

# **DRUG POLICY AND HEALTH IN ARMENIA**

*A Profile Prepared by the Drug Law and Health Policy Resource Network*

*1 April 2002*

---

## **CONTENTS**

### *Summary*

*HIV/AIDS*

*OTHER INFECTIOUS DISEASES*

*INJECTION DRUG USE*

*LAW AND LAW ENFORCEMENT PRACTICES*

*PUBLIC HEALTH INTERVENTIONS*

*ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL INDICATORS*

### *Full Report*

*INTRODUCTION*

*HIV/AIDS*

*OTHER INFECTIOUS DISEASES*

*INJECTION DRUG USE*

*LAWS AND LAW ENFORCEMENT PRACTICES*

*PUBLIC HEALTH INTERVENTIONS*

*SOCIOPOLITICAL ENVIRONMENT*

*RESOURCES*

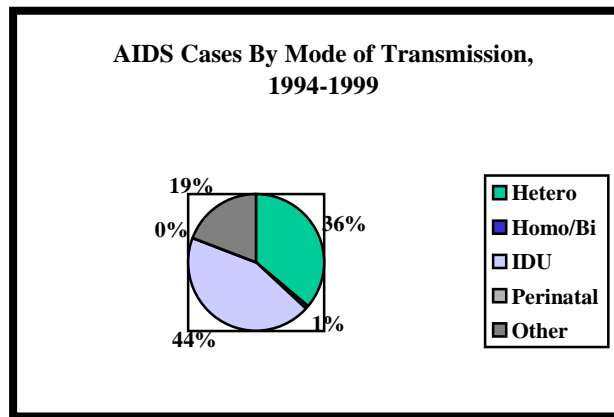
*REFERENCES*

---

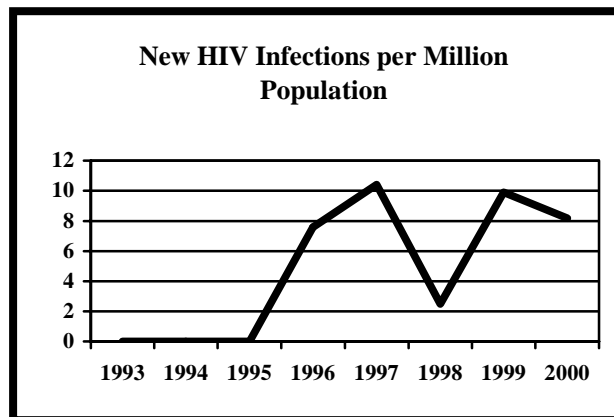
## **Summary**

## HIV/AIDS

Despite being far from complete, epidemiological data appear to indicate an increase in the incidence of HIV/AIDS since 1996. The total number of reported cases of HIV increased from 3 in 1995 to 65 in 1996. By May 1999, the total number of registered cases of HIV had reached 124. Cumulative HIV infections per 100,000 population had reached 1.8 as of January 1998. The primary mechanisms of transmission for the 124 reported cases of HIV as of May 1999 were heterosexual contact (48.4%) and intravenous drug use (38.7%). The estimated HIV prevalence rate among injecting drug users in major urban areas was 6.25% as of 1998. Sentinel Epidemiological Surveillance conducted in 2000 revealed an HIV prevalence rate of 9 - 19% among intravenous drug users and 5 - 6% among sex workers. Several factors may be fueling the spread of HIV, including: socioeconomic changes, migration (20-22% of Armenians are living in Russia or Ukraine) and an increase in sexually transmitted diseases (STD's) overall. Also considered are the difficulty in acquiring quality condoms, poor health education and the lack of availability of therapeutic drugs. (1)



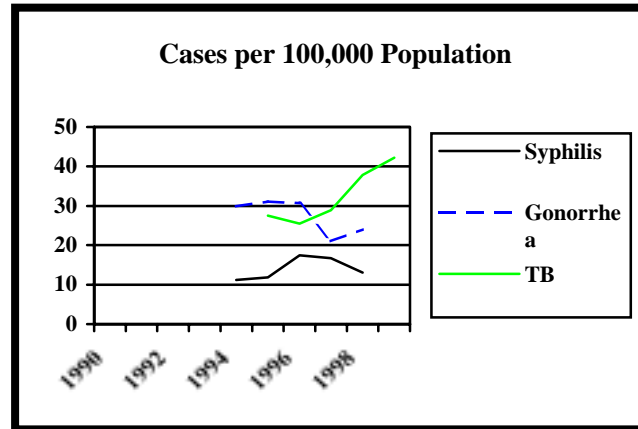
Source:[http://www.unaids.org/hivaidsinfo/statistics/fact\\_sheets/pdfs/Kazakhstan\\_en.pdf](http://www.unaids.org/hivaidsinfo/statistics/fact_sheets/pdfs/Kazakhstan_en.pdf)



