

# CAPTURING MIGRATION IN THE ARMENIAN AND REGIONAL CONTEXTS

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# Introduction

Migration in Armenia has long been considered as an area of utmost importance. High rates of outmigration starting from 1991 independence are now coupled with the volumes of immigration, which got a new impetus after the 2020 Nagorno Karabakh war and the 2022 Russia-Ukraine conflict that led thousands of people to enter Armenia. Thus, the country is now dealing both with emigration and immigration flows, and the better understanding of these phenomena would be of high importance for a wide range of actors that are interested in human mobility, such as the government, academia, NGOs and others.

Migration outflux from Armenia is predominantly associated with demographic (security, brain-drain) as well as migration-development nexus' perspectives (economic development, money transfers, diaspora mapping and engagement). The influx in its turn is mostly viewed through the prism of migration management and integration. Hence, it is crucial to understand the nature and composition of migration in the Armenian context for a set of reasons, including policy planning and implementation. However, the analysis of the vast body of literature sheds some light on the scarcity and imperfectness of migration data, let alone statistics, which are vital prerequisites for understanding the very topic. These lead to a simple research question: *RQ How is migration captured in Armenia?* For answering this question 13 key informant interviews were conducted, which have been examined through thematic network analysis.

In order to present the analysis and findings, the current study adheres to the following structure. First, the literature review concentrates on the international experience from a broader perspective by elucidating the existing approaches of capturing migration. In particular, this paper primarily analyzes post-soviet nations in the middle-income category in Eurasia. Then, the analysis narrows down to regional and sub-regional states, with a final focus on the Armenian case. Afterwards, a thorough presentation of the research methods follows in the methodology part. The findings and discussion of the study succeeds subsequently, which are later epitomized in the concluding part along with the derived recommendations.

# Chapter 1. Literature review

## Capturing International Mobility

After World War II the amount of international migration has skyrocketed both in scale and magnitude. Even conventional migrant sending countries transformed into societies that receive a huge influx of foreigners. Since experiencing these developments, different countries have needed to capture the needed statistics on immigrants, mainly for policy implementation reasons, such as migration management, integration, as well as motivated by security concerns.

The monitoring of peoples' mobility, which is one of the inseparable characteristics of the modern world, dates back to the 19<sup>th</sup> century as an instrument for surveillance purposes in order to keep foreigners under watch (Torpey 2000). The international borders were not a subject of systematic and widespread control just prior to the mentioned time period (Kivisto and Faist 2010). The emergence and gradual proliferation of nation-states has incentivized the authorities not only to keep borders controlled but also to initiate steps in order to differentiate citizens from foreigners. One of the first countries to collect data resembling an 'inventory' for foreigners was France (Bartram, Poros and Monforte 2014). In particular, the 1851 census in France was the first measurement in this regard (Silberman 1992). Nowadays, the analysis of migration influx and outflux is common all over the world and can be defined as follows: 'Migration 'stocks' and 'flows' are basic demographic concepts used to analyze and understand migration processes in a country or region. Migration stocks are the numbers of migrants living in a country or region at a given point in time. Migration flows are the number of migrants entering or leaving a country or region during a specific period of time (Bartram, Poros and Monforte 2014, p. 99).

Migration stocks and flows are quite difficult to record statistically in comparison with other population growth contributors such as mortality and fertility. As one of the most prominent scholars in migration studies Douglas Massey notes, the main challenge in capturing net migration rate is the dynamic nature of the phenomenon that unlike death and birth does not occur once only, and the status of a potential mover can interchangeably be transformed (2010). Besides, he argues that the obstacles while recording the movement stem not only from combining the results of arrivals and departures, but also from the fact that the actors involved, in particular, sending and receiving countries might have a mutually exclusive view on a given case. The most vivid manifestation is attributed to the very definition of a migrant. For instance, an 'immigrant' might be defined either by country of birth/origin (i.e. Australia, Poland, United States), by citizenship (i.e. Austria, Denmark, Italy), or by self-reported nationality (i.e. France, Germany, United Kingdom) (Pedersen, Pytlikova and Smith 2007). Apart from these discrepancies that unbalance migration statistics, the number of movers is often manipulated for political reasons as well, through antithetical interpretations of migrants (Massey 2010). In particular, one of the media monitoring in the UK has showcased that terms like 'asylum seeker', 'ethnic minority' and 'migrant' had been used synonymously (Baker et al. 2008).

Hence, the harmonization of migration statistics has long been in the spotlight of international organizations. In 1976, the United Nations Statistics division developed a set of recommendations, (last revision in 1998) meant to bring a consensus in basic definitions, such as 'migrant', which is defined as a person who changes his/her country of usual residence.

It is important to mention that the discrepancies are not solely demonstrated on an international level, but also within the borders of a single country, as both the organizations and ways of capturing the phenomenon might have a wide range of displays. The main actors who record the movement are using the following methods; population registers, issuance of residence permits, register of foreigners, issuance of exit permits, official clearance of departing migrant workers, issuance of work permits, records from regularization drivers, processing of asylum requests, border statistics, household surveys, censuses, surveys of establishments, reports to state authorities (social security, tax), reports from recruiting agencies, registry of people in insurance schemes, apprehension/deportation statistics (Hoffmann and Lawrence 1996; Bilborrow et al 1997).

