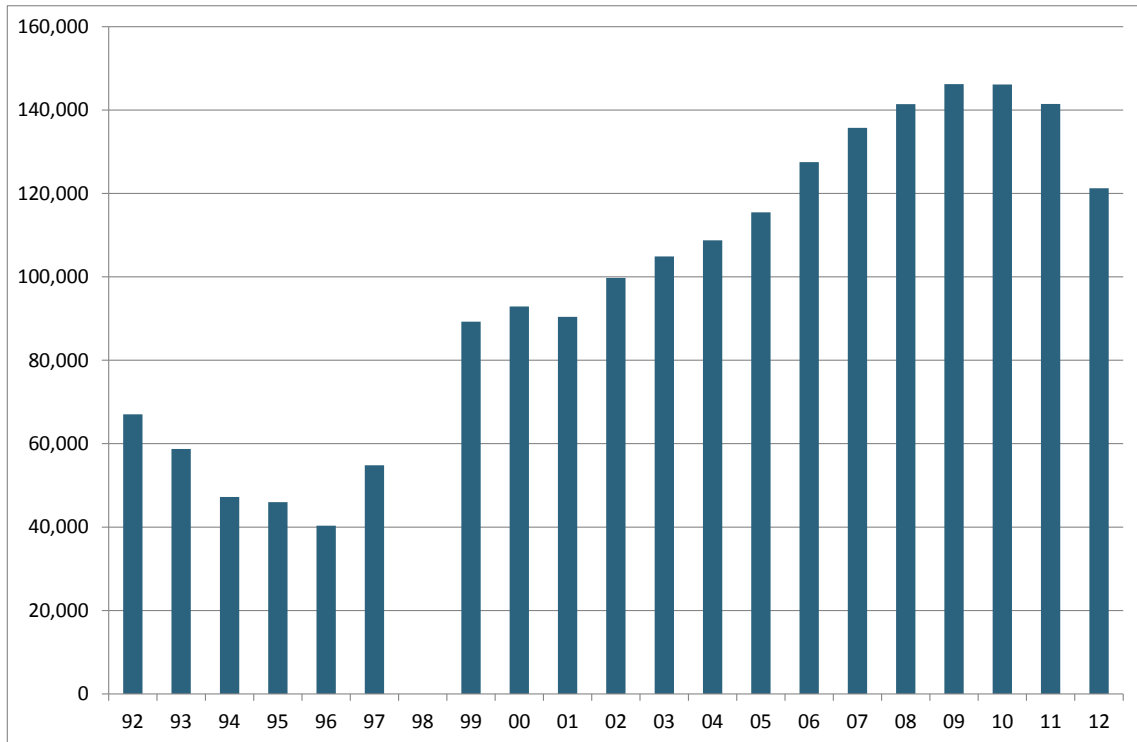
3.3.1 Higher education enrolment

According to the UNESCO Institute for Statistics, the gross enrolment ratio amounted to 46% in 2012. The total number of students enrolled at higher education institutions amounted to 121,000 in 2012. As Figure 7 shows, in the past two decades the number of students in tertiary education has been increasing steadily until 2009. The enrolment evolved from 67,000 students in 1992 into 100,000 students in 2002 and into 146,000 students in 2009. In 2010 the number of students started to decline (141,000 in 2011 and 121,000 in 2012 as stated above).

⁹ <http://www.cfep.am/en/strengthening-the-capacity-to-implement-a-sustainable-financing-system>

¹⁰ See results of the Education Quality and Relevance Second Project implemented by the Center for Education Projects PIU with the assistance of the World Bank
<http://www.cfep.am/en/strengthening-the-capacity-to-implement-a-sustainable-financing-system>