Source: Data from The European Centre for the Epidemiological Monitoring of AIDS (2)

## OTHER INFECTIOUS DISEASES

The total number of reported cases as well as the case notification rate of tuberculosis (TB) has been increasing since 1996. (3) The number of patients diagnosed with syphilis or gonorrhea for the first time appear to have peaked in 1996 and 1995 respectively, although the overall number of STD patients seen in dispensary is on the rise, increasing from 17.5 per 100,000 population in 1994 to 32.4 per 100,000 population in 1998. (1) Data on hepatitis is incomplete at this time.



Sources: (1)(3)

## INJECTION DRUG USE

**Drug use Trends.** Domestic consumption of illegal narcotics is relatively small, thus drug abuse is not considered a major problem in Armenia. The primary drugs of choice are opium and cannabis. Heroin first appeared in the Armenian drug market in 1996, with a slight upward trend in the sale of heroin particularly since 1998. The rising number of persons who have tested HIV positive associated with drug use has become a concern. It is estimated that the number of drug abusers exceeds 10,000 among a population of 3,531,000, of which half use opiates. (4)

**Risk Behavior Info.** No information available.

**Social Attitudes.** No information available.

## **LAW AND LAW ENFORCEMENT PRACTICES**

No information available.

## **PUBLIC HEALTH INTERVENTIONS**

**Harm Reduction Programs Generally.** No information available.

**Drug Treatment.** Drug abuse is one of the most serious concerns of health authorities due to poor financing, a lack of communication with remote areas and a lack of interest in preventive actions on the part of local NGO's. The average cost to the state for treatment for one drug addict is \$250 (US). (4)

**HIV Prevention Activities.** No information available.

## **ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL INDICATORS**

The Transparency Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI) ranks countries in terms of the degree to which corruption is perceived to exist among public officials and politicians. The CPI is currently unavailable.

The Human Development Index value is a composite index measuring average achievement in three basic dimensions of human development, including: a long and healthy life, knowledge and a decent standard of living. In 1999, Armenia ranked 72 out of 174 countries measured. (1)

The GINI Index measures the extent to which the distribution of income (or in some cases consumption expenditures) among individuals or households within an economy deviates from a perfectly equal distribution. The GINI Index of zero equals perfect equality, while an index of 100 implies perfect inequality. The GINI index is currently unavailable.

Unemployment refers to the share of the labor force without work but available for and seeking employment. Definitions of labor force and unemployment differ by country. The government of Armenia's official unemployment rate was 9.4% in 1998 but estimates put it closer to 20%. (1)(9)

The Gross Domestic product (GDP) is the total of all economic activities in one country, regardless of who owns the productive assets. The GDP for Armenia was estimated to be 10 billion dollars (US) in 2000. The real growth rate in 2000 is estimated at 5%. (9)

# DRUG POLICY AND HEALTH IN ARMENIA

*A Profile Prepared by the Drug Law and Health Policy Resource Network*

## Full Report

### I. INTRODUCTION

The Drug Law and Health Policy Resource Network is an international research collaboration designed to improve data collection and policy analysis on drug policy and health in the countries of Eastern Europe and the Former Soviet Union. The information in this report was gathered by staff at Temple University's Beasley School of Law and the University of Connecticut Health Sciences Center. It will be augmented by further research in 2002 by network collaborators in the study region.

This report presents available information in six domains: HIV/AIDS, other infectious diseases, injection drug use, law and law enforcement practices, public health interventions and economic and social indicators. It concludes that is in the early stages of a serious HIV epidemic driven primarily by injection drug use. With sufficient external support and dramatic internal changes in drug policy and law enforcement practice, a public health effort against HIV and other blood-borne diseases could be successful.