In regard to the necessary statistics that are recommended to obtain for a better understanding of international mobility, the UN document (1998: 10) prioritizes collection of the following information: a) What is the overall annual net gain or loss of population through international migration? b) How many international migrants are admitted annually? Which are their countries of origin? c) In countries having free establishment provisions for the citizens of selected States, how many migrants exercise such a right over the course of a year? What are their countries of origin? d) How many citizens emigrate every year? Which are their countries of destination? e) How many emigrant citizens return every year? From which countries are citizens returning? f) How many migrant workers are admitted annually? How many leave the country for good every year? g) How many persons in search of asylum arrive annually? How many international migrants are admitted on humanitarian grounds (including refugees)? h) How many persons are admitted for family reunification over a year? i) How many persons who do not qualify as tourists are admitted for periods shorter than a year? Among them, how many are allowed to work in the receiving country? j) What is the total number of international migrants in the country? How many of those international migrants are economically active?

These questions are predominantly meant to examine the phenomenon mostly from the viewpoint of migrant receiving states, as only three out of 10 above mentioned points entail insights on outflux. Indeed, the necessity to record migration, as is already depicted in this section, was mainly sparked by the need to capture foreigners rather than to collect information about the citizens who leave the state borders. Here, it is pertinent to mention, that there are many countries with a negative net migration rate, and from their perspective, understanding the scope of emigration is not less important than gaining information about the immigrants. One of these states is the Republic of Armenia. Before delving into the peculiarities of this specific context, it would be pertinent to analyze the cases of compatible countries with similar demographic, economic and geographic characteristics as well.

## **Regional (Eurasia)**

Nations in Central Asia and the Caucasus experience significant outflow migration, particularly since the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991. Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan are among the most remittance-dependent countries in the world (Wang et al. 2019, Chernina 2020). Therefore, much of the literature is focused on the effects of labor migration on the economy in the form of remittances and the societal effects on sending communities (Malyuchenko 2015; Chernina 2020).

Despite its significance, migration flow data is neither uniform nor reliable in these nations. For some countries, researchers rely on studies conducted solely by international organizations as

opposed to national censuses or other internal data sources. For instance, Kyrgyzstan does not have many sources that present raw migration data. According to the UN's International Organization of Migration (IOM), 'The collection and publication of migration data are sporadic. The State Migration Service's data are not collected on a regular basis. The National Statistical Committee's yearbook contains data on emigration and immigration, but the information is not disaggregated by sex' (IOM, 2018, p. 3). The government has a database on the labor market and on migrant workers, but these are not publicly available. Much of the migration research on Kyrgyzstan references the *Life in Kyrgyzstan* study conducted by the German Institute for Economic Research (Brück et al. 2018; Zhunusova et al. 2018; Wang et al. 2019). The longitudinal research study is an open access household and individual survey covering multiple regions in Kyrgyzstan (Brück et al. 2021). As an alternative, instead of relying on existing studies, some researchers conduct their own studies using methodologies such as in-depth interviews with migrant households, household surveys, and interviews with government officials. (Critelli et al. 2021; Dzhoshbekova 2021).

Where possible, international organizations work together with national statistical committees or governmental organizations. While collaboration with and reliance on international organizations provides states with guidance and expertise, it is also limiting. The research motivations come from the international organizations' agenda, often dictated by grant funding, and sometimes do not account for the state's needs.

In Tajikistan, one group of researchers observed migration patterns through surveys conducted by the State Statistics Committee of the Republic of Tajikistan with participation from the World Bank and UNICEF in 2007 and 2009 (Shemyakina 2011). Another paper, again focused on remittances and labor migration, uses the Listening to Tajikistan (L2TJK) survey, 'A telephone-based high frequency panel survey that monitors a variety of indicators including migration, income and employment, the wellbeing and life satisfaction of households, and access to water and electricity services' (Murakami et al. 2020, p. 4). Supplemental data sources are from the World Bank, but no data is provided by Tajikistan government or other institutions (Murakami et al. 2020). In Tajikistan, remittances account for up to 35% of the country's GDP. The nation began using a migration card system which helped estimate migration outflow. They were able to determine that 600,000 people leave the country to work abroad every year (United Nations Economic Commission for Europe and United Nations Population Fund 2011).

In Turkmenistan, researchers noted that no publicly available data exists on population distribution among territories. (Lukyanets et al., 2020). Likewise, researchers studying labor migration from Uzbekistan are also limited by available data. The main data source is from the Uzbekistan Ministry of Employment and Labor Relations (MELR). MELR does not provide detailed retrospective information needed to evaluate the migration process, however (Bondarenko 2021). Because of this, researchers turn to previously published international studies and articles, which are notably limited by pre-aggregated data. Another issue is the compatibility of MELR public opinion polls with earlier published materials. Further, the MELR data does not address the influence on communities affected by migration. In one particular study, the lack of data was compensated by in-depth interviews with migrants and their families. Only with the data gathered from interviews could the authors discern a cause-and-effect relationship between migration and its effects on a community (Bondarenko 2021).

In the case of Moldova, the country has the National Bureau on Statistics (NBS), which, according to IOM, is responsible for producing migration statistics and is financed by the state budget. Several studies rely on this data, indicating its higher consistency and accuracy. Moldova also has a Migration Statistics Division that works with the NBS to produce statistics based on data received from the General Inspectorate of Border Police, the Public Services Agency, and the Bureau for Migration and Asylum (IOM 2021). The main sources of data are the decennial Population and Housing Census, the quarterly/yearly Labor Force Survey, and the quarterly/yearly Household Budget Survey. NBS also collaborates with international organizations such as the European Commission, UNFPA, IOM, ILO, and the World Bank (IOM 2021).