Figure 7: Student numbers, 1992-2012

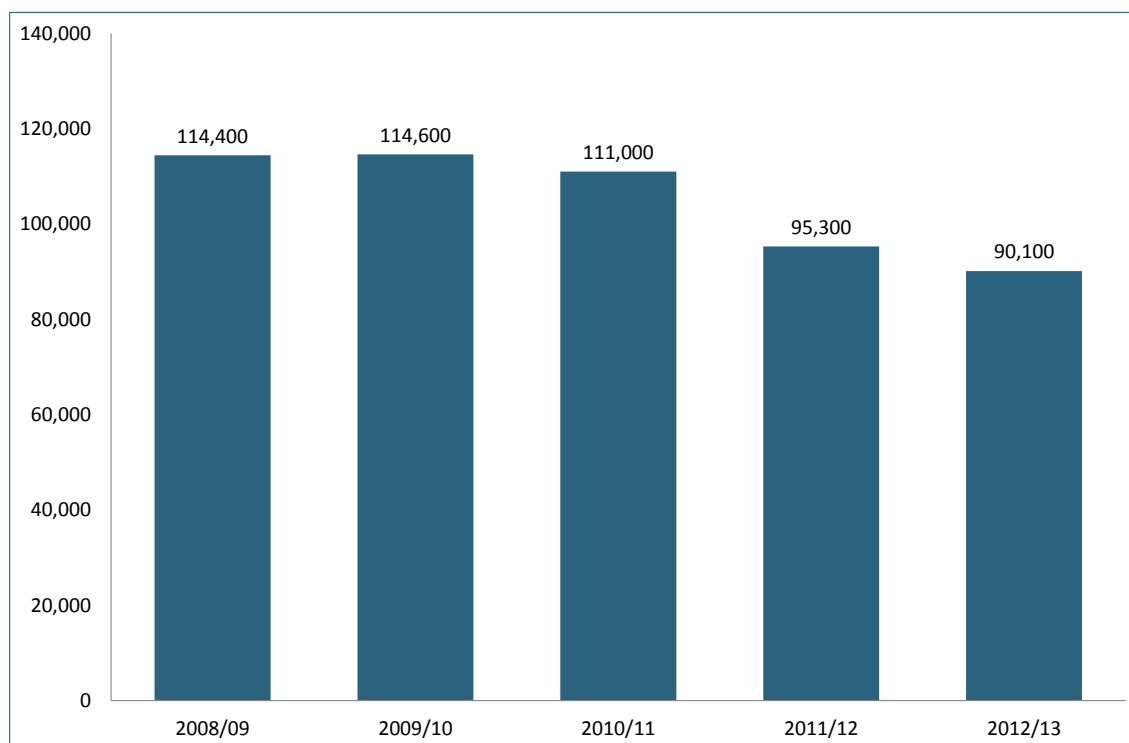


Source: UNESCO Institute of Statistics

Note: No data for 1998 available

The National Statistical Service solely provides data about enrolment to public higher education institutions, not about enrolment to all HEIs (public and private). However, these data show the decline of enrolment as well (from 115,000 students in 2009 to 90,000 students in 2012).