### II. HIV/AIDS

Accurate and complete data on HIV in Armenia are not available. The data presented here are from a variety of sources and may not entirely agree. These data generally do not represent HIV incidence and depend heavily upon patterns of HIV testing and reporting that remain very incomplete in the most severely affected countries. HIV infection is defined as an individual with HIV infection confirmed by a laboratory according to a uniform AIDS case definition originally published in 1982 and revised in 1985, 1987 and for adults and adolescents (>age13) in 1993. The 1993 European AIDS surveillance case definition differs from that used in the United States in that it does not include CD4 lymphocyte criteria.

**Overall Data.** Despite being far from complete, epidemiological data appear to indicate an increase in the incidence of HIV/AIDS since 1996. The total number of reported cases of HIV increased from 3 in 1995 to 65 in 1996. By May 1999, the total number of registered cases of HIV had reached 124. Cumulative HIV infections per 100,000 population had reached 1.8 as of January 1998. The estimated prevalence of HIV/AIDS in adults (age 15-49) at the end of 1999 was 200 - 300, resulting in a prevalence rate of 0.01 per 100,000 population. The number of AIDS deaths for both adults and children is estimated to be < 100 deaths.

**Data from The European Centre for the Epidemiological Monitoring of AIDS (11)**

Year	Reported AIDS cases		Reported New HIV infections		Homo/bi Contact #		Injection Drug Use #		Heterosexual Contact #		Perinatal Transmission #	
	#	Rate/ Million	#	Rate/ Million	HIV	AIDS	HIV	AIDS	HIV	AIDS	HIV	AIDS
1993	0	0.0	0	0.0	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
1994	0	0.0	0	0.0	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
1995	0	0.0	0	0.0	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
1996	7	2.0	27	7.6	0	0	5	4	6	2	0	0
1997	2	0.6	37	10.4	0	0	12	1	21	0	0	0
1998	2	0.6	9	2.5	0	0	2	0	5	1	0	0
1999	8	2.3	35	9.9	0	0	20	4	14	4	0	0
2000	3	0.9	29	8.2	1	0	18	1	9	2	0	0

The estimated prevalence of HIV/AIDS in women and children are estimated at < 100 cases for both groups at the end of 1999. The mechanisms of transmission for the 124 reported cases of HIV as of May 1999 were heterosexual contact (48.4%), intravenous drug use (38.7%), homosexual contact (0.8%), contaminated blood (0.8%) and unknown transmission (12%). HIV infections newly diagnosed in persons through heterosexual contact and transmission sub-category in cases reported from 1997 to 2000 were as follows: 11 cases of HIV with a high-risk partner (22.4%) and 38 undetermined (77.6%). The number of AIDS-free cases of HIV numbered 94 (86.2%) along with 15 cases of AIDS (13.8%) as reported by December 31, 2000. (2)

The cumulative number of HIV infections among injecting drug users was 14 cases as of January 1998, comprising 22% of reported HIV cases. At the National Center for AIDS prevention, 46 drug users were tested for HIV in 1999 with 22 testing positive. Several factors may be fueling the spread of HIV, including: socioeconomic changes, migration (20-22% of Armenians are living in Russia or Ukraine) and an increase in sexually transmitted diseases (STD's) overall. Also considered are the difficulty in acquiring quality condoms, poor health education and the lack of availability of therapeutic drugs. (1)

**Regional Distribution.** The estimated HIV prevalence rate among injecting drug users in major urban areas was 6.25% as of 1998. Sentinel Epidemiological Surveillance conducted in 2000 revealed an HIV prevalence rate of 9 - 19% among intravenous drug users and 5-6% among sex workers. (1)

**Stigma and social attitudes towards HIV/AIDS.** No information available.

### III. OTHER INFECTIOUS DISEASES

The spread of HIV is related in important ways to the incidence of other infectious diseases. Use of non-sterile injection equipment or practices are a risk factor not only for HIV, but also for hepatitis. Incarceration in many countries in this region is a risk factor for tuberculosis. Sexually transmitted diseases may increase the likelihood of HIV transmission during sex.

The total number of reported cases as well as the case notification rate of tuberculosis (TB) has been increasing since 1996. (3) The number of patients diagnosed with syphilis or gonorrhea for the first time appear to have peaked in 1996 and 1995 respectively, although the overall number of STD patients seen in dispensary is on the rise, increasing from 17.5 per 100,000 population in 1994 to 32.4 per 100,000 population in 1998. The rate for trichomoniasis in 1998 was 104.37 per 100,000 population. (1) Data on hepatitis is incomplete at this time.