## **Sub-Regional (Caucasus)**

### ***Georgia***

Within the Caucasus, Georgia experiences similar patterns in migration flows, particularly in outflow of labor migration to places such as the Russian Federation and the EU. The main statistical sources are produced by the National Statistics Office of Georgia (GEOSTAT) through their census (Tsitsagi et al. 2019). According to GEOSTAT, the main sources for international migration in Georgia are annual data of inflows and outflows produced by the Ministry of Internal Affairs, the data of stocks on international migrants currently residing in Georgia produced by the general population census, and the data of stocks of international migrants currently residing abroad, also produced by the population census (Tsekvava 2014). While migration data collection in the post-Soviet period was ‘essentially unregulated’ and needed significant legal, organizational, and structural reform (Tukhashvili 2012, p. 2), the situation over the last decade has improved significantly. In 2015, Georgia created a Migration Profile, a platform to collect and thematically analyze migration data. The Medium Migration Profile is updated once every two years and a Brief Migration Profile is updated in between. To track administrative data using big data technology, a Unified Migration Data Analytical System (UMAS) was developed by the Government of Georgia with funding from the EU. UMAS combines administrative immigration data, collected by different entities, into one database (State Commission on Migration Issues 2019).

### ***Azerbaijan***

Research on migration in Azerbaijan is very sparse. Desk research does not provide many meaningful results or sound findings on migration patterns. Similarly to Armenia, much of the research is either produced by or in collaboration with international organizations and donors. The content of research is focused on the push and pull factors of post-Soviet migration, and the effect of mass out-migration on the economic development of Azerbaijan. The Republic of Azerbaijan does have a State Migration Service which operates as a governmental agency in charge of regulation and activities surrounding migration. Most research analyzes data from the State Statistical Committee of the Republic of Azerbaijan (Yüksel et al. 2018, Hosner et al. 2018).

### ***Armenian Context***

Currently, a significant portion of the 2.9 million Armenians live outside of the country (OECD/CRRC Armenia 2017). This does not include the 7 million Diaspora Armenians living around the world. For these reasons, migration patterns in Armenia are of particular importance



and have been widely studied over time. Most literature in the last decade is focused on labor migration, remittances, return migrants, and the economic implications for Armenia. Given the interconnectivity between migration and the economy, understanding, tracking, and accurately reporting migration flows is critical to creating economic stability in the region.

The vast body of the literature predominantly examines the demography of migration with an emphasis on outmigration. However, the statistics only provide limited descriptive information on present migration status that is gained from household surveys, census data, and other administrative data. These statistics lack unraveling the motivational aspects of emigration and its long-term effects. Nearly half of the studies analyze the phenomenon of remittances as they relate to the host communities and families left behind. Short-term and seasonal labor migration are also of particular interest, but are hard to track due to the unofficial nature of this movement. Much of the literature is also focused on the interplay of gender, community, feelings of belongingness, and economic development in the country of origin. With more accurate and reliable data, researchers can perform deeper and more meaningful analyses on these topics.

The most common motivations for emigration are unemployment, low wages, desire to improve standard of living, and labor opportunities abroad (European Training Foundation and Caucasus Research Resource Center – Armenia 2012). According to World Bank data, in 2020, personal remittances received in the country constituted 10.4% of Armenia’s total GDP (World Bank 2020). The majority of emigrants are men who leave for work in urban areas of the Russian Federation (Armstat 2020a). According to data provided by the Statistical Committee of the Republic of Armenia’s Integrated Living Conditions Survey (ILCS), in 2018 261,500 permanent residents received remittances, the majority of which came from the Russian Federation (Armstat 2018). In 2019, 6.7% of the population was dependent on remittances (Armstat 2020b).

The major actors and contributors to migration statistics are the Statistical Committee of the Republic of Armenia, Migration Services, the Integrated Living Conditions Survey implemented by Armstat; the Report on Household Survey on Migration in Armenia; the Census of Republic of Armenia; and the National Security Service’s Border Management Information System (BMIS) (Vidal 2019). Additionally, the Russian Armenian Household Surveys conducted by RAU in 2015-2017, the Demographic Handbook created by Armstat, and the Social Snapshot and Poverty in Armenia (2019) and the ILO Survey conducted in 2009 are all widely cited sources.

Some studies rely mostly on the statistical sources mentioned above to draw conclusions (Chobanyan 2013; Denisenko 2014; Adunts et al. 2019). On the other hand, other studies complement the available/existing statistics with their own research, including focus groups, in-depth interviews, and household surveys (Makaryan et al., 2012, ETF and CRRC 2012, Makaryan et al. 2014; Tadevosyan 2014; IOM 2015; Honorati et al. 2019). And finally, some studies circumvent reliance on reported statistics, primarily using their own research to gain necessary insights (Fleischer 2008; Agadjanian et al. 2013; Lietaert 2016; Rasuly-Paleczek et al. 2017; Bolsajian 2018; Demirchyan et al. 2021).

Despite the broad interest, however, the lack of reliable, consistent data presents major challenges to migration research. The difficulties of migration data collection as described above are relevant in the Armenian context for several reasons. For instance, the organizations responsible for statistical reporting do not share centralized information, communication, and dissemination of data. As identified by IOM, ‘ILCS collects data on employment of migrants but not duration of stay; the Census collects data on employment of migrants but only every ten years; the Register

provides information on whether migrants work (not specifying occupation) but reliability of this is low; BMIS collects data on entries at borders but not on reason for entry' (IOM 2020, Ch. 8, p. 44). Seasonal migration is difficult to measure because their work is not tied to a visa. There is an overall lack of centralized information and communication between major actors or relevant bodies collecting data (Vidal 2019).