Figure 8: Students at public HEIs, 2008/09-2012/13

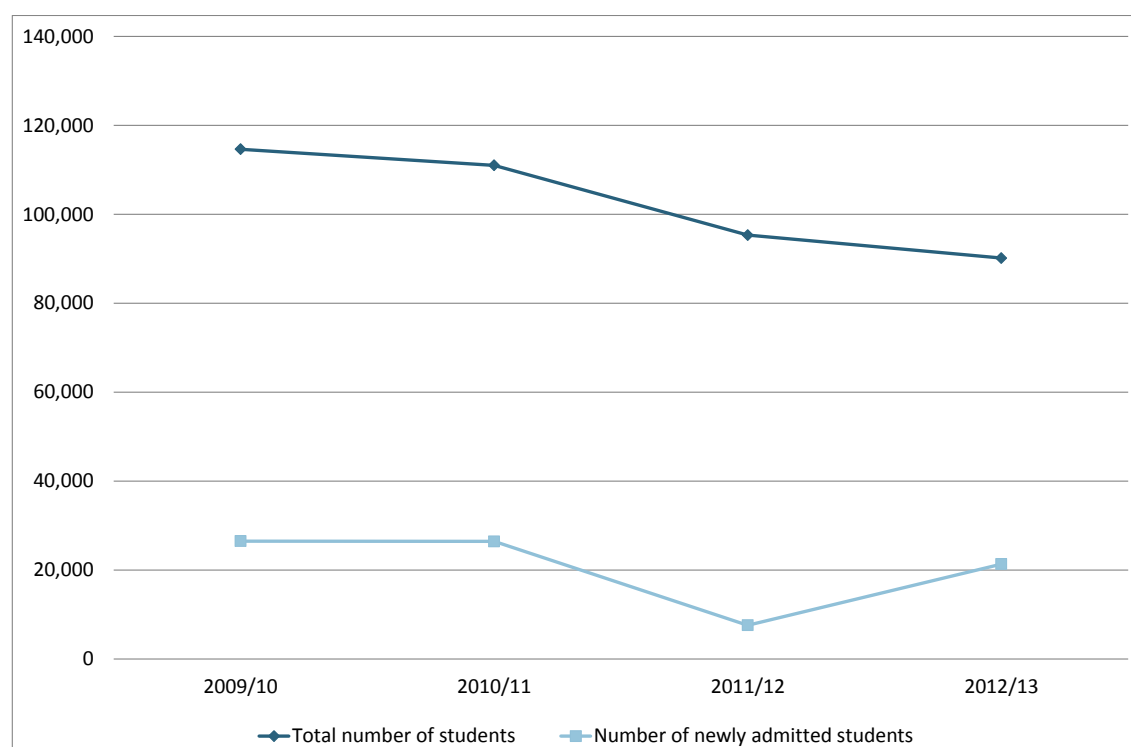


Source: *Statistical Yearbook of Armenia (NSS 2013)*

Using the mentioned UNESCO data (whole number of students in 2012: 121,000) and NSS data provided in the Statistical Yearbook (number of students at public HEIs in 2012: 90,000) about student enrolment, it can be concluded that about 75% of all higher education students attend a public university.

Kataoka (2013) explains the decline of higher education enrolment partially by the lack of graduates from secondary schools in 2010 because of an extension of general secondary education (see chapter 3.1). This assumption is underlined by the data provided by the National Statistical Service about student admission: In 2010, about 26,000 students were admitted to public HEIs, in 2011 the number dropped to less than 8,000 and increased to 21,000 students in 2012 (NSS 2013: 120). Another reason mentioned is the rather low level of birth rates in the 1990ies. However, a continuous decline of higher education graduates is projected until 2024 due to low birth rates in the 1990s and early 2000s (EV Consulting 2012: 15).