**Data from (1), (3)**

Year	TB		Syphilis	Gonorrhoea	Hepatitis A	Hepatitis B
	#	Rate/100,000	Rate/100,000	#	#	#
1993	-	-	-	-	-	-
1994	-	-	11.2	29.9	-	-
1995	1000	27.5	11.9	31.1	-	-
1996	928	25.5	17.4	30.7	-	-
1997	1051	28.9	16.7	21.0	-	-
1998	1381	37.9	13.1	24.0	2983	-
1999	1488	42.2	-	-	-	-
2000	-	-	-	-	-	-

**IV. INJECTION DRUG USE**

This section reports available information about drug use levels, trends and risk behaviors, as well as social attitudes about drug use and information about the problem of drug overdose. Drug treatment and other interventions to reduce the morbidity and mortality of drug use are discussed in Section V, below. Data about drug use come primarily from unofficial sources, including more or less rigorous rapid assessments, consultant reports and the news media.

Domestic consumption of illegal narcotics is relatively small, thus drug abuse is not considered a major problem in Armenia. According to the Interior Ministry, the local market for narcotics is not very large. However, the number of substance abusers has been on the rise since 1998. In addition the rising number of individuals testing positive for HIV associated with drug use has become a concern. (4)

**Drug Use Trends.** The primary drugs of choice are opium and cannabis. Heroin first appeared in the Armenian drug market in 1996, with a slight upward trend in the sale of heroin particularly since 1998. The rising number of persons who have tested HIV positive associated with drug use has become a concern. It is estimated that the number of drug abusers exceeds 10,000 among a population of 3,531,000 of which half use opiates. The Ministry of Interior reports an increase in drug use among 15 to 17 year olds, resulting in the average age of drug users declining to 25 from 35 in recent years. This may be partially explained by the increased use of narcotics in cafes and nightclubs and a rise in prostitution. (4)

**Risk behavior Information.** No information available.

**Drug Traffic Information.** The government of Armenia is recognizing its potential as a transit route for international narcotics shipments and has identified drug trafficking as one of its most serious problems. Because of its geographic location, Armenia has the potential to become a significant transit point for international drug trafficking. Although presently a secondary transit route for drugs due to limited transport between Armenia and neighboring countries, the amount of trafficking is increasing according to the Ministry of Interior. The Ministry estimates that 75 percent of all opiates in Armenia are smuggled in from Iran, which constitutes 50 percent of the total narcotics smuggled into the country. Although Armenia's borders with Azerbaijan and Turkey remain closed due to the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, it is expected that drug trafficking will increase when the borders eventually re-open. The majority of heroin found in Armenia originates in Iran, Russia or Ukraine. (4)

**Social Attitudes Towards Drug Users.** No information available.

**Drug Overdoses.** No information available.

## **V. LAWS AND LAW ENFORCEMENT PRACTICES**

### **A. Drug Law**

This section describes what is known about both the drug-related laws on the books and the way these laws are enforced. It covers syringe access, drug possession, drug treatment, drug trafficking and the handling of drug arrestees and prisoners within the criminal justice system. It also lists the international drug-related instruments to which the country is signatory.

**Syringe access and needle exchange programs – law.** No information available.

**Syringe access and needle exchange programs – practice.** No information available.

**Drug possession law.** No information available.

**Drug possession law – practices.** No information available.

**Drug treatment law.** No information available.

**Compulsory treatment practices.** No information available.

**Drug Trafficking Law.** The newly drafted General Section of the Criminal Code has passed all three parliamentary readings and is currently waiting presidential approval. This section includes a draft law on narcotic drugs. Narcotic drug law pertains specifically to psychotropic substances and includes provisions that would give the Interior Ministry a clear mandate as the lead agency for combating drug trafficking. The Interior Ministry has also drafted a decree for the establishment of a joint committee to update the classification of drugs and to introduce stricter control over illicit production, sale and distribution of pharmaceutical drugs of a psychotropic nature. (4)

