

IFLA/FAIFE
World Report:
Libraries and
Intellectual Freedom



Armenia

Population:	3,344,336 (2000)
GNP per capita:	\$2,900 (1999)
Government / Constitution:	Republic
Main languages:	Armenian (93%), Russian, Kurd
Main religions:	Armenian Orthodox
Literacy:	99% (1999)
Online:	0,9 % (July 2000)

Armenia declared independence in 1991 September. Although after the collapse of the USSR until 1996 the Armenian libraries continued to operate under the centrally controlled system of management. During the pervious regime libraries were united into the so-called Centralized Library System (CLS) which envisaged a central library with its dependent branches, under the Ministry of Culture. The number of the CLS in 1996 made up 42, with 1289 public libraries. After the administrative and territorial reform introduced in autumn 1996 by the Armenian Parliament, all the public libraries were handed-over to local authorities. The CLS was winded up rapidly, while no new system was established instead. Still there are some regions in the country that continue to operate under the previous centralized system.

According to the reform and based on the Constitution of the Republic of Armenia, the territory of the Republic was divided into 10 Marzes. The Yerevan (the capital of the Armenia) got a special administrative status, equal to those of the Marzes. In order to co-ordinate the activities of all libraries throughout the country, Marz Republican Libraries were founded in each Marz. The latter has a direct subordination to the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth Affairs. The rest of the Marz libraries are subordinate to the local authorities.

There has not been any significant decrease in the number of the libraries during these years. We can say that the Armenian library network operating in the Soviet system still exists, although several libraries have deteriorated to the point that they are unable to serve the public thus implementing their main mission.

<i>N</i>	<i>Type of Libraries</i>	<i>Figures 1989</i>	<i>in</i>	<i>Figures 1999</i>	<i>in</i>	<i>Difference</i>
1.	Libraries under Ministry of Culture, Youth Affairs and Sport	1328		1166		- 162
2.	Libraries of Academy of Sciences System	32		31		-1
3.	Higher Education Libraries	11		93		+ 82
4.	Technical Libraries	30		13		- 17
5.	Health Libraries	30		22		- 8
6.	School libraries	1353		1400		+ 47
7.	Children Libraries	99		58		- 91
	Total	2883		2783		- 100

Internet Access in Libraries

The Internet is not widely spread in the Armenian libraries. There is a huge difference between the capital and the regional libraries. Most of the academic and scientific libraries in Yerevan have Internet services. Unfortunately, this cannot be said regarding the regional libraries. The Internet Access and service in all the libraries is a paid service, except five IREX sponsored Internet Access Training Program (IATP) Centers. Activities for the IATP began in November 1997.

The main objective of the program was to expand Internet resources and opportunities for the US alumni and other target constituencies. At the same time the program was structured with an understanding of the dramatic opportunities available through the Internet to impact the development of democratic institutions and a stable infrastructure in the transitional societies of Eurasia. The IATP currently maintains Internet access sites at the *National Library of Armenia* in Yerevan (www.iatp.am/sites/nla), the *American University of Armenia Open Web Workshop* (www.iatp.am/sites/aua/workshop), and the *Yerevan Institute of Architecture and Construction* (www.iatp.am/sites/yeriac). In Gyumri (the second city after Yerevan), IATP supports an Internet site at the *Gyumri Educational Complex* (www.iatp.am/sites/gyumri), and at the *Lori Region Public Library in Vanadzor*, the third city after Yerevan, (www.iatp.am/sites/vanadzor).

Three of these centers are located in libraries and offer various Internet services. They organize training for the library users and patrons, as well as they make possible for the scientific, educational and cultural organizations to create their own web pages and locate it on the web. The main IATP Center is in the National Library of Armenia. It has seven computers hooked up to the Internet. The Center in Vanadzor is in the City Central Library and also serves to the public. For more details please visit the following site: www.iatp.am.

Intellectual Freedom

As for the Intellectual freedom everything seems to be perfect (normal) from the first glance. At least there have not been any violations or restrictions of the reader's rights. The first case of reader-library took place in 1997.

The previously known "special funds" in libraries, which were established during the Soviet Times, were completely eliminated. The library censorship also was eliminated. At present there are no inaccessible or forbidden "special" funds for the public in the libraries.

As an example of restriction of free access to the "special funds" we can mention the most dramatic period of the Armenian-Azeri conflict in 1992-94. There was registered a big increase of interest towards the literature depicting military production process of explosives and guns. Trying to avoid the possible aggravation of the criminal situation in the republic and considering the fact that young and inexperienced readers could be involved in the production of home-made guns, the National Library administration restricted the provision of that kind of literature to the students.

At present in Armenia it is noticeable hidden violation of reader's rights. The fact that more than 90% of the libraries in reality are not receiving new acquisitions means that the authorities are violating somehow the reader rights of the population by under funding the libraries.