Figure 9: Number of newly admitted students, 2009/10-2012/13

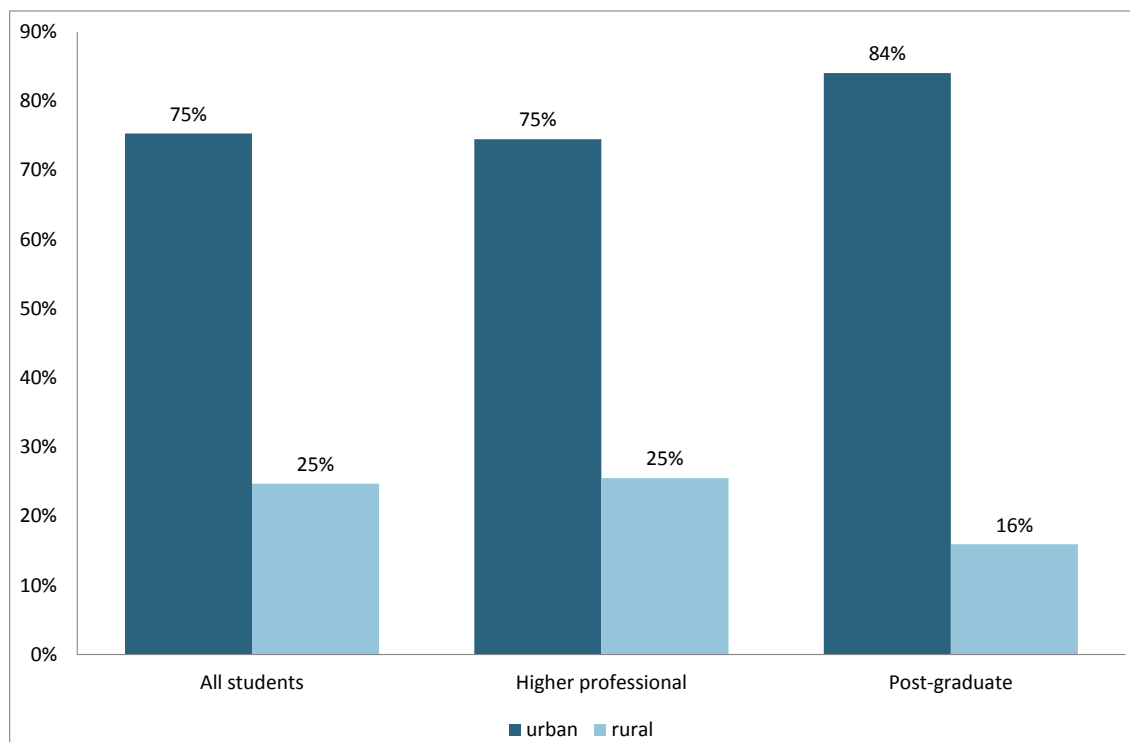


Source: *Statistical Yearbook of Armenia (NSS 2013)*

According to Karlova (2012), about 89% of all students at state HEIs study within first-cycle programmes (Bachelor), about 10% within Master programmes and about 1% within PhD programmes. This corresponds approximately with the data provided by the NSS Population Census 2011 that suggest that about 9% of the total student population are enrolled into postgraduate programmes.

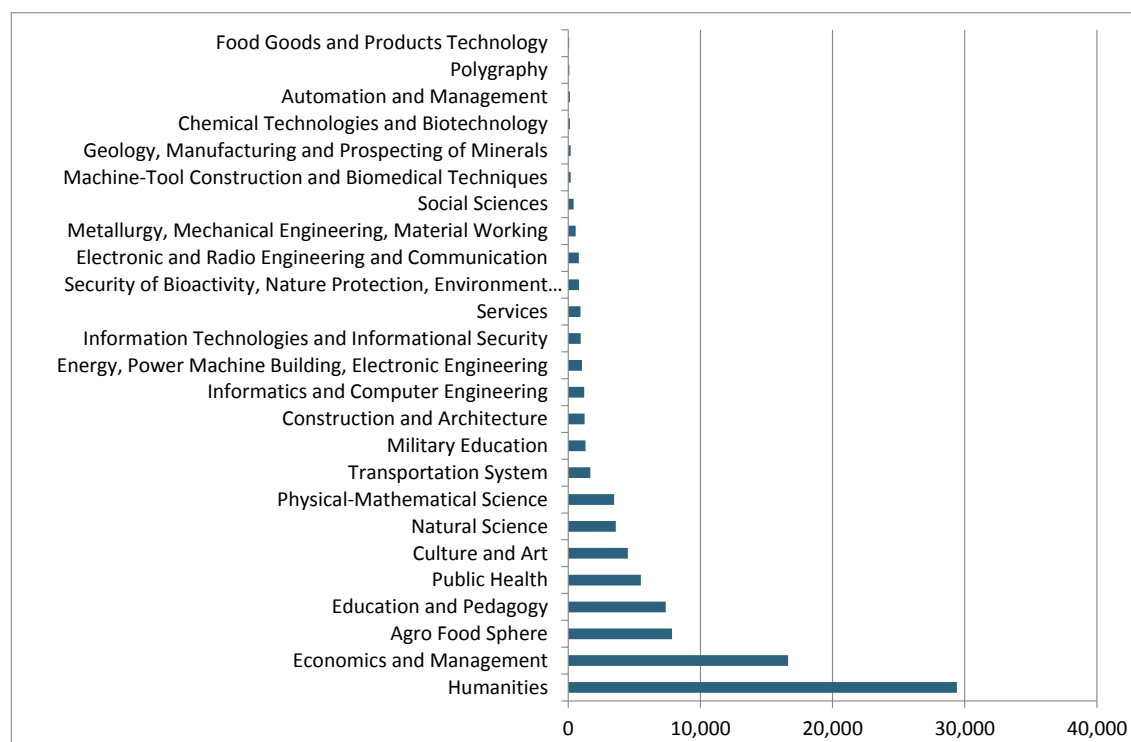
Three quarters of all higher education students live in urban areas, whereas only one quarter lives in rural regions. With 16%, rural residents are especially underrepresented among postgraduate students.

Figure 10: Residence of higher education students (urban vs. rural)



Source: NSS Population Census 2011 (Table 3.2).