Further, data on employment and unemployment versus data gathered through surveys often show significant discrepancies (Makaryan et al. 2012). While some analysts acknowledge where and how datasets fall short but still rely on them to draw conclusions, others cite the explicit lack of available data as a major issue. For example, in a Policy Brief by the World Bank, the authors mention that the RAU survey does not contain information to calculate monetary migration costs, so instead they created a migration-cost index from qualitative responses in the survey (Honorati et al. 2019). On the other hand, in one study presented by CARIM East and the European Union, the challenges of accurate data collection are enumerated as a significant obstacle. For instance, they state that 'The analyses are based on estimates, Armenia does not have any reliable tools to measure migration, which in itself is a serious problem for a country with such a high level of migration' (Gomółka 2018).

First, and perhaps most crucially, emigration data is processed by the National Statistical Service of Armenia through local branches of the Passport and Visa Department of the Armenian Police via the 'Migrant's Statistical Registration Form.' The reported numbers do not reflect real migrant flow, however, since emigrants are often not de-registered before leaving and re-registered after return. Further, the entry/exit registration data is collected for every international passenger by the International Border Crossing Information, but the information does not include country of destination or origin, duration of stay abroad or in Armenia, or other relevant information that would help determine motivation of migration. Therefore, it is very difficult to estimate the number of returnees (Gomółka 2018).

Another major challenge is matching migration information with destination countries. Russia's reporting on Armenian migrants is both inconsistent with Armenia's reporting and hard to access. Experts are skeptical of the spike in migration reported by the Russian Federation, stating that systems for recording migration in Russia have undergone recent changes, and Rosstat has not reported these methodological shifts (JAMnews 2019).

The most common methodological workarounds to lack of data are either complementing or replacing statistical information with household surveys, proprietary fieldwork studies, focus groups, in-depth interviews, and creation of proxy indicators in place of more standard international indicators. For example, the IOM's and Armstat's Household Survey is one of the most comprehensive collections of migration data from household surveys, however, they themselves note the challenges of a household survey. In particular, since migration is in itself a rare event, finding a household with an emigrant abroad or a returned migrant is a challenge (Góis 2014). This is also problematic because of the inefficiency and duplication of research. Further, oftentimes the qualitative data collected in the literature cannot be compared to one another, and it seems that researchers interested in migration in Armenia are not in conversation with one another. Again, this is inefficient, but more insidiously, creates unreliable and often unusable data related to migration.

The IOM completed an analysis on migration data collection in 2010 titled 'Enhancing Migration Data Collection, Processing and Sharing in the Republic of Armenia: Needs Assessment and Gap

Analysis Report'. At this time, they identified the two existing migration data sources: statistical and administrative. The data should capture migration duration, reasons for migration, frequency, origin and destination, citizenship, age, sex, occupation, and employment status. In a key finding, IOM noted that in fact Armenia had already collected large data sets on migration-related information, however, the lack of synergy and collaboration between different organizations presents a major roadblock to collecting accurate, reliable, and comprehensive data. One of the key challenges identified is that information is decentralized: different governing bodies are responsible for capturing different information. Therefore, there is no one system that tracks information through all stages of the migration system. In light of this, IOM creates a roadmap of suggestions to enhance data collection in Armenia (Manke et al. 2010).

As a follow-up, the IOM published a paper in 2020 underscoring the importance of collecting migration data in Armenia to meet their 2030 Sustainable Development Goals. The IOM created new, specific indicators that relate to SDG's and that were feasible to collect given Armenia's data-poor situation. The paper also outlines future solutions and suggestions for maintaining a robust data-collection system on migration, working with Armstat, the State Migration Service, and other major stakeholders. What is not clear, however, is what has changed in this ten year period, if any improvements have been made, and if any of key organizations have adopted the suggestions outlined (Vidal 2019).

Ultimately, the research shows that researchers in Armenia are not always reliant on state migration statistics. Because of this, they produce their own research, which is often qualitative and does not incorporate quantitative methods. In some cases, the research lacks expertise in the field as well as methodological rigor.

## Chapter 2. Methodology

From the chapter above, it can be deduced that the current state of affairs in terms of migration data availability in Armenia signals a gap, which needs further examination. Thus, the research paper seeks to address the following research question: How is migration captured in Armenia? Such a broad formulation of the question enables one to unravel not only the obstacles in the context of data availability, but also to dig deeper with an aim to target a set of other insights that determine the comprehensive picture of the phenomenon.

The rationale to conduct this study mainly emanates from the point that most of the studies in the sphere of migration are predominantly observing the case only within the scope of the Armenian context, neglecting any engagement with the vast body of academic literature, as well as juxtaposing their findings with already existing scope of studies carried out to examine the same phenomenon. Consequently, this paper aims to fill this gap by conducting exploratory research that will examine the very issue from a broader perspective.

To answer the research question, 13 key informant interviews were held with different parties including the representatives of the main entities that deal with migration coupled with independent researchers that supplement academic insights in order to gather an all-round picture. The interviewees are the representatives of the following entities: State Migration Service, Statistical Committee, Government of RA, IOM, ILO, UNFPA, UNHCR (former representative), International Center for Migration Policy Development, People in Need, Caritas, and three academicians studying migration.

The semi-structured survey questionnaire was designed after the literature review examination. The average duration of the interviews is approximately 40 minutes, with overall 506 minutes in total. The recorded materials were transcribed and analyzed using Nvivo software. As a result of the thematic analysis (Attride-Sterling 2001) 224 unique codes have emerged. Eventually they originated three global themes that are presented in the following chapter.

