

ARMENIA

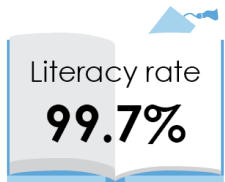
A landlocked, mountainous country with Turkey to the west and Georgia to the north, Armenia has an ancient cultural heritage with a history longer than most other European countries. Situated along the route of the Great Silk Road, it has had a number of cultural influences and empires. It is one of the earliest Christian civilizations with the first churches founded in the fourth century, and many religious sites are located throughout the country. After independence from the Soviet Union in 1991, it became a multi-party, democratic nation. Armenian is the official language and Russian is widely spoken. The currency is the dram and some of the main exports are diamonds, machinery and foodstuffs.



Population
2,968,544



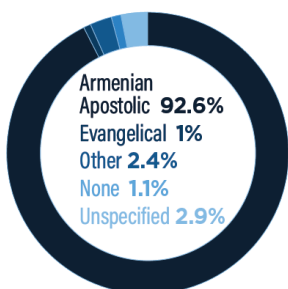
10,889 MI²
Slightly smaller than
Maryland



Ethnicities



Religions



FAMILY LIFE

It is common to have multiple generations living in the same household and it is typical for men to work and women to take care of household chores. Fathers are usually responsible for making family and financial decisions, but this is slowly changing, especially in large cities. Meals are usually eaten together as a family.

The elderly are held in high regard and families emphasize respect for older family members, particularly grandparents, who often live with the family. Generally, conversation between family members is direct if the relationships are close.

In the household, belongings are considered one's own and the etiquette of asking before borrowing depends on each family. It is considered normal for parents to socialize with friends without their children, who may stay at home alone or with extended family. It is considered unusual for someone to spend too much time alone.

Daughters are usually responsible for general cleaning around the house and helping out with meals. Sons may have chores that are outside the home, such as shoveling snow or working in the yard. Brothers may be expected to escort their sisters to school, and sisters may be expected to clean up after their brothers. These traditional gender roles are slowly changing.

Parents sometimes give teenagers a small allowance since it is uncommon for teenagers to have part-time jobs, although some teenagers find summer jobs in cafes, hotels, or shops.

Parents are very involved in the lives of their children and often monitor how much time they spend away from their studies and on the computer. Big decisions, such as choosing a career or attending university, are usually discussed as a family.

Some families have dogs or cats which usually are kept outside. Pets are not usually viewed as members of the family, and often are not given much attention since they are considered unclean.

FRIENDSHIP

It is acceptable for teenagers to socialize in groups and one-on-one with friends of the same gender. One-on-one socialization with friends of the opposite sex is not considered appropriate.

Extended family members and neighbors usually make up the majority of students' closest friends. Classmates are often very close to each other since they are with the same group throughout all grades. Sharing money and buying gifts for one another is considered a normal part of a friendship, and the money is usually not expected to be paid back. It is understood that if you

invite someone out, you will pay the bill. It is common for boys to collectively pay the bill when out with a group of mixed gender.

The acceptable distance when speaking or standing next to someone is quite close, and making eye contact is considered a sign of respect when speaking to others. It can be common for people to express negative emotions in public, and Armenian people are often quick to forgive without taking things personally.

SCHOOL LIFE

Students are divided into groups in elementary school and remain together as a class until graduation. They usually study 5-7 subjects. Teachers move between rooms and students stay in the same classroom where they are primarily evaluated on homework, class participation, and oral exams. Students have little flexibility in choosing their academic classes and all subjects are studied at the same level of difficulty. There are some students who choose to enter a specialized school in 10th grade where they have the opportunity to take more intensive or specific classes.

Students are expected to dress formally and neatly at school. Students usually eat breakfast at home before school and return home for lunch. It is uncommon to bring food to school.

Plagiarism and cheating, although discouraged, may have less serious repercussions in Armenian schools. Punishments may consist of verbal warnings or being asked to leave during a test, which results in a failed mark. In cases of bullying, class representatives often try to resolve these issues, and teachers and directors are involved to ensure no reoccurrences.

The relationship between teachers and students is very formal. To show appreciation to teachers, students will often give gifts or organize performances for them on the first day of school and on national teacher's day. Classes in school are mixed-gender except for sewing and cooking class for girls and wood-working classes for boys. There are frequent meetings between parents and teachers at school, especially in smaller communities. Students also keep school diaries where their marks are recorded and signed by the teacher.

Extracurricular activities are important to Armenian families and they are not usually available in schools. Parents encourage private lessons and participation in dancing, languages, visual arts, and sports activities, which are available in the community and are usually fee-based.

FOOD

Vegetarianism and vegan diets are not common, but there are those who observe special diets due to food allergies or other medical conditions. Restaurant portion sizes are average in Armenia and it is not common to take uneaten food home.

RELIGION

Some families go to church services on Saturdays, but most attend only on holidays or for family life events. Religious institutions are for worship and are not commonly considered a community center for non-religious activities.

PERSONAL CARE

It is common for Armenians to shower once or twice a day during the summer. People tend to shower less frequently during the winter or when water is scarce, and sometimes only twice a week. In these cases, people use a washcloth to bathe themselves. It is not common to wash hair every day. People change their clothes daily but items like jeans may be worn multiple times. It is normal for every family member to have one bath towel and one wash cloth, and they are usually used more than once before being washed.



The Future Leaders Exchange (FLEX) program is sponsored by the U.S. Department of State. FLEX provides competitively selected secondary school students from 22 countries in Europe and Eurasia with the opportunity to spend the academic year in the U.S. living with a volunteer host family and attending a host high school. Begun in 1993, FLEX now has over 29,000 alumni.