As stated in chapter 3.2.2, specific fields of study have especially high enrolment rates, namely in the field of “Economics and Management” and “Humanities” (among them, particularly many students are enrolled in Law studies). The least students are enrolled in programmes related to engineering and technology.

Figure 11: Student enrolment by field of study

Source: *Statistical Yearbook of Armenia (NSS 2013)*

3.3.2 Socio-economic background

Kataoka states that in 2009 the enrolment rate for tertiary education “varied from 33.4 percent for the richest to 7.4 percent for the poorest in 2009” (Kataoka 2013: 22). According to an OECD report, regional and income-based inequality is a major issue of the higher education system. Rural residents are half as likely to enrol in higher education institutions as urban residents (OECD 2011: 52).

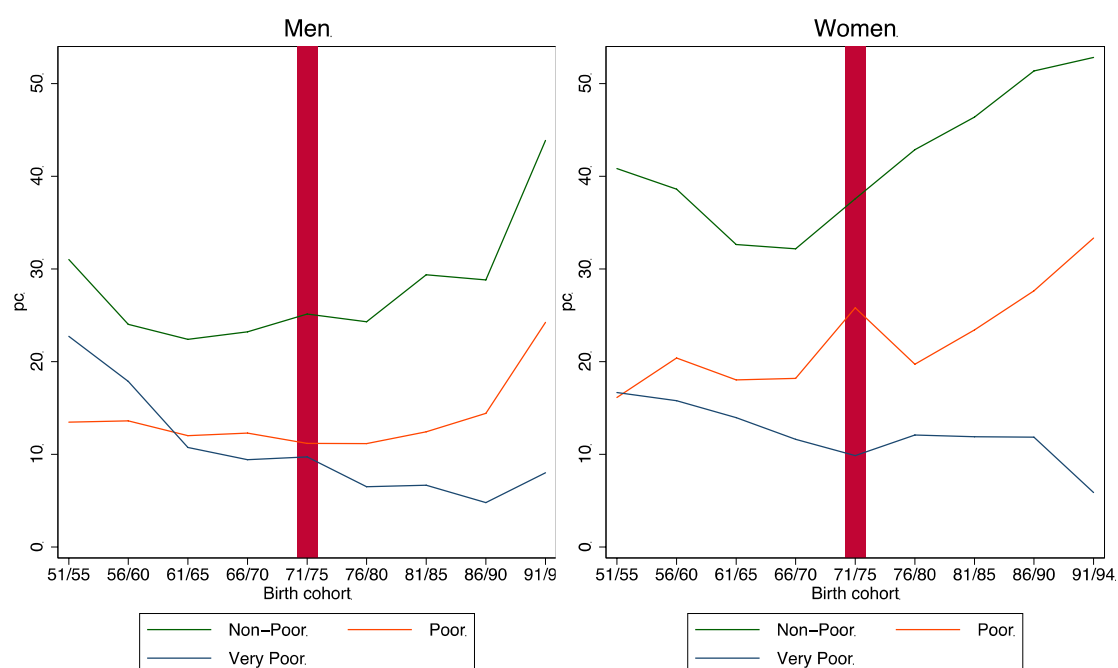
According to K. Harutyunyan (Public Governance, No 5, 2014, pp. 24-34), the overall enrolment ratio of young people aged 18-22 years was 37% in 2011, with notable differences by economic situation of the family. Whilst 44% of children of non-poor families aged 18-22 years are enrolled in higher education, it is only 10% of the children of extremely poor families. Accordingly, the share of persons having attained tertiary education is 19% among the poor and 81% among the non-poor (ILCS 2011; NSS, World Bank 2013).

Table 2: Enrolment rate of persons aged 18-22 years by their economic situation

18-22 year old youth by economic situation	Enrolment rate
Non-poor (18-22y)	44%
Poor	25%
Extremely poor	10%
Total	37%
Richest quintile	64%
Poorest quintile	19%

Source: NSS 2011, NSS, World Bank 2013.