## Chapter 3. Findings and Discussion

This chapter can be best grouped under the following headings, as the thematic analysis has revealed three global themes: The first set of elucidation examines the phenomenon of the available migration data. The second theme posits that cooperation is a means to abate migration related issues. And the final part sheds some light on the necessity of solid needs assessment research.

**Global Theme 1: Available Data is a Two-Sided Sword.** Both the availability and the lack of data entails wide-ranging problems, including constraints for understanding migration, in terms of misuse and misinterpretation of the data. The open source migration data is approached from the security perspective. In particular, open source migration data is viewed as an area of concern, because the securitized information might also be available to other parties and this possibility is a direct threat to the national interests of Armenia. Thus, it is argued that the data should be classified, even though the importance of data availability in terms of policy planning and implementation is asserted as well.

*‘There are two contradicting interests, on one side the available data will undoubtedly boost the effectiveness of different institutions residing in Armenia, but on the other hand, it might cause some security threats, I mean we have to understand what we have to achieve and how it can be executed to minimize these risks... Only the National Security Service has an access to the Electronic Border Management Information System, and the attempts of making them available also for other institutions was doomed to fail. At least the ones who are engaged in policy planning should be allowed access.’*

Nevertheless, it is a widely held view that the possible data access is a means to minimize security related issues as well. For instance, the more data availability increases, the more effective and easier the process of migrant integration would become, and the more protected their rights would become as well. This notion is in line with the vast body of academic literature claiming that level of migrant integration in the receiving societies predefines the socio-economic stability for the parties involved, while minimizing the possible security threats emanating from the potential disintegration (Kivisto and Faist 2010).

The importance of integration received a new impetus after the recent developments in the post-Soviet region. The second Nagorno Karabakh war in 2020, which caused thousands of people to flee the violence and cross into Armenia, and the Russia-Ukraine conflict in 2022 that caused the inflow of thousands of foreigners into Armenia has necessitated to propose steps for integration. Indeed, many non-government organizations in Armenia that have been involved in integrating Syrian-Armenians are enlarging their scope of interests, given the latest developments but still have problems when it comes to data collection in order to track people that have crossed the Armenian border.

As regards the interlinkage between migration related data and human rights protection the best manifestation of it is the accessibility of synchronized data-set between the State Revenue Committee, State Migration Service and Health and Labor Inspection to combat trafficking and human rights violations. In particular, the list of migrants who have not paid an income tax for a given period of time might be filtered, and a supervisory body can monitor the case to detect a possible conducts of labor rights violation, for instance undocumented working.

As pointed out in the beginning and elaborated afterwards migration data/statistics can be misused externally entailing security concerns and also might be misinterpreted internally, which presumably is capable of distorting the overall picture of migration. The number of migrants, as discussed in the literature review, might be presented differently based on political reasons. One of the interviewees notes that in order to show the alleged boom in the tourism sector some repatriates or refugees can be classified as tourists, or some Armenian tourist that have left the country for a short period of time can likewise be interpreted as migrants that have decided to live elsewhere. Not only the existing numbers of migrants might be manipulated for political reasons, but also proposed demographic and migration strategies may be determined by political interests for satisfying populist sentiments.

*'Look what we have... Some years ago, the previous political authority envisaged to have four million people living in Armenia by 2040, the current political authority tried to outnumber their predecessors by declaring the goal to have five million people living in Armenia by 2050... None of them explained what lies behind these numbers, given that the optimistic projections by the UNFPA are not even closer to the desired picture. This is comical and ridiculous... I think they are matching the envisaged numbers to the timeline; four in 2040, five in 2050, and maybe six in 2060... who knows?'*

Though there are some risks regarding misuse and misinterpretation of data and statistics, the imperfectness of the latter is an area of a major concern, which is manifested both in terms of frequency and intensity of the analysis. The main problems can be divided into three main categories: lack of migration related data, scarcity, and incompleteness of it. The fundamental available data regarding migrants are predominantly epitomized within the scope of information that passports contain; the bearer's name, place of birth, date of birth, sex etc. The numbers of border crossings, data on asylum-seekers, the numbers of international students and work permit holders are also available.

The gap in data and in statistics might be attributed to several factors. The key aspects of the general picture can be listed as follows: Migration related insights are not user-friendly, digitalized, comparable, open, disaggregated, are not collected in a methodologically sound way, there are hardships to access (both time wise and due to bureaucracy) and even are not rather reliable. It is argued that some statistics are openly available, but given their complicated and confusing appearance, it is hard to understand and use them. Given the interdisciplinary nature of migration, the administrative data is collected by different actors, such as State Migration Service, Police, Ministry of Justice, National Security Service etc., and by using various methodological approaches. Some might define terms differently or in some cases the collected data might be digitalized or not. The incomparability of data is mostly attributed to the decentralized system of migration management, where there are different responsible parties involved. What makes the case even worse is the fact that interoperability of databases is mostly lacking. Thus, a unified information platform is seen as a way for ameliorating these issues.

The hardships of data access are not only ascribable to independent researchers or other interested parties, but also to the main actors in the field both within the state officers and among international partners. Sometimes policy makers have no possibility to analyze the data derived from Electronic Border Management Information System, let alone to access the data. In regards to the databases that are not classified, the parties might encounter problems in the face of red tape and delays in

information access. One of the informants notes that once their entity needed immediate access to a dataset for double checking important information, but it was out of the working hours and it was not possible to connect with the body that owned the needed data. The things are more difficult for the researchers or other interested parties that want to examine migration. As a result, they conduct their own research to unravel the needed insights, but as the execution of a quantitative analysis is quite expensive, they mostly rely on qualitative tools.