**Drug trafficking law – practices.** No information available.

**Drug treatment regulation.** No information available.

**Criminal justice system – law.** No information available.

**Criminal justice system – practices.** No information available.

**International Drug Conventions Signed.** The country is a party to the following international drug agreements.

- 1988 UN Drug Control Convention
- 1972 Protocol
- 1971 UN Convention on Psychotropic Drugs
- 1961 UN Single Convention
- 1992 Kiev and 1996 Dushanbe Narcotics Control Assistance Agreements of the NIS countries
- 1999 Trilateral Agreement on Cooperation to Combat Drug Trafficking with Iran and Georgia
- Bilateral Agreements on Cooperation Against Illegal Traffic in Narcotics and Psychotropic Substances with the Customs Service of Turkmenistan, Customs Committee of Georgia and the Customs Committee of Tajikistan
- OPG expected Armenia to sign an Agreement on Collaboration of Member States of the Commonwealth of Independent States in

Combating Illegal Trafficking of Narcotic, Psychotropic and Precursor Substances in January/February 2001.

**A. Public Health and Human Rights Law**

This section describes what is known about public health and human rights law on the books, as well as the way these laws are enforced. The section covers the right to health care and HIV treatment, reportability of HIV/AIDS, HIV testing provisions, anti-discrimination provisions, privacy and criminal penalties associated with prostitution and homosexuality. It also lists the international human rights instruments to which the country is a signatory.

**Right to health care generally/ Right to HIV Treatment –law.** No information available.

**Right to health care generally/ Right to HIV Treatment –practice.** No information available.

**Reportability of HIV, AIDS, HCV, HBV – law and practice.** No information available.

**HIV Testing Provisions –law and practice.** No information available.

**Anti-Discrimination Provisions based on HIV or drug use – law and practice.** No information available.

**Privacy law and practice.** No information available.

**Criminal penalties for exposing others to or transmitting HIV.** No information available.

**Criminalization of prostitution –law and practice.** No information available.

**Criminalization of homosexuality –law and practice.** No information available.

**Status of international human right conventions.** Armenia's acceptance of the major international human rights instruments is as follows:

- International Covenant on Economic, Social & Cultural Rights (CESCR) – **signed September 13, 1993**
- International Covenant on Civil & Political Rights (CCPR) – **signed June 23, 1993**

- International Covenant on Civil & Political Rights, Optional protocol (CCPR-OP1) – **signed June 23, 1993**
- Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) – **signed September 13, 1993**
- Convention Against Torture and other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (CAT) – **signed September 13, 1993**
- Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) – **signed June 23, 1993**
- International Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Racial Discrimination (CERD) – **signed June 23, 1993**

(4)

## VI. PUBLIC HEALTH INTERVENTIONS

This section provides information on interventions to reduce HIV transmission and other health problems among drug users, the availability of drug treatment and HIV prevention programs.

### A. Interventions to Reduce Disease and Other Injuries Associated With Drug Use

**Government Position.** No information available.

**Needle Exchange Programs.** No information available.

### B. Drug Treatment Programs/Availability

**Overall Summary.** Drug abuse is one of the most serious concerns of health authorities due to poor financing, a lack of communication with remote areas and a lack of interest in preventive actions on the part of local NGO's. The average cost to the state for treatment for one drug addict is \$250 (US). (4)

### C. Public Health Measures to Prevent HIV and other Significant Diseases

.No information available.

**Programmatic Details.** The total number of HIV tests performed, excluding unlinked anonymous testing and testing of blood donations by year (1996 - 2000) and rate of testing per 100,000 population. (2) The number of HIV testes decreased dramatically in 1997 due to a severe shortage in the number of test kits. (5)

1996: **18,296**

1997: **11,156**

1998: **9,108**

1999: **10,996**  
2000: **7,580**

Totals per 100,000 population: **2.2**

## VII. SOCIOPOLITICAL ENVIRONMENT

A variety of data and data indices are commonly used to characterize social, political and economic factors in a country. The following are several of these for

Perceived corruption in government is measured by the Transparency Corruption perception Index (CPI), which ranks countries in terms of the degree to which corruption is perceived to exist among public officials and politicians. The CPI for Armenia is currently unavailable.

Perceptions Index (CPI)

- Country Rank: **unavailable**
- 2001 CPI Score: **unavailable**
- Surveys Used: **unavailable**
- Standard Deviation: **unavailable**
- High-Low Range: **unavailable**

D. The GINI Index measures the extent to which the distribution of income (or in some cases consumption expenditures) among individuals or households within an economy deviates from a perfectly equal distribution. A Lorenz curve plots the cumulative percentages of total income received against the cumulative number of recipients, starting with the poorest individual or household. The GINI Index measures the area between the Lorenz curve and the hypothetical line of absolute equality, expressed as a percentage of the maximum area under the line. Thus, GINI Index of zero equals perfect equality while an index of 100 implies perfect inequality.