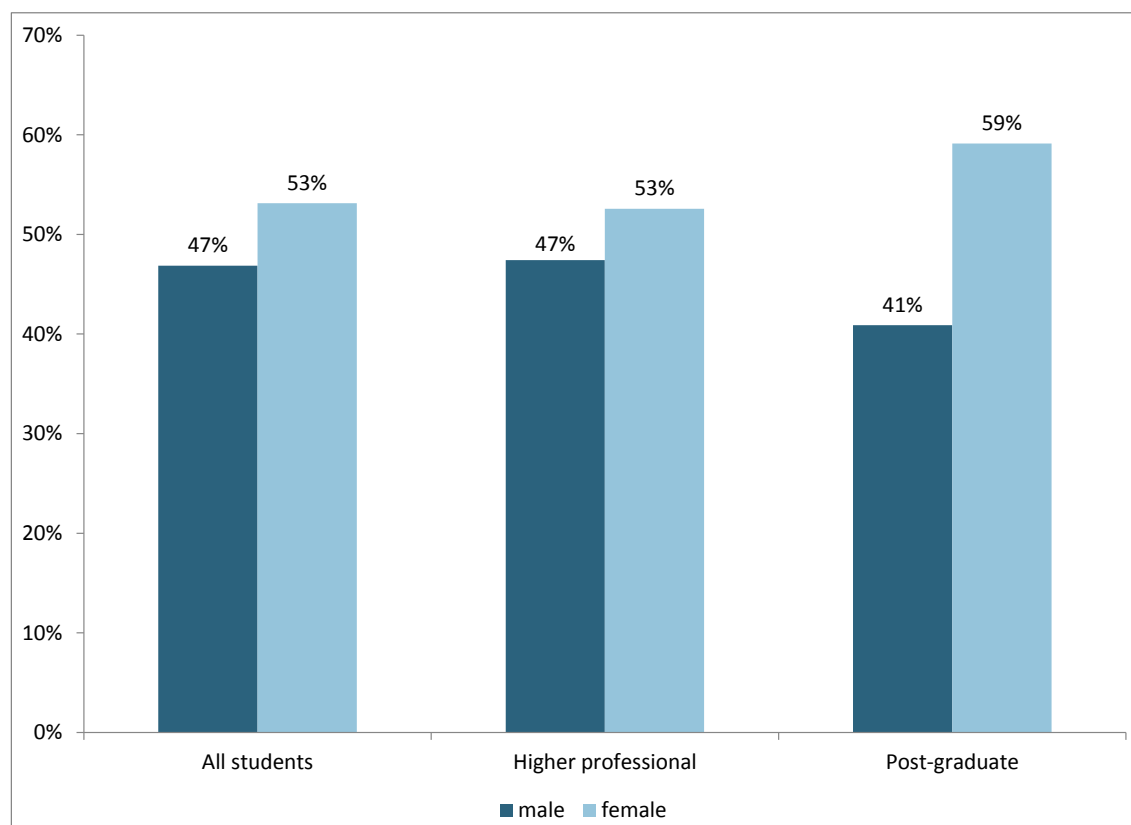
Looking at the development over time, data from the Integrated Living Household survey clearly shows different effects of poverty on educational attainment. While for non-poor and also for poor persons, the probability of attaining higher education raised over time, access to higher education has decreased among the very poor. For very poor young men however, the situation appears to be changing for the better, as the enrolment/ attainment quota is increasing remarkably for the youngest male cohort.

Figure 12: Share of persons who attained/ are currently enrolled in HE by birth cohorts

Source: NSS 2011, calculations by Koen Geven.

3.3.3 Gender equality

Population Census 2011 data show that the majority of students are female (53%) which corresponds with the general population in Armenia (52% females). Figure 13 shows that the share of female students in post-graduate programmes is particularly high (59%).

Figure 13: Student population by level of higher education and sex

Source: NSS Population Census 2011 (Table 3.2).