Yet another root cause of having insufficient migration insights stems from the database of State Registry of Population, which is considered as one of the most important sources of information. However, people are not incentivized enough to register the necessary data into the system that could be properly analyzed for a set of reasons and needs. The imperfectness of the very source is vividly manifested by the fact that after the 2011 census it became clear that the estimates provided by the State Registry of Population were fairly incorrect. In particular, the error of their calculations exceeded the number of the overall population residing in Armenia by approximately 260,000 people. SRP is the primary body that might collect data regarding the internal migration, which is of utmost importance, especially in the context of high rates of urbanization. Nevertheless, it is argued that there is limited to no understanding on the internal aspect of the phenomenon.

It is noteworthy to mention that the troublesome picture related to migration data is not an exception. The issues concerning data availability in general, let alone the statistics, is quite widespread in the country. The potential steps targeting the betterment of migration related databases should not be approached separately, but rather be seen as a part of a whole, given the interdisciplinary essence of the phenomenon. Likewise, the existence of migration statistics is not sufficient for gaining a complete insight. As the interviewees posit, statistical insights should be coupled with the analyses of the international expertise and historical analogues to be able to deduce forecasts and act accordingly.

Though this idealistic model of statistics availability is desired, it is a widely held opinion that the current state of affairs is far from it. For instance, there is no information on the net migration rate in Armenia. The available data is about the current balance of the population based on the calculations of inflow and outflow.

*'It is not right to call net migration rate, it is more of a balance, which might be considered as a proxy to the former... suppose 30,000 people left, 25,000 people entered the country, so the balance is -5,000, but you do not know the exact number of entrants. The same person might leave four times in a given year, so they are not four different individuals... what can be inferred is that if a person has left four times, then at least three times he/she has returned. Besides, we do not know who leaves for what reason. One might be a tourist but his/her departure might negatively affect the balance, and that in its turn may be interpreted as outmigration'.*

Apart from the necessity of having a net migration rate, there are some other minimal needs in terms of data collection that are still lacking. The recorded goals of the entrants and departing people is highly needed. It is stated that in the Eurasian Economic Union Armenia is one of few countries where migration cards are not issued to foreigners upon entrance. Though collecting insight about goals is a challenging task, as it has some objective reasons (see the next theme), the total absence of mechanisms can resist no critique.

To sum up, it is evident that on one hand there is a wide-ranging issue related to migration data and statistics availability, and on the other hand the limited amount of existing data sources and statistics might be a subject of misuse and misinterpretation. However, the lack and incompleteness of the mentioned sources is an even bigger challenge, as presented above. The global thematic networks that follow are elaborating on alternative solutions that are meant to circumvent issues emanating from this very gap.

**Global Theme 2: Cooperation Abates General Problems Related to Migration.** This thematic network is an amalgamation of two organizing themes. First, it is evident that migration management, policy planning and implementation have multifaceted sets of problems and second, it is claimed that the cooperation is an urgency.

Though migration management related obstacles are well identified, a set of solutions are lacking. The most important issue is attributed to the fact that migration management is decentralized which means there are more than one body dealing with the case. A potential emergence of a Ministry of Internal Affairs is the key solution for improving migration management. Besides, the predominant majority of Eurasian and European countries have adhered to this very approach.

The finding indicates that some structural and legislative drawbacks even worsen the situation. For instance, migration policies are mainly being planned by the State Migration Service, though this responsibility is not envisaged for them by the charter, as being a body under the Ministry of Territorial Administration and Infrastructure, presumably they would be engaged in the implementation phase only. On the other hand, the Ministry itself does not have enough capacity for migration policy designing.

Given the decentralized structure of migration management there are many bodies that deal with human mobility, and consequently many state officers that somehow have their say on the matter lack necessary competencies. The evidence suggests that not all state employees have solid understanding on migration, and this void is not compensated. One of the interviewees states.

*'At the government, migration was one of the main topics that I was responsible for, however that was a bit problematic... hmmm... I did not have sufficient knowledge and competency for that, and no other specialists or experts were supporting me, which of course was full of concern'.*

Though there are various bodies involved in migration management, policies are not considered in a wider context. Of course, the frequent meetings of the council for demographic improvement and the recent revision of demography related regulatory acts are a step forward, however these initiatives are more of an exception to the rule. Migration and demographic goals sometimes can better be achieved by policies that are dealing with the matter indirectly. Particularly, the mortgage policies for young families, apart from other objectives, were envisaged for boosting the demographic composition, but the mentioned ultimate goal was doomed to fail. Eligible people are given a limited amount of money which is suffice for obtaining houses in Yerevan with small square meters. Eventually, the program envisaged for child birth rate increase might have an opposite effect, as small houses are potentially a constraint for having many children.

*'I want to put an emphasis on an important topic. Migration is a constituent part of demographics, right? Then look what we have. Kindergartens close at 16:00, but*



*parents usually work until 18:00, is it normal? I suggest extending hours until 19:00. It will change the situation for the good’.*

Migration related policies sometimes are planned for the sake of it. As one of the speakers notes, state might allocate money for child birth, but without initiating necessary actions, parents might emigrate with the newborn child. Yet another root cause for inefficient policies stems from the fact the initiatives are proposed based on available financial assets rather than needs. Indeed, policies are highly reliant on financial allocations.