In 2000 9 Armenian libraries and about 20 other Armenian institutions with the assistance of the Open Society Institute Armenia Branch got the opportunity to subscribe to the EBSCO Electronic Databases.

Legislation on Libraries

Armenia is probably the only State in the NIS that has not accepted a law on library regulations. The main document in Armenia regarding the human rights is the Constitution, which says: " Citizens, regardless the national origin, race, sex, language, creed, political or other persuasion, social origin, wealth or other status, are entitled to all the rights and freedoms, subject to the duties determined by the constitution and the laws. (Chapter 2, Article 15).

Since the autumn of 1996 the draft law on the librarianship in the Republic of Armenia was developed. It covered all the main aspects of the librarianship. However the Library Law has not been discussed in the National Assembly (Armenian Parliament).

The Armenian National Assembly has passed (adopted) only two laws regarding the regulations in the sphere of culture.

The " Law on Press and Other Mass Media Establishments of the RA" is closely connected with the Intellectual and Information freedom issues. According to the 21 article of this law the issue of allocation of deposit copies is regulated as follows: "Samples of all publications are sent free of charge to the Book Chamber of the Republic of Armenia, the National Library, Founder and the agency which issued the establishment's license".

In May 1998 the Armenian Parliament passed the Copyright law, which it should be mentioned functions only partially. The market is full with unlicensed audiovisual products, which appear even on the National TV channels.

The responsibilities of the local governing bodies regarding the libraries are backed (enforced) by the 34th article of the 1996 law on the "Local Governing ".

The responsibilities of the head of the community in the sphere of education and culture include "Organizing the activities and operation of the professional schools, kindergartens, clubs, culture houses, libraries and other educational and cultural organizations under the community subordination, as well as their construction, exploitation and renovation".

The issues of professional behavior of the librarian (code of ethics) were first discussed at the one-month training courses

of the Armenian Library Association in 1998 spring. Currently the Armenian Library Association is preparing the "Code of Ethics of Armenian Librarians" to be adopted in April-May 2001.

The Armenian Library association has translated and published in Armenian and disseminated among the librarians and the information specialists the following documents:

- "UNESCO Public Library Manifesto"
- ALA "Library Bill of Rights"

The Armenian Library Association

In May to June 1993 The American University of Armenia organized a 3-week course entitled "Strategic Planning for Librarians," inviting as presenters two American-Armenian librarians, Sylva Natalie Manoogian, Los Angeles Public Library Department Manager, and Araxie Churukian, from the University of California at Riverside. Participating in the course were more than 50 library workers, who were encouraged by their colleagues from abroad to establish a planning group with the following goals:

- To develop the constitutional structure of the Armenian Library Association
- To convene the inaugural conference of the Association in 1994

On 7 October 1994, the Armenian Library Association conference was convened in the National Library of Armenia. Inaugural Conference participants were 119 delegates and 64 guests, including representatives of the American Library Association.

The delegates represented all major research, academic technical, special, public, and children's libraries of the Republic. Overall, 44 library representatives, and of that number, delegates from nearly all of the nation's regional libraries. One hundred of the 119 delegates were women; and 19 were men. Anelka Grigoryan, first deputy minister of culture of the Republic of Armenia gave the welcoming address. Also participating in the conference were American-Armenian librarians, S. N. Manoogian, A. Churukian, and Samuel Fustukjian (South Florida University Library director), and also Marie Mathis, Los Angeles Public Library.

The conference approved the Association's constitution and elected a 21-member administration. Nerses Hayrapetyan was elected the first president of the Library Association. Upon examining the status of library work in the Republic, the inaugural meeting approved the mission statement submitted to the library workers, the intellectuals, and the public. This states:

"We, the participants in this inaugural meeting, are applying to our co-workers and to all those supporters of library work, asking them for their enthusiastic support of the goals of the Association. The free development of our national culture and knowledge depends on the expression of our individual intellectual strength. Libraries, as centers for the preservation of national spiritual values, moral upbringing, cultural and historical traditions, must assume the place of utmost importance in the sphere of illumination and education".

The initiators of the first library association in Armenia were the National Library of Armenia, the Academy of Sciences Library, the Republican Scientific-Medical Library, the Republican Scientific-Technical Library, the Khnko Aper Republican Children's Library, the Avetik Isahakyan Yerevan City Central Library, and the Republic of Armenia Ministry of Culture.

The Association was officially registered with the Republic of Armenia Ministry of Justice in March 1995 under the name Library Association of Armenia. On 6 March 1998, by decision No. 9/1-3 of the Ministry of Justice, the organization was reregistered under a new name, Armenian Library Association (ALA). From August 1996 ALA is a National Association member of IFLA.