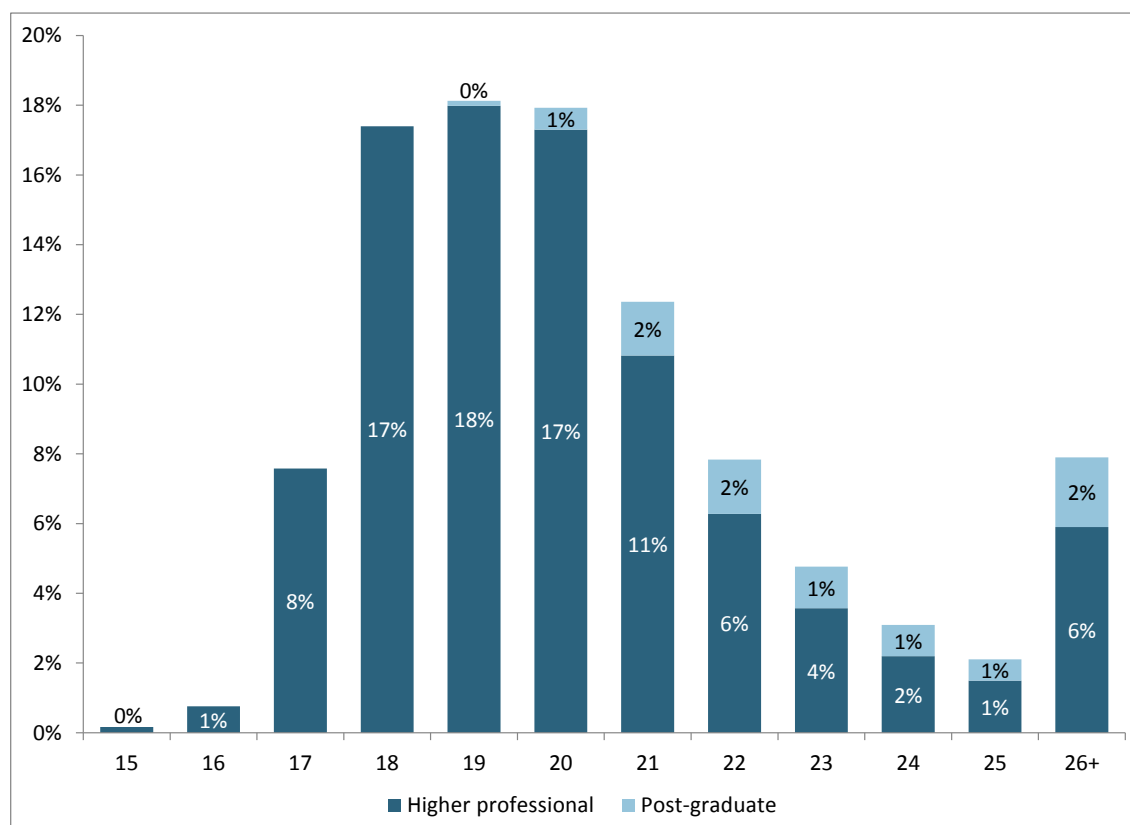
Female students hold a relative majority at all levels of higher education. However, there are certain groups within the Armenian student body that are not clearly dominated by female students. The first difference appears by taking a closer look to students' residences (urban versus rural regions): While on average 53% of all higher professional students residing in urban regions are female, less than 51% of higher professional students of rural residence are female. I.e., nearly half of higher professional students residing in rural regions are male. Among post-graduate students, there is no gender-related difference between students residing in urban or rural regions. Additional differences become visible by taking a closer look to the age structure: Within certain age groups, male students hold the majority of all students (e.g. among the youngest students between 15 and 17 years of age; see 3.3.4).

Like in other countries within the European Higher Education Area, horizontal inequalities concerning fields of study play an important role concerning gender equality. Ms. Nounch Zastoukhova from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs stated at the 55th Session of the UN Commission on the Status of Women in 2011 that women are underrepresented in fields of study like technical and natural sciences which results into limited professional chances in areas of the labour market like the Information and Communication Technology sector (UN woman watch 2011).

3.3.4 Age distribution

Armenian higher education students are of comparably young age: 61% of all students are 20 years of age or younger, as much as 87% are 23 or younger. The proportion of mature students is low in international comparison: Only 8% of all students are 26 or older, about 1% is older than 34 years (NSS Population Census 2011: Table 3.2).

Figure 14: Student population by age



Source: NSS Population Census 2011 (Table 3.2).