Having discussed the specter of obstacles related to migration management and policy planning, it can be posited that effective cooperation between state bodies and various entities dealing with human mobility can greatly compensate for issues emanating from above mentioned reasons. In particular, international organizations provide financial support and share their expertise with state agencies.

*‘International organizations are supporting in very different ways, starting from initiatives that improve border management to census organization. During these years, the partnership has increased both in scale and magnitude, which definitely has improved the overall situation’.*

Likewise, NGOs share their research and data for different reasons, including policy planning. Besides, cooperation with international partners leads to harmonization processes that might both increase the levels of migration management and policy planning. The ratification of international conventions in its turn smooths cooperation between parties.

**Global Theme 3: Need for Quality and Need Based Research.** The analysis of the final theme unravels that there is a vivid need for quality research, meanwhile the available ones do not even match the basic demands of the state, which in its turn is not properly identified. In particular, the demand for migration research is mainly proposed by the donors and in the meantime, the state entities show little to no involvement either in co-formulating the demand or proposing their own needs.

Low quality studies on migration mostly lack theoretical and methodological bases, which casts some doubt on the quality of research from the academic point of view. The examination of the literature review backs the notion of interviewees that most of the research either ignore applying migration theories or address the phenomenon solely from the prism of economic theories, while elaborating on the Armenian case. These circumstances have their negative consequences on the analysis of the studies. Specifically, the existing studies lack or encounter hardships while combining quantitative and qualitative methods. On one hand, the studies often have repeated content, and on the other hand the results of some quantitative studies cannot be juxtaposed, as a result of difference in term definitions and antithetical methodologies. Moreover, some vital topics of migration have been neglected by examiners such as the cases of Syrian Armenians, the influx of immigrants or the main determinant of Armenian emigration in general.

The void is most likely stemming from the scarcity of professionals and lack of knowledge in the specific field. It is widely asserted that in Armenia there is only one demographer, which is extremely troublesome given the importance of the matter. One of the respondents who is teaching demography at one of the main universities accepts his limited knowledge and moreover, posits that advanced mathematics is crucial for studying demography however in the Faculty of

Sociology quantitative preparedness lags behind the expected level. Nevertheless, the vacuum is not filled by other actors such as think tanks or international experts, who are not well familiar with the Armenian context.

However, it should be noted that there are some objective reasons that predefines the current state of affairs. First and foremost, the lack or incompleteness of migration data and statistics is the major constraint for the researchers. As a result, this vacuum is usually compensated by the qualitative research, which creates its own difficulties. For instance, the real reasons of migration are very hard to obtain.

*'Usually immigrants or repatriates do not state the real reasons for their departure and are talking about alternative realities to kind of justify their choice to emigrate... they may idealize their stay abroad without mentioning the actual troubles they witnessed there, or might exaggerate their earnings or incomes for the same reason... Besides, some of them may have psychological issues, which creates additional difficulties for the researcher'.*

Overall, the respondents were unanimously positing that for demographers and researchers it is quite difficult to study migration. Having explored the reasons for quality research shortage, the following part of the theme analysis will concentrate on how the demand and supply of the research determine the content of the existing studies.

The content of migration related research is mostly shaped by the demand of the donors, which predominantly are international organizations. Particularly, the topics of the studies are principally proposed by research grants. As is noted, researchers and NGOs usually examine cases based on available financing rather than being driven by their own interests. Moreover, the demand is formulated through the viewpoint of migrant receiving states, who are the main donors of research grants. That is to say, the research questions and methodologies are more in line with the realms of migrant receiving countries rather than sending ones.

Meanwhile, state entities are not much engaged in proposing research demands. As is posited, the authority does not exactly know what is needed to be done in the sphere of migration. Actually, migration related issues and goals are not properly identified, and migration wise objectives are only fragmentarily manifested by the state. A vivid example of it can be found in the Law on Structure and Activity of the Government (2018), which neglects addressing a word about the very issue. The cooperation between the authority and donors that might lead to research demand generation would be more effective if the state would follow a more proactive stance in terms of engagement.

*'International organizations are ready to support in many different ways, and we highly appreciate their efforts in this regard, it is us [government] who halt the process... the ball is on our side of the pitch, so we have to speed up our part of work a bit'.*

## Concluding Remarks and Recommendations

The findings obtained from the literature review and key informant interviews point to major issues with collecting migration data in Armenia - a problem that spills into many other important issues in the country, such as demographics and population. Furthering our understanding of migration is critical to the development and improvement of the country's operations, and quality data collection is central in this sense.

Generally speaking, migration statistics are collected through three major sources: labor force surveys, household and population censuses, and administrative data such as visa and work permits, border registration, and foreign employment departments (ILO 2021). Issues with data collection, access, and dissemination, can be identified in all three of these sources.

By first examining the international expertise at a regional and sub-regional level, it is clear that many post-Soviet nations with high levels of outmigration flow face similar challenges to those of Armenia. General lack of organized national communication, no centralized data, minimal online database or digital tracking tools, and poor presentation and public availability are all common themes in gathering migration data in the region. Additionally, the transient and undocumented nature of short-term labor migration (primarily to Russia), the major driving factor of migration in this region, creates administrative issues when trying to collect proper statistics. National and economic security threats in Armenia make challenges to data dissemination particularly difficult. Data can often be misused and misrepresented for a particular agenda. While the research shows that access to data is critical in understanding migration, disseminating such data must be done with caution and understanding of its implications. This must be taken into account when formulating a solution.