- GINI Index: **unavailable**

The Human Development Index is a composite index measuring average achievement in three basic dimensions of human development, including a long and healthy life, knowledge and a decent standard of living.

- Human Development Index Rank (HDI) in 1999: **72/174** (1)

E. Unemployment rates refer to the share of the labor force without work but available for and seeking employment. Definitions of labor force and unemployment differ by country.

- Unemployment rate, official (1998): **9.3%** (9)
- Unemployment rate, estimated (1998): **20%** (9)

Standard & Poor's Insurer Financial Enhancement Rating is a current opinion of the creditworthiness of an insurer with respect to insurance policies or other financial obligations that are predominantly used as credit enhancement and/or financial guarantees. The ratings range from 'CC', which is defined as "currently highly-vulnerable" to a rating of "AAA", which is defined as an "extremely strong" capacity to meet its financial commitments.

Local Currency: **unavailable**

Long-Term rating:

Outlook:

Short-Term Rating:

Foreign Currency: **unavailable**

Long-Term rating:

Outlook:

Short-Term Rating:

The Social Indicators of Poverty represent the health status of individuals in different socioeconomic groups within countries for the last survey year:

- Infant Mortality Rate:
  - Poorest Quintile: **u/a**
  - Richest Quintile: **u/a**
- Child Immunization Rate:
  - Poorest Quintile: **u/a**
  - Richest Quintile: **u/a**
- Prevalence of Child Malnutrition:
  - Poorest Quintile: **u/a**
  - Richest Quintile: **u/a**
- Low Mother's Body Mass Index:
  - Poorest Quintile: **u/a**
  - Richest Quintile: **u/a**
- Total Fertility Rate:
  - Poorest Quintile: **u/a**
  - Richest Quintile: **u/a**

#### E. The National Poverty Line

- Population Below the Poverty Line, (BPL), 1999 (est.): **45%** (9)

The Gross Domestic Product (GDP), (2000 est.): **\$10 billion (US)** (9)

Gross Domestic Product per Capita (PPP US\$): **u/a**

Gross Domestic Product - Real Growth Rate, (2000 est.): **5%** (9)

Purchasing Power Parity, (2000 est.): **\$3,000 (US)** (9)

## **VII. RESOURCES**

**Larisa Minasian**

OSI-AF Armenia

1 Pushkin Street, Apt.2, Yerevan

375010, Armenia

Tel/Fax: (3742) 541719

542119

543901

email: office@osi.am

## **IX. REFERENCES**

- 1) Epidemiological fact Sheet on HIV/AIDS and Sexually Transmitted Infections, 2000 Update, <http://www.unaids.org>
- 2) European Centre for the Epidemiological Monitoring of AIDS, HIV/AIDS Surveillance in Europe, End-year report 2000. 2001; N<sup>o</sup> 64.  
[www.eurohiv.org](http://www.eurohiv.org)
- 3) WHO Europe Communicable Disease, WHO Regional Office for Europe, 1999 - 2001, <http://cisid.who.dk/>
- 4) International Narcotics Control Report, 2001,  
<http://www.state.gov/g/inl/rls/nrcrpt/2000/index.cfm?docid=892>
- 5) The determinants of the HIV/AIDS Epidemic in Eastern Europe, Monitoring the AIDS Pandemic, 1999
- 6) Office of the United nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, Status of Ratifications of the Principal International Human Rights Treaties, 26 Jun 2001, <http://www.unhchr.ch/pdf/report.pdf>
- 7) Corruption Perceptions Index 2001, Transparency International, June 27, 2001,  
<http://www.transparency.org/documents/cpi/2001/cpi2001.html>
- 8) Sovereign ratings List, Standard & Poor's, August 3, 2001,

<http://www.standardandpoors.com/RatingsActions/RatingsLists/So.../SoverignsRatingsList.htm>

- 9) CIA -- The World Factbook 2000 -- Armenia,  
<http://wwwcia.goc/cia/publications/factbook/geos/pl.html>