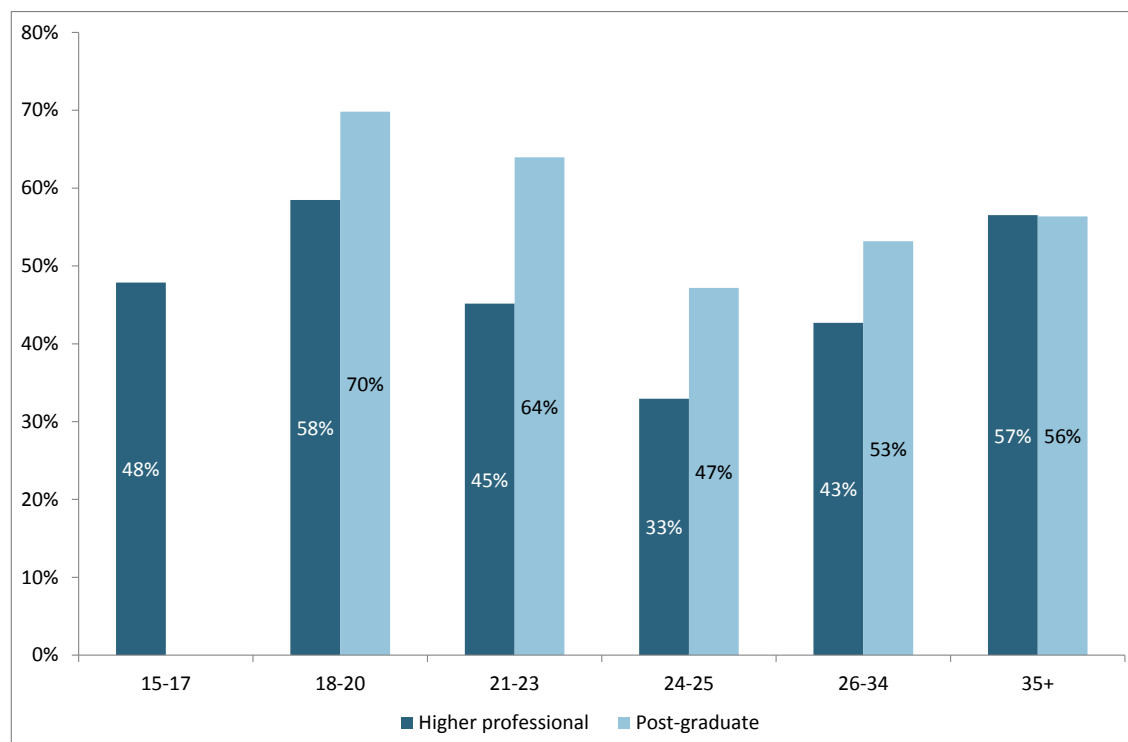
9% of higher professional students are aged between 15 and 17 years. Presumably, most of these students graduated upper secondary school before it was extended to grades 10-12 (see chapter 3.1). A clear majority of higher professional students are aged between 18 and 20 years (58%). Only 6% are 26 years of age or older.

Post-graduate students are comparably young as well: 50% of post-graduate students are aged between 21 and 23, around 77% are younger than 26 years of age, i.e. about 23% are aged 26 or older. Only 3% are older than 34 years of age.

As Figure 15 shows, the composition of the student body by gender differs significantly between certain age groups: Namely, the youngest students (15-17 years of age) are predominately male (48% female students). Among students between 18 and 20 years of age there are significantly more women (58%). At the age of 21, the share of female students starts to decline. Between the age of 26 and 34, about 43% of all higher professional stu-

dents are female, whereas among students aged 35 or older, women represent the majority again (57%).

Figure 15: Percentage of female students by age



Source: NSS Population Census 2011 (Table 3.2).

3.3.5 Student mobility

According to the National Statistical Service, the number of international students at Armenian higher education institutions has considerably declined (from 4,000 students in 2008 to 2,700 students in 2012). Incoming students at Armenian HEIs most likely come from Russia (28%), Georgia (27%), Iran (21%) and India (14%; Karlova 2012/ NSS 2013: 139).

The number of outgoing students has been increasing over the last years (from 125 students in 2006 to 313 students in 2010). However, in relation to the total number of students (146,000 in 2010) it is still rather low - way less than one percent (Karlova 2012).

3.4 Graduation and transition

In the academic year 2012/13, about 24,600 students graduated from a higher education institution. Since 2009/10, the number of graduates increased slightly by about 5% (NSS 2013).

According to the Bologna implementation report 2012, the completion rate in Armenia (95%) is the highest in the whole European Higher Education Area (EACEA 2012: 106f).

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