In Armenia, policymakers have difficulty accessing administrative data from border management. Even public, unclassified data is still difficult to access in a timely manner. Further, the data that is available is difficult to find and interpret. It is often presented confusingly, not digitized, and not disaggregated.

Due to lack of availability or hesitancy to rely on available statistics, literature shows that individual researchers or organizations often attempt their own data collection. Because quantitative analysis is expensive, however, much of the research is qualitative. The data is thus not cross-comparable due to different, or not sound, methodological approaches, and general lack of professional knowledge and expertise in the field. Researchers are duplicating work and producing asynchronistic information. Some low-quality studies on migration lack in both theory and methodology. Therefore, not only is data difficult to access, but the data that *is* available is unreliable and incomplete. It is clear that the research is primarily focused on migration's effect on the economy, remittances, and sociocultural effects on communities left behind. Further, topics such as migrant motivation, immigration, influx of Syrian Armenians, have been mostly ignored as stated by the informants. There is a need for higher quality migration research.

Moreover, much of the research is funded by international institutions with their own agendas and predetermined budgets. The funders often do not effectively collaborate with the state bodies, and the state does not advocate for their own needs. Often funds come from research grants which are limited to available finance. Further, the donors mainly approach the research from a migrant-

sending, not migrant-receiving, perspective, which is problematic for determining solutions for the Armenian case.

As for the administrative data that is collected, many insights come from the information available in border crosser's passports. Armenia is one of few countries in the EEU where migration cards are not given to foreigners upon entrance. It is therefore impossible to track migration flows, a difficulty that has been noted in the literature as well. Without knowing the details of motivation for movement, a full picture of migration cannot be understood.

Another major issue gleaned from the research is in the multitude of state bodies dealing with migration in Armenia. There is no one governing body responsible for creating migration policy, implementing policy, and collecting data. Cooperation and collaboration among these bodies is an urgent necessity. Informant interviews have revealed that lack of training, capacity, and understanding within government bodies presents a major roadblock to collecting thorough migration statistics collecting and therefore to creating relevant and effective migration policy.

Migration is an interdisciplinary issue and should be considered in concert with demographics and other policies that address the population in Armenia. Migration cannot be evaluated in a vacuum and must also be cross compared to other nations, put in a historical context, and looked at with a holistic approach.

Lack of expertise, poor communication, decentralization, and overlap of effort all present major issues to addressing migration properly in Armenia. A single government body, such as a Ministry of Internal Affairs (yet to be formed), would address these problems. Many European and Eurasian countries already have something similar. If a state body is formed that deals with migration, they can work more effectively with international organizations who provide financial support and share expertise, but do not solely propose the topic of research.

Armenia can look to countries with similar challenges who have implemented policies that create more reliable and valuable data for researchers. As an example, through their collaboration with international organizations like ILO and World Bank, Moldova has worked to improve accuracy of social surveys (Fasulo et al. 2020). Using administrative, census, and survey data, Moldova collects information on both citizens and non-citizens, foreigners and nationals, refugees, asylum seekers, and exit nationals leaving for temporary purposes. Statistics provide information on five essential demographic areas of age, sex, marital status, educational attainment, and household size. Armenian organizations might look to this example on improving both the content of and administration of household and labor surveys in order to dedicate a larger concentration on migration.

Similarly, Georgia's online 'migration profile' database has standardized, codified, and improved international migration data collection significantly over the past years (State Commission on Migration Issues 2019). Policy makers in Armenia again could look to this example to create a unified digital information platform.

## **Recommendations**

Looking forward, the research indicates several recommendations that could be adopted relatively quickly and easily in order to improve migration data in Armenia. First, the 2022 Census can be seen as an opportunity to gain needed insight on migration. New survey questions specifically

relating to migration as well as organized collation of data are both possible avenues for improvement.

Yet another room for improvement is the linkage of the capacities of donors with the needs of state entities. For instance, the major topics discussed in the sessions of the Demographic Situation Improvement Council (one of the recent meeting has taken place in 2021) might be reformulated into research questions and be shared with the international organizations and other partners to understand the Armenian context of migration and demographics. Not only would this provide better shared understanding for outside organizations and stakeholders, but the topics discussed could in turn become research focuses for international funders.

Further, capacity building for the State Population Registry is of utmost importance, as internal migration statistics can be collected by this body. However, as is mentioned previously this aspect of human mobility is poorly identified.

In regard to poor quality of research, one proposed initiative is to unify research methodologies. This includes standardizing definition of terms, increasing expertise in the field, and revising existing methodologies. For instance, one challenge identified in this research is that respondents are reluctant to mention their real reason for emigration, perhaps out of fear or shame. In order to address this, non-personal, generalized questions could be asked in addition, such as ‘why do *people* usually migrate?’

Additionally, building a Ministry of Internal Affairs that collaborates with international organizations in order to ensure they are abiding by international statistical standards and using uniform definitions and indicators while maintaining focus on Armenia’s specific case and national priorities is another such example that can be learned from the regional community. This new group can collaborate with international counteragents abroad as well to help track Armenians that have emigrated for work or education. Finally, following Georgia’s model, Armenia might begin to develop an online, digitalized tool that collects and tracks disaggregated migration data and is clearly available to research stakeholders to view and download.

Migration data exists; however we need better standards for collecting, organizing, and sharing it. We need more training and expertise in the field, improvements to methodologies, and a multifaceted approach to centralizing migration issues, starting with the collaboration of different bodies. Our research concludes that addressing these targets in concert with the recommendations listed above will significantly improve data on migration in Armenia.

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